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Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (4)

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THE VISIT – A MULTIDISCIPLINARY FILM-BASED ENQUIRY INTO HUMANITY’S FIRST
ENCOUNTER WITH INTELLIGENT LIFE FROM SPACE

Abstract

The Visit is a documentary by Danish filmmaker Michael Madsen which addresses the reaction to, and implications of, humanity’s first encounter with intelligent life from space.

From his position as a conceptual artist and film director, Madsen enquires into and documents this “*event that has never taken place*” through interaction with experts coming from both from the space domain (such as the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, the International Space University, NASA, CNES, Committee on Space Research, the University of Texas, etc.), from the military, and government advisors.

However, rather than using conventional interviews with the experts, in *The Visit* Madsen encourages in them an imaginative, improvisational and performative approach. Using the camera as the never-seen visitor, each of the experts addresses the extraterrestrial, questioning its nature and purpose while, in the process, revealing key aspects of humanity, its self-image and its behaviour.

This paper will explain the background to *The Visit*, from its philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings and its intended purpose, to its position and situation within the cultural domain. It will describe the challenges of engaging with the space, government and military sectors and how these were overcome, as well as the necessary dialogue and interaction with the various experts. In addition its impact, both on those involved in its making and on audiences who have watched it, will be assessed.

Finally, the paper will review critical and popular reaction to *The Visit*, from its world premier at the Sundance Film Festival in early 2015 through the execution of its developing release campaign, culminating with its simultaneous showings in international film theatres in the late summer.