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**Speed** (comments by Mark R. Leeper):

When you get older, slow is the new fast. [-mrl]

**THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951)** (film retrospective by Mark R. Leeper):

Trivia question: what day of the week is "The Day the Earth Stood Still"? Answer later in the article.

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL is a sentimental favorite among Fifties science fiction films. It is certainly good but not nearly as good as its reputation would make it. What you have is a story of militant pacifists from outer space who come to Earth to say "be nice and don't fight or our robots are going to kick some ass." This has never been my idea of an inspiring message. And the mere fact that it isn't the aliens themselves but their robotic police does not make the message one iota more palatable, at least not for me. I think that the concept that aliens were going to come down and keep peace-or at least limit warfare-like some sort of super-parents is less than appealing.

The film begins with a subjective sequence showing an approach to Earth from space. Once again we see that the 1950s' fascination with flying saucers is used in a film, in fact more than some of the films that just had references. Here the flying saucer which we saw the first sequence actually lands in a park in Washington D.C. The military immediately surrounds the craft. From the saucer comes a mysterious alien, Klaatu, who is almost immediately shot due to paranoia on the part of the military guards sent to meet him. The saucer again opens and out comes a nine-foot-tall robot who destroys all the weapons aimed at the saucer, then turns himself into a statue. Klaatu is taken to a hospital but heals himself faster than Earth medicine could. He requests an audience with all world leaders and is refused. He escapes from his hospital to find out for himself what humans who are not politicians are all about. At a science fiction convention I attended, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL was used as an example of a science fiction film that is not also a horror film. That seems to be the general perception by most fans, yet I think looking at the film there definitely is an element of horror in the film. I see this in two aspects. First is the way Klaatu is handled in the early parts of the film. Often his face is hidden or we see him from behind or in shadow. This combined with Bernard Herrmann's menacing music is clearly intended to make Klaatu seem threatening. And certainly the robot Gort is intended to be frightening. He kills when he has to and stands implacably the rest of

the time. On subsequent viewings one realizes that Gort kills only two soldiers in the course of the film and then only because they are threatening him with rifles.

Patricia Neal is in love at the beginning of the film and discovers she doesn't really like her intended during the course of the film. One of the things she does not like is his assumption that he should be a dominating male. In some ways this film is years ahead of its time. The other major lead and certainly the only Earth- person of much real interest value in the film is Sam Jaffe as Prof. Barnhardt, a thinly disguised imitation of Albert Einstein. Jaffe was a great character actor who seemed equally at home playing German scientists or Gunga Din. The generation who was growing up seeing *The Day the Earth Stood Still* may have come to think of him as Dr. Zorba on the TV show "Ben Casey".

There are a number of nice touches in the film. Several well-known news commentators of the period agreed to appear as themselves adding an air of authenticity. Names like Elmer Davis are not familiar now, but were certainly so at the time of the release of the film. We also get a feel for the contemporary Cold War paranoia. Helen Benson jumps to the conclusion that Carpenter is a spy. Also the Christ symbolism is a bit blatant. Klaatu, who takes on the name Carpenter (initials J.C.), is hated in spite of his message of peace. He is killed but returns from the dead to meet with people and then to ascend into the heavens. Imaginative visual touches include Gort's strange death-ray lens and a rather interesting set for the internals of the saucer. It has been suggested that, as in the short story "Farewell to the Master" (on which the story is based), the robot is really the boss and not the human. I see no internal information that is conclusive either way, but the film is marginally more interesting if Klaatu is actually running interference for the true master Gort.

Trivia answer: And what day of the week was "The Day the Earth Stood Still"? It was a Tuesday. Bobby did not have school the day he went to Prof. Barnhardt's house but did have school the next day so presumably that was a Sunday. That night Klaatu returns to the house and tells the professor that the demonstration will be two days hence.

Some impressive scenes with Gort and the score by Herrmann give this film most of what is good about it. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Turner Classic Movies is running this in a prime slot on December 9, 8:00 PM, as part of their salute to Bernard Herrmann. [-mrl]

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### **BEYOND THE VISIBLE--HILMA AF KLINT** (film review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

**BEYOND THE VISIBLE--HILMA AF KLINT:** This documentary is about the first abstract painter, Hilma af Klint. Hilma af Klint came before Vassily Kandinsky or Piet Mondrian, and for years it was thought that her abstract work was never displayed during her lifetime. However, the filmmakers discovered that there had been an exhibit in London in 1928. (Her first modern exhibit in the 1980s drew a million visitors.)

Another puzzling question is why many of Hilma af Klint's paintings seem to have been copied by artists such as Kandinsky, or Mondrian, or Andy Warhol (demonstrated in a side-by-side sequence). If it was believed that there had never been an exhibit before these other artists had painted, how could one explain this? It turns out that Rudolf Steiner had photographs of many of Hilma af Klint's works, and also that Steiner knew Kandinsky, so it was possible.

Hilma af Klint was ignored by the art world both during her lifetime and after her abstract paintings were displayed years after her death. This is attributed to several factors. The obvious one is that women artists are often ignored by the art world. (One statistic cited is that the Modern Art wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art has females representing 5% of their artists, but 85% of their nudes.) One indication of how little regarded she was in her lifetime is that she doesn't even get her name on the gravestone of her family, which contains only her father's name.

The second factor is the apparent unwillingness of the art world ever to rewrite its history (at least according to the art experts interviewed for this). Once Kandinsky and Mondrian have been declared the first abstract painters, it is next to impossible to change that pronouncement. (One interviewee said that modern art is about making money and maintaining the history as written.)

And lastly, at least one expert says that the current reticence to recognize Klint stems from the fact that Sweden is a very secular country and Hilma af Klint's work had a strong theosophical basis. Even during her lifetime, her work was discounted with the excuse that it had a mystical basis, conveniently overlooking that the vast majority of male artists also showed a spiritual basis in their work. Some of her early semi-abstracts are similar to paintings by William Blake, and his work certainly had a mystical basis.)

One result of these three factors was that when the Moderna Museet Stockholm was offered the collection of her work (over 1200 pieces) they turned it down, apparently without even looking at it.

The film obviously shows a lot of Hilma af Klint's work, but it also intersperses these with shots of nature which are often filmed in such a way as to seem like abstract art themselves. Even a shot of shelves of her boxed paintings and journals at first looks like an abstract painting. And there are the usual "talking heads", the primary ones being Josiah McElheny (artist), Iris Muller-Westerman (director of the Moderna Museet Malmo), and Julia Voss (art critic).

Obviously this is a must-see for anyone interested in abstract art, or in the history of women in art. The only caveat is that for those of us not well-schooled in abstract art, the meaning behind the paintings is often not clear. [-ecl]

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**The Utah Monolith (Possibly) Explained (and Other Comments)** (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper and letters of comment by Joy Beeson, Keith F. Lynch, Gary McGath, and Dorothy J. Heydt):

From <https://www.cnet.com/news/mysterious-monolith-puzzle-has-been-solved-by-internet-sleuths/>:

"[Reddit users] were able to isolate the monolith's approximate location, tracking the flight paths of Utah Public Safety's helicopters in order to triangulate a rough area near Canyonlands National Park and the Colorado River. Once the approximate location was narrowed down, the internet sleuths took to Google Earth to isolate the coordinates and figure out when the monolith first appeared.

"Historical imaging data reflected that the monolith arrived sometime between August 2015 and October 2016, leaving open a fairly significant gap. Roughly around that time, the epic sci-fi drama WESTWORLD was filming in a nearby location, so the best bet at the moment is that someone on the crew either didn't pack up properly or maybe even used the metal to play a longterm Kubrick- inspired prank on the world."

The location of the monolith was briefly labeled on Google Maps as "Utah Monolith", but apparently Google has removed that so as not to encourage people to head out into the back country to see it and end up needing rescuing, or to cause damage to Native American sites and artefacts. [-ecl]

Joy Beeson writes:

It annoys me no end that every single reference to the stele calls it a monolith. There is no lith in it, and I've not seen any suggestion that its mono, rather than pieces welded together. [-jb]

Keith F. Lynch responds:

The pieces were riveted together, not welded, and nobody (except its unknown builder) knew what was inside. It could have been solid rock inside. Or a portal to another dimension.

It's gone now, as mysteriously as it arrived. [-kfl]

Gary McGath explains:

It collected its data and returned to the homeworld. Probably we'll be invaded soon. If it's on Christmas and they attack London, the Doctor will save us. [-gmg]

Dorothy J. Heydt updates:

And a new one has surfaced in Romania,

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7493097/utah-monolith-romania/>

And, since I last looked, has disappeared again. [-djh]

[More responses may be found at <https://groups.google.com/g/rec.arts.sf.fandom/c/-nXMSmPSNu8>. [-ecl]

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**Edward Gibbon and China** (letter of comment by Joseph T. Major): Evelyn's comments on Edward Gibbon's MEMOIRS in the 11/27/20 issue of the MT VOID, Joseph T. Major writes:

Evelyn writes, "Gibbon also is a bit weak on Chinese history, writing, "... the posterity of Confucius having maintained, above two thousand and two hundred years, their peaceful honours and perpetual succession." There were nine dynasties in that time, and it was not always peaceful." [-ecl]

The descendants of Kong Fuzi/Kung Fu-tse have succeeded peacefully, even as the dynasties changed. The current senior descendant Kung Tsui-chang is Sacrificial Official to Confucius, a senior official of the Chinese (Taiwan) government. He is the 79th in descent from Confucius, and he has a son, Kung Yu-jen.

A less distinguished, but more powerful, descendant of Confucius was H. H. Kung, Kung Hsian-hsi, Chiang Kai-shek's prime minister. [-jtm]

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**This Week's Reading** (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

THE GREAT KOSHER MEAT WAR OF 1902: IMMIGRANT HOUSEWIVES AND THE RIOTS THAT SHOOK NEW YORK CITY by Scott D. Seligman (University of Nebraska/Potomac, ISBN 978-1-640-12358-8) covers more than just the protests over the increase in the price of kosher meat. It also looks at those as the beginning of a series of protests over food prices, rents, and labor conditions, as well as the women's suffrage movement. But the book begins with a very detailed explanation of the supply chain from animal to butcher shop, especially the particular restrictions on kosher meat and the cultural importance of meat. I found it an informative read, but my suspicion is that unless you are already somewhat steeped in the Lower East Side culture or the social movements of the early twentieth century, this book will have more detail than you are interested in. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

All models are wrong but some are useful.

--George Box

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