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COMMENTARY

Imagining decline or sustainability: Hope, fear, and ideological discourse in Hollywood speculative fiction

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Over the past decade within Hollywood speculative fiction (SF), the natural environment has become more prominent as a cause of societal collapse. Interstellar, Elysium, Wall-E, Mad Max, and Tomorrowland, as a few examples, all include environmental change and deterioration as prominent plot points, rather than merely as settings. I analyze the political and ideological tenor of these films with a discourse framework to assess the influence of certain real-world discourses, as well as their optimism or pessimism in the context of real-world sustainability transformations. Within this genre, one continues to find a degree of 'Prometheanism,' or techno-optimism, but the distinctive discursive influence of the past decade and a half has been the rise of 'Survivalism,' a more dystopian or post-apocalyptic discourse. When the environment is prominent as a theme, that is, these films more often explore its destruction—often by humans—and the conditions of existence within such environments.

Keywords: Discourse; Imagination; Sustainability

Long before Yogi Berra, a resident of ancient China once made a quip that would eventually become a proverb:

> *If we do not change our direction, we're likely to end up where we're headed.*

It might have been meant in irony even then—or perhaps not—but in the context of imagination and transformations toward sustainability, the proverb raises questions of earnest importance: Where *are* we headed? Do we want to be heading this way? Can we change direction, and if so how? Who's included in the *we*?

For the moment let the '*we*' be all humanity circa 2018CE, a planetary civilization of nearly eight billion *Homo sapiens* struggling and striving towards various personal and shared ends amid ineffable complexity. No one can say with certainty where our civilization is headed, of course, because in the strict sense the future cannot be known—its not having happened yet. But certainty is not a constructive standard for useful knowledge. If you are driving toward a cliff, it does not take much imagination to *know* what will happen if your course does not change. Projecting your course—that is, *imagining* what will happen if you fail to turn the wheel or hit the brake—is what convinces you of the need for an action, varying in urgency depending on your speed and other variables. If you are a climate scientist, ecologist, or enthusiast of speculative fiction (SF) coming out of Hollywood, you could be excused for extending this metaphor to humanity's trajectory. We may not be heading toward the figurative equivalent of a cliff, beyond which lies inevitable descent and a cataclysmic meeting with the ground below; but on the other hand—we also might be (see for e.g. Steffen et al., 2018; Barnosky and Hadly, 2015; Costanza et al., 2007). The truth is we do not know, but equivalent 'cliffs' do exist. There was one for most of the dinosaurs,[1] and they did not even need to move toward it: *their cliff came to them*.

Unlike the dinosaurs, presumably, we humans have the capacity to imagine what's ahead, and spend a good amount of time doing so. We imagine real and fictional worlds, the sublime and the tragic, the past and the future. In relation to geological time, humanity has achieved some remarkable successes in the mere blink of an eye, and doubtlessly a degree of imagination has helped. We imagine pyramids and Platonic realms, the perils of plagues and the promise of cures. We imagine how *the cliff* came to the dinosaurs—or more importantly, how it could happen to us, and occasionally tell the tale on the big screen (Bulfin, 2017).[2] In this same vein, and in the context of epochal change into the Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin, 2015), it is increasingly worth asking: How do some of our popular cinematic storytellers imagine the future? How do they conceive the path that humanity may be on and project it forward, with all the sophisticated and necessary caveats of allowing for genuine novelty and future surprises, to tell a story about where we may be going? How do they evaluate the nebulous question of whether our civilization appears to be moving toward the equivalent

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of a cliff—the thing that ends our possibilities—or along a road that, with some effort at self-transformation, at least continues, no matter how bumpily, and thus holds our possibilities and aspirations aloft?

These are some of the questions addressed herein. The point of departure will not be all cinematic depictions, of course, nor even all SF cinema; this would still be too large and diverse a set. The object of interest is Hollywood SF, especially the blockbuster variety with large global earnings. When examined as a group, what we see is that the present environmental *imaginary*[3] of this cinematic space is increasingly dark and declinist; that is to say, while humans may survive in the future, it is often in a form of post-civilizational-collapse, and the natural environment has been profoundly perturbed—occasionally beyond repair, occasionally not. When the cliff is avoided, or a sort of redemption in difficult new circumstances is shown to be possible for those who survive, it is rarely achieved without violence. What that means for viewers in the real world is of course an interesting question. But that, as they say, is getting ahead of the story.

On Method and Theory: Environmental Discourse Analysis

Before getting to discursive content, two important questions must be addressed at the outset: Why Hollywood, as opposed to other national or regional film industries? And why SF, as opposed to other genres? The choice of this particular industry reflects its prominence as a regional instance of the global film industry, and bounds what would otherwise be too large a body of work to analyze. I do not contend that Hollywood is representative of all human cinematic storytelling, of course, and do not infer from it any broader generalizations. That said, Hollywood is a well-known, well-established example of industrial filmmaking, and its stories do travel. Its use as an object of analysis is well-represented in film studies literature (Boggs and Pollard, 2016; Langford, 2005; Brereton, 2005; Ingram, 2000; Turner, 1988).

The SF genre, for its part, is a critical space for studying imagination because its authors and directors often envision future states of society, including times that may potentially correspond to the real world's Anthropocene. SF's *imaginaries*—"visions of what is attainable through science and technology, but also of how life ought, or ought not, to be lived" (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 5)—are visually evocative and potentially transformative, combining elements of continuity and novelty. All fiction contains representations, characters to potentially emulate or despise, values, and other politically or culturally salient traits, but SF especially does so with an eye to *what could be*, for individuals and whole societies, which is why continued engagement with this particular genre—especially what it challenges or reinforces in our current society—is so important (Robinson, 2016).

This brings us to affect and ideology. As with any story about the future, the depiction of what could come can be seen in the light of two impulses, aspiration or warning, corresponding to the affects of hope and fear (Dahlbeck, 2014). What particular referent state may be *cause* for hope or fear (or other similar types of affect) can vary, however, in part due to ideological beliefs: that is, one group's hope for the future can invoke another group's fear, an inverse relationship of desired ends captured in SF by Samuel Delany's ecological typology of New Jerusalem and Arcadia (Delany, 1990). For Delany, those who would hope to live in the former fear the latter as a Land of the Flies, while those who would hope to live in the latter fear the former as a Brave New World. The inverse interpretation of each space occurs because of different values and ideological commitments—regarding how people, places, and interactions *ought* to be organized (Jost et al., 2013). They are lenses through which reality, physical as well as social, is seen, differentiated, and normatively evaluated (van Dijk, 2013).

SF films of recent years display less mutual exclusion than Delany's typology, however, and more of a mixed-bag of overlapping influences, for which the environmental discourse framework of John Dryzek is apposite (Dryzek, 2013). His framework includes nine distinct—but not necessarily mutually-exclusive—discourses, reproduced below in **Table 1**.

Many of these discursive influences can be found in the narratives and plots of Hollywood SF, whether to critique them, caricature them, or uncritically reinforce them. Prometheanism, for instance, is occasionally typified as SF's defining attribute (Podeshi, 2002), but SF now contains increasing influence from Survivalist discourse as well. But what do each of these categories mean? It would do us well to elaborate a few key points about the most influential discourses, which include the two just mentioned, along with Administrative Rationalism, Economic Rationalism, and Green Consciousness, whose contributions are less pronounced but nonetheless detectable in Hollywood SF.

Prometheanism is the discourse of technologically-inspired optimism regarding human creativity and mastery. Here the only limits to progress are those that we place upon ourselves. Nature can never be an insurmountable barrier to human ingenuity and advancement, and the question of its extent, finite or infinite, is effectively irrelevant. The most fervent Promethean thinkers occasionally even believe "that a total control of nature is within our

Table 1: Environmental Discourses (Dryzek, 2013). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.344.t1

1. Survivalism
2. Prometheanism
3. Administrative Rationalism
4. Democratic Pragmatism
5. Economic Rationalism
6. Sustainable Development
7. Ecological Modernization
8. Green Consciousness
9. Green Politics

grasp" (Dryzek, 2013, p. 61). This discourse is thus one of hope for humans; the natural world can pose challenges, certainly, but is not deserving of fear, for with the right values and knowledge all challenges can be overcome. There can be no *cliff* for humanity, only opportunities to fly.

Survivalism is effectively the mirror-opposite discourse. Here, human mastery over nature is more myth than reality; limits are real, and things can turn for the worse—or collapse entirely—surprisingly quickly. Should nothing change from our business as usual pathway, figures within this discourse anticipate "misery, starvation, and death resulting from unconstrained human procreation and consumption" (Dryzek, 2013, p. 28). They therefore advocate a radical alternative to the historical trajectory of advanced economies over the past two centuries. This discourse is more fearful for humanity, and its hopefulness is only reserved for, and directed toward, deep change away from the status quo.

Administrative Rationalism can be summarized as the discourse of expert management. Only with particular institutional arrangements and rules, set up by those with the right expertise, can technology and human creativity be made effective at solving problems, whatever their origin. Economic Rationalism discounts all institutions besides the market, and strongly rebukes the role of the state in economic, personal, or almost any affairs. Here individuals and their autonomy are paramount, and rules should be kept to a minimum in order to let individuals negotiate their conduct with others in as many domains as they see fit. Economic Rationalism can thus be thought of as the mirror-opposite of Administrative Rationalism, often discounting the very nature of collective action problems like climate change and mass extinction (also see Clapp and Dauvergne, 2011, for a discussion of four similar 'environmental worldviews').[4] Finally, Green Consciousness refers to the discourse of beliefs and arguments which find that more than anything else, humanity must change how it *thinks*; only a revolution of the mind can provide the transformation necessary to bring humanity back from the brink, and repair our relationship with the natural world (Dryzek, 2013).

There is also imbrication between these discourses, according to Dryzek. Administrative and Economic Rationalists, for example, also tend to be somewhat Promethean in thinking that humans are natural problem-solvers. Yet their perceptions of what causes these problems and the best means to solve them are at odds, pushing each of them toward more fearful, Survivalist conclusions when the other's approach is adopted—Delany's typological inversion at work once again. This effect does not occur for Dryzek's other four discourses, however, and their influence in SF film is also non-apparent.[5] We can thus leave them aside as a path for other research to travel, and continue along our main trajectory: SF films and their discursive content.

Survivalism Rising – The Natural Environment and Societal Decline

For fans of SF, it is hard not to notice that whenever the natural environment is foregrounded as more than merely a setting, and is relevant to the plot, the film is quite likely either about an eco-catastrophe, or a post-apocalyptic eco-dystopia of some sort. **Table 2** presents a list of Hollywood SF blockbusters since 1995, listed chronologically with date of release as well as their global theatrical box office earnings.

Many of these films' environmental conditions are scientifically plausible, which should not be surprising; their imagined settings have analogs in reality and historical experience. Deserts and impoverished mega-slums each exist (the settings of *Mad Max* and *Elysium*, respectively), as do dustbowl agricultural conditions (*Interstellar*) and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (*WALL-E* comes to mind). Skies have been dimmed by volcanoes, and geo-engineering designed to replicate this effect, such as solar radiation management (*The Matrix*; *Geostorm*), is increasingly being researched (Morton, 2016). Human groups have overharvested forests (the tragedy of *The Lorax*), imperialized others to obtain precious metals (the tragedy of *Avatar*), and run the gamut of socio-ecological interactions that harm other species, perturb ecosystems, and strain the communities that depend on them. These are all markers of Survivalism, as defined by Dryzek.

One can also see the catastrophe/post-catastrophe distinction at work, and although either premise can be a marker of Survivalist influence, sometimes a narrative

Table 2: Hollywood SF Blockbusters since 1995.[6] DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.344.t2

Waterworld (1995) – *264.2 million USD*	After Earth (2013) – *243.8 million USD*
Deep Impact (1998) – *349.5 million USD*	Elysium (2013) – *286.1 million USD*
Armageddon (1998) – *553.7 million USD*	Interstellar (2014) – *677.5 million USD*
The Matrix (1999) – *463.5 million USD*	Mad Max Fury Road (2015) –*378.9 million USD*
The Day After Tomorrow (2004) – *544.3 million USD*	The Martian (2015) – *630.2 million USD*
WALL-E (2008) – *533.3 million USD*	Tomorrowland (2015) – *209.2 million USD*
Star Trek (2009) – *385.7 million USD*	Jurassic World (2015) – *1.67 billion USD*
Avatar (2009) – *2.79 billion USD*	Inferno (2016) – *220 million USD*
2012 (2009) – *769.7 million USD*	Geostorm (2017) – *221.6 million USD*
The Lorax (2012) – *348.8 million USD*	Avengers: Infinity War (2018) – *2.04 billion USD*

can avoid catastrophe due to an ingenious intervention, thus representing Prometheanism (as with *Armageddon* and *Tomorrowland*). Excluding these latter two, seven of the films still portray some manner of catastrophic natural event that can or does cause societal collapse/decline, whether in the form of an asteroid (*Deep Impact*), extremely rapid climate change (*The Day After Tomorrow*), some unspecified environmental threshold being crossed (the film *2012*), or antagonists (including humans, as in *The Lorax* and *Avatar*) that are either uncaring of environmental destruction, or explicitly wish to reduce population pressure (as with *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Inferno*). Each of these catastrophe premises, depicting collapse or severe decline in real-time, portrays Survivalist concern (on catastrophism and climate change, see Bulfin, 2017).

Seven films on the list (*Waterworld*, *The Matrix*, *WALL-E*, *After Earth*, *Elysium*, *Interstellar*, and *Mad Max*) follow the post-catastrophe premise, taking place in a future where either the biosphere or industrial civilization as they are known today have already collapsed—although there are a few interesting twists to a simple collapse narrative. For example, *Interstellar* and *Elysium*'s storylines display continued technological advance for some subset of humanity, despite the natural world having been profoundly damaged or perturbed, and most of civilization having regressed to impoverished milieus. In *WALL-E*, technological progress enables humanity to escape Earth—but not clean it up, a refuse-strewn ruin—and while the technical advances appear equitable, they are also perverse: every individual is excessively obese, unable to walk without technological assistance. Another interesting exception is *After Earth*, where the departure and absence of humans on Earth for several centuries eventually leads to a resurgent biodiversity—but also one that is directly identified as dangerous, in need of Promethean subduing. Only in *Waterworld* and *Mad Max* can we see both an altered/destroyed environment as well as clear technological regression to simpler forms; examples of 'classic' collapse scenarios, exemplifying Survivalist fear of the possible worst that can happen if humanity is not careful (see Tainter 1988).

Whether the harmful environmental conditions that these films portray occur everywhere and affect everyone equally (as in *Waterworld*), or whether those conditions are mediated by inequality and structural violence (as in *Elysium*), Survivalist SF can help serve the classic dystopian function of *critique* (Rogan 2009). When there may be more plastic in our oceans than plankton (Eriksen et al., 2014), the depiction of a refuse-covered Earth in *WALL-E*—quite literally covered in skyscrapers of waste—suddenly appears more critical than its animated-style would otherwise suggest. These films, despite being fiction, can thus sensitize viewers to what might be possible, or even plausible, for the whole Earth as a system, and thus for all humanity in some fashion. In this respect the films are tracking, consciously or inadvertently, the rise of Earth System science as an interdisciplinary field (Steffen, 2005; Biermann et al., 2010). Regardless of their other discursive content, then, the films represent what we might call *diagnostic* or *prognostic* imaginaries. They do not need to be precisely accurate—they have the benefit of being both fictional and speculative—but are more or less constructive to the degree that they serve as creative spurs for reflection and thought. '*Is this where we could be going?*' they implicitly prompt the viewer to consider.

The mere prompting of such questions may offer little hope or guidance for how to avoid such an outcome in the real world, however. For these elements, it is important to look for what might be called *prescriptive* representations, or depictions of beliefs and behaviours deployed towards particular ends. Consider *Tomorrowland*, which contains an instructive fable. At one point the story's protagonist recounts it to her father, dejected at his impending unemployment: "There are Two Wolves, and they're always fighting: one is Darkness and Despair, the other is Light and Hope. Which wolf wins?" The father's response? "*Whichever one you feed.*" The moral of this fable—that we must feed hope, lest despair and resignation set in, and no positive change in society will occur while its members are resigned—appears quite simple and self-evidently constructive; a basic element of the Promethean attitude. Yet the place of Tomorrowland itself—the spacious city with green infrastructure and jet packs, the positive envisioning of what we are supposed to hope *for*—is suggested to be the result of all the Earth's geniuses hiding away from governments and 'the masses,' each implied to be fetters upon these geniuses' natural Promethean capabilities. It is said that to build Tomorrowland they needed "a place free from politics, bureaucracy, distractions, greed—a secret place, where they could build whatever they were crazy enough to imagine."[7] This is Economic Rationalism at work—bureaucracy and politics are appraised negatively, as distractions—but the scope of its operation is limited to those of 'genius' intelligence, a notion left undefined in the film.

Consider as an alternative set of prescriptive representations the long-running *Star Trek* franchises, whether of television or film. They contain Prometheanism, but also a good amount of Administrative Rationalism: Star Fleet, organized in hierarchy but with functional differentiation according to expertise, is a clear example of institutional arrangements designed to make science, technology, and human creativity servants of just causes (in this case, the benign or even benevolent exploration of the final frontier). The political orientation is thus diametrically opposite of the representation offered by *Tomorrowland*; there is no going it alone in space, one thinks with *Star Trek*, genius or not. Then there is Ridley Scott's 2015 adaptation of *The Martian*, with an intriguing mix of influences and discursive adaptations. Left for dead on Mars, its protagonist employs science to problem solving, saying at one point: "I'm going to have to science the s**t out of this," Prometheanism on full display. At first he does so alone, by necessity, but the narrative's clear valorization of the individual might belie a slight influence of Economic Rationalism. Eventually he finds a way to communicate with NASA and his fellow crew members, and together they plan and successfully carry out his retrieval—but only after his fellow crew members

mutiny against NASA's leaders (elements both for and against Administrative Rationalism).

One can also see markers of Green Consciousness in Hollywood SF blockbusters. In *Avatar*, all but a handful of the invading humans fail to understand the Na'vi's deep interconnection with other Pandoran life and biota—an obvious metaphor for humanity's connections to other life and ecosystems on Earth, and the perils of rapacious extractivism (Holtmeier, 2010; Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014). Here, a cognitive shift of vision and a normative shift of values go hand in hand, although the expression of this process will always be context-specific.[8] An intellectual move toward thinking of the biosphere either as Gaia (see e.g. Lovelock, 1991) or as "natural capital" (and that we therefore ought to respect as such) are examples of this environmental discourse in action today (on natural capital see Costanza and Daly, 1992; for the perils of false equivalence and over-financialization, however, see Sullivan, 2014). In *Jurassic World* (and its predecessors), Green Consciousness and Survivalism are creatively mixed to critique the Prometheanism of genetic engineering and the possibility of de-extinction (Shapiro, 2015). At one point the chief geneticist is berated for creating the Indominus Rex, a vicious hybrid that escapes its paddock and terrorizes the island, clearly a monster to the island park's owner—to which the geneticist quips: "Monster is a relative term. To a canary, a cat is a monster—we're just used to being the cat." The mental shift that this line unsubtly suggests is that, without restraint, humans should consider (or perhaps even fear) how monstrous we can be, both to other life forms and to ourselves. Perhaps this analogy can be set aside as simple techno-phobia, but another interpretation is that it carries on the viewpoint of the first *Jurassic Park* (1993), whose "scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could [do de-extinction] that they *didn't' stop to think if they should*." Connecting the possible and the desirable—indeed, limiting the former to the latter—is a marker of the Green Consciousness discourse at work.

Overall, then, we can see a mixture of discursive influence across Hollywood SF in the past two decades. Yet the bulk of the films display catastrophes or post-collapse settings and narratives, themes that fit well within Survivalist environmental discourse. The presence of the latter in SF does not mean that we should only fear the future, however. These films also show the possibility of redemption: The gangs are defeated in *Mad Max*; land is found in *Waterworld*, as is a new planet on which to settle in *Interstellar*; Elysium's healing technology is made available to those on the planet's surface, from which they were previously excluded; Wall-E helps humanity return to Earth to begin again, its soils recuperated; and the world is quite literally saved from total destruction in *Tomorrowland*. Problematically, though, violence is always necessary within-narrative to enable these 'redemptive' endings, a sad fact with multiple interpretations. Part of it may represent a tragic catharsis; the feeling that if only our real environmental problems were so simple that they could be fist-fought away. Part of it may be a simple reflection of the real world, where violence, both interpersonal and structural, has always distressingly fluctuated (though perhaps declined over the *longue durée* as well; see Pinker, 2011). On the other hand, the depiction of violence as seemingly necessary may also be a unique feature to Hollywood cinema, whose historical connections with the American military have been noted elsewhere (Alford, 2017). But this point is beyond the current scope of analysis.

Finally, the general possibility of positive societal transformation across these films occurs by reverse implication, through the pseudo-critical act that is telling a Survivalist narrative to viewers who are likely in comfortable and safe surroundings. While it may occur to varying degrees of effect, for those who value public safety and high living-standards—maintaining them where they exist, and extending them to where they do not—the general prescription of these films might be simply: *take heed and act now, the hour may be later than you think.*

The Ends of Imaginary Future-Gazing

Environmentally-themed SF cinema, in sum, does not shy away from imagining human civilization to be in a troubled state, especially with regard to its relationship to the rest of the natural world. Humans have variously overfilled it with waste, over-harvested its resources, denuded its food-producing capability, caused the sea to inundate it, or otherwise harmed its diversity and marred its beauty. Our present, real society is implied to be in deep need of transformation. Without change from our current course, SF cinematic storytellers are just as fearful as hopeful for life on Planet Earth with humans at the helm. *Homo sapiens* may yet avoid its cliff for the time being—but we may *be the cliff* for many other species and ecosystems, perhaps even to the point of a mass extinction event (Barnosky et al., 2011). Speaking of humanity going extinct as a species thereby oversteps a more important prior point; that our extant, globally-interconnected civilization has come to where it is on a knife-edge of climatic stability and biospheric integrity (Rockstrom et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2018). We may not be the dinosaurs, but our *civilization* could be, a plight that Hollywood SF is increasingly imagining.

The process of admittedly partial envisioning that these films offer also displays a mixed-bag of discursive ideological influences. One can variously find elements of Economic Rationalism—of governments or institutions in general being fetters on our natural creative problem solving—and of Administrative Rationalism—where institutions are examples of self-governance and appropriate checks on human groups and technologies that could otherwise run amok. One can also still find a degree of classic Promethean optimism; but when the environment is a prominent theme, one is just as likely to now find Survivalist pessimism amid post-apocalyptic circumstances.

Most importantly of all, however, the recent explicit foregrounding of the natural world in popular cinematic storytelling can perhaps be taken as a barometer of wider

engagement with environmental themes and issues outside the scientific community and environmental movement. While the politics embedded within such representations may remain pluralistic and contentious, this may be a feature and not a flaw, if it leads to more reflection, discussion, debate, and imagining of what could be, both in terms of what we hope for, and also what we hope to avoid: *The End*.

Notes

[1] Excluding those that survived and evolved to become contemporary birds.

[2] See *Armageddon*, 1998; *Deep Impact*, 1998.

[3] The term 'imaginary' is defined below, in the next section.

[4] Clapp & Dauverne's four worldviews include: Market Liberal, Institutionalist, Bioenvironmentalist, and Social Green. The first two align well with Dryzek's Economic Rationalism and Administrative Rationalism, respectively, while the Bioenvironmentalist category overlaps with Dryzek's Survivalism.

[5] But perhaps relevant to other genres, such as drama: one can find the influence of the Green Politics discourse at work in films such as *Erin Brokovitch*, 2000, and *The East*, 2013.

[6] Theatrical box office earnings were obtained from Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com). Some of these films fit within more specific sub-genres, such as comic-book/superhero adaptations (e.g. *Avengers: Infinity War*) and might therefore not seem to fit. *Infinity War* is included because the film's antagonist, Thanos, is motivated by clearly Survivalist concerns over unrestrained population. At one point he says to his step-daughter: "It's a simple calculus: this universe is finite; it's resources finite. If life is life unchecked, life will cease to exist. It needs correcting." The rest of this sub-genre quite universally does not meet this environmental criterion, and can therefore be excluded. The adaptation of Dan Brown's *Inferno* is placed within the ambit of analysis for the same reason as *Infinity War*: although clearly more of a suspenseful-drama with speculative elements, the antagonist is once again motivated by Survivalist fears of over-population. Franchises with multiple films (like *The Matrix*) are treated effectively as a single story, and those with historical predecessors (like the original *Mad Max* trilogy) are excluded simply for their distance from the present. *Star Trek* (2009) is included as a representative of the Star Trek universe as a whole, since it is occasionally thought to be *the* prototype of science fiction/speculative fiction. And the recent Disney-produced *Star Wars* films, which are certainly blockbusters, are excluded not for being space opera or too fantasy-oriented, but because they are effectively a null-case for the influence of Dryzek's environmental discourses.

[7] There is many an online review of *Tomorrowland* calling its director, Brad Bird, a disciple of Ayn Rand, so I will not belabor the point here.

[8] Nor will this cognitive and normative shift necessarily occur in an equivalent way for all individuals or groups involved. In the case of Avatar, the main human protagonist does join the Na'vi and fight against his fellow humans in the end, while most of the humans remain utterly recalcitrant in their pursuit of a precious mineral; but the protagonists' leadership role in the resistance fight prompted debate over the film's reproduction of a white savior complex (see Adamson, 2012 for a review). Avatar has also been criticized for other problematic elements (see e.g. Ketchum et al., 2011). The point here, however, is simply that the film's reconceptualization of ecological interconnection—between a people, place, and other species—is a common element of the Green Consciousness discourse.

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