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Pablo Gómez Muñoz

A Better World? Cosmopolitan Struggles in Twenty-First Century Science Fiction Cinema

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Director/es
Deleyton Alcalá, Celestino

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Tesis Doctoral

A BETTER WORLD? COSMOPOLITAN
STRUGGLES IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA

Autor

Pablo Gómez Muñoz

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Pablo Gómez Muñoz

Director

Celestino Deleyto Alcalá

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
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Portions of the section “*In Time: Connecting Borders and Global Finance*” in chapter two have been previously published in slightly different form as part of the article “Keeping Workers at a Distance: The Connection Between Borders and Finance in Andrew Niccol’s *In Time*” in *Geopolitics* 21:1 (2016). Small excerpts in chapter two have also been drawn from the article “Interplanetary Border Imaginaries in *Upside Down: Divisions and Connections in the American Continent*” in *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 7:1 (2016). I would like to thank the editors and anonymous referees of both journals for their helpful comments.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, science fiction films have begun to show particular interest in transnational interactions and cosmopolitan issues. The dissertation focuses on the way in which recent films rely on a series of themes and conventions of the genre such as dystopian societies, unbelievable natural disasters, apocalyptic scenarios, aliens, monsters, time travel, teleportation, and supernatural abilities to address cosmopolitan concerns. Chapter one provides an overview of scholarly work on transnational science fiction cinema and cosmopolitan theory. The chapter proposes that a cosmopolitan method based on the analysis of borders as sites of struggle (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 18) is a particularly suitable approach to transnational sf film. The second chapter focuses on *Elysium* (Neill Blomkamp, 2013) and *In Time* (Andrew Niccol, 2011), two systemic dystopias that expose the radical inequalities that global neoliberalism generates. Through close analysis of *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), chapter three argues that seemingly mindless, spectacular disasters can contribute to building an eco-cosmopolitan sense of planet and exploring the biopolitical dimension of climate change. Chapter four analyzes the ways in which human-alien romances like *The Host* (Andrew Niccol, 2013) and *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (Madeleine Olnek, 2011) suggest that the development of intimate relationships between beings from different planets encourage attitudes of cosmopolitan openness in their societies. The last chapter looks at the notion of cosmopolitan networks through the example of *Cloud Atlas* (The Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer, 2012), a multi-protagonist film that draws multiple spatiotemporal connections

between individuals. The chapter explores how the film challenges different iterations of the logics of coloniality by establishing connections between characters across national borders and time periods. Although these films seem to celebrate cosmopolitan change, this dissertation argues that their cosmopolitan discourses tend to be ambivalent.

RESUMEN

Esta tesis argumenta que, a principios del siglo XXI, el cine de ciencia ficción (cf) ha comenzado a mostrar un interés especial por las interacciones transnacionales y cuestiones relacionadas con el cosmopolitismo. La tesis se centra en el modo en que películas recientes del género utilizan temas y convenciones de la cf como las sociedades distópicas, desastres naturales increíbles, escenarios apocalípticos, alienígenas, monstruos, viajes en el tiempo, teletransporte y habilidades sobrenaturales para abordar inquietudes cosmopolitas. El primer capítulo ofrece una perspectiva general sobre trabajos académicos relacionados con el cine de ciencia ficción transnacional y teorías sobre el cosmopolitismo. El capítulo sugiere que una metodología cosmopolita basada en el análisis de las fronteras como lugares que canalizan conflictos de interés es particularmente apropiada para el análisis de la ciencia ficción transnacional. El capítulo número dos se centra en *Elysium* (Neill Blomkamp, 2013) e *In Time* (Andrew Niccol, 2011), dos distopías sistémicas que enfatizan las desigualdades radicales que genera el neoliberalismo global. A través de un análisis detallado de *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), el tercer capítulo demuestra que los desastres espectaculares y que aparentemente no tienen ningún sentido pueden contribuir a desarrollar una conciencia de planeta eco-cosmopolita y a explorar la dimensión biopolítica del cambio climático. El capítulo cuatro considera los modos en que películas sobre romances entre humanos y alienígenas como *The Host* (Andrew Niccol, 2013) y *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (Madeleine Olnek, 2011) sugieren que el desarrollo de relaciones íntimas entre seres de diferentes planetas fomentan actitudes de apertura cosmopolita en sus sociedades. El

último capítulo se acerca a la idea de las redes cosmopolitas a través del ejemplo de *Cloud Atlas* (The Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer, 2012), una película coral que establece diversas conexiones espaciotemporales entre individuos. El capítulo se centra en cómo la película cuestiona diferentes versiones de la lógica de la colonialidad mediante conexiones entre personajes a través de varias fronteras nacionales y periodos históricos. Aunque estas películas parecen celebrar cambios cosmopolitas, la tesis sugiere que estos discursos cosmopolitas tienden a ser ambivalentes.

INTRODUCTION

Borders between rich and poor regions, multinational corporations exploiting natural resources in far-flung places, transnational couples, large-scale environmental disasters, and global interconnectivity are all familiar images that appear in the media regularly. In the cinema, they are also part of the worlds of *Elysium* (Neill Blomkamp, 2013), *In Time* (Andrew Niccol, 2011), *The Host* (Andrew Niccol, 2013), *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (Madeleine Olnek, 2011), *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), and *Cloud Atlas* (The Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer, 2012), among many other movies. These science fiction (sf) films combine such ‘real’ situations and events with not-so-real elements like global elites living in a giant wheel floating in outer space, people using time as currency, body snatchers, the sinking of the world, reincarnations, and futuristic cities such as Neo Seoul. Even though the universes that these films create are imaginary, they work as metaphors of our social context. In this dissertation, I discuss a growing number of recent science fiction (sf) films (2000-present) that use their extrapolative power to reflect on the cosmopolitan dimensions of several contemporary issues. Although sf has regularly shown interest in international matters, in the last fifteen/twenty years, it has begun to overly exploit the possibilities of its generic conventions to examine transnational phenomena and cosmopolitan concerns. This shift coincides with the marked transnational character of both present-day societies and cinema. Sf, because of its traditional relationship with technology and borders and its ability to imagine alternative worlds and to combine spatiotemporal dimensions, is one of the best-equipped genres to deal with phenomena related to globalization. Approaching sf films from

a cosmopolitan perspective, this dissertation argues that twenty-first century sf films combine seemingly cosmopolitan discourses that question borders with ambivalent narrative elements that reinforce them.

The turn to the twenty-first century has witnessed a proliferation of discourses on cosmopolitanism. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of scholars started to resort to cosmopolitanism to reflect on the social reality that they observed (Nussbaum 1996; Beck 1996, 1998, 2002; Harvey 2000; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Since then, cosmopolitanism has become a major field of study (Delanty 2012a: 1). Rather than speaking of ‘a cosmopolitan age,’ “an age of cosmopolitanism” (Fine 2007: 19), or even “an age of cosmopolitanization” (Beck 2012: 304), it may be more appropriate to refer to the present as an age of cosmopolitan struggles. Our time is characterized by tensions between the impacts of globalization and cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan reactions to them. In other words, we live in an age of transnational changes and global challenges that call for cosmopolitan answers: new technologies facilitate faster and safer travel, instant communication, and the movement of capital, while traditional and new technological borders and surveillance systems control the movement of people; economic decisions in one country have a direct impact in other societies; CO₂ emissions ignore boundaries; (geo-)political and economic measures, lack of opportunity, corruption, violence, repression, and changes in the environment affect local populations who are forced to move elsewhere to live decently or to survive; jobs move around in search of cheap labor or tax benefits; workers from different parts of the world move to Western countries to look after Western children and elders in order to support their families back home; industries, companies, and services traditionally owned by the state or national investors now have multiple owners around the world; international institutions like the International Monetary Fund tell national governments what they are expected to do in order to keep their economies afloat and not to make stock markets

nervous or unhappy; undeclared fortunes jump from one tax haven to another in order to re-enter the 'real' economy in a laundered form; cultural trends rapidly spread across borders; social movements replicate and forge alliances across countries; and fundamentalist, terrorist attacks from transnationally-connected individuals and organized groups hit Nigeria, France, Irak, Syria, the USA, Spain, the UK, or Australia. All of these realities may be best addressed and understood from a cosmopolitan point of view that considers their transnational dimension and the cosmopolitan challenges that they pose.

Migration, borders, travel, intercultural communication, transnational influence, international trade, and top-down control have existed for centuries. Cosmopolitanism is not new either: there have been at least three major cosmopolitan moments (apart from the present one) characterized by the theories of the Greek Stoics, Immanuel Kant, and Hannah Arendt (Fine and Cohen 2002: 1-22). What is new in today's world is a heightened awareness of transnational and global social phenomena (Beck 2006: 21). Such a perception is due to the intensification of globalization processes and their impact on individuals and social groups. A key element in making people aware of transnational forces and repercussions is the media, as they chronicle and react to our times. Among the media, cinema plays a central part, if not always as obvious as, say, news programs on television. As cultural products, films capture contemporary structures of feeling, offering viewers channels to think about their social environment and time. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay notes that the visual codes that films use are the most obviously global language nowadays (2012: 486). While viewers may require subtitles or dubbing to understand a film, their images and their editing techniques are almost universal. In addition, films are virtually everywhere. Many films reach locations all over the world—although, obviously, not every single place and person on the planet. People watch them in multiple platforms and places: at movie theatres, on their TVs, laptops, tablets, smart phones, on screens in airplanes, trains, buses. We regularly bump into movie ads on

billboards, on subway walls, or as we flip through magazines and newspapers or scroll down websites. In spite of the current hype about television and video streaming platforms, a PricewaterhouseCoopers study shows that global cinema admissions and box office revenue have grown since 2010 and projects that they will continue to do so in the period 2015-2019 (“Filmed Entertainment” 2015). For these reasons, the cinema, as a prominent media that engages with contemporary social concerns, is an optimal site to study discourses about cosmopolitan struggles. However, I do not argue that the films that I analyze here are necessarily cosmopolitan. Films, like other media (e.g. the news), may generate empathy and solidarity, but they may also adopt anti-cosmopolitan stances, or ambiguous positions that allow disparate readings.

Science fiction, as one of the most popular genres and as a genre with an exceptional potential to articulate transnational stories, is particularly apt to study cosmopolitan struggles. Even though Vivian Sobchack has recently observed the decline of sf and the simultaneous rise of fantasy (more about this later) (2014), the prominence of the sf genre is obvious both from an industrial/economic and from a sociocultural point of view. From an economic perspective, sf was among the highest-grossing genres worldwide from 2000 to 2014. In 2015, the top 100 box-office ranking included 90 films released in or after 2000. Out of these, 20 per cent were predominantly sf movies; 22.2 per cent, animation; 18.8 per cent, fantasy; and 16.6 per cent, superhero movies (which often include sf elements) (“All Time Box Office” 2015).¹ In February 2018, four sf films—*Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (J.J. Abrams, 2015), *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2014), *The Avengers* (Joss Whedon, 2012)—were among the five highest-grossing films of all time (“All Time Box Office” 2018). From 2000 to 2014, sf films occupied the leading position on the cover of *Empire Magazine* more often than any other genre (23.3%) (“Empire Magazine

¹ Even though many animation movies often share elements with the sf and fantasy genres, I have chosen to treat animation films as a separate category, as the borders between sf and fantasy are particularly blurred in the case of animation films, making it problematic to distinguish between them.

Covers” 2015).² Superhero films—which share some characteristics with sf movies—came second, featuring prominently on the front page 21.05% of the time (“Empire Magazine Covers” 2015). The predominant position of the sf genre can also be appreciated in “Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder,” a recent special season organized by the British Film Institute (BFI) in 200 different sites across the UK. From October to December 2014, the BFI put together the largest program of science fiction events ever organized: over a thousand screenings, concerts, workshops, and panel discussions; accompanied by a series of books and DVDs, TV broadcasts, films to stream online from the BFI Player, blog posts, and articles (Stewart 2014: 5). The fact that the BFI has chosen to devote one of its largest events ever to science fiction and the fact that it has chosen to do it so recently attests to the current popularity of the genre and its ability to connect with the present time.

A textual and cultural reading of contemporary sf also points to its topicality. Sf cinema has a unique ability to articulate discourses on a social context characterized by transnational processes and cosmopolitan challenges like the present. Barry Grant argues that, since the late 1960s and early 1970s, sf has taken the place of the western as the dominant genre. Grant explains that the rise of sf is due to its ability to deal with technological developments in the last decades (2013: 1-2). What Grant does not mention is the central role of technology in globalization processes and cosmopolitan struggles. For instance, recent advances in technology allow faster and more efficient movement and control of people, information, and goods (although, at the same time, the development of technologies in some places push some areas and many people further into the margins). The central role of technology in globalization processes is not the only reason for the prevailing

² I have chosen *Empire Magazine* because, unlike other popular film magazines (e.g. *Total Film*), it offers a full catalogue of its covers in its website. *Empire* is the most widely distributed film magazine in the UK. In addition, the magazine has a 'global' presence: it distributes its UK edition to other countries and publishes a US/Canada digital edition. From 2000 to 2014, out of 168 monthly covers, 42 (23.3%) were sf, 40 (21.05%) superhero, and 19 (10.55%) fantasy. In those cases in which a monthly issue featured alternative covers with different films, I did not include such issues in my count.

position of sf within the current transnational context. Borders—one of the main places where transnational phenomena take place—are inscribed in the genre’s identity: many sf films fall between the real and the imaginary and they often deal with different kinds of borders (human/non-human, Earth/outer space, upper class/lower class, humanity/technology, body/mind, physical/virtual). Like globalization, science fiction jumps and combines spatial scales. Sf also makes connections across time: it speculates on the future of transnational interactions and explores their relationship with the present and the past. The ability of sf to incorporate rare, novel concepts, images, and narratives also grants it a matchless and almost boundless freedom to explore social concerns and establish compelling parallels with the ‘real’ world. In sum, sf is a well-equipped genre to deal with the current proliferation of transnational connections, disruptions, and cosmopolitan challenges.

This dissertation proposes that one of the main trends in twenty-first century science fiction cinema revolves around the construction of alternative worlds that offer opportunities to reflect on cosmopolitanism. From a cosmopolitan perspective, I analyze a significant corpus of science fiction films from 2000 onwards that deal with borders, transnational phenomena, and globalization. Most of the films that I analyze were released after 2007. Yet, I set the limit in 2000 to include other films worthy of mention or analysis such as *What Planet Are You From?* (Mike Nichols, 2000), *Code 46* (Michael Winterbottom, 2003), *The Day After Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004), and *The Fountain* (Darren Aronofsky, 2006), to name a few. Obviously, there are many pre-2000 films that develop narratives that connect with the cosmopolitan imagination, including *Island of Lost Souls* (Erle Kenton, 1932), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin Schaffner, 1968), *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979), *Enemy Mine* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1985), and *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, 1997). Despite these

earlier instances, I have chosen to focus on films produced after the turn to the twenty-first century because the number of sf films that explore cosmopolitan conflicts and their investment in such issues has multiplied in recent years. Most of the films that tend to develop discourses on cosmopolitanism are products of Western countries (especially, the USA). Although grounding this project almost exclusively on Western films may seem like an obstacle for a cosmopolitan perspective, this circumstance actually offers rich critical possibilities, as I explain in the section “Critical Cosmopolitanism and Western(ized) Films.” As I have mentioned above, the aim of this dissertation is not to label a group of films as cosmopolitan. Rather, I intend to explore, through the analysis of these movies, some of the conflicts, tensions, and struggles around which discourses on cosmopolitanism revolve. Through formal and sociocultural film analysis, I argue that a large number of twenty-first century sf films adopt ambivalent positions towards cosmopolitan concerns. From a sociocultural point of view, these films articulate a type of cosmopolitanism that both questions and reinforces social borders, hierarchies, inequalities, and environmental exploitation: an ambivalent cosmopolitanism. Close formal analysis allows me to test this hypothesis by concentrating on how a variety of twenty-first century sf films use film techniques to develop wondrous concepts, spatiotemporal connections, spectacular elements, and an abundantly- or sparsely-detailed *mise-en-scène*.

In the first chapter, I consider previous approaches to the notion of transnational (science fiction) cinema both from a Film Studies and a Science Fiction Studies perspective. This theoretical chapter continues by exploring the critical possibilities that cosmopolitan analysis offers for the study of sf cinema. I first consider the methodological and normative dimensions of critical cosmopolitanism. After that, I move on to situate cosmopolitanism and science fiction cinema in relation to modernity and coloniality. In connection to this modern/colonial contextualization of my object of study, I emphasize the centrality of

borders to cosmopolitan conflicts and science fiction and explain how focusing on conceptual borders serves to exploit the critical potential of cosmopolitanism and science fiction. Finally, the last section specifies the kind of films that this dissertation studies, the concept of science fiction that it employs, and some of the elements that may help identify how sf films use visual and narrative techniques to articulate cosmopolitan conflicts.

The other four chapters of this dissertation (2-5) present four groups of films in which the cosmopolitan concerns of twenty-first century sf cinema are particularly evident. In each of these chapters, I offer an overview of a main trend in contemporary sf cinema and read one or two films closely. Chapter two focuses on the proliferation of global dystopias that present exploitative economic systems. The first case analysis (*Elysium*) explores the interrelationship between public and private actors in the framework of transnational neoliberalism. *In Time* provides an opportunity to investigate the connection between urban borders and the interests of transnational financial actors. The third chapter pays attention to the proliferation of eco-conscious sf discourses, concentrating on films that articulate transnational environmental concerns through spectacle-ridden narratives. Through the example of *2012*, I show that seemingly mindless spectacles of disaster can be an effective means of representing climate change impacts. In addition, my analysis of *2012* considers the biopolitical implications of the apocalyptic scenario that the film depicts. The fourth chapter examines transnational/transcultural romance and kinship, arguing that the alien can be a particularly useful vehicle to consider cosmopolitan questions. The chapter first looks at Andrew Niccol's *The Host* as a film that is representative of the proliferation of young adult love stories at the turn of the twenty-first century. The analysis of *The Host* suggests that, despite its clichéd representation of love, the film presents a nuanced image of the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities in a context of interspecies/transnational tensions. In addition, the chapter questions the lack of queer sf films that deal with cosmopolitan issues

and offers a close reading of *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*. The section on this film argues that, despite its whiteness, *Codependent Lesbian* envisions a queer utopia that is not necessarily Western. Finally, chapter five deals with films that draw personal connections across time and space, often emphasizing characters' shared humanity. In this chapter, I focus on *Cloud Atlas*, a multi-protagonist film with six storylines that bring together characters across five centuries and four continents. Close analysis of this film draws attention to the relationship between cosmopolitan struggles and different iterations of coloniality through time. Despite the variety of issues that this dissertation touches upon, it still constitutes an incomplete overview of transnational sf films that develop discourses on cosmopolitan conflicts.

CHAPTER ONE

Transnational Science Fiction and Discourses on Cosmopolitan Conflicts

1.1. BEYOND THE NATION: NEW APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF CINEMA AND SCIENCE FICTION

This section considers national, transnational, and cosmopolitan approaches to sf. Before starting, however, I would like to clarify what I understand by such closely-related but semantically-different terms as globalization, global, international, transnational, and cosmopolitan(ism). I use the term ‘globalization’ mostly in an economic sense. Globalization makes it easier for world capital to penetrate markets, facilitates the movement of goods and some kinds of qualified labor, makes it possible for companies to produce wherever labor is cheaper or taxes lower, and builds systems of commercial and financial dependency. Globalization also describes technological developments (mostly in transportation and telecommunications) that connect people, goods, and places and spread information and cultural products across the world. Yet, as Robert Holton notes, globalization also includes a series of cultural, political, and religious processes that are not necessarily dominated by technology and the economy (2008: 7-8). I use the term ‘global’ in a broader sense to refer to events that affect many parts of the world, for example, in the case of climate change or financial decisions that have an impact on many countries (Heise 2008: 151-3; Castells 2010

[1996]: xx-xxi). The word ‘international’ often alludes to relations between nation states. Steven Vertovec also uses the term ‘international’ to describe the movement of people or goods “from one nation-state [...] to another” (2009: 3). International connections, unlike transnational interactions, do not challenge state borders (Beck 2006: 32, 62-3; Delanty 2009: 48; Vertovec 2009: 3-4). Transnational phenomena are not necessarily global in scope, but they transcend bi-lateral relations (Vertovec 2009: 3). Although transnational formations in many cases derive from the economic and logistic structures of globalization, the adjective ‘transnational’ refers to a wider range of social phenomena and relations, including (but not limited to) migration, intimate relationships, kinship, informal and underpaid labor, access to and exploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation and protection, cultural connections, and violence.

Finally, ‘cosmopolitanism’ describes an ideal, desirable horizon characterized by sociocultural connectivity, sustainability, and respect for human rights on a global level (Delanty 2009: 14; Fine 2009: 8; Harris 2011: 6-16; Woodward and Skrbiš 2013: 54-56). Some of the key markers of cosmopolitanism are the right to work, migrate or seek asylum; decent work conditions; access to water, food, and health; sensible resource management; environmental protection; global institutions grounded on people’s sovereignty; the regulation of markets; and the eradication of tax evasion (Appiah 2006: 163; Beck 2006: 9, 89; Delanty 2009: 7, 41; Harvey 2009: 93-4). Reality is not necessarily becoming cosmopolitan, but films and other cultural forms incorporate discourses on cosmopolitanism. I use cosmopolitanism as a critical perspective to interpret transnationalization processes at multiple scales (local, regional, national, transnational, global) and the cosmopolitan challenges, tensions, and struggles that such processes create (Beck 2002: 29; Fine 2007: 136-7; Delanty 2009: 15).

1.1.1. Defining Transnational Cinema

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, film scholars started to notice the limitations of looking at films through a national lens (Ezra and Rowden 2006: vii-viii). Andrew Higson points out that film critics tend to present national publics as homogeneous communities and acknowledges that cinema often portrays local and transnational environments (2006: 17-18, 23). This turn in film studies does not describe a new reality: movies have always reflected transnational influences and collaborations (Ezra and Rowden 2006: 2). Yet, such a critical shift is no coincidence, as transnational story elements and filmmaking practices are becoming more and more usual for both economic and social reasons. As far as the industry is concerned, contemporary studio ownership, funding, audiences, and box-office sales are part of transnational ecosystems (Davis 2006: 74). An obvious example of this trend are the changes that US cinema is currently undergoing in order to meet the expectations of its growing Asian audiences, especially Chinese audiences. Films that perform poorly in the US box office can be top ticket-sellers in other countries. One recent example is *Jupiter Ascending* (The Wachowskis, 2015), which flopped in the US but was number one at the Chinese box office (McClintock 2015). Sf movies like *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013), *Looper* (Ryan Johnson, 2012), or *Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007) introduce locations like Hong Kong or Shanghai to attract Chinese audiences. San Francisco, the city with the largest Asian population in the US, has started to feature prominently in sf movies such as *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Rupert Wyatt, 2011), *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2014), *Cloud Atlas*, *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards, 2014), and *Big Hero 6* (Chris Williams, 2014). *Big Hero 6* even imagines a new city: San Fransokyo, a combination of San Francisco and Tokyo. Transnational connections obviously do not only spring between the US and East Asian countries: these are just some examples of the variety of transnational collaborations, influences, and references that characterize contemporary filmmaking.

Since this dissertation looks at transnational cinema from a cosmopolitan perspective, Maria Rovisco's notion of 'cosmopolitan' cinema may seem an ideal point of departure (2013: 153). Yet, Rovisco's notion of 'cosmopolitan' cinema is based on a pre-defined set of characteristics that exclude a variety of contemporary filmmaking practices. Her notion of 'cosmopolitan' cinema is similar to Hamid Naficy's accented cinema (2006). As Rovisco explains, both 'cosmopolitan' and accented cinema focus on the experiences of exilic and diasporic subjects, "have a recognizable self-reflexive and multilingual style" and "often stem from an artisan and collective mode of production that seeks to resist the mainstream" (2013: 153). The only difference between the two is that, unlike accented films, 'cosmopolitan' films are not necessarily made by "exilic and diasporic filmmakers" (Rovisco 2013: 154). Even though Rovisco attempts to make her approach broader than Naficy's, her notion of 'cosmopolitan' cinema also refers to a very specific kind of film. In the case of sf at least, it is not productive to establish such a division between mainstream and artisanal films. Neill Blomkamp and Gareth Edwards are clear examples of directors who started making transnational films or short films with few resources (*Alive in Joburg* [Blomkamp, 2005], *Monsters* [Edwards, 2010]) and now employ their skills in transnational higher-budget Hollywood films (*Elysium*, *Godzilla*). Rather than 'cosmopolitan' cinema, this thesis is concerned with a cosmopolitan approach to cinema—a strategy that Celestino Deleyto has recently proposed (2017). I will explain this approach in detail in the section on critical cosmopolitanism. Regarding transnational cinema, apart from the fact that transnational films explore connected sociocultural phenomena that involve two or more countries, the term transnational cinema does not refer to a specific set of characteristics shared by a group of films. Mette Hjort identifies up to nine different kinds of transnational cinema, of which accented/'cosmopolitan' cinema is just one (2009: 16, 21). Transnational films include a variety of themes dealing with social life beyond the scope of the nation. They are often concerned with borders, global cities, migration, (in)hospitality, interconnectivity, networks,

mobility, legal loopholes, transnational kinship, power relations, global economic actors, neoliberalism, (neo)colonialism, the environment, global risks, and cultural influence. This dissertation uses cosmopolitanism as a perspective or an approach to transnational cinema rather than as a pre-defined set of characteristics to look for in films.

1.1.2. Transnational Science Fiction Film

Even though Istvan Csicsery-Ronay notes that “globalization of one form or another has been the default vector of sf from the beginning” (2012: 488-9), sf critics have rarely emphasized the transnational orientation of the genre. A clear example of the lack of attention that the transnational dimension of the genre has received is its absence from the main companions to the genre (ed. James and Mendlesohn 2003; ed. Seed 2005; ed. Bould, Butler, Roberts, and Vint 2009; ed. Latham 2014). *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (ed. Bould, Butler, Roberts, and Vint, 2009) includes the largest number of chapters (56), but none of them explores the notion of global/transnational/international science fiction. The closest chapters are one on “Empire” and another on “Postcolonialism.” As far as sf film criticism is concerned, scholars often rely on a national perspective to approach the genre. In *The Liverpool Companion to World Science Fiction Film* (ed. Fritzsche 2014), most authors consider the sf cinema of a specific nation. Several of the main studies on the sf film genre focus on sf films as US American products that reflect US American culture, history, and politics (Sobchack 1987, Telotte 2001, Booker 2006, Nama 2008, Geraghty 2009, Johnston 2011, Link and Canavan 2015). Such an overwhelming focus on US American society probably has to do with the dominance of Hollywood cinema in general and US American sf in particular, scholars’ tendency to employ methodological nationalism (Beck 2006: 24-33), and the historical development of sf cinema. Regarding the last point, twenty-first century sf films are more prone to represent transnational concerns and they do it more overtly than

previous sf films due to the intensification of globalization processes in the last two decades. Although the focus of these studies on the US is more than justified and they have provided insightful approaches to the genre, they have underestimated the genre's capacity to reflect transnational phenomena.

Apart from the fact that approaches to transnational sf cinema are scarce, the few studies that refer to sf's transnational narratives focus on literature, provide only brief accounts of the ability of sf films to articulate such narratives, or do not situate films in their larger cinematographic context, often including only one or two films in their analyses. In most cases, these studies do not capture the variety of transnational sf films being produced nowadays or the multiple issues that they deal with. Probably the first study to insist on the rich possibilities of looking at transnational discourses in sf cinema is Christine Cornea's *Science Fiction Cinema* (2007). Cornea identifies the transnational orientation of sf cinema. Yet, in covering different areas of the sf genre (gender, performance, technology) and a large timespan (1950-2006), Cornea's reflections on transnational sf are diluted among the many other topics that she considers. Csicsery-Ronay examines the notion of 'global' sf, offering an instructive overview of the relationship between sf and transnational narratives in literature and film, but he does not explore such relationship in detail (2012).

Alien Imaginations: Science Fiction and Tales of Transnationalism (Küchler et al. 2015) constitutes a major development of the study of transnational sf, but the volume does not offer a clear image of changes in the film genre, as it deals mostly with literary works and does not place the four sf films analyzed (*Code 46*, *District 9* [Neill Blomkamp, 2009], *Avatar*, and *Elysium*) in their cinematic context. Similarly, Lysa Rivera only considers one film (*Sleep Dealer* [Alex Rivera, 2008]) in her article on cyborg labor in the US-Mexico borderlands (2012). *Simultaneous Worlds: Global Science Fiction Cinema* (ed. Feeley and Wells 2015), despite its title, does not show a particular investment in mapping transnational

imaginaries and discourses within sf cinema. Rather, the volume appears more interested in tracing dialogues and influences between different national sf cinemas and analyzing transnational modes of production (Feeley and Wells 2015: xi, xv). While the volume offers valuable insight into both non-Western and Western sf, as a whole, it does not capture the variety of transnational concerns that contemporary sf cinema articulates. However, in this volume, Everett Hamner identifies *Sleep Dealer*, *Code 46*, *District 9* and *Monsters* as part of “a growing body of twenty-first-century science fictional immigration narratives that are rethinking assumptions about geopolitical boundaries and transnational spaces” (2015: 154-155). Hamner’s chapter shows perceptive awareness of the proliferation of transnational interactions in sf cinema. Yet, immigration is but one of the many issues that sf films explore through the multiple border configurations that they imagine.³

Mark Bould’s *Science Fiction* (2012) provides the most comprehensive study of transnational sf cinema. Bould analyzes films from more than 40 countries and covers the history of the genre from 1895 to 2011. Although Bould does not explicitly study transnational films, some of his interpretations focus on the transnational character of sf narratives. In the last part of the book, Bould shows how sf films have dealt with colonialism, imperialism, and globalization from the early twentieth century until the present. Bould identifies neoliberal capitalism and labor as some of sf cinema’s growing concerns since the 1980s and as one of its main topics in the twenty-first century (2012: 177-195). As Bould’s work suggests, the twenty-first century is a particularly appropriate period to investigate transnational phenomena in sf cinema. In this dissertation I hope to develop Bould’s remarks on twenty-first century sf cinema, analyzing transnational discourses in even greater detail, providing further examples of sf’s ability to articulate such discourses, and identifying additional transnational and cosmopolitan questions addressed by sf.

³ Apart from Hamner, J. P. Telotte’s contribution to the volume offers an enlightening reading of one of the first films that revolved around transnational interactions in sf cinema: *F.P.1 Antwortet Nicht/F.P.1 Doesn’t Answer* (Karl Hartl 1932).

In order to situate Mark Bould's work and to point to additional views on the transnational character of sf within the larger context of sf criticism, in the next two paragraphs, I provide an overview of the main debates around transnational phenomena in sf and point to some new directions. Despite the little attention that sf cinema's transnational orientation has received, some studies (mostly literary) offer readings of sf classics and more recent works that go beyond the limits of the nation. Although critics rarely refer to the notion of transnational sf, they do underline the genre's connection to discourses on colonialism, imperialism, diplomacy, and international relations. Jutta Weldes, Zadar Ziauddin, and Csicsery-Ronay identify sf's interest in globalization, aliens, and post-national structures respectively (Weldes 2001, Ziauddin 2002, Csicsery-Ronay 2002). All of them note that sf texts tend to develop discourses that reach beyond the scope of the nation to project the point of view of empires.⁴ In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), John Rieder develops new readings of science fiction literary classics, considering the centrality of colonialism to their narratives. For example, Rieder offers an additional reading of the relationship between the Morlocks and the Eloi in *The Time Machine* (H. G. Wells, 1895). He suggests that, apart from representing class conflict in British society, the relationship between both groups in the novel also captures colonial relations between Great Britain and its colonies (2008: 86-9). Otherness has also received substantial attention in sf scholarship, but often in the context of international relations: scholars have focused on aliens and Cold War fears (Biskind 1983, Lipschutz 2003) and diplomatic relations and foreign policy (Weldes 2003, Neumann 2003). These studies often revolve around the somewhat worn concepts of identity and difference. While references to actual migrants and indigenous populations in sf have traditionally been rare, Ramírez Berg explicitly argues that aliens are a

⁴ More recently, a number of volumes have explored postcolonial issues in sf, mostly from a literary perspective. Some of the most obvious examples are: *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (Hoagland and Sarwal, 2010), *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays of Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction* (ed. Raja, Ellis, and Nandi, 2011), and *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (Langer, 2011) and *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction* (Smith, 2012).

metaphor for migrants (2012 [1989]: 402-32). As I will show later, these discourses (especially those dealing with colonialism and using aliens as a metaphor for migrants) are central for a framing of transnational narratives from a cosmopolitan perspective. Yet, even though colonialism, imperialism, otherness, and diplomacy are related to transnational interactions, looking at these categories separately does not offer images that account for the variety of transnational interactions, influences, and connections in today's world.

More recently, sf critics have begun to directly address and exploit the critical possibilities that sf's global/transnational orientation offers. In a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies (SFS)* on globalization (2012), Csicsery-Ronay explains how many of the changes that the world is experiencing are related to traditional sf motifs such as environmental disasters, alien attacks, dystopian settings, technological, cybernetic, and biological developments, and transnational "corruption and conspiracy" (2012: 480). In the same *SFS* issue, Lysa Rivera focuses on sf texts set on the Mexico-US border region, considering the relationship between transnational capital and labor after NAFTA and the replication of previous colonial structures in the region (2012). In the introduction to *Alien Imaginations*, the editors of the volume emphasize the metaphorical connection between the figure of the alien and migrants and, like Rivera, point to borders as a prominent element of contemporary sf (Küchler et al. 2015: 6). Apart from these, several other sf themes recall transnational phenomena and articulate discourses on cosmopolitanism: sf films are also about planet relations, supranational structures, intergalactic wars and conquests, resource exploitation, moving to new homes, hierarchies between species, alternative social actors, and divergent social structures, countries, and world orders. This dissertation seeks to develop the aforementioned debates on borders, migration, techno-advances, neocolonialism, capital, and labor and explore how they work in a larger corpus of recent sf films. In order to do so, I investigate the connection between these themes; with other sf discourses on

colonialism, imperialism, and international relations; and with additional themes such as finance, neoliberal state-corporate partnerships, (private) militarization, kinship, climate change, and interconnectivity. Although K uchler, Maehl, and Stout suggest that recent Western sf works challenge common “Western hegemonic discourses” and project a critical outlook (2015: 6) and David Higgins emphasizes the cosmopolitan possibilities of sf literature (2011: 331-2), this dissertation argues that sf is not necessarily critical or cosmopolitan. Instead, I examine the strategies that sf films employ to present cosmopolitan ideas and the ambivalent side of the discourses that these films develop. As I explain in the next section, a cosmopolitan approach to sf contributes to the articulation of a critical interpretation of transnational sf narratives.

1.2. TOWARDS A CRITICAL COSMOPOLITAN TURN IN THE STUDY OF SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA

1.2.1. Critical Cosmopolitanism: The Methodological and Normative Dimensions

This section explores the notion of cosmopolitanism and sketches the cosmopolitan approach that the dissertation follows. Gerard Delanty’s approach to cosmopolitanism locates the term’s critical orientation in the interplay between the concept’s methodological and normative dimensions (2009: 1-2). He holds that what differentiates cosmopolitanism from purely empirical approaches to globalization and transnationalization is its normative horizon (Delanty 2009: 82). By projecting a desired horizon, cosmopolitanism allows us to look at the present, the past, and the future critically. Methodological cosmopolitanism is based on the study of the conflicts and struggles that develop from the transnationalization of society, while normative cosmopolitanism is based on an imagination that includes markers such as

rights, social and environmental responsibility, well-being, conviviality, mobility, and mutually-beneficial cultural exchange. Critical cosmopolitanism constitutes a particularly suitable theoretical framework to study sf, as both sf and critical cosmopolitanism base their imaginations on discourses about otherness, (neo)coloniality, borders, global events, and transnational impacts related, for example, to environmental deterioration and disasters. Although normative and methodological cosmopolitanism are defined separately here, in practice, they are intertwined and are part of the same critical cosmopolitan perspective. Apart from Delanty, Walter Mignolo (2000, 2011a, 2011b) and Chris Rumford (2008) have developed their own notions of critical cosmopolitanism. In the following paragraphs, I connect the questions that these approaches raise about modernity, colonialism, neoliberalism, and borders to critical cosmopolitanism. Drawing on different notions of critical cosmopolitanism and related approaches that are not explicitly cosmopolitan (e.g. Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), this dissertation presents critical cosmopolitanism as a perspective that explores how borders articulate cosmopolitan struggles in a wider context of tensions between modernity and colonialism.

The methodological dimension of critical cosmopolitanism is based on the study of struggles related to cosmopolitan projections of society. This idea draws on and refines Ulrich Beck's notion of methodological cosmopolitanism. Beck delineates this methodology as a response to methodological nationalism. In contrast to most scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences, the nation is not the main unit of analysis for methodological cosmopolitanism. This does not mean that methodological cosmopolitanism ignores the nation: it explores interactions at multiple scales, including global-local/regional/national and translocal/-regional/-national levels (Beck 2006: 77, 82). More specifically, Beck posits methodological cosmopolitanism as the analysis of processes of cosmopolitanization (2002: 18, 2006: 75-6). For him, cosmopolitanization refers to the

relationship between “cosmopolitan developments and movements” and “the resistances and obstructions to which they give rise” (Beck 2006: 94). Despite the importance of cosmopolitanization for the development of a cosmopolitan methodology, this dissertation does not use Beck’s concept for two reasons: First, as an empirical approach to sociocultural reality, cosmopolitanization is hardly distinguishable from transnationalization. Both terms overlook the critical potential of the normative character of cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2009: 81-2). Secondly, the term cosmopolitanization easily leads to misinterpretation, as it deceptively suggests that “reality is becoming cosmopolitan” (Beck 2006: 68). As mentioned before, having a cosmopolitan horizon in mind does not imply that societies are necessarily becoming cosmopolitan. Despite the misleading character of the term, cosmopolitanization points to a key aspect of social reality from a cosmopolitan perspective: conflicts. That is, the conflict between cosmopolitan changes and opposition to them (Beck 2002: 29). Similarly, Delanty refers to cosmopolitanism as “a site of tensions” (2009: 15). Conflicts, tensions, and struggles problematize social reality and facilitate the exercise of critical cosmopolitan analysis: their contradictory nature calls for a reflexive interpretation of convergence and divergence. For this reason, this dissertation studies cosmopolitan conflicts/tensions/struggles instead of cosmopolitanization. Such an approach highlights the analytical possibilities of the sf genre, as its critical potential is inscribed on the conflict between the reality from which it extrapolates and the alternative worlds that it builds. The notion of cosmopolitan conflicts/tensions/struggles that this thesis develops includes not only the contrast between “cosmopolitan developments” and their anti-cosmopolitan “resistances” (Beck 2006: 94), but also between these and the social systems in which they develop and the circumstances and actors that shape those systems. This dissertation investigates the strategies that sf films use to incorporate cosmopolitan concerns, how they deal with struggles, and how they generate (in)consistent and (in)coherent discourses about cosmopolitanism.

From the perspective of critical cosmopolitanism, normative considerations should complement a methodological focus on cosmopolitan struggles. When examining the normative side of critical cosmopolitanism, this dissertation approaches cosmopolitanism as an imagination. Gerard Delanty (2009: 2) and Ulrich Beck (2002: 18) use the terms ‘cosmopolitan imagination’ and ‘dialogic imagination’ respectively.⁵ For simplicity purposes, I use the former term. The cosmopolitan imagination projects a horizon characterized by the desirability of a global recognition of rights (Delanty 2009: 7, 41); access to natural resources and foodstuffs, decent work conditions, welfare, and quality of life in general; a sense of transnational responsibility and accountability; the interrogation of social, economic, and cultural borders (Beck 2006: 89; Delanty 2009: 7); and a predisposition to focus on what cultures have in common rather than on what makes them different (Delanty 2006: 39). The last point refers to what Beck calls the “both/and” logic of cosmopolitanism, which contrasts with the “either/or,” “us/them,” and inside/outside logics of nationalism (2006: 32-3). Another key trait of the cosmopolitan imagination is its dialogic character (Beck 2002: 18, 2006: 89; Delanty 2012b: 42). The cosmopolitan imagination challenges divisions and celebrates “exchange, encounter, and *dialogue*” [my emphasis] (Delanty 2009: 8). Cosmopolitan dialogue means to consider, from a reflexive position, how different cultures may influence each other in a mutually beneficial way. Last but not least, the awareness of the global interrelation of societies is also part of the cosmopolitan imagination: risks and catastrophes related to climate change, terrorism, epidemics, business practices, and economic crises sometimes produce globe-spanning impacts that can cultivate a planetary consciousness and transnational solidarity (Beck 2006: 22). Like the cosmopolitan imagination, sf often addresses the relationship between self and other, relying on the figure

⁵ Although the cosmopolitan imagination has, according to Delanty (2009: 6), a methodological dimension based on tensions and conflicts, I mostly focus on its normative power in this paragraph. The previous paragraph focuses on methodological cosmopolitanism. The next section considers both dimensions together in its account of the link between debates about critical cosmopolitanism and the sf genre.

of the alien, other species, or the human inhabitants of imaginary geopolitical entities. Most sf films negotiate borders of some kind. Some sf narratives also revolve around large-scale planetary events or connect actions and consequences across different spatial and temporal contexts. The genre is particularly fond of presenting environmentally degraded landscapes and natural disasters that open paths for reflection about global ecological challenges. Like cosmopolitanism, sf also projects horizons: imagined futures and alternative pasts and presents that open up a dialogue between the viewer's reality and the world depicted on screen.

1.2.2. Connecting Cosmopolitanism and Science Fiction: The Modern/Colonial Complex

This sub-section begins by situating science fiction and cosmopolitanism in the context of modernity and continues by pointing out, first, the connection between modernity and coloniality and, then, between coloniality and science fiction/cosmopolitanism. Both science fiction and cosmopolitanism are intrinsically related to the notion and the development of modernity.⁶ Borrowing from Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, Marshall Berman claims that, in modernity, "all that is solid melts into air" (1982: 333). In other words, modernity challenges tradition and its certainties. In a similar way to cosmopolitanism, modernity privileges individual subjectivities, rights, and choices (Fine 2007: 16). Modernity and cosmopolitanism also coincide in their plural orientation, their tendency towards the problematization of conventions, and their investment in negotiation and, sometimes, in transformation (Delanty 2009: 8, 34; Strydom 2012: 31). Like cosmopolitanism, modernity usually alludes to positive developments. Yet, such a conceptualization does not imply that positive changes are widespread. The contrast between the old and the new and between

⁶ Even though most scholars frame cosmopolitanism within classical and late modernity, this dissertation adopts a broad view of modernity, comprising the time span between early modernity—starting in the late fifteenth century—and the present. The next paragraphs provide further details about this conceptualization.

traditions and individual rights gives rise to the tensions, conflicts, and struggles of modernity/cosmopolitanism. The previous account may (deceivably) suggest that both terms describe the same reality. Ulrich Beck's notion of first and second modernity makes the difference between both terms clear. In first modernity, changes typically occur under the umbrella of the nation, while in second modernity (the current time of cosmopolitan conflicts), changes take place at a transnational level and their speed intensifies (Beck 2006: 6, 36). The connection between modernity and cosmopolitanism is important when considering the relationship between the cosmopolitan and the science fictional imaginations. Piet Strydom refers to cosmopolitanism as part of cognitive modernity (2012: 26-35). Yet, ideas do not stand on their own. The cognitive side of modernity depends on a series of technological, scientific, and industrial processes that emerge from modern thought and practices. For instance, communication and transportation technologies enable (but do not guarantee) the spread of cognitive modernity and the cosmopolitan imagination. They bring people closer and they do it faster than before, although they also leave other groups of people more disconnected. It is in this respect that science fiction is relevant. Sf can help clarify the connection between cosmopolitanism and technological/scientific/social advances. At the same time, cosmopolitanism may help to look at the processes of second modernity that appear in sf through a critical lens.

The connection between sf and modernity is most obvious in the interest of the genre in technology and science. As Roger Luckhurst points out, sf is "the literature [and cinema] of technologically saturated societies" (2005: 3). Advances in telecommunications and transport, the compression of time and space, geographic and scientific frontiers, mechanization, urbanization, and (un)democratic forms of government are common concerns of both sf and modernity. A clear example of the confluence of science fiction, cosmopolitanism, and modernity are the first real and imagined trips to the moon and its

orbit. Sf played a crucial role in imagining such an endeavor. Although humans did not land on the moon until 1969, writers had consistently imagined moon landings at least since the sixteenth century and, more notably, since the Industrial Revolution (Gunn 2013: 207). George Méliès' film *Le Voyage dans la Lune/A Trip to the Moon* (1902) also portrayed this event long before it actually happened. Yet, launching a rocket ship and landing it on the moon in 1969 was only possible thanks to modern scientific and technological developments. The moon orbit exploration trips that preceded and followed the landing on the moon in 1969 provided humans with the first real images of the whole planet Earth. These images (particularly the 1972 image of 'the blue marble' taken during the Apollo 17 expedition) had a substantial impact of human imaginations, especially in the industrialized, media-rich countries. They generated an awareness of the different parts and countries of the planet belonging to a unitary entity (Heise 2008: 22-3). Engaging with the sf imagination and benefiting from modern technological advances, these pictures offered a new perspective on the planet that evoked a cosmopolitan sensibility of a shared environment and common destiny. More generally, space adventures create transnational metaphors of exploration, contact, and negotiation that offer opportunities for critical cosmopolitan analysis. Thus, sf contributes to the contextualization of both modern cognitive and scientific developments. In addition, sf may also account for the often overlooked contribution of technology to the creation of a series of social circumstances that call for the development of a cosmopolitan imagination. With the intensification of modernization processes and the proliferation of cosmopolitan conflicts in the last three decades, the connection of cosmopolitanism and science fiction to modernity suggests that both concepts constitute a privileged site to study contemporary society as part of a larger sociohistorical structure.

Like the title of the book *Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder* suggests, sf films—and cosmopolitanism—are not only about the wonders of modernity—they are also about the

fears and injustices that modernity creates (Bell 2014: 6). Sf does not simply alert viewers to what can go wrong with modern scientific and technological innovations (e.g. nuclear energy, mutations, rebel artificial intelligences)—it also comments on social, cultural, and economic relations. In this respect, colonialism is a central concern of the genre. Writing about sf, John Rieder argues that “colonial invasion is the dark counter-image of technological revolution” (2008: 33). Similarly, Walter Mignolo also refers to “coloniality” as “the darker side of modernity” (2011b: 2). For Rieder, technology generates colonial difference. He notes that, both in sf and in history, those who develop or have access to technological innovations typically see those who do not as incarnations of their past, and therefore, as inferior (2008: 32). Technology then becomes a justification to assert power over other peoples and their territories. Sf intervenes in (but does not necessarily support) the colonial discourse that links technology and science to civilization and humanity and lack of technology to savagery, non-human species, and the past (Rieder 2008: 5-6, 26). Like colonialism, sf uses the opposition between human and non-human species to develop discourses on race and national-belonging. Nature is also part of colonial scientific discourses, which often hold that humans are entitled to control and exploit nature. In contrast, the extreme temperatures, floods, lack of biodiversity and/or resources, and other natural disasters that appear in recent sf show that discourses on this issue are changing. In spite of the connection between technology and colonialism, sf does not necessarily endorse colonialism, nor does it always criticize it. As a cultural product, sf addresses the concerns of its time and may reproduce and reinforce mainstream discourses, which can be colonial discourses in some cases. Yet, thanks to its almost boundless imagination, sf can also question norms, invert roles, conceive alternatives, and present societies that challenge our worldview.

Apart from the role of technology in creating colonial difference, colonial themes abound in sf. The genre deals with journeys into the unknown, the discovery of new worlds, the encounter with other civilizations, resource extraction, labor exploitation, capital accumulation, intermarriage, and miscegenation. Although the sf imagination has been active throughout history, sf blossomed as a genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coinciding with Darwinism and imperialism (Rieder 2008: 2-3; Bould 2012: 148; Luckhurst 2014: 110). In addition, sf first developed in industrialized countries with an imperial orientation (Csicsery-Ronay 2002: 237, 2003: 231). Colonial narratives in sf cinema do not just concern films that represent late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperial concerns. The encounter between American natives and the European expeditions that crossed the Atlantic and charted American soil and its civilizations is quite similar to the contact between science-fictional space crews and the different inhabitants that they may find in other planets (e.g. *Avatar*) or the relationship between humans and alien visitors or settlers on Earth (e.g. Andrew Niccol's *The Host*). Sf movies that extrapolate from the present to project on to the future also revolve around colonial preoccupations. *Sleep Dealer*, the *Total Recall* remake (Len Wiseman, 2012), *Upside Down* (Juan Solanas, 2012), *Elysium*, and *Jupiter Ascending* present technologically-advanced elites that benefit from labor exploitation and resource extraction in world regions or planets deprived of high-tech and the latest scientific developments. These are just some examples of the wide array of colonial themes that twenty-first century sf uses to approach contemporary cosmopolitan conflicts.

As transnational systems of struggle for power, past, present, and future colonialisms constitute key sites to be examined from a cosmopolitan perspective. Several scholars criticize the Eurocenteredness of the emphasis on modernity in the study of cosmopolitanism and argue that colonialism, slavery, and imperialism are key historical events to understand contemporary transnational interactions from a cosmopolitan perspective (Mignolo 2000,

2011a, 2011b; Harvey 2009; Bhabra 2011). Walter Mignolo argues that critical cosmopolitanism should examine “coloniality” (2011b: 2). “Coloniality,” a term coined by Aníbal Quijano, refers to the universally-oriented logic of hierarchical power that has developed from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the conquest of the Americas to the present (Mignolo 2011b: 2). The logic of modernity/coloniality is grounded on the production of technological/pseudo-scientific/racial difference, which Euro-North American elites have historically used as a justification for invasion, annihilation, resource exploitation, and slave trade (Mignolo 2000: 741, 2011b: 2; Quijano 2007 [1999]: 171). While colonialism as a political system may be over, the logic of colonialism (coloniality) still permeates societies around the world (Quijano 2007: 170). My emphasis on coloniality here is not coincidental. Several authors date global schemes back to the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers in the Americas and the drawing of the first complete world maps in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Mignolo 2000: 725-6; Sassen 2006: 82; Harvey 2009: 276; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 31-2). Mignolo identifies four ‘global designs’ that feed on each other: the “Christian mission” led by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the “civilizing mission” led by France and Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the developmental mission led by the US in the second half of the twentieth century, and the current neoliberal mission led by large corporations and financial firms and institutions (Mignolo 2000: 724-5). As Gurinder Bhabra points out, the pervasiveness of coloniality from the sixteenth century to the present challenges Beck’s idea of first modernity as the age of the nation state and second modernity as a time of transnational interactions (2011: 317-320). Yet, it is obvious that cosmopolitan conflicts have multiplied in recent years. Accordingly, a critical cosmopolitan perspective should recognize the recent intensification of transnational interactions, while accounting for the colonial structures that have contributed to building contemporary societies and their present forms.

1.2.3. Epistemological Borders as Cosmopolitan Method

Along with the modern/colonial matrix, the genre tends to rely on conceptual borders to structure cosmopolitan conflicts within and between modernity and coloniality. Approaching modern/colonial contexts through borders opens up ways for critical cosmopolitan analysis (Mignolo 2000: 739-44, 2011a: 329-345), as borders are prime sites to observe cosmopolitan tensions. Borders have, as Étienne Balibar points out, a “world-configuring function” (2002: 79). More recently, Celestino Deleyto has proposed a cosmopolitan approach to cinema, situating borders at its center (2017: 96). Drawing on the work of Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbish, Deleyto invites to see films as “performers of cosmopolitanism” which “may [or may not] activate and enact a series of cosmopolitan strategies” (98). He argues that borders, as central elements of the cosmopolitan imagination, constitute a “vantage point” from which to analyze the ways in which films perform cosmopolitanism (98-100). Translating Chris Rumford’s sociological work (2012) to film studies, Deleyto suggests looking at films “from the border” (2017: 99). That is, he proposes examining how “film narratives are structured around borders and borderlands” and how borders configure cinematic spaces (100). Following Deleyto’s approach, this dissertation explores some of the main ways in which recent sf films perform cosmopolitanism through borders. The following paragraphs consider the relationship between borders, sf, and cosmopolitanism and explain in more detail how borders shape the cosmopolitan approach employed in this dissertation.

The sf genre has a longstanding relationship with borders (Desser 1999: 84; King and Krzywinska 2000: 39; Telotte 2001: 197; Kitchin and Kneale 2002: 2, 9). Sf narratives typically negotiate male/female, human/machine, virtual/real, rich/poor, powerful/helpless, human/monster, technology/nature, science/savagery, or inside/outside borders. Yet, these borders are not necessarily transnational and, hence, they do not necessarily vertebrate cosmopolitan discourses. More recently, Elena dell’Agnese and Lysa Rivera have pointed out

that films like *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997), *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *Sleep Dealer* comment on geopolitical and socioeconomic relations in the Mexico-US borderlands (dell’Agnese 2005, Rivera 2012). Cosmopolitan discourses in twenty-first century sf fall somewhere between these two kinds of symbolic and territorial borders.⁷ That is, seemingly cosmopolitan narratives in sf film do not exclusively revolve around physical borders or the territories that surround them, nor do they just incorporate any kind of social border (e.g. virtual/real or male/female). The relationship between cosmopolitanism, borders, and sf on which I focus in this dissertation concerns the *transnational* physical, symbolic, spatial, and temporal borders that sf uses to construct seemingly cosmopolitan discourses. This approach to transnational borders coincides with recent developments in the conceptualization of borders. For several scholars, borders are not just the walls or fences that separate countries. In fact, borders appear in multiple places, sometimes hundreds or thousands of miles away from border walls (Balibar 2002: 79; Cooper and Rumford 2011: 263; Popescu 2012: 16; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 2-3). In consonance with these observations, contemporary sf films organize cosmopolitan tensions around transnational borders that spread throughout countries.

As advanced in the previous paragraph, borders are one of the most prominent places where cosmopolitan conflicts (un)ravel: they mediate transnational interactions between cultures, economies, social models, environmental impacts, and people with different socioeconomic status. Both Walter D. Mignolo and Chris Rumford connect borders and (critical) cosmopolitanism, although they do so in different ways. For Mignolo, critical cosmopolitanism operates through “border thinking,” which consists of approaching the modern/colonial world (1492-present) “from the perspective of those local histories that had to deal all along with global [universal] designs” (2000: 744). Mignolo’s border thinking

⁷ I am borrowing the notion of physical/territorial and symbolic borders from Gabriel Popescu (2012: 8). Although Popescu distinguishes between them, he also points out that borders usually combine their physical and symbolic dimensions (2012: 8, 84).

therefore proposes to unveil colonial logics and to develop social models from a subaltern/decolonial and non-capitalist point of view (2000: 743-5, 2011a: 338). Alternatively, Chris Rumford adopts a broader approach to the relationship between borders and cosmopolitanism. Rumford argues that people interpret cosmopolitan borders from multiple positions and in disparate ways (2008: 154). He explains that borders are cosmopolitan in three senses: 1) They are “not only the business of the nation-state.” 2) They do not only divide, they also connect. 3) They do not only offer the possibility of looking “from both sides” but also “from the border” itself (Rumford 2012: 247-9). Although the second and third points open up ways to explore cosmopolitan conflicts, Rumford’s ‘cosmopolitan’ approach to borders lacks the normative, critical power of the cosmopolitan imagination. The first point includes any kind of actor that shapes transnational borders, whether directly or indirectly (e.g. “smugglers, tourists, and market traders”) (2012: 248, see also 2008: 56-7). Following Rumford’s approach, a company that does financial engineering in order to pay taxes in a country with lower tax rates than the country where they have produced the revenue would be shaping ‘cosmopolitan’ borders. While smugglers or market traders may generate and participate in cosmopolitan conflicts, their actions do not align themselves with the cosmopolitan imagination. So, while Mignolo focuses too much on the decolonial side of the border, Rumford seems more interested in highlighting that a wide range of actors can shape borders than on the critical potential of cosmopolitanism. A critical cosmopolitan perspective should stand halfway between both propositions. The next paragraph develops this option.

Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson propose using borders as a method to understand the contemporary world (2013). While not addressing directly theories of cosmopolitanism, they do put critical cosmopolitanism into practice indirectly. They explain:

The border is for us not so much a research object as an *epistemological viewpoint* that allows an acute critical analysis not only of how relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation are being redefined presently but also of the struggles that take shape around these changing relations. The border can be a method precisely insofar as it is conceived of as *a site of struggle.*” [my emphasis] (2013: 18)

As a viewpoint or perspective, the border offers critical possibilities. Unlike Rumford’s notion of cosmopolitan borders, Mezzadra and Neilson’s concern over “relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation” coincides with the normative/critical backbone of the cosmopolitan imagination. Yet, border as method avoids the exterior/interior binarism of other approaches (e.g. Mignolo’s) (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 18). Mezzadra and Neilson’s conceptualization of the border as “a site of struggle” recalls Delanty’s emphasis on tensions and connects to the focus on cosmopolitan conflicts of this dissertation. In addition to this, the employment of borders as a method is based on the constant revision and reconfiguration of concepts (17). Using borders as method also entails questioning the treatment of “the objects of knowledge [here, seemingly cosmopolitan sf films] as already constituted and *investigating* instead the processes by which these objects are constituted” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 17). To employ this method is then to problematize and approach social reality in a reflexive manner, a strategy that Delanty proposes as a function of critical cosmopolitanism (2009: 8). This means that this dissertation will interrogate the cosmopolitan discourses that twenty-first century sf films develop and looks for inconsistencies in them. In sum, ‘border as method’ deploys critical cosmopolitanism by focusing on border struggles, adopting a normative critical stance, and favoring problematization and revision.

A critical cosmopolitanism based on the use of borders as a method shares several traits with sf. This approach focuses on one of the genre’s greater strengths: its ability to reflect on borders. Organizing its narratives around borders allows sf to deal with struggles

and to negotiate tensions between the inside and the outside. In addition, sf films problematize the worlds that they build: while the universes that sf films create cannot escape the context in which they are produced, they dislocate ‘reality’ and produce alternative perspectives on it. Sf films also introduce viewers to unfamiliar models of social and natural organization and thereby encourage them to explore less-travelled routes. Studying sf through a critical cosmopolitan/border perspective implies that sf does not only require suspending disbelief. Seen from the border, sf films also ask viewers to suspend their beliefs: to examine their perception of the world in which they live. Yet, in some cases, even when sf films interrogate the viewers’ perceptions of society, they may do so only to reinforce the state of things as they are (e.g. the perception of aliens/migrants as a threat). It is precisely in this tension between the problematization and the strengthening of the modern/colonial complex that sf and border as method offer critical cosmopolitan possibilities.

1.3. APPROACHING AND ANALYZING SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA FROM A CRITICAL COSMOPOLITAN/BORDER PERSPECTIVE

This section looks at the kind of films that the dissertation deals with and the formal parameters that it focuses on when examining cosmopolitan conflicts. The first subsection tries to explain how the dissertation tackles the somewhat paradoxical fact that most of the films that explore cosmopolitan tensions usually adopt Western visual, narrative, and cultural styles. In the second subsection, I present science fiction as a genre with flexible borders. The last subsection explores some of the elements that can be particularly useful to investigate how sf films use visual and narrative techniques to shape discourses on cosmopolitanism.

1.3.1. Critical Cosmopolitanism and Western(-ized) Films

What kind of films should a dissertation that uses a critical cosmopolitan/border perspective study? At first, the obvious answer may be: films from different parts of the world that connect with the cosmopolitan imagination, especially from those areas that, as Mignolo would say, global designs have historically excluded from participation in the configuration of socioeconomic models. Yet, upon observation of the films that usually develop discourses related to the cosmopolitan imagination, the answer changes. As the different chapters of this dissertation show, it is often US American movies, major studio productions, and films from other first-world countries that address cosmopolitan conflicts.⁸ In the case of films from industrially/technologically/financially-developed countries, they often aim to reach ‘global’ audiences and tend to rely on US American film aesthetics and tropes. By ‘global,’ I do not mean that people all over the world have access to and are interested in these films. Rather, ‘global’ here describes the aspiration of certain films to reach audiences from different (but often Western/-ized) markets across the globe. Even though, ideally, a project about transnationalism and cosmopolitanization in sf cinema should not privilege films from a specific nation (the USA) or from Western(-ized) regions in general (even if they are transnational collaborations), it is impossible not to do so in the present context of film production.

Despite the prominence of US commercial sf cinema, this dissertation also considers non-US American films (although mostly from the so-called first-world nations). Many of these films participate in what Istvan Csicsery-Ronay calls “the international style” (2012: 487). Films that employ the international style rely heavily on CGI (computer-generated imagery), special effects, art design, and double-coding. While most films can be read in multiple ways, double-coding refers to layered narratives that allude to cultural specificities

⁸ As Csicsery-Ronay points out, the sf genre has been traditionally dominated by technologically-developed industrial and imperial nations (2002: 19, 2003: 231).

(directed towards viewers who are familiar with a particular social or historical context) while at the same time addressing more general considerations that connect with wider, global publics (Csicsery-Ronay 2012: 487). The examples of international-style films that Csicsery-Ronay provides show that even though most films that employ the international style are Hollywood films, filmmakers from outside the US industry also rely on it to reach audiences around the globe. Csicsery-Ronay locates the emergence of the international style in the Hollywood films of Paul Verhoeven and Roland Emmerich⁹ and provides more recent examples from outside the US American motion picture industry: the ‘Japanese’ movie *Patlabor II* (Mamoru Oshii, 2000), the ‘Hungarian’ *The District!* (Áron Gauder, 2004), the ‘South Korean’ *The Host* (Bong Joon-ho, 2007), the ‘Swiss’ *Cargo* (Ivan Engler and Ralph Etter, 2009), and the ‘South African’ *District 9* (2012: 487). Some other recent non-US films that participate in the international style and whose narratives revolve around cosmopolitan conflicts are: the ‘French’ *Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, 1997), the ‘British’ *Code 46*, the ‘French’ *Banlieue 13/District B13* (Pierre Morel, 2004), the ‘British’ *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006), the ‘Mexican’ *Sleep Dealer*, the ‘British’ *Moon* (Duncan Jones, 2009), the ‘Spanish’ *Planet 51* (Jorge Blanco, Javier Abad, and Marcos Martinez, 2009), the ‘British’ *Monsters*, the ‘German’ *Hell* (Tim Fehlbaum, 2011), the ‘Russian’ *Branded* (Jamie Bradshaw and Aleksandr Dulerayn, 2012), the ‘French-Canadian’ *Upside Down*, the ‘South Korean’ *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho, 2013), the ‘Japanese’ *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (Shinji Aramaki, 2013), the ‘Australian’ *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015), and the ‘Hungarian’ *Jupiter’s Moon* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2017). Although I have referred to these movies as national products, all of them use transnational imagery, depict transnational events, and are not actually national products. Despite the different contexts and countries in which these films have been produced, most of them share an interest in transnational

⁹ Although Csicsery-Ronay does not specify what films he refers to, they are probably *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, 1997) and *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996).

sociocultural and geopolitical questions related to the US or use settings that resemble US American landscapes. After all, and despite the solid growth of the Chinese film market, the US continues to be the largest producer and consumer of cinema in the world (Makinen 2015). Thus, this dissertation draws on films made in different parts of the globe, but US American films, aesthetics, motifs, and techniques predominate.

Apart from the characteristics mentioned before, (the English) language is also a trait of the international style in sf cinema. The notion of international style derives from Csicsery-Ronay's exploration of global sf and his observations on the role of the English language in sf literature. He acknowledges the hegemonic position of the English language (and the importance of imperialism to its current widespread use). Yet, he also notes its role as a lingua franca (2012: 482). In many cases, authors whose first language is not English use it in order to reach a larger, international readership (Csicsery-Ronay 2012: 483). Although films are often dubbed, some recent productions from non-Anglophone countries use English in their original versions. Some examples of this practice are *Planet 51*, a Spanish production; *Upside Down*, a French-Canadian production; and *Snowpiercer*, a South Korean production. In these three cases (among many others), English is the language of the original version. These examples show that, apart from writers, filmmakers sometimes also resort to shooting in English in order to make their work more accessible worldwide. Despite the fact that Csicsery-Ronay does not mention it, English is also a feature of the international style in film. Many of the films that explore cosmopolitan conflicts thus participate in the US-dominated international style and resort to the English language in an attempt to reach audiences 'globally.'

The previous paragraphs may leave the reader wondering whether it makes sense to apply a cosmopolitan perspective almost exclusively to Western(-ized) English-language sf films. Even though this may seem an incongruity, the analysis of Western(-ized) English-

language movies does offer critical possibilities. Like any movie that may draw from the cosmopolitan imagination, they depict cosmopolitan conflicts. As Western(-ized) products, they offer abundant opportunities to problematize and interrogate their discourses. Indeed, Mark Bould notes that the cinema emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, coinciding, like sf, with the “height of Western imperialism” (2012: 148). Bould highlights that cinema has been connected from the outset to imperial/Western discourses and has often functioned as a modern Western ideological tool (2012: 148-9). In this sense, Western(-ized) sf films are optimum material on which to apply a critical cosmopolitan/border perspective. They develop seemingly cosmopolitan discourses and, at the same time, are also products of the modern/colonial complex. Apart from this, cosmopolitanism has some limitations. Walter Mignolo notes that “there is no cosmopolitan project (as yet) stemming from dewesternizing or decolonizing trajectories” (2011b: 258). He even wonders: “would cosmopolitanism be a project that dewesternizers and decolonials would engage in and promote?” (2011b: 258). A project on the hypothetical notion a dewesternized or decolonial *and* cosmopolitan cinema runs the risk of appropriating voices that, as Mignolo points out, do not have the slightest interest in engaging in cosmopolitan projects. As a matter of fact, the hypothetical concept of a critical cosmopolitan movie would not be much different from Maria Rovisco’s notion of cosmopolitan cinema (which has some limitations, as noted earlier). In light of these observations, it is then preferable to focus on mainstream discourses from a critical cosmopolitan/border perspective.

1.3.2. Generic Galaxies: Science Fiction Films as Complex Systems

This section considers how to approach science fiction as a genre from a border perspective. This implies that sf has diffuse borders. The perception of the genre may shift depending on its development or on the perspective of those who approach it. Vivian Sobchack’s

pessimistic diagnosis of contemporary sf in “Sci-Why? On the Decline of a Film Genre in an Age of Technological Wizardry” (2014) serves to highlight the importance of approaching the genre from a border perspective. Sobchack argues that sf is in decay, fantasy elements are contaminating sf cinema, and fantasy and superhero genres are becoming the cinematic forms that best connect with the current sociocultural context (285-6, 293). She sees this as something new and negative. Yet, while fantasy and superhero cinematic narratives may be on the rise, sf is not necessarily perishing. Some scholars argue that the claim that sf is in decay is often associated with the establishment of rigid generic borders (Luckhurst 1994; Bould and Vint 2008: 43-44). This is also Sobchack’s case. For her, “empirical logic” and “instrumental process” are what defines the sf genre (2014: 284). In contrast, she sees the ‘recent’ drift of the genre towards fantasy and “magical thinking” as a consequence of our use of technology and the internet and of the need to evade from terrorist, economic, and natural catastrophes (2014: 286-7). I will return to the relationship between sf and fantasy later. For now, suffice it to mention that Sobchack’s observations derive from a rigid approach to sf, which contrasts with her earlier writings (1987).¹⁰ In “Sci-Why?” Sobchack makes a point that is particularly at odds with the main argument of this dissertation. She claims that “sf’s narrative gravity seems [...] lightweight and trivial insofar as the genre has primarily avoided any reflective relation (allegorical or not) to the significant issues that trouble contemporary culture” (2014: 284). However, seen from the border, sf fiction is indeed one of the genres (if not *the* genre) that best capture some of “the significant issues that trouble contemporary culture:” cosmopolitan conflicts.

From a border perspective, films are sites of generic struggle. It is therefore not always possible to draw a clear line that divides a genre (here, sf) from its neighbors (fantasy,

¹⁰ From a cosmopolitan perspective, a further problem with Sobchack's claim on the decline of the sf genre is that she only uses US box-office data to show that fantasy movies sell more tickets than sf films (2014: 298). Given that most films earn more money through their international ticket sales than through their sales in the US, the appropriateness of her data is questionable.

superhero, horror, western, or others). Seeing from the border implies acknowledging that, although a film may not be predominantly sf, it may have some science-fictional elements worthy of analysis. This observation does not only derive from applying a border perspective on film genres: it also coincides with other recent approaches to film genres. In *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman argues that producers, distributors, critics, and audiences approach and use genres in different ways, producing disparate understandings of the same genre (1999: 98, 164-5). He further holds that people use genres as “discursive claims” (101). This is possible because films mix genres and have done so throughout Hollywood’s history (Altman 1999: 142, 194). Altman builds his arguments on observations on film production, distribution, criticism, and consumption, but not so much on the textual (visual and narrative) dimension of films (Deleyto 2012: 217). Although these parameters provide valuable information about films, this dissertation focuses on textual aspects (as I explain in the next section). Celestino Deleyto points out that “genres [...] are part of a complex system” of both chaotic and consistent connections (2012: 220). This means that film genres are “chains of relationships and similarities” but do not have essential characteristics (220). Drawing on Derrida, Deleyto also notes that films “participate in” rather than belong to genres (221). In this sense, a film may participate in several different genres (Deleyto 2012: 221, see also 2011). Like border-as-method, these approaches to film genres invite us to question the boundaries, in this case, of the sf genre. This dissertation then sees sf films as part of a complex system of generic struggles that favors the participation of a given film in several genres at the same time. Sf films belong, in sum, to generic galaxies that allow for multiple combinations.

Whereas some film scholars have pointed out the inadequacy of putting films into boxes, sf critics tend to emphasize the genre’s loose borders even more clearly. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint point out that any definition that aims to capture the essence of the sf genre inevitably excludes other works or films that also participate in the genre. This observation

leads the authors to provocatively state in the title of an article that “There Is No Such Thing as Science Fiction” (Bould and Vint 2008). In a similar way, John Rieder and Mark Bould refuse to define sf in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* and in *Science Fiction: Routledge Film Guides* respectively (Rieder 2008: 16; Bould 2012: 1). Instead, they develop specific, yet non-exclusive readings of sf works and films. However, Rieder also recognizes that it is sometimes necessary to define sf in order to develop specific arguments about the genre. In any case, he emphasizes the open, non-normative character that definitions and approaches to the genre should have (2010: 206). Using border as method, this dissertation stands halfway between the need to define sf and the impossibility of doing so. The dissertation presents—and, in a way, also defines—sf as a cinema of transnational interactions which has recently shown interest in cosmopolitan conflicts. Yet, this is just one of the multiple ways of approaching the sf genre. In addition, this particular definition of sf as a vehicle for transnational stories is not restricted to a certain kind of movie that meets certain requirements that all sf movies are supposed to share (e.g. realistic scientific or technological explanations). Not every sf film participates in the sf genre to the same extent. Indeed, two sf films can participate in the genre and actually have little in common. For example, *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973) shares few elements with *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979). The same holds for more recent films about cosmopolitan conflicts like *The Host* (2013) and *2012*. Since one of the strengths of sf is its capacity to generate almost boundless possibilities, fixing its borders would be to hinder its imaginative, extrapolative, and critical power.

Having observed that films are part of complex generic systems and that it is not possible to provide an overarching definition of the sf genre, it is time to turn back to Vivian Sobchack’s observations on the present state of the sf, fantasy, and superhero genres. As the previous paragraphs have advanced, the borders between the sf, fantasy, and superhero

genres (and also between these and other genres) are not as clear as Sobchack suggests. To begin with, the combination of science-fictional and fantastic elements in films is not new. This is actually a point that Sobchack makes in her earlier book *Screening Space* (1987), where she acknowledges sf's connection to fantasy (28), horror (30, 49) and even magic (58). Apart from her, a substantial number of critics have observed the relationship between fantasy and sf (King and Krzywinska 2000: 23-5; Telotte 2001: 10-16; Bordwell 2006: 53; Cornea 2007: 4-6; Fowkes 2010: 3; Johnston 2011: 22-3; Csicsery-Ronay 2012: 480-1; Vint 2014: 2). Several sf classics include fantastic elements that cannot be explained through "empirical logic" (an essential quality of the sf genre, according to Sobchack's 2014 article [284]). Aliens, body-snatching, superior apes, monsters, time-travel, miniature humans, giant animals, unexplainable, and even magical technologies are fantastic elements that some sf movies incorporate and that resist "empirical logic." The physical fusion of an alien and a human being at the end of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* or the magical asteroid-destroying weapon of *The Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, 1997) are more specific examples of the combination of fantasy and sf.

Vivian Sobchack also draws a line between the sf and the superhero genres, connecting the latter to fantasy (2014: 285). Yet, films also combine superhero and sf themes (actually, they do so quite often). Just as critics have acknowledged the common combination of sf with the horror, western (Altman 2012: 34, Grant 2013: 1-2), and fantasy genres;¹¹ there should not be any problem in recognizing the synergies between sf and superhero movies. An illustrative example of the use of sf elements in superhero movies is *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Anthony and Joe Russo, 2014). The film revolves around the intention of a group of international leaders to implement a global 'security' system consisting of military-like flying ships that orbit around Earth and whose objective is to immediately destroy

¹¹ More generally, Keith M. Johnston has also noted that films combine science fiction with a wide variety of genres, including: romantic comedy, drama, musical, noir, gangster, war, sports, animation, and epic films, to name a few (2011: 24-5).

“anyone who is a threat now or in the future.” Throughout the film, especially in the last part, viewers witness a tedious cocktail of chases, flights, shootings, explosions, and crashes. Yet, *The Winter Soldier* also displays a large range of both existing and futuristic technologies including virtual hologram meetings, bordering mechanisms, monitoring devices, body recognition and geo-location systems, military weapons, and (personal) data mining and explores the role of such technologies in the making of global political decisions. The projection of a futuristic global ‘security’ system in the film offers opportunities for critical cosmopolitan analysis: *The Winter Soldier* ventures into the future (and present) misuse of highly-developed technologies, their connection to transnational geopolitical power, and the social and biopolitical impact of exerting control over them. It is then clear that some superhero movies draw on the sf imagination. Rather than trying to set fantasy, horror, superhero, and sf films apart; it seems more productive to see films as part of a complex system and to focus on how any kind of movie uses the sf genre to build certain kinds of discourses (here, seemingly cosmopolitan discourses).

Right after humans realize that aliens have come to Earth in *Signs* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2002), a television reporter remarks: “What you’re seeing is real. It’s unbelievable. Everything they wrote in science books is about to change.” This metafictional comment shows that science fiction stands on the border between the real and the imagined. In this sense, a productive way to think about science fiction is Cornea’s approach to the genre. She suggests that sf moves between the more fantastic and the more realistic genres (2007: 4-6). Similarly, Barry Grant notes that sf makes the unreal real (2013: 3) and Sherryl Vint argues that the sf genre is not just about “real science,” but also about perceptions and “mythologies of science” (2014: 4). In light of these observations, this dissertation understands sf as a genre that floats between fantasy and reality. This approach makes room for seeing films as part of a complex generic system and for focusing on their sf elements,

even when they are not predominant. Consequently, this dissertation does not aim to uncover the essence of sf or to identify what “could be properly called sf” (Sobchack 2014: 290). Rather, it explores how films negotiate the relationship between fantasy and reality—that is, how they participate in the sf genre—and how that shapes their discourses on cosmopolitan conflicts.

1.3.3. The Formal Articulation of Cosmopolitan Conflicts in Science Fiction Cinema

Before turning to more specific analyses in each of the chapters, this section identifies some formal aspects that can be particularly helpful to understand how science fiction films articulate cosmopolitan tensions. The dissertation mainly focuses on these sites, but it also considers other less-evident elements. Here I offer a preliminary, non-exhaustive account of the sites where the sf viewer/critic may locate and examine cosmopolitan tensions.

The primary elements of study that unleash the cosmopolitan imagination are the concepts that sf movies develop. These concepts transplant social perceptions of reality to other planets, galaxies, ecologies, times, dimensions, or alternative versions of our own world; which may provoke viewers and lead them to reexamine their beliefs. From a cosmopolitan perspective, it is particularly productive to look at how sf concepts develop supranational structures and world orders, remap territories, reorganize borders, alter social and ecological hierarchies, present variations of scope and scale, and envision both existing and imaginary transnational connections. Equally important is to consider the role of imagined species, the degree of influence of social actors and its possible deviation from reality, and, more generally, the rules that govern other worlds or different versions of our socioeconomic system. When considering sf concepts, there are two fundamental questions: 1. What do these models of social organization entail? 2. What can changes, differences, and similarities in these structures tell us about contemporary societies? An effective way to

approach these questions is through the notion of “cognitive estrangement” (Suvin 1979: 4). Estrangement refers to the act of presenting viewers with an unfamiliar image of their society. Cognition alludes to the relationship of that imaginary world with the society that viewers inhabit. As Suvin notes, cognition “implies not only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality” [emphasis in original] (10). This dissertation employs the word ‘cognition’ in a broader sense than Suvin’s. Contrary to what Suvin holds (8, 19-20), the more fantastic elements of sf can also have a cognitive function and relate to ‘reality.’ Much of the critical potential of sf is based on the dialogue that emanates from the pairing up of estrangement and cognition in sf concepts. This combination propels viewers away from and back into reality, encouraging them to look at social contexts from a different perspective. Mirroring border as method, cognitive estrangement also questions the sociocultural reality that is being represented/studied and opens paths to investigate how it is shaped. In addition, the tension between estrangement and cognition matches the contradictory nature of cosmopolitan conflicts. In sum, the multiple forms of displacement that sf concepts produce through cognitive estrangement constitute key sites to explore cosmopolitan conflicts from a border perspective.

A sizable amount of science fictional worlds are detail-crammed and bare spaces that build unfamiliar environments and call for close analysis. David Bordwell identifies a predominantly science fictional cinematic technique that he calls “worldmaking” (2006: 58). This term refers to the practice of “massive detailing” in films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *Alien*, or *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) (Bordwell 2006: 58-9). These films develop settings full of details and nuances that allow viewers to dig deeper into the universes that they build. Such details may range from the depiction of urban environments, buildings, and landscapes to vehicles, furniture, clothes, or props. To analyze massive detailing is then to focus on the mise-en-

scène. A clear example of sf's invitation to examine its spaces and their details is the *Blade Runner* scene in which Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) zooms in and out of different parts of a picture to see if he can find a clue that leads him to the replicants that he is supposed to go after. Although this technique is not exclusive to the sf genre, sf films are particularly inclined to constructing such worlds. Sf allows a creative freedom that fosters the inclusion of a myriad details and the creation of spaces that draw attention to the social life that they contain in overt ways. In contrast to more realistic genres, sf can amplify or accentuate the prominence of certain details to make them more evident. Even though Bordwell points to the prominence of massive detailing in worldmaking, sf films sometimes also reflect social environments through bare spaces with scarce details. Vivian Sobchack refers to these surfaces as “deflated” and “empty” spaces, depending on their electronic/virtual or natural character respectively (1987: 260-1, 266-9). The simulation training room in *Ender's Game* (Gavin Hood, 2013) is an example of deflated space, while an instance of empty space would be the desert in *The Host* (2013). The deflation and emptying of space, like massive detailing, build unfamiliar settings that generate cognitive estrangement and call for close analysis.

In contemporary films like *Avatar*, *In Time*, *Upside Down*, *Elysium*, and *The Host* (to name a few of the most obvious cases), the analysis of detail-crammed and bare spaces is a window into the cosmopolitan tensions that sf films reflect. Ridley Scott refers to his use of massive detailing in *Blade Runner* as “layering” (Bordwell 2006: 58). That is, the film offers several different levels of details and analysis which the viewers may or may not excavate. Looking at such variety of details allows the sf viewer to examine the interconnection of multiple geographical spaces, actors, and objects. By establishing links among the layers that appear in seemingly cosmopolitan sf films, viewers can move across different global-local/regional/national/transnational axes and delve into the translocal/-regional/-national interactions that articulate cosmopolitan tensions. In addition, the analysis of smaller details

and spaces, and not only of transnational structures, also helps looking at and from borders that are far away from the walls that mark the limits of nations. For instance, borders can also be found in the cluttered urban spaces that sf films often present. In order to analyze the aforementioned details and layers, the dissertation relies on Mark Shiel's geographical approach to film. His model of analysis focuses on "the space of the shot; the space of the narrative setting; the geographical relationship of various settings in sequence in a film; [and] the mapping of a lived environment on film" (2001: 5). Building on Shiel's approach, I also pay attention to characters' behavior and appearance in different spaces, interactions among characters in specific locations, transitions between spaces, the transformation of spaces, and characters' influence in such processes. In this manner, I hope to build a vantage point to reflect on how the environments that appear in a film and characters' experiences in them develop discourses on cosmopolitan conflicts.

Sf narratives do not only build spatial layers—they also include temporal layers. Thus, another way to explore cosmopolitan tensions in sf cinema is to study how films connect different moments of transnational history, how they throw light on the influence of past configurations on the present, and how they present the role of time (more specifically, disparate but simultaneous kinds of temporal speed) in the organization of current social structures and hierarchies (e.g. high-speed transport versus conventional transport). As previously mentioned, cosmopolitan tensions, while more prominent than ever, do not sprout from nowhere: they develop through time. Cosmopolitan analysis should account for the temporal/historical as well as for the spatial/geographical dimensions of social reality (Beck 2006: 77; Harvey 2009: 255). Focusing on temporal relations helps situating cosmopolitan conflicts in their historical context and accounting for the relationship between coloniality and cosmopolitan struggles. By paying attention to time, sf also considers how temporal borders work. Temporal borders reveal how the use, purchase, and consumption of time

contribute to creating disparate life conditions and styles in the same historical point (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 132-3). There are at least four ways in which sf films create temporal bridges: 1. Sf films develop narratives that connect different times, for example, stories of time travel (e.g. *The Time Machine* [George Pal, 1960; Simon Wells, 2002]) or characters who do not travel but are connected through time (e.g. *Cloud Atlas*). 2. Films that are set at one specific point in time only may include elements that recall other past times (e.g. early colonial references in *Avatar*). 3. The ways in which twenty-first century sf films reuse elements from previous sf films (e.g. *Elysium* or *The Host*). 4. Films that explore how temporal borders work and how they organize human beings (e.g. *In Time*). A film may rely on more than one of these modes of temporal (dis)connection. In a similar way to spatial film analysis, mise-en-scène, design, characterization, behavior, clothes, and editing help understanding how films establish relations between different times and how these relations shape cosmopolitan conflicts.

Finally, spectacle is another common sf element that amplifies social trends and can stage cosmopolitan struggles. Scholars and critics tend to dismiss spectacle as meaningless entertainment and posit it against narrative. For example, Susan Sontag argues that “wishful thinking” dominates disaster films and their spectacular scenes (2004 [1965]: 44). Yet, spectacle is a key part of sf narratives as it provides valuable information about the world on and off the screen by generating unfamiliar images that make certain narrative elements more evident. Spectacular components, because of their unusual dimensions, intensity, or strangeness, often stand out and draw attention to their role in the film. As prominent constituents of sf narratives, spectacular elements have the ability to project the (cosmopolitan) tensions around which the story revolves. Since spectacle enhances specific narrative threads and social phenomena, it can easily picture the global impacts that the cosmopolitan imagination responds to. One of the most obvious examples are the scenes of

weather disruption and destruction in *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Scott Derrickson, 2008), and *2012* and their allusion to climate change. Apart from natural disasters, there are other common kinds of spectacle that sf movies include such as unknown spaces and times, variations in scale, excessive deterioration, utopian/dystopian environments, radically different beings, and futuristic technologies, architecture, and urban planning. To a greater or lesser extent, all of these varieties of spectacle have the potential to allude to transnational events and serve as a vehicle for cosmopolitan concerns. Even action-based and often-derided ingredients such as fights, chases, explosions, jumps, crashes, and flights that defy physics can connect with other elements in the narrative and contribute to the articulation of discourses on cosmopolitan struggles. In sum, this dissertation relies primarily on concepts, massive detailing/empty spaces, spatiotemporal layers, and spectacle to study cosmopolitan tensions.

CHAPTER TWO

Systemic Dystopias through a Cosmopolitan Lens: Contesting Global Neoliberalism, Sort of

2.1. SYSTEMIC DYSTOPIAS GO GLOBAL

Dystopias have always worked as social thermometers of their time. They project grim visions of alternative (often futuristic) spaces and times to address contemporary concerns. For example, *Alphaville* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965), *Blade Runner*, and *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) register anxieties over the development of technology, computers and artificial intelligences; *Soylent Green* and *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988) draw attention to the ever-increasing influence of large corporations and economic neoliberalism accompanying the progressive neoliberalization of the US and world economy from the 1970s onwards; and *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) reflects the racial tensions surrounding the 1992 Rodney King beating in Los Angeles (Grant 2013: 151-2). As these examples suggest, dystopias typically address issues such as authoritarian power, class/income inequality, biotechnological advances, and otherness. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a substantial number of dystopian film narratives have begun to add a further layer to their traditional discourses by showing greater interest in the transnational dimension of socioeconomic borders and hierarchies. *Code 46*, *Sleep Dealer*, *In Time*, *Upside Down*, the 2012 *Total Recall* remake, *Elysium*, *Snowpiercer*, and *Jupiter Ascending*, among others, are

some of the most representative examples of this emerging trend. This chapter focuses on *Elysium* and *In Time*, two films that travel often-uncharted paths in science fiction cinema. They explore the form and role of physical and symbolic borders of global economic structures at multiple scales, focusing on aspects such as territorial organization, sovereignty, markets, finance, and lifespan. The analysis of these two films from a cosmopolitan perspective sheds light on what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson call “operations of capital,” that is, the logics and workings of “dispossession, exploitation, and accumulation” and also “incorporation” into the system (2015: 4-5). Contributing to this debate, this chapter discusses *In Time* and *Elysium* as two films that mirror societies governed by neoliberal expansion, the financialization of the economy, and the individualization of the benefits that technological advances and modernity bring about. At the same time, the chapter notes the difficulty that these movies find in imagining alternative modes of socioeconomic organization. *In Time*, *Elysium*, and similar films often picture worlds that eventually reproduce the same circumstances and hierarchies that they seemingly criticize.

The recent proliferation of dystopian films revolving around transnational socioeconomic matters is not surprising: the last five decades (from the 1970s onwards) have borne witness to a series of technological, economic, and sociostructural changes that have contributed to a major leap in the scope and scale of globalization. A progressive financialization of the economy has been developing since the mid-1970s and early 1980s (Epstein 2005: 4; Marazzi 2010: 28-31; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 81-2). Such financialization entails the growing influence of finance in the production and commercialization of services and goods and an increasing control of the economic system by globally-connected financial elites (Marazzi 2010: 28-29). Apart from this, societies have experienced a gradual neoliberalization, that is, a transfer of the control of economies and social services from state/public to global corporate hands (Harvey 2009: 56-7; Sassen 2014:

84). In this context, private interests and profit growth dominate over citizens and their well-being. The recent development of communication technologies has also contributed to the growth and consolidation of the global economy. Information technologies such as the internet and telecommunication systems have enabled instant modes of communication that allow finances to operate smoothly. Finance and logistic technologies such as containers, mega trucks, and drones also facilitate the planning of commodity routes and networks, cost efficiency, and the maximization of profitability (Mezzadra and Neilson 2015: 3). Such developments are providing prime narrative material to a genre that, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay notes, has always been drawn to the exploration of the darker side of socioeconomic models and global designs (2002: 218).

From a cosmopolitan perspective, it is essential to investigate the dystopian dimension of the aforementioned developments. As Kwame Anthony Appiah notes, cosmopolitanism is often not “the name [...] of the solution but of the challenge” (2006: xiii). Processes of economic globalization produce a range of precarious, unequal, and destabilizing circumstances that are directly related to cosmopolitan concerns. Cosmopolitan challenges are evident in contemporary realities such as transnational tax-evasion, the undermining of the welfare state, public services, and worker’s rights, lack of access to healthcare, extreme poverty, uneven access to resources (e.g. water), brutal re-localizations of capital and labor, forced mobilities, unwelcome migrations, land-grabs, and the erosion of sovereignty (see, among others, Appiah 2006: 163, 169; Beck 2006: 83-4; Papastergiadis 2012: 36-77; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 202-235, 245). In general, the workings of global neoliberalism affect a central dimension of cosmopolitanism: well-being and the possibility of having “decent lives” (Appiah 2006: 163, 167). As David Harvey argues, in order to imagine cosmopolitan alternatives, it is necessary to “unpack” the abstract character of neoliberal globalization and examine the actors behind it, their background, their intentions,

and how they operate (2009: 57-8). In an attempt to do so, my analysis in this chapter relies heavily on theories of borders, the economy, and finance. Such theories are crucial to unpack neoliberal globalization from a cosmopolitan perspective based on the aforementioned concerns. In this sense, this chapter uses cosmopolitanism in a predominantly methodological fashion.

Dystopia, critical dystopia, uncritical dystopia, anti-utopia, and utopia are all terms that refer to the scenarios that sf modes of thinking tend to develop. Given the different interpretations of these terms and particularly of ‘dystopia,’ I will briefly clarify the differences between them and explain what I mean when I use the term ‘dystopia’. A common assumption is that dystopia is the opposite of utopia. Yet, scholars like Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan note that dystopias occupy a middle ground between the utopia and the anti-utopia. According to Baccolini and Moylan, it is actually the anti-utopia that questions and even negates utopian possibilities (2003: 5). Dystopia is a fuzzier term: the only characteristic that the different kinds of dystopias seem to have in common is their focus on the gloomy side of future/alternative societies. Critical dystopias tend to look into the logics and causes of certain social and/or environmental systems (Penley 2004: 126), point to alternatives (Rivera 2012: 415; Tanner 2015: 10), and develop narratives of hope (Baccolini and Moylan 2003: 7). Baccolini and Moylan rely on literary examples such as *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley, 1932) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (George Orwell, 1949) to argue that dystopias, in contrast to critical dystopias, do not develop discourses of hope or change at some point in their narratives, especially at the end (2003: 7). However, the absence of hope in these narratives does not imply that they do not engage in critical social analysis. From a slightly different perspective, Tanner Mirrlees distinguishes between uncritical and critical dystopias, arguing that the former “obscure” the role of capitalism in the apocalyptic scenarios that they portray (2015: 10). In addition, Mirrlees notes that critical dystopias both

point to the ills of capitalism and imagine “how things could and should be done otherwise” (10).

Mirrlees, Baccolini, and Moylan’s dichotomous distinction between (uncritical) dystopias and critical dystopias has some limitations. Even though critical dystopias develop hopeful discourses, the solutions that they present may fail to address other central issues. In addition, the absence of social alternatives in a film does not automatically imply that the film endorses current social systems. Indeed, the negative perspective on social reality in such films may lead to a less indulgent attitude in viewers than that of films that offer hopeful (but sometimes delusive) solutions. By the same token, dystopias that do not entertain utopian possibilities as part of their narrative may also lead viewers to think about alternatives, that is, to use their utopian imagination. Thus, dystopias offer opportunities for critical social analysis even if they do not adhere to the aforementioned characteristics of the critical dystopia. Most of the films included in this chapter may be considered critical dystopias, yet, in order to avoid the limitations of using this label, I refer to the films I analyze as simply ‘dystopias.’

Since the number of films covered by the term dystopia is too large to be considered in one chapter, this part of the dissertation focuses on what I call ‘systemic dystopias.’ Other chapters of the dissertation also include reflections on different kinds of dystopia, although in a more tangential way. In this chapter, I will first explain what I mean by ‘systemic dystopia’ and then why I have chosen to focus on this kind of film. Systemic dystopias often deal with models of socioeconomic organization and their impact in the lives of citizens. These gloomy narratives often examine the role of class, social hierarchies, government, corporations, and other social or economic actors in the configuration and operation of a given system. Apart from addressing concerns about systems of social organization, contemporary dystopias also

focus on other themes such as epidemic or viral threats and environmental risks.¹² *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2003), *Children of Men*, *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007), *Contagion* (Steven Soderbergh, 2011), *Side Effects* (Steven Soderbergh, 2013), *World War Z* (Mark Forster, 2013), and *Maze Runner: Scorch Trials* (Wes Ball, 2015), among others, reflect on the epidemic risks of the ever increasing connectivity of contemporary societies and the role of borders in viral crises. Julia Echeverría's dissertation explores the epidemic film using a framework based on contagion, transnational, and risk society theories (2017). Echeverría offers a detailed analysis of this group of films, which will not be considered in this dissertation except to illustrate specific points.

Environmental dystopias such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), *The Road* (John Hillcoat, 2009), *2012*, *Snowpiercer*, *Elysium*, *The Rover* (David Michôd, 2014), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* emphasize the grim ecological landscapes of the age of climate change. These environmental dystopias are discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. Chapter three looks into the transnational dimension of environmental issues in sf, focusing on climate change and the use of spectacular images and scenes to address this phenomenon. Of course, the boundaries between the aforementioned categories are not clear-cut. For example, *Children of Men* and *Maze Runner: Scorch Trials* rely on both viral and systemic plot lines. Similarly, *Snowpiercer*, *Elysium* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* draw on systemic and environmental motifs. I will refer to some epidemic and environmental dystopias to illustrate my arguments throughout the chapter but my main focus will be on socioeconomic systems. For the sake of conciseness, I will not use the label 'systemic' but will regularly refer to the socioeconomic systems that appear in the films that I analyze.

¹² Obviously, films about robots, cyborgs, and AIs continue to be a staple group of dystopias, but their investment in discourses on transnational interactions is not as clear in the case of other dystopias and so this dissertation rarely pays attention to them.

Throughout their history, systemic dystopias have dealt with authoritarian human and technological powers, oppression, and violence. *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1929), *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960), *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin Schaffner, 1968), *Zardoz* (John Boorman, 1974), *Parts: The Clonus Horror* (Robert Fiveson, 1979), and *Gattaca* (Andrew Niccol, 1997) use class, status, species-belonging (which often serves as a metaphor of race), and biological traits/genetic profiles to pose questions about highly stratified societies, economic exploitation, hierarchies, and (under)privilege. *Alphaville*, *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966), *THX 1138* (George Lucas, 1971), *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Michael Radford, 1984), *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1990) focus specifically on authoritarian governments that suffocate their own citizens. Among these, *Alphaville* and *Logan's Run*, along with other films such as *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (Joseph Sargent, 1970), *The Terminator*, and *The Matrix* (The Wachowskis, 1999), attribute oppressive powers to computers, AIs, and machines in general. Coinciding with the rise and expansion of neoliberalism since the 1970s, *Soylent Green*, *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975), *Blade Runner*, *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), and *They Live*, to name a few, concentrate on the excesses of corporate control and its search for ever-rising profit. Similar social scenarios also appear in *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979), *Dead-End Drive-In* (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986), and *The Running Man* (Paul Michael Glaser, 1987). These films imagine times of economic crisis and unrest, linking these situations to crime, violence, and (often young) gangs on the rampage. This chapter shows that twenty-first century systemic dystopias continue to organize their narratives around these themes and concerns, although their emphasis on some of them has decreased. Economic stratification and exploitation stand out as major concerns in contemporary dystopias, while authoritarian states and machines and civilian violence are not as prominent

and, when they appear, they are often connected to other socioeconomic considerations (as in the case of films such as *The Hunger Games* or *Elysium*).

As previously mentioned, an obvious difference between classical dystopias and contemporary ones is the latter's focus on transnational interactions and global designs. Although global concerns are not exclusive to twenty-first century sf films, earlier films tend to ignore the global contexts in which they set their narratives or present transnational narratives that barely reflect on transnational issues. *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, *Mad Max*, *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, and *The Matrix* are either set in a context of global or even galactic economic unrest or of (presumably global) totalitarian machine domination but do not include explicit evidence of transnational connections and economic influence. An illustrative example is *Blade Runner*, which is set in an interplanetary system, but fails to explore the role of 2019 futuristic Los Angeles in its larger context. The film emphasizes the racial and cultural mix at street level, yet it barely gives any information about the—presumably global/galactic—white elites that live in off-Earth colonies. Viewers do not even get a glimpse of the off-world colonies and there is no direct evidence of the influence of Dr. Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel)—the owner of the (presumably transplanetary) corporation that produces replicants—in the urban environment that the film presents. In spite of this, *Blade Runner's* mise-en-scène provides a bleak depiction of urban growth, material waste, and all-encompassing corporations. The opposite happens in *Until the End of the World* (Wim Wenders, 1991). The film opens with several shots of Earth from outer space and has its protagonists move from Italy to France, then Germany, Portugal, Russia, China, Japan, the US, and finally, Australia. Apart from this, the film also reports on an Indian nuclear satellite going out of control. Yet, *Until the End of the World* barely provides any specific information on how the society that it presents works and it pays little attention to the socioeconomic system in which its characters live. In contrast to

twenty-first century dystopias, the aforementioned examples tend to either foreground socioeconomic/systemic aspects of specific locations or, in some cases, transnational connections, but they rarely foreground both at the same time. In this sense, more recent films like *In Time*, *Upside Down*, and *Elysium* develop the imaginaries of the aforementioned films and provide more elaborate portraits of global elites, their relationship with other social actors, and the transnational impact of their activities.

Rollerball and *They Live* are probably the two pre-2000 films that most closely resemble the transnational orientation of twenty-first century systemic dystopias. Both films make explicit what the films mentioned in the previous paragraph just imply: they show the role of (aspiring) global agents in the socioeconomic system. *Rollerball* presents a world in which nations no longer exist and a handful of corporations control everything. Although *Rollerball* focuses mostly on US American characters and on a game that is part of corporate strategies to shape citizens' personalities, the film also highlights transnational communication and coordination among corporate elites. For example, it includes a scene of a video call among managers from different places and shows Madrid, Tokyo, Houston, and New York executives sitting closely in stadium boxes. In this world dominated by secretive corporations, the protagonist wants to find out who makes corporate decisions and how. In spite of this, viewers do not see what the socioeconomic impact of absolute corporate control is. The film concentrates instead on a series of seemingly illogical personal/moral demands of a group of corporate leaders on the protagonist, an experienced sports player who defies corporate logic with his outstanding performance on the rollerball track. In this sense, the film's concerns seem closer to the authoritarian states of *1984* or *THX1138* than the economic nightmares of *In Time*, *Upside Down*, or *Elysium*.

They Live initially presents a realistic portrait of LA and the US in 1988. Yet, as the film progresses, two construction workers, George (Roddy Piper) and Frank (Keith David),

gradually find out that aliens, along with an elite group of humans, control their society and manipulate their perception of it. Towards the end of the film, Frank and George walk into a gala dinner where a group of business people and aliens celebrate having taken over the whole US and having plans to do the same on a planetary scale by 2020. A few minutes later, a business man tells George and Frank: “There ain’t no countries any more. No more good guys. They’re running the whole show. They [aliens] own everything. The whole goddamn planet. They can do whatever they want.” Through these two moments, the film acknowledges the global aspirations of neoliberal capital. Despite *Rollerball*’s lack of criticism of the socioeconomic impact of corporate operations, both films prove to be forerunners of the current tendency towards film narratives that explicitly point to the growing control of economies and societies around the world by a handful of neoliberal actors.

Situating their narratives in an often explicit transnational context, many twenty-first century sf films combine previous dystopian motifs such as economic exploitation, stratification, class hierarchies, and corporate control with other themes such as borders, (im)mobility, territoriality, sovereignty, transnational networks of power, capital flows, and profit-making practices, even life extraction. By addressing these topics, recent sf films often bring to the fore concerns that are central to the cosmopolitan imagination (e.g. rights, access to resources, welfare). Although little attention has been paid to these themes as recurring motifs in contemporary sf cinema, Mark Bould identifies non-places, “the dialectics of mobility and confinement,” and the relationship between different kinds of labor and global capital as common concerns in contemporary sf films (2012: 184-194). Bould mentions several twenty-first century films that feature characters living in isolated spaces that range from business lounges and offices to ghettos and refugee camps. The examples that Bould mentions include: *Demonlover* (Olivier Assayas, 2002), *Code 46*, *Jigureul jikyeora!/Save the*

Green Planet (Jang Joon-hwan, 2003), *Le temps du loup/The Time of the Wolf* (Michael Haneke, 2003), *Banlieue 13/District 13*, *Gusha no bindume/Hellevator* (Hiroki Yamaguchi, 2004), *Children of Men*, *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007), *Eden Log* (Franck Vestiel, 2007), *Death Race* (Paul Anderson, 2008), *Doomsday* (Neil Marshall, 2008), *La horde/The Horde* (Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, 2009), *District 9*, *Gamer* (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2009), and *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, 2011). Bould's extensive selection of films shows the prominence of borders and border-related issues in contemporary sf (84-7). Apart from focusing on borders, mobility, and lack thereof, contemporary sf films also deal with other transnational issues. *Babylon A.D.* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 2008), *Sleep Dealer*, *In Time*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Robocop* (José Padilha, 2014), *Elysium* and again *Code 46* imagine worlds in which biometrics, surveillance, and dataveillance play a key role in organizing humans within and beyond the nation state. Another sub-trend that is equally central to the analysis of globalization processes, but has attracted little attention so far is that of films that picture alternative territorial organizations or project current territorial changes at larger scales or in an intensified manner. *Code 46*, *Children of Men*, *Africa Paradis* (Sylvestre Amoussou, 2006), *Sleep Dealer*, *District 9*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Branded*, *Upside Down*, *World War Z*, and *Elysium* consider how these territorial schemes affect norm-making, sovereignty, individual rights, spatial integration, and market expansion. In addition, they point at the extraterritorial actions of specific social actors.

Despite the recent proliferation of sf films that explicitly point to the global context of the events that they portray, some contemporary films—like films from previous decades—continue to portray transnational interactions and influences in an implicit manner. Although this chapter focuses on those films that deal with globalization in a more explicit manner, less explicit films also provide valuable material to be analyzed through a cosmopolitan lens. This

is the case of films that only apparently deal with borders at local, regional, national, or unspecified levels such as *District 13*, *The Island* (Michael Bay, 2004), *Aeon Flux* (Karyn Kusama, 2005), *Daybreakers* (The Spierig Brothers, 2009), *Dredd* (Pete Travis, 2012), *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner* and the *Divergent* franchises, *The Purge: Anarchy* (James DeMonaco, 2014), and *The Giver* (Phillip Noice, 2014), to name but a few.

Several of the films mentioned in this chapter are also related to labor: they feature workers who are rarely allowed to move from their run-down areas and visit—let alone live in—wealthier neighborhoods, cities, regions, or countries. Conversely, those with economic and/or political power manage the industries where poorer people work, the areas where they live, and their resources. In these films, globally-connected elites attempt to maximize profits and turn a blind eye on the consequences of their money-making activities. Apart from the films on which Mark Bould focuses his analysis of contemporary labor—*Africa Paradis*, *Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007), and *Sleep Dealer* (2012: 189-195), films such as *Code 46*, *Eden Log*, *Cargo*, *Transfer* (Damir Lukacevic, 2010), *In Time*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Upside Down*, *Snowpiercer*, *Elysium*, *Jupiter Ascending* and also (although less pointedly) *The Island*, *Moon*, *Repo Men* (Miguel Sapochnik, 2010), *Self/less* (Tarsem Singh, 2015), and *Maze Runner: Scorch Trials* (Wes Ball, 2015) constitute an additional branch of films that present systems in which those who rule society tend to take advantage of transnational/galactic asymmetries to extract value, health or lifetime from other people's bodies, not only through physical activity, but also through the body itself, its organs or its life. These films point directly to the social implications and the personal costs caused by the operations of global corporate players and the privileges that only exclusive groups of people enjoy. They throw light into the logics, actions, and actors of global neoliberalism. In sum, contemporary systemic dystopias seem mainly concerned (sometimes explicitly, sometimes

ambiguously and metaphorically) with geopolitical and biopolitical issues beyond national frameworks and borders.

This chapter focuses on *Elysium* and *In Time*. Before turning to the close analysis of these films, I will briefly comment on other films that also present powerful concepts and visuals, then explain why I have decided to focus on *In Time* and *Elysium*, and finally introduce some key notions about borders. *Code 46* imagines an Earth divided into global cities such as Seattle, Shanghai, New Delhi and desert regions populated by outcasts on the fringes of the system. Drawing on this geographical model, the film addresses a variety of concerns related to labor, genetics, biometrics, norm-making, citizenship, mobility, and the environment. In spite of this, *Code 46* does not address the role of those who run the system. The same holds for the *Total Recall* remake, which shows the attempts of the government of the fictional United Federation of Britain to take over the Colony, located in present-day Australia, through a shuttle tunnel built through Earth. *Sleep Dealer* presents a world where Latinos no longer migrate to the US because they send their labor there by plugging their bodies to a computer and working through a virtual reality program. On US soil, robots receive the information sent by the workers in Mexico and perform the job for them. Even though *Sleep Dealer* offers a critical portrait of US-Mexico border relations, its almost exclusive focus on the Mexican side of the border prevents the film from exploring the role of foreign corporate managers and policy makers in the development of such a system. In short, *Code 46*, *Total Recall*, and *Sleep Dealer* produce abstract representations of power that do not illuminate the transnational impact of the elite's decisions and ways of life.

In a similar way to *In Time* and *Elysium*, *Upside Down*, *Snowpiercer* and *Jupiter Ascending* show how those in power influence and even direct the lives of others across borders. *Snowpiercer* transplants class hierarchies and conflicts to a train that travels around a post-apocalyptic Earth without ever stopping. As Gerry Canavan's article on necrofuturism in

the film proves (2014), the film generally offers rich possibilities for analysis. Yet, the confined space of the train limits the opportunities to study transnational interactions. *Upside Down* presents two radically different portraits of two neighboring planets that are connected through a skyscraper. Through this setting, the film metaphorically explores and negotiates the economic divide between the global North and South or, more specifically, between the US and Latin America. Although *Upside Down* presents an original concept and a detailed mise-en-scène that offer ample opportunities for analysis, *In Time* and *Elysium*, as I explain in the following paragraph, incorporate many of the socioeconomic concerns present in *Upside Down* while also focusing on more specific discourses on financial institutions and territorial organization respectively. *Jupiter Ascending* imagines a similar scenario of transplanetary economic activity, in which a royal corporate family spread out across the galaxy breeds and harvests humans on Earth to make and sell a rejuvenating product. However, the large number of characters and settings and their lack of development and specificity reduce the opportunities of analysis. These three films will be referred to again in the chapters on the environment, transnational love, and interconnectivity respectively.

Elysium and *In Time*, on the other hand, are more directly concerned with transnational socioeconomic systems: they address common themes in contemporary sf such as biometrics, borders, and economic extraction, and more rare topics such as finance and territoriality. They (particularly *Elysium*) do so at different scales, and they explicitly point to the impact of corporate and governmental practices. *Elysium* imagines life in the year 2154, when the affluent elites live in a spaceship to which no-one else is allowed access. Meanwhile, the rest of humanity remains on an over-populated Earth that is running short of natural resources and whose infrastructures have severely deteriorated. In this world, borders have been relocated and multiplied for the benefit of political and corporate elites, leaving Earth inhabitants practically destitute. Through this scenario, *Elysium* explores what Anne

Laure Amilhat-Szary and Frederic Giraut call “the superposition of vast sets of technologies of control” (2015: 2). In addition, the spatial organization that the film presents allows to study reterritorialization processes, extraterritorial actions, and sovereignty. *In Time*, for its part, focuses on the impact of financial global designs at a local level. The film depicts a world where time is the new currency and cities are divided in ‘time (money) zones.’ *In Time* differs from the rest of the aforementioned films in its ability to connect border-making practices with the interests of a specific sector of neoliberal globalization: finance. While all the films mentioned above imagine worlds that call for close analysis, *In Time* constitutes a unique case-study due to its interest in the proliferation of borders in cities and the relative absence of science fiction films dealing with the financial sector. In addition, both films share an interest in the relationship between economic extraction and the shortening of specific kinds of lives and call for an analysis of the biopolitical implications of this reality. Both films draw attention to a variety of processes that accentuate the divide between those who enjoy unprecedented levels of well-being and those who barely have access to food or shelter. By approaching these issues from a critical perspective, they situate the cosmopolitan imagination at the center of their narratives.

Given the prominence of borders in twenty-first century systemic dystopias and their relevance for the cosmopolitan methodology employed in this dissertation, I will now briefly explain how this chapter approaches the notion of border. When considering the role of borders, I will bear in mind the notion of ‘networked borders,’ a term that accounts for the variety and interconnection of borders that appear in the films analyzed in this chapter. I have decided to use the term ‘networked borders’ instead of Saskia Sassen’s ‘transversal borderings’ (2009: 596-7) because both describe the same reality and the former is more widely used (Popescu 2012: 81). Bearing in mind previous elaborations on the notion of networked border by William Walters and Chris Rumford, Gabriel Popescu explains that

networked borders proliferate in multiple places, that is, they are not simply the lines that divide countries. They are part of a larger web of global borders that spread deep inside national territories (81). Popescu also notes that networked borders are mobile: they move along with flows of people and goods (82). My approach to borders is influenced by two more notions. First, Popescu distinguishes between physical or territorial borders and symbolic borders, which he also calls boundaries (8). At the same time, he notes that most borders partake in both categories (8, 84). Given this observation, I use the word ‘border’ to refer to both cases. Secondly, Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naersen note that borders are mechanisms of “spatial differentiation” that “order” and “other” people (2002: 126). Given that the films included in this chapter present divided societies and suggest that borders are often systems of differentiation and segregation, I consider how these borders “order” and “other.” Yet, towards the end of the chapter I also consider how borders can be used as mechanisms of contestation in the film and in the ‘real’ world. In sum, the chapter examines networked borders, how they order and other people, and how people may challenge such structures.

2.2. *ELYSIUM*: INCORPORATING MARKETS, BORDERING BENEFITS

The universe of *Elysium* provides rich opportunities for the analysis of supranational socioeconomic structures and territorial formations at several levels. The film revolves around the interactions between Los Angeles/Earth and the wheel where human elites live and the control that the latter exercises on the former. In visual terms, the Elysium wheel stands out due to its dimensions, some establishing shots that direct viewers’ attention towards it, and several moving aerial and close-ups that allow viewers to inspect it. The wheel and the technocultural specificities of its society are also the central conceptual elements of the novum that *Elysium* develops. Darko Suvin defines novum as a plausible

“novelty” or “innovation” that “determines the narrative logic” of the story (1979: 63). The wheel is indeed the greatest novelty in the system that the film depicts, as it is a new spatial formation. As such, it produces estrangement in viewers and draws their attention to itself. Given the visual and narrative prominence of the wheel and the interactions that it articulates at local, planetary and galactic levels, my analysis of the film focuses on the territorial and socioeconomic re-configurations in the futuristic and yet utterly familiar environment of the film. This section shows how *Elysium* presents different kinds of border formations as central elements in the geographical organization of global and even galactic systems whose aim is to protect and foster ever-growing profits and individual privileges.¹³ Given the relevance of borders in *Elysium*, the film lends itself particularly well to the exploration of transnational “relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation,” which is one of the pillars of the idea of border as method (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 18) and of the cosmopolitan approach that this dissertation employs.

Situating its action between Earth and its orbit, *Elysium* provides an eagle’s eye view of current major geopolitical and economic trends in the planet. It is possible to look at globalization processes in *Elysium* from at least three different (and yet compatible) perspectives, as the film relates to debates in the fields of urban studies, border studies, and, more generally, geopolitics (particularly territory and sovereignty). Interpreted as an urban metaphor, the scenario that *Elysium* presents is similar to the analysis of Los Angeles that scholars such as Mike Davis (1990, 1998) and Edward Soja (2000) develop. Although this is a relevant aspect of the film, it is not my main concern here. Instead, the next section on *In Time* deals with the specific urban manifestations of economic globalization. *Elysium* actually stands out as a film that deals with global issues at a larger scale. Through its

¹³ Although economic expansion through the universe may seem an idea confined to the science fictional imagination, both public and private investment on projects beyond Earth is increasingly becoming part of contemporary global economic structures (see Dickens and Ormrod 2010: 531-553). This issue is addressed later on in this section.

exploration of global economic structures, *Elysium* captures many of the multiple bordering processes that take place nowadays: reterritorialization and rebordering practices (Sassen 2008, 2014; Popescu 2012; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), the networking, personalization, and mobility of borders (Walters 2004; Popescu 2012; Amilhat-Szary and Giraut 2015), and the growing use of biometrics (Amoore 2006; Popescu 2012; Potzch 2015). The film takes advantage of the privileged viewpoint that these borders offer to shape a discourse that denounces the growing socioeconomic inequalities that global capital generates. This is an aspect that *Elysium* shares with other recent sf movies such as *Code 46*, *In Time*, *Total Recall* (2012), and *Upside Down*. *Elysium*'s ability to connect current debates on borders with wider territorial and socioeconomic processes is what makes it a particularly useful film for the analysis of globalization. From a broader geopolitical perspective, *Elysium* engages in current debates on new international trade agreements such as TIPP or TPP and older ones such as NAFTA, the economic annexation of territories in the historical and present development of capitalism (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Mignolo 2000; Dickens and Ormrod 2010), the expansionist logics of neoliberalism, the proliferation of special economic zones—SEZs—(Ong 2006; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), extraterritorial concessions (Strauss 2015) and foreign land acquisitions (Sassen 2014: 80-116), and the automation and privatization of violent force (Singer 2003; McFate 2015; Varin 2015). As different as these issues may be, *Elysium* elucidates how they are governed by a set of neoliberal logics in which borders play a key role.

This section on *Elysium* begins with a brief overview of the different kinds of borders that appear in the film. It then moves on to consider how both governmental and private actors reconfigure norms and defend their economic interests, sometimes disregarding sovereignty. Then I analyze how the film relates to historical, current, and future processes of territorial integration, market incorporation, and profit maximization. Yet, *Elysium*'s elites do

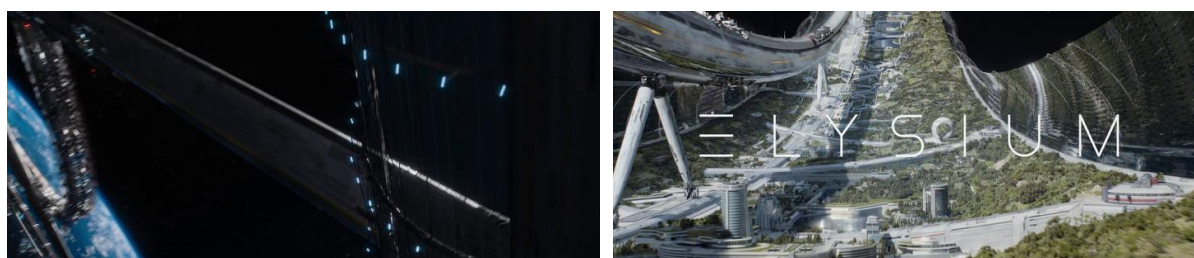
not only enjoy the privilege of accumulating capital: they use their economic and political power to enjoy a series of benefits (healthcare, fast transportation, leisure, an unpolluted environment, and technological advances) for themselves. That is, they border the benefits of technocultural modernity. However, at the end of the film, a few insurgents find a way to provide decent healthcare for every human. In this way, *Elysium* seemingly offers viewers a cosmopolitan alternative to the rigidly divided world that they have previously seen on screen. The last part of the section considers the implications and shortcomings of this discourse. It suggests that *Elysium* offers an ambivalent position towards borders, showing their role in the articulation of global designs at multiple scales, but also perpetuating racial boundaries and proposing patches to the system rather than a revision of the function of borders and substantial systemic reform.

2.2.1. Beyond the Fence: Dispersed, Mobile, and Embodied Borders

Elysium and *In Time* depict similar kinds of networked borders, although they do so in different ways. Since my analysis of *In Time* in this chapter focuses more on the local dimension of transnational borders and the film's use of mise-en-scène, here I briefly point to the main characteristics of the borders that appear in *Elysium* to contextualize my analysis of the film. The analysis of *In Time* looks at urban borders in more detail.

Border walls feature prominently at the beginning of *Elysium*, as the camera flies over a fence topped with barbed wire at the edges of the space wheel and an extreme long shot shows the dimensions of the fence (figures 1 and 2). Yet, borders do not only appear at the limits of Elysium. As Étienne Balibar notes, borders are “wherever selective controls are to be found” (2002: 84). Migrants in *Elysium* find borders in the homes of the space wheel, as the advanced healing beds only heal those who have an Elysium id printed in their wrists. In addition, the robot police automatically single out those passengers whom they deem

suspicious at a local bus stop. A similar scene also appears in *Sleep Dealer*, where a security guard uses a hand-held scanner to check passengers before they get on the bus. In this sense, borders are, as Popescu writes, “dispersed through society” (2012: 27). The scenario that *Elysium* presents may seem futuristic, yet many borders are already dispersed hundreds of miles inside and sometimes also outside national territories. Examples of this can be found around the world. For instance, Australia processes migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in off-shore centers outside its national territory in Bintan Island, Indonesia, or Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 167; Gibson 2015: 83). Since the drastic rise in the number of refugees who arrived in Europe in 2015 (mostly but not only because of the war in Syria), the borders of the European Union seem to have moved from countries in its edges such as Greece or Bulgaria to countries well inside its territory (such as Hungary and Austria) and outside of it (such as Turkey). These countries conduct additional controls and have built new fences to manage the arrival of refugees in their territories (Castle and Surk 2015; Langley 2016). Similarly, the US Border Patrol has set up interior checkpoints up to a hundred miles away from the borderline with Mexico or Canada (Ortega 2014). In this sense, *Elysium* reflects a global tendency towards border dispersal.



Figures 1 and 2: The very first shots of the Elysium space wheel draw attention to the relevance of borders in the film.

The use of drones, satellites, and the data they gather in *Elysium* also show that, apart from being dispersed, some borders are also mobile. Satellites track the course of the three unregistered shuttles that carry migrants to Elysium and, as soon as migrants land there, a

Homeland helicopter carrying robot border agents comes to their location. Homeland efforts do no longer concentrate right at the border but wherever migrants are or go. In this sense, borders move around and follow migrants. Mobile border technologies such as satellites and drones do not only facilitate Elysium's control over its territory, they also help Elysium to carry out extraterritorial actions that aim to protect its citizens and its political/economic interests on foreign soil. Satellites locate the place where the shuttle of John Carlyle (William Fichtner) crashes on Earth and allow Elysium to send a group of mercenaries to fight those who plan on attacking the Elysium CEO and stealing the sensitive information that he carries in a brain-incorporated device. Satellites also reveal the identity of the protagonist, Max Da Costa (Matt Damon), as he and some other people who assault John Carlyle are identified by satellite. Later, drones manage to identify Max when he hides in the streets of Los Angeles. Satellites and drones obtain information on the go that helps Elysium's authorities to protect its territory, its privileged status and the wellbeing of its citizens in almost real time.

Elysium goes even further and suggests that borders are not only dispersed and mobile, but also embodied. Through its depiction of embodied borders, the film suggests that borders can be anywhere and may build on other borders. Gabriel Popescu explains that embodied borders “are highly mobile and utterly individual, allowing constant and accurate movement control at the smallest spatial scale” (2012: 107). Embodied borders in *Elysium* (and often also in real life) are also biometric borders: they use a subject's unique physical or behavioral traits to establish her/his identity. Common examples of biometric markers are iris, facial features, fingerprints, keystroke, or movement patterns (Amoore 2006: 342; Popescu 2012: 108; Potzch 2015: 105). The beds that heal citizens in the film work or not depending on the body that lies on them (figure 3). They are designed to heal Elysium citizens only. In order to determine whether someone is from Elysium, they read a tag that is inscribed in the patient's skin (figure 4). Similarly, satellites and drones can identify Max

because his biometric information is part of the database that they use. A brief glimpse of his facial features is enough for a drone to identify him. Apart from pointing to the use of physical features to sort individuals, *Elysium* shows that behaviors can also be used to produce information about bodies. In the film, robots acting as police and parole officers automatically read bodies: they do not only single out Max and instantaneously have access to his criminal history, but also track and respond to his reactions (knocking him down when he uses sarcasm, or offering him a pill when his heart rate rises). The robots' reliance on such behavioral markers resonates with Holger Potzch's argument that biometrics serve to identify "abstracted patterns of life" that are deemed to require disciplining (2015: 105-6, 114-5). As several scholars have noted, the growing use of biometric information and the subsequent embodiment of the border that comes with it entails that the border is wherever a human body goes (Amoore 2006: 347-8; Popescu 2012: 107; Potzch 2015: 106). Whether in their physical or behavioral form, *Elysium* makes clear that biometric borders are everywhere, as the information that bodies provide can be accessed and deployed wherever Max is. In general, the use of biometric information makes borders dispersed, mobile and embodied at the same time. The combination of different modalities of borders indicates that they superpose and form networks. For example, the healing beds in the film constitute a dispersed border mechanism and also depend on the embodiment of the border at a personal level through the use of biometric information.

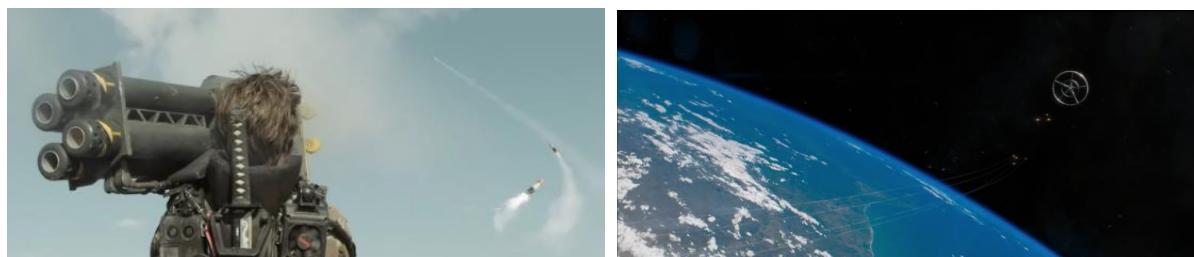


Figures 3 and 4: Embodied borders prevent non-Elysians from using the medical beds in the space wheel.

2.2.2. Re-(b)ordering Norms and Sovereignty

The multiplicity and superposition of borders in *Elysium* points to three current socioeconomic processes: the re-bordering of norms and sovereignty, market incorporation, and the individual bordering of economic benefits. To begin with, the superposition of borders allows certain actors (such as Elysium ministers and mercenaries) to skirt around sovereignty. Border policing both in the film and in the real world takes place beyond a nation's territory and its borders. The mercenaries are an illustrative example. One of them, Kruger (Sharlto Copley), receives an order to launch three missiles towards three 'undocumented' shuttles from Earth transporting migrants headed towards Elysium (figures 5 and 6). Kruger launches the missiles from Earth and, by doing so, he circumvents Earth's sovereignty. He executes an order on foreign soil, where he and Elysium would have, in theory, no authority. Even though Kruger's action in *Elysium* is more of an extraterritorial than a cross-border shooting, this scene recalls the widely covered death in 2012 of sixteen-year-old Mexican José Antonio Elena Rodríguez after US border agent Lonnie Schwartz shot him ten times across the border (Associated Press 2015). Such actions are not only criminal offences but they also disregard sovereignty. These kinds of events are not rare: the US border patrol killed 42 people in cross-border shootings from 2005 to 2013, according to *The Arizona Republic* (Ortega and O'Dell 2013). As in real life, cross-border shooting is not legal in the film. Elysium officials note: "we are unauthorized to use our assets on Earth." In this case, the Elysium government calls the person who is ultimately responsible for this action—Delacourt (Jodie Foster)—to a hearing. Yet, it is a hearing without consequences for her. She keeps her political position and rebukes other government members for their 'weak' approach to the protection of Elysium's borders. The only measure that the Elysium government takes is to discharge the mercenary who actually executed Delacourt's order to shoot. As in the film, governments and judicial powers often allow these actions to go unchallenged, delaying

investigations and eventually failing to take actions against those who are supposed to see to the compliance with the law but actually break it, and trampling over the people and the government of the border territory affected by these actions (Ortega and O'Dell 2013).



Figures 5 and 6: Extraterritorial actions: following Elysium's orders, a mercenary launches three missiles from Earth that are supposed to hit three 'undocumented' shuttles headed towards the space wheel.

Sleep Dealer, *Upside Down*, and *Captain American: The Winter Soldier* present similar scenarios in which armed services deploy force on foreign soil to 'defend' their borders or to protect their economic interests. *Upside Down* shows border patrol agents shooting anyone who ventures into the bounded border area of the Sage Mountains, even if those who step into this area are still in their own country. *Sleep Dealer* extends the range of action of the US border forces, which protect U.S.-owned dams in Oaxaca (southern Mexico) and Vaupes (Colombia). The film includes two scenes in which drone pilots attack so-called 'water terrorists,' that is, those whom they deem a threat for the water company. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* envisions a global surveillance system comprising satellites and military-like flying ships capable of shooting anyone who poses a threat to the economic and political powers anywhere on Earth. *Elysium* participates in this dialogue around extraterritorial armed forces with other contemporary sf films and develops a cosmopolitan critique of the advance of neoliberalism in terms of territorial scope.

At the same time, *Elysium* presents a more nuanced picture of current geopolitical trends than the aforementioned films by capturing the proliferation of private armies and mercenaries since the 1990s, a process that contributes to increasing the volume of private economic activity and to the consolidation of neoliberalism (Singer 2003, Tonkin 2011, Mc

Fate 2014, Varin 2015). In the film, Kruger retrieves the missiles that he is asked to launch from a container displaying the words “Elysium Corporate Authority” and “Civil Cooperation Bureau” [my emphasis], hinting that he is not part of the military. When he and two other mercenaries chase Max and his colleagues, there is nothing in their gear, equipment, or ship that links them to Elysium. Indeed, the ship carries a South African flag (a country and government that does not appear in the film), thus suggesting that these private mercenaries may have bought it from the no-longer existing (in the film) government of South Africa. In addition, Kruger’s operations are not officially authorized by Elysium’s government, thus recalling the covert nature of many of the operations carried out by mercenaries and private military firms in real life (Singer 2003: 48). By introducing private military actors in its narrative, the film enables a reading of military privatization as one of several steps towards the incorporation of activities and opportunities for increasing private sector profits. However, *Elysium* misses the opportunity to present these mercenaries as part of the military corporate industry, to show their role in the global economy, and their connection to finance, which according to some scholars, is a prevalent reality (Singer 2003: 47).

Production models and technologies of screening and control in *Elysium* show a wide network of extraterritorial economic influence designed to cater for the needs of corporations and the extreme neoliberal system in place in the film. Armadyne is a company managed by an Elysium citizen, John Carlyle, and it manufactures its products (robots) for Elysium. The government of the space wheel then decides how to deploy the robots both on Earth and Elysium. The large dimensions of the facility and the workers’ precarious conditions point to Armadyne’s resemblance to a maquiladora or a factory in a SEZ (special economic zone)—both examples of extraterritorial concessions (figure 7). As Michael Strauss points out, extraterritorial concessions consist of a company or country operating activities in a delimited

area on foreign soil in which special norms or laws apply (Strauss 2015: 63). He also notes that “a leased territory can be a potential target of military attack” (2015: 66). Armadyne adopts security measures such as scanning workers to assure that they do not carry any weapons into the factory. This suggests that Armadyne is an extraterritorial concession. A similar way of depicting an extraterritorial concession appears in *Sleep Dealer*, where armed guards, automatic firearms, and drones protect dams owned by US capital in Colombia and Mexico. Extraterritorial concessions such as SEZs in China, India, Latin America, some African countries (often with China as a mediator) or maquiladoras in Mexico adapt their national legal framework to specific areas so that companies may benefit from a set of norms that meet their needs (Ong 2006: 19, 77, 106; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 216-7). In this sense, corporations indirectly alter legislation to suit their interests. Elysium’s power to alter norms is also evident in its ability to designate Los Angeles as a no-fly zone as they see fit, temporarily banning any flights to and or from the city. Such configurations indicate that Elysium re-orders and re-borders norms and evince the malleability of Earth’s sovereignty.



Figure 7: The Armadyne factory as maquila.

2.2.3. Territorial Integration and Market Incorporation

Elysium also presents a world of territorial and economic integration. Even though it focuses on a specific area—a sprawling LA in ruins—the film suggests that this area represents the state of most of the planet. This is evident from the very first shots. *Elysium* opens with a

series of aerial tracking shots that show several identical sprawling urban areas in decay (figures 8 and 9). The speed of these shots, the substantial range of space that they cover and the almost-identical landscapes that they show indicate that the view that they offer is a generalized reality. In addition, the captions that accompany these initial shots introduce the film's geographical premise by referring to Earth as a whole. The fact that the parts set in LA were actually shot near Mexico City and that LA visually recalls, as Celestino Deleyto points out, a "Middle East war-wrecked town" ("The Beauty of the Gated Community") also contribute to the effect of making this fictional LA look as if it could be set almost anywhere on Earth. After these glimpses of urban spaces, an establishing shot of the planet suggests that Earth has become a single territory (figure 10). The film further reinforces this image of a unified global space through additional establishing shots of urban areas in decay without specifying their location at different points in the film.



Figures 8 and 9: Several aerial tracking shots showing similar landscapes present Earth as space of inescapable decay in the opening shots of *Elysium*.



Figure 10: Before showing Elysium, an establishing shot presents Earth as a unified territory.

Such territorial integration on Earth, along with Elysium's extraterritorial power, indicate that Elysium has set up a large scheme of economic extraction in which those who live in the space station benefit from the generation of value from Earth as a whole. Free trade with Earth satisfies one of the biggest concern for Elysians—apart from border security: to maximize revenue. In a conversation with Armadyne CEO John Carlyle, other managers show their concerns that “a clear path to upside” (to higher profits) may be compromised. Relying on different narrative techniques, other sf films such as *They Live* and *Jupiter Ascending* have shown similar cosmopolitan concerns by having civilizations from distant planets come to Earth to incorporate its economic activity into their system. Similar market enlargement and integration patterns are taking place in the world right now, both at private and national levels. A clear example from the private sector is Apple. On October 27, 2015, the company presented the largest annual corporate profit in history (\$53.4 billion), mostly thanks to its sales in the Chinese market (News Corp Australia 2015). In general, this kind of results depend on a constant renegotiation of norms to allow companies to penetrate markets with evermore advantageous conditions.

Apart from trade and market integration agreements in place such as NAFTA and that regulating the European Economic Area, several national governments are trying to develop similar agreements at an even larger scale. Two of the most prominent examples are the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which currently includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the USA and the European Union. Although Trump's US Government has recently retreated from the TPP and put the TTIP on hold, it is likely that the US will join these or similar deals in the future (Rappeport 2018). Before the United States' current position, these agreements entailed a major leap in scope. The TTIP and the TPP were forecast to regulate economic zones that account for 50% and

40% of the world's GDP respectively. Together, however, they were expected to comprise 60% of the world's GDP, as the US initially participated in both agreements (Oxford Analytica 2014). These agreements guarantee an easier mobility of capital and goods, but do not envisage the free mobility of people, nor do they protect their welfare. TTIP creates advantageous normative frameworks for transnational business players, giving them a say in public policy-making and granting them the right to sue governments if their policies harm their profits—however beneficial such policies may be for the environment or society (Strange 2015: 86; De Ville and Siles-Brügge 2016: 130-1). In short, such agreements seek to expand the scope of corporate power and profits. While the idea of a homogeneous, completely-integrated Earth that *Elysium* sketches is deceiving, it hints at the role of scale in what Saskia Sassen calls the “systemic deepening of advance capitalism” (2014: 86, 216).

The current trend towards the enlargement of the scope of economies by territorial means that *Elysium* presents is not entirely new: it is part of a larger historical context of territorial incorporation that is likely to keep developing in the future, as the film suggests. Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein argue that the Americas were essential in the growth and establishment of the modern world-system, which they trace back to the 16th century. They note that one of the key factors in the development of the world-system was that the Americas provided a large extension of land (1992: 549-50). As I advanced in the first chapter, Walter Mignolo observes that the first Christian mission that incorporated the Americas into a world-system then gave way to what he calls the civilizing, developmental, and neoliberal missions (2000: 724-5), all of which have been ways of reorganizing world geopolitics to expand the economic scope and influence of capital-hoarding elites. Opportunities for profit enlargement are not limited to Earth: Peter Dickens and James Ormrod have noted the relevance of outer space in current economic systems and its central role in future economic growth. In their work on the galactic expansion of the economy,

Dickens and Ormrod point to current realities such as the role of satellites in the functioning of communication systems and their relevance in sectors such as the media and finance (2010: 533-4). They also mention the plans for expanding the tourism industry in outer space and the economic potential of setting mines in other planets and finding new ways of using solar energy in outer space (2010: 535, 541). *Elysium* captures this ongoing development of the neoliberal mission in outer space through the spatial concept that governs the narrative, by filtering some events through satellite information screens, and through the camerawork that the film uses to present the space station. This last aspect is evident in an establishing shot at the beginning of the film in which the camera pans from Earth to the Elysium wheel as the music increases slightly in volume (figure 11). Apart from showing the location of a new economic frontier, this shot captures the radical expansion of the system in a visual and aural way.



Figure 11: Earth is not enough: a socioeconomic system in need of perpetual growth has no choice but to enlarge its scope to outer space.

2.2.4. (De)bordering Benefits: *Elysium*'s Ambivalent Cosmopolitanism

The expansion, integration, and accumulation processes described above are accompanied by the bordering of the profits and benefits that Elysium generates (a clean environment, advanced technologies, fast transportation, comfort, leisure, health). Of all these benefits, the film puts special emphasis on access to health treatments and the de-bordering of this

‘privilege’ at the end of the story. *Elysium* juxtaposes an overcrowded and deteriorated hospital with scarce resources in LA with the individual healing beds that every Elysium citizen seems to have at home. Advanced technologies also check health risks and life threats for Elysians and provide them with instant information about their health anywhere on Earth or on Elysium. For example, when John Carlyle’s shuttle crashes in LA, a computer lets him know that he is not harmed and provides Elysium with updates on his condition. The networked, dispersed, embodied, mobile, and extraterritorial character of borders guarantees restricted access to such Elysian privileges while allowing the expansion of borderlands and of the neoliberal economic system that Elysium relies on. The film suggests that borders do not only delimit (rich) countries but also protect the individual property, benefits and security that a few enjoy. When a shuttle with migrants heads towards the space station, Elysians treat it as a “security breach.” This breach does not pose a violent threat for Elysians. Rather, for them, it threatens their privatized and personalized security (which reflects a reversal of the social security schemes that some countries built in the second half of the twentieth century and are now being privatized and thus, individualized). The film reflects what Walter Williams, in his analysis of British security policies, calls the “reordering and [...] re-hierarchicizing of political priorities” in favor of border security and to the detriment of social welfare (2004: 244). Elysians deem the inclusion of more citizens an obstacle to the growth of their income and privileges. In the hidden logics of this system, more people equals less share. However, at the end of the film, Max and Spider, the leader of the gang that sends the shuttles to Elysium, hack Elysium’s computer and re-set it so that everyone on Earth counts as an Elysium citizen. By doing so, they de-border Elysium’s health privileges. Some of the last shots show people of different ethnicities running towards medical shuttles sent to Earth. Thus, the film celebrates the cosmopolitan ideal of global access to decent healthcare.

Yet, even though *Elysium* appears to develop a cosmopolitan discourse through its critical portrayal of borders, its extraterritorial power and its celebration of universal healthcare, it is more ambiguous in other respects. The ending hints that the divide between both worlds vanishes as every person on Earth gets citizenship and access to healthcare. Without doubt, healthcare is an important issue, but it does not guarantee the creation of a series of circumstances that will allow people to have a decent life (although it contributes to it). In spite of the changes that the events at the end of the film bring about, a gulf still exists between the former citizens of Elysium and those who live in resource-depleted areas, those who have poor job conditions or do not even have a job, and presumably also other groups who do not explicitly appear in the film such as the homeless and families without incomes. At the end of the film, the systemic circumstances that lead most people to live in shanty towns and to subsist through informal economic activities do not change. Although the different borders in *Elysium* disappear or weaken, the film's ending overlooks the central role of the economic model (extraterritorial concessions, market integration and expansion, corporate cultures of profit maximization, and resource exploitation) in creating the harsh life conditions that most people on Earth endure throughout the film. Echoing Giorgio Agamben, the authors of "The antiAtlas of Borders, A Manifesto" note that "neoliberal thinking [...] sees addressing the root causes of various issues as more costly than dealing with their effects" (Parizot et al. 2014: 3). This is precisely what *Elysium*'s ending does: it presents the mitigation of some effects of Elysium's neoliberal economic practices (the lack of healthcare) as a solution for people on Earth. It proposes a patch on the system rather than its reformulation. *Elysium* also reflects what Mark Fisher calls "capitalist realism": the inability to imagine alternatives to neoliberalism (2009: 2). Conforming to this notion, *Elysium* generates contradictions and makes the alternative (a global healthcare scheme) part of the mainstream (a savage neoliberal system) (Fisher 2009: 5, 9). In the end, *Elysium*'s

cosmopolitan dreams fall prey to the capitalist-realist environment that permeates contemporary life.

Another aspect that contributes to the ambivalent character of *Elysium* is the role of race in the film. *Elysium* includes characters of different ethnicities: LA is a largely Latino area where some Spanish can be heard, the ‘undocumented’ shuttles that travel towards Elysium carry Asian, Latino, and black characters, Carlyle has a video call with other managers who are a black man, a blonde Anglo woman, and an Asian man, and the last name of Elysium’s Prime Minister is Patel, suggesting that he is of Indian descent. Yet, except for nurse Frey (Alice Braga), Max’s friend Julio (Diego Luna), and perhaps also Spider (Wagner Moura), most of the main characters (Max, Delacourt, Carlyle, Kruger) are white. More importantly, the end of the film emphasizes Max’s role as a Christ-like (and white) savior, pushing other racial and systemic debates to the side. In this sense, *Elysium* develops a similar racial discourse to *The Matrix*. Nicola Rehling observes that “despite the trilogy’s obvious effort to include a multicultural cast [...], Western racial norms are reinscribed” by presenting Neo as a white messiah (2009: 126). In one of the last scenes, Max gives his life, that is, he dies, so that the rest of humanity may be granted citizenship and have access to healthcare. The last moments of the film pay tribute to Max’s heroism by recreating some moments from his childhood. Previously, the film celebrates universal healthcare through several shots of non-white people running towards the health shuttles that are landing on Earth (figures 12 and 13). The inclusion of moments from Max’s childhood shifts attention from the actual changes that the world is about to go through to focus on the white savior. In fact, the very last shot of the film is an image of Max as a kid running on the street as a thin halo of light glows in the middle of the frame (figure 14). In addition, the shuttles and the robots that come to heal people are also white and their color fills the frame in several of the last shots. Although white is a color that is commonly used in medical contexts, such

whiteness is non-existent in the LA hospital that appears earlier in the film. These images thus reinforce the image of the white savior and the strong dichotomy between the whiteness of the saviors and the blackness of the saved, a trope that Matthew Hughey has identified as a common practice in cinema (2014: 2). In spite of the potential that *Elysium* has shown in this section for the analysis of contemporary global phenomena from a cosmopolitan perspective, the film fails not only to imagine systemic reinvention, but also to envision non-whites participating in the construction of their future.¹⁴



Figures 12 and 13: A series of shots of non-white people running towards medical shuttles celebrate the newly-acquired universal right to healthcare.



Figure 14: The last shots of *Elysium* privilege the figure of the white savior over the cosmopolitan cause that he has fought for along with some secondary characters.

2.3. IN TIME: CONNECTING BORDERS AND GLOBAL FINANCE

This section presents *In Time* as a film that illuminates the role of borders at a local level and their relationship with the transnational interests of financial corporations. By exploring these issues, the film draws attention to a series of cosmopolitan concerns related to working

¹⁴ The section on *In Time* in this chapter also touches upon discourses on race in sf. A more detailed analysis of race in contemporary sf film appears in chapter four.

conditions, quality of life, mobility, and the right to live. Despite the relevance of finance in bordering processes, theories of cosmopolitanism have generally overlooked its role in shaping situations that pose cosmopolitan challenges. This section attempts to bring to the surface some of those challenges. *In Time* imagines a near future in which time has replaced money as the currency. In this world, people have been genetically engineered to stop aging at 25, so, when they reach that age, they have to earn time or they die within a year. The film, shot in Los Angeles, portrays a world divided into “zones” and focuses on two of them: Dayton, a working-class area, and New Greenwich, a financial district. Through this setting, *In Time* explores the roles of borders in the processes by which the latter territory extracts value from the former. In order to investigate such processes, I consider the different kinds of borders that appear in the film, including not only fences and walls, but also other borders related to wealth, time, etiquette, behavior, race, and surveillance. Close examination of borders, spatial dynamics, and characters’ behavior elucidate the rationale behind the socioeconomic structures that the film depicts, who benefits from them, and what their interests are. Focusing on such aspects, this section shows that the different borders that appear in the film control the movement of people and money. By doing so, these borders contribute to creating and preserving several conditions that benefit global financial firms and pose cosmopolitan challenges: the generalization of debt, the casualization of labor, workers’ acquiescence, the protection of the financial sector, and the criminalization of the poor.

In Time offers a cosmopolitan perspective on economic globalization by emphasizing the central role and abusive power of finance in current global structures. In her work on global cities, Saskia Sassen associates new border formations in cities with the neoliberal interests of global corporations (2013b: 68). Sassen notes that, since the current global system began to develop in the 1980s, borders have become increasingly “transversal and impenetrable” (68-9). She identifies cities as one of the main places where these new borders

sprout (69). The transversality of borders is evident in *In Time*, as borders are not only physical barriers: they are surveillance systems and borders related to wealth, time, and appearance also control movement into, out of, and through areas. *In Time* also provides a more detailed portrait of the scenario that Sassen describes. While Sassen refers to financial firms, along with multinational corporations, as one of the main bordering agents in cities, she does not explicitly connect the interests and operations of financial firms with specific kinds of urban borders and their impact in workers' lives. This is precisely what *In Time* does. Writing on contemporary borders and their socioeconomic context, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson argue that borders and labor are multiplying and connect these processes to the progressive financialization of the economy since the 1970s (2013: 81-5). Although *In Time* does not explore the multiplication and heterogeneization of labor that Mezzadra and Neilson identify (2013: 87-92), the film also connects the multiplication of borders to financialization processes. Close analysis of *In Time* shows how some of the conditions that the multiplication of borders produces meet the interests of global finance.

I start by analyzing the two main different spaces that the film presents and explaining how it introduces globally-connected financial corporations in a segregated urban environment. I then move on to consider the different kinds of networked borders that appear in the film and how they manage the movement of people and money. In addition, I briefly address the connection between bordering processes and financial power. Then, I concentrate on a specific set of border-generated circumstances that meet the interests of global finance: the generalization of greed, the casualization of labor, workers' acquiescence, the protection of financial areas, and the criminalization of the poor. Finally, this section reflects on the possibilities that people have to challenge border systems in spite of the ordering and othering ability of borders and the power of financial corporations.

2.3.1. Urban Differentiation and Transnational Connections

In *In Time*, the contrast between wealthy and poor areas is evident in the radically different urban, architectural, and design models that configure each area. On the one hand, the streets in zone 12 (Dayton) feature brick walls covered in washed-out paint, dull concrete blocks, low buildings, barbed wire, fences, and bare open spaces in the vicinity of factories. In Dayton, Will (Justin Timberlake) and his mother (Olivia Wilde) share a modest apartment with just a few pieces of basic furniture and no decoration or paintings. Their austere lifestyle becomes even more obvious when an empty closet with a few hangers and no clothes and almost empty food drawers can be seen in the background of the frame (figures 15 and 16). Both in the apartment and in the street, the camera adopts different perspectives, providing a comprehensive 360-degree view of the space where both characters live and emphasizing their situation. As Will gets paid for his work, several workers line up in a corridor with low ceilings and no windows waiting to get their salary. The lack of windows, the concrete walls, and artificial lighting suggest that the corridor is underground. This setting evokes a similar scene in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) in which some workers mechanically march out of the factory through a tunnel. The resemblance between both scenes links the workers' oppression and exploitation in *Metropolis* to the precarious conditions of the workers in Andrew Niccol's film. In general, the mise-en-scène delineates a space characterized by time-worn, run-down buildings and scarce resources. Yet, as Will puts it, "Dayton is not the only zone that could use a few extra years." Towards the end of the film, a television channel shows people from zones 11 (Circadia), 12 (Dayton) and 14 (Livingston) massively crossing borders between areas, reminding viewers that Dayton is not the only poor area.



Figures 15 and 16: Almost-empty closets and drawers: life on the bare minimum.

New Greenwich (zone 4) has a completely different appearance: modern high-rise buildings, upscale luxury hotels, glass façades, avenues, casinos, mansions, and private beaches signal the concentration of wealth in the area. Instead of using buses like the citizens of Dayton do, people in New Greenwich own vintage cars driven by chauffeurs. The New Greenwich hotel where Will sleeps presents a modern, stylish design that contrasts with the somber decoration of the ‘no-tell’ hotel and the old-fashioned furniture at ‘The Century’ hotel in Dayton (Figures 17 and 18). Pristine white linen, glass walls that let the light flood the suite, furniture shaped in pronounced straight lines, and room catering and service indicate that the New Greenwich hotel takes care of all kinds of details and caters to nearly every need its clients may have. Spaces also appear to be more open in New Greenwich: there are some green areas and boulevards, people have their meals as they sit at restaurant tables on the street, and a glass wall separates the hotel lobby from the street, giving the impression that these two spaces are not separated. Even though the ornate, ostentatious mansions and casinos contrast with the functional, polished offices, they show the same reality: that the elite has all the resources that they need and want. The film also points towards the uncontestable power of New Greenwich’s financial corporations and institutions by offering several long shots in which the façades of the police headquarters, the Weis Timelenders building, or other banks’ skyscrapers fill all of the frame (figure 19). The vast dimensions of these buildings—that exceed the limits of the frame—give the socioeconomic actors that operate from them an imposing appearance.



Figures 17 and 18: The mise-en-scène emphasizes the abyss between Dayton and New Greenwich.



Figure 19: The façade of the Weis Timelenders fills most of the frame, giving the company an imposing appearance.

Even though *In Time* is limited to one city, the film employs visual and narrative strategies to clarify that the urban environment in the film reflects global dynamics. More specifically, *In Time* focuses on the centrality of transnational webs of financial interests and the role of borders in the mapping of such interests in urban spaces. In spite of the differences and borders between zones, *In Time* features a highly connected world. After Will kidnaps Sylvia (Amanda Seyfried), her father—banker Philippe Weis (Vincent Kartheiser)—talks to other overseas leaders, trying to reassure them that no ransom money/time will be paid for the kidnapping of his daughter. In turn, they show their fear that the problem might spread to other parts of the world and that the system might collapse. Throughout the conversation, an electronic world map covering an entire wall in Philippe’s office appears onscreen (figure 20). The map indicates that Philippe is calling from California and his counterparts are in Europe (probably Germany or Poland) and in central Russia. In addition, the screen—like the one in Carlyle’s office in *Elysium*—offers live feed on time markets. Similarly, the timekeepers’ headquarters are equipped with computers and large screens that display live

time-flow and per capita time on maps and charts (figure 21). As Philippe talks to timekeeper/policeman Raymond Leon (Cillian Murphy), the screen always appears in the background, either directly or reflected in the window glass (figure 22). The constant presence of the world map highlights Philippe and Raymond's role in the international economic system: they represent the interests of global finance and Philippe responds directly to it. In fact, after Sylvia and Will steal a million years from Philippe, the screen in the banker's office starts flashing and beeping with calls from all over the world. In this sense, *In Time* resembles such movies as *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Elysium*, which also feature politicians and corporate managers from different countries or of different ethnicities having video or even hologram conferences, pointing to the interconnected interests of global money.

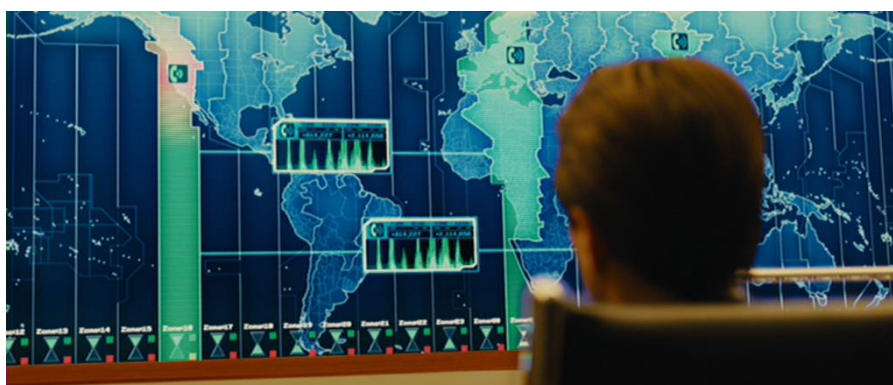
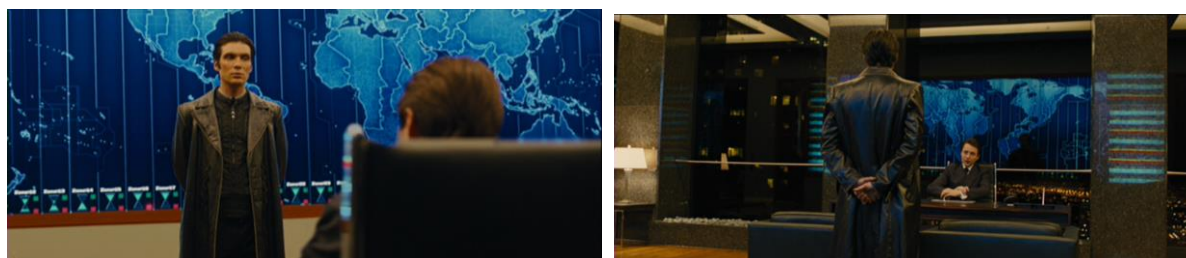


Figure 20: Tracking financial power: a world map shows Philippe's connection to other executives around the globe.



Figures 21 and 22: Even when character talk about personal and local matters, the shadow of transnational financial interests looms large.

The previous examples from *In Time* show two dynamics: first, as Zygmunt Bauman notes, the elites become 'dephysicalized' and exert extraterritorial power (1998: 19). Second,

transnational connections and interests are not limited to the economy. Or rather, the ‘needs’ of global finance structure the rest of society. The government is simply absent in the film and the only presumably public institution (the timekeepers) is at the service of global markets. The transfer of public sovereignty to private hands is evident in the last scene, in which a modified version of the Los Angeles City Hall serves as the setting for a bank (*In Time* Filming Locations’). The film then suggests that those who hold economic power also hold institutional and legal power. *In Time* constructs a world that resonates with the work of several scholars on globalization and borders, suggesting that the concentration of power in global corporate hands hinders sovereignty (Bauman 1998: 19; Brown 2010: 23; Sassen 2013b: 68; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 85). Reflecting such a reality, *In Time* presents what could be called ‘virtual financial governance.’

2.3.2. Networked Borders: Monitoring Bodies, Money, Time, and Identities

Zygmunt Bauman links “the pressure to pull down the last remaining barriers to the free movement of money and money-making commodities and information” with “the pressure to dig new moats and erect new walls” (1998: 93). Similarly, *In Time* presents a society in which money moves mostly in one direction while simultaneously employing a range of visual cues to underline the centrality of physical borders in its fictional world. Apart from highlighting the appearance of highway checkpoints through close-ups, the camera also emphasizes the presence of fences, often filming characters and action sequences through them (figures 23 and 24). Fences seem to appear accidentally, as in the scene in which Sylvia and Will leave a hotel room to escape from the police (figure 25). Yet, by constantly including fences in the frame, the film reinforces characters’ entrapment and marginality. After a ten years reward is offered to those who lead the authorities to Will and Sylvia, the Dayton gang forces a few workers to line against a fence (figure 26). The gang members

pressure the workers to tell whatever they know about the whereabouts of the runaways and steal one of the workers' time until he dies. This scene foregrounds the abuse that Dayton inhabitants suffer and hints at the role of borders in creating circumstances that lead to such events. In sum, the film foregrounds the presence of checkpoints and fences, infusing them with an oppressive character and inviting viewers to look for other kinds of borders.



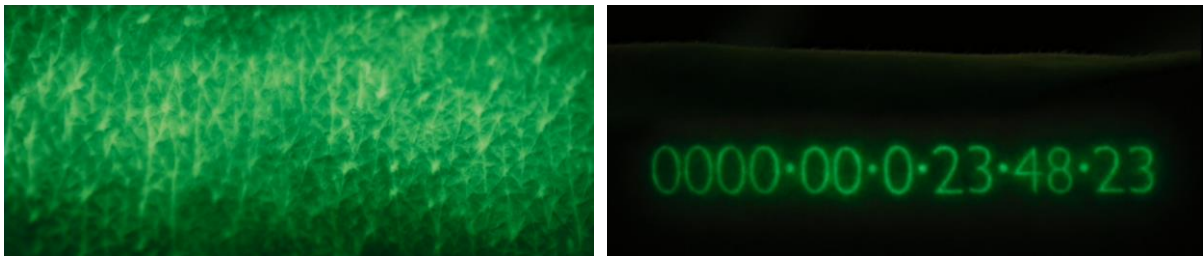
Figures 23 and 24: *In Time* regularly draws attention to physical borders.



Figures 25 and 26: The recurrent appearance of borders and fences in the film encourages viewers to think about their role in the system that the film depicts.

Besides *In Time*'s emphasis on physical borders, the film depicts a larger network of borders that order and other bodies according to wealth, time, and appearances. Screening technologies supplement these systems of differentiation. One of the main kinds of borders in the film revolves around time/money and economic status. Raymond says that, when a person brings time/money to the 'wrong' place (Dayton), "what matters is what happened to their time." In the film, authorities (only represented by the timekeepers) are interested first and foremost in ordering time/money. As in *Elysium*, an effective way to do this is through embodied borders. *In Time* is built on the premise that people have been genetically modified to be born with time/money counters in one of their forearms. The film brings attention to the small scale of borders by opening with an extreme close-up of Will's skin. The camera

slowly zooms out of Will's skin, revealing a time counter on his forearm and hinting at the central role of embodied time/money in bordering processes (figures 27 and 28). After this, embodied money borders appear several times. In order to get a taxi to go from Dayton to New Greenwich, Will has to show the taxi driver his forearm, that is, his money. When Will crosses the border checkpoints to other areas, he has to pay with his forearm. The same happens at a casino, where a doorman advises Will to make a 'voluntary' donation of a year before he walks in. Through these examples, *In Time* emphasizes that the border comes down to the level of the body and moves with the person through the city. The body and its time/money spending capacity allow or prevent mobility and access to certain places.



Figures 27 and 28: A zoom-out at the beginning of the film reveals the embodied character of time/money and, by extension, of the borders that regulate that time.

In Time also presents embodied borders as temporal borders. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson explain that “the compression, elongation, and partitioning of time” work as mechanisms of “control, filtering, and selectivity” that facilitate or hamper mobility (2013: 132). In *In Time*, Will has to pay one year in order to get from Dayton to New Greenwich. As he approaches New Greenwich, the amount of time that he has to pay rises. Such amounts of time are prohibitive for Dayton citizens, which makes it impossible for anyone from Dayton to get to New Greenwich, as they would need to save a whole year's salary when most people barely have twenty-four hours on their clocks. This evokes those who do not have the money for an education and may have to save it, which takes time. People from African countries who try to migrate to Europe often make several stops on their way in order to work, save money, and be able to go on with their journey. Those who can afford to buy tickets for high

speed trains move (and live) three times faster than those who can only afford to travel by bus. In general, it takes time for people to move both socially and spatially. In contrast, capital moves around almost instantly and those who control it usually move faster than the rest.

In Time literally holds that money orders people in different temporal groups (time zones) with disparate degrees of mobility. In addition, the film's strategy of integrating money and time highlights that money accumulation and dispossession are connected to life length. This is evident in the fact that people pay for everything with their life time. The film also draws attention to this situation when Will and Sylvia mug a woman on the highway. Will tells her: "I'd say [give me] 'your money or your life,' but since your money is your life..." Lack of money actually costs some characters their life. As in the film, running out of money in real life may eventually lead people to run out of time, to die. The quality of life, diet, healthcare, and safety that people can afford are often directly related to their wealth. These factors make people's lives longer or shorter. In this sense, money borders are also temporal borders, allowing some to live longer than others. Both in the film and in real life, money does not only buy physical and social mobility, it also buys time.

Other borders that are not strictly embodied, but bring ordering practices to the level of the individual are etiquette and behavioral codes. These signs often indicate whether someone is 'out of place.' They are a consequence of the disparate lifestyles that people can afford to have in different areas and, thus, signs of economic status. Will's arrival in New Greenwich provides the most obvious example of such a dynamic in the film. Just as he gets off the car, he starts running. Yet, he soon notices that nobody else is running, looks at his watch, and realizes it is no longer necessary to run: he has plenty of time. Timekeeper Raymond, however, notes that running is "a hard habit to break" and a waitress tells Will that he does things "a little too fast." Analyzing a restaurant scene in *El Norte* (Gregory Nava,

1983), another film set in Los Angeles, Camila Fojas observes a “division of labor and leisure [that] has racial, ethnic, and *temporal* implications [my emphasis]” (2008: 160). The analogy with *In Time* becomes more evident when she notes that “the Anglo patrons enjoy a slow-paced, leisurely meal while the Latino workers sweat in the kitchen” (160). Yet, both films do not deal with ethnicity in the same way. I will return to this point later on. The speed mismatch also applies in reverse direction when a broker crosses from New Greenwich to Dayton. His clothes and his time/money (he buys drinks for everyone and he does not cover his watch) reveal that he comes from somewhere else. Pace, having large or small sums of money, wearing the right clothes (e.g. certain kinds of suits), employing bodyguards, or taking risks indicate whether someone ‘belongs’ in a place or not. In this sense, etiquette and behavioral codes, even if they are not read by machines as in *Elysium*, also function as biometric markers and embodied borders. They presume the identity of the individual moving through the city in order to assess, as Popescu notes, “the risk [that] it poses to society” (2012: 107).

Despite its variety of borders, *In Time* is oblivious of a type of embodied border that is deeply connected to wealth and economic status: race. The division between the time zones in the film seems to be deployed along a typically Angeleno East/West line, with New Greenwich loosely identified with the Oceanside affluent communities and Dayton with East LA. Even though Dayton has an undeniable East LA Latino flavor, ethnicity plays an insignificant role in the film. Writing about sf cinema in general, Adilifu Nama identifies a “structured absence of blackness” in sf films (although his examples indicate an absence of racial diversity in general) (2008: 10). He also notes that when black/non-white characters are part of the story, their appearance rarely works as more than a “token presence” (13). This is the case of *In Time*: it presents a racially mixed society (guests at Philippe’s mansion are black, white, and some appear to be Latinos). Yet, these are secondary characters who rarely

utter a line: they appear as tokens. In addition, the film does not provide any explicit information about the social or historical reasons of this mix. Even though Will's surname (Salas) suggests that he is of Spanish-speaking descent, *In Time* does not explicitly feature any Latino character. Considering that Los Angeles had a 48.5 percent Latino population in 2010, according to the United States Census Bureau, the invisibility of Latino ethnicity and culture(s) in the film is striking. In her analysis of borders in global LA, Camila Fojas also pinpoints race as the main feature that conditions where people 'belong' or not in non-sf films such as *El Norte*, *Star Maps* (Miguel Arteta, 1997), and *Bread and Roses* (Ken Loach, 2000) (2008: 181). So, while *In Time* denounces segregation and stresses the significance of economic status in practices of differentiation in urban environments, the film overlooks the central role of race in such processes. Philippe Weis' remarks illustrate the film's ambivalent stance towards race. He says: "Of course, some think [that] what we have is unfair: the difference between time zones. [...] But isn't this the next logical step in our evolution? And hasn't evolution always been unfair? It's always been survival of the fittest." By using the term 'survival of the fittest,' Philippe evokes racial Darwinism and, at the same time, presents a new stage of 'natural selection': economic segregation. While Philippe's words seem to link race and economic status, he does not refer to race explicitly. In short, discrimination practices in *In Time* leave race aside and revolve around economic position, overlooking the connection between race and borders.

Other recent science fiction films that deal with borders such as *Elysium*, *Code 46*, *Total Recall*, *Upside Down*, and *The Hunger Games* installments also present variations of the "structured absence" of racial diversity typical of the genre and commercial cinema in general. An exception to this group of films is *Sleep Dealer*, which imagines a world where Latino migration to the US has ceased. In this future, the US still depends on the labor of Latinos, who work from Mexico through a virtual reality program. As an 'infomaquila'

manager explains, the United States benefits from having “todo el trabajo sin los trabajadores [latinos]” (“all the work without the [Latino] workers”). At first sight, *Sleep Dealer* may appear to imagine an overwhelmingly white US. Yet, the film focuses almost exclusively on the Mexican side of the border. The only US inhabitants who have a relevant role in the film are a Latino drone pilot and, to a lesser extent, his parents. In this manner, *Sleep Dealer* subverts the structured whiteness that is common in the sf genre. Adilifu Nama argues that the “structured absence of blackness[/racial diversity]” in sf cinema often works towards the affirmation of “racial fantasies” of white dominance and survival in films such as *When Worlds Collide* (Rudolph Maté, 1951), *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960), and *Logan’s Run* (2008: 15, 17, 27). Yet, in *In Time*—and in the border films mentioned above—the lack of emphasis on racial hierarchies contrasts with the main discourses on global finance and economic exploitation, generating an ambivalent discourse on cosmopolitanism.

Finally, another element that plays a central role in the film’s system of networked borders is technological surveillance, as it allows time keepers to monitor people’s actions and mobility and to make sure that money does not leave the zones where it is supposed to be. Detail shots of different surveillance cameras draw attention to the monitoring of citizens’ lives in Dayton. Thanks to such cameras, timekeepers manage to match images of Will with his identity. Another means of control is the timekeepers’ database and their live time distribution feed. When there is more time in an area than there ‘should’ be, computers automatically set an alarm off at the timekeepers’ headquarters and at Philippe’s office. In addition, screens in both places display constantly updated data in green and red indicating the status of each area. These colors and the non-stop time/money flow may remind viewers of stock exchanges, reinforcing the connection between borders and finance. The surveillance technologies that appear in the film allow Raymond to “keep time,” that is, to maintain the time/money order and the economic status quo. These borders look out for undesired kinds of

mobility of money and people, supplementing physical and embodied borders. As Zygmunt Bauman and Gerard Delanty hint, networked borders signal a shift from enclosure based on the dichotomy national/foreign to an organization of space governed by the (im)possibility of moving at free will (Bauman 1998: 18; Delanty 2006: 32).

2.3.3. (B)ordering People and Money: Protecting and Feeding the Financial System

So far, my analysis of *In Time* has considered the kinds of borders that the film makes visible and hinted that many of these borders are connected to the financial world. But why is this network of borders in place? What are the logics behind them? Who benefits from them?¹⁵ *In Time* suggests that borders control the mobility of money and people in order to produce the right conditions to increase financial revenue. Of course, the film does not completely separate the interests of financial firms from those of other corporations. Yet, it emphasizes the predominance of finance in the running of the current global system and suggests that borders are at its service. Henry Hamilton (Matt Bomer), a broker, explains to Will that time zones serve the interests of those who live in New Greenwich and help divert time/money from Dayton to New Greenwich. All the main characters from New Greenwich are connected to the financial sector (Henry, Philippe, and Sylvia) or defend its interests (timekeepers). Throughout the film, Sylvia and Will's contestation efforts are directed at banks, channeling viewers' attention towards financial actors. Apart from the visual references to stock markets, characters' time clocks also allude to the financial sector, as they resemble the contactless payment wrist bands, cards, and mobile phone apps that many real banks already offer their clients.

¹⁵ Gabriel Popescu argues that asking this kind of questions contributes to understanding the contexts in which borders evolve (2012: 22, 152). David Harvey has also noted the importance of asking similar questions when attempting to develop a cosmopolitan perspective through the analysis of neoliberal globalization (2009: 57-8).

In Time presents five conditions generated by borders that allow financial extraction to work smoothly: the generalization of debt, the casualization of labor, workers' acquiescence, the protection of finance, and the criminalization of the poor. The different kinds of borders presented in the previous section order people and their money, making sure that people in Dayton are often short of time. Since Dayton citizens live "day to day" and missions (charities) often run out of time, some people have to borrow money from New Greenwich banks in order to stay alive. This situation is quite lucrative for banks, as there is a regular demand for credit and they can charge higher return rates of interest. A bright screen showing a bank's lending rate going up to 37 per cent stands out against a dark background in the scene in which Sylvia and Will consider whether they should give up (figure 29). *In Time* hints that the reason why the system is not interested in the flow of money across most areas is that the elites extract a significant amount of capital through debt. Philippe Weis confirms this hypothesis when he says that "flooding the wrong zone with a million years [...] could cripple the system." The name of his bank (Weis Timelenders) further emphasizes the importance of debt in the running of the system. At the same time, *In Time* recalls the burden of debt to so-called developing countries and, more recently, also to European countries and the USA. The film suggests that the global economic system is more interested in extracting value through financial mechanisms than through consumption or labor (although the film also shows how companies continue to make money through these methods). Some scholars also emphasize the dominant role of finance in today's economy. Christian Marazzi explains that nowadays finance is "pervasive" and "spreads across the entire economic cycle" (2010: 81-2). Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson add that finance even permeates "the subsistence economy," that is, it produces revenue from all social groups (2013: 92). It is no coincidence that *In Time* brings both finance and borders to the personal level of the body. As Mezzadra and Neilson argue, people are not excluded but differentially

included in the global financial system (159). Borders are then essential to the regulation of hierarchical inclusion.

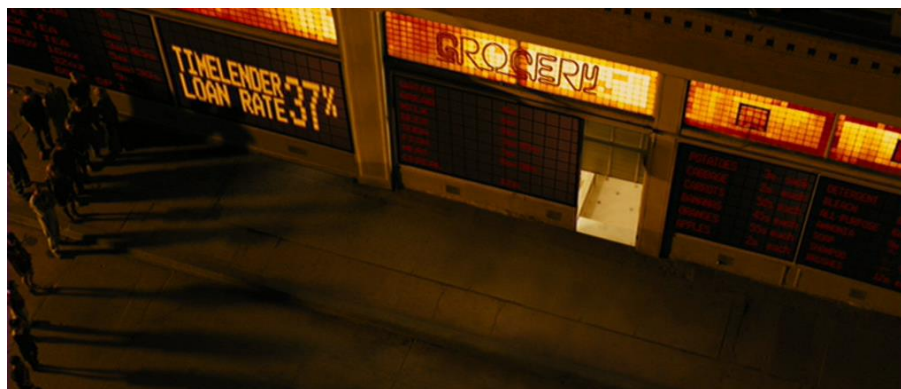


Figure 29: A bright sign showing the loan rate go up against a dark background emphasizes the profit-hunger of the economic system that *In Time* pictures.

In Time does not explicitly address the relationship between the interests of financial firms and other corporations. Yet, it makes clear that actors other than financial companies contribute to creating the conditions that lead people to borrow money. Networked borders also play a part in this system, holding Dayton citizens hostage and leaving them no other choice but to accept the conditions that companies offer them. Job and income uncertainty prevent workers' physical and social mobility and generate situations in which workers cannot sustain themselves and their families, thus needing to borrow money. Electronically modifiable prices vary at the will of companies. Firms also modify production quotas and workers' salaries unilaterally. As a result, workers progressively need more time to pay for their living expenses and new conditions force them to work longer hours for less time/money. At the same time, fewer jobs are available. Sassen refers to this kind of working conditions as the "casualization of the employment relation" (1998: 145-8). That is, the precarious kind of work available and its temporary character drives workers to accept any kind of job, less security, and lower remuneration. Some people do not manage to survive: Will's mother dies because she presumably does not get any time for her last day of work. Such events indicate that New Greenwich conceives Dayton citizens as a "surplus

population,” to use Sassen’s term (2013a: 199). Sassen explains that financial actors have worked towards a “systemic deepening of advanced capitalism” in which the system does no longer value people as workers and consumers (199-200). *In Time* shows that people are useful for the system as long as they finance their own lives and are able to pay the money/time back. This is also clear in *Repo Men*, a film in which those who do not pay the debt for their manufactured organs on time are forced to give them back to the corporation that makes them, sometimes dying. In the systems that *In Time* and *Repo Men* depict, some people are disposable. These scenarios resonate with Peter Sands’ interpretation of the cities in *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, and *The Matrix* as representations of the “cannibalistic nature of global capitalism” (2003: 139). In a similar manner, *In Time* also depicts a cannibalistic economy: precarious work conditions, casual work, rising prices, and debt devour workers. Meanwhile, financial firms keep raising their profits, as they exploit a network of borders built to suit their needs.

The (b)ordering of economic resources leads to the generalization of two attitudes: acquiescence in Dayton and greed in New Greenwich. At the very beginning of the film, Will says: “I don’t have time. I don’t have time to worry about how it happened. It is what it is.” Later on, a dead man lies on the floor as his colleagues walk into the factory and past his body. Only Will and a colleague stop for a second, but their supervisor stares at them and they quickly go into the building. Later on, workers waiting on a line complain when Will protests about his salary reduction and makes them lose time. These two scenes elucidate the fragmentation of the workforce in the film. In his discussion of *En el Hoyo/In the Pit* (Juan Carlos Rulfo, 2006), a film about the construction of a bridge in Mexico City, Vicente Rodríguez analyzes the attitude of one of the workers (Chaparro) and notes that he does not seem frustrated or outraged: he accepts ‘his role’ (2012: 11). Rodríguez argues that global socioeconomic structures benefit from hampering workers’ attempts to improve their quality

of life, as their work is necessary for the system (11). Borders are essential in this equation, as they order people according to the money they own and control their mobility, embedding the poor in a set of circumstances that barely leave any time for them to reflect on their situation and to call it into question.

At the other extreme, in New Greenwich, everything people appear to care about is to continue their endless path towards time accumulation. Both Philippe and the broker say what seems to be a catchphrase in New Greenwich: “for a few to be immortal, many must die.” Such a phrase elucidates that those who belong to the financial sector in the movie seek to increase the amount of time that they own at any cost. This catchphrase also resonates in other recent sf films in which the elongation of some privileged lives comes at the expense of other people’s lives. *The Island*, *Daybreakers*, *Transfer*, *Jupiter Ascending*, *Scorch Trials*, and *Self/less* construct narratives in which wealthy people extend their lives thanks to the death (or practical death) of other people or sentient clones. These films, along with *In Time*, show a growing concern with the limits of greed: for a few to enjoy certain privileges, many have to sacrifice their lives.

Another function of networked borders is to protect finance in two senses: they guarantee the safety of those who control capital and reduce the opportunities of people from other areas to make their claims visible. *In Time* presents what Edward Soja would call a “carceral archipelago” (2000: 299). New Greenwich secludes Dayton citizens and voluntarily isolates itself. In this manner, *In Time* depicts a city made up of islands that keep citizens in open-air urban prisons, just like skid rows and gated communities in real LA (Soja 2000: 305-6, 312-3). While these areas are very different, their inhabitants live—some willingly, others involuntarily—in confined spaces. Aesthetically, Dayton resembles a prison: workers wear uniforms that are similar to those of convicts, fences and barbwire abound, and grey, washed-out tones predominate. In New Greenwich, most inhabitants are concerned about any

possible threat to their safety, are often accompanied by bodyguards, and avoid going to other areas. In addition, timekeepers' cars, which have shooting equipment, are banned from using it in New Greenwich. Sassen argues that, for global corporations, networked borders (which she calls transversal borders) should protect capital, facilitate its movement, and restrict the mobility of anyone or anything else (2013b: 69). Yet, Sassen also notes that cities are ideal places to make claims visible and question power structures (69-70). Even though acquiescent workers in the film are not likely to draw attention to their situation in public, networked borders further reduce this possibility. They help to keep the system running without being questioned. In this way, *In Time* shows, in a similar way to *Elysium*, that one of the main functions of networked borders is to avoid challenges to the system in place and to ensure the personal safety of those who move capital around.

New Greenwich inhabitants, through their influence on discourses on crime and theft, present Dayton citizens as a threat and conceal the real menace for the largest part of the society: their own abusive practices. Throughout the film, New Greenwich companies, the media, and timekeepers treat Will and Sylvia as criminals. Networked borders in general and embodied borders in particular are essential for this purpose, as they make it easy to identify people and label them. That way, authorities can assess the risk that each person poses, depending on where they come from, as Popescu points out in his work on borders (2012: 107). Timekeepers assume that Will has stolen the time that he actually received from the broker and that he later won at the casino. The media also report on Will being a murder "suspect" and, later, on Will and Sylvia being "criminals." Bauman denounces that crimes perpetrated by the elites are often ignored and sometimes even go unnoticed (1998: 123-4). He asserts that "complicity", "loyalty" and the complexity of some of the legal and financial operations are the most obvious reasons behind their invisibility (123-4). Even though such crimes affect more citizens and on a wider scale than other offenses, Bauman notes that

misbehavior at the top is seldom perceived as a threat (123-4). *In Time* reflects such a rationale behind the system, and then lays it bare. Will tells Raymond: “if you guys are looking for stolen time, maybe you should arrest everyone here [at Philippe’s mansion].” Will also denounces that there is “mass murder in the ghetto every day.” In this manner, the film highlights that acting ‘legally’ does not imply respecting other people’s rights. *In Time* denounces the role of networked borders in framing and criminalizing the poor and points to significant, wide-scale crimes being committed at the top. The criminalization of the poor makes it harder for them to make claims and to challenge the logic of the system.

2.3.4. Challenging Dichotomies and Doing Borderwork

In spite of the clear differences between Dayton and New Greenwich, *In Time* does not produce antagonistic images of their dwellers. Early in the film, broker Henry Hamilton decides to give his whole fortune to Will. For Henry, the system does not work anymore. He is 105 years old, has the body of a 25 year-old man, and the time/money to enjoy life, but he does not find any incentive to keep on living. In addition, Jaeger (Collins Pennie), one of the timekeepers, questions the orthodox beliefs and decisions of his colleague Raymond throughout the film, empathizing with Dayton citizens. Sylvia also shows that people cannot be as easily classified as networked borders and virtual financial governance do. Being the daughter of the owner of an important bank, she can have everything she wants. Yet, when she meets Will, she realizes that, despite all the money that her family has, they are too fearful to enjoy life. At the same time, she comes to realize how deeply troubling it is to expand their lifetimes at the expense of other people’s lives. Sylvia also tells Will: “you must hate me, where I come from;” to which Will responds: “it’s nobody’s fault what they’re born with.” This short conversation shows that *In Time* does not demonize any particular group of

people. Instead, the film denounces the logic behind the global financial system. As a result, the image that *In Time* paints is not black and white.

Even though *In Time* qualifies its split representation of Dayton and New Greenwich, it does not capture the variety of labor positions and subjectivities that contemporary borders generate. In their analysis of contemporary economies and capital, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson argue that the multiplication of borders in today's world entails a multiplication of labor (2013: 21-2). The concept of multiplication of labor describes the heterogeneization of labor as a consequence of the global reorganization of production processes (84). *In Time*'s representation of labor is much more limited, as it includes manufacturing and finance jobs only. Yet, if the film had presented a wider range of personal situations, perhaps its main message about the growing divide between those who boost their income through financial operations and the rest and the role of networked borders in this process would not come across so clearly.

Taking advantage of the maneuvering margin that borders give them, Sylvia and Will challenge the system's status quo and attempt to kickstart a grass roots redefinition of their society. They notice that the uneven distribution of economic resources in the film is directly linked to borders and dispute the idea that an unbalanced distribution of wealth is the 'natural order.' These modern 'Robin Hoods' do not think of their actions as theft crimes. "Think of it as repossession," Will tells a woman. The separation between zones, despite its insidiousness, also allows them to redistribute time more easily. In this sense, they do what Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford call "borderwork:" borders do not only put limits in their lives, they are also "potential mechanisms of everyday [cosmopolitan] empowerment" (2011: 273). *In Time* points towards change as people go out on the streets massively, cross to other areas, and disrupt the normal operation of the system. Meanwhile, timekeepers observe how time markets lose control over other time zones. One of them notes: "it's spreading." Wealth

redistribution and the mobility that comes with it become ways of asserting power, claiming rights, and re-appropriating space. In the end, the film hints that citizens at least entertain some hope: they are not indifferent and resigned anymore.

In Time's emphasis on contestation differs from earlier SF classics. David Desser notes that *Metropolis* and the *Star Trek* episode "The Cloud Minders" (Jud Taylor, 1969) resort to the figure of a mediator to solve conflicts (1999: 89). Another common solution in films like *Fahrenheit 451*, *Zero Population Growth/Z.P.G.* (Michael Campus, 197)), and *Soylent Green* is for the protagonists to leave the dehumanized city (Desser 1999: 88-90). Conversely, *In Time* and other recent SF films such as *Upside Down*, *The Hunger Games*, *Elysium*, and *Snowpiercer* offer alternatives that originate at the bottom. These contemporary dystopias present borderwork as a means of alleviating inequalities. Yet, in an article about *In Time* and other recent dystopian films, Mark Fisher wonders whether Will and Sylvia's efforts are "futile or [...] pre-revolutionary" (2012: 31). Certainly, *In Time* and similar films often imagine easy solutions to complex problems, but by developing stark critical portraits of the organization of socioeconomic structures, they give viewers cosmopolitan food for thought. Extrapolating from its social context, *In Time* identifies a specific group of global socioeconomic structures that do not work for most people, explores how they operate and the challenges that they pose, and offers viewers a framework that can help them think about possible ways to address such problems.

In conclusion, *In Time* presents a world of intense virtual, financial connections and networked borders that order people according to their economic status. The film suggests that these borders contribute to increasing financial revenues through the generalization of debt, the casualization of labor, workers' acquiescence, the protection of financial areas, and the criminalization of the poor. By making these processes visible, *In Time* draws attention to the often unnoticed role of a socioeconomic sector (finance) that has a deep impact on

cosmopolitan questions related to rights, resources, working conditions, welfare, quality of life, and the porosity of borders. At the same time, *In Time* shows the cosmopolitan potential of borderwork as a means of countering the effects of global networks of financial interests. Of course, robbing banks is far from being a realistic solution to the inequalities generated by finance. Yet, the Robin Hood metaphor that *In Time* uses to represent borderwork makes two points clear: first, contemporary global finance contributes to the accumulation of disproportionate amounts of wealth by a handful of people. Second, for people to live decently, financial profits need to be controlled. Social awareness of the unchecked power of financial companies is also evident in a recent transnational political initiative that, like *In Time*, has resorted to the Robin Hood metaphor. In 2010, several NGOs launched an international campaign to root for a 0.05% financial transaction tax (FTT) that they called 'The Robin Hood Tax.' Drawing on their cosmopolitan imaginations, governments would then use the money raised from this tax to fight poverty, climate change, help create jobs, and fund education and health programs both in the tax collecting countries and abroad. This idea is not new: James Tobin proposed a similar tax on foreign-exchange transactions in the 1970s, but it was not implemented (Felix 1995: 57; Buckley 2013: 154, 162). While the impact of global finance on people's lives may not have been so evident at the time when Tobin proposed this tax, globalization and telecommunications have brought about systemic changes that now make a tax on global finance necessary (Buckley 2013: 156, 161-2).

The ultimate implications of *In Time*'s discourse coincide with the proposals for changes regarding taxation that some scholars have recently made. Ross Buckley notes that financial firms have been the largest beneficiaries of globalization so far and their operations are having a negative impact on poor regions, jobs, and working conditions (Buckley 2013: 166-7). Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty also advocate for similar kinds of (global) taxes on capital that allow no exceptions (2012: 343; 2013: 517-8). While these taxes are more

general than the FTT (including also property and business assets), financial transactions are obviously one of their central targets (Stiglitz 2012: 348; Piketty 2013: 515-8). In all of these cases, the objective of such taxes is to diminish the impact of financial operations/capital accumulation and to use the money raised to curb inequalities (Stiglitz 2012: 344-7; Buckley 2013: 166-7; Piketty 2013: 518). Through the Robin Hood metaphor, *In Time* connects with these debates and points to taxes on financial transactions as a way of doing cosmopolitan borderwork. The film reminds viewers that instead of letting global finance and capital (b)order people, societies need institutions to (b)order finance and capital.

CHAPTER THREE

Greening Apocalypse: Eco-Conscious Disaster and the Biopolitics of Climate Change

3.1. GETTING THE WORST OUT OF NATURE:

CLIMATE CHANGE IN SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA

Following the release of *The Day After Tomorrow* in 2004, several films have used the extrapolative power of the science fiction genre to deal with one of the most pressing global issues: climate change. Since climate change is a group of threats that do not respect national boundaries, affect all countries (although to varying degrees), and are sometimes produced by actors hundreds or thousands of miles away from the places that suffer the worst consequences, cosmopolitanism offers a particularly suitable perspective to approach these phenomena. Sf films about climate change go from the desert landscapes of *Young Ones* (Jake Paltrow, 2014), the deadly cold of *Snowpiercer*, and the waste in *Wall-E* to the more spectacular catastrophic events of *2012* and the galactic searches for resources and habitats in *Avatar* and *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014). Apart from presenting environmental and geographical changes, many of these films suggest that one of the most significant transformations that climate change brings about is the need for large groups of human beings to migrate, build homes far from home, reorganize social structures, survive lethal weather conditions, and even attempt to live in outer space. That is, they point to the

biopolitical implications of climate change. These sf films tend to deal with radical environmental transformation through disaster-packed spectacular rides or post-apocalyptic scenarios. This chapter focuses on sf disaster films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Scott Derrickson, 2008), *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards, 2014), and *2012* because of their novel combination of the conventions of the sf and disaster film genres to draw attention to ecological concerns in general and the global scope of the impacts of climate change in particular. *2012*, the film that mounts the largest spectacle in scale in this group, is an example of how spectacle, however mindless it may seem, can also address relevant socio-environmental issues. Drawing on theories on spectacle and biopolitics, this chapter argues that *2012* uses disaster sequences to draw attention to the magnitude, unpredictability, and global scope of the catastrophic impacts generated by climate change and to explore opposite scenarios of biopolitical privilege and equality through a cosmopolitan lens.

Although sf films have dealt with environmental issues at least since the 1950s (more about this later) and recent films share some of their concerns about the environment with twentieth century sf movies, climate change constitutes an unprecedented challenge in terms of scope and scale. This spate of recent films tend to focus on these time-specific concerns. Following studies on climate change (Frame and Allen 2008, Beck 2009 [2007], Giddens 2009, Vanderheiden 2011, Golub and Maréchal 2011, Klein 2014), this chapter relies on the reports published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body that is part of the United Nations and whose main task is to write publicly-available reports about climate change for policymakers. Scientists from different parts of the world volunteer to participate in the drafting of IPCC reports drawing on research that is already available. The evidence for human-induced climate change is indisputable. Pointing to a similar temporal framework to that of the acceleration of economic globalization and the rise of neoliberalism

from the 1970s to the present mentioned in the previous chapter, the IPCC 2014 Synthesis Report registers that “about half of the anthropogenic [human-induced] CO₂ emissions between 1750 and 2011 have occurred in the last 40 years,” especially from 2000 to 2010 (2015: 5). At the same time, the report also reflects that the period from 1983 to 2012 “was likely the warmest thirty-year period of the last 1400 in the Northern Hemisphere” (2) and that the current “atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide [...] are unprecedented in the last 800,000 years” (4). Despite the frequent equation of ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming,’ the term ‘climate change’ entails a variety of effects that go beyond temperature increase. The IPCC 2014 Synthesis Report mentions environmental impacts such as cold and warm temperature extremes (7), heat waves (8), droughts (8), water scarcity (13), wildfires (7-8), ice-melting, glacier retreat (5), ocean acidification (6), rising sea levels, coastal erosion (7), landslides (15), air pollution (15), heavy precipitation and storms (7, 8, 15), cyclones (8), floods (8), and crop damage (6). In certain scenarios, some crops such as wheat, rice, and maize could disappear regionally or even globally (13). Although the report considers mostly future scenarios, we can already perceive several of these impacts with the current global mean temperature increase of 0.87° C (NASA January 2015). An increase of over 2° C is considered the point at which climate change involves medium to very high risks and begins to pose a serious threat for human life (IPCC 2015: 13).

The changes to our environment are so profound and so clearly forced by human activity (particularly in Western countries) that some scientists are even proposing that humans have provoked the development of a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. The concept of the Anthropocene was popularized by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, when they argued that human activity was working as “a major geological force” that was (and is) altering ecosystems profoundly (17-8). The Anthropocene constitutes a radical

change, as transitions between geological periods do not happen frequently: the previous, post-glacial period—the Holocene—lasted between 10,000 and 12,000 years (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000: 17). The concept of Anthropocene does not only refer to the radical environmental disruption brought about by greenhouse emissions—it also alludes to a whole array of human activities and their impact on the natural functioning of the planet’s ecosystems. Accordingly, Crutzen and Stoermer mention events and activities such as population growth, resource consumption (specially water), the burning of fossil fuels, urbanization, land usage, the use of fertilizers in agriculture, species extinction, and the release of “toxic substances in the environment” (2000: 17-8). Apart from these, later scientific studies also refer to dam construction, mining, landfills, sediment movement, and the terraforming that cities require (Wilkinson 2005: 161-164; Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007: 616-8; Zalasiewicz et al. 2011: 836). The idea of the Anthropocene, therefore, suggests that, apart from generating the emissions that produce climate change, humans also perform other activities that unsettle natural forces severely and present environmental challenges for human and non-human life. As Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill note, the Anthropocene begins in the late 18th century with the Industrial Revolution, although they indicate that the impact of human activities has been particularly forceful from the 1950s to the present, a period that they refer to as “the Great Acceleration” (2007: 616-8). Since this chapter analyzes the proliferation of environmentally-conscious films in the 2000s and 2010s, the term climate change often helps to describe the concerns that these films depict more accurately, although the concept of the Anthropocene is some times used to situate questions in a wider framework and to refer to broader impacts. The chapter therefore usually relies on the term ‘climate change’ for the sake of specificity and occasionally also draws on the term ‘Anthropocene.’

My approach to eco-conscious sf films from a cosmopolitan perspective, takes into account the ways in which films draw attention to ecological connections at a transnational level, the kind of knowledge about ecological processes that they offer viewers, and the social and biopolitical dimension of the impacts that they imagine. My focus on these three elements derives from the work of Ulrich Beck (2006, 2009 [2007], 2010), Ursula Heise (2008), and Paul Harris (2010) on the relationship between climate change and cosmopolitanism. Regarding the first aspect, Ursula Heise notes the limitations of traditional approaches to the environment based on a local “sense of place” (2008: 53-5). Instead, she proposes a shift towards a “sense of planet” that helps to explore transnational “networks of ecological links” while taking local particularities into account (55-6). From a cosmopolitan perspective, understanding the interconnectedness of environmental phenomena is just the beginning. The transnational dimension of climate impacts requires, in addition, extending the range of action and mitigation beyond national borders, both in ethical and pragmatic terms (Beck 2010: 172; Harris 2010: 5-6; Skillington 2012: 145). Concerning the second element, Ursula Heise suggests that cosmopolitan approaches to the environment should pay attention to the “systemic functioning” of ecology (2008: 55). Indeed, only by understanding how the environment works and how climate threats develop can human beings live in sustainable ways that may contribute to the protection of human and non-human lives. To that end, my analysis of disaster in *2012* will evaluate the kind of ecological knowledge that the film offers. In this respect, my analysis may not always draw attention to the connection between disaster and cosmopolitanism. Yet, as Heise suggests, understanding mechanisms (and their mediated representation) contributes to mapping larger connections and so both tasks are essential for the development of a sense of planet (2008: 62).

The last aspect of the cosmopolitan approach that this chapter employs reflects the fact that climate change and the Anthropocene are not just about the environment, but also

about social organization, human and animal well-being, and, ultimately, the right to live (Heise 2008: 60-1; Harris 2010: 2, 8-11). The focus of this chapter is then not so much on the science of disaster and on whether films get it right or not. Rather, the question is how film stories, their narrative development, and their spectacular scenes draw connections between environmental and social impacts that have cosmopolitan implications. Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society helps to frame this question through its connection of risks and modernity. In the risk society we live in, financial, environmental, and terrorist dangers are not controllable (Beck 2009 [2007]: 15). These risks do not indicate that the system is malfunctioning. Rather, the dangers of risk society are a sign of the success of modernity. They are simply side-effects that show that the technocapitalist system is working at full speed and fulfilling its purpose (Beck 2009 [2007]: 8). Beck's link between modernity and risks (climate change) is particularly useful because it also indirectly points to the concept of the modern/colonial complex from which cosmopolitan conflicts and possibilities emerge. As I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, modernity has a colonial dimension. Climate change is no exception: it is produced by modernity and governed by colonial logics. From a cosmopolitan point of view, the colonial side of climate change has two interconnected dimensions: 1. The ruthless exploitation of nature and Earth's resources by humans. 2. The aggravation of already-existing precarious life conditions by industrial/technological economies that are responsible for most emissions and circumvent environmental agreements through practices such as emissions trading. Meanwhile, societies that barely emit damaging gases often bear the brunt of climate change. Responding to these realities from the perspective of cosmopolitan justice, Paul Harris notes the importance of denouncing and restricting the unequal and abusive access of affluent individuals to the planet's resources (2010: 2, 7-9).

Social structures and logics are not just relevant in the production of climate risks and impacts but also in their management. Signaling the more dystopian side of climate change,

the IPCC warns that climate impacts worsen current problems such as hunger, forced-migration, and violence (2015: 16) and generate other kinds of impacts that may affect ecosystems, food production, health, livelihood, and economics (7). Even though climate impacts are virtually global in scope, they are unevenly distributed (Beck 2010: 171, IPCC 2015: 11-12). In fact, the fifty countries that generate least emissions—contributing 1 per cent of the global emissions rate—bear the brunt of ninety per cent of the impacts of climate change (Skillington 2012: 145). The IPCC points at the particular vulnerability of people living in “developing countries with low income” (2015: 15) and of those who “lack the resources for planned migration” (16). At the same time, those who live in certain highly developed areas or who belong to certain social groups can better prepare for climate impacts or move to areas with lower risks without much trouble. A cosmopolitan approach to the uneven social impacts of climate change requires interrogating the colonial logics that generate asymmetrical exposure to climate risks. Some of the key foundations of colonial logics are based on biopolitical aspects. As Sherryl Vint explains, biopolitics establish which “lives [are] deemed ‘worth living’” and which ones are “deemed expendable” (2011: 163). Rather than provide an overview of biopolitical theories here, I will be considering these theories in relation to specific points in the formal analysis of *2012* and other films about human hierarchies in eco-dystopian scenarios. In short, the question at stake regarding the interplay between biopolitics and cosmopolitanism is who suffers the consequences of climate change and why. Although contemporary disaster films have developed visual and narrative strategies to deal with climate change, not all of them draw attention to its colonial logics and biopolitics. The analysis of *2012* in this chapter draws on other film narratives that offer biopolitical readings such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Wall-E*, *Snowpiercer*, and *Interstellar*.

Even though the sf imagination typically projects environmental changes, alien ecosystems, extraordinary natural forces, and catastrophes, most of the main critical studies on sf cinema rarely emphasize the environmental questions addressed by the genre (Biskind 1982: 101-160; Sobchack 1987 [1980]: 40, 263-4; Kuhn 1990, 1999; King and Krzywinska 2000; Redmond 2004; Cornea 2007; Johnston 2011: 97). Other key studies by J. P. Telotte (2001), Lincoln Geraghty (2009), and Mark Bould (2012) mention (though in passing) a few examples of eco-conscious sf films and some of their central themes. Telotte, Geraghty, and Bould coincide in identifying the 1970s as a period in which sf films about environmental degradation proliferated. Bould notes that films such as *No Blade of Grass* (Cornel Wilde, 1970), *Silent Running* (1972), *Z.P.G.* (1972), and *Soylent Green* (1973), to name four of the most representative cases, dealt with “overpopulation, resource depletion, pollution, habitat destruction[,] and species extinction” (2012: 171).

Working with the slightly broader concept of ecology, Pat Brereton argues that ecological considerations are present in US cinema at least since the 1950s, particularly in the sf genre. He reads films such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugène Lourié, 1953), *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957)—and, I would add, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (Val Guest, 1961)—as films that deal with the challenges that humans have to face when adapting to new environments shaped by the side-effects of nuclear power (2005: 144-9). Apart from the widely discussed *Blade Runner*, the 1980s and 90s also saw other scattered (and seldom commented on) examples such as *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) and its sequels (1981, 1985), *Steel Dawn* (Lance Hool, 1987), *Moon 44* (Roland Emmerich, 1990), *Waterworld* (Kevin Costner and Kevin Reynolds, 1995), *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995), and *The Arrival* (David Twohy, 1996) that included environmental degradation as part of their narratives. These films also show, especially in the

case of *Waterworld* and *The Arrival*, emerging concerns about climate change in the form of rising sea levels and temperatures respectively.

Sf films about climate change and environmental degradation began to proliferate at the turn of the century, following a decade of deliberation on climate change at international level—the first UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was held in 1992—and coinciding with the growth of scientific and social consensus around the role of humans in the generation of harmful emissions and other impacts in the first years of the twenty-first century (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007: 618). When looking at discourses on the environment in contemporary sf cinema, scholars tend to study the same movies: *The Day After Tomorrow* (Cubitt 2005, Branston 2007, Reusswig and Leiserowitz 2012, von Burg 2012, Crespo and Pereira 2013, Ivakhiv 2013, Rust 2013, Svodoba 2016), *Avatar* (Adamson 2012, Bergthaller 2012, Ivakhiv 2013, Collins 2014, Morton 2014, Anglin 2015, Reber 2016), and occasionally also *Wall-E* (Anderson 2012, Whitley 2012, Reber 2016) and *Snowpiercer* (Canavan 2014, Bordun 2015, Freedman 2015, Haupts 2016). Yet, a much wider range of eco-conscious sf films reflect what Mark Bould calls “the Anthropocene unconscious” (2016)—the social awareness of the fact that humans are living in an age of anthropogenic ecological crisis. Although the volume *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (ed. Canavan and Robinson, 2014) is predominantly devoted to the exploration of literary narratives, Gerry Canavan’s introduction hints at some key ways in which contemporary sf films deal with the current environmental crisis. Canavan notes that recent films such as *Wall-E*, *Daybreakers*, *Avatar*, and the short film *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu, 2009) show concern with capitalism’s endless quest for growth, entertain hope for magical societal change, or envision ecotopian Earths without humans (2014: 12-16).

An even larger number of early twenty-first century sf films imagine eco-catastrophic scenarios that are often governed by new social structures in contexts of resource scarcity,

social unrest, refugee camps, and militarization—all scenarios that present cosmopolitan challenges. That is the case of the scorching, dry scenarios of *Acquaria* (Flávia Moraes, 2003), *Hell* (Tim Fehlbaum, 2011), *The Rover*, *Young Ones*, *Autómata* (Gabe Ibañez, 2014), *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Pumzi*, *The Last Survivors* (Thomas Hammock, 2014), *Crumbs* (Miguel Llansó, 2015), *Morgenrøde/Dawn* (Anders Elsrud Hultgreen, 2014); the ice-age of *Snowpiercer* and *The Colony* (Jeff Renfroe, 2013); the decrepit, polluted landscapes and rubble aesthetics of *Children of Men*, *The Road* (John Hillcoat, 2009), *The Day* (Douglas Aarniokoski, 2011), the short film *The Rising* (Sebastian Mattukat, 2012), and *Index Zero* (Lorenzo Sportiello, 2014); the rising sea levels, super storms, and general ecological instability forecast in *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Nihon Chinbotsu/Japan Sinks* (Shinji Higuchi, 2006), *Nihon Igai Zenbu Chinbotsu/The World Sinks Except Japan* (Minoru Kawasaki, 2006), *2012*, *Haeundae/Tidal Wave* (JK Youn, 2009), the Neo Seoul scenes in *Cloud Atlas*, *NUOC 2030* (Minh Nguyen-Vo, 2014), *Credence* (Mike Buonaiuto, 2015), and *Geostorm* (Dean Devlin, 2017); the side effects of toxic substances in *The Host* (2006), *The Happening* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2008) and *Train to Busan* (Sang-ho Yeon, 2016); and the life-threatening space junk of *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013). Developing slightly different concepts, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) and *Godzilla* (2014) feature powerful natural or alien forces that force humans to reconsider their relationship with nature and their environment. *Red Planet* (Antony Hoffman, 2000), *Wall-E*, *Avatar*, *Cargo*, *Pandorum* (Christian Alvart, 2009), *Moon*, *Exaella* (Andrew Oudot, 2011), *After Earth* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2013), *Elysium*, *Interstellar*, and *Terra Formars* (Takashi Miike, 2016) pose questions about alternatives to life on an Earth where life is no longer possible or presents many challenges, the possibility of building life environments outside Earth, and the side-effects of extracting resources in outer space (and by extension, also on Earth). Even though most of these films present their stories as part of a global situation, their narratives are often confined to a single location. Only a few of them—*The Day After Tomorrow*, *The World*

Sinks Except Japan, *The Day the Earth Still*, 2012, *Elysium*, *Snowpiercer*, *Godzilla* and *Geostorm*—make connections between the main location in the film and other places around the world.

3.2. SPECTACULAR DISASTER, GLOBAL NARRATIVES, AND ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS

Most of the aforementioned films, except *Elysium* and *Snowpiercer*, are disaster films and participate in a tradition of *science fiction* disaster movies of situating their stories in a global framework. Disaster films in general actually tend to focus on specific local sites of destruction. That is the case of disaster classics such as *Airport* (George Seaton and Henry Hathaway, 1970), *The Poseidon Adventure* (Irwin Allen and Ronald Neame, 1972), *Earthquake* (Mark Robson, 1974), and *The Towering Inferno* (Irwin Allen and John Guillermin, 1974) (Keane 2006: 16-7; Thompson 2007: 12) and even more recent films such as *Twister* (Jan de Bont, 1996), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *Poseidon* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2006), *The Impossible* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012), and *San Andreas* (Brad Peyton, 2015). Although Kirsten Thompson draws attention to the global scope of 1990s disaster films (2007: 12), this global scope is also present in disaster films from previous decades such as *Deluge* (Felix Feist, 1933), *When Worlds Collide* (Rudolph Maté, 1951), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, *Meteor* (Ronald Neame, 1979) and in 1990s films such as *Independence Day*, *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), and *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998). Although post-1990 films feature prominently in this list, it is clear that it is actually sf—rather than the 1990s—that brings a transnational sensibility to the disaster genre.

Many of these sf disaster films include variations on montage sequences that feature several cities from different countries (often through their famous landmarks) being affected by similar events as the ones that take place in the city or area on which the film focuses most of the time. Through this kind of global montage, films imply that the events that they are showing have a global impact. However, seen from a cosmopolitan perspective, the global montage tends to include images of industrial nations only. In addition, the global scope and context of the disasters that these films imagine is often also limited—as in the case of most non-sf disaster films—by their focus on a specific location, often a major city such as London or New York. In the twenty-first century, films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* and the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* continue to rely on the global montage, while others such as *Godzilla* and *2012* go one step forward and have their stories actually take place in several places around the globe. In this way, sf disaster films seem to be slowly shifting from global montages to scripts in which the action, narrative, and spectacle take place in different parts of the world, although US cities continue to be central locations in the narrative.

Apart from drawing on the tradition of planetary awareness in sf disaster movies, twenty-first century sf movies also exploit the traditional reliance of disaster movies on the spectacular qualities of disaster to address the more recent challenges of Anthropogenic environmental degradation. Contemporary sf disaster movies rework a tradition of showing how aliens, monsters, technological miscalculations, floods, quakes, fires, volcano eruptions, tornadoes, and other natural forces destroy cities and civilizations to deal with the harsh socio-environmental impacts and radical transformation that result from human activities. While the effectiveness of framing the Anthropocene through spectacular disaster may be questionable, it is evident that the use of disaster images to deal with anthropogenic environmental degradation is widespread. Apart from sf cinema, scientific studies, the media, and documentaries also rely on the spectacular potential of disaster images to inform and

warn about the effects anthropogenic ecological damage and climate change. The book *Earth Under Fire: How Global Warming Is Changing the World* (ed. Braasch, 2007) is one such example. *Earth Under Fire* combines scientific articles with double-page images of environmental changes. Although images and graphics often appear in scientific studies, the prominence of these images in the book attest to the ability of disaster images to connect with readers/viewers and generate awareness of the threats of climate change. *Earth Under Fire* includes pictures of melting and melted ice sheets and glaciers, polar bears and penguins in ice-free landscapes, floods, drought, and fires. These images both depict some of the changes that are already visible and hint at the looming catastrophe. For example, the book juxtaposes an image of a large group of people surrounded by water in Bhola Island (Bangladesh) and a high-angle, extreme-long-shot image of the coastal urban area of Delray Beach (Florida), emphasizing the dimensions of this urban area, its closeness to the sea, and linking it to the already critical situation of Bhola Island. This example confirms the role of visuals in general and spectacle in particular as prime vehicles for discourses on climate change. Spectacular images of disasters draw viewers' attention because what they show are (so far) rare occurrences whose magnitude is greater than the norm. Sf cinema, because of its visual and conceptual power, can mount sophisticated spectacles that easily tap into contemporary socioenvironmental concerns.

It is indeed no coincidence that it was a sf film that relied heavily on disaster (*The Day After Tomorrow*) that first allowed a number of political and media agents to change the public perception of climate change. As Stephen Rust demonstrates, following the release of the film, the media (e.g. *Newsweek*, *Time*) turned their attention to climate change. Between 1991 and 2007, the number of people in the US who recognized climate change as a real threat more than doubled, rising to eighty-four percent by 2007 (Rust 2013: 197-8). Rust points out that, although the film did not directly influence audiences in this respect, it

generated discursive impulse that allowed other media to draw attention to climate change (2013: 199-200). Since the release of *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), *2012*, *Godzilla* (2014), *Geostorm*, and, to a lesser extent, the B-movie *The World Sinks Except Japan* have linked the spectacles of disaster that they present to their climate change narratives. Even though *2012* is not explicitly about climate change, this chapter focuses on this particular movie because most of its narrative and spectacle touch directly on the cosmopolitan challenges that anthropogenic environmental changes pose to human lives across the planet and because it is the sf film that more overtly exploits the possibilities of disaster to address global climate change. In addition, the scale, magnitude, and variety of the spectacle in *2012* are beyond that of any of the aforementioned films, offering rich material for analysis. Like *Godzilla*, *2012* is an example of the emergence of global action in disaster cinema, although it includes more locations and connections than the former film. Apart from this, *2012* was a widely popular film in its year of release (2009), ranking 5th in the global box office in a highly competitive year (*Avatar* and films of the *Harry Potter* and *Transformers* franchises were also released) (“2009 Worldwide Grosses”).¹⁶ In spite of its popularity, many scholars and critics tend to deride the film, particularly because of its over-the-top spectacle (Dargis 2009; Rodríguez Ortega 2012: 118; Gomel 2010: 118-20; Lebovic 2012: 6; Pirro 2013: 410). This chapter reads disaster in the film closely to show the critical possibilities that disproportionate spectacle offers. In addition, *2012*, unlike *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Godzilla*, shares concerns about cosmopolitanism, biopolitics, and the right to live with several contemporary eco-conscious films and some of the systemic dystopias mentioned in the previous chapter.

In the cinema and particularly in sf cinema, spectacle plays a more relevant role that is often acknowledged. One of the first to note the centrality of spectacle in sf was Susan

¹⁶ *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and *Godzilla* respectively ranked 6th, 25th, and 14th in the global box office in their year of release (“2004 Worldwide Grosses,” “2008 Worldwide Grosses,” “2014 Worldwide Grosses”).

Sontag in her article “The Imagination of Disaster,” in which she argues that sf films are more about disaster than science (2004 [1965]: 41). But even though Sontag notes the centrality of spectacle in the genre, she dismisses sf disaster as simplistic (2004 [1965]: 42) and lacking the ability to engage in “social criticism” (2004 [1965]: 46). Challenging the privileging of narration in film studies, Tom Gunning claims, in 1986, the importance of spectacle (which he calls attractions) in early cinema. He notes that “actuality films outnumbered fictional films until 1906” (1986: 64). Gunning refers to ‘the Lumière tradition’ that presents ordinary activities or vehicles in movement, but also to films from ‘the Méliès tradition,’ in which the story revolves around its attractions (effects). This cinema of attractions is based on the “ability to *show* something,” on the interest that the novelty of the moving image and its visual tricks generate (Gunning 1986: 64-5). It is a cinema that does not necessarily pay much attention to characterization and character development (Gunning 1986: 65). Even though narrative film predominates after 1906, Gunning notes that the cinema of attractions did not disappear but went “underground” (64). Building on Tom Gunning’s work and concentrating on the evolution of science fiction cinema, Brooks Landon argues that sf “has its roots in spectacle rather than narrative” (1992: xiv). For Landon, sf spectacle represents what he calls an “aesthetics of ambivalence” (xxv, 157).¹⁷ He argues that “the technological accomplishment of the [sf] film sends quite a different message than does its narrative” and encourages other scholars to try and look for connections between the uses of technology and special effects in films in the same way that they often try to organize their arguments around narrative patterns (xxv, 147-8). Brooks Landon shows, from a technological perspective, the centrality and meaningfulness of spectacle in sf films.

¹⁷ My use of the term ‘cosmopolitan ambivalence’ does not derive from Landon’s concept of “an aesthetics of ambivalence.” The cosmopolitan ambivalence of eco-conscious sf films is addressed in the last part of the chapter.

Brooks Landon's work, while still highly relevant and unique in the way he points to the critical possibilities of analyzing spectacle in sf cinema, predicts a course of development and growth for visual technologies in 1992 that has not quite come to realization (207). This is evident in Michele Pierson's work on special effects in sf cinema. Pierson and Landon paint a similar landscape regarding computer-generated imagery, virtual reality, simulation and special effects in general in the 1980s and early 90s, as they both focus on titles that rely heavily on the new technologies available at their time such as *Tron* (Steven Lisberger, 1982), *The Abyss* (James Cameron, 1989), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991), *Lawnmower Man* (Brett Leonard, 1992), *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), and *Johnny Mnemonic* (Robert Longo, 1995) (Landon 1992: 145-160; Pierson 2002: 93-130). They both identify a tendency to self-reflexively call attention to the novelty of the CGI effects in these films. Yet, Pierson notes a shift towards the seamless integration of CGI effects both in the shot and in the narrative in mid-1990s cinema (2002: 131-149). She explains that in *Independence Day*, *The Fifth Element*, and *Godzilla* (1998), among others, CGI effects do no longer have a technological aesthetic. They become part of "complex composite shots" along with more traditional elements such as "models and miniatures" and generate a variety of styles, including B-grade, retro, and camp aesthetics (Pierson 2002: 135-147). As a consequence, it is not so easy to identify the special effects in the film anymore. Pierson's arguments advance an idea that scholars such as David Bordwell, Keith Johnston, and Mark Bould have emphasized since then: narrative and spectacle intertwine and tend to work in the same direction both throughout the history of cinema in general and particularly in the current blockbuster-dominated era (Bordwell 2006: 105-6; Johnston 2011: 42, 46-7; Bould 2012: 67-9).

Although the industry has further evolved in the thirteen years that separate the release of *Independence Day* and *2012* (e.g. models are hardly ever used nowadays),

Michelle Pierson's argument about the integration of effects and other narrative elements in the shot still applies to the sf disaster films studied in this chapter. In an interview in the July 2016 issue of *Empire*, Roland Emmerich acknowledges that shooting *2012* with a digital camera allowed him to develop some images and ideas that would have been impossible to produce when he made *Independence Day* (Smith 2016: 67). Yet, *2012* (like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Godzilla* (2014), and *Geostorm*) is not about showing the power of CGI. Continuing the course initiated by *Independence Day*, the CGI in these films is seamlessly integrated into the narrative. Although the analysis of *2012* in this chapter emphasizes the role of spectacle in the film, it does not do so to claim that the narrative is irrelevant. Rather, following the aforementioned studies, the chapter offers a reading of the interrelation of narrative and spectacle in the cosmopolitan, biopolitical, and environmental discourses that the film develops.

3.3. IN CASE YOU DIDN'T SEE IT COMING:

CLIMATE CHANGE DISASTER IN *2012*

3.3.1. *2012* as a Climate Change Movie

Even though *2012* does not explicitly connect its events to climate change and human actions, Roland Emmerich's filmography invites to read the film from an environmental perspective and to situate it in the context of the Anthropocene. From the very beginning of his career, Emmerich's films have shown environmental concerns. His first film, *Das Arche Noah Prinzip/Noah's Ark Principle* (1984), revolves around a US-European joint venture to operate a space station from which both regions try to alter and control Earth's climate. The opening shot of *Moon 44* informs viewers that "by the year 2038, all natural resources on

Earth have been depleted.” Continuing this eco-conscious trend, the protagonist in *Independence Day* is an environmentalist that literally cycles into the office and reminds everyone that they have to recycle. Emmerich’s remake of *Godzilla* (1998) also includes environmental references. After seeing the first steps of the giant lizard on the rampage in New York, a camera recording a story for television slowly tilts up to show a hole in the middle of the Met Life building, which frames the sky in the background. Bearing in mind that the Kyoto protocol (which sought to stop the enlargement of the ozone layer hole) was signed the year before the release of the film, such a framing of the sky through a hole seems a clear, if isolated, allusion to ozone depletion in the film. Stephen Keane also offers an environmental reading of this film, noting that *Godzilla* seems to “bring the [bad] weather with him” and sometimes “appears to cofound the storm,” even though the film presents this as “accidental disaster” (2006: 86-7). More recently, Emmerich has also directed the previously mentioned *The Day After Tomorrow* and produced *Hell*, which projects, through blinding lighting, a future in which Earth temperatures go up 10°C, putting an end to rainfall and ruining all crops. The regular references to environmental issues in Emmerich’s filmography, along with the scenes of natural disaster in *2012* and the similarities between the development of its narrative and of climate change, call for a reading of the film through the lens of the Anthropocene and climate change.

2012 features a series of earthquakes, volcano eruptions, tsunamis, and side effects such as flying cars and trains, collapsing skyscrapers, sinking freeways and runways, crushed landmarks, and planes about to crash. The film focuses on the attempts of a US American family to survive as they travel from the US to China and then to South Africa. Other main characters include US American scientist Adrian Helmsley (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and White House Chief of Staff Carl Anheuser (Oliver Platt), who adopt different approaches towards the management of the crisis. Although at first sight the series of disasters that unfold through

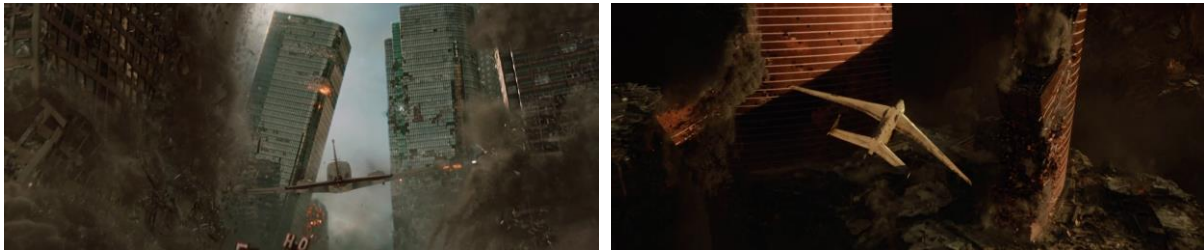
2012 may not seem connected to climate change or to anthropogenic environmental degradation, the use of spectacle in the film, narrative developments, and some subtle references to ecological deterioration invite to read the film as a reference to the effects of the human exploitation of nature. A detailed analysis of the development of the narrative and spectacular scenes will be offered later in the chapter. Regarding the more subtle but clear references to anthropogenic impact on the environment, people hold signs with messages such as “Stop oil sucking” and “People’s planet” in the demonstration that precedes the G8 meeting in Canada. Later on, the earthquake scene in LA situates the action in the film in a context of ecosystemic degradation when a billboard that reads “Heal the Bay” and displays a giant fish skeleton appears as the freeway collapses (figure 30). Towards the end of the film, a giant wave literally erases a field full of planes, wiping out one of the main emitters of warming gasses. This is only a small sample of the references that the film includes. Other references are analyzed throughout the chapter. Apart from the connections that these examples establish with anthropogenic environmental degradation, the scientific discourses in the film resemble discourses about climate change in real life. For instance, in one of the first scenes in the film, Carl Anheuser mocks Adrian’s insistence on the importance and urgency of the information that he wants to provide. In addition, the forecasts that *2012* includes turn out to be too optimistic in most cases. At one point Adrian exclaims: “I thought we had more time.” Through these discursive parallels with climate change and subtle references to ecological damage, *2012* invites viewers to approach the story through the prism of the Anthropocene.



Figure 30: A billboard featuring a fish skeleton and the words “Heal the Bay” presents a society that is dealing with serious ecosystemic challenges.

2012 also self-reflexively points to its status as a film that looks beyond the historical thematic conventions of the sf genre and the post-9/11 fears of Western societies. *2012* reworks well-known images such as those of the destruction of the White House in *Independence Day* and those of planes flying into New York City’s World Trade Center on 9/11/2001. Instead of having aliens fry the White House as in *Independence Day*, in *2012* it is environmental forces (specifically, a tsunami and the aircraft carrier ship that the wave sweeps along) that wreck the iconic building. In this way, the film hints that the actual menace is not aliens (or the foreigners or terrorists that they represent), but climate disruption. This discourse becomes even more evident when the film visually alludes (twice) to the moments before the planes hit the twin towers on 9/11 and presents a different outcome: they do not crash into the skyscrapers. As the protagonist family leaves first LA and then Las Vegas, the film shows their different planes flying between two towers that have an identical height and size (figures 31 and 32). In this way, the film cues viewers to look beyond the widespread obsession with aliens, foreigners, and terrorism and pay attention to the major environmental threats that it depicts. Indeed, the towers collapse in both scenes (as a consequence of the earthquakes) but the planes do not touch them. Moreover, a few moments after the plane flies between the two towers in the scene in which the protagonist family escapes from LA, characters and viewers witness the severity of the environmental catastrophe as Santa Monica and its neighboring cities spectacularly sink into the sea. Despite

the somewhat carefree handling of references to 9/11, *2012* effectively taps into popular concerns and redirects viewers' attention towards the pressing matter of extreme environmental degradation. This interpretation gains more force when considering the treatment of 9/11 in Emmerich's previous disaster film, *The Day After Tomorrow*. After the release of the film, Emmerich acknowledged that even though the waves hit the Statue of Liberty with a force that would have destroyed it, he decided not to use special effects to bring it down in order to respect viewers' sensibilities (Pirro 2013: 400, 402). Considering this context, *2012* points towards a shift in audiences' major concerns from 9/11 to climate change.



Figures 31 and 32: In two tactless references to 9/11, planes fly between towers without hitting them, encouraging viewers to forget about terrorist threats and worry instead about environmental disaster.

Vicente Rodríguez Ortega identifies a progressive social discourse in *2012*, which, he argues, is overshadowed by the magnificence of destruction. He interprets the film as a “kinetic spectacle of destruction” that flattens urban space and produces a “superlative theme park” [my translation] (2012: 118). Like Rodríguez Ortega, this chapter also finds a double discourse about the social consequences of the Anthropocene—what I call the ‘cosmopolitan ambivalence’ of the film. Yet, through its emphasis on the environmental discourse of *2012*, the chapter shows that the spectacular disasters that appear in *2012* actually echo the real development of climate change and emphasize its transnational impacts. That is, the spectacular character of the images does not flatten their meaning. Instead, the main sources of the cosmopolitan ambivalence of the film are, as I will show later, the film’s premise

(which directs attention away from human responsibility for climate change) and its simultaneous denunciation and reproduction of biopolitical logics.

3.3.2. Mirroring Ecological Realities, Envisioning Catastrophes

Even though several of the disaster scenes in *2012* may not appear to be connected to climate change at first sight, recent scientific studies have suggested that there is a connection between human actions, their impact on the environment, and certain unforeseen disasters of the kind that appear in the film (earthquakes, volcano eruptions, and tsunamis). In this sense, the film points, by chance, to the unexpected consequences of climate change, a point that this chapter will address in depth later on. In connection with the first major disaster scene of the film (that of the LA earthquake), geophysicist William Ellsworth links earthquakes in areas that are not particularly prone to earthquakes to human activity, particularly to water disposal as part of hydraulic fracturing (fracking). He also notes that “earthquakes throughout the world are also recognized to be associated with mining, petroleum and gas production, and geothermal energy extraction” (2013: 6). Ellsworth mentions examples in Oklahoma (USA), Konya (India), Wenchuan (China), and Lorca (Spain) (6) as cases in which earthquakes may have been connected to intense resource extraction. In the book *Waking the Giant: How a Changing Climate Triggers Earthquakes, Tsunamis, and Volcanoes* (2012), Bill McGuire, one of the authors of the 2011 IPCC report and former member of the UK Government Natural Hazards Working Group, argues that the impact of human activities in the environment can lead to certain kinds of disaster that involve elements (e.g. the Earth’s crust) that so far have not been considered to be connected to climate change, or more generally, the Anthropocene. Thus, the mega-earthquakes, volcano eruptions, and tsunamis that appear in *2012*, despite their magnitude, may not be so detached from the potential futures of climate change. Their appearance and their order in the narrative development of

the film are not arbitrary either. The natural forces in all the major disaster scenes in the film are connected to the movement of the Earth's crust. The film shows a possible (even if exaggerated in proportion) chain of reactions: earthquakes can trigger volcano eruptions and tsunamis. Even though *2012* does not explicitly link these images of disaster to human activity and climate change, it draws attention to the interconnection of natural elements and the unpredictability of environmental impacts in the Anthropocene. In this sense, the film throws light on ecological mechanisms that are, however simplistic, essential to grasp the scope of climate change and contribute to building a cosmopolitan sense of planet.

The film does not only offer opportunities to read environmental disaster from the perspective of scientific predictions—it also makes implicit visual connections to already-perceptible scenarios of climate change. Some of the sequences in *2012* resemble the images of environmental disasters that regularly appear in the news and reflect the kinds of threats that people are beginning to experience as a consequence of climate change. The earthquake scenes, however, are an exception, as they bear little resemblance to widespread images of climate change. Nonetheless, certain parts of the volcano eruption in the film visually resemble some of the amateur video footage of the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires in Alberta (Canada) that the media disseminated (Decker, Sabovitch, and Edmonson 2016). Both in these real images of people fleeing their homes in their vehicles and in the extreme long shots and long shots first of Jackson and then of a small airplane flying away from the fire, a cloud of ashes and fire fills the entire screen (figure 33). As in the case of other increasingly frequent major wildfires in Australia, Brazil, Siberia, Spain, and the US, the conditions that originated the Canada fires were aggravated by anthropogenic climate change: rising temperatures, drought, and land use (McGrath 2016, The Associated Press 2016). In addition, the film also includes drying landscapes. When Jackson and his children visit Yellowstone, they find a very different image of the lake that Jackson had visited before: the trees around it

are dying, most of the water has vanished, the shores have receded, and steam comes out of the ground. As the family approaches the lake, the film includes a close-up of a dead deer and the sound of flies hovering around it (figure 34). This close-up also reveals cracks in the soil and emphasizes the drought that the area is suffering. Similar images of dead donkeys and goats in Somaliland appeared in the media in November 2015 after the country, which is used to enduring droughts, saw their impact rising to catastrophic levels (McCabe 2015). Several of the images of disaster and ecological crisis in *2012* therefore resemble actual images of the impacts of climate change.



Figure 33: A cloud of ash produced by a volcano eruption in *2012* recalls real-life wildfires.



Figure 34: A close-up of a dead deer lying on cracking soil points at the fatal consequences of drought.

2012's disaster scenes also draw connections to climate impacts that involve water and ice. The end of the earthquake sequence in LA visually resembles a different kind of environmental disaster and one of the best-known signs of climate change: the melting of

glaciers. After the protagonists take off from the Santa Monica airport and fly past a train that has been sent flying and between two towers, the film includes an extreme long shot of the Santa Monica Pier sinking into the ocean. This shot is followed by an even more spectacular shot from a further distance in which not only Santa Monica, but also its neighboring areas appear onscreen (figure 35). In this shot, the ground on which Santa Monica stands has shifted from its original horizontal position to a 30-degree inclined angle, which slowly makes the city sink into the sea, mirroring the melting of Antarctic glaciers. Towards the end of the shot, part of the city dislodges from the main piece of ground and drifts off, drawing a visual connection to the chunks of ice that detach from glaciers and have become a symbol of the global average rise in temperatures. Apart from this, the tsunamis in the film also work as a reference to anthropogenic climate disruption. Although audiences may not readily identify tsunamis (both in the film and in real life) with climate change, they may connect the threatening character of water out of control in the film with the floods that have begun to increasingly affect many countries in recent years and the rising sea levels (a consequence of melting glaciers) that already threaten the inhabitants of some islands such as Bhola Island in Bangladesh (Braasch 2007) and will likely affect mainland coastal populations in the future. Indeed, Emmerich's earlier film, *The Day After Tomorrow*, overtly presents the waves that flood New York City as a consequence of anthropogenic emissions. Despite the lack of explicit reference to climate change in *2012*, the thematic resemblance of several of the disaster scenes (drought, fire, water out of control) to the aforementioned real anthropogenic disasters sketches a landscape of severe climate disruption.



Figure 35: The sinking of Santa Monica mirrors the melting of a glacier.

3.3.3. Staging Climate Change: The Domino Effect and Global Action

In tune with scientific warnings about the effects of climate change, the different major disasters in *2012* are interconnected and part of the film's construction of a cosmopolitan sense of planet. A double graphic match of a ship being flipped over evinces the discourse of global interconnection. The first graphic match takes place between two shots separated by 91 minutes of screen time and the second one between shots in two adjoining scenes. The first instance of this graphic match appears in the first scene in the film when a child is playing with a toy ship in a yard full of puddles in the Naga Deng Copper Mine in India (figure 36). The moment that becomes part of a graphic match later in the film is when a car driving by the kid flips the toy ship over to one side, giving the impression that the ship has been hit by a wave and is sinking. This mock disaster that opens the film advances what happens later in two contiguous scenes set off the coast of Japan and in Washington DC respectively. Mimicking the first scene in India, the first giant wave to appear in the film literally flips over the cruise ship in which the father of the main scientist in the film works as a singer (figure 37). The next scene opens with the President of the United States lying on the floor as it snows. Shortly after, a shot of a wave carrying a US navy ship follows. As the previous shot hints, the wave is headed towards the White House. In the same way as in the cruise ship scene in the sea of Japan and in the Indian copper mine, the wave flips the ship

over, crushing the White House and symbolically destroying (the center of) contemporary geopolitics (figure 38). Through this graphic match that creates a sense of continuity between three distant places, *2012* points to the global scope, interconnectedness, and inescapability of disaster in the age of climate change.



Figure 36: A toy ship advances the disaster to come in the Japan and the US.

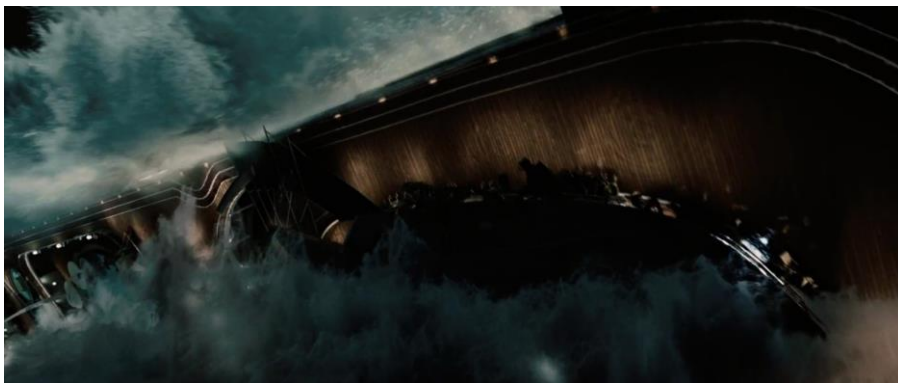


Figure 37: First graphic match: *2012* draws a connection between India and the Sea of Japan.



Figure 38: Second graphic match: *2012* draws additional connections between India, Japan, and the US.

2012 also relies on other visual effects to present its disasters as part of a chain reaction or domino effect of ecological alteration. The domino-like dynamics of environmental disruption are implied in the first disaster scene, in which the beginning of the earthquake in LA emulates the movement of a wave, alluding to the tsunamis that appear later on in the film (figure 39). In a later scene, camera and in-frame movement reinforce the idea of disaster connectivity by emulating the swiveling movement of a fan: just a few seconds before the conspiracy-paranoid Charlie Frost (Woody Harrelson) is about to witness the eruption of the Yellowstone caldera on site, the off-focus mountain in the background begins to quickly spin to the right as the camera pans in the same direction. This effect gives the impression that the landscape is revolving around Charlie and that the mountains will act as a fan, spreading the soon-to-erupt ash and the lava to other places. Indeed, later on Hawaii becomes an active volcano and pockets of smoke and fire spread through Las Vegas. The swiveling camera and in-frame movement therefore hints that no place is going to be left untouched by the upcoming disaster. In his analysis of *The Day After Tomorrow*, Stephen Keane notes that the film “has an accelerating and accumulative sense of spectacle as it follows the natural enough snowball effect of global environmental failure” (2006: 98). While this effect is only implied in the narrative of *The Day After Tomorrow*, *2012* amplifies it by including obvious visual references to it. After the main dome of the Vatican collapses, it rolls on the ground, replicating the movement of a snowball. Later on, the ships being flipped over by the waves carry out a similar circular movement. Following the scene of the cruise ship being hit by the wave, the film introduces the post-earthquake scenario in Washington DC through a shot featuring a spinning wheel in the right corner of the frame, again showing a similar kind of movement. The idea of snowballing disaster is reinforced by the dialogues between those who monitor the disaster crisis. After the Vatican collapses, Carl Anheuser asks: “so, what happens next?” Through these examples, *2012* suggests that the

unleashing of certain natural forces produces a chain reaction that spreads disaster around the world.



Figure 39: A wave-like earthquake points at the domino-effect of environmental impacts and disasters.

Apart from visually pointing to the interconnectedness and domino effect of disaster in the Anthropocene, *2012* emphasizes the global dimension of environmental threats through its narrative organization. Like many sf disaster films, *2012* relies on the popular global montage to render a sense of worldwide impact. The film includes the traditional sf news montage, which in this case features earthquakes in South America, the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro crumbling, riots in London, people praying in Mecca, and people of different faiths marching on the streets in the US. Yet, the film takes a step further by making its action global. Although this is an aspect that develops gradually throughout the film, the first seventeen minutes clearly establish the global scope of the action through a series of short scenes edited together that take place around the world (although only in the Northern Hemisphere). After the first scene, which shows a series of solar flares erupting from the sun, the next fifteen minutes show different groups of people preparing (some unknowingly) for the catastrophe to come in nine different locations, including: a copper mine in India where two of the three main scientists in the film discover temperature anomalies, a fundraising event in Washington DC, a G8 Summit in British Columbia (Canada), the expropriation of land by foreign governments in Tibet, a suite in a London Hotel in which an Arab King considers buying tickets on the arks to be built, the replacement

of the Mona Lisa painting at the Louvre Museum in Paris, mass suicide in Guatemala following the predictions of the Mayan calendar, a series of scenes in Los Angeles in which the protagonist, Jackson Curtis (John Cusack), and his family are introduced, and two musicians boarding a Japan-bound cruise ship in San Francisco. These opening scenes boldly situate *2012*'s narrative in a context of global impacts and transnational responses. In addition, some of these scenes include easily-identifiable markers such as nationality, race, income, and social position which hint at the film's cosmopolitan concern with people's unequal chances at survival.

The global scope of the action in the film is further reinforced by making the main characters move around the globe or placing their friends, colleagues and relatives in different parts of the world. In their quest for survival, Jackson, his children, his ex-wife and her new husband travel from their suburban LA home to the Santa Monica airport, then Yellowstone, Las Vegas, Hawaii, China, and finally, the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa). Through their trip, the film shows the impact of different but interrelated kinds of disaster around the world. In most sf disaster films, the main catastrophes often happen wherever the protagonists are—not in global montage sequences. Although this actually applies to the three major disaster scenes in *2012*, the film makes use of its secondary characters to introduce additional disaster scenes around the globe. After the earthquakes in LA and Las Vegas that affect the protagonists, a later sequence introduces further earthquakes in Japan, Washington DC, and the Vatican. The scene in Japan registers a phone conversation between a singer who works in the same cruise ship as Adrian's father and his family in Japan. The scene in Washington DC focuses on the US president, who decides to stay with the regular people. Even though the film does not feature any familiar character in the Vatican scene, Anheuser says in the previous scene that the Italian Prime Minister also decided to stay home and pray (which justifies the inclusion of this scene). In this way, these earthquakes are

connected to the main line of action in the film and the characters involved in it. Similarly, the tsunami in India features Satnam Tsurutani (Jimi Mistry), the scientist who discovered temperature anomalies (and who is a friend of Adrian), and the tsunami scene in Tibet features a monk who is the teacher of the main character in the Tibet scenes and later helps Jackson and his family to sneak into the ark. The aforementioned tsunamis in the sea of Japan and Washington DC, the previous earthquakes in these two areas, and the tsunamis in Tibet and India (which are not edited together) all affect secondary characters and potentially build a sense of identification in viewers that could not be achieved by simply including random references to other places around the world in dialogues or in news broadcasts. Additionally, this allows the filmmakers to show how the same kind of disaster impacts different parts of the planet.

3.3.4. What Are the Odds? The Development and Consequences of Climate Change

Apart from emphasizing the global dimension of climate change, *2012* also highlights some other key characteristics: its imminence, the impossibility of predicting all its effects, their unavailability, the apparently invisible development, accumulation, and escalation of the side effects of environmental disruption in a context of inaction, and the threat they pose to modern, technology-dependent lifestyles. In this section I explore each of these aspects in detail. Regarding the last aspect, *2012* compresses time to emphasize the devastating consequences of the often imperceptible development of cumulative alterations to ecosystems over time. As Anthony Giddens notes, the effects of climate change “aren’t tangible, immediate or visible in the course of day-to-day life” and people therefore tend not to worry about a danger that they cannot clearly perceive (2009: 2, in Rust 2013: 205). Similarly, in his keynote address at the 2016 Conference of the Science Fiction Research Association, Andrew Milner noted that the fact that climate change is slow is also a problem for its

narrative representation. He observed that a way of solving this problem is by setting the events in the narrative after the catastrophe. Yet, sf film narratives, using the genre's ability to play with time and space and relying on viewers' willingness to suspend disbelief, accelerate catastrophic processes to draw attention to the impending (even if slow and hard to notice) impacts that climate change is already producing. The accumulation of the spectacular scenes of destruction in *2012* and their large scale are not just disaster for the sake of it: they point, in a metaphorical way, towards the often-disregarded disruption that climate change will likely cause in life on Earth and in modern developments.

Several disaster scenes in *2012* show ecosystems giving signs of their critical state and the scarce time left to reverse disastrous environmental processes. Before viewers witness the beginning of the cascading series of disasters that develops throughout the film, a dead deer lying on a patch of land affected by drought and steam coming from the ground in Yellowstone hint at the rising temperature of the ground. They feature as early signs of the volcano eruption that will happen in that area and of the major changes that that ecosystem, according to Jackson, has gone through. In a later scene in Yellowstone, just before lava and ash erupt from the Yellowstone mountains, an extreme long shot shows large bumps of ground swelling as if the planet were about to burst (as the area eventually does). This visual effect underlines the pressure that the planet is subject to. *2012* and the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* also rely on cracking window glass as a metaphor for the fragility of human life and the ecological and technocultural systems that support it. When one of the arks hits Mount Everest in *2012*, the crash unleashes an avalanche of rocks that hit the main window of the ark's control room as the ark reverses its course and avoids a fatal outcome for the collision. The cracked glass, along with the aforementioned details in Yellowstone, work as metaphors that present a planet in critical condition and on the brink of disaster.

Once the chain reaction of disasters that appear in *2012* has been unleashed, the film introduces several last-minute actions that save the protagonists from the deadly impact of the different disasters, particularly, the tsunami. Although in-the-nick-of-time rescues and flights are common in cinema (see Williams 2001: 33-35), *2012* features a remarkable number of situations in which the protagonists narrowly escape from nature's deadly forces. That is the case of the drive through LA during the earthquake, the flights from LA, Yellowstone, and Vegas, the scene in an ark in which a gate malfunction is about to flood the vessel and make it sink, and the partial collision of the ark with Mount Everest. This last scene is the one that most clearly represents popular perceptions of climate change at the time that the film was released: it suggests that there will likely be some impacts, but it is possible to mitigate or even reverse this situation. The allusion to climate change in this scene is not only evident in the metaphorical use of the cracking glass mentioned before and the last-minute intervention analyzed below, but also in its visual reference to icebergs, whose melting has become one of most noticeable effects of climate change. Despite the fact that the ark hits Mount Everest, detail shots of the icy surface of the mountain and of the collision give the impression that the ark crashes into an iceberg. After one of the giant waves hits the ark carrying the protagonists, the ark approaches a side of Mount Everest as a computer informs viewers that the ark is only 50 meters, then 40 meters from it. The ark eventually hits the mountain and yet, shortly after that, the computer again informs passengers and viewers that the ark is reversing its course and is first again 10 meters away from the mountain, and then 20 meters away from it. This scene shows that the impacts of the wave and the mountain have caused some damage to the ark but it is still operational. The scene also suggests that a certain amount of damage is unavoidable: the ark reverses its course several meters before hitting the side of the mountain and yet it still collides with it. By including this kind of event as the last disaster scene in the film, *2012* suggests that climate change offers little time to react and its consequences are unavoidable and yet, at the same time, it also suggests that

these impacts can be diminished with the right preparation and, literally, with a change of navigational/environmental course.

2012 and Emmerich's previous eco-conscious film, *The Day After Tomorrow*, also use concepts that challenge common environmental patterns as a kind of narrative spectacle that draws viewers' attention towards the unexpected effects of climate change. Keith Johnston notes that spectacle extends beyond special effects and may also include star personae, music, set designs, and clothes (2011: 47-9). Concepts also can be spectacular, as they draw our attention by presenting unusual ideas or events. A scene at the beginning of *The Day After Tomorrow* illustrates how concepts serve as spectacle when a series of tornadoes rampage LA, including its well-known Hollywood Sign and Capitol Records Building. In this scene, a reporter says: "yes, a twister in Los Angeles," pointing at the unlikelihood of this event taking place. Emmerich uses a similar technique of conceptual dislocation in *2012*. Despite the fact that the LA area is earthquake-prone, the Yellowstone caldera can erupt, and tsunamis in the Pacific can be particularly devastating (as in the 2004 catastrophe), the magnitude of these events highlights the unpredictability of the environment in the film. Apart from the appearance of disasters themselves onscreen, *2012* develops spectacular concepts through dialogues (mostly between scientists and politicians) and screen animations added in post-production to economically point at the difficulty of predicting the nature, scale, scope, location, and development of the disasters that climate change brings about. They show unexpected side effects and scientific miscalculations, including the propagation of earthquakes around the world, the destabilization of the Pacific plate, the displacement of the Earth crust by 1,000 miles, the course and speed of giant waves, and the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa becoming the highest peak in the world instead of The Himalayas. In one of the arks that appear towards the end of the film, scientists brief a politician about the development of the global catastrophe. A scientist explains: "the Earth

poles have reversed magnetic fields,” to which the politician replies: “So, you’re telling me that the North Pole is now somewhere in Wisconsin?” A scientist responds: “Actually, that’s the South Pole now,” further reinforcing the sense of unpredictability of the transformation of the environment in the film and in the current era of climate change. As characters pronounce these words, the film includes animated screens as part of the mise-en-scène illustrating the radical geographical dislocation that they discuss (figure 40). The unbelievable character of the concepts and spectacles of disaster in *2012* is therefore not just a strategy to generate awe in the viewer but also to draw attention to the unpredictable and unexpected consequences of climate change.



Figure 40: Through economical special effects, an animated screen shows the unpredictability of climate change.

2012's spectacular concepts and images of destruction capture the threat that climate disruption poses for all kinds of lifestyles, be they urban or rural. Yet, the film particularly emphasizes how environmental threats can shatter the developments of technological and urban modernity. At the G8 meeting at the beginning of the film, the US president could not be clearer about the challenge that the world faces in the film. He says: “The world as we know it will soon come to an end.” Of course, by “the world as we know it,” he refers to modern ways of life and comforts. The main scientist in *Godzilla* (2014) (Bryan Cranston) shares similar concerns, forecasting that the natural forces unleashed by Godzilla are going to “send *them* back to the Stone Age.” Such comments also hint at the emergence of a world

where cosmopolitan considerations are likely to dwindle in the face of struggles for resources and survival.

2012, as it is usual in disaster cinema, creates havoc through collapsing buildings and landmarks, crumbling roads, explosions, and rubble. Less common is the appearance of vehicles falling from the sky or flying, which in this case indicate the foundering of modernity. This is most evident in the earthquake scene in LA, in which parking lots appear to vomit cars (figure 41), giving the impression that the city cannot take any more of them. The film also has a truck crash against a gas station, setting it on fire. The destruction in this scene seems to be particularly directed at modern means of transport (cars) and their source of power (oil), which are responsible for the emissions that have greatly contributed to climate change and continue to do so. Later on, as the protagonists fly away from LA on a small plane, a train flies past them diagonally from the back to the front of the screen in the process of crashing against the ground (figure 42). The unbelievable trajectory of this train reinforces the emphasis of this sequence on the malfunction of the modern capitalist system and its technical developments. Mark Bould notes that throughout the history of sf, trains have been first an object that inspired awe and later a symbol of “democratising politics” (2012: 63-4). The contrast between these generalized uses of the train in sf and that in *2012* emphasizes the potential (and ever more likely) collapse of modernity under the impact of climate change. Vehicles out of control also feature in *The Day After Tomorrow*. In this film, tornadoes make cars and buses fall from the sky and wreck airplanes on the tarmac and the extreme cold makes the machinery of several helicopters fail, making them crash. The appearance of this motif in Emmerich’s two most-clearly eco-conscious films establishes vehicles out of control as a symbol of the fragility of modernity and of the threat that climate change poses to it. *2012* shows that disruptions to the climate and ecosystems challenge the mobility and fast-paced, have-all-you-want lifestyles associated with modern vehicles. In

addition, the film ironically and literally smashes and blows up one of the major sources of the problem: contemporary means of transport that burn fuel and emit exhaust fumes.

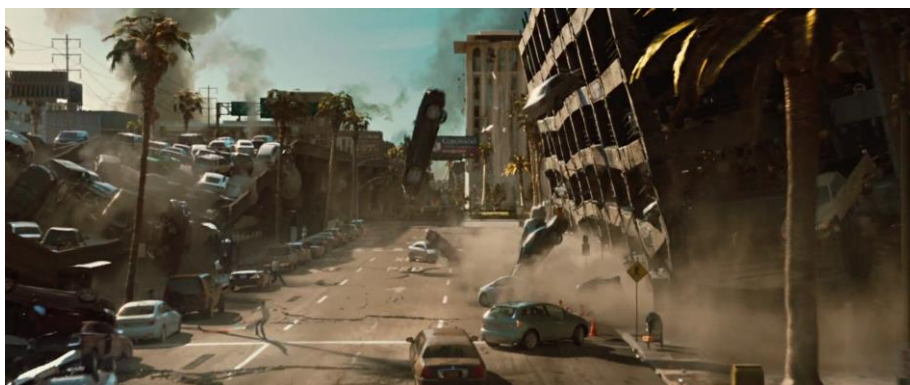


Figure 41: In *2012*, freeways collapse and parking lots vomit cars, showing the inability of the planet to cope with more cars and the collapse of modernity in the city.



Figure 42: A flying train about to crash reinforces the idea of the failure of modern technological developments.

3.3.5. The Ambivalence of Disaster in *2012*

In spite of the references to the spatiotemporal dynamics that the current planetary ecological crisis is bringing about and to the malfunctioning of modernity, *2012*, unlike other recent sf disaster films, obscures the causes of climate change. This, in turn, undermines the cosmopolitan attempt of the film of making environmental impacts and their transnational dimension visible. The film never explicitly links human action to the disasters that appear in it. It develops an ambivalent position towards climate change by showing its outcomes while misdirecting viewers' attention to another cause of the crisis: an unprecedented solar eruption. The film opens with a scene featuring a range of flares erupting from the sun's

surface. The second scene in the film establishes anomalies in the size of these flares as the trigger for the disaster domino that develops throughout the film. A passing reference to the role of the sun is also made later in a video made by conspiracy theorist Charlie Frost. Apart from these three moments, images or references to the activity of the sun are virtually absent in the rest of the film. As the last section has shown, after the second scene *2012* focuses on other kinds of information: scientific discourses that are similar in tone and content to those about climate change, images of destruction that bear visual resemblance to actual disasters triggered by climate change, and a set of spatial and temporal processes and dynamics that characterize the development of disasters induced by human activities. In addition, even though audiences are unlikely to be familiar with the scientific theories that suggest that climate change can cause earthquakes, volcano eruptions, and tsunamis, they may still interpret the disasters in *2012* as references to climate change. The aforementioned details encourage them to do so. *2012* also makes clear connections to the Noah's Ark story from different religions, in which God floods the world as punishment for human misbehavior (in Darren Aronofsky's 2014 cinematic version of the story, for their abusive attitude towards nature). In *2012*, the three giant arks that transport the few who are supposed to survive also carry animals from different species and Jackson's son is named Noah. Yet, in spite of the film's obvious reference to the Noah story, it does not use this as an opportunity to point at humans' reckless attitude towards the environment. In sum, *2012* crafts an ambivalent discourse, both fostering and preventing eco-conscious readings of the film.

After *The Day After Tomorrow* received substantial media attention and originated a heated debate about the plausibility of climate change (Rust 2013: 196-200), it is perhaps not odd that *2012* downplayed its references to this threat to life on Earth. Such ambivalence perhaps helped the film reach wider distribution and avoid the reticence that climate change skeptics might have had towards a film that had dealt with climate change more overtly. *2012*

seems to rely on political subtlety to make people aware of environmental challenges. Indeed, the publicity campaign of the film focuses on the idea of the catastrophe being a prediction of the Mayan calendar. Except for the teaser trailer, the three different full trailers of the film open with images and sound referring to this forecast. Although this prediction will become almost irrelevant in the film (being introduced through the news and only used to reflect Jackson's lifestyle and interests and then later also in Charlie Frost's home-made video), its prominent use in the publicity campaign shows how the film directs viewers' attention away from the causes of disaster. Yet, the ambivalence of disaster in *2012* has a more problematic side: since the premise of the film is that solar flares unleash the chain of disasters in the film, there is not much that humans can do about it. They only try to adapt to the circumstances, as the premise on which *2012* is built leaves no room to imagine how humans could change the way they run their lives and reduce their impact on the planet. In contrast, both in *Godzilla* (2014) and in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), humans fight against the monsters/aliens in an attempt to stop the disasters that they bring about. While in both films human efforts to stop the monsters are in vain (they cannot compete against them), in *The Day* humans are able to stop the apocalypse by agreeing to change their behavior towards the planet.

Therefore, other eco-conscious sf disaster films are not so ambivalent regarding the impact of human activity on the environment and, by extrapolation, its role in producing climate change. The 2014 remake of *Godzilla* introduces new destructive monsters, the MUTOs (Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organism), which come to life as a result of human actions and technologies. In turn, *Godzilla* features as a representative of nature that aims to restore environmental balance. The film establishes humans as active agents in the unleashing of catastrophic events from the very beginning, which takes us to a mining site of the Universal Western Mining company (a name that features prominently in the film's opening shots) in the Philippines. There, a group of people find the bones of a creature and an

egg, which is later identified as one of the MUTOs. In a later scene a scientist says that the drilling of the mining company woke up a MUTO, which looked for “the nearest source of radiation”: a power plant in Japan, where it cocooned and fed on nuclear energy for fifteen years. The film covers its awakening and its destructive power as it searches for nuclear nourishment. By linking the MUTO’s awakening to intensive mining and nuclear power, the scientist’s description shows the unintended, unexpected, and transnational effect of modern human developments.

The Day After Tomorrow, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Wall-E*, and *Snowpiercer* include even clearer references to the impact of human activities on the planet. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, the US President’s speech at the end of the film clearly acknowledges that humans (particularly US inhabitants) cannot “continue consuming the planet’s natural resources.” The 2008 remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* also points at humans’ lack of environmental responsibility. Klaatu (Keanu Reeves), the representative of an alien species, warns humans that they must change their attitude towards the planet. Otherwise, aliens will use their technology to annihilate humans in order to ensure that the planet continues to be alive. *Wall-E* shows that humans have had to leave Earth as a consequence of their unrestrained consumption, their mindless use of natural resources, and the ecological impact of their behavior (e.g. plants do not grow anymore). In the opening scene, the camera flies through a compact layer of satellites surrounding Earth and later shows a new urban landscape of skyscrapers of trash. The film does this through long aerial and overhead shots that dissolve into each other, giving a sense of spatial continuity and suggesting that this kind of scene has become widespread. A few seconds later, the film introduces close-ups of the robot Wall-E organizing the waste that surrounds him and a montage showing an abandoned landscape of ‘ultrastores,’ gas stations, giant billboards that clutter the city skyline, and freeways that highlight the hyper-consumerist character of a society run by the monopolist

company Buy n Large (BnL). The opening scene of *Snowpiercer* also alludes to humans explicitly, as a radio broadcast explains the course of implementation of “a revolutionary solution to mankind’s warming of the planet,” which then of course backfires and puts humans in an even more precarious position. Even though *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Godzilla* (like *2012* and other apocalyptic films) do not make explicit references to climate change and/or the Anthropocene, the films mentioned in this paragraph (including the last two) are less ambivalent than *2012* in establishing links between human activities and planetary environmental degradation. Yet, despite pointing at anthropogenic environmental degradation, each of these films is ambivalent towards some other aspect of climate change: *Wall-E*—like *2012*—is ambivalent towards biopolitics, *Godzilla* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* ignore biopolitics altogether, *The Day After Tomorrow* focuses on the impact of disaster in the US, and as Gerry Canavan notes, *Snowpiercer*’s ending is open to both hopeless and utopian interpretations of the future of humanity (2014: 59-60).

Another aspect that reinforces the ambivalence of *2012* is the series of meetings between governments from different countries and their collaboration in the ark construction project, which situate the realm for political action at a transnational level. In this case, the film reflects ambivalent responses to the consequences of disaster rather than towards the causes of climate change. Although the film appears to hint at the importance of cosmopolitan cooperation, the collaboration between governments—in contrast to disaster—is not global: Latin American, African, Middle Eastern countries, plus India and many other smaller territories do not participate in this project, although the film never explains why. During the G8 meeting in one of the first scenes in the film, the US president alerts the heads of state of Japan, Canada, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and the USA of the impending catastrophe. Later on, the film features a videoconference of the G8 leaders plus China in which Adrian briefs them about the time left before they have to board the arks.

A discussion towards the end of the film about the inhumanity of leaving people standing by the gates of the arks reveals that the arks depend on the political elites of the countries that participate in the videoconference and, for some unknown reason, also Spain. By showing several nations actively organizing a plan for survival, the film suggests the need for transnational organization to face the consequences of anthropogenic environmental disruption. This contrasts with most sf disaster films, which tend to show the reaction of one government only, typically the United States' (*Independence Day*, *Armageddon*, *The Core* [Jon Amiel, 2003], *The Day the Earth Stood Still* [2008], *40 Days and Nights* [Peter Geiger, 2012], *Godzilla* [2014], and *Interstellar*). Some films mention the occasional collaboration between two governments, for example, Russia and the US in *Meteor* and in *Deep Impact* or the US and Mexico in *The Day After Tomorrow*. Bearing these conventions in mind, *2012* stands out from these films in its attempt to present environmental disasters as problems that require the cooperation of different countries. Through this depiction, the film also reflects the cosmopolitan challenges that climate change generates in the realm of geopolitics. Yet, it is only the major economies that join their efforts to ensure their own survival, excluding the rest of the world. In this sense, the collaboration between countries in *2012* resembles the alliances that *Elysium* and *In Time* depict: they serve the interests of the economic and political elites.

3.4. THE BIOPOLITICS OF DISASTER: SOVEREIGN INDIVIDUALS AND BARE

LIFE IN 2012

3.4.1. Dollars and Passports, Please!

The previous section hints at the role of politics, wealth, and power in deciding who gets to live and who does not, that is, at the role of biopolitics. Like classical disaster movies (e.g. *The Towering Inferno*), *2012* articulates what Stephen Keane identifies as “the disaster movie game”: guessing who is going to survive (2006: 38-9). Although chance also plays a part in these narratives, Keane notes that class, race, and gender are markers of survival in disaster cinema, especially since the 1990s (64). Adhering to this generic convention, *2012* also relates survival to clearly identifiable social markers. In addition, by including a large ensemble of different characters and focusing on political decision-makers, the film situates its narrative in the realm of biopolitics. It clearly establishes who is, according to biopolitical logic, supposed to board the ark and who is not. As the introduction to this chapter advanced, biopolitics explores the political logics that render certain kinds of lives more valuable than others. Through its focus on such logics, biopolitics offers prime opportunities to address cosmopolitan challenges related to the right to live and to have a decent live. In his work on biopolitics/biopower, Michel Foucault notes that since the eighteenth century “the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” [emphasis in original] (1978: 138). These operations of power are clearly established in *2012*, as some lives are protected and fostered and others are let perish.

Developing Foucault’s work, Giorgio Agamben bases his biopolitical theories on the distinction between the Greek terms *zoē* (politically-excluded “bare life”) and *bios* (politically-included, empowered bodies) (1998: 134, 140). More specifically, Agamben’s work focuses on the Roman concept of the *homo sacer*, which is roughly equivalent to *zoē*.

Although *homo sacer* literally means ‘sacred man;’ in practice, the term refers to a person who “may be killed and yet not sacrificed” (Agamben 1998: 140). Despite the differences between Foucault and Agamben’s approaches to biopolitics (see Agamben 1998: 140), both authors coincide in their emphasis on the sociopolitical structures that disregard some lives to the extent of allowing their end. In the context of *2012* and the catastrophes that it displays, it is the latter aspect of biopolitics (letting the *homo sacer* die) that becomes particularly relevant, with the film highlighting it through dialogues, mise-en-scène, and disaster spectacle. Apart from analyzing this dimension of *2012*, the final part of this section also considers how other films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Wall-E*, *Snowpiercer*, and *Interstellar* present wealth, profession, nationality, and race as major references in the organization of the new social scenarios that climate change produces.

Although Foucault and Agamben focus on bare life, *2012* pays particular attention to the kinds of lives that power fosters. The following paragraphs first explore this emphasis on the character of privileged groups and then see the implications of this for the portrayal of *homo sacer* in the film. *2012* includes multiple references to billionaires, royalty, and, to a lesser degree, politicians and scientists as the lives that ‘deserve’ saving. One of the opening scenes in a hotel suite in London features an Arab king who is offered tickets on the ark for the price of one billion euros. When Charlie has a conversation with Jackson on his trailer, the conspiracy theorist mentions that the arks have been built for people like “Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, or some Russian billionaire.” A Russian billionaire, Yuri Karpov (Zlatko Buric) is indeed introduced minutes later at a boxing event during which he receives a biometrically encrypted message telling him to start the boarding procedure.

As the film advances towards the end, the references to the kinds of lives that are fostered become more obvious, bringing cosmopolitan concerns to the forefront. Right after scientists get off the helicopter that transports them to the site where the arks have been built,

a shot showing their faces looking at something invites viewers to pay attention to two close-ups of a corgi dog and the feet of a woman. These two shots are followed by a long point-of-view shot revealing that the woman is Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom, who is bringing her two well-known dogs with her. Moments later, a conversation between Adrian, the president's daughter, Laura Wilson (Thandie Newton), and Anheuser about the selection procedure for those who get to board the ship explicitly points at the reason why some people make it on board and others do not: their money. Again, the film relies on a point-of-view shot to emphasize the kind of passengers entitled to board. In this case, the film shows a line of passengers (who are all white Anglo, except an Arab family) marching into the ship after Adrian literally points at them with his finger in the previous shot (figure 43). The film also directs viewers' attention towards the identities of these people by staging the scene as if it were a police line-up. After Adrian and Laura show their skepticism at Anheuser's explanations, he admits: "Without billions of dollars from the private sector, this entire operation would've been impossible." As the work of several scholars suggests, biopolitics need to be understood in relation to capital (Vint 2011: 164-5; Cupples 2012: 15, 25-27; Dalby 2013: 187, 190; Baker 2015: 115-119). By highlighting the centrality of money in the operation of biopolitics in catastrophic scenarios, *2012* unveils some of the economic logics of biopolitics. Yet, the film only addresses the role of capital in the biopolitical management of disaster, but not in its biopolitical production.



Figure 43: By questioning the selection criteria to board the ark and pointing at a group of people who represent the top of the biopolitical ladder, Laura and Adrian bring cosmopolitan concerns about the different value of lives to the forefront.

Through its multiple references to the privileged biopolitical status of the extremely wealthy, *2012* shows that climate change does not affect everyone equally. In addition, the film hints at a *de facto* privatization of state decisions by showing the adaptation of the neoliberal model of public-private partnerships to the realm of catastrophe management.¹⁸ This model is most evident in Anheuser's reference to the billions of dollars that private investors have contributed to the project. Even though states orchestrate the construction of the arks and government representatives are the ones who make the decision to open the gates later, these governments do not build the arks for the benefit of any of their citizens. Representatives do so for themselves and for other wealthy individuals. In this sense, Brian Baker's work on biopolitics and mobility in *Code 46* is relevant. Baker explains that he uses the term "sovereign bodies" instead of "states" "because the very notion of the state is under erasure in *Code 46*" (2015: 116). Instead, entities or actors such as corporations establish regulations, procedures, and emit official documents. 'Sovereign bodies' is also an apt term to describe the working of biopolitics in *2012*. 'Bodies,' though, would carry a slightly different meaning in the scenario that *2012* projects: the term would refer to the individual bodies who protect their personal interests and lives only. In *2012*, it is individuals, through their capital in some cases and through their corrupt political power in others, who are sovereign. They decide which lives are going to be saved (their own and those that are essential for their survival) and which ones are not (everyone else's). These privileged bodies ride roughshod over the sovereignty that citizens confer to their governments to defend, in theory, the general interest. Even some people who have paid to get onboard, such as Yuri and his family are prevented from doing so in order to guarantee the safety of those who are already onboard. *2012* then shows that, in a situation of catastrophe, sovereignty does not reside in the state or in non-governmental entities, but in individual bodies.

¹⁸ Saskia Sassen, among others, has described similar systemic trends concerning the relationship between state and markets since the 1980s. She mentions, for instance, the privatization of state authorities and public functions and the privileging of the market (2006: 186).

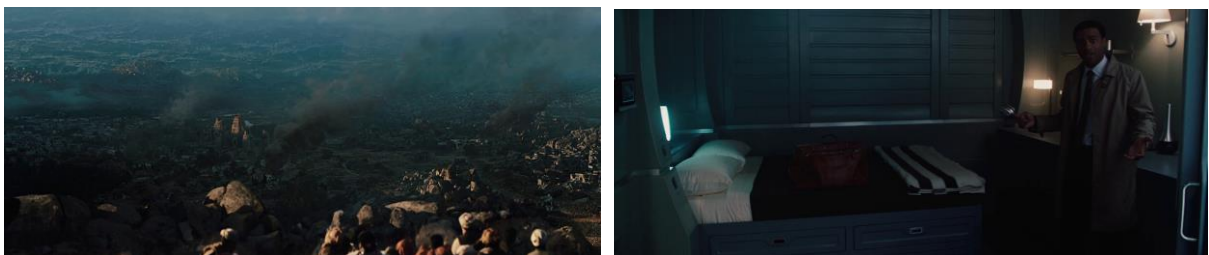
The almost uncontested right of billionaires (with the exception of Yuri) to protect their own lives and let others die in *2012* contrasts with the role of the millionaire in the 1951 film *When Worlds Collide*. In this film, a scientist stops the attempts of a millionaire to decide who should be onboard the spaceship that will allow some people to survive the apocalyptic catastrophe that is about to hit Earth. The identities of those who will be allowed to travel on the spaceship are established through a raffle, although the millionaire and the scientists have guaranteed spots because they fund and develop the operation respectively. Eventually though, the chief scientist forces the millionaire (who is in a wheelchair) to stay on Earth with him in order to save fuel and give those on the spaceship a higher chance of survival. *When Worlds Collide* also presents private actors as essential for the development of the operation, but they are not, as in *2012*, sovereign over everyone else: the millionaire is not allowed to choose who should or should not be on the spaceship. In Foucauldian terms, the figure of the millionaire does not have the power to let die. The contrast between the roles of capital in both films suggests a change in the public perception of the power of money in the current neoliberal context, particularly in situations of exception. The boarding criteria in *When Worlds Collide* are based on a cosmopolitan appreciation of the equal value of human lives. In contrast, *2012* develops an ambivalent cosmopolitan position: on the one hand, it criticizes the unequal, hierarchical, and monetary value of lives and, on the other, it fails to challenge such a system.

2012's focus on the fostering of the lives of sovereign bodies and, as a result, the generalization of the condition of *homo sacer* in the Anthropocene does not mean that the film ignores the biopolitical role of factors such as nationality, race, and profession—it does not explicitly point at gender, although the film clearly focuses on the survival of male characters. The earlier section on disaster already showed that the plan to build the arks was orchestrated by economically powerful nations, leaving others to their own fate. In addition,

the part of the film that deals with the boarding of the arks provides more information about specific biopolitical markers. The most obvious case is that of the exclusion of Satnam, the Indian scientist who discovers the anomalies that allow individual sovereign bodies to prepare for the cataclysm. The following paragraph analyzes his case in detail. Before Satnam's death, the end of the conversation about the selection procedure develops the biopolitical logics that *2012* denounces. When Adrian, showing cosmopolitan concerns, asks why workers (in general) do not get passes, Anheuser replies: "if you want to donate your passes to a couple of Chinese workers, be my guest." The emphasis of Anheuser on the nationality of the workers shows his biopolitical reasoning: in the state of emergency of the film, he sees the Chinese as *homo sacer*. Chinese workers also stand out in the extreme long shots of a mass of people waiting for the arks' gates to open thanks to the yellow color of their uniforms, which contrasts with the dark color of the outfits of the rest of the people waiting. While the workers who built the ships are markedly Chinese, the captain of the US ark is white and speaks in perfect US American English. The physical appearance of the crew in the US ark in general invites to surmise that the nationality of the crew coincides with that of the nations that are responsible for each of the arks. A comparison between the two main scientists in the film confirms this point: Adrian, a black US American scientist, boards the ark, while Satnam and his family are left stranded in India. Although people from all kinds and origins are subject to this biopolitical system, the emphasis on the exclusion of Indian and Chinese people clearly demarcates an additional biopolitical line between citizens from major economies and citizens of developing nations (the first line being that between sovereign bodies and the rest).

Relying on crosscutting and spectacular images of impending disaster, the scene of the death of Satnam Tsurutani is the moment that most overtly visualizes the opposing statuses that biopolitical logics establish. His death is particularly significant as Satnam is,

after all, the character who first discovers and shares the signs of environmental alarm. The conversation about the selection procedure is followed by the sight of the second major wave in the film approaching a city in India. A large group of people including Satnam move forward in slow motion carrying bags, suitcases, and other belongings, and thus showing that they have escaped from the area where they live. They stop, look back, and the screen shows, through an extremely long establishing shot, a giant wave forming over an Indian city already in the distance (figure 44). The next shot cuts to Adrian settling in his sleek room and noting: “you could fit ten people in here” (figure 45). Shortly after dropping his bag, Adrian gets a phone call from Satnam, who informs him of the unexpected evolution of the mega-tsunami (which was not meant to hit his city so soon) and lets him know that he and his family did not get picked up. By crosscutting between the impending disaster scene in India and the sleek and spacious ship that will keep its passengers safe from the giant waves, the film exposes the distinction between *zoē* (*homo sacer*, bare life) and *bios* (the sovereign bodies who have biopower). The criticism of this system takes particular force because it is a familiar and likeable, even if secondary, Indian character and his family that get killed after the previous scenes highlight the nationality and economic status of the passengers in the arks. Indeed, Satnam and his family are the only characters who are shown to be literally hit by disaster once the evacuation has already started. Their example additionally shows the interweaving of narrative and spectacle both in the environmental and in the biopolitical discourses that the film develops.



Figures 44 and 45: *2012* crosscuts between shots of Satnam, his family, and other people about to be hit by a giant wave in India and Adrian’s spacious room on the ark to emphasize the radically-different position of these characters in the biopolitical order that the film denounces.

Satnam's death also works as a turning point in the film, articulating the two biopolitical options that the film considers: 'the lifeboat' and 'the collective' (Fiskio 2012: 14-32). While Janet Fiskio does not refer to the presence of these two metaphors in *2012*, she identifies these two terms as the "dominant narratives" in discourses of global climate change (2012: 14). Even though Fiskio does not use biopolitical terms, the metaphor of the lifeboat corresponds to the distinction between *homo sacer* and sovereign body addressed in the last paragraph. In turn, Fiskio describes the collective as a "courageous and generous" attitude in a chaotic environmental context (2012: 14). She uses the example of Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (2009) to explain that, in the metaphor of the collective, "spontaneous communities form in response to disaster" and "ordinary people come together to care for one another" (2012: 22). In other words, the collective could also be described as a cosmopolitan stance in a situation of environmental crisis.

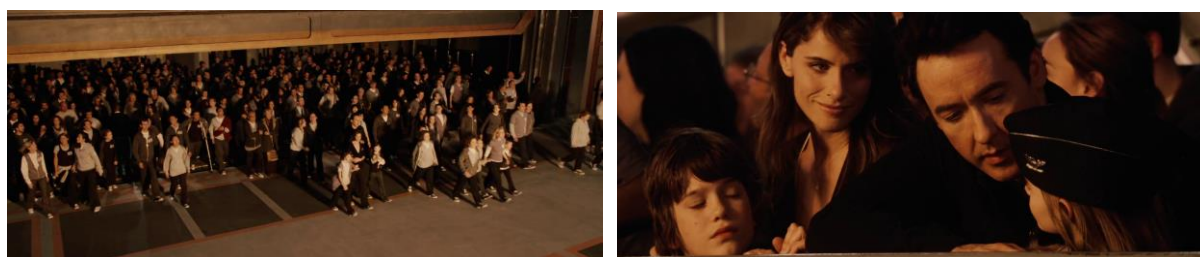
The crosscutting between the ark and the impending tsunami in India serves as a catalyst for change that introduces the metaphor of the collective in *2012*. The cosmopolitan spirit of the collective resonates in Adrian's address to political leaders from all over the world, trying to convince them to open the arks' gates to let the people outside board the ark. He asks: "Can we really stand by and watch these people die?" Adrian uses the personal story of the death of his friend Satnam to move people from different nations in the arks and change their minds. In order to do this, Adrian also calls the presumably civilized character of sovereign bodies into question, arguing that if they consider themselves civilized, they should open the gates. The film also underlines Adrian's personal commitment and invites viewers to identify with his cosmopolitan discourse through the frequent use of close-ups that frame him, his cracked voice, his performance (he looks at different directions, seeking empathy), and by alternating between shots of his speech and shots of different leaders

considering his argument. In this way, *2012* intertwines disaster, drama, and biopolitical allusions to discredit the metaphor of the lifeboat and endorse the cosmopolitan orientation of the metaphor of the collective. Apart from the opening of the gates to let a large group of people in, the film narrative also reinforces the metaphor of the collective by showing a Tibetan family unselfishly helping the protagonist American family and Yuri's Russian girlfriend to stow away on one of the ships. In these scenes, *2012* praises specific moments in which characters decide to adopt cosmopolitan modes of acting.

3.4.2. Steering towards Cosmopolitanism, a While

Stephen Keane argues that “disaster movies are not so much about clinging onto dear life as making your way, out of the rubble, towards a life with renewed perspective” (2006: 22-3). Yet, even though *2012* replaces the metaphor of the lifeboat with the new perspective of the cosmopolitan collective, the film is also ambivalent towards the biopolitics of climate change. As noted earlier, *2012* ignores the role of humans (particularly of Western industrialized nations) in unleashing ecological disasters, it grants the US American family a central position in the future that the film hints at, and, in addition, it envisions a new beginning for humanity in Africa in which Africans do not appear. After the stowaways are saved from a flooding sector of the ark, the film includes an intertitle that reads: “Day 27 Month 01 Year 0001,” showing that a new period has begun for humans. In the second scene in this sequence, the film presents the humans that will be part of this new society. The film first includes long and extreme long shots of a racially diverse group of people combined with medium shots of some of the main characters. As the gates open to let people walk on the platforms for the first time since they boarded, the film highlights the presence of the protagonist US American family and the Tibetan family through the casting of the hard light of the sun on their faces in two separate medium shots, followed again by a longer shot of the

large group of people walking out on the deck (figure 46). In this way, *2012* seems to celebrate the survival of different groups of people. The film then includes a series of shots that show the arks en route and reveal South Africa as the destination of the ships. Yet, before the film introduces its final zoom-out shot, the last shots of characters closely focus on the white, heterosexual, middle-class US American family talking about their future home (figure 47). Therefore, *2012* appears to present a racially diverse future but eventually privileges the white US American family.



Figures 46 and 47: *2012* seems to celebrate the survival of different groups of people, but eventually privileges the protagonist white US American family.

The film also develops an ambivalent biopolitical position through its presentation of South Africa as the place where survivors will settle. One of the scientists informs Adrian that the Drakensberg Mountains in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) have become the highest point in the world and that the African continent has suffered the least impact from environmental upheaval. On the one hand, the designation of an African country as the place where the survivors on the arks are supposed to live suggests a potential revision of world geopolitics, in which a continent that has traditionally suffered the abuses of Western nations and companies will now be a world leader. On the other hand, the ending does not consider the situation of the people living in South Africa, many of whom could still be alive, as the information provided by the scientist invites to think. *2012* does not include a single image of, not even a comment about, South African survivors. In this way, the film presents South Africa as an empty land ready for the passengers of the ships to occupy and silently reproduces the logics of colonialism. This ending contrasts with that of *The Day After*

Tomorrow. In Emmerich's earlier film, people living in the US are allowed into Mexico but Mexico retains its sovereignty and demands changes in the way that the global economy works (asking the US to condone the debt of all Latin American countries). Even though Mexico demands something in return, this demand is a cosmopolitan one (from which other countries also benefit). The Mexican government in the film pushes for a more even global economic system and, ultimately, US citizens are allowed to cross the border into Mexico in what is also an exercise of empathy and cosmopolitanism. By overlooking South African citizens altogether, *2012* passes over their sovereignty and undermines the seemingly cosmopolitan discourse of its ending.

The final shot, which zooms out from the ships to show an almost complete image of Earth from outer space, also evinces the film's ambivalence towards biopolitics and climate change. This image of the Blue Planet, which also closes *The Day After Tomorrow*, has often been related to environmentalist discourses (Heise 2008: 22-23). As Ursula Heise explains, this kind of image has been interpreted in varying, almost opposite ways. In the 1960s and 1970s, many environmentalist movements embraced images of the Blue Planet for their depiction of Earth as a singular, precious, common home for different beings (Heise 2008: 22). More recently, the image has been criticized, as she notes, "for its erasure of political and cultural differences" (2008: 24). The appearance of the Blue Planet image at the end of *2012* fits into both of these discourses. At first sight, the sublime image suggests that humans have another chance at living on an Earth that now appears to be borderless. Yet, the transition from the close-ups of the US American family to the blue marble image of Earth all but reinforces the discourse that sees such images of the planet as an erasure of diversity, here depicting this family as a projection of the whole of humanity.

The ambivalence of the biopolitics of climate change is not unique to *2012*. Films such as *Wall-E*, *Snowpiercer*, *Interstellar*, and, to some extent, also *Elysium* develop similar

discourses. *Interstellar* presents a global human extinction scenario: once crops start to fail massively and dust storms become routine, humans have to find a way of continuing their lives outside planet Earth. Some of the dialogues at the beginning of the film explicitly refer to biopolitical and cosmopolitan questions: John Brand (Michael Caine) says that authorities realized that “dropping bombs [on starving people] was not a long term solution” and Amelia Brand (Anne Hathaway) mentions that genetic diversity is necessary for the colonization of other planets. Later on, characters also show concerns over humanity in planetary terms. For instance, Joe Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) warns that “the people on Earth [...] are gonna die” and later on mentions that the advanced beings who built the outer-space maze chose Murphy (Jessica Chastain) “to save the world.” In spite of these references to global humanitarianism/cosmopolitanism, *Interstellar* only shows the impact of Cooper’s intergalactic quest for a solution to environmental degradation through the lives of its white US American protagonists. Indeed, *Interstellar*’s visualization of the space station where humanity is supposed to continue living is a celebration of Americana in outer space (figure 48). The Americanness of the sets (the baseball field, the corn fields, Cooper’s farm house, and its porch) along with the almost-exclusively white US cast of the space station scenes suggest that the lives of white US citizens are the only lives that viewers should care about. Although *Interstellar* develops a compelling story of the bond between a father and a daughter, it ignores the obvious cosmopolitan and biopolitical questions that climate change and the prospect of life off Earth pose.



Figure 48: Americana in outer space: In *Interstellar*, the only future that matters is that of the US and the white protagonists.

In *Wall-E*, the advert of a spaceship at the beginning of the film presents the idea of living in space as an inclusive project in terms of race, gender, and age (the advert's narrator explicitly says "even grandma can join the fun"). The advert also shows that there are several ships and focuses on "the jewel of the BnL fleet," which later turns out to be a ship that seems to carry US Americans only. By mentioning that ships would depart every day (implying that many people would be able to leave), the film papers over the fact that everyone living on Earth most likely did not fit on the spaceships. In addition, by focusing on one of the ships only, *Wall-E* does not draw attention to the biopolitical logics that likely governed this turning point for humanity. Although the film barely develops characters, the narrative implies, via their American accent, that *Wall-E* deals—in a similar way to *Interstellar*—with a US spaceship. Therefore, despite criticizing the avid consumerism of the passengers and portraying a racially diverse spaceship, *Wall-E*, in practice, celebrates the biopolitical supremacy of US citizens. In contrast, *Snowpiercer* develops the opposite discourse. As Gerry Canavan notes, the last shot of the film features the presumably only survivors of the freezing eco-apocalypse: "an Asian woman and a young black child, dressed as Inuits, [who] stare out into a non-white, and presumably non-Western, future" in which both characters will have to start from scratch (2014: 59). In general, the biopolitical

imaginings of *2012*, *Interstellar*, *Wall-E*, and *Snowpiercer* work in an either/or manner, privileging US American nationality and/or whiteness or doing away with it, as in the case of *Snowpiercer*. This apparent reciprocal exclusiveness of racial categories contrasts with the both/and character that Ulrich Beck ascribes to cosmopolitanism (2006: 4-5). That is, from a cosmopolitan perspective, cinematic discourses on the Anthropocene should be able to imagine futures in which both whites and other races and both US Americans and people from other countries belong. In other words, excluding a biopolitically-privileged group does not offer viewers a more cosmopolitan perspective.

To conclude, this chapter has shown how over-the-top, seemingly meaningless spectacle can develop a detailed portrayal of the socio-environmental dynamics and impacts of climate change. Through the speculative character of its special effects, matches-on-action, camera movement, and the globalization of its action, *2012* highlights, like few other films, the planetary scope of climate change and the connectivity of its impacts, not only conceptually (as in most sf films) but also narratively. The spectacular character of many of the scenes in *2012* also contributes to signaling the critical condition of ecosystems, exposing the almost-invisible intensification of climate change, and pointing at some of its key characteristics such as the unpredictability and unavoidability of its effects, its imminence, and the threat it poses even for modern Western lifestyles and, more generally, human lives worldwide. Although *2012* provides an elaborate picture of climate change dynamics, it also overlooks a central element of climate change: its anthropogenic origin. *2012* develops an ambivalent position towards climate change: it offers a cosmopolitan perspective by emphasizing the transnational dimension of its impacts and fails to point explicitly at the responsibility of humans over its production.

Similarly, Ulrich Beck refers to climate change as “pure ambivalence” (2010: 175-6). He explains that climate change unleashes catastrophes in which hierarchies make specific

groups and regions more vulnerable, but he also notes that such situations of crisis provide an opportunity for cosmopolitan organization (175-6). The larger and stronger the impacts, the more people are likely to be affected by them, making transnational collaboration and actions on a global scale a necessity. This chapter has shown that *2012* also presents climate change as an opportunity for cosmopolitics and adds a further dimension to Beck's argument, suggesting that ambivalence is also inherent to attempts at organizing and depicting cosmopolitan responses. This additional layer of ambivalence towards environmental dislocation stems from the film's simultaneous denunciation and reproduction of the biopolitical logics of disaster crises. Through the metaphors of the neoliberal lifeboat and the cosmopolitan collective, the film exposes the system that allows the extremely wealthy, royalty, and top government representatives of major economies to exercise ungranted power in order to protect their own lives and let everyone else (even highly-qualified, non-Western people) die. By endorsing the metaphor of the cosmopolitan collective, *2012* celebrates racial diversity, the inclusion and value of people of all nationalities, professions, and incomes, and the restructuring of global geopolitics. Yet, at the same time, it reinforces the supremacy of white US Americans (as also happens in *Interstellar* and *Wall-E*) and disregards the sovereignty of South Africans.

Even though *2012* presents the ideal of the cosmopolitan collective as an effective response to large-scale disaster, Frédéric Neyrat points out that the emphasis on the management and biopolitics of catastrophe obscures the more urgent and more necessary task of distinguishing between disaster as "misfortune" and as "injustice" (2016: 261). That is, to differentiate between those catastrophes that are 'natural' and those that are 'forced.' Indeed, *2012*'s ambivalence towards the role of human activities in forcing climate change gives the impression that the disasters it portrays are natural. Although Neyrat does not situate these ideas within the framework of cosmopolitanism, his argument suggests that addressing the

threats that climate change poses from a cosmopolitan perspective involves identifying who and what generates the conditions that unleash or aggravate natural disasters in order to identify responsibilities and prevent the operation of the biopolitics of catastrophe in the first place (261-262). 2012's cosmopolitan ambivalence is therefore also due to its presentation of disaster as a misfortune, and not as injustice. Even sf films that link disaster to human activities (e.g. *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Godzilla*, *Wall-E*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*) fail to identify specific actors and activities—other than humans or neoliberalism in general—and to regularly emphasize their connection to the environmental degradation and life hazards that they produce. In spite of their powerful visualization of climate change catastrophes, sf disaster films are still missing a crucial element that should be part of their cosmopolitan imaginations: the concept of disaster as anthropogenic injustice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Love for the Alien Same: Interplanetary Romance and Kinship as Harbingers of (Ambivalent) Cosmopolitanism

4.1. COSMOPOLITAN INTIMACIES

One of the main ways in which early twenty-first century sf cinema is structuring its discourses around globalization is through transnational love. While romantic relationships have enjoyed regular attention in sf throughout its history, a number of recent sf films, starting with *The Fifth Element* in 1997, have reshaped the use of romantic relationships in the genre to address cosmopolitan concerns. This does not mean that the films mentioned in this chapter are necessarily cosmopolitan or offer visions of an ideal world whose inhabitants live in harmony with others, appreciate difference, and have reasonable access to economic resources and decent healthcare. Rather, these films, echoing some recent work on cosmopolitanism in the social sciences (Mezzadra and Nielson 2013; Woodward and Skrbis 2012; Stacey 2014a, 2014b), explore cosmopolitanism through personal struggles, occasional collaboration and alliances, moments of empathy and bonding, and the ambivalence of cosmopolitanism itself. In order to develop this argument, I start with a brief account of the conceptual and narrative use of romantic relationships and kinship in the sf genre, introduce romantic relationships between humans and aliens as a metaphor for transnational love, and

offer a close reading of two radically different films in terms of aesthetics. I first focus on *The Host*, (Andrew Niccol, 2013), a commercial Hollywood production based on the novel of the same title by Stephenie Meyer (2008), and then examine *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* (Madeleine Olnek, 2011), a zero-budget film which echoes the style of B-movies such as *Planet 9 from Outer Space* (Ed Wood, 1959). Despite their very different aesthetics, I argue that these two films develop an ambivalent position towards cosmopolitanism by presenting the formation of transnational couples as a harbinger of cosmopolitan attitudes in their societies and, at the same time, reinforcing social dichotomies by casting only white American actors as the members of the transnational couple.

While sexuality, romance, intimacy, and reproduction, and gender may not have traditionally occupied a central position in discourses of globalization and cosmopolitan challenges—when compared, for instance to economics and politics—(Padilla et al. 2007, x), they are a central dimension in the daily lives of many people influenced by and shaping global processes. In a context of increasingly mobile labor, one member of a couple may have to go to another country to work and live for a period of time while the other stays home. Partners may meet for the first time while they are abroad, online, or across the border a few miles from their home and then try to continue their relationship at a distance or relocate together at some point. People from different countries and/or cultures may attempt to start a new life together in one of their countries or in a different country altogether. Sometimes, people are forcefully driven into migration (because of their sexual orientation or the unequal statuses of sexes in their countries, or because of economic reasons, political dissidence, or religious beliefs). Regardless of the different reasons that drive people into transnational relationships, these couples usually have to deal with borders, visa regimes, and social conventions that challenge their relationship.

Clashing human rights frameworks and legislation paradoxically also offer opportunities for certain kinds of individuals to fulfill their intimate needs or their reproductive desires. Queer people sometimes flee the hostile environments in which they live and attempt to start anew in places where their lives are not endangered and their sexual rights are recognized. The protection of LGBTQ rights in some countries may produce a transnational domino effect of rights-recognition (for instance, in the case of homosexual marriage) but it may also generate counter-reactions in others (the current escalation of violence towards homosexuals in certain regions of the world, for instance, in Russia). Some couples (often from the global North) may resort to the cheap (and typically female) labor of the global South in order to care for their children or elderly. Paradoxically, these women often have to leave their own children behind at home in order to care for the relatives of others. Infertile couples sometimes decide to circumvent the legislation of their country and rent the bodies of surrogate mothers so that they gestate children with the genetic material of the paying couple or individual. Others may adopt a child who has lost her/his family at the other side of the world. Yet, as comprehensive as this list may seem, it is impossible to fit all the different configurations of global love, sexualities, gender, and kinship in a series of categories. This is evident, for instance, in Ken Plummer's listing of over sixty different instances of modern sexual worlds (2015: 43). Transnational intimate interactions and reproductive hopes do not automatically derive from global suprastructures, rather individual desires and local understandings of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality rework systemic influences (Padilla et al. 2007: xii-xiv; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2011: 30-31).

The fact that engaging in transnational relationships and marriages, looking for sexual freedom abroad, conceiving transnational babies, and adopting children from other nations is becoming more and more common (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2011: 32) may suggest at first sight that transnational kinship promotes cosmopolitanism. Yet, as Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth

Beck-Gernsheim note, the proliferation of transnational couples and world families does not necessarily mean that more and more people are opening their minds towards difference. As they note, world families also produce counter-reactions from people who defend more ‘traditional’ relationships (245). In addition, some transnational/transcultural families can embrace their mobility privileges and be blind to other cosmopolitan causes. A telling example is that Nigel Farage and Donald Trump—two of the most prominent leaders in contemporary xenophobic politics—were married to women from different countries than their own when they orchestrated their nationalist campaigns for closed borders. More generally, the formation of transnational families and their daily lives are not necessarily cosmopolitan. That is the case, for instance, of children who are born to Indian surrogate mothers and raised by wealthy European families and whose origins, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim point out, bear “the inequalities of the world” (2011: 247). Similarly, John McLeod notes that transcultural adoptions take place in an “uneven terrain” of glocal interactions (2015: 9). Still, even though transnational love and families may not embody or cultivate cosmopolitan attitudes, from a narrative point of view and in the past and present contexts of reticence towards miscegenation and of laws forbidding intermarriage in many parts of the world, the narrative celebration of transnational family ties constitutes a cosmopolitan practice of opening up life possibilities and choices.

Despite the fact that many early twenty-first century sf films present transnational couples as harbingers of cosmopolitanism, that is not the main concern of this chapter. Rather, following Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbis, this chapter approaches cosmopolitanism as “a sensibility that people sometimes draw upon and other times ignore” (2012: 132). Through the desire for and the intimate engagement with national/cultural/racial/religious difference, individuals may negotiate their own and their society’s cosmopolitan conflicts and struggles. In this sense, the development of

cosmopolitan sensibilities is not limited to the sphere of the transnational couple or family. Their experiences can contribute to building cosmopolitan trust, openness, and alliances (and resistance towards them) in their communities and societies as well. To investigate the interplay of cosmopolitanism and love is therefore to consider how desire, intimacy, affection, sex, and care mediate individual and collective approaches to human rights, openness towards difference, conviviality, mobility, and mutually-beneficial interpersonal relationships and cultural exchanges.

Looking at romance and kinship through the lens of cosmopolitanism necessarily involves considering sexual freedoms and human rights. As Nicola Mai and Russell King note, the ability of an individual to “enjoy a plurality of lifestyles” is “very unequally distributed at a local, national and globalized level” (2009: 305). This is particularly relevant in the case of queer individuals and women, whose sexual desires are banned in the case of the former and their agency and role within the couple severely limited in many parts of the world in the case of the latter. The recent recognition of LGBTQ rights in several Western nations, especially since the 2000s (The Netherlands was the first country to approve homosexual marriage in 2001), has simultaneously generated a sense of identification with a global LGBTQ community and a sense of cosmopolitan responsibility with people from other parts of the world whose societies negate their sexual rights. For instance, participants in World Pride Madrid 2017 who were interviewed by the media constantly referred to the precarious situation of LGBTQ people in many other parts of the world. Numerous world societies continue to trample over the rights of sexual minorities and women. Both local and foreign governments fail to realize and raise awareness of the blatant violation of human dignity in these territories. In this context, mobility (in the form of migration, asylum, and refuge) will continue to play a central part in the relationship between sexual/gender rights and cosmopolitanism. In this sense, LGBTQ rights and experiences are a particularly ripe site

of cosmopolitan conflicts, as societies that are still working on improving their awareness and openness towards LGBTQ lifestyles have the capacity and responsibility—though often not the will—to help queer individuals whose lives are in danger because of their sexual orientation or who are simply not allowed to express their non-normative sexualities freely. Looking at and from the other side of the border, it is also essential to bear in mind that there are different individual capacities to be mobile and that many lack the privilege of mobility (Canzler, Kaufmann, Kesselring 2009: 5-6; Toivanen 2014: 35). Although migrants in general also face cosmopolitan challenges connected to love (e.g. being away from their families, facing different sexual and romantic cultures), LGBTQ migrants embody a double kind of liminality because of their queerness and their mobility (Mai and King 2009: 296-298). It is therefore surprising that, with the exception of Ken Plummer's *Cosmopolitan Sexualities* (2015), the study of cosmopolitanism has largely overlooked LGBTQ struggles so far. This chapter will pay particular attention to these issues, as I explain later.

Although contemporary sf films offer opportunities to explore many of the aforementioned issues related to kinship to a greater or lesser extent, they pay particular attention to transnational/interplanetary romance. This chapter focuses on these discourses, paying special attention to the figure of the alien. I concentrate on human/alien romances for two reasons: 1) discourses on cosmopolitan love began to proliferate in heterosexual human/alien romances at the turn of the twenty-first century (especially in young adult films such as *The Host*). 2) The human/alien love story at the center of *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* provides a unique opportunity to bring non-normative sexualities into the analysis of transnational sf film and into discourses on cosmopolitanism. Although Wendy Pearson's work has opened opportunities for rich analyses of queerness in sf, particularly in sf literature (1999, 2008, 2009; Knabe and Pearson 2011) and Mark Bould has offered an overview of some of the most significant concerns in queer sf film (2002, 2012), sf film

scholarship and sf cinema itself appears to elude looking at non-normative sexualities in general and their transnational dimension in particular. As Andrew Butler notes, full-blown homosexual characters are “almost nonexistent” in sf cinema (2009: 389). Putting the cosmopolitan methodology of border as method into practice, this chapter challenges the almost complete lack of cosmopolitan discourses about LGBTQ rights in sf film. In a piece on sexuality in sf, Sherryl Vint argues that it is necessary both to interrogate the genre’s “lack of engagement with sexual politics” and the “masquerading” of dominant sexual practices as natural and to write about texts that look beyond sexual normativity (2009: 403). In order to counter the general absence of narratives about LGBTQ issues in sf film, the chapter devotes its last section to a peculiar example which is an exception rather than the norm. *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* is not part of a larger group of sf films that share similar thematic concerns—as the main case studies of this dissertation are. The film is an unlikely example whose aesthetics and zero budget set it drastically apart from the young adult blockbusters in which cosmopolitan romances are proliferating. Through the analysis of *Codependent Lesbian*, the chapter attempts to question the common exclusion of queer discourses in sf film, particularly in the current context of the cosmopolitanization of the genre. Although sf films about homosexual, queer, and heterosexual relationships share many of their narrative strategies and visual techniques, I will analyze them separately. This will allow me to make queer narratives more visible and to simultaneously point to the scarcity of sf films of this kind.

4.2. MAPPING TRANSNATIONAL SAME-SPECIES ROMANCE AND KINSHIP IN SCIENCE FICTION

Apart from their predominant theme of transnational/interplanetary romances, sf films sometimes feature transnational forms of kinship, although they often do so in passing. *Sleep*

Dealer and *Moon* are two of the few examples that offer a glimpse into the affection-deprived daily lives of families who have to live apart in order to accommodate to the global/transplanetary economy. With the exception of the human who cares for the baby of a dead alien in *Enemy Mine* (Wolfgang Peterson, 1985) and the CEO, astronaut, and robot who raise a Mars-born human teenager in *The Space Between Us* (Peter Chelsom, 2017), sf cinema has not been particularly creative at addressing transnational adoption, either. There is, however, a growing—if still modest—number of sf films that explore questions around transnational surrogate motherhood. *Transfer* (Damir Lukačević, 2010) imagines a world where (wealthy, white, Western) individuals may rent or, in practice, buy other bodies (of younger, black, African people) hoping to improve their economic position. The film introduces an accidental/unexpected pregnancy in this context and points both at fears of miscegenation (Vint 2016: 104) and to the question of who retains the right to decide in care markets. In addition, the animation film *Mars Needs Moms* (Simon Wells, 2011) presents a planet where machines give birth to children and robots take care of them. Yet, this society needs the surrogate consciousness of a mother from Earth in order to program the robots that are supposed to raise the children. Most of the action then revolves around the attempts of an earthling child to rescue his mother from the Martians and their exploitative technology. However, in spite of this seemingly cosmopolitan/human rights discourse, the film couples its critique of surrogate motherhood with a reactionary defense of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. *Mars Needs Moms* emphasizes the division between technocratic females who do not embrace motherhood and uncivilized males who raise the machine-incubated children as a community. Through this division the film ultimately presents non-normative families as the source of all social ills. Apart from *Transfer* and *Mars Needs Moms*, the short films *Silver Sling* (Mohammad Gorjestani, 2010) and *Refuge* (Tze Chun, 2013)—both part of the *Futurestates* series (2010-14)—also point to the disadvantaged economic circumstances of the women who are expected to be surrogate mothers and the

pressures they are subjected to. Despite the critical potential of these films, their emphasis on neoliberalism and economic exploitation sometimes prevents them from considering issues related to love. In contrast, interplanetary romances usually develop narratives that are more focused on exploring the possibilities and conflicts that emerge around cosmopolitan love.

The almost-boundless imagination of science fiction has allowed the genre to develop multiple kinds of films in which romantic relationships play a strong part. For the sake of clarity, I first focus on films in which both members of the couple are human and then on films in which one of the members is an alien and the other is human. Regarding human relationships, three of the main strands of science fiction cinema that have shown interest in romantic relationships (the time-travel film, films about monsters, cyborgs and AIs, and dystopias that revolve around the bleakness of authoritarian regimes) have traditionally framed their narratives within the scope of the nation.

Many of the twenty-first century sf films that feature transnational couples do so by presenting a more up-to-date spin on systemic dystopias that feature forbidden romantic relationships.¹⁹ Films such as *Code 46*, *Africa Paradis*, the Neo-Seoul couple in *Cloud Atlas*, and *Looper*—which also relies on the possibilities of the time-travel narrative—relate the social rules that oppress transnational couples to the pressures of economic systems. In most cases, the protagonist couples, whose members tend to be from different origins, need to fight to stay by the side of their loved ones as they often face prejudice or are subject to certain rules set by markets and big economic players that hamper their relationship. *Africa Paradis* presents a world where relationships between black Africans and white Europeans are taboo. *Code 46* and the Neo-Seoul story in *Cloud Atlas* establish biological or genetic difference (which coincides with national and ethnic difference in both films) as an obstacle for

¹⁹ This category includes films such as *THX 1138*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), *Brazil*, *The Adjustment Bureau* (George Nolfi, 2011), *The Giver* (Phillip Noyce, 2014), *Equals* (Drake Doremus, 2015), *Identicals* (Simon Pummell, 2015), and *The Lobster* (Yorgos Lathimos, 2015). Some systemic dystopias such as *Liquid Sky* (Slava Tsukerman, 1982), *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983), and *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2005) also consider issues related to non-normative sexualities.

relationships. *Looper*'s time-travel narrative is driven by Joe's (Bruce Willis) love of his Chinese wife (Xu Qing), his inability to cope with her loss, and the barriers that those who control time-travel markets set on his way. Leaving authoritarian dystopias aside, the cosmopolitan point of view of the alien in *PK* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014) questions national, religious, and ethnic borders which eventually allow a Hindi woman and a Pakistani man to rebuild their relationship after it was previously destroyed by prejudice. A single transnational/transracial couple surviving the apocalypse is the only hope for the perpetuation of the human species in *Snowpiercer* and *Segon Origen/Second Origin* (Charles Porta and Bigas Luna, 2015) and so is the miraculously-conceived son of a black undocumented migrant in *Children of Men*. Despite the efforts of some of these movies to capture transnational realities and include non-white characters, these films display an inability to articulate the intersectionality of identity and to address other elements that are significant from a cosmopolitan point of view. Sometimes, they add religion or class to the equation, as *PK* or *Code 46* respectively do. Yet, in all of these examples, the story revolves around a heterosexual couple and it rarely problematizes gender conventions.

In contrast, when twenty-first century sf films do include LGBTQ characters, they often continue to feature couples whose members belong to the same nation or frame them in a context in which these relationships develop as local/national. Since the recent and ongoing struggle for LGBTQ rights has developed within the framework of the nation-state, it is no wonder that films typically frame their narratives in national terms (e.g. *V for Vendetta* [James McTeigue, 2005]). For instance, the short film *Closets* (Lloyd Eyre-Morgan, 2015) relies on time travel to reflect upon shifting attitudes towards homosexuality in the UK in the 1960s and in the present. In addition, the individual and intimate character of questions concerning sexuality and sex change often makes their transnational dimension less visible. *Teknolust* (Lynn Hershman Leeson, 2002), *Zerophilia* (Martin Curland, 2005), *Horror in the*

Wind (Max Mitchell, 2008), *Were the World Mine* (Tom Gustafson, 2008), *Splice* (Vincenzo Natali, 2009), *Open* (Jake Yuzna, 2010), *Cloud Atlas*, and *Pojkarna/Girl Lost* (Alexandra-Therese Keining, 2015) deal with a range of questions around identity and body transformation, including fluid gender identities and sexualities, (viral) sex changes, individuals who change sex after every sexual intercourse, trans and intersex intimacy, and the replication of body features in a couple. Similarly, *Predestination* (Peter and Michael Spierig, 2014) relies on a time-travel narrative to reflect about the intersex experience of the protagonist at different times. While these films challenge and exploit bodily and temporal borders, they tend to overlook the geographical dimension of sexual matters.²⁰ For instance, they fail to engage with issues such as the need of trans people to go abroad to complete their transition when their states do not support certain procedures legally or financially (La Sexta Noticias). In general, queer human-centered sf films tend to frame their narratives in national contexts. Even though Istvan Csicsery-Ronay notes that sf has always looked beyond the nation (2002: 218-223), the previous examples show that sf films dealing with kinship and sexuality have not included explicit transnational references until recently.

Another challenge for the study of cosmopolitan sexualities in sf cinema is that films that feature homosexual characters and relationships such as *Deadly Skies* (Sam Irvin, 2005), *Kaboom* (Gregg Araki, 2010), *Space Station 76* (Jack Plotnick, 2014), *Credence* (Mike Buonaiuto, 2015), and the post-apocalyptic short *Goodbye Blue Sky* (Brandon Zuck, 2017) barely use the speculative character of the genre to reflect on sexuality. The same happens with the brief inclusion of gay characters (often as tokens) in the dance scene at the beginning of *Matrix Reloaded* (The Wachowskis, 2003), *Okja* (Bong Joon-ho, 2017), and recent franchise films such as *Star Trek: Beyond* (Justin Lin, 2016), *Independence Day: Resurgence* (Roland Emmerich, 2016), *Star Wars: Rogue One* (Gareth Edwards, 2017), *Power Rangers*

²⁰ In this sense, the previous examples follow the pattern of earlier films such as *Caught Looking* (Constantine Giannaris, 1991) and *Dandy Dust* (Hans Scheirl, 1998), which explore the possibilities that virtual reality offers to accommodate queer bodies and desires and to establish personal connections.

(Dean Israelite, 2017), and *Alien: Covenant* (Ridley Scott, 2017). As Wendy Pearson notes, this kind of portrait may provide cognitive estrangement to viewers who are not used to LGBTQ visibility but does not offer a path to think about queerness (1999). In this context of national narratives, ruminations on the specificities of individual bodies, and lack of speculative engagement, the short film *Beholder* (Nisha Ganatra, 2011) constitutes a notable exception that invites a transnational reading. This short film presents a society (Red Estates) where homosexuality is forbidden and genetically deleted during pregnancies. A (formerly lesbian) woman pregnant with a homosexual child manages to escape this society with the help of an empathic nurse who is part of a resistance that has established an alternative social model beyond the borders of Red Estates. While these examples show a growing visibility of LGBTQ realities in science fiction, the general obliviousness towards their transnational dimension and the superficiality of many of these characters shows that (cosmo)queer discourses still have a long way to go in sf cinema, particularly when aliens are not part of the story.

4.3. THE ALIEN AS A VEHICLE FOR COSMOPOLITAN DISCOURSES

Given the limited interest of human-centered sf narratives in the exploration of the transnational dimension of romance, I now turn to alien figures as a potential vehicle for the exploration of sexual and love matters from a cosmopolitan perspective. The exploration of the relationship between self and other, national and foreign, inside and outside is often built into the premises and concepts of films that feature alien characters. In addition, cinema, since its early days, has regularly drawn on alien-human romances as a means of addressing other concerns (fears of communist infiltration, rising female autonomy, miscegenation, racial relations, migration). Early examples of human-alien relationships in film would be, for instance, *When the Man in the Moon Seeks a Wife* (Percy Stow, 1908) (Johnston 2011:

63) or *Aelita* (Yákov Protazánov, 1924) (Csicsery-Ronay 2007: 16).²¹ Although the alien offers multiple readings, these creatures are often presented and read as a reference to the other in terms of race and nationality, two markers that often intersect and are particularly relevant from a cosmopolitan point of view. Csicsery-Ronay argues that films tend to present the biological difference between human and alien species as “analogous to terrestrial racial difference” (2002: 228). Similarly, Christine Cornea identifies films such as those in the *Planet of the Apes* original franchise (Franklin Schaffner, 1968; Ted Post, 1970; Don Taylor, 1971; J. Lee Thompson, 1972, 1973) and *Enemy Mine* as a “conspicuous allegory” of race relations in the US (2007: 182). Regarding aliens’ foreignness, Charles Ramírez Berg claims that “Alien Others” stand for Latin American immigrants in sf films (2012 [1989]: 404-5). He relies on figures to support this point: he notes that of all “unauthorized immigrants” to the US in the first decade of the twenty-first century, 80 per cent were Latin American and 60 per cent, Mexican (2012: 423). This leads him to read the presence of an other in sf film (and not just aliens, but also cyborgs) as a reference to Latin Americans. Even though Ramírez Berg points in the right direction, at times, his reading may be somewhat over-generalizing. In this chapter, I read aliens in general as a metaphor for the foreigner and then see what particular readings each film favors. For example, the aliens in *Avatar* can be read as Native Americans, those in *I Am Number Four* (D.J Caruso, 2011) as a reference to refugees in general, and the ones living Down Below in *Upside Down* as Latin Americans.

Although each particular film encourages viewers to read aliens in different ways, Andrew Butler, in his analysis of *District 9*, notes that reading abject aliens as “allegorical representations of Black or Coloured South Africans” can easily slip into (probably unintentional) racism (2015: 104). Butler further locates the genesis of such potentially racist associations in the habit of presenting the alien in contrast to a social template configured by

²¹ Csicsery-Ronay refers to Alexey Tolstoy’s novel *Aelita* (1923), but his observation also applies to the film.

whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, and the middle class (108). This chapter therefore analyzes race and nationality in alien narratives by attempting to exercise “a looser sense of engagement” with their representation (Butler 2015: 110). That is, the chapter tries to avoid equating abject aliens with specific racial groups. Instead, it focuses on the racial hierarchies that films reproduce. Whatever the labels that may be attached to the depiction of aliens in a film, the self/other structure of human-alien and even alien-alien relationships offers opportunities to examine transnational scenarios of love, affection, and sexual freedom from a cosmopolitan perspective.

By approaching the alien as a foreigner, this chapter suggests that the figure of the alien allows sf films to articulate cosmopolitan discourses. As I noted earlier in this dissertation, Celestino Deleyto suggests looking at films as “performers of cosmopolitanism” that can “activate and enact a series of cosmopolitan strategies” (2017: 98). He argues that films “may ostensibly identify themselves with a diversity agenda or with certain discourses of solidarity,” although sometimes they may not (98). Drawing on Deleyto’s remarks, I read the figure of the foreign alien as a potential vehicle for cosmopolitan strategies. The alien offers opportunities for interrogating the self and its social relation with others. In the introduction to *Alien Imaginations*, Ulrike Kuchler, Silja Maehl and Graeme Stout suggest that alien narratives are not only about how we (humans) perceive aliens and sometimes fail to do so, but also how aliens see humans (2015: 2). Aliens then do not only offer opportunities to look at the other, but also opportunities for humans to reflect about themselves, as it were, from the outside. More specifically, they may encourage dominant or hegemonic 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 to examine the notion of openness (and lack thereof) towards other cultures and societies, it allows characters and viewers to consider perspectives from

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.

Considering these observations, *The Host*, *Codependent Lesbian*, and other films that feature human-alien romances constitute valuable case studies of cosmopolitanism in contemporary sf cinema, as they tend to feature remarkably vocal aliens and humans. Sf films do not frequently offer viewers opportunities to consider how aliens see humans. Aliens are often destructive beings who do not utter a word (e.g. *The War of the Worlds* [Byron Haskin, 1953]), peaceful beings who can only communicate with humans through rudimentary or limited means (e.g. *E.T.* [Steven Spielberg, 1982]), or body snatchers who do not want to reveal their intentions and their perspective on humans (e.g. *They Live*). In addition, sometimes aliens speak with humans, as in *District 9*, but “cannot speak for themselves” (Butler 2015: 96). In contrast, in films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1954, 2008), *Stranger from Venus* (Burt Balaban 1954), the *Star Trek* movies, *Enemy Mine*, *Cocoon* (Ron Howard, 1985), *Avatar* (2009), the *Transformers* franchise, *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve 2016), and most (if not all) of human-alien romances mentioned in this chapter, aliens have an intelligible voice or are able to communicate with humans effectively. The ability of aliens to express themselves offers characters and viewers clear opportunities to reflect on alien perspectives. This, however, does not mean that films that feature speechless aliens do not offer opportunities for fruitful cosmopolitan analysis.

Finally, vocal aliens may not necessarily draw attention to cosmopolitan concerns. Human-alien communication may indeed facilitate the erasure of diversity. While listening to aliens may expose viewers to a different point of view, aliens typically speak the same language as humans and films magically breach linguistic and cultural barriers. This is not only the case of English-language films. *G.O.R.A.* (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2004) features

Turkish-speaking aliens and points to the unlikeliness of aliens and humans speaking the same language when a character mockingly notes that everyone speaks Turkish in the alien facility. In this way, the film recognizes the paradox that, in order to establish a dialogue between two cultures in a film, the most practical thing to do is to homogenize language.

4.4. FROM ENEMIES TO FRIENDS: ALIEN-HUMAN ROMANCES

While sf films about romance between two human characters barely paid attention to social formations beyond the scope of the nation before the turn of the twenty-first century, this has been different in the case of alien films. In some cases, these films address transnational concerns (such as the fear of communist influence). In *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (Gene Fowler, 1958)—and to a lesser extent, also in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956)—the protagonist finds out that her partner's body has been occupied by aliens who attempt to take over the US/Earth. In tune with other 1950s sf invasion films, this concept serves as a metaphor for the fear of communist infiltration, or alternatively, of conformity and sameness in 1950s US American society. These fears, however, have barely left a trace in current sf filmmaking, although the trope of the body snatcher is still one of the main resources of sf cinema to deal with otherness, as the analysis of *The Host* later in this chapter shows. Not all 1950s films employed the alien as a metaphor for the foreign other. Several films such as *Cat-Women of the Moon* (Arthur Hilton, 1953), *Devil Girl from Mars* (David MacDonald, 1954), and *Queen of Outer Space* (Edward Bernds, 1958) address fears of rising female independence and power (Johnston 2011: 84) through female societies who need Earth men to reproduce or who simply realize they desire a group of male visitors from Earth and decide to overthrow the system that bans men from their society. Other times, alien females seduce human male astronauts as a means of stealing their ship and conquering Earth. In contrast to these distrustful representations of the alien, more positive portrayals of

romantic human-alien couples encourage readings of the alien as a foreign person, specifically a Soviet communist. *Teenagers from Outer Space* (Tom Graeff, 1959) shows how an alien teen deserts his fellow alien invaders when they attempt to colonize Earth and falls in love with the human girl, stopping the alien (communist) invasion in the process. Similarly, *Invasion of the Star Creatures* (Bruno Ve Sota, 1962), *Moon Pilot* (James Neilson, 1962), and *Unearthly Stranger* (John Krish, 1963) feature aliens with suspicious or evil intentions who eventually fall in love with humans, leaving their harmful schemes aside in the process. Yet, despite these exceptionally positive portrayals at the turn of the 1960s, the image of the alien remained until the late 70s and early 80s a negative one in general terms, particularly in better-known films such as *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks, 1951) or *The War of the Worlds* (1953).

Following the release of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977) and *E.T.* (1982), sympathetic images of aliens who fall in love with humans by chance began to proliferate in the late 1970s and 1980s in films such as *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976), *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) and its sequels, *Cocoon* (Ron Howard, 1985), *Starman* (John Carpenter, 1984), *Cocoon: The Return* (Daniel Petrie, 1988), *Earth Girls Are Easy* (Julien Temple, 1988), and *My Stepmother Is an Alien* (Richard Benjamin, 1988). Even though both humans and aliens in these films attempt, with varying degrees of predisposition and willingness, to open their minds to the culture of the other, their narratives typically end with the departure of the alien (as in *Cocoon*, *Cocoon: The Return*, *Starman*, and *Earth Girls Are Easy*). As Ramírez Berg notes, “the Sympathetic Alien movies allow us to have it both ways. We can appreciate the aliens, and even learn from them, but in the end the status quo is maintained by sending them home—for their own good” (2012 [1989]: 412). Even in those stories in which aliens stay, they do not bring about much change. The aliens in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and *My Stepmother Is an Alien* are indeed

the only aliens that end up living among humans on Earth, and so their cultural impact is minimal.

More recent films have continued to develop the trend of positive intimate relationships between aliens and humans. *The Fifth Element*, *What Planet Are You From?* (Mike Nichols, 2000), *G.O.R.A.* (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2004), *Earthbound* (Alan Brennan, 2012), *Avatar*, *I Am Number 4*, *Upside Down*, *The Host*, *Sakasama no Patema/Patema Inverted* (Yasuhiro Yoshiura, 2013) and, to a lesser extent, *Meet Dave* (Brian Robbins, 2008), *Thor* (Kenneth Branagh, 2011), *John Carter* (Andrew Stanton, 2012), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (James Gunn, 2014), *Jupiter Ascending*, *The Space Between Us*, and the newest installments of the *Star Trek* franchise (J. J. Abrams 2009, 2013; Justin Lin 2016) celebrate the formation of a couple whose members are from different planets. In a similar way to 1980s films, both members of the couple typically develop an attitude of openness and understanding towards the other, establishing a relationship in which both members (and sometimes also those around them) learn from each other. But, unlike 1980s films, aliens often stay on Earth or the society that hosts them, challenging social norms and borders, and instilling their environments with cosmopolitan sensibilities that range from conviviality to questioning economic exploitation. Of course, not all contemporary films present human-alien intimate encounters as an opportunity to develop cosmopolitan sensibilities: *Species* (Roger Donaldson, 1995), *The Astronaut's Wife* (Rand Ravich, 1999), *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013), and *The Fifth Wave* (J. Blakeson, 2016), to give a few examples, depict aliens who pair up with humans for self-serving reasons, often with fatal consequences. Yet, the growing corpus of films about human-alien conviviality is developing consistent cosmopolitan discourses that deserve closer inspection.

Several of those films (*I Am Number Four*, *Upside Down*, *The Host*, *Patema Inverted*, and *The Space Between Us*) are also part of a wider category of speculative/fantastic films

that feature romances between humans and supernatural beings such as zombies, vampires, witches, or wizards. Apart from having couples formed by members of different species (even if they often look alike), what links these films together is that the members of their protagonist couples tend to be teenagers or young adults. That is the case of the *Twilight* franchise (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008; Chris Weitz, 2009; David Slade 2010; Bill Condon, 2011, 2012), *Vampires Suck* (Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, 2010), the zombie film *Warm Bodies* (Jonathan Levine, 2013), and the witchcraft films *Beautiful Creatures* (Richard LaGravenese, 2013) and *Robin Rot/Ruby Red* (Felix Fuchsteiner, 2013). These films reinforce the hypothesis that the film industry is massively producing narratives of understanding and bonding between seemingly incompatible social groups that are cast in a position of privilege and of liminality respectively, thus articulating cosmopolitan concerns. As these movies tend to be primarily commercial and, in many cases, are adapted from novels, their production probably depends on projections of economic returns. However, the success of these narratives also suggests that there is an audience of young (and perhaps not so young) viewers and readers who are fond of stories with cosmopolitan overtones. As part of the two aforementioned trends (human-alien romances and young adult romances), *The Host* constitutes a key site to explore the articulation of cosmopolitan discourses on love and kinship in mainstream productions. Apart from this, the use of framing towards the end of the film provides opportunities to draw parallels with other recent sf romances and point at some formal strategies that several of these films rely on.

Although these films include intimate relationships between beings from two different planets or species, most of them paradoxically feature white anthropomorphic aliens/zombies/vampires and white humans. While films that emphasize racial difference (such as *Avatar* or *Guardians of the Galaxy*) may seem to offer more opportunities for critical analysis, the pervasiveness of relationships between white humans and white aliens

makes the films that feature such couples significant objects of study. Moreover, as Richard Dyer points out, whiteness should not be analyzed only in those texts that explicitly situate it in contrast to non-whiteness (1997: 13). He notes that whiteness is present in all texts, whether other races appear as well or not (13). Indeed, Dyer argues that it is important to analyze race in films or texts that only feature white characters in order to see whiteness itself as a race and to expose its privileged, universal status (13). While romances between white humans and white aliens have been the norm throughout the history of sf cinema (from *Aelita* to *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* to *Cocoon*), the proliferation of such stories in recent years make the analysis of whiteness in them particularly necessary. In addition, the cosmopolitan awareness that many contemporary sf films display makes their whiteness all the more striking. For these reasons, the analyses of *The Host* and *Codependent Lesbian* in this chapter pay substantial attention to the whiteness of these two films.

In spite of the abundance of films revolving around aliens or supernatural others and framing them through a cosmopolitan point of view, queer aliens are surprisingly absent from both mainstream and independent sf narratives. The very few examples of twenty-first century sf movies featuring overtly queer aliens include the Chinese underground film *Star Appeal* (Cui Zi'en, 2004), the highly successful Turkish film *G.O.R.A.*, the zero-budget US film *Codependent Lesbian*, and the low-budget, animation, US film *Strange Frame: Love and Sax* (GB Hajim, 2012). The remarkably scarce examples of queer aliens in recent sf cinema is all the more surprising considering that earlier films featuring queer aliens comparatively received more support from the movie industry. For instance, 20th Century Fox was involved in the making of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) and *Enemy Mine* and Dino De Laurentiis produced *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968). The liminality of twenty-first century queer alien films within the movie industry and the scant number of recent productions evince the structural level of cosmopolitan ambivalence within

sf as a genre: the genre's megatext presents transnational relationships as harbingers of cosmopolitanism, but only as long as these relationships conform to heterosexual patterns. Indeed, *G.O.R.A.* (the only major production of the four contemporary examples), paints a clichéd image of queerness and presents its homosexual couple as evil plotters. In general terms, sf producers and filmmakers show a general lack of willingness or perhaps—although less likely—imagination when it comes to reflecting on the transnational dimension of LGBTQ experiences. In this context, the strategy of using borders as a method of cosmopolitan enquiry invites to turn the liminal status of queer alien films within generic production and their general invisibility (especially within twenty-first century sf cinema) into a central site for the understanding of cosmopolitanism in sf cinema.

Although there are not many examples of aliens and monsters overtly addressing LGBTQ themes, let alone their transnational dimension, in general, the few films that have been made offer a powerful platform to investigate cosmopolitan concerns related to sexuality. Commenting on the sf genre in general, Patricia Melzer notes that “many of the aliens and/or female cyborgs having sex with humans do not rethink desire; they merely channel it into familiar paths through newly configured bodies” (2009: 398). Indeed, that is the case of most of the heterosexual alien-human romances mentioned before (e.g. *The Host*, *I Am Number Four*). Although queer alien relationships also mirror normative human sexualities, they tend to offer more chances to imagine alternative modes of desire, love, and kinship. When compared to sf films focusing on queer relationships between humans, films about queer aliens also offer more critical opportunities from a cosmopolitan point of view. In contrast to the national framework of queer sf films that only feature humans, queer alien films pay attention to foreigners (beings from other planets) who, through their mobility, create frameworks for the exploration of potentially different sociocultural and biological systems. That is, human visits to other planets or alien visits to Earth allow characters to be

exposed to different affective and sexual cultures, different understandings of kinship, and different modes of reproduction. Queer alien films tend to pit normative heterosexual sexuality (or futuristic versions of it—such as the pill-induced orgasm at the beginning of *Barbarella*) against alternative sexual options and systems which are often presented through camp aesthetics (see Bould 2012: 103-116). Such alternatives go from the wide range of desires and sexual practices that planet Lythion offers to the human Barbarella in her different encounters with a number of locals and even a machine, to the all-male, black, gay, and imperial civilization in *Gayniggers from Outer Space* (Morten Lindberg, 1992), the bisexual options that Dr. Frank N. Furter (Tim Curry) opens up for the human couple in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the exclusively-female transvestite society in *Vegas in Space* (Phillip Ford, 1991), or the hermaphrodite alien species in *Enemy Mine*. By featuring characters from different planets and who typically have varying conceptions of gender, desire, sexual possibilities, practices, and norms, sf films do not only expose constructions of gender and sexuality (Pearson 2009: 31), but also shed light on transnational asymmetries with regard to sexual practices and the legal and social systems that regulate them. In this way, queer alien films offer a more intersectional approach to sexuality and cosmopolitanism (and potentially also to other elements such as class or race) than other sf films.

Since some of the cosmopolitan themes that *The Host* touches upon also appear in *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* and *Codependent Lesbian*'s discourse on sexuality offers a unique perspective from a science-fictional point of view, I first analyze *The Host* and then *Codependent Lesbian* in order to highlight the singularity of some of the narrative and visual elements in the latter film.

4.5. *THE HOST*: AMBIVALENT OPENNESS

In spite of the flatness of some of its dialogues and its sometimes clichéd representation of young adult romantic love, *The Host* offers a nuanced insight into processes of cosmopolitan negotiation. In contrast to other films such as *I Am Number Four*, *Upside Down*, and *The Space Between Us*, which feature star-crossed lovers who strive to be together from the very beginning, *The Host* explores the process of personal change with regard to the alien other that both characters in the interplanetary couple experience. Even though the film sometimes deals with character development in a superficial way (e.g. leaving some changes in attitude unexplained), its focus on characters' processes of deliberation and transformation lays a pathway to reflect on cosmopolitan struggles. *The Host* invites viewers to explore the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities through Melanie and Wanderer's (Saoirse Ronan) negotiation of their hybrid body, their symbolic adoption of the name Wanda, the cosmopolitan struggles that are part of the romance between Wanda and Ian (Jake Abel) and, to a lesser extent, of the relationship between Wanda and the rest of the human community. In contrast to other films such as *Avatar*, which show the perspective of the settler (Loza 2013: 57), *The Host* offers an insight into the minds of both the alien guest and the human host. Indeed, in Spain, the film was retitled as *The Guest* (*La Huésped*). In this sense, *The Host* offers a path to approach cosmopolitanism that is similar to Nikos Papastergiadis' notion of the concept. Building on the work of Homi Bhabha (1994, 1996) and Stuart Hall (1996a, 1996b), Papastergiadis reclaims hybridity as a useful term for the study of cosmopolitanism (2012: 116-7, 129-31). He stresses its applicability to a broad range of situations in contrast, for instance, to the specificity of terms such as creolization or diaspora (120, 130-1). Papastergiadis notes that discourses on hybridity typically present it as an effect or result: "a fixed object" (117, 120). Instead, he argues that hybridity should be approached as a process rather than a product (120). He proposes to focus on "zones of interaction,

exchange and formation” (120). From this perspective, hybridity shares common ground with methodological cosmopolitanism: both focus on the tensions and connections that develop around borders. Although hybridization is, according to Papastergiadis, “a starting point for understanding the aesthetic dimensions of the cosmopolitan imaginary” (117), films do not always point towards cosmopolitan processes explicitly. In this respect, *The Host* is a rare example that highlights the role of hybridization processes in the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities.

Apart from Wanda and Ian’s relationship, the film also explores a wider range of relations mediated by cosmopolitan questions and conflicts. Although this section focuses on the struggles of the couple, the articulation of cosmopolitan openness in *The Host* transcends it. Accordingly, my analysis sometimes sidetracks from the romantic and intimate aspects of cosmopolitan love and the struggles that enable its development to focus on the larger social scope that the film points to. As the overview of films in the introduction to this chapter hints, the appearance of romantic relationships in science fiction does not always offer a reflection on the salient romantic and sexual customs of the time. Rather, romance is sometimes used as a metaphor for other concerns (e.g. 1950s movies addressing concerns over communist influence or female empowerment). In general terms, the development of the narrative and the use of filmic techniques in *The Host* show three main aspects of cosmopolitanism. First, that its openness does not appear or develop with ease (Stacey 2014a). The film presents cosmopolitan openness as part of a process of hybrid interactions and struggles. Second, that it presents cosmopolitanism as a non-universal attitude and as way of acting that is not necessarily constant, as Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbis note (2012: 312). Finally, cosmopolitanism in *The Host*, as in many contemporary sf films, is ambivalent: it both displays openness and perpetuates the privileges of the Anglo, white West and the discrimination of the rest. The analysis of *The Host* in this section first considers the

film's exploration of reluctant and intermittent cosmopolitanisms and then adds whiteness to the equation.

In the world of *The Host*, aliens have taken over most human bodies on Earth. They accomplish what we only begin to witness in the 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Yet, instead of playing on fears of foreign infiltration or exposing the unsettling character of social pressures to conform, *The Host* recycles the body-snatcher theme to explore and eventually celebrate interplanetary hybridization. The film focuses on Melanie, whose body has been taken over by an alien called Wanderer. Apart from the presence of the alien, the protagonist's name (Wanderer) also encourages viewers to interpret the film as a story of interaction between nationals and foreigners from the very beginning. Melanie's mind, like other human hosts, offers resistance to leaving her body and she and Wanderer engage in a constant conversation (and often arguments) about what to do with their lives. Melanie convinces Wanderer to escape the facility where other aliens are trying to make Melanie leave her body and they go back to Melanie's home inside a mountain in the middle of the desert. There, Wanderer/Melanie is met with hostility, as her boyfriend, Jared (Max Irons) and the rest of the community see her as a potentially dangerous alien. Meanwhile, another man from the group (Ian) and Wanderer start to know each other and fall in love. The film revolves around the conflict created by this situation and eventually shows how Wanderer and Melanie find a solution that allows them to live in separate bodies and have a relationship with the humans they love.

4.5.1. Cosmopolitanism Is Not Inbred: From Struggle to Openness

Even though *The Host* appears to celebrate the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities, the film presents cosmopolitanism as a non-automatic, lopsided, and intermittent process. This is evident from the very beginning of the film. The first sequence presents a future Earth which

has seemingly advanced towards cosmopolitan-world building. A narrator tells viewers: “the Earth is at peace, there is no hunger, there is no violence, the environment is healed. Honesty, courtesy, and kindness are practiced by all.” As he utters these words, the film opens with an extreme long shot of Earth in which we can also appreciate the reflection of a rainbow flag approach Earth and dissolve into it, suggesting that the film may deal with sexual diversity and queerness, a path which is not taken. This first shot is followed by a montage of different zoom-outs and dissolves of a woman and the Eiffel Tower in the background, a man in a convenience store in India, a couple with the Empire State in the background, and a child in a plain that seems to be somewhere in Africa. The film therefore situates the story in a global context of apparent diversity. Through the dissolves, it also points to the interconnectivity between humans and aliens and suggests that they have been affected by similar (but still unknown) circumstances. Yet, the transition between this opening sequence and the next scene is marked by the opposite message, as the narrator informs viewers that “the few humans who have survived are on the run.” The contrast between the opening scene and the rest of the plot presents streamlined accounts of cosmopolitanism as biased and misleading. Indeed, the society that aliens envision is not so peaceful and open to diversity: aliens chase humans and attempt to occupy their bodies without their consent. In this way, the film encourages viewers to focus on the role of struggles in cosmopolitan negotiations.

As the transition between the opening sequence and the first scene suggests, *The Host* does not present characters, whether human or alien, as if they had an inbred cosmopolitan sensibility from the beginning. Indeed, the film shows Wanderer’s relationship with Ian as part of a larger process of getting to know the other and her/his culture and society. Apart from the entrenched positions that both aliens and humans hold in the film, they also appear to have a different attitude towards personal and intimate relations. Like Aelita (Yuliya Solntseva) in the film of the same name (Yákov Protazánov, 1924), Wanderer learns about

human sexuality almost by accident and gets carried away by this experience later. The Seeker (Diane Kruger) warns Wanderer that “humans have strong physical drives,” thus suggesting that their alien species has a different social and/or biological conception of affection, desire, and love. Since Wanderer is a guest in Melanie’s body, she has access (sometimes willingly, other times unexpectedly) to Melanie’s memories. The film presents this interaction as central to the development of a cosmopolitan sensibility in both characters at the beginning. Accessing Melanie’s memories is also part of Wanderer’s task of facilitating information about humans. In this respect, an activity that is theoretically aimed at neutralizing difference by locating human resistance has the unintended effect of fuelling feelings of cosmopolitan empathy.

Wanderer’s voice narrating events in Melanie’s life, repeated cutting between Wanderer’s recollection of Melanie’s memories, and close point-of-view shots of her eyes emphasize Wanderer’s interest in what she is seeing. This effect is increased by the proximity of the camera to Wanderer’s wide-open eyes and the off-focus, depthless background, especially when Wanderer witnesses some of the first romantic moments between Jared and Melanie (figure 49), which suggest that Wanderer is interested in and empathizes with the experiences that she is witnessing. Although the film also includes close-ups of Wanderer’s face and eyes when Melanie attempts to interfere in Wanderer’s speech and actions, the proximity of the camera to Wanderer’s eyes when she visualizes scenes of the time that Melanie spent with Jared and Melanie’s silence in these particular moments are remarkable, as they highlight that it is Wanderer herself that is interested in what she is seeing. In this way, the film invites viewers to interpret romantic love (and specifically the acquaintance with the romantic feelings of the other) as a particularly powerful driver of cosmopolitanism. Through this initial interaction with the other, *The Host* also suggests that cosmopolitan love is part of a more general scheme of social dialogue with strangers/others. Indeed, it is

unlikely that Wanda would have developed a romantic interest in Ian without the previous knowledge of human relations that Melanie's memories and thoughts provide.

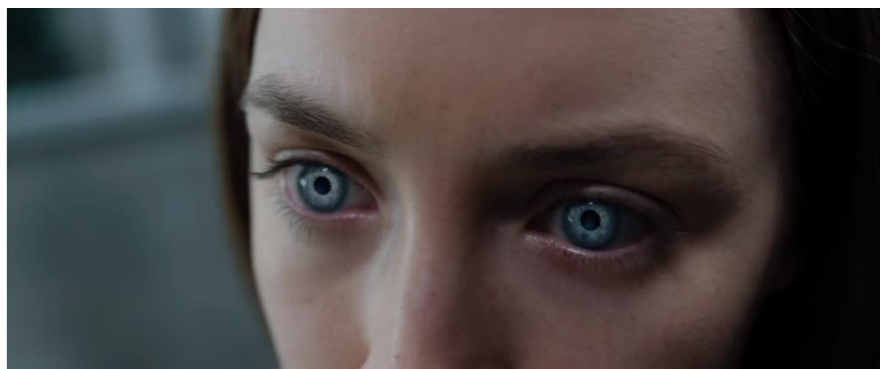


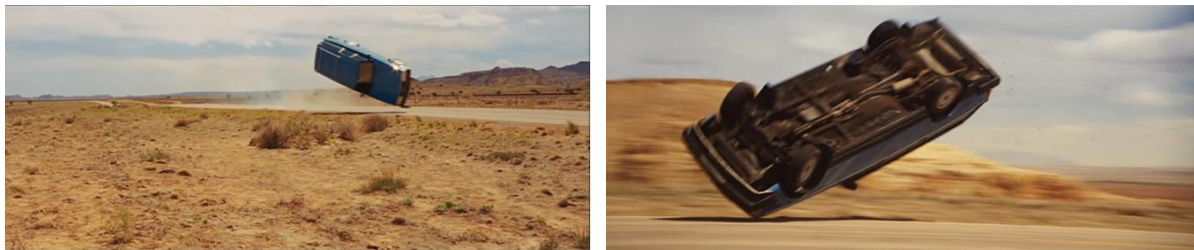
Figure 49: Wanderer's wide-open eyes and the shallow background highlight her interest in the images of Melanie's life that come through her mind.

Characters do not develop a cosmopolitan sensibility as smoothly as Wanderer's introduction to human love and sexuality suggests. Melanie's influence on Wanderer (and vice versa) is not always direct. Even though Wanderer can access Melanie's memories, they regularly have to negotiate what they want to do. Indeed, at the beginning, both characters withhold information from each other often, as each of them has a different agenda (Melanie wants to return to her family and boyfriend, Wanderer wants to seek the assistance of an alien doctor). When Wanderer escapes the building where she is kept under observation by other aliens, the film presents her escape as a challenging situation, as it is one of the first steps towards negotiation with the human other in her body. She approaches the door and then the balcony with hesitation. In addition, the door to the balcony serves as a metaphor of both Melanie and the Wanderer opening a new chapter in their lives. A camera tilt and low and high angle shots, later followed by an extreme-long shot, emphasize the height of the floor where she is, the distance to the floor, and the difficulty of the process that she is about to begin. In addition, the flickering reflection of lights on the water further reinforces her hesitation. This visual effect appears again towards the end of the film in a cave where Wanda ponders how to negotiate the relationship between her body and the different feelings

of her two minds. Even though the door acts as a symbol of a new period in the life of both minds, the film emphasizes the struggle that Wanderer and Melanie go through at different points in the film to negotiate their identities and their attitude towards the other in their body.

Another obvious moment when the film shows that cosmopolitanism is not inbred is after Wanderer and Melanie escape the government facility in which they were being held and drive through the desert. They start to argue whether to go to Fort Worth, where the alien facility is, or to the deep desert where Melanie's relatives live. As the argument builds up, Wanderer brakes suddenly and the car turns around a couple of times, showing their competing intentions. Eventually, the car ends up spinning in the air. The sense of confrontation is intensified by the use of the shot/reverse shot technique to show the car spinning from two opposite points of view and by the sudden and loud sounds of the car braking and accelerating, making their initial inability to understand each other even more evident (figures 50 and 51). In this sense, *The Host* reflects what media and cultural studies scholar Jackie Stacey calls "uneasy cosmopolitanism" (2014b: 171). Stacey explains that this kind of cosmopolitanism "cautions against the easy optimism of a cosmopolitanism that places prejudice and aversion elsewhere, reluctant to recognize those things in ourselves" (171). As the aforementioned scene shows, *The Host* does not present cosmopolitanism as a gift that some people have and others don't: it recognizes the personal struggles that develop around cosmopolitan possibilities and it does not present cosmopolitanism as inherent to transnational couples. Although this 'uneasy cosmopolitanism' continues almost up to the end of the film, it slowly turns into a less perceptible resistance towards the other. The visual and aural staging of differences and disagreement between Melanie and Wanderer gradually fades away and the film increasingly reflects dissent between both characters only verbally. For instance, when Wanderer first kisses Ian, Melanie grunts: "You're not even from the

same planet.” Yet, Melanie utters these words as the film frames both characters through close-ups, privileging Wanderer’s desires. In addition, the kiss takes place as a balanced, soft melody engulfs a series of flickering notes that had dominated the scene’s non-diegetic score up to that moment. In this way, the scene reflects that Wanderer and Ian’s emotions are finally surfacing. Wanderer and Melanie still disagree but the scene refuses to emphasize the struggle between both through the use of visual and aural techniques, as in the car scene or in the sudden body movements and spatial transgressions of the scene in which Wanderer and Melanie escape the alien facility.



Figures 50 and 51: The use of the shot/reverse shot emphasizes Wanderer and Melanie’s opposite plans.

Along with the toning down of differences and struggles between Melanie and Wanderer, *The Host* emphasizes the creation of spaces of trust in the minds of some characters as soon as a group of humans led by Jeb (William Hurt) find Wanderer in the desert. Following the ambivalent logics of cosmopolitanism, humans (particularly Jeb, Jared, Ian, and Jamie [Chandler Canterbury]) only begin to trust Wanderer because she is in Melanie’s body. Their cosmopolitanism is at first based on their desire to recover Melanie. The most startling change of attitude towards Wanderer is that of Ian. Soon after she arrives at the cave, Ian—who did not previously know Melanie—attempts to strangle her, along with two other young men. Despite this initial behavior, Ian soon regrets his reaction to Wanderer’s arrival in the community when he realizes that Wanderer jumped between Jared and Ian’s brother to stop their fighting. As he begins to think that Wanderer may not be as dangerous as he first thought, he begins to pay attention to how she behaves and he gradually

begins to desire the alien. He clears some prejudices from his mind in order to consider what Wanda may have to say, show, and teach him. Similarly, Wanderer also gives Ian an opportunity despite his attempt at killing her. Nikos Papastergiadis notes that there is often little emphasis on the role of “the void” in the development of cosmopolitan “engagement with the other” (2012: 136-7). He explains that the void consists on the “emptying of the self” of preconceptions in order to give way to something new (153). Although Papastergiadis primarily uses the notion of the void to analyze artistic processes, the development of the relationship between Ian and Wanda in *The Host* suggests that the void is a key element in the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities in general.

The Host stages the opening of a void in Ian’s and (to a lesser extent) Wanderer’s minds through editing techniques that show an increasing degree of connection in the looks between them despite the spatial distance between their bodies. As Mark Cooper argues, film narratives often revolve around the articulation and resolution of “a spatial problem” (2002: 149). Cooper also observes that films regularly rely on looks (particularly “longing looks”) to negotiate spatial divisions and explore ways to overcome them (150-1, 156). *The Host* uses the longing looks of Ian and Wanderer to present the division between humans and aliens as a (spatial) problem and to frame cosmopolitan love as its solution. The looks between both characters hint at their desire to trust each other despite their troubled acquaintance and the environment of interspecies hostility that surrounds them. The film highlights the division between both by including Ian in scenes in which he is not present at first or does not talk, such as the scene in which they change the position of the mirrors for the first time or that in which Melanie tells others about her planet in the kitchen. These scenes hint at Wanderer and Ian’s wish to break their separation through a series of eyeline matches that show both characters looking at each other. For instance, when Wanderer is telling everyone about her planet in the kitchen, Ian is also sitting at the table, but at the other end of it, and even though

he does not utter a word, the film includes shots of Wanderer and him looking at each other (figures 52 and 53). This scene also includes shots of other characters who do not talk and look at Wanderer, yet their gazes are never met by the alien's gaze (figures 54 and 55). In this way, the film implies that Ian and Wanderer have created a void in their minds that allows them to interact with the other.



Figures 52 and 53: Wanderer and Ian's gazes meet and hint at the emergence of a cosmopolitan void.



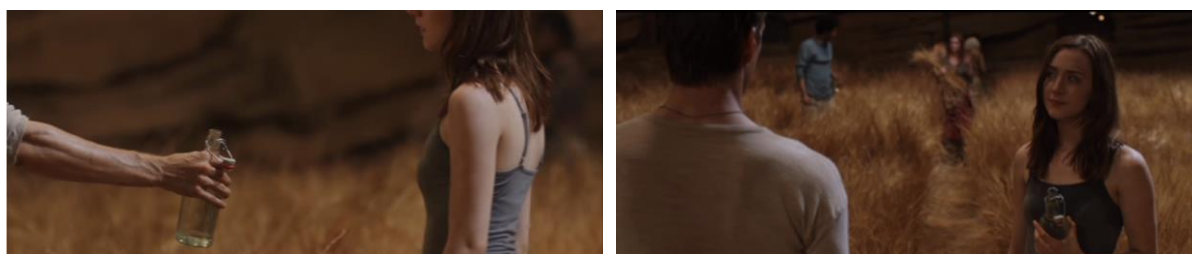
Figures 54 and 55: The gulf between minor characters and Wanderer: their gazes never meet.

Apart from the looks between Wanderer and Ian, the film suggests the carving of a potentially cosmopolitan void in the consciousness of both characters through the framing of interactions between both of them and the visual reformulation of specific spaces. This is particularly evident when Ian shares a bottle of water with Wanderer while they are harvesting. After Maggie (Frances Fisher)—a character who is quite vocal about her suspicion of the alien—goes around the wheat field giving bottles to everyone but Wanderer, the film includes a three-quarter shot of Ian reaching out his bottle to Wanderer (figure 56). This shot is then followed by a medium shot of Ian's head, suggesting that it is a personal decision (figure 57). Finally, the next shot cuts to a medium close-up of the bottle that highlights the significance of this gesture (figure 58). Indeed, by sharing this bottle with Wanderer, Ian confirms that he is creating a mental void that will facilitate his understanding

of the alien other and, eventually, the development of a romantic relationship between him and Wanderer. While this happens, Melanie tries to persuade Wanderer to ignore Ian. Yet, a shot of Wanderer smiling at him as she returns the bottle confirms that she has also opened up a space in her mind for considering the human other in a different light (figure 59).



Figures 56 and 57: Ian shows that he trusts Wanderer.



Figures 58 and 59: Ian and Wanderer develop a mental void that offers room for cosmopolitan understanding.

The act of cutting wheat in this scene further reinforces the idea that both characters are getting rid of some of their and their societies' prejudices. In spatial terms, the development of the story suggests that by cutting wheat Wanderer and Ian metaphorically remove obstacles in the way of cosmopolitan openness and love. When Wanderer lets Ian know that she has decided to leave Melanie's body and Earth, both characters stand together in the middle of the former wheat field (now empty) kissing and embracing. In retrospect then, the act of cutting wheat in the harvesting scene is also a way of making room for the coming together of the couple. A similar re-staging of the relationship between both characters appears at the end of the harvesting scene, when characters have to change the position of the mirrors that let light into the cave for a second time. The first time that humans have to change the position of the mirrors, Wanderer and Ian move different wheels and their bodies are framed separately, although they are looking at each other (figures 60

and 61). The second time, Ian and Wanderer no longer appear in different frames and now collaborate to move the same wheel (figure 62). In this way, *The Host* revisits some of the spaces in which the couple shows its first signs of openness to underline the development of their relationship. In contrast to other films in which desire is established automatically or magically, *The Host* highlights the process of learning and developing a new consciousness that the void opens up. For instance, in *Avatar*, Neytiri decides to trust Jake because the flying seeds of the Sacred Tree magically flag him as a reliable subject. In this sense, *The Host* emphasizes the relevance of creating mental spaces of cosmopolitan trust.



Figures 60 and 61: Framed separately but looking at each other: a cosmopolitan void begins to develop in Wanderer and Ian's minds.



Figure 62: Wanderer and Ian's collaboration and their presence in the same frame suggest that they trust each other.

As the story progresses and characters negotiate interspecies conflicts, the film begins to suggest that Wanderer and Ian's feelings could extend to other places and invites viewers to see cosmopolitan openness as a spreading awareness. The film does this mainly through the framing of open spaces, specifically the distance of the camera and its movement. In his

analysis of *Io Sono Li* (Andrea Segre, 2011)—a non-sf film that performs cosmopolitanism—Celestino Deleyto argues that the space in a film, or rather the way a space is filmed, can be a powerful means of conveying ideas about cosmopolitanism (2016: 7). In this sense, the presentation of spaces in *The Host* goes beyond the resolution of the ‘spatial problem’ that the initial division of Wanderer and Ian poses and articulates a more general discourse on cosmopolitanism. The camera often directs viewers’ attention from the characters to vast open spaces, including the horizon within the frame. In the first private encounter between Wanderer and Ian outside the cave, they enter the frame from the left, giving prominence to the landscape. During the rest of the scene, their conversation is sometimes shown through long shots that highlight the space behind them and capture the horizon. The open space behind them is prominent even in closer shots, thanks to the widescreen ratio that the film uses. When they go back to the cave, the camera tilts, leaving them for a second, and directing viewers’ attention to the vast landscape again. Through the framing of this open space, the film suggests that the couple’s emerging cosmopolitan sensibilities may spread to other parts of their society. The development of a cosmopolitan sensibility is even clearer in the previous to last scene, in which the camera zooms out from a close-up of the alien-human couple to an extreme long shot of the group of people who resist the authoritarian alien government (figures 63 and 64). The camera then simultaneously tilts up and pans to the right and stops to focus on the hole at the top of the cave (figures 65 and 66). The light fades as the narrator says “if one of them can find a way to live with one of us, I wonder.” This panning shot takes viewers from the interspecies couple and the small group of humans that the film has so far focused on to the outside, encouraging viewers to see the formation of alien-human couples as something that could also happen in other places. The film therefore forges a connection between the openness and intimacy of the transnational couple and the world outside.



Figures 63 and 64: Zooming out: cosmopolitanism beyond the human-alien couple.



Figures 65 and 66: A pan/tilt shot towards a hole at the top of the cave suggests that Ian and Wanderer's love and cosmopolitanism may spread to other places.

Although *The Host* appears to be about to end after the panning shot inside the cave, the film actually continues beyond and offers viewers an additional scene set a few months later in which we can see the protagonist couples driving into the city and being stopped by what at first sight appear to be seekers (the alien police). Unlike the additional scene at the end of the original version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*—which softens the unsettling tone of the film (Grant 2010: 14)—this final scene does not change the reading of *The Host*, but reinforces the cosmopolitan message that it develops and broadens its scope. As someone who is supposed to be a seeker checks whether the occupants of the car are human or alien, the conversation between him and Wanda (Emily Browning) reveals that other aliens are also living in human communities. The last two shots of the film, which include essential information regarding its cosmopolitan discourse, follow shortly after the film makes viewers aware of this new situation. The previous to last shot frames the interspecies couple from a medium close-up distance. In this shot, both Wanda and Ian look at each other with a smirk on their faces and then Wanda gazes up to the sky (figure 67). This shot is followed by an extreme long shot of the LA skyline, which moves up vertically, as if it were a tracking shot,

and ends up framing the stars in the sky (figure 68). The vertical camera movement from the couple to the distant planets and stars in the sky establishes a connection between them and suggests that the cosmopolitanism and love that fuel Ian and Wanderer's relationship is spreading to other places. This scene then amplifies the message of the previous one by confirming the cosmopolitan possibilities that the panning shot towards the hole at the top of the cave hinted at and pointing towards a wider, galactic scope. The credits further enhance this discourse by including a song with the chorus "welcome to the new age" as the credits flash by against a background of planets and stars in outer space. The last scene in *The Host* then confirms that the use of open spaces throughout the film advances the potential development and spread of a cosmopolitan consciousness.

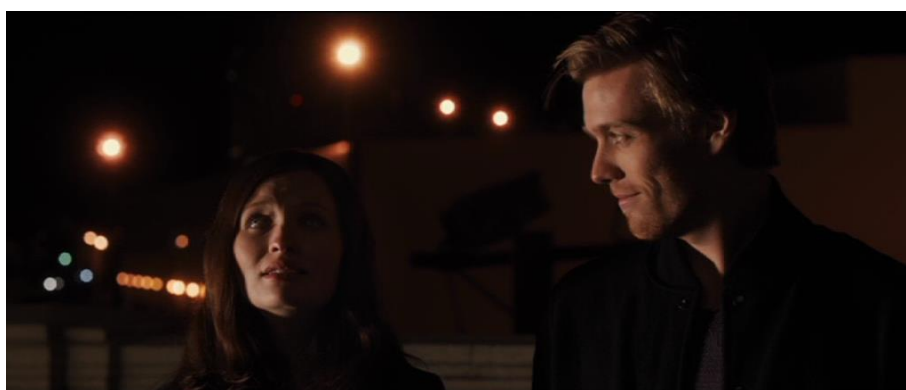


Figure 67: Wanda gazes up at the sky, hinting at the spread of the couple's cosmopolitan sensibilities.

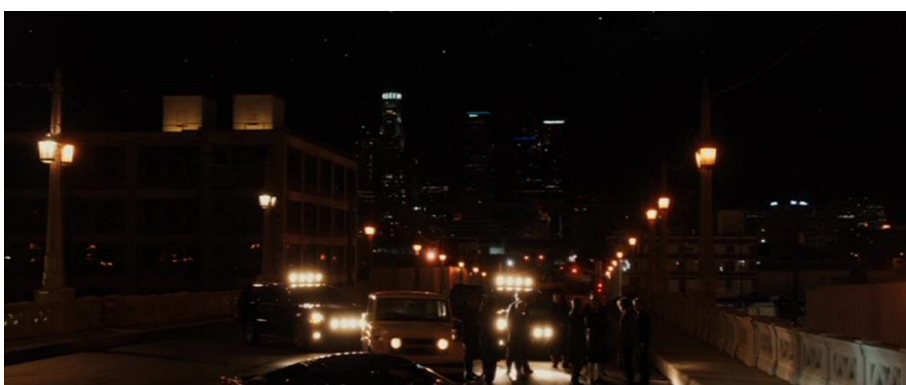


Figure 68: A vertical tracking shot takes viewers from the city to the starry sky, suggesting that the cosmopolitan love of the alien-human couple is spreading to other places.

The last scenes in other twenty-first century romantic alien films employ similar techniques to present cosmopolitan love as a spreading awareness. In *Warm Bodies*, a crane

shot gets closer to the embracing human-zombie couple from the back and flies over them to show the city in the background and the walls around it falling down. This camera movement suggests that the cosmopolitanism of the couple is about to extend to the rest of society. In like manner, *Upside Down* presents the expansive force of cosmopolitan love through a shot that, after framing the interspecies couple from a medium-close distance, tracks back to reveal a different urban landscape that suggests that the inequalities that separate two different worlds have faded. The last scene of *What Planet Are You From?* features an interspecies couple discussing whether to live on Earth or on the alien planet. After a medium shot of the couple with their baby from the back of the car, the camera zooms out a bit and slightly tilts up to show their car moving forward on the road towards a horizon that features a mountain range and the sky. Although *I Am Number 4* does not frame the couple together immediately before pointing to the horizon/an open space, in the last shot, the camera that follows a pickup truck from the back tilts up to frame the sky in the horizon. In all of these movies viewers go from seeing close-ups of the faces of the transnational couple together to extreme long shots, literally transporting cosmopolitan love to a broader spatial framework and projecting it towards other parts of the planet and even the galaxy in the horizon.

4.5.2. Cosmopolitan Whiteness

Despite the emphasis of *The Host* on cosmopolitan dialogue and openness, the discourse that the film develops is not as innocent as its optimistic tone of harmony between civilizations suggests. The contrasting discourses that *The Host* develops regarding openness and difference can be captured in a question that Jackie Stacey poses. She asks: “What if the projection of world citizenship is a blended panhumanity that violently erases difference instead of recognizing it?” (2014a: 35). This is precisely the paradox that *The Host* presents viewers with. The film only shows the openness of white people towards white aliens. With

the exception of a healer, a doctor, and a few seekers (all secondary characters), *The Host* revolves around relations and negotiations between white characters. In addition, although the aliens in the film are supposedly quite different from humans, the film barely points at their actual differences, except for casual references to the emotional detachment of the aliens, their generalized trust in everyone, and their hyper-efficient economic system and healthcare—differences which the film does not consider as points of struggle and negotiation. Therefore, *The Host*, despite its attempt to present openness to alien difference, celebrates openness to sameness rather than otherness. In this sense, the film uses Wanderer and Ian's relationship to develop what Néstor García Canclini calls "tranquilizing hybridization" (1997: 126): a celebration of hybridity which in the end perpetuates the system of racial and cultural hierarchies that actually hamper hybrid cross-pollination.

In his book *White*, Richard Dyer notes that Western discourses present/see whiteness as "unmarked, unspecific, [and] universal" (1997: 45). *The Host* manages to articulate cosmopolitanism through the overwhelming whiteness of its cast thanks to the unmarked character of whiteness in Western culture. As Dyer points out, whites do not define themselves in terms of race (1988: 735, 1997: 9). Given its lack of specificity, whiteness can be anything: it can represent the self, the other, or something in-between. This is what allows *The Host* to put across a message that seems to celebrate diversity and hybridity despite the white uniformity of its cast. Indeed, Dyer also describes whiteness as "a colourless multi-colouredness" (1988: 735). Building on Dyer's work, Dale Hudson has developed a similar argument: he identifies the operation of what he calls "multicultural whiteness" in the vampire films *Vamp* (Richard Wenk, 1986), *Vampire's Kiss* (Robert Bierman, 1989), and *Carmilla* (Gabrielle Beaumont, 1990) (2008: 129). In these films, multicultural whiteness is evident in the fact that, first, non-white vampires are present in the narrative in order to reaffirm the hegemonic role of white characters and, second, these vampires can only be

accepted as rightful citizens by performing an idealized notion of US whiteness based on material consumption, property acquisition, and reproduction (Hudson 2008: 132-3, 146). In more general terms, Hudson argues that “multicultural whiteness negotiates contradictions between an overstated racially blind inclusiveness of multiculturalism and an understated racial exclusiveness of whiteness” (130). Seen against this light, *The Host* also deploys a ‘multicultural whiteness,’ yet a more overt version of it than the one in the vampire films that Hudson analyzes. The film evokes a conceptual, elusive alienness that functions without including substantial cultural differences, non-whiteness, or other visual signs/markers of otherness. In this way, *The Host* constructs a post-racial vision of difference in which race seems misleadingly irrelevant. The exploitation of the universal and multicultural character of whiteness in *The Host* eventually dynamites its cosmopolitan narrative: the film builds an ambivalent discourse that simultaneously questions and reinforces supremacy.

As the introduction to this chapter hints, the case of *The Host* is far from isolated. Although Miller and Van Riper point out that 1980s and 1990s narratives of miscegenation in sf tend to highlight differences between species—for instance, through the alien “glowing ball of energy” in *Cocoon* (2012: 23), films from that period (with the exception of *Earth Girls Are Easy*) typically feature interspecies romances between two white, anthropomorphic beings. Yet, while those naive differences set aliens apart from humans to a certain extent in the 1980s and 90s, the presence of these generally banal differences is even more diffuse, if present at all, in early twenty-first century films. While *The Fifth Element*, *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*, and *Warm Bodies* make subtle references to the physical difference or awkwardness of the alien member of the couple, *I Am Number 4*, *John Carter*, *Upside Down*, and *The Host* barely call attention to it. Except for the Na’vi in *Avatar*, the pink and green anthropomorphic aliens in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (Dey’s family and Gamora), and perhaps also the winged half human/half dog hybrid in *Jupiter Ascending*,

twenty-first century aliens indeed look more human and whiter than ever and the visual and conceptual difference between humans and aliens has become less and less perceptible.

The fact that films like *The Host* do not are not interested in racial difference at all suggests the presence of a deceiving cosmopolitanism in which one race is privileged over the rest. Yet, the depiction of racial difference is not less tricky. Csicsery-Ronay notes that “while *Star Trek* attempts to figure tolerance by displacing racial difference onto alien-human difference, it reproduces the very confusion that inspires confusion about race among real humans, conflating cultural difference with putative natural difference” (2002: 229). The openness to a difference that is actually sameness in *The Host* is then paradoxical. On the one hand, it serves as a vehicle for the exploration of cosmopolitan sensibilities. As Miller and Van Riper suggest, films that have aliens pass as humans (e.g. *Starman* and *What Planet Are You From*) may “make social inroads in places where more identifiable Others would be turned away” (2012: 21). As problematic as multicultural/multicolored whiteness is, this is particularly accurate in a context in which it is common to dehumanize the other (Papastergiadis 2012: 58). The non-menacing character of Wanderer and most of the aliens in the film question popular narratives of wariness and hatred towards the foreign other. On the other hand, the white masking of difference and race that the film employs to make its cosmopolitanism more palatable to audiences relies on the racist assumption that whites are more human (and more easily acceptable) than anyone else (Dyer 1997: 2). In general terms, *The Host* both replicates and challenges the logics that prevent people from being open to otherness. The film celebrates processes of cosmopolitan negotiation and hybridization while simultaneously rendering them meaningless.

4.6. COSMOQUEER UTOPIANISM IN *CODEPENDENT LESBIAN SPACE ALIEN SEEKS SAME*

Like *The Host*, *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* celebrates cosmopolitan openness through multicultural whiteness. All the main and secondary characters, both human and alien, are white US Americans. Yet, in contrast to *The Host*, *Codependent Lesbian* presents an alien civilization with a different sexual culture, offering opportunities to consider how the film articulates openness and lack thereof towards both foreign and sexual otherness. In this respect, the film is also a clear example of ambivalent cosmopolitanism: on the one hand it is only able to picture a white world and, on the other, it imagines a queer alien civilization in sexual, reproductive, and performative terms. By putting two different sexual worlds into dialogue, the film explores how living in societies that offer alternative sexual and/or affective options can be beneficial for individuals. In other instances, however, *Codependent Lesbian* exploits the idea of aliens as foreign and sexual others to celebrate the positive impact of interspecies/transnational bonding in the personal fulfillment of the characters. The cosmopolitan discourse of the film focuses on the opening of life possibilities that cosmoqueer sexualities offer rather than on the celebration of emerging bonds across racial/national/religious divides. As in *The Host*, the film's cosmopolitanism also stems from an accidental situation: some aliens have no choice but to travel to Earth because their 'strong feelings' are threatening their planet's ecosystem. Their interaction with humans is part of a plan to get their heart broken so that they stop having emotions that damage the environment and can return to their planet. In spite of this, *Codependent Lesbian* does not immerse characters in conflicts between cultures. Rather, the film focuses on their experience when navigating an alien culture, the contrast between sexual conventions in both planets, and the new perspectives and unexpected connections that emerge from human-alien interactions.

4.6.1. Interplanetary Camp: Celebrating Aesthetic, Sexual, and Alien Otherness

This section argues that *Codependent Lesbian* infuses its narrative with cosmopolitanism by approaching queerness as a utopian exercise. More specifically, I point at the film's camp aesthetics and performance and its ability to conceptualize an alternative social system (especially in terms of sex and affection) as particularly effective means of exploring queerness through a cosmopolitan lens. The cosmoqueer vision that *Codependent Lesbian* offers echoes José Muñoz's call for queer utopian futures. Muñoz argues that queerness is something not yet realized: it is future-oriented (2009: 28). At the core of Muñoz's notion of queer futurism is the distinction between "the here and now" of normative kinship, sexuality, and reproduction and "the then and there" of still-non-existent queer possibilities (1, 10, 28-9). Muñoz reclaims the utopian potential of picturing and aspiring to a different time and place against the presentism of heteronormative supremacy and a homosexual agenda solely based on marriage, human rights, and serving in the military (26, 29, 32). In a similar vein, *Codependent Lesbian*'s celebration of sexual, aesthetic, and alien otherness is an exercise in utopian queerness. Given the parallels between Muñoz's utopian vision of queer futurism and *Codependent Lesbian*'s cosmoutopian impulses, this section regularly returns to Muñoz's thinking in order to consider how *Codependent Lesbian* envisions an alternative place (a there) which is non-normative. Although Muñoz's line of argument does not seem particularly concerned with the transnational or the cosmopolitan, he notes that "the here [...] requires the challenge of a there that can be regional or global" (29). In this sense, *Codependent Lesbian* offers an opportunity to critically emphasize the role of the transnational in the utopian process of imagining a queer there.

Since digital filmmaking and other technological advances have generally made it easier to make science fiction films on a tight budget (Pratt 2014: 56-7), it is particularly surprising that *Codependent Lesbian* still relies on shoestring special effects and designs. Yet,

at the same time, the film turns its zero budget into an advantage, drawing connections to the camp roots of 1950s queer cinema and using camp's awkwardness to build a discourse on transnational/intergalactic otherness. Given the generalized absence of queerness from sf cinema in general and of cosmopolitan queerness in particular, it is no wonder that *Codependent Lesbian* relies on camp as a vehicle for its queer cosmopolitanism. In his work on camp as a queer mode of film production, Matthew Tinkcom explains that "within the lacunae of [mainstream, capitalist] modes of production, camp filmmakers find the opportunities to press the cinematic commodity into a new form of service that expresses their presence within the domain of production" (2002: 28-29). In the present filmmaking context, cosmopolitan sexualities (especially lesbian sexualities) are largely absent. Big-budget productions rarely feature homosexual characters and, when they do, they tend to appear as male tokens (e.g. *Star Trek: Beyond*). More modest productions sometimes give LGBTQ characters a more central position but barely explore sexual questions (e.g. *Kaboom*) and when they do explore these questions, they do so in national terms (e.g. *V for Vendetta*). *Codependent Lesbian* includes references to other films that situate it as part of a tradition of marginal camp films. The typography of the film's title—which appears a minute into the film—recalls that of 1950s sf B-movies such as *Queen of Outer Space* and its basic settings and props and its black and white cinematography recall those in Ed Wood's sf cult film *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Just as Ed Wood, Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, and John Waters resorted to camp in the 1950s to "answer Hollywood from the margin" (Mennel 2012: 36-41), *Codependent Lesbian* relies on camp to resist the heteronormativity of contemporary sf cinema and articulate queer cosmopolitan sexualities.

The reliance of *Codependent Lesbian* on camp is essential for the imagination of a then and there and for the sexual cosmopolitanism of the film. As Muñoz notes, "the queer utopian [...] is drawn to tastes, ideologies, and aesthetics that can only seem odd, strange, or

indeed queer” (2009: 26). As Muñoz’s words hint, camp is indeed an optimal means of expressing queerness. In addition, the strangeness of camp also makes it a potential vehicle for discourses on cosmopolitanism. In general, camp celebrates the breakthrough of the unusual, the uncommon, and the unconceivable in individual behaviors and social relationships. From the perspective of cosmopolitanism, in *Codependent Lesbian*, camp becomes a useful tool to emphasize otherness and draw viewers closer to it through humor. *Codependent Lesbian* primarily draws on awkward performances (in terms of body movements, dancing styles, ways of speaking, and social interactions) and costumes and sets made from cheap, simple materials to convey a humorous and enjoyable bizarreness. For instance, aliens wear tracksuits and vampire-like, triangle-shaped collars around their necks and the spaceship model is made out of two takeaway food trays and a set of lights. Although many of these details may appear banal at first sight, they infuse scenes with an air of lightness that invites viewers to enjoy not only the story but also its surfaces. Camp provides pleasurable excess because it pushes beyond the usual and the norm. From an aesthetic point of view, it displays resourcefulness by finding new, unexpected uses for everyday objects. Camp adopts a carefree attitude towards its non-normative performance and aesthetics: it celebrates or applauds otherness by putting awkwardness on display for audiences to enjoy. In this sense, *Codependent Lesbian*’s camp channels both queer and foreign otherness.

Of course, camp, in and of itself, is not automatically linked to the foreign other. *Codependent Lesbian* includes a series of cues that present the aliens in the film as foreigners. Apart from the fact that the aliens travel from another planet, they speak an unrecognizable, invented language that would sound foreign to any viewer. In a similar way to the horror classic *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922), *Codependent Lesbian* also figures the female aliens’ sexual and national otherness through the bald heads of the monstrous/alien other. Aliens also convey their otherness through their monotonous way of speaking and

awkward performances. Indeed, the aliens regularly show uncommon behavior in social contexts (e.g. by “giving a scarf a ride” in a laundromat) and one of them particularly, Barr (Cynthia Kaplan), shows her concern about the difficulty of navigating a foreign culture. Despite the multiple elements that invite viewers to see the aliens as foreigners, the use of camp and the aforementioned cues present an otherness that lacks specificity: an otherness that does not engage with the culturally-specific situations of queer migrants who do not conform to socially-sanctioned affective and sexual behaviors in their home societies. As Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt note, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s distinction between minoritizing and universalizing discourses (1990: 1; 40-4; 82-6) is central to transnational queer cinema (2016: 69). Universalizing discourses argue for the need to spread practices or attitudes that promote the freedom and well-being of queer individuals. These models, however, tend to be devised by economically-powerful geopolitical actors (Schoonover and Galt 2016: 15). Minoritizing discourses, in contrast, see queerness as the product of geographical or cultural specificities, thus showing skepticism towards transnational connections in the realm of sexuality (76). Drawing on Sedgwick, Schoonover and Galt note that neither of these categories is preferable to the other. They explain:

The universalism that hopes to create equality and repeal homophobic laws can often work in practice as a form of neo-imperialism that alienates non-Western governments so that queer people in those countries become more vulnerable to state-sanctioned attack. At the same time, the minoritizing discourse that rejects universal identities can end up demanding a very particularized identity that forecloses on the imaginative and literal spaces available for queers. (77)

While the racial homogeneity of *Codependent Lesbian* may seem to offer a universalizing discourse at first sight, the film does not present queerness as a Western project. I will first offer a more detailed analysis of the film and then return to this question towards the end of this section.

Even though *Codependent Lesbian* does not focus on the culturally-specific struggles that queer individuals may face in a given society, the film does point to a key area of concern from the point of view of queer cosmopolitanism: the persecution of those who do not conform to sexual and gender roles and the opportunity that living in a different country may offer for the expression of their identities and desires. Although the three lesbian aliens that the story follows are not sent to Earth because of their sexual orientation, their situation recalls that of people who are almost-forcefully driven into migration because their feelings towards the same sex are deemed incompatible with the culture or society where they live. *Codependent Lesbian* presents the strong feelings of some of the alien characters as a danger to their planet's ozone layer, that is, to their environment. This echoes real-life situations in which societies perceive non-normative sexualities as a threat to their social or religious ecosystem and to their economic hegemony. By contrasting regulations and feelings, *Codependent Lesbian* brings to the surface the queer dimension of sexual oppression that sf dystopias about forbidden love such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *THX 1138*, *The Adjustment Bureau*, or *Equals* often erase.

At first sight, *Codependent Lesbian* may appear to establish a parallel with the persecution of non-normative sexualities and gender roles in non-Western societies. Yet, its lack of references to a specific group of people resists that kind of reading and invites to see the alien misuse of environmental science as a more general reference to sexually-repressive societies. As Wendy Pearson explains, Western societies also have traditionally conceived homosexuality and migration as threats to their economic hegemony. A decrease in the birth rate of (white) babies and an increase in the number of (non-white) migrants endanger the idea of ever-growing white economic power (2009: 302). In addition, the government of Zots conceives the aliens' trip to Earth as a means for certain aliens to get their hearts broken by careless humans so that they stop having strong sexual desires and romantic feelings. This

premise recalls the belief that homosexual people can cease to desire the same sex through conversion therapy, a practice that is current and legal in both Western and non-Western societies. In this way, by not including characteristics that invite to link the aliens to a specific nation, race, region, or religion (although actors are clearly white and US American) and by including references to globally widespread practices that restrict sexual freedom, the film keeps its dystopian side open enough to be interpreted as a reference to any society that sees homosexuality as a threat to the national or religious ecosystem.

Even though all the aliens in the film are white and they share several behavior patterns (e.g. repeating words), the film presents three female aliens with different attitudes towards sexuality who get involved in different kinds of relationships. In this way, *Codependent Lesbian* does not reduce the alien other to a single image. The first alien that the film introduces on Earth is Zylar (Jackie Monahan). Subtitles present her as a “sexually generous” character. Indeed, Zylar behaves just as she would in her planet: she has multiple intimate encounters with other people but she does not make a big emotional investment in any of these relationships. She just wants to have a good time on Earth. Given her self-confidence and her ability to read other cultures, she is the character who best navigates the dating scene in the US/on Earth. In contrast, Barr, the codependent alien after which the film is titled, has difficulty getting used to dating conventions on Earth/US. For instance, initially she scatters “over 2,000 one-line love letters” which obviously do not get her any closer to having a date with a human. Given her initial lack of success in accomplishing the plans of her government, she gives up on earthlings and begins to be romantically interested in Zylar. After experiencing freedom from alien regulations—which forbid ‘big feelings’ and ‘sentimentalism’—Barr imagines herself living her life on Earth with Zylar and never returning home. However, when Zylar shows her completely opposite view of

romance/sexuality, Barr changes her mind and wants to return home, where it is easier for her to fit in, even at the cost of not being allowed to develop strong feelings there.

Although the film's title seems to present Barr as the main character, Zoinx (Susan Ziegler) is the alien that gets most of the narrative attention, as she gets involved in a relationship with human Jane (Lisa Haas). In addition, her sexuality is the most undefined. As she travels to Earth, subtitles present her disposition as "uncertain." Although Zoinx is perhaps the clumsiest of the three aliens, she is lucky to bump into Jane, a nerdy lesbian presumably without any romantic experience and very open to Zoinx's weirdness. Both develop a stable relationship in which they find an opportunity to share moments and feelings that they had not shared before. The completely different attitude of these aliens towards sexuality and relationships helps build a non-monolithic image of the foreigners, which is essential from a cosmopolitan point of view. As Plummer notes, "cosmopolitanism needs a globalization that creates diversification and heterogeneity rather than pushing for homogeneity and essentialist categories" (2015: 93). In this sense, *Codependent Lesbian* offers a peek into the varied and deeply personal forms that the cosmopolitan dimension of sexuality may adopt.

A central element of *Codependent Lesbian's* cosmopolitan discourse on sexuality is its ability to imagine alternative alien sexual and affective practices and to explore them by making regular allusions to heteronormative conventions. Although the two agents who follow the lesbian aliens may seem to add little to the narrative at first sight, their conversations are central to sketching the view of the film on the sexual cultures of New York and Zots. The alien agent (Alex Karpovsky) and the human agent (Dennis Davis) have almost completely opposite views on sexuality. Through his questions and comments, the alien gradually reveals that his society is radically different in sexual terms from heteronormative Earth: he appears surprised when he finds out that it is legal to get married

on Earth and he also asks the human (to the latter's offense) whether his wife is a trans man. Later on, Zoinx also suggests that aliens are different in reproductive terms when she mentions the time that she was in the 'hatching device' as a baby. In a similar way to *Star Appeal*, which uses the figure of the alien as "a way of questioning Chinese gender relations" (Berra 2013: 193), *Codependent Lesbian* relies on aliens to look beyond heteronormativity. The agents' conversation about how they like coffee and donuts provides the most powerful metaphor for the different attitudes towards sexuality that both characters (and, by extension, their planets) have. The emphasis of the characters on the jelly and the cream inside the donuts invites to read them as references to bodily fluids, especially when the human agent mentions his concern about the jelly coming out at the front/the back and when the alien agents notes that "you have to nibble." The outrage of the human at the alien's position on jelly donuts echoes the heated reactions that some people have towards the visibility and expression of non-normative sexualities. Even though the dispute is not resolved, the film invites viewers to empathize with the alien because of the human's defensiveness and his disgusted look. As Bould notes, the "playful traces" that are characteristic of camp have the potential to pave the way for alternative ways of being (2012: 109). Indeed, it is the playfulness of the alien's awkward comments—using jelly and cream donuts as sexual metaphors—that allows the film to question social norms and imagine other sexual cultures.

Jane and Zoinx's interactions queer sexuality in a more direct manner. The clearest example is the aliens' sexual/intimate practice of touching their noses. Zoinx and Jane's first intimate encounter consists of Zoinx touching Jane's nose and then Zoinx leading Jane's hand towards her nose (figure 69). For both characters, this is a new experience: Zoinx has never touched noses "so quickly" and Jane has "never done that at all." By including a camp depiction of alien sex or affection that looks ridiculous (at least by Western standards), the film engages in the practice of queer utopianism: it depicts a sexual practice beyond usual or

normative patterns. Camp also occupies a central place in the other key queer intimate moment in the film. During the shower scene that features Jane and Zoinx, both characters adopt a position that the film presents as awkward (figure 70). Although the fact that two persons appear together under the shower should not, in theory, appear strange, the film presents it as such. Jane's body appears to be trapped in an uncomfortable position by Zoinx's reclining figure, as Jane retreats into the very corner of the shower to let Zoinx wash her head properly. In addition, the camp fact that Zoinx has to wear her alien collar around the neck at all times and the compositional imbalance of the shot increase the oddity of the moment. Yet, in spite of the bizarre appearance of the shot, Jane's face shows her pleasure and Zoinx's expression denotes a self-contained feeling of satisfaction. In this way, the film reframes an everyday activity as odd and simultaneously presents it as a utopian moment. This weirding or queering of the characters' sexualities has cosmopolitan implications. In his work on cosmopolitan sexualities, Plummer notes that when people move, "a transforming world of sexualities moves with them" (2015: 67). As both scenes suggest, these experiences do not only open new pathways of sexual fulfillment for Jane and Zoinx: both characters see their daily lives transformed through the presence of a foreign otherness that offers previously unknown possibilities.



Figure 69: By having characters touch each other's noses, *Codependent Lesbian* queers affection and sex.



Figure 70: Compositional imbalance and pleasurable awkwardness.

In tune with Muñoz’s vision of utopian queerness (2009: 135), *Codependent Lesbian* also uses camp to imagine a (cosmopolitan) queerness that transcends sexuality. The film relies on this broader sense of queerness to explore the notion of cosmopolitan openness. Examining Andy Warhol’s *Still Life (Flowers)* (ca. 1956), Muñoz asserts that “utopia exists in the quotidian” (9). *Codependent Lesbian* also finds utopian possibilities in the quotidian, often through camp moments. Whenever Zoinx laughs out loud at the movies while nobody else does, when she dances in her own way at a bar where she gets stares from the crowd, or when she hands Jane an empty love card that she has just bought from her, she is performing a queer then and there: she is, as Muñoz would say, ‘taking ecstasy’: behaving beyond normativity and following her desires (185-7). Although Jane expresses herself in a much more reserved and standard way in these situations, these experiences are for both of them what Muñoz calls “moments of queer relational bliss” (25). Indeed, during her stroll with Zoinx along Coney Island’s boardwalk, Jane fondly recalls some of these moments. They are important for her because Zoinx embodies a quality that she admires and does not have: she expresses her emotions freely.

At the same time, these situations allow Zoinx to show her feelings towards Jane and the moments that they share. Both sexual and quotidian queerness help articulate attitudes of openness in both characters, particularly in the case of Jane. The embracing of otherness

appears as one of the foundations of their relationship. When Zoinx laughs at a disproportionately loud level at the movies, Jane discreetly looks at her with a smirk on her face. Similarly, Jane does not question Zoinx's looks: when Zoinx reveals that she is an alien, Jane acknowledges that she "did wonder about the gills." With these words, Jane suggests that Zoinx's conspicuous otherness is not an obstacle to their relationship. Jane also shows her sensibility towards difference (and sexual consent) when she asks Zoinx if she should wash under her collar when they are in the shower. Other than presenting Jane as a robust woman and a nerd, the film focuses on Zoinx's otherness. Yet, Zoinx also shows her cosmopolitan side: she seems particularly interested in learning about US/Earth sexual cultures. As Zylar says, Zoinx never misses the TV program "Studz," which mostly revolves around heterosexual dating. Through these moments of openness, the film envisions everyday moments of utopian queerness in which characters find opportunities to learn about and connect with the other.

4.6.2. Imagining and Doing Otherwise:

Queer Resourcefulness and Cosmopolitan Horizons

Codependent Lesbian also practices queer utopianism by having Jane and Zoinx creatively adapt objects or circumstances so that they meet the needs of their transcultural and transplanetary relationship. More specifically, the film resorts to props such as a modified mug and portable folding chairs in order to show both their flexibility and their ability to shape their realities into a then and there that suits them. The mug is a present that Jane gets for Zoinx. Since Zoinx is a name that does not exist on Earth, Jane buys a mug with the name 'Zoey' on it, covers half of the name with what appears to be Tipp-Ex, and writes the letters 'inx' over the erased part. This small detail evinces Jane's resourcefulness: she imagines alternatives and remakes circumstances in order to be able to express her feelings towards

Zoinx. Jane's ability to make do also works as a broader metafictional reference to the nature and status of the film: both Jane and the film reconfigure the resources available to them to create objects, moments, and spaces of utopian queerness.

The scene in which the folding chairs appear revisits the famous Queensboro Bridge scene in *Manhattan* (Woody Allen, 1979) to offer a different perspective on the space by the riverside. For Sam Girgus, the original scene in *Manhattan* hints—through the fog that engulfs the city in the distance and the disruption of the symmetry of the bridge by the structures on the left—at the “ultimate failure” of the relationship between Mary (Diane Keaton) and Isaac (Woody Allen) (2007: 70-1). The almost-identical framing and lighting in *Codependent Lesbian* in conjunction with the addition of the alienating sound of traffic and new props such as a line of garbage bags and an “END” sign elicit a similar reading of the scene at first sight (figure 71). Yet, there are two substantial differences: the substitution of a couple of portable folding chairs for the bench in *Manhattan* and the subject matter of the characters' conversation. In contrast to the fixity and rigidity of the bench, the folding chairs are portable and flexible. Like the characters who carry them, they are can adapt to circumstances and they are mobile (as the film's ending confirms). The folding chairs suggest that even if this environment is unwelcoming, they are ready to move to another place where they may find comfort. Indeed, they are sitting in front of the Queensboro bridge but not talking about the view, like Mary and Isaac do. Jane is fantasizing about going to the beach in summer with Zoinx even though the latter “would have to watch out for the syringes.” Jane's comment about the syringes suggests that her utopian summer may not be perfect, but is nevertheless more appealing than the here and now of the Queensboro bridge. Like the fine-tuning of the mug, the folding chairs and the restaging of *Manhattan*'s scene highlight the importance of imagining and doing otherwise.



Figure 71: A couple of portable folding chairs present Zoinx and Jane's relationship as flexible and mobile.

Jane also shows that she dares to imagine and do otherwise when she gets into the spaceship that is supposed to get the lesbian aliens back to Zots. Like Isaac at the end of *Manhattan* again, Jane arrives at the last minute before Zoinx leaves and yet, unlike in Woody Allen's film, the two members of the couple do not part ways. This scene is not only the most utopian moment in the film, but also when camp peaks. Apart from featuring a spaceship model that is made from two takeaway food trays and presenting aliens in the same camp manner as through the rest of the narrative, the film includes several details that reinforce the campiness of the mise-en-scène: Barr, the pilot, wears a set of headphones made from two plastic bowls joined with some duct tape and the interior of the spaceship consists of plain metal-like wallpaper, rivets, a pair of pipes, and a few light bulbs inside what seem to be cardboard boxes wrapped in foil paper (figure 72). The convergence of such a large number of rudimentary, camp details in this scene invites viewers to see the whole situation (like the mug and the chairs previously) as a product of make do and queer resourcefulness.



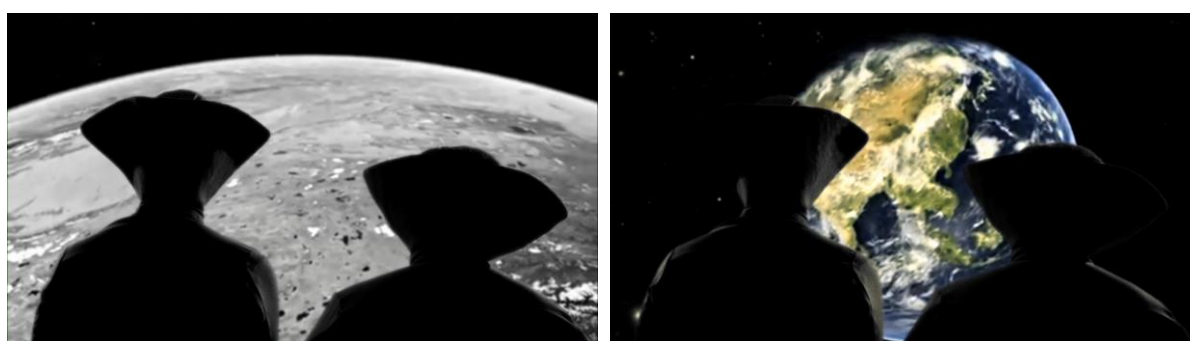
Figure 72: Camp all over: *Codependent Lesbian* emphasizes its own and its characters' resourcefulness.

Through its campy mise-en-scène and its dialogues, this scene articulates a tension between social norms and utopian possibilities. At first, Zylar adopts a realistic position warning Jane that “no-one is worth leaving your galaxy for.” In addition, Zylar notes that Jane will be “rejected,” “a freak,” and “an oddity” in Zots. Zylar’s comments point at the unforeseeable character of Jane’s intentions: she does not fit into the here and now of Zots, where no human has lived before. The use of remarkably hard lighting in the second half of the scene also underscores the risk that Jane is taking. Zylar’s comments and the use of hard lighting suggest that geographical distance and differences between species and cultures are paramount obstacles to interplanetary relationships. Yet, just as the aesthetics of this scene look deliberately precarious and improvised, Jane and Zoinx make do with their circumstances. Despite the spontaneous character and unpredictable outcome of this situation, they hang onto their ticket to ecstasy: to the possibility of sharing more time together. They look beyond their respective social environments and follow their utopian desires. In visual terms, the campiness of the scene also pushes beyond the usual and the norm. It introduces viewers in a visual there: an old-fashioned oddity in the current context of widespread CGI and expensive special effects. At the same time, the camp mise-en-scène and performances make this a deeply enjoyable moment. In this sense, the film crafts a powerful

moment of utopian queerness. As Muñoz explains, “queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise” (26). By getting into the spaceship, Jane steps into what is not yet here: she is about to be the first human to travel to a different planet for love. The spontaneity of Jane and Zoinx’s last-minute decision to stay together indeed suggests that their actions are driven by the anticipatory power of their utopian desires. Yet, the film offers a slightly different version of queer utopia than Muñoz’s, emphasizing the transnational dimension that often remains in the background in *Cruising Utopia*. In *Codependent Lesbian*, the alternative place that characters project emerges from queer desire, but its development depends on cosmopolitanism. Jane and Zoinx’s image of a utopian there depends on cosmopolitan openness rather than on queer possibilities, even though most of the film focuses on imagining and celebrating non-normative ways of feeling and desiring.

As in most sf films about transnational love, the last scene in *Codependent Lesbian* establishes a visual relationship between the love of the protagonists and vast spaces such as Earth and outer space. Yet, in contrast to most of these films, the camera in *Codependent Lesbian* never leaves the couple. One of the last shots begins by featuring Jane and Zoinx against an image of Earth that occupies most of the background. As the shot progresses, the camera dollies in and zooms out simultaneously to keep framing Jane and Zoinx from a medium distance and to make Earth become smaller in the background (figures 73 and 74). This visual effect keeps the focus on the interspecies couple while it shows viewers how the couple’s cosmopolitan love ventures into outer space. Yet, this shot does not suggest that the couple’s love spreads cosmopolitanism across Earth or through the universe. In contrast to the endings of *What Planet Are You From?*, *The Host*, *I Am Number Four*, *Upside Down* and *Warm Bodies*, the camera in *Codependent Lesbian* does not move away from the characters

to frame a wider, more open space. Jane and Zoinx always remain inside the frame. In his book about cosmopolitan sexualities, Plummer argues that cosmopolitanism should emerge from “little-grounded utopian processes of hope” rather than from grand schemes (2015: 189). This is precisely what *Codependent Lesbian* does: it keeps viewers focused on the small actions of Zoinx and Jane while celebrating cosmopolitanism by linking them to the cosmopolitan symbol of the blue marble. Indeed, when Jane and Zoinx simultaneously touch their noses, the image of the globe frames their sign of affection from the background.



Figures 73 and 74: As Jane and Zoinx venture into outer space and metaphorically spread their cosmopolitan attitudes, the camera never distances viewers from the small-scale actions of the human-alien couple.

The shift from black and white to color in the shot in which Zoinx and Jane touch each other’s noses with Earth in the background reinforces the utopianism of the ending. As characters get closer to the cosmoqueer ‘there’ that they desire, their reality gets literally brighter. The last shot of the film celebrates the queer ecstasy of the couple by recreating one of the key moments of intercultural queer affection in the film, as both women touch each other’s nose (figure 75). Yet, as Muñoz points out, “if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon” (11). Although the last shot appears to suggest that Jane and Zoinx are now living in a cosmoqueer utopia, both women look upwards, towards something beyond the frame: something unknown which is never shown and remains in the horizon. The presence of both women in the lower part of the frame, giving prominence to the starry sky above them, emphasizes the presence of the horizon in the shot (figure 76). In this sense, the last scene of the film projects a

cosmopolitanism that is based on the free expression of queer personal feelings that are always yet to come.



Figure 75: *Codependent Lesbian*'s ending celebrates cosmoqueer affection.



Figure 76: Beyond the frame: queer utopia as what is always yet to come.

To conclude, both the strength and the weakness of *Codependent Lesbian*'s cosmopolitan queerness lie in its lack of cultural specificity. Even though the film revolves around the experiences of white US characters, camp makes the whiteness of the aliens weird and different. Yet, their otherness is abstract enough to discourage racist readings that link the aliens to a specific group of people. In this sense, the film both practices and favors the “looser sense of engagement” with alien representation that Andrew Butler calls for (2015: 110). Although this implies that the film fails to represent non-Western people and their sexualities, its last scene contributes to tone down its seemingly universalistic/Westernizing discourse. To begin with, by having Jane move to Zots, the film indicates that New York and the Western world are not necessarily the natural or logical homes of cosmopolitan sexualities. This narrative move is quite significant. As Schoonover and Galt note, more realistic transnational queer films tend to present the West as the place that best accommodates queer individuals (2016: 59, 76). Although *Codependent Lesbian*'s protagonists are markedly US American, the location of the last shots of the film in outer space suggests that the queer utopian space that the film projects in the horizon does not belong to a particular nation or planet. Another problematic issue that Schoonover and Galt find in films that deal with transnational queerness is that their universalism is sometimes

based on discrediting localisms (50-53, 60). *Codependent Lesbian* also resists this universalistic tendency by having Jane wear alien clothes in the last scene, suggesting that she finds herself at home in the aliens' local culture.

Despite its general lack of cultural specificity, the film points at the constructedness and lack of rigor of discourses that aim to subdue non-normative sexualities. As Zylar informs Zoinx, the science that indicated that big feelings damaged their planet's ozone layer was far from accurate. Instead, the cause of the depletion of the ozone layer is the reflection of the sun on the aliens' bald heads. By drawing once again on camp humor, the film both exposes the ridiculousness of the situation and infuses the moment with an air of lightness. This presents the scientific and political discourse that leads Barr, Zoinx, and Zylar to leave their planet as a mistake in perception. Thus, *Codependent Lesbian*, on the one hand, locates the source of sexual and affective oppression in unfounded beliefs and prejudice rather than in specific cultures, nations, religions, or regions. On the other hand, the little information that the film provides about the change of situation in planet Zots deceptively suggests that societies that exert a rigid control over their citizens' affective and sexual lives may change overnight. By doing this, the film overlooks the struggles that people who cannot love freely go through in order to gain gradual recognition for their rights. This magic turn at the end obscures the importance of activism, protest, education, and visibility in raising awareness of LGBTQ experiences and rights. Therefore, in spite of its powerful cosmoqueer utopianism, *Codependent Lesbian* cannot help but give in to the cosmopolitan ambivalence that characterizes contemporary sf cinema at certain points.

CHAPTER FIVE

Resisting Coloniality: The Cosmopolitan Potential of Human Networks

5.1. TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS THROUGH TIME

The last chapter of this dissertation focuses on how cosmopolitanism is primarily about a sense of shared humanity or, more generally, a sense of shared sentience with other beings. As Anthony Kwame Appiah notes, cosmopolitanism looks for connections beyond ancestry and shared cultural conventions (2006: 135). This chapter looks at a variety of films that draw connections across time and/or space, often bringing human beings from different backgrounds and parts of the world together as part of transnational networks. The films in the previous chapters deal with more general types of connections—the transnational influence of powerful economic actors, the networking of borders, or the domino effect of environmental impacts. This chapter, on the other hand, focuses on connections of a more personal or individual type, but not based on affection or intimacy, like those related to kinship and love in chapter four. Many of the connections that these films draw potentially involve all human and sentient beings. In addition, unlike in the previous chapters, the films mentioned in this one do not belong to a more or less homogenous trend: most of them establish connections through disparate strategies. They rely on a wide range of premises, concepts, and narrative forms. These films may develop transnational and cross-temporal

narratives in a single location and time, like *The Man from Earth* (Richard Schenkman, 2007); unveil world-shaking knowledge, like *I Origins* (Mike Cahill, 2014); show how a change in the past has transnational implications in the present and the future, like *Project Almanac* (Dean Isrealite, 2015) does; or link characters across centuries and continents, like *Cloud Atlas*. From a formal point of view, the films included in this chapter may not appear to share much. At the same time, all of them revolve around individual human connections of some kind or another. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the main ways in which contemporary sf cinema imagines connections between individuals across different times and/or spaces from a cosmopolitan perspective. It then offers a close analysis of *Cloud Atlas*, a film that stands out because of its ability to combine spatial and temporal dimensions and present a wide range of identities and cosmopolitan challenges as part of a planetary network of humans. The analysis of *Cloud Atlas* is divided in two parts: the first examines the film's emphasis on economic coloniality as a historical continuum and its relationship with other kinds of colonial difference. The second focuses on cosmopolitan connections and the cosmopolitan potential of small actions that seemingly have a personal or local scope. In general, *Cloud Atlas* celebrates cosmopolitan impulses by drawing attention to a multiplicity of transnational connections between humans and to the transgression of a range of colonial borders (in the broader sense of the term) through time.

The term 'connectivity' often brings to mind the development of the network society. Early interest in network theory was related to the popularity of cybernetic theories of the 1940s and 50s and chaos and complexity theories of the 1980s and 90s (Shaviro 2003: 10) and the internet and cyberculture boom of the 1990s (Bukatman 1993; Castells 1996; Shaviro 2003: x). Yet, networks are not only related to cybernetics and they are not an exclusive feature of telecommunication-centered societies. Manuel Castells defines a network as "a set of interconnected nodes" (1996: 500) and Robert Holton notes that networks are "forms of

multicentered social organization distinct from two other major organizational types, namely markets and hierarchies” (2008: 4). Holton, in addition, distinguishes between interpersonal, institutional, and electronic (telecommunication) networks (2007: vii, 2008: 2-3). Although people, goods, ideas, traditions, and other cultural artifacts have always moved along transnational routes and have formed networks, technical innovations and telecommunications have enabled a proliferation of nodes and an intensification of the connections between them at the turn of the twenty-first century. Contemporary interpersonal and institutional networks often rely heavily on technical developments. In the 2010 prologue to *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), Manuel Castells points at two key elements in the development of the network society after 1996: (1) wireless connectivity and the spread of the internet and (2) the rise in urbanization and the growth of metropolitan regions (xxv-xxvi, xxxii-xxxv). These two elements enable “perpetual communication” (Castells 2010 [1996]: xxx) and faster and more intensive mobilities respectively, both key elements in the globalization of networks (Holton 2008: 6). At first sight, this kind of development may appear to suggest that the space of flows (virtual spaces, instant financial and informational flows, temporal compression) is reinforcing its dominance over the space of places (everyday interpersonal relations, customs, and work). Yet, in contrast to Castell’s early theorization of the network society—which emphasized the increasing separation between these two kinds of spaces (2010 [1996]: 459), more recent studies remark the entanglement between both spaces (Holton 2008: 27-8; Castells 2010: xxxvi, xxxix; Deleyto and Azcona 2010: 107). Science fiction offers a prime platform to explore these social developments. As could be expected, a substantial number of contemporary sf films construct virtual, magical, and cross-temporal connectivities on transnational scales and speculate on the ways in which places shape connectivities and vice versa.

Despite the technical advances that enable the growth of transnational networks, their development is not necessarily positive or even neutral. Transnational networks facilitate the expansion of large corporations and the consolidation of neoliberal systems. They allow finance and capital to operate freely and to be permanently in search of more ‘convenient’ and favorable legislations. Logistical networks lower the prices of products, but also raise CO2 emissions and dump the waste of the wealthiest societies in deprived places. Networks also contribute to spreading bigoted outlooks. Terrorists draw inspiration from international networks of influence and so do populisms and religious lobbies (Plummer 2015: 78-9). Conversely, Robert Holton sees networks as “major sites of intercultural engagement” and as mechanisms that allow people to resist and reshape some of the aforementioned processes (2008: 133). In other words, electronic, interpersonal, and institutional connections allow actors to organize into networks that enable them to advance cosmopolitan causes. Such actors range from migrants, refugees, “professionals exchanging knowledge,” and aid workers (Holton 2008: 3, 8) to any kind of person working for a transnational organization, journalists, activists, museums, and even social media users. A clear example of a cosmopolitan network is the collaboration between several media around the world in the investigations of the Panama and Paradise Papers. These journalistic investigations led to the global dissemination of information about the unethical (and in many cases illegal) use of offshore companies in tax havens. The origins of this network can be traced back to the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which received the documents and relied—through the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists—on the local expertise of media professionals from other nations to process and analyze millions of documents. The findings of the Panama Papers investigation had repercussions in all continents and reached people across the world in 25 languages (Schmidt and Myers, 2016). Although networks are not necessarily cosmopolitan, this example shows that they can be extremely useful for cosmopolitan causes. The network of journalists that worked on the Panama Papers exposed

the transnational systems that allow wealthy individuals to pay fewer taxes and avoid contributing to the funding of welfare programs.

Cosmopolitan connections and collaborations do not just depend on networks but also on spaces, objects, and situations that also enable connections at a smaller scale. Gavin Kendall, Zlatko Skrbiš and Ian Woodward have coined the term ‘cosmoscape’ to refer to “spaces, practices, objects and images which afford and construct networks within which cosmopolitan engagements become possible” (2009: 154). Although this definition appears to suggest that cosmoscapes always form networks, Kendall, Skrbiš, and Woodward clarify that such engagements happen in “particular sites and situations” which do not guarantee cosmopolitan practices (9). Following the same line of thought, these sites and situations may sometimes also nurture more modest cosmopolitan encounters and collaborations. That is, they may just enable a connection between two or three points or persons in space or time—an idea that sf films seem particularly keen on exploring. Among cosmoscapes, Skrbiš and Woodward present what Elijah Anderson (2011) calls ‘cosmopolitan canopies’—spaces where such connections are particularly likely to occur (2013: 56). Cosmopolitan canopies are urban spaces that stimulate intercultural relations based on civility and a certain degree of openness towards others (Anderson 2011: xiv). Again, canopies, as more or less self-contained spaces, do not only host nodes that are part of larger networks. They also favor more basic forms of cosmopolitan engagement. Drawing attention to the spatiality of films, Celestino Deleyto has recently extended the originally-urban dimension of cosmopolitan canopies, arguing that “films may [also] construct their own canopies by purely cinematic means” (2017: 98). The concept of cosmopolitan canopies then invites to pay attention to the ways in which film techniques and the spaces and situations that they build channel everyday cosmopolitan interactions which may or may not be part of larger networks.

Given the spatial dimension of cosmopolitan canopies and the relative newness of the instantaneity of the space of flows, it may seem that the study of networks and connections primarily concerns spaces. Yet, as several recent sf films suggest, networks also connect points across time. From a linear perspective of time, a series of actions across the past and the present shape the future. For instance, certain infrastructures and interpersonal relationships may allow networks to develop across time; ideas do not only develop as they travel in space but also in time; and human evolution and actions across deep (geological) time determine the kind of environment that future generations will have to deal with. All of these elements raise cosmopolitan concerns which seem to require future planning. Yet, as Willian Brown notes, different times (and their corresponding spaces) do not relate in a linear way. Drawing on chaos and butterfly-effect theories, he notes that a given event is “the result of so many simultaneous and intertwined phenomena that we cannot find a true, linear cause” (2013: 105). Thus, time is “interconnected and interdependent” but not causally linear (Brown 2013: 101). The non-linear character of events is even more evident in what Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call “reverse causalities” (1987: 431 in Shaviro 2003: 245). Reverse causalities draw attention to the fact that projected futures may shape the present itself. Similarly, the present may also modify the past; for instance, by manipulating historical accounts. While a linear perspective of time may suggest that cosmopolitan futures can be planned, reverse causalities show the limitations of such expectations. The analysis of *Cloud Atlas* in this chapter highlights that the film offers a non-linear view of the development of cosmopolitanisms across time.

Regarding spatial connections in sf cinema, most films focus on different ways of combating or challenging neoliberal or politically extreme uses of electronic or magical transnational networks. Some films such as *Jumper* (Doug Liman, 2008) and *Now You See Me* (Louis Leterrier, 2013) present ordinary people with the ability to be highly mobile and

flow across space by teleporting (annihilating time in the process). At the beginning of *Jumper*, David (Hayden Christensen) describes his daily routine from the top of a pyramid: coffee in Paris, surfing in the Maldives, a nap at the Kilimanjaro, flirting in Rio, attending the NBA final—all before lunch. David, as an ordinary young man from a disadvantaged family background, challenges the predominantly elite and corporate uses of the space of flows. *Jumper* and *Now You See Me* show the concern of corporations, governments, and even fellow citizens when ordinary people manage to move as quickly as finance, money, and information. Similarly, the mystic superheroes in *Dr. Strange* (Scott Derrickson, 2016) jump between New York, Kathmandu, Hong Kong, and London through magical teleportation holes as they fight another group of mystics who defend the interests of an abstract, ever-expanding, alien entity (neoliberalism) which plans to swallow Earth. *Sleep Dealer* exposes the dark side of connectivity and how it contributes to the advancement of neoliberal interests by reshaping migrant mobilities, tightening borders, virtualizing physical labor, and adapting Central and North American geopolitics to the interests of US corporations. These films emphasize the transnational dimension of the dystopian view of the space of flows that was already present in *The Matrix* trilogy.

Offering a slightly different perspective, *X-Men: Apocalypse* (Bryan Singer, 2016) shows the demi-God En Sabah Nur (Oscar Isaac) taking control of Cerebro, an electronic network that allows Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) to connect with all mutants. Yet, En Sabah Nur uses Cerebro's network technology to broadcast messages to all humans and mutants around the world and let them know that he will destroy the world because humans worship false Gods. *X-Men: Apocalypse* thus employs Cerebro as a metaphor for the fundamentalist misuse of religions to fuel terrorism through the internet. Several films about viruses and epidemics also establish transnational connections. *Outbreak* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1995), *Contagion* (Steven Soderbergh, 2011), *Resident Evil: Retribution* (Paul W.

S. Anderson, 2012), and *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013), to name a few, show viruses spreading across national boundaries. In these films, however, viruses often depend on the physical mobility of virus carriers rather than on virtual or magical connections. In general, epidemic films tend to present more scientifically-accurate depictions of networks, although such depictions often also serve as metaphors for other more superstitious concerns related to guilt, control, and borders (Echeverría 2017: 140-7).²²

Films that make connections across time often depend on the inclusion of foreign spaces in their stories in order to explore transnational connections and address cosmopolitan concerns. Otherwise, films often focus on local environments. Time-travel and time-loop films such as the *Back to the Future* franchise (Robert Zemeckis, 1985, 1989, 1990), *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993), *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004), *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006), *Timecrimes* (Nacho Vigalondo, 2007), *The Time Traveller's Wife* (Robert Schwentke, 2009), or *About Time* (Richard Curtis, 2013) typically focus on small communities or local events. Other well-known time-travel films such as *Le Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962), *12 Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995), *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991) ground their narratives in global contexts (the Third World War, a virus that has spread across the globe, a machine-dominated world) but fail to establish clear connections between local places across national boundaries.

More recently, a few films have begun to point at the transnational implications of the butterfly effect: an action somewhere may trigger a seemingly unrelated action or event at the other side of the world. In *Looper* (Rian Johnson, 2012), Joe is sent back in time from his happy life in China to be terminated by his past self, who lives in the US. The film revolves around the paradox that, in his attempt to modify the past to prevent being sent back in time

²² I would like to thank Julia Echeverría for kindly sharing her dissertation *The Viral Screen: Viruses, Zombies, and Infectious Diseases in Post-Millennial Films* with me.

in the future, old Joe forces Joe to shoot himself, thereby erasing the future in which both Joes (as the same future Joe) are happy in China. Yet, Joe's decision makes sense because by sacrificing himself he prevents the child who will control the most important crime organizations in the future (and sends old Joe to the past) from becoming that person. In *Project Almanac*, a group of high school teens in the US develop rudimentary time-travel technology through which they alter apparently minor details in their past and future. Yet, such minor modifications lead, among other things, to the crash of an airplane flying between London and Madrid. Similarly, *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Bryan Singer, 2014) features a group of mutants changing the course of history by time-travelling from near-future China to the US in 1973 and then by plane to a peace summit in Paris about the Vietnam war that same year. Their time trip to change the course of history successfully alters the future in China: at the end of the film, mutants are no longer threatened and they do not need to travel to the past anymore. Although these films establish spatiotemporal connections, I describe them as time-travel films here because that is the predominant dimension in their narratives. Below, I will offer some examples of films in which connections between times and places are more balanced.

A remarkable number of films also focus on how spaces change through time or establish often-unnoticed connections between distant times. In the two versions of *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960s; Simon Wells, 2002) and *Lucy* (Luc Besson, 2014), the protagonist develops the technology or acquires the ability to go forward or backwards in time across centuries, witnessing how spaces and their inhabitants radically transform with the passing of time. Such revisions of spatial configurations open paths to interrogate discourses that defend the *supposed* cultural and ethnic purity and homogeneity of a given place. In the case of *Lucy*, the film shows—within the scope of two minutes—radically different versions of Times Square: from the present, to its original construction, to a time

where Native Americans roamed un-urbanized plains, to an era when dinosaurs lived, and, finally, to pre-Homo sapiens times. Offering a similar perspective, the protagonist in *The Man from Earth* (who has travelled across centuries) notes that “you can’t go home again because it isn’t the same.” These films, along with other examples that I will mention later such as *Cloud Atlas* and *The Fountain* (Darren Aronofsky, 2006), show a different approach to the relationship between time and space from that of films from the immediately preceding decades. Vivian Sobchack notes that 1980s films in general and even time-travel films such as *Back to the Future* or *The Philadelphia Experiment* (Stewart Raffill, 1984) often “conflate past, present, and future,” offering homogenized and nostalgic portraits of time (1987 [1980]: 274-276). In contrast, the aforementioned twenty-first century films emphasize the heterogeneous configurations that a given space adopts through time.

While these films suggest that places do not have a static essence, other films use similar concepts to highlight the interconnectedness (but not the conflation) of time. The famous graphic match in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) bridges four million years of technological ‘evolution,’ presenting humans as part of an evolving continuum that persistently verges on the dystopian. *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011) goes a step further. As William Brown notes, it takes viewers “from the present moment right back to the origins of the universe, and from the present moment forward to the ‘end of time’” (2013: 101). While more modest in scope, the mockumentary *The Age of Stupid* (Franny Armstrong, 2009) also establishes links between past and present human actions and future scenarios of global environmental apocalypse by using real images of environmental damage from the past and the present in different continents. Conceptually, all of these examples emphasize the interdependence of different moments across time and the perpetual mutability of cultures and peoples.

Although spatiotemporal connections across different historical periods and countries have been present in the cinema from the outset—for instance, in *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916)—such links have proliferated in recent sf films. These films often stress that characters happen to live in a given place at one time, but they or a version of them may have also lived or could live in a different place at a different past or future time, thus raising questions about strict understandings of cultural and biological belonging. An early, anachronistic example of this trend is *Slaughterhouse Five* (George Roy Hill, 1972), which revolves around the protagonist's traumatic experience of World War II, by following his mind as it jumps between different episodes of his life during the War in Germany, back home in the US after the war, and on planet Tralfamadore (after supposedly being abducted by aliens). Later films such as *The Fountain*, *The Man from Earth*, and *Portable Life* (Fleur Baonman, 2011) also tend to focus on one or two actors moving across time and continents, sometimes as the same person and other times as different characters. While *The Fountain* and *Portable Life* feature a range of different locations, films do not always resort to introducing their actors in different spatiotemporal contexts on screen. That is, actors do not always move around in the plot, although they always do in the story. For instance, *The Man from Earth* takes place in a cottage where a mysterious man tells a group of friends about his long and highly mobile life. The film revolves around Professor John Oldman (David Lee Smith), a person who has lived 14,000 years and is an eternal migrant who has lived, among other places, in Mesopotamia, the UK, France, Belgium, the US, Summeria, Babilonia, Fenicia, and India. Even though he eventually turns out to be an alternative version of the Christian figure of Jesus, he praises Buddha's teachings. As a person who is regularly on the move and who appreciates different cultures, his figure questions monolithic notions of local, regional, or national identity.

In spite of the early example of *Intolerance*, which connects different humans across different times and places through their shared encounters with the colliding forces of hatred

and love, films in general and sf films in particular have rarely connected such a vast array of circumstances and personal experiences. One exception is *The Philosophers/After the Dark* (John Huddles, 2013), which shows how a group of students and their teacher imagine and shape a range of alternative worlds from a classroom at an international high school in Indonesia. As in the case of *The Man from Earth*, *The Philosophers* shows that films can draw connections using a single room as the only location in the real world of the film and still offer thought-provoking scenarios in which different temporal, spatial, and social configurations drive the narrative. This particular film offers a range of scenarios in which characters consider questions related to biopolitics and intersectionality (including race, gender, sexuality, occupation, skills, and disability), often through a cosmopolitan glass. Yet, as products of characters' imaginations, their projected futures ultimately remain grounded in the characters' present. A more remarkable example is *Cloud Atlas*, which weaves a web of stories influenced by a range of (neo)colonial and cosmopolitan influences across different continents and centuries. Moving between the Chatham Islands in the Pacific, San Francisco, the UK, Scotland, the fictional and futuristic city of Neo Seoul, a post-apocalyptic Hawaii, and an unknown planet, and between the years 1849, 1936, 1973, 2012, 2144, and 2346, the film addresses interrelated concerns about oppression, race, greed, sexuality, age, sentience, beliefs, and environmental exploitation. In this sense, *Cloud Atlas* virtually channels all the main cosmopolitan discourses of contemporary sf cinema. *Cloud Atlas* also stands out because of the way in which it explores the borders of editing and narrative conventions. Constantly juggling times and places, the film establishes strong connections between characters by pushing the limits of intensified continuity, casting, performance, and make-up. *Cloud Atlas* explicitly directs viewers' attention towards the connections between its six storylines and thus practices cosmopolitan intersectionality both in conceptual and formal terms.

Cloud Atlas also represents a so-far unmentioned phenomenon in contemporary sf cinema: several recent films articulate discourses on cosmopolitan connectivity by introducing reincarnation in their narratives. Apart from *Cloud Atlas*, recent sf reincarnation movies include stories about spatiotemporal mobility such as those in *The Fountain* and *Portable Life* and other more time-bound stories such as those in *I Origins* and *Jupiter Ascending*. In general, these films embrace cosmopolitanism by suggesting that, while human souls seemingly vanish when death arrives, they actually find a new body to start a new life. As a natural process (following the logic of these films), the reincarnation of these souls may happen anywhere. Reincarnation then challenges established borders and blurs the line between self and other. *I Origins* devotes most of its story to tracking the connection between the eyes of Sofi (Åstrid Bergès-Frisbey), a white and probably European woman who lives in New York, and Salomina (Kasish), an Indian girl. While the moment in which both characters connect is brief and appears at the end of the film, by establishing such a link, the film invites viewers to question their notion of national belonging. The film appears to wonder whether human beings would care more about others if we knew that we might become someone else in our next life. Although *Jupiter Ascending* may not come readily to mind as a reincarnation movie, it relies on the premise that its protagonist, Jupiter Jones (Mila Kunis), a Russian immigrant who works as a cleaner in Chicago, was a Queen of the Abrasax royal family in her past life. In this way, the film looks beyond nationality in its attempt to develop a cosmopolitan critique of belonging: it suggests that cultural essentialism also relies on the enforcement of borders that maintain class and income inequalities. Some films also interrogate the limits between self and other further by drawing links between humans and other beings. For instance, *The Fountain* suggests that Izzi (Rachel Weisz) becomes a tree after her death and *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat/Uncle Boonme Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010) features an ape-like being who was a human in a past life. *Uncle Boonme* also shows a princess (Wallapa Mongkolprasert)

having sex with a catfish, suggesting that they have some kind of past connection. In general, reincarnation films blur the line between self and other in an attempt to make viewers aware of the lives of other beings with whom they share the world.

5.2. “THERE IS A METHOD TO THIS TALE OF MADNESS”: PUTTING THE PIECES OF *CLOUD ATLAS* TOGETHER

Since *Cloud Atlas* has an interlocking structure that constantly jumps across time and space, this section provides some essential information about each of its six storylines and the techniques that the film uses to draw connections between them. *Cloud Atlas* is based on the novel of the same title written by David Mitchell and published in 2004. Since the novel has attracted substantial scholarly attention and its form is quite different from the film's, this section also offers a brief comparison of both versions of the story. Such comparison helps me to relate my argument to some of the differences between both versions and to explain how my analysis of the film contributes to scholarly debates on the film and the novel.

In order to analyze the connections between the six storylines, this chapter (like the film) will jump from one storyline to another. To avoid diverting my main argument constantly to explain details from each of the stories, I offer here a summary of the six storylines and introduce the main characters. Although the film jumps across times constantly, for purposes of clarity, I summarize each of the storylines chronologically. The first story begins in the Chatham Islands in Polynesia in 1849, where Adam Ewing (Jim Sturgess) signs a contract through which he buys some slaves. Most of the story takes place on a ship that takes him back home to San Francisco, where he is poisoned by Dr. Goose (Tom Hanks) and saved by the stowaway Autua (David Gyasi). The next story takes viewers to Scotland in 1936, where Robert Frobisher (Ben Wishaw) works as an amanuensis for the famous composer Vivian Ayr (Jim Broadbent) while he corresponds with his lover Rufus

Sixsmith (James D'Arcy), who is a student in Cambridge. Frobisher's story revolves around this long-distance relationship and his constant clashes with Ayrs, some because of the latter's homophobia. The film then jumps to 1970s San Francisco, where inquisitive journalist Luisa Rey (Halle Berry) unveils, with the help of an older Rufus Sixmixon, the scientist Isaac Sachs (Tom Hanks), and security guard Joe Napier (Keith David), the conspiracy of an oil company to make a nuclear reactor fail. In the year 2012, viewers meet Timothy Cavendish (Jim Broadbent), a vanity editor, who teams up with other seniors to escape the elderly home where his brother has locked him up in Scotland. Forward into 2144, *Cloud Atlas* sketches a cyberpunk Neo Seoul in which identical-looking fabricants (clones) work at the service of pureblood consumers (humans) under the rule of a corpocracy. The story focuses on the life of 'fabricant' Sonmi-451 (Donna Bae) who works as a waitress in the fast-food chain Papa Song and later becomes a revolutionary leader with the help of Hae Jo Chang (Jim Sturgess), the Rebellion's First Science Officer. The last story transports viewers to Big Isle (Hawaii)²³ in the year 2346, where some humans (Valleymen) live in technology-free communities, others (the Kona) have become cannibalistic soldiers, and other humans (Prescients) are a technologically advanced civilization who can no longer survive in their territory and need the help of the Valleymen to search for a new place to call home. This post-apocalyptic story focuses on the collaboration between Valleyman Zachry (Tom Hanks) and Prescient Meronym (Halle Berry). The only major change to the locations and times with respect to the novel is that Robert Frobisher works as an amanuensis in a Scottish castle instead of a Belgian one, probably because of shooting and/or budget limitations.

²³ The film does not specify the location of the Big Isle with respect to contemporary geography. According to Gabriel Estrada, *Big Isle is Hawaii* (2014: 4). Estrada probably infers this from the fact that the last story is set in 'Ha-Why' in the novel. In addition, the space observation center at the top of a mountain in Big Isle recalls similar observatories in contemporary Hawaii. I will refer to Estrada's analysis of the presence of this observation center in the film later.

Although the film approaches the same themes and includes more or less the same characters as the novel, their narratives develop in radically different ways. The novel first presents the six stories in chronological order, from 1849/1850 to a post-apocalyptic Ha-Why in the future. After the chapter set in future Hawaii (“Sloosha’s Crossin’ an’ Ev’rythin’ After”), the novel returns to the other stories in reverse chronological order, ending in 1850. The novel therefore develops a Russian-doll structure (Selisker 2014: 454; Parker 2015: 131; Shaw 2017: 58) that forms a palimpsest in which all the stories form “a bundle of several different textual strands held together by porous seams” (Dix 2010: 119). The film, in contrast, constantly juggles times and links personal experiences through editing, sound, and casting, multiplying the novel’s “porous seams.” The film alters the structure of the novel from the very beginning, as it opens with a series of short scenes from each of the stories in non-chronological order: from the 23rd century to 1849, 1973, 2012, 1936, and finally 2144. These opening scenes are then followed by two or three longer scenes per storyline (this time in chronological order) in which the film establishes the contexts for each of the times more clearly. In addition, another significant change in the film is that Zachry’s yarn frames the whole film. The only two sequences in which he appears as a narrator in another planet open and close the film. In the novel, in contrast, Zachry’s yarn functions as an anchoring point in the middle of the narrative, allowing it to reverse its so-far linear perspective of time. In general, the film version of *Cloud Atlas* presents a much more fragmented form, temporality, and spatiality.

The film retains or develops some of the strategies that the novel employs to interlink the different storylines. It connects characters through their birthmarks, embeds bits of media from previous stories in the stories that follow them, and includes similar or identical objects that establish casual links between characters. Both in the film and the novel, one character from each of the storylines (Adam Ewing, Robert Frobisher, Luisa Rey, Tim Cavendish,

Sonmi-451, and Meronym) has a birthmark in the shape of a comet, suggesting that the same soul reincarnates itself into these different characters. The fact that the birthmark has the shape of a comet situates human life in a cosmic context wider than localities, nations, and continents and appears to embrace the idea of boundless mobility. By connecting the different traits of these characters under the umbrella of a single soul, both the novel and the film present disparate kinds of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, age, biological origin, beliefs, religion, profession, skills, and personality as part of a continuum. The different kinds of media that *Cloud Atlas* features (a journal, letters, a novel, a film, a recorded interrogation, a yarn) also establish a chain of connections, influences, and inspiration across time and space. While the novel develops the narrative through different narrative forms (an actual journal, epistolary chapters, third person narration, first person narration, and an interview), the film introduces the different media as objects rather than as means of narration. Instead, the film signals the different styles of the stories through the different film sub-genres in which each of the stories participate (period drama, thriller, comedy, dystopian sf, post-apocalyptic sf/fantasy). As in the novel, the film embeds media from the past in future times. Frobisher reads Ewing's journal; Frobisher's music permeates—in multiple forms—all of the stories; Rey reads the correspondence between Frobisher and Sixsmith; Cavendish edits a novel based on Rey's investigation; the rebellion that Cavendish inspires at the elderly home becomes a reference film for fabricants; Sonmi becomes a Goddess in 2346 Hawaii, and her ideas circulate both in video form and in a book made of fabric onto which words are sewn. The film also connects stories in more 'banal' ways, mostly through objects. For instance, Dr Goose steals a pair of blue buttons from Adam Ewing in 1849 which reappear in Zachry's hands in 2346. Similarly, Ewing burns a contract on a fireplace in 1849 and old Zachry tells his story by a fire in one of the last scenes in the film. In this way, the film recycles and expands some of the novel's strategies to bring a wide range of experiences, styles, and tones together.

Most scholarship on *Cloud Atlas* has focused on the novel, the differences between it and the film, or on a specific story or set of stories in the novel or the film. Analyses of any of the two media often highlight the interconnection between the six storylines but often fail to investigate the relationship between the different kinds of links that appear, the way they operate, and the discourses that they develop. For instance, Jo Alyson Parker notes that “doors and bridges often *serve* as links” (2015:127) and yet she does not consider what the film achieves by adding such connections to the stories. Instead, Parker underlines the disparate forms of the novel and the film, arguing that the fact that Zachry’s yarn frames the rest of the film radically changes the open-endedness of the novel (123, 132-3)—an argument that I revise later on. Other scholars tend to concentrate on a limited set of stories. In one of the few articles that focus on the film, Gabriel Estrada analyzes the representation of the indigenous Nations of the Moriori and Māori in the Polynesian Chatam Islands in 1849 and (the supposedly) Kanaka Maoli in 2346 Hawaii. Drawing on evidence from these two storylines, Estrada surprisingly argues that *Cloud Atlas* develops a discourse based on “heterosexist settler colonialism” (2014: 1). Yet, such an argument loses weight when the connections between the different stories are considered, as I will show later. Scott Selisker also focuses on a specific storyline: he analyzes the hermetic spaces of the Nea So Copros story in the novel, comparing the Papa Song restaurant, its workers’ lodgings, and the operation of the system in general to a cult (2014: 454-6). In this case, Selisker focuses on just one story in order to draw connections to other themes in David Mitchell’s work. From a different perspective, Kristian Shaw applies the cosmopolitan perspective that *Cloud Atlas* seems to cry for. He emphasizes that the novel revolves around “an interconnected global multitude that escapes the cyclical entropy of history” (2017: 57). Yet, in spite of his emphasis on interconnection and the concept of multitude throughout the chapter that he devotes to *Cloud Atlas*, Shaw does not pay much attention to the 2349, 1936, and 1973 stories. While scholars tend to privilege certain storylines for a variety of legitimate reasons,

Cloud Atlas calls for analyses that treat the film or the novel as the narrative networks that they are. The analysis of the film in this chapter attempts to mirror the relatively equal treatment all the storylines are given in it.

An exception in the aforementioned scholarly context is Donna Peberdy's article on performance and the multi-protagonist cast of the film (2014). Focusing on one of the most innovative aspects of the film (the casting of the same actors as different characters in all or most of the stories), Peberdy sheds light on the network of human relations across time and space that the film builds. Peberdy notes:

[T]he multi-role performances not only see the actors perform across time, space and genre but also, with the help of makeup and prosthetics, across gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. For example, Berry plays a native African woman, a Caucasian Jewish woman, an Indian woman and an aged Korean man; Sturgess, Weaving, D'Arcy, Grant and Broadbent also play Asian characters in the Neo Seoul storyline; Whishaw and Weaving appear as women in the present-day story; and Bae plays Caucasian and Mexican women in two of the storylines. (2014: 169)

Apart from the categories that Peberdy mentions, actors also transcend class and power dynamics and experience shifts in the relevance of their characters from one story to the next. For instance, Keith David—who plays secondary and minor roles in the film—goes from being a servant in 1849, to a security guard in 1973, the leader of a resistance group in 2144, and the leader of the Prescients in 2346. In some cases viewers have perceived some of these performances as instances of whitewashing (e.g. Sturgess playing a Korean character) (Peberdy 2014: 170). Yet, to see whitewashing in a film that so explicitly foregrounds characters' rebirth across borders is to miss the point, specially bearing in mind actors such as Donna Bae, who plays a Latino character in the 1973 and an Anglo-American-looking woman in 1849. As Peberdy emphasizes, by relying on multi-role performances, the film challenges boundaries (177). The cosmopolitan discourse of the film does not only rely on the fact that actors play multiple roles. If that were so, a single actor may have been enough

for the movie to get its message across. The film shows souls moving and evolving across time, but also establishes connections between the protagonists' souls and other characters who are generally from different times. Thus, *Cloud Atlas*' cosmopolitan discourse depends not only on performances but on its multi-protagonist structure.

The theory of the multi-protagonist film genre that María del Mar Azcona has developed (2010) serves to define many of the stylistic resources that *Cloud Atlas* employs. Azcona identifies a set of visual conventions that also helps me to explain how *Cloud Atlas* weaves a cosmopolitan network between characters. As she notes, multi-protagonist films often gather “a broad spectrum of characters [with similar narrative weight] who get involved in different storylines” (2010: 37). Films with several protagonists tend to synchronize stories, establish parallels, and find unexpected connections between them (Azcona 2010: 37). For these purposes, they draw connections through camera movement and often employ graphic matches, matches on action, montage sequences, or a recognizable soundtrack that link the experiences of different characters (Azcona 2010: 39-44). Global thrillers like *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) also rely on the juxtaposition of similar activities (Azcona 2010: 130-1). As the typology of these linking techniques suggests, multi-protagonist films establish connections governed by randomness and chance (Azcona 2010: 127, 143). In addition, these films are particularly useful vehicles to explore questions related to globalization: through their form and subject-matter, they both show and embody the difficulty of making sense of global puzzles (Azcona 2010: 130).

Cloud Atlas exploits all these conventions of the multi-protagonist film and takes them a step further than similar transnational ensembles. While many of its visual and aural strategies coincide with those employed in *Syriana*, *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), and similar films, *Cloud Atlas* multiplies its reliance on the aforementioned techniques and experiments with additional ways of drawing connections. In this sense, *Cloud Atlas* is

not only a film about characters that cross spatiotemporal boundaries but also a film that crosses and reshapes several cinematic borders. *Cloud Atlas* matches storylines by cutting between two parts played by the same actor in two different times or between the similar facial expressions of two different characters/actors, by juxtaposing similar actions, objects, and situations, or by editing together two shots that use the same kind of framing (e.g. angle) in two different periods. The movement of the camera sometimes continues a movement initiated by a character in a different storyline. Further contributing to the film's quest for spatiotemporal fragmentation, graphic matches may occur several minutes after the first shot appears. For instance, the almost visually-identical train rides of Frobisher and Cavendish to Scotland appear forty minutes away from each other (figures 77 and 78).



Figures 77 and 78: Two shots separated by forty minutes of screen time form a graphic match that stretches editing conventions and invites viewers to look for connections in the film's spatiotemporal cocktail.

The film also creates similar effects through the *mise-en-scène*. As Lana Wachowsky points out in the special features of the *Cloud Atlas* Blu-Ray, the chateau where Vyvian Ayrs lives in Scotland reappears later on as a home for the elderly. Similarly, the layout of the Papa Song restaurant and the London roof bar in the 2012 story are the same. Zachry's left-shoulder tattoo also replicates the pattern of Vivian Ayrs' nightdress. By using different film genres for each of the periods, the film also transcends generic boundaries each time it establishes a visual link between two or more stories. In addition, *Cloud Atlas* regularly includes montage sequences in which a character from a given time speaks as the film crosscuts between her/his time and other periods. Sometimes the reaction of a character appears after a sound from a different time that could have triggered that reaction (but in

reality does not). Characters also utter words that are edited together with related actions from other times and that appear to inspire and help other characters or simply describe their experiences. Just as characters reincarnate themselves into other characters, so does “The Cloud Atlas Sextet” composed by Robert Frobisher mutate into different diegetic and non-diegetic versions (Peberdy 2014: 177). In one instance, it becomes a slightly different tune that fabricants sing as the film crosscuts between their Xultation ceremony and Frobisher composing the original song. These examples show that the film makes the most out of Mitchell’s original story by exploiting the possibilities that cinematic language offers. Through this array of strategies, *Cloud Atlas* constantly encourages viewers to look for additional ways in which the different pieces of its spatiotemporal puzzle may fit together. In this sense, the film encourages viewers to put into practice the cosmopolitan habit of paying attention to what unites rather than what divides humans.

5.3. THE MULTIPLE ITERATIONS OF COLONIALITY IN *CLOUD ATLAS*

In the film’s five-minute-long trailer, Isaac Sachs (Tom Hanks) suggests that *Cloud Atlas* revolves around forces such as fear, belief, and love, which “begin long before we are born and continue after we perish.” While these phenomena are at the center of all the narrative strands, Sachs does not mention two other interrelated forces that also mutate across time and pervade all the stories in the film: greed and coloniality. Before addressing any racial and religious issues related to colonialism in the first story, *Cloud Atlas* features the signing of a contract between two men, which establishes the purchase of some slaves. Thus, the film emphasizes the economic dimension of coloniality from the very beginning. Indeed, it seems no coincidence that the first story in *Cloud Atlas* is set in 1849, a time to which Robert Holton refers as “High Empire” (2008: 133). Yet, the film channels its most obvious critique of greed through the neoliberal version of coloniality in 2144, when Neo Seoul has become a

city with an ever-rising skyline. Extreme long shots convey a sense of overdevelopment, as multiple objects and details flood shots of industrial facilities and of buildings mounting on each other. Sonmi's description of fabricants' "twenty-four-hour cycle" suggests that she lives in a system that operates non-stop. It is also a system that economizes on the material resources that its labor force uses or consumes to the maximum extent. Workers live in corporate facilities, they shower by walking in and out of a room in a queue, and sleep on rows of individual pods piled on walls, saving space. When they wake up, the doors of these cabins pop out automatically and slide the bodies of the fabricants out (figure 79). In this way, fabricants appear to emerge from an oven, as if they were manufactured bread rolls. Ironically, the film later reveals that the clones are a cheap source of food for themselves. The "soap" that they eat is made from the bodies of older fabricants. Although corporate actors barely appear in the story, these details suggest that neoliberalism has been carefully tweaked to optimize corporate profits.



Figure 79: Manufactured lives: fabricants pop out of their beds as if they were bread rolls coming out of an oven.

Previous stories also reflect different iterations of the relentless force of greed. Vyvyan Ayrs seeks to steal and profit from the work of his amanuensis, Robert Frobisher. The 1970s thriller revolves around Big Oil's attempts to trigger a major failure in a nuclear plant in order to manipulate public opinion and eliminate competitors in energy markets. In 2012, Timothy Cavendish's brother (Hugh Grant) gleefully notes that Aurora House is

“incredibly lucrative.” Finally, Meronym says that the “hunger for more” of previous civilizations caused their fall. Indeed, all of the stories revolve around humans’ hunger for money and power.

All the stories couple economic coloniality, greed, and exploitation with other kinds of colonial and imperial difference, including categories such as race, species-belonging, religion, gender, sexuality, age, and the environment. As I will show later, the film relies on different kinds of coloniality to articulate its defense of cosmopolitan ideals. Given its emphasis on colonial divisions, *Cloud Atlas* grounds its cosmopolitan discourse in a similar way to the approaches to cosmopolitanism that Walter D. Mignolo, David Harvey, and Gurminder Bhambra have proposed. They argue that any attempt to explore cosmopolitan possibilities should account for the influence and impact of (neo)colonial designs through time (Mignolo 2000: 723; Harvey 2009: 283; Bhambra 2011: 320). Following the observations of these scholars and *Cloud Atlas*’ own discourse, this section maps the range of colonial relations that the film presents.

In the two storylines that foreground coloniality most obviously (1849 and 2144), characters played by Hugo Weaving note: “there is a natural order to this world,” hinting at the centrality of pseudo-scientific racial, national, and genetic hierarchies within colonial logic. In the first case, the scene in which Adam Ewing formalizes a contract with Reverend Horrox (Hugh Grant) is followed by a scene in which they discuss slavery, another scene in which native slaves are working in a plantation, and finally, another one in which a man whips Autua, a Moriori man, savagely. The role of fabricants within the economic system of the 22nd century is compounded by the construction of a biological order. Fabricants call humans ‘purebloods,’ a name that signposts the inferior status of the clones. In addition, love and sex between purebloods and fabricants is forbidden, replicating earlier miscegenation laws. Both in 1849 and 2144, predominant religions (Christianity and the Consumer

Catechisms respectively) become another means of supporting pseudo-scientific differentiations between humans. In-between, the film includes other references to racial and national difference, although it does not relate them clearly to economic coloniality. In 1936, Vyvyan Ayrs lets Robert Frobisher know that Jocasta (Hale Berry) and a German composer had feelings towards each other but their relationship was doomed because of the sociopolitical environment in Germany. In the 1970s storyline, a Latina woman knocks a racist hired assassin down and tells him: “don’t call me a fucking wetback.” The ghost Old Georgie (Hugo Weaving) misleadingly warns Zachry about Meronym’s intentions, saying: “She ain’t your tribe, ain’t your color.” In this manner, *Cloud Atlas* connects all of its storylines thematically by showcasing different kinds of economic, racial, national, religious, and genetic colonialities and drawing parallels between them.

The list of colonial connections does not stop there. Although coloniality may not appear to be related to sexual, gender, age, and species hierarchies at first sight, Walter D. Mignolo notes that the colonial matrix of power (a term coined by Aníbal Quijano) consists of four interrelated domains: “control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity” (2011b: 8). To this matrix, Mignolo also adds nature. Control over these domains was originally exercised through theological differences and later on through racial and gender/sexual distinctions as well (Mignolo 2011b: 8-10). Yet, these differences do not replace each other, but rather pile up and produce evolving versions of the logic of coloniality. In like manner, *Cloud Atlas* shows how colonial differences can adopt a wide range of configurations. In the first story, Madame Horrox (Susan Sarandon) points at the absence of women in the theological/racial designs that several men discuss during dinner. Characters from the 1970s story also draw attention (both in hopeful and derogatory terms) to the historical exclusion of women from higher education institutions and to chauvinist remarks that value women’s looks over their professionalism. The film also

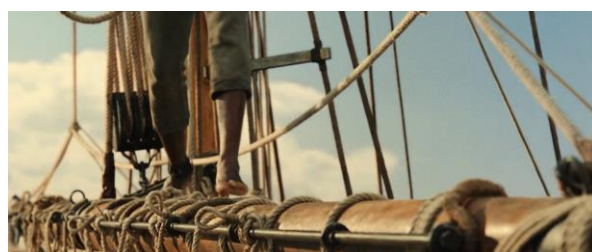
suggests that the arrow of time does not necessarily bring about improvements for women: The Neo Seoul story foregrounds the misogyny of its futuristic society. Apart from the fact that the whole of the exploited workforce is female (something that is also obvious in the 1970s maquila-style factory), purebloods touch fabricants' bodies when they please and a male customer uses a bottle of mustard to simulate that he is ejaculating on a fabricant's back as she bends over to pick up some trays. In addition, Seer Rhee (Hugh Grant), the restaurant's manager, sexually abuses Yoona-939 (Xun Zhou) and terminates her life in a later scene by pressing a button when she attempts to run away from the restaurant. The Chatham Islands, San Francisco, and Neo Seoul storylines thus show that gender discrimination, greed, genetic and racial hierarchies are part of the same colonial matrix.

Although in a less obvious manner, *Cloud Atlas* also establishes connections between coloniality and sexuality, age, and nature. Ayr's' condescending attitude towards Robert Frobisher is not just a matter of age and expertise, but sexuality. The composer tells Robert that, before his arrival, an acquaintance wrote about the latter in the following terms: "he is a prostitute whose liaison with perverts and sodomites were commonplace [...]. Lock up the silverware." Apart from being demeaning, Ayr's' words point at the practice of baseless criminalization of homosexual people. After these comments, Ayr's goes on to threaten Robert with ruining his career, showing a direct relationship between notions of value and success and sexual hierarchies. By making homophobia the main source of oppression in one of its storylines, *Cloud Atlas* charts a connection between heteronormativity and the wider network of colonial difference—a relationship that several writers and scholars have noted (Anzaldúa 2012 [1987]: 41; Mignolo 2011b: 18; Schoonover and Galt 2016: 37, 240-1). In more general terms, the 2012 storyline also suggests that the system profits from the mistreatment of the elderly and the privation of some of their rights. Finally, the film shows that a system geared towards even-increasing economic accumulation does not hesitate to

encroach on and abuse nature, disregarding that a whole community will be exposed to nuclear disaster in 1973 and letting sea levels rise to the pace of economic profit in 2144. In the end, *Cloud Atlas* shows, as Mignolo would argue, that the colonial matrix of power “operates in a series of interconnected heterogeneous historico-structural nodes crossed by colonial and imperial differences and by the underlying logic that secures those connections: the logic of coloniality” (2011b: 17). The ability of the film to map several strands and nodes of the logic of coloniality across time is one of the key features that make it unique. *Cloud Atlas* manages to pull together different instances of oppression and to regularly connect most of them to other key features of the colonial matrix of power such as authority and economic control.

Apart from connecting all the storylines thematically through different kinds of colonial hierarchies, *Cloud Atlas* strengthens its colonial network by establishing visual links between different pairs of storylines, often in the form of matches on action and conceptual matches. Through the term ‘conceptual match,’ I refer to shots that show characters immersed in two similar situations without relying on the explicit replication of an image. The film also draws heavily on conceptual matches that connect sound (the words that a character utters) with a related image or situation in another storyline. Regarding matches on action, one of the most obvious is a delayed match between Hae Jo Chang walking on a footbridge on the Neo Seoul skyline and Autua walking on the ship mast (figures 80 and 81). In both cases, characters fall down (by tripping and jumping respectively). In addition, they are both shot at by other people who have a higher position in the colonial hierarchy. *Cloud Atlas* establishes another clear parallel through a conceptual match in which Hae Jo and Sonmi, and later Luisa Rey, find themselves under a mass of water (figures 82 and 83). In the first case, Hae Jo and Sonmi take refuge below a trapdoor after making an underwater tunnel explode in order to get rid of the police forces that chase them. In the second case, a hired

assassin pushes Rey off a bridge with his car, making Rey's car sink into the water. In both cases, water fills the whole frame and links characters who are targeted by corporate actors. Although these matches are not edited directly together (as graphic matches and matches on action are), the scenes in which they appear do indeed follow one another and it is therefore easy for viewers to appreciate the similarity of both situations. Several other conceptual matches also establish connections between 1973 and 2012 and between 2012 and 2144 through scenes involving cars and characters who are locked respectively. By multiplying connections related to oppression and persecution through editing and several kinds of visual matches, *Cloud Atlas* reinforces its presentation of coloniality as a continuum. Although the film revolves, as I will show later, around characters' efforts to challenge coloniality, the presence of it in all of the stories suggests that ethical progress is not linear. Cosmopolitanism therefore does not always gain ground along with the passing of time in the film.



Figures 80 and 81: A match on action links characters from different centuries running away from people who hold a higher position in the colonial matrix of power.



Figures 82 and 83: Conceptual matches of characters submerged under water act as a metaphor for the neocolonial forces that oppress them.

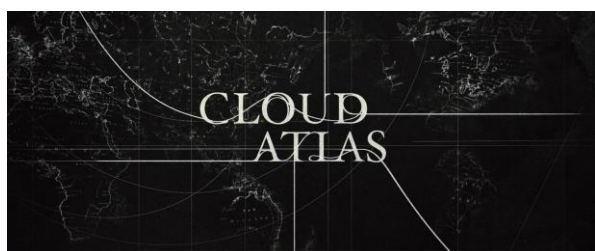
5.4. CONNECTING HUMANS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

5.4.1. Cosmopolitan Reincarnations and Shared Experiences

Although *Cloud Atlas* frames coloniality in critical terms and thus channels cosmopolitan discourses through its depiction of it, coloniality also serves as a backdrop against which to build cosmopolitan alternatives. The film does this in two main ways: (1) by questioning and reversing the aforementioned colonial discourses (mostly through personal connections between characters and storylines) and (2) by engaging characters in individual and collaborative struggles against coloniality. Regarding the first strategy, *Cloud Atlas* draws on the main theme of reincarnation as cosmopolitan metaphor, the use of doors as a metaphorical reference to transmigration, and a range of editing combinations that draw attention to the experiences and feelings that characters share. In all of these cases, the film questions colonial discourses by pointing at characters' shared humanity. The emphasis of the film on this aspect is not anecdotal or trivial. Several scholars see the notion of common humanity as one as central to cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum 2002 [1996]: xii , 7; Appiah 2006: 111, 134-5; Fine 2007: xvii). These theorists do not claim that all humans are or should be identical or have the same habits and beliefs. Rather, they point out that all people should be respected and valued as human beings that share similar feelings, emotions, and abilities and deserve the same basic rights. Despite the simplicity of this argument, this is an idea that many people do not share or care about, especially in the current climate of nostalgia for national identities and calls for a staunch defense of national borders.

Cloud Atlas' concept of intersectional, transnational, and cross-temporal reincarnation exposes the fabricated nature of the hierarchical differences that the logic of coloniality breeds. Where coloniality draws borders, reincarnation builds cosmopolitan bridges. The title of the film itself points at the relationship between these two dimensions. The word 'cloud'

hints at the shape-shifting, fluid character of reincarnated identities. ‘Atlas’ alludes both to the planetary dimension of the story and, through its cartographic undertones, to the link between the drawing of the first maps of the entire world and the emergence of coloniality (Mignolo 2011: 185-7; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 30-35). As the intertitle at the beginning of the film suggests, clouds (travelling souls) redraw the lines that the maps of the colonial world have traced (figures 84 and 85). Of course, reincarnation is not necessarily cosmopolitan per se. Indeed, some cultures have used the concept of reincarnation to justify social inequalities and maintain the state of things as they are and others have limited its scope to the family or to privileged groups such as royalty, saints, or heroes (Bernabé and Mendoza 2011: 556, 562-4). Yet, *Cloud Atlas*’ ability to bring intersectionality into most of the aforementioned references to reincarnation clearly offers a cosmopolitan view of transmigration. In this sense, the film presents a cosmopolitan image of reincarnation that is close to the idea of universal solidarity at the center of the Pythagorean concept of reincarnation or to Buddhist and Jain beliefs, which see reincarnation as a phenomenon that transcends castes and social divides (Bernabé and Mendoza 558, 568-9).



Figures 84 and 85: An animated intertitle suggests that clouds (migrating souls) can redraw the (colonial) map of the world.

Although I have already mentioned that the main ways in which *Cloud Atlas* points at its reincarnation theme are the appearance of the birthmarks in a group of characters and the multi-role, intersectional performances of most of its cast, the film employs additional strategies to make the transmigration theme more obvious. *Cloud Atlas* regularly draws explicit visual connections between two characters played by the same actors through editing

choices: the same actor appears in two scenes (sometimes shots) from different times edited together or as part of a montage including other storylines. While Frobisher, Sachs, Cavendish, and Sonmi say lines that directly refer to reincarnation, Sonmi pronounces the words with the most obvious cosmopolitan implications. She says: “from womb to tomb we are bound to others, past and present.” Apart from the explicit cosmopolitanism of Sonmi’s reference to “others,” her line appears three times through different media, bringing her message to the foreground through its repetition (53 minutes into the film, then at 110, and at 153). Finally, the end credits further reinforce the intersectional cosmopolitanism of the film by showing the names of each of the actors that play different roles along with images of each of the characters that they play framed in an oval against a black background. In this way, the end credits compress and underline the transnational and cross-temporal connections that develop throughout the film. Despite *Cloud Atlas*’ multiple references to reincarnation, its cosmopolitanism is not restricted to this concept. As I will explain later, the film provides examples of characters’ shared humanity by establishing connections between different actors too.

Cloud Atlas also uses doors as a conceptual and visual metaphor of reincarnation and cosmopolitan possibilities. For instance, when Cavendish comes across the house where his former girlfriend Ursula (Susan Sarandon) lives, he utters the word ‘door.’ The film then instantly cuts to a different scene in which Zachry (a reincarnation of Cavendish [both have birthmarks]), knocks on the door of a house where a character played Susan Sarandon is healing a girl. By connecting these two scenes through a door, the film reinforces the idea that the same soul has been present in these two moments despite their temporal, geographical, and cultural remoteness. The most obvious example of the connection between doors and reincarnation appears at the end of the film when Sonmi explains: “I believe death is a door. When it closes, another one opens.” Sonmi (Bae) pronounces these words just after

Hae Jo Chang (Sturgess), the person she loves, is killed. Immediately after she pronounces these words, the film introduces a scene in which Ewing (Sturgess) opens a door and embraces his wife Tilda (Bae) (figure 86). This metaphorical use of doors allows Sonmi to imagine an alternative iteration of her life in which she does not lose Jim Sturgess. The last scene in *I Origins* also relies on the metaphorical potential of doors. After being certain that part of Sofi's consciousness has transmigrated to Salomina's body, Ian (Michael Pitt) goes down the stairs of a hotel holding Salomina in his arms and goes out through a gate. As he pushes the gates open, an almost-blinding source of light beaming in the middle of the frame suggests that both characters are walking into a new world (figure 87): a world in which people may change their ways of seeing and relating to other nations, cultures, and races after knowing that they can become anyone else, anywhere else in the world. *I Origins*, like *Cloud Atlas*, draws on doors both to point at the interconnectedness of human lives and to hint at the possibility of cosmopolitan change.



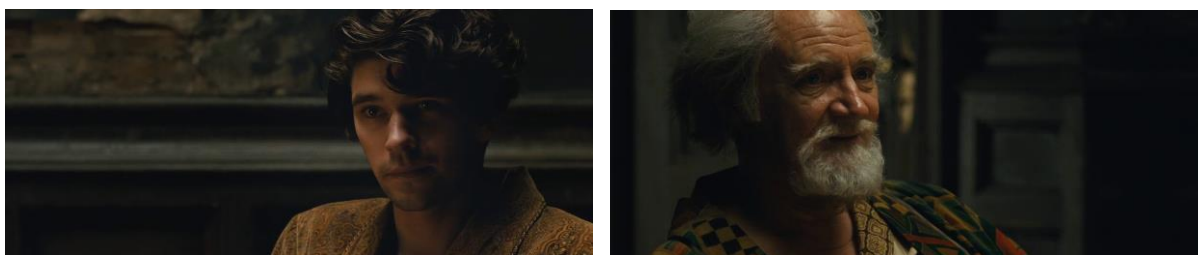
Figures 86 and 87: *Cloud Atlas* (left) and *I Origins* (right) use doors as a symbol of the cosmopolitan potential of reincarnation.

Some of the strategies that *Cloud Atlas* uses to present a cosmopolitan view of reincarnation have also been recently deployed in other media as ways of channeling cosmopolitan discourses. The web version of *Human* (Yann Arthus-Bertrand, 2015), a documentary that offers a cosmopolitan look at human emotions across 60 countries and 63 languages, is a clear example of this. In a similar way to *Cloud Atlas*' ending, Arthus-Bertrand's documentary begins with a montage of human faces of different genders, ages, races, religions, and sexualities against a black background. Despite the variety of facial

features and emotions that the opening moments show, they convey a sense of these people's shared humanity through the bodies that stand out against the black background and their shared ability to show their feelings through their facial expressions. Similarly, *I Origins* includes a montage of extreme close-ups of different kinds of eyes at the very beginning, bringing all the humans to whom those eyes belong together through the same kind of visual concept and frame composition. Using a similar temporal perspective to that of *Cloud Atlas*, "The DNA Journey," a 2017 advertising campaign by the travel search engine Momondo points at the multiple ethnic influences that most people have by looking at the genetic information that their ancestry has passed onto them. In a set of reality-show style videos, a variety of individuals from different countries give a sample of their saliva to find out about the ethnic groups that conform their DNA mix over the last 500 to 2000 years. The videos then show that participants typically share genetic information with rival ethnic groups and nationalities that they sometimes despise. In addition, the campaign shows that, on average, people tend to belong to between four and six ethnic groupings. In this way, the ad emphasizes the multiple origins that people have, especially when considering the evolution of their DNA across time. While this campaign is not about reincarnation, it adopts a similar temporal perspective to that of *Cloud Atlas* to highlight the constructed nature of the social borders that often separate human beings. The shared visual and temporal strategies that *Cloud Atlas*, *I Origins*, *Human*, and "The DNA Journey" share hint at the emergence of common, cross-genre strategies that allow films to establish cosmopolitan connections between humans.

Cloud Atlas also offers a cosmopolitan vision of humanity by presenting characters as part of a global community of humans that go through similar experiences and share similar emotions. Although many of the characters' shared experiences may appear to be primarily about the impact of coloniality in their lives, the visual and conceptual techniques that the

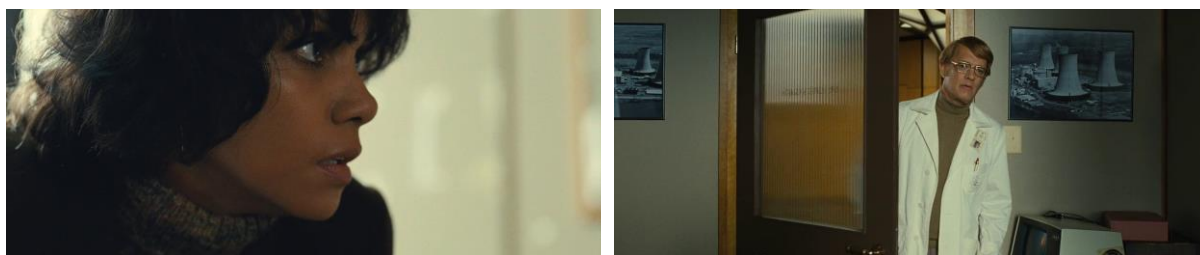
film employs actually emphasize the feelings or experiences that characters share across time. Indeed, in several cases, characters' common reactions or emotions are not related to coloniality. One of the most obvious ways in which the film does this is by including montages that combine shots from different storylines while a single character from one of those stories talks about his/her experiences or makes generalizations about life. In many cases, what the chosen character says applies to or is illustrated by the other stories that appear in the montage. In addition, a melody (typically, "The Cloud Atlas Sextet") tends to accompany such pseudo-narrations. Sometimes, there is no character acting as a kind of narrator and only the Sextet brings together the similar experiences that characters have. A clear example of this strategy is the montage that draws parallels between Frobisher's feelings and those of Sonmi and Dr. Sachs while Frobisher's voice-over hints at his infatuation with Vivian Ayr. An eyeline match between Frobisher and Ayr (figures 88 and 89) is followed by Frobisher narrating his experience over shots of the other storylines. While he says: "it was music that poured from his eyes and breathed from his lips," the film includes shots of Rey and Sachs about to meet for the first time and of Sonmi listening to Chang's heartbeats. In the next shots, both Sonmi and Chang and Rey and Sachs look at each other's eyes (figures 90, 91, and 92), signaling a potential romantic connection. By bringing these three looks together through editing and Frobisher's voice, *Cloud Atlas* suggests that many people have the ability to connect with other humans just by looking at their eyes—a notion that the film explores earlier through the first encounter between Ewing and Autua.



Figures 88 and 89: An eyeline match opens a montage that brings together characters through the positive cues that they find in the eyes of the other person: inspiration, desire, and trust.



Figure 90: Sonmi and Chang's gazes meet as he wakes up.



Figures 91 and 92: Just after seeing Luisa for the first time, Isaac Sachs knows that he can trust her.

The film also employs different kinds of matches to underline that characters go through similar experiences and have similar reactions in their lives. These matches involve both main and secondary characters. There are manifold examples of these two strategies throughout the film. A conceptual match brings together Catkin (Raevan Lee Hanan)—who lives in the twenty-fourth century—and Sonmi as they both lie down in different beds. Frobisher and Jocasta have sex just before Cavendish and Ursula do in the next scene. A graphic match of the faces of the Mexican woman from the 1970s and Mr. Meeks (one of the people who run away from the elderly home) shows that they both feel overwhelmed. Filmed from their backs, Zachry and Sonmi see their communities being abused from a distance in extreme long shots which are respectively followed by close-ups of both characters' faces. Separated by just a minute of screen time, Sonmi and Sixsmith share their grief for the death of their lovers. And the list goes on. From these examples of visual matches and the aforementioned combination of narration/music and montages, it is clear that the narrative of *Cloud Atlas* is not only interested in colonial continuities across time. The film also provides multiple examples of shared emotions and experiences that go from the seemingly banal to what matters most in people's lives (e.g. freedom, love). Such an emphasis on similarities

between humans across geographical locations and times indeed blurs the hierarchical distinctions that the logic of coloniality establishes. Eventually, the constant inclusion of connections between characters foregrounds a cosmopolitan sense of shared human sentience.

Cloud Atlas's discourse on shared humanity has at least two limitations. First, it may appear obvious or unnecessary to point at the fact that every person is equally human. At the same time, the current spread of populisms based on the reinforcement of borders and national, racial, sexual, and income divisions (e.g. Trump or Le Pen) show that the cosmopolitan notion of a common humanity cannot be taken for granted. A more substantial limitation to the film's discourse is that, despite its convoluted structure, it eventually presents an easy cosmopolitanism that overlooks controversial differences between disparate ways of understanding human rights. The concept of shared humanity addresses cosmopolitan challenges, but mostly on a superficial level. Despite its intersectional discourse, *Cloud Atlas* barely tackles questions related to cosmopolitan conflicts between particular approaches to culture, forms of social organization, and social norms. Such conflicts often—but not only—concern sexuality and women's and LGBTQ rights (Appiah 2006: 77-84; Plummer 2015: 131-143; Schoonover and Galt 2016: 49-78). These tensions are not always directly related to coloniality. A clear example of these conflicts is the opposite views on female genital mutilation that people have wherever it is practiced and wherever it is outlawed (Appiah 2006: 72-3). *Cloud Atlas*' discourse of shared humanity and its avoidance of thorny cosmopolitan conflicts hinder the possibility of negotiating radical differences between humans. As Robert Fine argues, cosmopolitanism can be a tool to bridge "the dualisms of our age" (2012: 384). *Cloud Atlas* bridges some of those dualisms, but mostly imagines easy negotiations of the less controversial cosmopolitan tensions.

5.4.2. A Multitude of Drops: The Relevance of Ordinary Cosmopolitanism

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the cosmopolitan discourse of *Cloud Atlas* goes beyond the mere denunciation of coloniality and its emphasis on characters' shared feelings and humanity. The film also features characters who engage in local struggles against oppressive hierarchies and regulations. Throughout the film, characters often transcend physical and more abstract social borders. Although these borders sometimes are not explicitly transnational or transcultural, they often articulate concerns that are related to those of cosmopolitanism such as human rights and well-being (Appiah 2006: 163; Fine 2009: 8-9). The presence of these borders in the film also highlights characters' attempts to contest—sometimes symbolically and other times literally—(neo)colonial forms of domination. Regarding borders with a more physical and visual presence, the most obvious example is perhaps the moment when a group of retirees manage to break out of the elderly house by driving a car through the gates of the facility (figure 93). The film also presents Sonmi's escape as the crossing of a border in a shot in which Chang's hand invites her to walk out of a completely blue room through a white threshold (figure 94). The white opening in the room's blue walls breaks the chromatic monotony of the space and presents Sonmi's escape as a transition between two spaces: one of enslavement and one of potential freedom. Borders are also particularly present when Sonmi and Chang sneak into a restricted area and she discovers the bleak meat-processing industry that runs on fabricants' bodies. The film first foregrounds the presence of a fence by filming Sonmi through it as she sees the industrial facility from the outside (figure 95). In a later scene, Sonmi is filmed through a glass wall as she sees other fabricants hanging from their feet as if they were pigs in a slaughterhouse (figure 96). The transition from the fence to the glass suggests that Sonmi has crossed a knowledge barrier. Yet, the border is still there, as she has not figured out yet how to challenge the boundaries between purebloods and fabricants. Further examples appear in

these and other storylines. Even though these visual examples are not explicitly transnational, the discourse that the film develops through its regular references to borders is, in broad terms, a cosmopolitan one. In a film that constantly jumps between local realities and draws countless connections between them, the seemingly local character of some border transgressions is not such. In the film's overall discourse, love, kindness, and cosmopolitanism emerge from the tensions that all kinds of borders channel.



Figures 93 and 94: A group of elderly people (left) and Sonmi (right) trespass the borders that separate the spaces where they are confined from the world outside.



Figure 95: Sonmi begins to perceive the neocolonial reality behind the borders that keep fabricants in place.



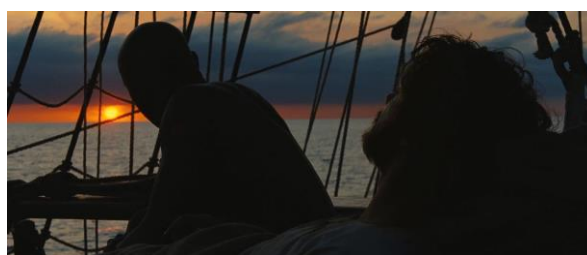
Figure 96: The border that separates Sonmi from the bleak reality behind Xultation is about to fade away.

A montage that appears two hours into the film further emphasizes the centrality of borders in *Cloud Atlas*' discourse and the cosmopolitan dimension of borders in the film. The montage brings together three couples (two of them interracial and intercultural and one of them queer) to the tune of "The Cloud Atlas Sextet" and a pseudo-narration by Robert Frobisher. In the three cases, at least a member of the couple transcends social borders. The montage opens with a shot of Sonmi framed through window railings, connecting with the overarching theme of her entrapment and liberation throughout the film. In the next shots, Sonmi approaches Chang, says "I know it is forbidden" (referring to the rule that forbids human-fabricant sex and relationships), and kisses him (figures 97 and 98). In this way, Sonmi and Chang transcend a border that is not visible and yet present in the words of Sonmi. After this, Frobisher's narration begins as the film crosscuts between shots of him at the Scott Monument in Edinburgh and of Ewing and Autua on the ship as they all contemplate different sunsets (figures 99 and 100). A new scene in a room full of china pieces begins as Frobisher says: "I understand now that boundaries between noise and sound are conventions." As he pronounces the word "conventions," a close-up shows a china figure shattering against the floor, suggesting that Frobisher and Sixsmith (who has just entered the room) are also challenging conventions (figure 101). Frobisher continues his speech with the words: "all boundaries are conventions waiting to be transcended" as the next shot cuts to Sonmi and Chang having sex (figure 102). Frobisher continues to talk about conventions as the next shots cut to Zachry wrapping Meronym up with his blanket as she sleeps—showing his solidarity and his potential romantic interest in her (figure 103). This seemingly irrelevant act is of particular significance because Zachry and Meronym belong to different civilizations and Zachry is highly suspicious of Meronym initially. Frobisher's monologue continues by noting that "separation is an illusion" as Sonmi and Chang continue to have sex (figure 104). In addition, the film sandwiches a shot of a vase being smashed in the 1936 scene between shots of the 2144 sex scene, further interweaving these moments of transgression (figures 105

and 106). The montage concludes with a couple of shots of Frobisher and Sixsmith throwing shelves down and breaking most of the plates and china in the room, and thus, metaphorically breaking most conventions (figure 107). In this figurative manner, Frobisher and Sixsmith—like the other two couples—transgress the norms that hamper their relationship. There is more to say about the china scene from a theoretical point of view, but I will return to it at the end of the chapter.



Figures 97 and 98: Invisible borders separate Sonmi and Chang.



Figures 99 and 100: The sunset brings together Frobisher, Autua, and Ewing in a conceptual match.



Figure 101: Symbolically breaking conventions.



Figure 102: Sonmi and Chang transcend boundaries.



Figure 103: Zachry: from suspicion to kindness.

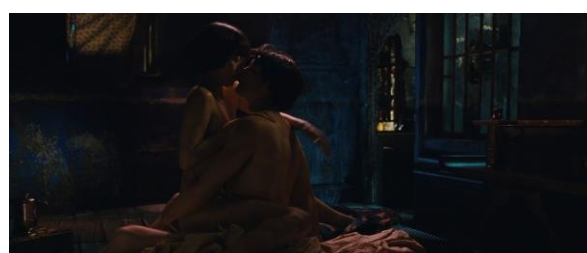
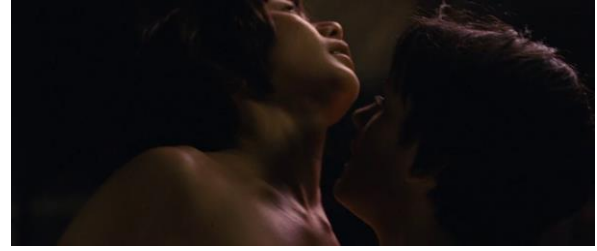


Figure 104: Chang and Sonmi continue making love.



Figures 105 and 106: Crosscutting within the montage sequence further reinforces the links between characters' struggles against colonial conventions.



Figure 107: In an alternative world, Sixsmith and Frobisher break most conventions.

This montage sequence stands out among the moments that foreground the presence of borders in the film and the rest of the montage sequences because of the range of strategies that it uses to connect the different storylines and to draw viewers' attention towards the cosmopolitan attitude of questioning and transgressing borders. Frobisher's discourse regularly mentions conventions, boundaries, and divisions while shots of other lives and his own appear. All of the characters in these shots challenge social borders related to their personal relationships in one way or another. Even though there is no action in Ewing and Autua's shots in the montage sequence, the presence of both characters quietly watching the sunset shows that they have transcended a boundary that the film had signaled much earlier. When Autua looks Ewing in the eye while the former is being whipped, he breaks the shell that isolates the white man's feelings from the atrocities that accompany the contract that he has just signed. As Autua later tells him, by looking him in the eye, he is able to break that barrier, establish a connection with the lawyer, and plant the seed for their later friendship. The montage described in the last paragraph forges further connections between the different

transgressions of boundaries by crosscutting within the montage and blurring the border between Frobisher and Sonmi's stories specifically. Unlike other borders that appear in the film, the ones in this montage sequence clearly mediate transcultural divisions and hierarchies constructed by the colonial matrix of power. Ironically, despite *Cloud Atlas*' emphasis on transcending borders, its cosmopolitan discourse depends on them. One of the main ways in which the film articulates its defense of cosmopolitanism is by pointing at the presence of borders. In this sense, it is evident that, as Cooper and Rumford suggest, borders do not only divide but also connect (2011: 262-3). All the personal connections between the characters involved in the montage sequence are indeed mediated by a border.

The previous account of borders in *Cloud Atlas* may give the impression that the film naively suggests that borders are easy to cross. Indeed, the montage sequence contributes to this effect by bringing together several moments of transgression and masking the more violent and repressive dimension of borders. Yet, other scenes in the film introduce the bleaker side of borders, as I have shown in my account of the evolution of the colonial matrix of power in the film. For instance, colonial actors attempt to kill Autua, Luisa, Sonmi, and Hae Jo when they cross different kinds of systemic borders. The 2144 storyline also includes several examples of the ugly and overwhelming side of borders: Yoona's attempt to escape Papa Song ends in her death; Sonmi hesitates whether to cross the threshold that separates Papa Song from the outside world; and Sonmi's discovery of the truth behind the Xultation ceremony leaves her traumatized. However, the fact that most of these examples come from the Neo Seoul storyline indicate that, in general terms, the film is reluctant to draw attention to the difficulty of crossing borders. In addition, the film just offers glimpses of the aforementioned moments in its crosscutting spree. This suggests that the film is not as interested in showing the challenging experience of crossing a border as in drawing attention to the logic of coloniality. In *Cloud Atlas*, crossing borders often appears to require little

effort. This is particularly evident in the escape from the elderly home and in the shots in which Zachry leaves his prejudice behind and lends his blanket to Meronym. The film's celebration of frequent and effortless crossings of borders then builds a discourse based on an easy cosmopolitanism. Through its representation of borders, the film shows further evidence of its general reluctance to deal with challenging cosmopolitan conflicts.

Despite the easy cosmopolitanism that certain aspects of the aforementioned montage sequence project, it offers a nuanced image of cosmopolitan processes. It makes clear something that the individual appearances of other borders in the film imply: cosmopolitan impulses in *Cloud Atlas* emerge from everyday experiences and small actions, an aspect that Raffaella Baccolini has also noted (2016: 76). In this sense, *Cloud Atlas* presents what Skrbiš and Woodward would call "ordinary cosmopolitanism" (2013: 99-102). This does not mean that characters transcend these borders on a daily basis (although some do). Rather, ordinary cosmopolitanism refers to actions that impact personal lives and local realities. The film indicates that actions driven by cosmopolitan thoughts or feelings do not always attempt to modify large global schemes. In addition, ordinary cosmopolitanism does not necessarily emerge from exposition to other cultural forms or from a disposition or interest in other cultures. In *Cloud Atlas*, characters exercise what Skrbiš and Woodward call the "reflexive style" of ordinary cosmopolitanism (104). As they explain, reflexive cosmopolitanism is a "process of political and ethical reasoning" that allows people to "[step] outside power categories" (104). By transgressing a variety of physical and symbolic borders configured by specific local and historical circumstances, *Cloud Atlas*' characters hint at the cosmopolitan potential of small actions.

Throughout the film, actions, cultural objects, and ideas from other times influence and inspire characters from the future in their struggles against the matrix of colonial power. Although some actions appear to be local and ordinary at first sight, they transmit

cosmopolitan impulses and generate transnational impacts. For instance, the British composer Robert Frobisher compares his experiences to those in the diary written by Adam Ewing on his journey through the Pacific and seems to get part of the inspiration to write his sextet from them. Frobisher's letters to his lover Sixsmith accidentally lead Luisa Rey to the next clue in her risky investigation in San Francisco. A phrase from the film based on Timothy Cavendish's Scottish odyssey—"I will not be subjected to criminal abuse"—inspires Yoona and Sonmi to reveal against the system that exploits them. The transcription of Sonmi's revelations into a book influence Valleymen's peaceful beliefs in 2346 Hawaii. In all of these cases, characters' actions are influenced by the texts, films, or video recordings from other times and places that come across their ways. From a cosmopolitan perspective, the transnational circulation and influence of cultural objects and ideas that *Cloud Atlas* maps shows that cultures are not static entities. Indeed, cultural borders are permeable and what some may see as the essence of a culture is often a mix of other influences (Appiah 2006: 107-111; Holton 2008: 135-9). *Cloud Atlas* does not stop here: it presents influences across time and space as cosmopolitan agents.

The impact of the aforementioned actions and the circulation of the things that characters create present cosmopolitan efforts as cumulative. *Cloud Atlas* infuses the butterfly effect—one of the conventions of multi-protagonist films—with cosmopolitan potential. As Azcona notes, multi-protanist films often show how minor actions or events can create snowball effects that affect other characters. These effects are not necessarily positive. Indeed, they often have a negative impact on characters' lives (2010: 34-5, 141). In contrast, cumulative effects in *Cloud Atlas* often contribute to the advancement of cosmopolitan causes. However, the film does not suggest that the future has more cosmopolitan societies in store. The metaphor of the ocean as "a multitude of drops" illustrates this. After Ewing and Tilda announce that they are going to work with the abolitionists, Tilda's father (Hugo

Weaving) warns them: “no matter what you do, it will never amount to more than a single drop in a limitless ocean.” To this, Ewing replies: “What is an ocean but a multitude of drops?” This exchange of opinions reinforces the film’s discourse on the relevance of small-scale, ordinary actions for the advancement of cosmopolitan causes. A drop may just change a small detail in the present or even get lost in a sea of colonial currents, but that small action may also trigger a chain of personal reactions or unforeseeable impacts across geographical and temporal distances. Although drops may vary in their number and shape, *Cloud Atlas* suggests that every little action contributes to making cosmopolitan currents stronger. At the end of *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Charles Xavier offers a similar reflection. He says: “countless choices define our fate. Each choice, each moment: a ripple in the river of time. Enough ripples and you change the tide.” With these discourses, *Cloud Atlas* and *Days of Future Past* seem to step out of a convention of multi-protagonist films. Azcona notes that global multi-protagonist stories often present solutions to global problems as “extremely difficult to come by” and human agency as futile (2010: 124-126). While *Cloud Atlas*, like *Days of Future Past*, does not necessarily envision cosmopolitan utopias, it suggests that human actions are far from futile.

Characters also undertake cosmopolitan endeavors and face coloniality through collaboration within and across storylines. This kind of connection has noteworthy implications from a formal and theoretical point of view. Through these collaborations, *Cloud Atlas* imagines a social web that resembles Mignolo’s concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism. Like Mignolo’s concept, the film does not endorse past models of monocentric imperialism nor does it advocate the current model of polycentric capitalist world (see Mignolo 2011b: 282-4 for an explanation of these models). Instead, the film presents collaborations across civilizational divides and sometimes even across times which recall the mode of operation of decolonial cosmopolitanism. As Mignolo explains: “the

cosmopolis of the future would be composed of ‘communal nodes’ around the planet cooperating rather than competing with each other” (2011b: 283). Apart from the aforementioned examples of characters sharing experiences or emotions (which develop a communal discourse), *Cloud Atlas* exploits the possibilities that editing and multi-role performances offer to reveal instances of extradiegetic collaboration between characters from different storylines. For instance, while Zachry is considering whether to stab Meronym (Halle Berry) at the space center, Joe Napier (Keith David) warns Luisa Rey (Berry) that some people will attempt to kill her. Seconds later, Meronym (Berry) turns around and discovers Zachry carrying a knife on his hand—as if she had been listening to Napier’s warning. Through this kind of connection, *Cloud Atlas* advances a strategy that is common in the television series *Sense8* (The Wachowskis and Michael Straczynski, 2015-18). The series revolves around a group of mentally-connected characters who frequently draw on the abilities of other characters who are hundreds of miles away to deal with challenging situations. Apart from collaboration across time and space, *Cloud Atlas* also shows Autua and Ewing and Zachry and Meronym helping each other despite the cultural conventions that initially prevent them from doing so. In this way, *Cloud Atlas* explicitly shows the emergence of communal nodes across civilizational and temporal borders. In broader terms, the equal weight and the slight variations in theme across the different storylines of the six storylines suggests that *Cloud Atlas* does not privilege a specific cosmopolitan vision but the communal nodes that the different stories weave against coloniality.

Kristian Shaw also points at the relevance of cooperation within the novel’s cosmopolitan discourse and in Mitchell’s work in general. More specifically, Shaw notes similarities between these cosmopolitan connections and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s notion of the multitude (2017: 11-13). Quoting Hardt and Negri, Shaw argues that *Cloud Atlas* pictures ““a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live

in common (2004: xiv)” (2017: 12). Yet, given the ambiguous character of the concept (Brown and Szeman 2005: 372-3), I find decolonial cosmopolitanism a better term to define the connections and collaborations that appear in *Cloud Atlas*. Even though Negri and Hardt clarify that the multitude does not depend on unity, the concept offers little room for non-centralized modes of action (Brown and Szeman 2005: 376-7). Decolonial cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, acknowledges that different nodes may not always share the same sociopolitical concerns and may wish to channel their decolonial efforts in different ways. Yet, *Cloud Atlas* focuses on a group of nodes that are predominantly Western. Of the six stories, two take place in the UK, and three on current US soil. While this set of geographical locations contributes to draw attention to the origin of colonial actors in some cases, in general, it distances the film from struggles in large parts of the world such as Latin America, Africa, and Central and Western Asia. Moreover, by doing so, the film—like the novel—overlooks that these are precisely the regions that have endured the roughest consequences of (neo)coloniality. Even though *Cloud Atlas* appears to present an image of cosmopolitanism that offers room for a variety of decolonial projects, the invisibility of the regions and people that have been most deeply affected by coloniality ultimately weakens the cosmopolitan potential of the nodes that the film connects.

Although the last lines may give the impression that *Cloud Atlas*' emphasis on interconnections and cosmopolitan impulses presents a linear conception of time, this is not the case. *Cloud Atlas* does not present history as the path towards a pre-determined future, nor does it present cosmopolitanism as an ethical force that advances steadily through time. I will first address the treatment of time and then cosmopolitanism. Writing about the novel, Shaw notes that “[...] later chapters impact on the actions of earlier chapters—a reminder that futures are still open and subject to individual agency” (2017: 59). In contrast, Jo Alyson Parker argues that the film alters the temporal discourse of the novel and presents a more

linear view of history. In Parker's view, by opening and closing with a scene in which old Zachry tells a story, "the film shifts its emphasis from a future in flux to a future that is fixed—as in a frame" (2015: 123). While the 2346 storyline certainly frames the other stories, Parker overlooks that in several scenes past actions reverse future actions and future actions influence the past. Some pairs of actors meet again in a past storyline after one of them passes away in a future storyline. Through a conversation between Ayrns and Frobisher the film also suggests that the future influences the past. Before Frobisher begins composing "The Cloud Atlas Sextet," Ayrns goes to his room in the middle of the night, telling him that he has had a dream in which he listened to a beautiful melody "in a nightmarish café [with] blaring, bright light, but underground, [with] no way out" where all the waitresses "had the same face"—obviously, the Papa Song restaurant. In a letter to Sixsmith, Frobisher notes that although Ayrns could not remember the melody, "music poured from his eyes." Later on, when Frobisher plays the sextet for the first time, Ayrns notes that that was the music from his dream. The film then opens up the possibility that Frobisher may have gotten his inspiration to write the sextet from the future through Ayrns' dream.

Regarding the film's presentation of cosmopolitan advances through time, the film suggests that cosmopolitan ethics and rights are not part of a project that develops automatically with the passing of time. For instance, the situation of women's rights in Neo Seoul is actually worse than that of Luisa Rey and the female workers of the maquila-style factory in 1970s San Francisco. The same holds for the human treatment of the environment in both storylines. The fact that the future is not intrinsically more cosmopolitan than the past is particularly evident in the film's celebration of love in its last twenty minutes. While *Cloud Atlas* offers a utopian ending in which several romantic couples get together (Ewing and Tilda, Cavendish and Ursula, Zachry and Meronym), from a chronological perspective, one of these couples of actors does not end together. Sonmi-451 (Bae) sees Hae-Joo Chang

(Sturgess) die in 2346 and, in the next scene, the same actors reunite and hold each other after Ewing comes home from the Pacific in 1850. Something similar happens in the case of Frobisher and Sixsmith's love story. Although a hired assassin shoots Sixsmith forty-seven minutes into the film in the 1970s storyline, he joins Frobisher an hour and thirteen minutes later in the dream-like scene in which they break china pieces in an alternative 1936. The use of non-chronological editing then suggests that cosmopolitanism is not something that comes along with the passing of time. *Cloud Atlas* shows that the past may sometimes offer more pathways to pursue utopian, cosmopolitan goals than the future.

Although the future may not always be brighter in *Cloud Atlas*, most of the stories have an optimistic ending in which cosmopolitan ethics gain ground to colonial forces in the individual lives of the main characters. Two exceptions are the love stories between Frobisher and Sixsmith and Sonmi and Chang, which end with the death of all these characters at different times. In the case of the latter, the film revises the development of its narrative by showing Bae and Sturgess' reunion. The fact that Frobisher and Sixsmith are the only couple who is denied a happy, optimistic ending has led Gabriel Estrada to argue that *Cloud Atlas* denies any hope of "queer futurity" (2014: 7). Yet, Frobisher and Sixsmith's singularity as the only couple that does not get a happy ending can be read through a different light. By singling out this couple, the film underlines their suffering and the potentially-fatal consequences of homophobia. In addition, the film hints, as Frobisher writes in his farewell letter, that he and Sixsmith will meet again in "a better world." Although Frobisher eventually commits suicide and the couple does not reappear in any other storyline, the film offers a peek into queer futurity earlier. As I mentioned before, the scene in which Frobisher and Sixsmith smash vases and plates suggests that they are symbolically breaking colonial borders and homophobic restraints. At the end of the scene, Sixsmith wakes up on a train car, signaling that this scene is a product of his imagination. The fact that the action happens in an

unlikely room full of china pieces (figure 108) also suggests that the action is taking place in an alternative, timeless reality and enhances the utopian connotations of Frobisher's words. Following this line of thought, the scene brings to mind José Esteban Muñoz's notion of queer utopia: the transgression of boundaries in it remains abstract enough to indicate that both characters desire something that is "not yet here" (2009: 26). At the same time, the scene depicts a moment of queer ecstasy in which both characters step out of "the temporal stranglehold [of] straight time" (32). Ironically, this scene also embodies the ambivalent nature of cosmopolitanism in twenty-first century sf cinema. Despite imagining a queer future, the metaphorical character of the scene downplays its queerness. After all, apart from the half-cunning, half-desiring looks between both men, sexuality does not play any role in the scene.



Figure 108: A room full of china pieces about to be smashed presents an alternative reality: a queer utopia.

Like most cosmopolitan sf movies, *Cloud Atlas* displays a certain degree of ambivalence in its defense of cosmopolitanism. Throughout the chapter, I have pointed at the film's reliance on easy cosmopolitanism, its reluctance to explore controversial cosmopolitan conflicts, and its privileging of Western nodes within its seemingly decolonial cosmopolitanism. Apart from that, *Cloud Atlas*' celebration of diversity is based on the self: the idea that we should care about others because we may reincarnate into them dilutes the ethical strength of the film's advocacy of cosmopolitan empathy and solidarity. This is not exclusively a limitation of *Cloud Atlas: I Origins* and Momondo's "The DNA Journey" also

base their cosmopolitanism on the transnational dimension of the genetic configuration of the self. In addition, Gabriel Estrada has rightly criticized the unproblematized depiction of the Mauna Kea Mountain in the film as the grounds for an observation center. As he points out, such depiction dismisses indigenous spiritualities by disregarding the sacred character of the mountain (2014: 24). Finally, despite *Cloud Atlas*' attempt to present a variety of identities and geographical and racial origins through its multi-role casting, the cast is itself predominantly Western. With the exception of Donna Bae and Zhou Xun, who are South Korean and Chinese respectively, all the major actors are from the UK, the US, or Australia.

Despite these weaknesses, *Cloud Atlas* undoubtedly develops one of the most powerful cosmopolitan discourses in sf cinema to date. Although the cast is surprisingly homogeneous in terms of nationality, the characters that these actors embody paint an altogether different picture. The film takes every opportunity to show human heterogeneity and to draw intersectional connections across a wide range of aspects of human life. Moreover, while the film's celebration of diversity through reincarnation may seem limited, the film also establishes transnational connections between characters who are not reincarnated. By emphasizing characters' shared experiences, emotions, and humanity against the multiple faces of coloniality, *Cloud Atlas* draws attention to what for Nikos Papastergiadis is one of the cornerstones of cosmopolitanism: the "universalist aspiration for moral connectedness" (2012: 136). At the same time, through its depiction of future colonialities and its exploration of reverse causality, the film shows that cosmopolitanism cannot be taken for granted. *Cloud Atlas* equally underscores the relevance of small actions and ordinary cosmopolitanism as a way of building communal nodes across geographical and temporal borders. Thus, in spite of its ambivalent elements, as a whole, *Cloud Atlas* offers one of the most unflinching defenses of cosmopolitan ideals and practices in sf cinema.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has shown how recent sf films bring to the surface elements of the genre that are particularly useful to channel transnational issues and have been part of science fiction for a long time. Sf has historically been interested in exploitative forms of government, abusive corporations, apocalyptic landscapes, disaster, planetary events, aliens, alternative civilizations and life forms, and travels across time and space. Given the intensification of globalization since the 1990s and 2000s, it is indeed no wonder that sf has begun to develop discourses on cosmopolitanism. At the turn of the twenty-first century, systemic dystopias have begun to show a clear interest in border zones, walled cities, and dispersed borders that replicate the hierarchies established by larger territorial configurations. These films pay particular attention to the ways in which transnational asymmetries between cities, countries, imagined geographical formations, planets, or space stations offer opportunities to generate more profit. Many systemic dystopias include virtual meetings, calls, holograms, and maps that emphasize the transnational ties of corporate managers. Through different combinations of these and other tropes, contemporary sf films draw attention to the radical divide between global elites and those who are excluded from neoliberal societies. Other films situate their barren landscapes, extreme temperatures, or rising sea levels in a larger context of global ecological crisis. Sometimes they transform intergalactic exploration into a necessity through scenarios in which life is no longer possible on Earth. Several of the films mentioned in this dissertation also address cosmopolitan

concerns by relying on montage sequences that offer a glimpse of the transnational scope of disasters. In recent years, some films have also begun to develop stories in which protagonists and secondary characters travel to other world locations where they encounter disaster scenarios. All of these narratives contribute to building a cosmopolitan sense of planet and raise awareness of the deeply unequal situations that climate change generates.

Twenty-first century sf films also seem eager to imagine humans and aliens who manage to negotiate their differences, live peacefully, and even collaborate. Although sf continues to feature menacing, destructive, and unintelligible aliens, many films depict humans and aliens who communicate successfully. Unlike in most 1980s romantic sf films, aliens often stay on Earth or humans move to the alien planet. In addition, the interaction between humans and aliens tends to lead to the interrogation of some social norms and borders. Dystopias also imagine couples that challenge the belief systems that prevent them from loving a person who is different in genetic, national, or ethnic terms. Many contemporary sf films also embrace openness by grounding their narratives in supernatural concepts that blur the line between self and other. To do so, they present individuals as part of a global, cross-temporal network of humans and suggest that belonging to a particular nation, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or species is purely coincidental. Such films often revolve around immortal characters, migrant souls, or time travel beyond local and national environments. Sometimes they deal with individuals who are destined to occupy the place of another human, an animal, or a tree in their next life. Through this kind of narrative, films emphasize that human souls and spaces mutate through time and thereby challenge essentialist notions of national and cultural belonging. In this context, a cosmopolitan approach to sf cinema can be particularly useful to make transnational phenomena more visible and shed light on the ways in which sf films perform cosmopolitanism. In general, the use of cosmopolitan theory helps turn the spotlight on conviviality and absence thereof, the

equal right of individuals to have access to natural and economic resources, and their right to live beyond the rigid structures that the logic of coloniality (in its multiple forms) mandates.

As has been argued in this thesis, contemporary sf films revolve around a variety of cosmopolitan concerns. By focusing on transnational “relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation” that develop around borders (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 18), the analysis of *In Time* and *Elysium* has explored the ways in which economic powers shape abusive structures of extraction. The systems depicted in these films allow elites to maximize their revenue while encroaching on the well-being of the rest of the population. Following David Harvey, the cosmopolitan approach of this dissertation has also paid particular attention to the social actors that contribute to that situation and their reasons for doing so (2009: 57-8). In a similar vein, the focus of the dissertation on the right to live a decent life has led me to analyze the biopolitical logics that govern the apocalyptic scenario that *2012* presents. In this respect, the film shows a (seemingly) critical awareness of the importance of nationality and wealth in establishing biopolitical hierarchies and exposes the unequal value of human lives. *2012* also points to an equally relevant aspect of eco-cosmopolitanism: the development of a sense of planet. By replicating some environmental processes through spectacle and connecting its disaster scenes in a more logical way than it seems, the film draws attention to the chain of transnational impacts that characterize climate change. The focus on processes of personal cosmopolitan transformation in *The Host* has shown that cosmopolitan ways of thinking and acting, in contrast to the universal connotations of the term, do not tend to develop with ease and are often partial and intermittent. The border-as-method approach of this dissertation has also led me to consider what still remains at the margins of the genre’s cosmopolitan imaginary. In this sense, I have explored the centrality of queer issues to cosmopolitanism through the example of *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*. This film evinces the utopian potential of sf camp to celebrate sexual, affective, and national

otherness and to envision queer worlds beyond the West. Finally, I have described the complex web of spatiotemporal connections in *Cloud Atlas* to analyze the film's articulation of the tensions between cosmopolitanism and the different iterations of coloniality through time. In spite of this, *Cloud Atlas* does not present cosmopolitanism as a grand scheme. Instead, it emerges from small, ordinary actions that challenge oppressive regulations and borders.

Formally, sf films use a wide range of strategies to deal with cosmopolitanism. The films analyzed in this dissertation show that some of the strategies that contemporary sf cinema uses include: inventive concepts or premises that ask to be explored, spectacular disaster, bare and detail-crammed spaces that channel cosmopolitan concerns and possibilities, spaces that show the development of characters' psychology, shoestring camp, and editing choices that push beyond the supposed limits of intensified continuity, multi-role performances, and multi-protagonist conventions. There are, then, no specific film techniques or styles that are essential to channel cosmopolitan concerns. However, some of the films analyzed in this dissertation rely on some common strategies. For instance, the endings of *2012*, *The Host*, *Codependent Lesbian*, *Cloud Atlas*, and other examples draw a connection between the (seemingly) cosmopolitan realities of their protagonists and the planet or galaxy in which they live. In this sense, these films transport viewers from individual stories to the wider context in which they take place. María del Mar Azcona notes that this is a common feature in film endings. At the same time, she observes that when multi-protagonist films rely on this strategy, they tend to point at the small part characters play in a bigger social structure that requires the appreciation of many other small details and actors to be understood (2010: 43). Similarly, cosmopolitan sf films use this common technique in their own way. Although sf films rely on this strategy in slightly different contexts, they all use it to draw attention to the extended cosmopolitan potential of the story that they have developed. These endings

could certainly be criticized for their totalizing moves. However, in general, they tend to reflect a utopian impulse, inviting viewers to consider the wider implications of the stories that these films present.

Although the former account suggests that the films under scrutiny envision societies in which cosmopolitanism is bound to spread, my analysis has also pointed at the ambivalent side of cosmopolitan discourses—an aspect that some sociologists have also observed (Woodward and Skrbiš 2007: 745, 2013: 116; Papastergiadis 2012: 87, 116-131; Plummer 2015: 89, 97). The cosmopolitan approach of this dissertation has attempted to make the ambivalent dimension of cosmopolitan discourses in sf more visible. The ambivalence of these films is evident in their exploration of systems of global exploitation. *Elysium* celebrates universal access to healthcare, but masks the rest of the economic problems that, in all likelihood, continue to affect Earth inhabitants at the end of the film. *2012* fails to point at the ways in which affluent individuals and industrial nations contribute to the depletion of natural resources, the degradation of ecosystems, and to trigger disasters. *Cloud Atlas* regularly presents situations in which characters successfully face cosmopolitan tensions and challenge borders. However, the film develops an easy cosmopolitanism that avoids thorny conflicts. All the films analyzed in the previous chapters celebrate the weakening of borders and the development of more open positions towards the other. Yet, at the same time, many of them redirect their focus towards the heroism of the white protagonists or imagine alien others who are white. Even when characters are more racially-diverse (as in *Cloud Atlas*), the actors that play them are often from the US or the UK. In addition, *Cloud Atlas* and *The Host* build their discourses on openness on the idea that the other is a different version of the self. *Codependent Lesbian* illustrates the tension between abstract ideas and specific realities of acute suffering that Ken Plummer finds in discourses on cosmopolitan sexualities in general (2015: 89, 97). Through its abstract, camp depiction of the aliens, the film presents a weird

and different civilization that is likeable and easy to empathize with. Yet, the lack of details about the personal experiences of aliens in their planet fails to draw attention to the actual, sometimes life-threatening, challenges that sexually oppressed minorities face. In general, ambivalence appears to be a prevalent element of cosmopolitan discourses in sf.

Sf films that have been released as I completed this dissertation confirm the predisposition of the genre to address cosmopolitan issues. *The Bad Batch* (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2016)²⁴ and *Jupiter's Moon* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2017) picture dystopian scenarios of migration governed by physical and symbolic borders. *Geostorm* (2017) shows how a weather-control satellite system malfunctions and unleashes several disasters in different world locations. *Okja* (Bong Joon-ho, 2017) and *Downsizing* (Alexander Payne, 2017) feature concerns about the environment, resources, and animal sentience in transnational stories that deal with economic utopias turned dystopias. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (Luc Besson, 2017) recognizes the moral obligation of humans to repair the colonial harm inflicted on the inhabitants of planet Mü. *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (James Gunn, 2017), *The Shape of Water* (Guillermo del Toro, 2017) and *How to Talk to Girls at Parties* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2017) include romantic relationships between a human and a non-human. *Arrival* (Dennis Villeneuve, 2016) focuses on the will of a scientist to find ways to communicate with aliens despite cultural and linguistic barriers and the need of countries to collaborate in such a task. Sf cinema also seems willing to explore new directions. For instance, the Afrofuturism of *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018) challenges the frequent whiteness of cosmopolitanism in sf film. The film also considers questions related to transnational openness and solidarity. These examples show that the cosmopolitan discourses analyzed in this dissertation continue to thrive and adopt new forms.

²⁴ *The Bad Batch* was released on Netflix on September 22, 2017.

Although I have barely mentioned recent examples of sf films dealing with transnational networks and soul migration in this conclusion, some obvious examples have appeared on TV. As I noted earlier in chapter five, *Sense8* transplants the template of *Cloud Atlas* to television, concentrating on a network of diverse, mentally-connected characters across the world that help each other in their daily struggles. *Altered Carbon* (Laeta Kalogridis, 2018-) testifies to the popularity of the soul-migration metaphor. The show presents a society in which immortality is possible thanks to the digitization of human consciousness. In this society, a mind may be transferred to any human body. Although the premise may seem to question essentialist notions of racial and national belonging, in practice, *Altered Carbon* shows how such a system actually perpetuates biopolitical hierarchies. Science fiction television is therefore a relevant medium to consider in future research. As *Sense8* and *Altered Carbon* suggest, some television series base their premises on concepts that also appear in several of the films mentioned in this dissertation, sometimes looking at cosmopolitan issues from new angles. For instance, *3%* (Pedro Aguilera, 2016-), as a systemic dystopia set in a resource-depleted world where only a privileged few can have decent lives, recalls the worlds of *Elysium* and *The Hunger Games*. Another obvious example, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Bruce Miller, 2017-), offers a disturbing take on the violation of women and minorities' rights, sometimes touching on border issues. While these examples barely scratch the surface of the current context of sf television, they do show that similar cosmopolitan concerns are common in this medium and deserve to be studied in the future.

CONCLUSIONES

Esta tesis ha mostrado cómo el cine de ciencia ficción (cf) del siglo XXI saca a la superficie elementos del género que son particularmente útiles para tratar cuestiones transnacionales y que han sido parte del género desde hace tiempo. Históricamente la ciencia ficción ha mostrado interés por los gobiernos autoritarios, grandes empresas que abusan de la sociedad y de sus trabajadores, paisajes apocalípticos, desastres, eventos planetarios, alienígenas, civilizaciones y formas de vida alternativas, viajes a través del tiempo y del espacio. Dada la intensificación de la globalización desde los años 90 y 2000, no es de extrañar que la ciencia ficción haya comenzado a desarrollar discursos sobre el cosmopolitismo. A comienzos del siglo XXI, las distopías sistémicas han empezado a mostrar un claro interés en zonas fronterizas, ciudades fortificadas, y fronteras dispersas que emulan las jerarquías que establecen otras configuraciones territoriales a gran escala. Estas películas prestan especial atención a las maneras en que las asimetrías transnacionales entre ciudades, países, formaciones geográficas imaginadas, planetas, o estaciones espaciales ofrecen oportunidades para generar más beneficios. Muchas distopías sistémicas incluyen reuniones, llamadas, hologramas y mapas virtuales que ponen énfasis en los lazos transnacionales de las élites corporativas. A través de diversas combinaciones de estos y otros temas, el cine de ciencia ficción contemporáneo dirige la atención de los espectadores hacia la división radical entre las élites globales y aquellos a quienes las sociedades neoliberales excluyen. Otras películas sitúan sus paisajes áridos, temperaturas extremas, o el aumento de los niveles del mar en un contexto más general de crisis ecológica global. Algunas veces presentan la exploración de

espacio exterior como una necesidad mediante escenarios en los que no es posible seguir viviendo en la Tierra. Varias de las películas mencionadas en esta tesis tratan asuntos cosmopolitas a través de montajes que reflejan el alcance transnacional de los desastres medioambientales. Recientemente, algunas películas han comenzado a desarrollar historias en las que los protagonistas y algunos de los personajes secundarios viajan a otras partes del mundo en las que se encuentran inmersos en escenarios catastróficos. Todas estas narrativas ayudan a construir una noción cosmopolita de planeta y una mayor conciencia de las situaciones profundamente desiguales que genera el cambio climático.

El cine de ciencia ficción del siglo XXI también parece especialmente interesado en imaginarse relaciones entre humanos y alienígenas que contribuyen a negociar las diferencias entre sus sociedades, a vivir en paz e incluso colaborar. Aunque alienígenas amenazantes, destructivos e incomprensibles continúan apareciendo en la ciencia ficción contemporánea, muchas películas muestran a humanos y alienígenas que son capaces de comunicarse con éxito. Al contrario que en varias películas románticas de cf de los años 80, los alienígenas a menudo se quedan en la tierra o los humanos deciden mudarse a otro planeta. Además, la interacción entre humanos y alienígenas a menudo lleva al desafío de algunas fronteras y normas sociales. Las distopías también se imaginan parejas que desafían las creencias que les impiden amar a otra persona que sea diferente en términos genéticos, nacionales o étnicos. Varias películas de cf contemporáneas basan sus narrativas en conceptos sobrenaturales que difuminan la frontera entre el yo y el otro, lo que les permite defender actitudes de apertura hacia el otro. Estas películas tienden a presentar a varias personas como parte de una red global de humanos unidos a través de diferentes épocas y sugieren que el pertenecer a una nación, raza, género, clase, orientación sexual o especie es mera coincidencia. Este tipo de películas a menudo tratan sobre personajes inmortales, almas que migran, o viajes en el tiempo más allá de contextos locales o nacionales. Algunas veces giran en torno a individuos

que están destinados a ocupar el lugar de otro humano, animal o árbol en su próxima vida. A través de este tipo de narrativa, estas películas hacen énfasis en la idea de que las almas humanas y los espacios cambian a través del tiempo. De este modo, dichas películas ponen en duda nociones esencialistas de pertenencia nacional y cultural. En este contexto, una aproximación cosmopolita al cine de cf es especialmente útil para dar más visibilidad a los fenómenos transnacionales y para estudiar los modos en que las películas de cf representan el cosmopolitismo.

Como se ha demostrado en esta tesis, el cine de cf contemporáneo trata un amplio abanico de cuestiones cosmopolitas. Poniendo el foco en “relaciones [transnacionales] de dominación, desposesión y explotación” (Mezzadra y Neilson 2013: 18), el análisis de *Elysium* e *In Time* ha explorado los modos en que los poderes económicos dan forma a estructuras de extracción abusivas. Los sistemas sociales representados en estas películas permiten a las élites maximizar sus beneficios mientras que cercenan el bienestar del resto de la población. Siguiendo a David Harvey, la aproximación cosmopolita de esta tesis ha prestado especial atención a los actores sociales que contribuyen a la perpetuación de dicha situación y a las razones que les llevan a actuar de esa manera (2009: 57-8). De modo similar, la atención de esta tesis hacia el derecho a una vida digna me ha llevado a analizar la lógica biopolítica que gobierna el escenario apocalíptico que presenta *2012*. En este sentido, la película muestra, aparentemente, conciencia crítica de la importancia de la nacionalidad y la riqueza en el establecimiento de jerarquías biopolíticas y poner al descubierto el valor desigual de las vidas humanas. *2012* también apunta a otro aspecto central del eco-cosmopolitismo: el desarrollo de una conciencia o noción de planeta. Replicando algunos procesos medioambientales a través del espectáculo cinematográfico y conectando las escenas de desastres de una manera más lógica de lo que parece, la película muestra la cadena de impactos transnacionales que caracteriza al cambio climático. El énfasis en

procesos de transformación cosmopolita a nivel personal en *The Host* ha hecho patente que las formas cosmopolitas de pensar y de actuar, a pesar de las connotaciones universales del término, no suelen desarrollarse con facilidad o que su desarrollo es a menudo parcial o intermitente. La aproximación de frontera como método que emplea esta tesis me ha llevado a considerar los aspectos que permanecen en los márgenes del imaginario cosmopolita del cine de cf. En este sentido, me he centrado en la importancia de aspectos *queer* para el cosmopolitismo a través del ejemplo de *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*. Esta película evidencia el potencial utópico de lo camp en la cf para celebrar la otredad sexual, afectiva y nacional y para visualizar mundos *queer* más allá de Occidente. Por último, he descrito la compleja red de conexiones espaciotemporales que aparece en *Cloud Atlas* con el objetivo de analizar la manera en la que la película articula la tensión entre el cosmopolitismo y las diferentes iteraciones de la colonialidad a través del tiempo. A pesar de esto, *Cloud Atlas* no presenta el cosmopolitismo como un plan grandioso. La película sugiere que el cosmopolitismo emerge a partir de acciones pequeñas y cotidianas que desafían fronteras y regulaciones opresivas.

Desde el punto de vista formal, el cine de cf usa gran variedad de estrategias para tratar cuestiones transnacionales desde una perspectiva cosmopolita. Las películas analizadas en esta tesis muestran que algunas de las estrategias que utiliza el cine de cf incluyen: conceptos o premisas llenas de inventiva que invitan al análisis, desastres espectaculares, espacios desnudos o llenos de detalles que canalizan preocupaciones y posibilidades cosmopolitas, espacios que muestran el desarrollo del estado psicológico de los personajes, estética *camp* de presupuesto cero, y elecciones en la edición cinematográfica que llevan a la continuidad intensificada a sus límites, interpretaciones multi-papel, y las convenciones del cine coral. No hay, por tanto, un conjunto específico de técnicas o estilos que sean esenciales para articular preocupaciones cosmopolitas. Sin embargo, algunas de las películas analizadas

en esta tesis usan estrategias similares. Por ejemplo, los finales de *2012*, *The Host*, *Codependent Lesbian*, *Cloud Atlas* y otras películas establecen una conexión entre las realidades aparentemente cosmopolitas de sus protagonistas y el planeta o galaxia en el que viven. En este sentido, estas películas llevan a los espectadores desde las historias individuales de los protagonistas hacia los contextos más amplios en los que suceden. María del Mar Azcona apunta que esta es una característica común de los finales en el cine. Al mismo tiempo, Azcona observa que cuando las películas corales usan esta estrategia, estas tienden a enfatizar el papel menor que los personajes juegan en unas estructuras sociales que requieren la apreciación de muchos otros detalles para su comprensión (2010: 43). De modo similar, las películas de cf que tratan temas cosmopolitas usan esta técnica a su manera. Aunque las películas de cf usan esta estrategia en contextos ligeramente diferentes, todas ellas la usan para sugerir la potencial extensión del cosmopolitismo que se desarrolla a lo largo de la historia que presentan. Estos finales se podrían criticar por su aparente afán totalizador. Sin embargo, en general suelen reflejar un impulso utópico, invitando a los espectadores a considerar las implicaciones más amplias de las historias que presentan estas películas.

Aunque la interpretación anterior sugiere que las películas analizadas se imaginan sociedades en las que el cosmopolitismo está destinado a extenderse, mi análisis en esta tesis también ha apuntado hacia el lado ambivalente de los discursos cosmopolitas—un aspecto que algunos sociólogos también han observado (Woodward and Skrbiš 2007: 745, 2013: 116; Papastergiadis 2012: 87, 116-131; Plummer 2015: 89, 97). El enfoque cosmopolita de esta tesis ha intentado dar visibilidad a la dimensión ambivalente de los discursos cosmopolitas. La ambivalencia de estas películas es obvia en el modo en el que se aproximan al problema de los sistemas globales de explotación. *Elysium* celebra el acceso universal a la sanidad pero enmascara el resto de problemas económicos que con toda probabilidad continúan afectando

a los habitantes de la tierra al final de la película. *2012* no muestra el modo en que las clases acomodadas y las naciones industriales contribuyen al agotamiento de los recursos, el deterioro de los ecosistemas, y la provocación de desastres. *Cloud Atlas* presenta situaciones en las que los personajes se enfrentan a desafíos cosmopolitas con éxito. Sin embargo, la película desarrolla un cosmopolitismo fácil que evita tratar conflictos espinosos. Todas las películas analizadas en los capítulos anteriores celebran el debilitamiento de las fronteras y el desarrollo de posiciones de apertura hacia el otro. Al mismo tiempo, varias de estas películas redirigen su atención hacia el heroísmo del protagonista blanco o se imaginan alienígenas que son blancos. Incluso cuando el reparto es diverso racialmente (como en el caso de *Cloud Atlas*), los actores que interpretan estos personajes son a menudo ciudadanos estadounidenses o británicos. Además, *Cloud Atlas* y *The Host* construyen sus discursos de apertura sobre la idea de que el otro es una versión diferente del yo. *Codependent Lesbian* pone de manifiesto la tensión entre ideas abstractas y realidades específicas que Ken Plummer identifica en los discursos cosmopolitas sobre sexualidad en general (2015: 89, 97). A través de su representación abstracta y *camp* de las alienígenas la película presenta una civilización diferente y rara pero a la vez agradable y con la que es fácil establecer lazos de empatía. Aun así, la falta de detalles sobre las experiencias personales de las alienígenas en su planeta no permite llamar la atención sobre los desafíos reales y el riesgo de muerte a los que se enfrentan las minorías sexuales. En general, la ambivalencia parece ser un elemento frecuente en los discursos cosmopolitas que aparecen en el cine de cf contemporáneo.

Las películas de ciencia ficción que se han ido estrenando mientras acababa esta tesis confirman la predisposición del género a abordar cuestiones cosmopolitas. *The Bad Batch* (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2016)²⁵ y *Jupiter's Moon* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2017) se imaginan escenarios distópicos de inmigración gobernados por fronteras físicas y simbólicas. *Geostorm*

²⁵ *The Bad Batch* se estrenó en Netflix el 22 de septiembre de 2017.

(2017) muestra cómo un sistema de satélites que controla el tiempo comienza a dar problemas y desatar varios desastres en diferentes partes del mundo. *Okja* (Bong Joon-ho, 2017) y *Downsizing* (Alexander Payne, 2017) desarrollan historias transnacionales sobre preocupaciones medioambientales, recursos naturales y sensibilidad animal a través de utopías económicas que realmente demuestran ser distopías. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (Luc Besson, 2017) reconoce la obligación moral de los humanos de reparar el daño colonial infligido a los habitantes del planeta Mül. *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (James Gunn, 2017), *The Shape of Water* (Guillermo del Toro, 2017) y *How to Talk to Girls at Parties* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2017) incluyen relaciones románticas entre humanos y no humanos. *Arrival* (Dennis Villeneuve, 2016) se centra en la voluntad de una científica de encontrar maneras de comunicarse con una civilización alienígena a pesar de las barreras culturales y lingüísticas y en la necesidad de que diferentes países colaboren en dicha tarea. El cine de cf también parece interesado en explorar nuevas direcciones. Por ejemplo, el afrofuturismo de *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018) desafía la predominancia de protagonistas blancos en los discursos cosmopolitas del cine de cf. La película también aborda cuestiones relacionadas con la apertura y la solidaridad transnacional. Estos ejemplos muestran que los discursos cosmopolitas analizados en esta tesis siguen proliferando y adoptando nuevas formas.

Aunque en esta conclusión apenas he mencionado ejemplos recientes de películas que tratan sobre redes transnacionales y la metáfora de la migración de almas, algunos ejemplos obvios han aparecido recientemente en televisión. Como apunté anteriormente en el capítulo cinco, *Sense8* trasplanta el modelo de *Cloud Atlas* a la televisión, concentrándose en una red de personajes diversos que están conectados mentalmente y que se ayudan los unos a los otros en sus vidas diarias. *Altered Carbon* (Laeta Kalogridis, 2018-) demuestra la popularidad de la metáfora de la migración de almas. La serie se imagina una sociedad en la

que la inmortalidad es posible gracias a la digitalización de la conciencia humana. En esta sociedad, una mente puede transferirse a cualquier cuerpo humano. Aunque la premisa parece cuestionar nociones esencialistas de pertenencia a una raza o nacionalidad, *Altered Carbon* muestra cómo este sistema realmente perpetúa las jerarquías biopolíticas. La ciencia ficción televisiva es por tanto un medio relevante que merece ser considerado en futuras investigaciones sobre el cine de cf transnacional y el cosmopolitismo. Como sugieren *Sense8* y *Altered Carbon*, algunas series de televisión basan sus premisas en conceptos que también aparecen en las películas mencionadas en esta tesis, abordando cuestiones cosmopolitas desde nuevas perspectivas en algunas ocasiones. Por ejemplo, *3%* (Pedro Aguilera, 2016-), como distopía sistémica ambientada en un mundo en el que se han agotado gran parte de los recursos y donde solo unos pocos privilegiados pueden tener vidas decentes, recuerda a los mundos de *Elysium* y *The Hunger Games*. Otro ejemplo obvio, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Bruce Miller, 2017-), ofrece una visión desconcertante sobre la violación de los derechos de las mujeres y de las minorías a la vez que trata algunos temas relacionados con las fronteras. Aunque estos ejemplos apenas comienzan a arrojar luz sobre el panorama actual de la ciencia ficción televisiva, sí que muestran que la televisión está tratando preocupaciones cosmopolitas similares a las del cine y que el uso del cosmopolitismo en dicho medio merece ser estudiado en el futuro.

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FILMS AND TELEVISION SERIES

12 Monkeys (Terry Gilliam, 1995)

2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)

2012 (Roland Emmerich, 2009)

28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2003)

28 Weeks Later (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007)

3% (Pedro Aguilera, 2016-)

40 Days and Nights (Peter Geiger, 2012)

A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971)

About Time (Richard Curtin, 2013)

Acquaria (Flávia Moraes, 2003)

Aelita (Yákov Protazánov, 1924)

Aeon Flux (Karyn Kusama, 2005)

Africa Paradis (Sylvestre Amoussou, 2006)

After Earth (M. Night Shyamalan, 2013)

Airport (George Seaton and Henry Hathaway, 1970)

Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979)

Alien: Covenant (Ridley Scott, 2017)

Alive in Joburg (Neill Blomkamp, 2005)

Alphaville (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965)

Altered Carbon (Laeta Kalogridis, 2018-)

Armageddon (Michael Bay, 1998)

Arrival (Denis Villeneuve 2016)

Attack the Block (Joe Cornish, 2011)

Autómata (Gabe Ibañez, 2014)

Avatar (James Cameron, 2009)

Babel (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis, 1985)

Back to the Future Part II (Robert Zemeckis, 1989)

Back to the Future Part III (Robert Zemeckis, 1990)

Babylon A.D. (Mathieu Kassovitz, 2008)

Banlieue 13/District B13 (Pierre Morel, 2004)

Barbarella (Roger Vadim, 1968)

Battle for the Planet of the Apes (J. Lee Thompson, 1973)

Beautiful Creatures (Richard LaGravenese, 2013)

Beholder (Nisha Ganatra, 2011)

Beneath the Planet of the Apes (Ted Post, 1970)

Big Hero 6 (Chris Williams, 2014).

Black Panther (Ryan Coogler, 2018)

Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982)

Branded (Jamie Bradshaw and Aleksandr Dulerayn, 2012)

Brazil (Terry Gilliam, 1985)

Bread and Roses (Ken Loach, 2000)

Captain America: The Winter Soldier (Anthony and Joe Russo, 2014)

Cargo (Ivan Engler and Ralph Etter, 2009)

Carmilla (Gabrielle Beaumont, 1990)

Cat-Women of the Moon (Arthur Hilton, 1953)

Caught Looking (Constantine Giannaris, 1991)

Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Steven Spielberg, 1977)

Closets (Lloyd Eyre-Morgan, 2015)

Cloud Atlas (The Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer, 2012)

Cocoon (Ron Howard, 1985)

Cocoon: The Return (Daniel Petrie, 1988)

Code 46 (Michael Winterbottom, 2003)

Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same (Madeleine Olnek, 2011)

Colossus: The Forbin Project (Joseph Sargent, 1970)

Conquest of the Planet of the Apes (J. Lee Thompson, 1972)

Contagion (Steven Soderbergh, 2011)

Credence (Mike Buonaiuto, 2015)

Crumbs (Miguel Llansó, 2015)

Dandy Dust (Hans Scheirl, 1998)

Das Arche Noah Prinzip/Noah's Ark Principle (Roland Emmerich, 1984)

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes (Matt Reeves, 2014)

Daybreakers (The Spierig Brothers, 2009)

Dead-End Drive-In (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986)

Deadly Skies (Sam Irvin, 2005)

Death Race (Paul Anderson, 2008)

Deep Impact (Mimi Leder, 1998)

Déjà Vu (Tony Scott, 2006)

Deluge (Felix Feist, 1933)

Demonlover (Olivier Assayas, 2002)

Devil Girl from Mars (David MacDonald, 1954)

District 9 (Neill Blomkamp, 2009)

Divergent (Neil Burger, 2014)

Doomsday (Neil Marshall, 2008)

Downsizing (Alexander Payne, 2017)

Dr. Strange (Scott Derrickson, 2016)

Dredd (Pete Travis, 2012)

E.T. (Steven Spielberg, 1982)

Earth Girls Are Easy (Julien Temple, 1988)

Earthbound (Alan Brennan, 2012)

Earthquake (Mark Robson, 1974)

Eden Log (Franck Vestiel, 2007)

El Norte (Gregory Nava, 1983)

Elysium (Neill Blomkamp, 2013)

En el Hoyo/In the Pit (Juan Carlos Rulfo, 2006)

Ender's Game (Gavin Hood, 2013)

Enemy Mine (Wolfgang Peterson, 1985)

Escape from the Planet of the Apes (Don Taylor, 1971)

Exaella (Andrew Oudot, 2011)

F.P.1 Antwortet Nicht/F.P.1 Doesn't Answer (Karl Hartl 1932)

Fahrenheit 451 (François Truffaut, 1966)

Fifth Element (Luc Besson, 1997)

G.O.R.A. (Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2004)

Gamer (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2009)

Gattaca (Andrew Niccol, 1997)

Gayniggers from Outer Space (Morten Lindberg, 1992)

Geostorm (Dean Devlin, 2017)

Godzilla (Gareth Edwards, 2014)

Godzilla (Roland Emmerich, 1998)

Goodbye Blue Sky (Brandon Zuck, 2017)

Gravity (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013)

Groundhog Day (Harold Ramis, 1993)

Guardians of the Galaxy (James Gunn, 2014)

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 (James Gunn, 2017)

Gusha no bindume/Hellevator (Hiroki Yamaguchi, 2004)

Haeundae/Tidal Wave (JK Youn, 2009)

Hell (Tim Fehlbaum, 2011)

Horror in the Wind (Max Mitchell, 2008)

How to Talk to Girls at Parties (John Cameron Mitchell, 2017)

Human (Yann Arthus-Bertrand, 2015)

I Am Legend (Francis Lawrence, 2007)

I Am Number Four (D.J. Caruso, 2011)

I Married a Monster from Outer Space (Gene Fowler, 1958)

I Origins (Mike Cahill, 2014)

In Time (Andrew Niccol, 2011)

Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996).

Independence Day: Resurgence (Roland Emmerich, 2016)

Index Zero (Lorenzo Sportiello, 2014)

Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, 2014)

Intolerance (D.W. Griffith, 1916)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956)

Invasion of the Star Creatures (Bruno Ve Sota, 1962)

Io Sono Li (Andrea Segre, 2011)

Island of Lost Souls (Erle Kenton, 1932)

Jigureul jikyeora!/Save the Green Planet (Jang Joon-hwan, 2003)

John Carter (Andrew Stanton, 2012)

Johnny Mnemonic (Robert Longo, 1995)

Jumper (Doug Liman, 2008)

Jupiter Ascending (The Wachowskis, 2015)

Jupiter's Moon (Kornél Mundruczó, 2017)

Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg, 1993)

Jurassic World (Colin Trevorrow, 2014)

Kaboom (Gregg Araki, 2010)

La horde/The Horde (Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, 2009)

Lawnmower Man (Brett Leonard, 1992)

Le Jetée (Chris Marker, 1962)

Le Temps du Loup/The Time of the Wolf (Michael Haneke, 2003)

Le Voyage dans la Lune/A Trip to the Moon (George Méliès, 1902)

Logan's Run (Michael Anderson, 1976)

Loong Boonmee raleuk chat/Uncle Boonme Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010)

Looper (Rian Johnson, 2012)

Lucy (Luc Besson, 2014)

Mad Max (George Miller, 1979)

Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (George Miller and George Ogilvie, 1985)

Mad Max: Fury Road (George Miller, 2015)

Mad Max: The Road Warrior (George Miller, 1981)

Manhattan (Woody Allen, 1979)

Mars Needs Moms (Simon Wells, 2011)

Matrix Reloaded (The Wachowskis, 2003)

Maze Runner: Death Cure (Wes Ball, 2018)

Maze Runner: Scorch Trials (Wes Ball, 2015)

Meet Dave (Brian Robbins, 2008)

Men in Black (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997)

Meteor (Ronald Neame, 1979)

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1929)

Monsters (Gareth Edwards, 2010)

Moon (Duncan Jones, 2009)

Moon 44 (Roland Emmerich, 1990)

Moon Pilot (James Neilson, 1962)

Morgenrøde/Dawn (Anders Elsrud Hultgreen, 2014)

My Stepmother Is an Alien (Richard Benjamin, 1988)

Nihon Chinbotsu/Japan Sinks (Shinji Higuchi, 2006)

Nihon Igai Zenbu Chinbotsu/The World Sinks Except Japan (Minoru Kawasaki, 2006)

Nineteen Eighty-Four (Michael Radford, 1984)

No Blade of Grass (Cornel Wilde, 1970)

Noah (Darren Aronofsky, 2014)

Nosferatu (F. W. Murnau, 1922)

Now You See Me (Louis Leterrier, 2013)

NUOC 2030 (Minh Nguyen-Vo, 2014)

Okja (Bong Joon-ho, 2017)

Outbreak (Wolfgang Petersen, 1995)

Pacific Rim (Guillermo del Toro, 2013)

Pandorum (Christian Alvart, 2009)

Parts: The Clonus Horror (Robert Fiveson, 1979)

Patlabor II (Mamoru Oshii, 2000)

PK (Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)

Planet 51 (Jorge Blanco, Javier Abad, and Marcos Martinez, 2009)

Planet 9 from Outer Space (Ed Wood, 1959)

Planet of the Apes (Franklin Schaffner, 1968)

Pojkarna/Girl Lost (Alexandra-Therese Keining, 2015)

Portable Life (Fleur Boonman, 2011)

Poseidon (Wolfgang Petersen, 2006)

Power Rangers (Dean Israelite, 2017)

Predestination (Peter and Michael Spierig, 2014)

Project Almanac (Dean Isrealite, 2015)

Pumzi (Wanuri Kahiu, 2009)

Queen of Outer Space (Edward Bernds, 1958)

Red Planet (Antony Hoffman, 2000)

Refuge (Tze Chun, 2013)

Repo Men (Miguel Sapochnik, 2010)

Resident Evil: Retribution (Paul W. S. Anderson, 2012)

Rise of the Planet of the Apes (Rupert Wyatt, 2011)

Robin Rot/Ruby Red (Felix Fuchsteiner, 2013)

Robocop (José Padilha, 2014)

Robocop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987)

Rollerball (Norman Jewison, 1975)

Sakasama no Patema/Patema Inverted (Yasuhiro Yoshiura, 2013)

San Andreas (Brad Peyton, 2015)

Segon Origen/Second Origin (Charles Porta and Bigas Luna, 2015)

Self/less (Tarsem Singh, 2015)

Sense8 (The Wachowskis and J. Michael Straczynski, 2015-18).

Side Effects (Steven Soderbergh, 2013)

Signs (M. Night Shyamalan, 2002)

Silver Sling (Mohammad Gorjestani, 2010)

Slaughterhouse Five (George Roy Hill, 1972)

Sleep Dealer (Alex Rivera, 2008)

Snowpiercer (Bong Joon-ho, 2013)

Soylent Green (Richard Fleischer, 1973)

Space Pirate Captain Harlock (Shinji Aramaki, 2013)

Space Station 76 (Jack Plotnick, 2014)

Species (Roger Donaldson, 1995)

Splice (Vincenzo Natali, 2009), *Open* (Jake Yuzna, 2010)

Star Appeal (Cui Zi'en, 2004)

Star Maps (Miguel Arteta, 1997)

Star Trek (J. J. Abrams 2009)

Star Trek: Beyond (Justin Lin, 2016)

Star Trek: Into Darkness (J.J. Abrams, 2013)

Star Trek: The Motion Picture (Robert Wise, 1979)

Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977)

Star Wars: Rogue One (Gareth Edwards, 2017)

Star Wars: The Force Awakens (J.J. Abrams, 2015)

Starman (John Carpenter, 1984)

Starship Troopers (Paul Verhoeven, 1997)

Steel Dawn (Lance Hool, 1987)

Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)

Strange Frame: Love and Sax (GB Hajim, 2012)

Stranger from Venus (Burt Balaban 1954)

Superman (Richard Donner, 1978)

Syriana (Stephen Gaghan, 2005)

Tank Girl (Rachel Talalay, 1995)

Teenagers from Outer Space (Tom Graeff, 1959)

Teknolust (Lynn Hershman Leeson, 2002)

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (James Cameron, 1991)

Terra Formars (Takashi Miike, 2016)

The Abyss (James Cameron, 1989)

The Age of Stupid (Franny Armstrong, 2009)

The Arrival (David Twohy, 1996)

The Astronaut's Wife (Rand Ravich, 1999)

The Avengers (Joss Whedon, 2012)

The Bad Batch (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2016)

The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (Eugène Lourié, 1953)

The Butterfly Effect (Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004)

“The Cloud Minders” (Season 3, Episode 21), *Star Trek* (Jud Taylor, 1969)

The Colony (Jeff Renfroe, 2013)

The Core (Jon Amiel, 2003)

The Day (Douglas Aarniokoski, 2011)

The Day After Tomorrow (Roland Emmerich, 2004)

The Day the Earth Caught Fire (Val Guest, 1961)

The Day the Earth Stood Still (Robert Wise, 1951)

The Day the Earth Stood Still (Scott Derrickson, 2008)

The District! (Áron Gauder, 2004)

The Divergent Series: Allegiant (Robert Schwentke, 2016)

The Divergent Series: Insurgent (Robert Schwentke, 2015)

The Fifth Wave (J. Blakeson, 2016)

The Fountain (Darren Aronofsky, 2006)

The Giver (Phillip Noice, 2014)

The Handmaid's Tale (Bruce Miller, 2017-)

The Handmaid's Tale (Volker Schlöndorff, 1990)

The Happening (M. Night Shyamalan, 2008)

The Host (Andrew Niccol, 2013)

The Host (Bong Joon-ho, 2007)

The Hunger Games (Gary Ross, 2012)

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (Francis Lawrence, 2013)

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1 (Francis Lawrence, 2014)

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2 (Francis Lawrence, 2015)

The Impossible (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2012)

The Incredible Shrinking Man (Jack Arnold, 1957)

The Island (Michael Bay, 2004)

The Last Survivors (Thomas Hammock, 2014)

The Man from Earth (Richard Schenkman, 2007)

The Man Who Fell to Earth (Nicolas Roeg, 1976)

The Matrix (The Wachowskis, 1999)

The Maze Runner (Wes Ball, 2014)

The Philadelphia Experiment (Stewart Raffill, 1984)

The Philosophers/After the Dark (John Huddles, 2013)

The Poseidon Adventure (Irwin Allen and Ronald Neame, 1972)

The Purge: Anarchy (James DeMonaco, 2014)

The Rising (Sebastian Mattukat, 2012)

The Road (John Hillcoat, 2009)

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (Jim Sharman, 1975)

The Rover (David Michôd, 2014)

The Running Man (Paul Michael Glaser, 1987)

The Shape of Water (Guillermo del Toro, 2017)

The Space Between Us (Peter Chelsom, 2017)

The Terminator (James Cameron, 1984)

The Thing from Another World (Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks, 1951)

The Time Machine (George Pal, 1960)

The Time Machine (Simon Wells, 2002)

The Time Traveller's Wife (Robert Schwentke, 2009)

The Towering Inferno (Irwin Allen and John Guillermin, 1974)

The Tree of Life (Terrence Malick, 2011)

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part I (Bill Condon, 2011)

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part II (Bill Condon, 2012)

The Twilight Saga: Eclipse (David Slade 2010)

The Twilight Saga: New Moon (Chris Weitz, 2009)

The War of the Worlds (Byron Haskin, 1953)

Them! (Gordon Douglas, 1954)

They Live (John Carpenter, 1988)

Thor (Kenneth Branagh, 2011)

THX 1138 (George Lucas, 1971)

Timecrimes (Nacho Vigalondo, 2007)

Titanic (James Cameron, 1997)

Total Recall (Len Wiseman, 2012)

Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, 1990)

Train to Busan (Sang-ho Yeon, 2016)

Transfer (Damir Lukacevic, 2010)

Transformers (Michael Bay, 2007)

Transformers: Age of Extinction (Michael Bay, 2014)

Transformers: Dark of the Moon (Michael Bay, 2011)

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (Michael Bay, 2009)

Tron (Steven Lisberger, 1982)

Twilight (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008)

Twister (Jan de Bont, 1996)

Under the Skin (Jonathan Glazer, 2013)

Unearthly Stranger (John Krish, 1963)

Until the End of the World (Wim Wenders, 1991)

Upside Down (Juan Solanas, 2012)

V for Vendetta (James McTeigue, 2005)

Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets (Luc Besson, 2017)

Vamp (Richard Wenk, 1986)

Vampire's Kiss (Robert Bierman, 1989)

Vampires Suck (Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, 2010)

Vegas in Space (Phillip Ford, 1991)

Wall-E (Andrew Stanton, 2008)

Warm Bodies (Jonathan Levine, 2013)

Waterworld (Kevin Costner and Kevin Reynolds, 1995)

Were the World Mine (Tom Gustafson, 2008)

What Planet Are You From? (Mike Nichols, 2000)

When the Man in the Moon Seeks a Wife (Percy Stow, 1908)

When Worlds Collide (Rudolph Maté, 1951)

World War Z (Mark Forster, 2013)

X-Men: Apocalypse (Bryan Singer, 2016)

X-Men: Days of Future Past (Bryan Singer, 2014)

Young Ones (Jake Paltrow, 2014)

Zardoz (John Boorman, 1974)

Zero Population Growth (Michael Campus, 1972)

Zerophilia (Martin Curland, 2005)