It Came From Inner Space:
Faith, Science, Conquest
And *The War of the Worlds*

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I. Introduction

Media have played a key role in the foundation of cultural belief systems, from the beginnings of language to the earliest days of print, where literacy was considered to be to sole domain of holy men, to the rendering of legendary figures through paintings, tapestries, sculptures and stained glass. The latest mythic creature to haunt the minds of the masses is the extraterrestrial invader/abductor. There have been countless media renderings of this being and its technology, including hazy photographs and videotape footage, books, documentaries, and big-budget Hollywood movies and television shows. In fact, the latest form of electronic mass media, the Internet, has not escaped the presence of this alien being: according to some surveys, extraterrestrial life is one of the most accessed topics on the World Wide Web, second only to sex.[1]

In many academic studies of alien abduction, this phenomenon is viewed as a cultural myth that stems from recent historical events, media portrayals, and revolutionary developments in science and technology. What many of these studies overlook is that while the little gray aliens reported in abduction accounts share similarities with fairies, demons, and other supernatural creatures that at one time were believed to be real, what makes the aliens different is their (supposed) usage of technology. These creatures pose a potential threat and incite fear not because of any inherent mystical power, but because they have access to sophisticated technology and scientific understandings that dwarf our

1 Dean, Jodi. *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. 3.

own. In this light, it is no surprise that it was during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the ages of the Industrial Revolution, the World Wars and the Cold War, that sightings of mysterious objects in the sky were deemed as representatives of a potential technological threat to national security. This recontextualization of the unexplainable into scientific, military and technological terms reflects a change in how people perceive political and social power. No longer can nations effectively claim their superiority through the gods they worship and the supernatural myths they believe to hold eternal truth; instead, nations wield their power through their developments in and military and economic implementations of science and technology.

What is also at stake in this ideological conflict between the supernatural and the scientific is the quest for utopia, the perfect world that some believe to be possible through an understanding of eternal, inviolable truths. In essence, the word utopia means "what is nowhere," a place that exists in no real place. Authors of ideological texts employ utopias to comment on a wide variety of subjects, from family to religion to politics and so on, to the point that there can even be contradictory utopias. In short, utopias employ imagination to provide alternative, idealized perspectives to various aspects of living.[2] According to Paul Ricoeur, utopia, like ideology, is a way of understanding and dealing with power and its legitimacy in society. However, even though utopia provides for the presentation of alternatives to the current structure of social power and the exploration of

2 Ricoeur, Paul. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Ed. George H. Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 15-16.

the possible, the utopia ultimately remains a fantasy and can become a means of escaping the problems of how power is used and who assumes authority in certain situations.[3] "This escapism of utopia belongs to a logic of all or nothing. No connecting point exists between the 'here' of social reality and the 'elsewhere' of the utopia. This disjunction allows the utopia to avoid any obligation to come to grips with the real difficulties of a given society."[4] Nevertheless, the utopian vision of perfection is a powerful motivator of belief, spurring individuals to revere certain ideologies as the supreme answer to human existence.

The ideological conflict between religious and scientific cosmologies was initially addressed in H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, a narrative that focuses on the scientific possibility of alien life. Not only is this the first text to portray aliens as aggressive invaders from the sky, it is also the most media-rich alien invasion story. *The War of the Worlds* has appeared in almost all channels of media (print, radio, film, and television) throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has been reinterpreted countless times in each of these mediums, often coinciding with key developments in Western civilization during these eras. Yet Wells' commentary on the nature of religious belief in the face of inexorable scientific and technological advancement is curiously absent or altered in subsequent adaptations of his story. By comparing alien abduction narratives to the various interpretations of *The War of the Worlds*, I will examine how anxieties

3 Ibid., 17, 310.
4 Ibid., 17.

regarding science, religion, media, colonization, and technological superiority are expressed. I will show how language plays a pivotal role in the formation of alien narratives, and how it is able to join the fantastic with the mundane to make the notion of extraterrestrial visitation and invasion a tangible possibility. Also, I hope to show that the alien abduction phenomenon is not just another form of hysteria created by imagination and media, but a symptom of a culture undergoing a traumatic shift in how it views its place in the natural world.

This thesis will be a combination of historical and discourse analysis. I will begin with an overview of how ancient cultures used language to articulate their beliefs and to project them into the heavens and the world around them. A brief history of the flying saucer and UFO phenomenon and how the alien abduction narrative was developed will then be summarized. This will be followed by a textual study of *The War of the Worlds* and it subsequent adaptations to analyze how H. G. Wells originally depicted alien invasion, and how aspects of this narrative changed over the course of the 20th century. This thesis will feature theories put forth by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Kenneth Burke, Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, and Hayden White in order to understand how the development of and changes to *The War of the Worlds* narrative reflects the linguistic manipulation, textual revisionism, and historical emplotment that have turned the alien into a synecdochal representation of a conflict between two rival belief systems. This analysis will primarily follow a chronological order, from ancient history to the late 1800s

to the present, in order to maintain a sense of temporal and intellectual perspective.

II. Yesterday's Universe

While it may never be known exactly when the concept of religion entered the human mind or when humanity felt the need to understand and control the natural through influencing the supernatural, language plays a pivotal role in the formation of these beliefs. Language helps cultures express and explain the nature of gods, spirits and other supernatural beings, no matter how intangible they may be. What complicates this matter is how people often use metaphors in language, building links between otherwise unrelated ideas in order to understand the world around them, particularly articulating concrete scenarios to explain the abstract or disembodied. In their book *Metaphors We Live By,* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explore how metaphors structure people's perceptions, thoughts and actions, even though metaphoric comparisons are sometimes partial[5] and do not follow predictable rules of instantiation even though their internal logic is consistent and their conceptual framework exists across all languages. For example, ontological metaphors relate concepts, events and emotions to substances and entities, even though the subjects being metaphorized may not have any tangible existence or self-awareness.[6] By conceptualizing the intangible in the tangible, "we conceptualize the less

5 Only certain aspects of the metaphor are relevant when it stands in to explain a concept, e.g. "life is a journey" instantiates roads, crossroads, etc., but does not include passports or flight attendants, except in cases of novel extensions of the metaphor.

6 Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980. 25-29.

clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated."[7] Likewise, events are often linked through metaphor to better understand what is expected in certain situations and what is expected of the participants, such as when metaphors are used that liken arguments to war.[8] One expectation from that comparison is that there will be a victor in the argument, as there are victors in war.

In his exploration of the connections between language and religion, Kenneth Burke theorized how people molded language to generate the descriptions of the supernatural and to produce narratives that portray supernatural elements as active, plausible agents in the real world. In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke formulated this theory through his study of the language employed by the Judeo-Christian faiths. According to Burke, there are four realms to which words may refer. In the first order, words describe the natural: things, material operations, physiological conditions, animality, and other natural events and occurrences occupy this order. Words such as "tree," "sun," "growth," and "hunger" would all be examples of words from this category. In the second class, words describe the socio-political realm—social relations, laws, right and wrong. Words like "justice," "monarchy," "property rights," and "matrimony" would be included here. The third order features words about words, the realm of grammar, etymology, rhetoric and poetics (or, as Burke points out, aspects of the discipline of "Logology"). Words such as "nouns," "adverbs," "metaphor" and "gerunds" would

7 Ibid., 59.
8 Ibid., 77-86.

inhabit this order. The fourth order of words describes the supernatural. However, because the experience of the supernatural has (so far) been a matter of ineffable, subjective experience, Burke understands that for such a class of words to exist it would have to borrow words by analogy from the other three classes. Thus, to describe a concept as vast and abstract as "God," people inevitably employ metaphor. For example, one speaks of God's "powerful arm," using a metaphor from the physical realm; or of God as "lord," using a socio-political metaphor; or of God as the "Word," a metaphor brought over from the set of terms with which people describe linguistic phenomena.[9] (Lakoff and Johnson's work on conceptual metaphor theory allows us to articulate the system of terms and relations that underlies the metaphorical use of these Burkean-ordered words.)

Over time, cultures have attributed mystical powers to both spoken words and written text. Some ancient civilizations even credited the origin of their language to the gods. One of the words from Burke's first order often associated with deities and the supernatural is "sky." Mircea Eliade, in his studies of religious vocabulary, recognized the use of the Indo-European root word *deiwos*, "sky," in words designating the "god" (Latin *deus*, Iranian *div*, etc.) and in the names of key gods: Dyaus, Zeus, Jupiter. Thus, many cultures have linguistically and conceptually related the notion of deity to celestial sacrality, making the sky, or god of the sky, the supreme father. By extension, other gods were designated by the name of thunder, such as the Viking god Thor and the Celtic god

9 Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. 13-16.

Taranis, and the fire sparked by lightning was often regarded as being of celestial origin.[10] This association between sky and thunder as metaphors of divinity may have had a cause-and-effect relation: the sky god(s) would produce the lightning that caused the sacred terrestrial fire, which in turn the shamans and priests would employ in rituals.[11] By employing a system of metaphors and closely associating terms from Burke's first three classes of words to a fourth class,[12] ancient civilizations built social structures comprised of the natural, political and linguistic elements that emulated their ideas of the supernatural, literally grounding their beliefs by associating them with specific locations and rituals. This emulation works into various myths that detailed celestial territories, temples and cities. For example, all Babylonian cities found their archetypes in constellations (Sippara in Cancer, Nineveh in Ursa Major, etc.), and many believed God created a celestial Jerusalem before the city was built by humans.[13] In some cases, it was believed that heaven, hell and earth actually met at certain geographic locations, either at a sacred mountain that was considered to be the starting point of creation and was thus the center of the world, or at sacred cities, royal residences or temples, which by extension were also considered to be 'centers.' These sacred centers, then, were zones of absolute reality, of divine utopias made manifest, and mythic quests or actual pilgrimages to these

10 Eliade, Mircea. *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. 189-92.
11 Dowdy, Earl. *The Communication of Beliefs*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998. 186-87.
12 Lakoff and Johnson would describe this system of metaphors as "source" and "target." The target is the thing being expressed through metaphor; the source is what construes the metaphor. For example, in the phrase "life is a journey," life is the target and journey is the source.
13 Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1954. 6-9.

centers served as acts of initiation and transcendence from the physical world.[14]

That is to say, because of the operation of metaphor in description, many cultures have come to believe that every aspect of the natural world in which humanity existed, from the rivers to the mountains to the cities, has some divine, non-terrestrial analogy, either as a plan, a form, or a double existing on a higher cosmic level. Likewise, areas that surrounded the human world were often understood to be *terra incognita* and did not have a celestial counterpart. These areas typically were seen as manifestations of chaos: uncultivated lands, unknown seas, and places inhabited by monsters where no one dared to go. When cultures took possession of these unknown regions, rites were performed to symbolically repeat creation, first "cosmicizing" the zone before inhabiting it.[15] This pattern of a culture's religion cosmicizing conquered lands served as a means of exerting symbolic power over such territory, a pattern that continued during Europe's colonial expansion into the American continents. In regards to his arrival at the New World, Columbus was said to have claimed that "God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which He spoke in the Apocalypse by St. John . . . and he showed me where to find it."[16] A few centuries later, at the World's Columbian Exposition fair in Chicago in 1893, the Exposition's national committee chairman J. T. Harris stated in the opening speech: "It remained for the Saxon race to people this new land, to redeem it from

14 Ibid., 12-18.
15 Ibid., 9-11.
16 Sanford, Charles. *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961. 40.

barbarism, to dedicate its virgin soil to freedom, and in less than four centuries to make it the most powerful and prosperous country on which God's sunshine falls."[17] Such a statement implies that "God's sunshine" never fell on the Americas until the Europeans arrived.

However, this relationship between language, location, religion, and ideological authority (not to mention other race-based, power assumptions) has its own weaknesses. For example, in his essay on the philosophy of history, Walter Benjamin criticized historical materialism's attempts to establish a universal history. Benjamin asserts that historians have a tendency to view history from the perspective of the victors, portraying them in a Messianic light that has authority over the past, as if "our coming was expected on earth."[18] This tendency to center history on the current dominant ideologies does an injustice to past civilizations. As Benjamin states, "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[19] Thus, when a culture dies, what originally appeared to be divinely mandated histories and military conquests by one culture can be reinterpreted as misguided heathen endeavors by its successor, or, even worse, rendered completely meaningless and forgotten. The impulse to conquer, cosmicize and verbally articulate as much of the known world as possible then becomes a culture's way of maintaining power

17 Greenhalgh, Paul. *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988. 98.
18 Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Edited with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969 (1968). 254.
19 Ibid., 255.

and warding off both physical and historical death.

With human cultures inhabiting almost every area of land that is capable of sustaining human life, the heavens remain a geographic region that has yet to be fully understood. Furthermore, with the ancient science of astronomy using in each generation the newest technology to provide an ever-growing cosmological map that includes countless stars, planets, and galaxies, it has become a challenge for Earth-bound belief systems to confidently cosmicize these new territories under the name of their gods and governments. Nevertheless, religions still try to do so, lest they become challenged, conquered and forgotten by rival belief systems. For example, since being forced to deal with the discoveries of astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo, which challenged the cosmology of the Bible, Christianity has developed exochristology, a theology that expands the Christian faith and the rule of its god to the distant worlds of deep space. As summarized by Karl S. Guthke in his book *The Last Frontier*:

> The kind of reasoning they (exochristologists) employ has not changed much since the fifteenth century (though at that time it was esoteric and soon branded as heresy). The assumption that God created many worlds and humankinds only serves to enhance his glory; those "races" (like the angels) may either be "fallen" or not; if they are, either they have been redeemed by Christ or the incarnation of another savior, or they have not been redeemed; in the latter case, they are either damned, like the fallen angels, or capable of being saved at the end of time, like heathens in distant lands not reached by the gospel.[20]

Just as ancient civilizations looked to the sky for inspiration and used metaphor

20 Guthke, Karl S. *The Last Frontier: Imagining Other Worlds, from the Copernican Revolution to Modern Science Fiction*. Translated by Helen Atkins. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990. 17.

and other forms of linguistic rationale to articulate what they believed was up there (and in turn down here), modern science has changed the way people viewed what they saw in the heavens not only through the scientific lens of modern astronomy, but through the development of flying machines. These two different perspectives—of religion and science—came to a head during the twentieth century when, after the end of World War II and the dawn of the Cold War, people began to attach technological and scientific attributes to unknown objects that appeared to be flying in the air. At this time, the sky gods seemed to disappear, and the flying saucer had arrived.

III. A Brief History of Flying Saucers and UFOs

In the late 1940s, the flying saucer phenomenon began in the U.S. when Kenneth Arnold sighted several flying disks over Mount Rainier in the state of Washington.[21] According to Arnold, on June 24, 1947, he was flying his private plane over the Cascade Range when he saw half a dozen flat, round shapes flying at fantastic speed over the mountain peaks. Arnold's description of the disks' flight, "like a saucer skimming over water," was revised into "flying saucer."[22] The popular interpretation of these new flying saucer and UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) sightings painted a picture that was grounded in scientific speculation and military insecurity. The world still tried to grasp the full repercussions of atomic warfare, and the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union fostered a sense of heightened paranoia. Thus, the hundreds of sightings of

21 It is interesting to note that this event took place a year after H. G. Wells' death.

these craft reported after Arnold's encounter received attention from the military through a small investigative panel, code-named Project Grudge (later named Project Blue Book, which would go on to examine thousands of UFO sightings between 1947 and 1969).[23] Grudge was assembled to determine if these UFOs presented any defense threat and to quell any fears of invasion from space creatures, lest a repeat of *The War of the Worlds* radio scare that occurred in 1938.[24] The military enacted strict rules on the matter. On July 20, 1962, the US Air Force passed a regulation, numbered #202-2, that described UFOs as being "any aerial phenomena, airborne objects, or objects which are unknown or appear out of the ordinary to the observers because of performance, aerodynamic characteristics, or unusual features." The regulation also stated, "Air Force interest in UFOs is three fold. First, as a possible threat to the security of the United States; second, to determine the technical or scientific characteristics of any such UFOs; third, to explain or identify all UFO sightings."[25] Even though the passing of these rules and the early report released by Grudge gave some credibility to the idea that these objects were of threatening, extraterrestrial origin, the Grudge investigators found that no matter how vivid the eyewitness testimonies of these sightings were, no confirmation of whether such objects really existed could be achieved. This did not convince many UFO enthusiasts, people who believed in the validity of flying saucer sightings and suspected that the government

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22 Rimmer, John. "Unidentified Flying Objects." *Mysteries of the World*. Ed. Christopher Pick. London: Lyric Books Limited, 1979. 134.
23 Ibid., 134.
24 White, Dale. *Is Something Up There?* New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1968. 29.
25 Ibid., 38.

knew more about the alien origins of the aircraft than they were acknowledging.[26] Several groups formed to find the "truth" behind UFOs. For example, the National Investigations Commission on Aerial Phenomenon (NICAP), led by Major Donald E. Keyhoe, a retired officer of the U.S. Marine Corps, was developed to further research the possible extraterrestrial connection to UFO sightings.[27]

Meanwhile, the sightings continued and UFO "waves," large numbers of sightings originating from a particular area over a short time, occurred during the late 1940s and early 1950s.[28] Fictitious narratives manufactured by Hollywood complemented these waves of sightings, adding to the hype. Hollywood produced science fiction films before the arrival of the UFO, from adaptations of *Frankenstein* to flashy outer-space serials such as *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon*, so aliens and other strange creatures were not new the silver screen. But with the early intervention of the military in the UFO phenomenon, the flying saucer became a sign of possible invasion, and the involvement of the government and the military in possible alien activities became popular narrative devices in these new stories. Actually, such narratives were ideal for cinema: since the general public captured many of the UFO sightings and hoaxes on film, it only made sense for Hollywood to manufacture its own cinematic sightings and hoaxes. These films included *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956), and *Invasion of the*

26 Rimmer, 134.
27 White, 44.
28 Rimmer, 135.

Saucermen (1957).[29] Other films associated the concept of invaders from space with the threat of Communism (which was firm in the American mind through Senator Joe McCarthy's special investigations into Communism in the U.S., which suggested that Communists could be living next door) by suggesting the paranoid notion that aliens could assume human form. These films included *Invaders From Mars* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958).[30] In each of the films, a lone protagonist (a young boy, a doctor, a young bride) has a close encounter with a hostile extraterrestrial force in disguise, and a key part of the narrative involves the protagonist convincing others of the truth behind this hidden terror.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951) stands in contrast to these invasion films, portraying aliens not as a threat but as a source of peace and enlightenment for the inhabitants of earth.[31] The emissary of peace from space in this film, Klaatu, is the perfect alien: a tall, attractive, highly intelligent white male. He even comes with his own language ("Klaatu barada nikto!") that can be used to evoke the powers of the god-like technology he brings with him. While this does not precisely follow the aggressive invasion formula, the explicit link it makes between the alien and the near-divine powers

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29 Curt Siodmak's story behind *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*, which includes a climactic battle that destroys some of the famous monuments and buildings in Washington DC, was suggested by *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*, a book written by NICAP's Major Keyhoe. Read Danny Peary's review of this film in *Guide for the Film Fanatic*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986. 134.

30 It should be noted that *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has been viewed as either an anti-Communist or an anti-McCarthy narrative. See Danny Peary's review of this film in *Guide for the Film Fanatic*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986. 213.

it possesses through its technology remains intact.

At roughly the same time these films were being made, UFO sightings began to include accounts of direct contact with the inhabitants of the mysterious craft (or a "close encounter of the third kind" in UFO terminology). The most popular of these supposed contacts was George Adamski, who published a series of books detailing his contact with aliens from Venus, Mars and Saturn in Arizona and California during the 1940s, 50s and 60s.[32] Taking a cue from Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Adamski claimed that these aliens (or "Brothers," as he referred to them) were tall, attractive and humanoid in appearance, and they visited him so that he could spread their teachings of peace to the people of Earth. Through these aliens, Adamski was promising utopia not through a god, a supernatural master of creation, but through aliens, masters of science and technology, and it is these beings that humanity could follow to build a perfect world. Of course, the proof behind these visitations had to be kept a mystery:

> . . . I do have witnesses to one of my journeys in a spacecraft. Both are scientists who hold high positions. Once they are able to make a statement the picture will change overnight. However, the way things are nowadays with everything classified as security, for the time being they must remain in shadow. When they believe that they can release the substantiation they have without jeopardizing either the national defense or themselves, they have said that they will do so through the press. How soon that will be, your guess is as good as mine. But because they were with me at the request of the Brothers, some things are moving in behalf of both the Brothers and the general public that otherwise could not have been started.

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31 This is in contrast to "Farewell to the Master" by Harry Bates, the story upon which *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is based. In the print version, the alien society from which Klaatu and his robot companion, Gort, originate is much more sinister than it is in the movie.

32 Rimmer, 136.

> . . . This has happened in spite of opposing forces who, for whatever reasons, do not want the truth to come out. So, if we wait patiently and in quiet confidence, things will come out as they should. There will be more abundant proof throughout the world than I, as one man, could ever be given or, in turn, give out.[33]

IV. Alien Abduction: The Genre

Individuals like Adamski marked the beginning of a shift in alien encounter narratives. Slowly, more people began to report encounters with aliens where they were taken directly aboard the creatures' spacecraft for the purpose of experimentation. The first of these accounts to be widely publicized came from Betty and Barney Hill in 1961, an interracial couple who reported this encounter after undergoing hypnotherapy.[34] While some evidence of UFO sightings consists of photographs or videotapes, many accounts of supposed extraterrestrial abduction are recounted verbally. A typical abduction report may go something like this:

> *I woke up in the middle of the night and everything looked odd, and strangely lit. At the end of my bed was a four-foot high gray alien. Its spindly, thin body supported a huge head with two enormous, slanted, liquid black eyes. It compelled me, telepathically, to follow and led me into a spaceship, along curved corridors to an examination room full of tables, on which other people lay. I was forced to lie down while they painfully examined me, extracted ova (or sperm) and implanted something in my nose. I could see jars containing half-human, half-alien fetuses and a nursery of silent, sickly children. When I eventually found myself back in bed, several hours had gone by.*[35]

Because there is no other evidence to prove these claims, language and the shape

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33 Adamski, George. *Inside the Flying Saucers*. New York: Paperback Library, Inc., 1955. 12, 16.
34 Matheson, Terry. *Alien Abductions: Creating a Modern Phenomenon*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1998. 47.

and features of a coherent text, or genre, becomes a major factor in promoting the alien abduction narrative. The particular use of language by believers in the alien abduction phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by academics. In her book *Aliens in America*, political science professor Jodi Dean takes a close analysis of how UFOs and alien abduction have influenced American pop culture during the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. Dean argues that the current popularity of the alien abduction phenomenon stems from the public's uncertainty over what the truth really is in the face of a secretive government and an overabundant electronic media landscape.[36] In order for UFO research to be taken seriously, she observes how early UFO research groups such as NICAP, APRO (Aerial Phenomena Research Organization), and later MUFON (Mutual UFO Network) incorporated scientific and governmental-juridical discourses into their work in an effort to persuade scientists to study the UFO phenomenon and to convince the government to release related information.[37] Lacking physical evidence to support alien abduction claims, ufologists moved away from the essentialist understandings of truth that inscribes truth in physical objects, and promoted the thinking that truth is consensual. Under this rationale, the ufologists argued that the shared reality and institutionalized language of science and government (their biggest opponents) are exclusive, shutting out the voices of common individuals. "If truth is truly consensual, then other voices—those of the UFO

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35 Blackmore, Susan. "Alien Abduction." *New Scientist*, 19 November 1994: 29.
36 Oddly enough, Dean makes no reference to *The War of the Worlds*, to Orson Welles' effective radio broadcast, or to Hadley Cantril's detailed study of the broadcast that reached conclusions similar to hers, in her book.
37 Dean, 39.

witnesses—have to be included. As long as they are dismissed and objectified, as long as they don't count as citizens whose voices and opinions are worth taking seriously, then truth will be only a play of power."[38] When the UFO researchers adopted alien abductees as part of their case for UFOs, their use of scientific and governmental language and relativist approaches to truth moved their argument to a higher level of plausibility. Additionally, by using the language of therapy culture, the validity of alien abduction accounts seems like another variation of the debates in the psychological community over false-memory syndrome in sexual abuse cases. As Dean puts it:

> Accounts of alien abduction can now claim to fulfill established scientific criteria for truth on the basis of resemblance: they look like other accounts of improbable events defended through psychological evidence. . . . Put somewhat differently, because of the link to therapy culture, ufology has been able to defend more successfully the credibility of the witness. Therapy language enables the witness to appeal to experience without having to establish in advance the reality of that experience. Perception *becomes* reality.[39]

Furthermore, because UFO discourse has adopted the language of science, government and psychological therapy, ufologists can meet the same criteria of validity as the discourse provided by skeptics from science, government and psychological therapy. In short, the language of the UFO believer becomes indistinguishable from the UFO skeptic, to the point where skeptics' and their texts, such as Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World* (1995), form a necessary part of the UFO/alien abduction

38 Ibid., 45.
39 Ibid., 52-53.

phenomenon.[40]

To address the issue of alien abduction narratives more directly, Terry Matheson critiques in chronological order several abduction narratives from writers such as Budd Hopkins and Whitley Strieber (a latter-day Adamski) as part of an analysis of the evolution of the alien abduction genre in his book, *Alien Abductions*. Even though many of the abduction stories add new elements into the formula, they usually share key traits.[41] Among the patterns that abduction authors follow:

- The strengthening of the abductee's account by making detailed comments about his/her general reliability as a character, or the labeling of select individuals in a manner that creates a favorable impression in the mind of the reader (words like "truthful" and "distinguished" are commonly used);
- claiming to be skeptical or noncommittal on the subjects of aliens and UFO before encountering the abductee(s), thus adding to the power of the story (i.e., the conversion of the skeptic);
- the frequent usage of realistic details of everyday life to ground the account in a recognizable and plausible context;
- detailed attention to logical sequence;
- the direct involvement of the readers in the story's details, often through letting the abductees detail their experiences in their own words;
- encouragement of trust in the author him/herself, often through an introduction or preface that refers to the "decency" and "integrity" of the author, written by a presumably objective third party who possesses admirable academic credentials;
- stressing of author's own attention to detail, such as when they employed weather reports or astronomical charts in order to verify the atmospheric conditions as recalled by the abductee;

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40 Ibid., 58-60.

41 These particular traits are similar to those of urban myths, legends and folklore. See Jan Harold Brunvand's work, such as *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends & Their Meanings* (1981) and *The Choking Doberman & Other "New" Urban Legends* (1984), and the Urban Legends Research Center web site, http://www.ulrc.com.au/, for more information.

- emphasizing the strong consistency that can be found within the abductees' various recollections over long periods of time of their abduction experiences, touting this as compelling proof of the accounts' truth;
- connecting the many similarities that can allegedly be seen among separate abduction accounts.[42]

As Matheson summarizes his findings, "What this all means is simply that if a story appears coherent, seems to have a logical sequence of events, contains certain recognizable consistencies, and is endorsed by authorities, it tends to be believed whether it is true or not."[43]

Matheson's conclusion is that UFOs and the alien abduction phenomenon reflect society's ambivalence towards technology. While the flying saucers themselves represent the cutting edge of technological advancement, their popularity came during the initial years of the atomic bomb, a technology that served as a constant reminder that the end of the world was within arms reach. Thus, encounters with the beautiful, utopian Klaatu-like aliens as reported by people such as George Adamski in the 1940s and 50s were quickly replaced with aliens in the 60s who looked less human and, despite their occasional utterance of lofty sentiments, treated their abductees with indifference.[44] Matheson even suggests that these aliens represent subconscious fears of what humanity will become like if we continue to revere technology as the hallmark of advancement and rationality:

> Like Marley's ghost come to warn Scrooge, to the extent that they are so obviously at the mercy of their purely technological agenda, the aliens are

42 Matheson, 34-39.
43 Ibid., 37.
44 Ibid., 295.

> living proof of the dangers of a wholesale commitment to that technology, the incongruous treatment of their human victims a reflection of the incongruity inherent in technology itself. For if the myth presents the aliens as technocrats *par excellence*, it also reveals them as beings who possess little else of meaning in their lives. In those versions where aliens take their subjects on tours of their craft, it is almost as if they can take pride *only* in their technological accomplishments, for the tours are otherwise purposeless and inconclusive; evidently, they have nothing else they could point to in their milieu such as art, music, or literature that would demonstrate an enriched state of being. Here, the myth's message is pretty obvious: If ever-increasing amounts of our energy are needed to maintain an increasingly demanding technology, in a totally technological society, *all* opportunities for the creative functions will be lost; there will simply be no room or time for the exercise of the emotions, the passions, empathetic responses, or even love.[45]

Given these fears regarding technology, it is particularly interesting when the alien abduction narratives overlap the abductee's spiritual and religious beliefs with his or her extraterrestrial encounter. Dean noticed abductees making links to apocalyptic scenarios that are similar to those espoused by the Judeo-Christian faith, while others associate the abduction experience with an elevation in spiritual consciousness.[46] Matheson had noticed similar tendencies in his analysis, particularly in Raymond Fowler's *The Andreasson Affair*, an account of the supposed abduction of Betty Andreasson, a devout Christian. However, Matheson believes that such explicit connections to religion will not remain popular in alien abduction stories. As Matheson puts it, "the explicitly Christian element in Andreasson's story, for example . . . does not survive, probably because it is simply too

45 Ibid., 296.
46 Dean, 121, 141.

difficult to accept that alien beings could also be Christians."[47] Still, other researchers believe that the persistence of the flying saucer/alien abduction phenomenon lies in its ability to merge scientific terminology with religious mythology. For example, Warren Jones, a professor of psychology formerly at the University of Tulsa, suggested that there are essentially two sets of believers in UFOs. The first group uses UFOs as a replacement for religion: these are people who were brought up in strict fundamentalist backgrounds but have since given up faith, and the aliens they claim to see are like gods, all-powerful, all-knowing beings who are out to protect humanity from itself. The other group is immersed in science: these are well-educated people who believe that not only can civilizations exist on other planets, but that the science and technology they generate is much more advanced than ours.[48] From this perspective, the parallel between spiritual myth and scientific myth is to be expected, that just as Prometheus descended from Mount Olympus to give the benefit of fire to humankind and just as how God, Zeus and various other deities copulated with mortal women to give rise to heroes and messiahs, so are today's extraterrestrials rumored to be descending from space to give humanity the secrets of antigravity technology and steal the gametes of men and women alike to create a new chimerical species of intelligent life.

The linkage between Earth-based religions and mysticism to space-faring, technology-wielding alien beings occurs occasionally in alien abduction accounts. For

47 Matheson, 102.

example, the Alien Abduction Experience and Research (AAER) site (http://www.abduct.com/) features a discussion group where abductees can share their experiences and discuss their beliefs in the alien. References to deities sometimes appear, as in this one posting on the AAER site that was made in response to one abductee's account:

> A few final truths: ---There is a God and He is not 'them.' ---One effect of abduction is often a heightened psychic ability. ---God hears our prayers anyway but with an abductee's heightened psychic capabilities, it's like we've been handed a bullhorn. God DEFINITELY hears us![49]

In another posting on the same web site, one participant made a more explicit attempt to match Christian cosmology with alien abduction accounts, following an exochristological line of thought:

> I feel God created tons of beings, as well as us. We may be His later creations. . . Like humans, other aliens also have a free will to do what they please-- God won't even interrupt their free will, as he won't interrupt ours. If an alien even wants to kill a human, God may allow the human to die that way if their "number is up" (the person's soul is under God's protection if the person allows it to be.) . . . It's possible that God blessed us out of all the other creatures on different planets, because we are the LEAST of all. Maybe, in His plan, He intends to try to "reach" the Aliens through weak humans. . . As agnostics and athiests are usually people with a high degree of intelligence who may reason too much-- many aliens, also, most likely, don't believe in a God- Who created them. Their intelligence keeps them from having any faith- they do as they please with no regard for God's other Creation. (If a person would ask an alien about God, the alien would probably say "There is none".) . . . Using the weakest to reach the advanced is what He did in the Old Testament with Isreal. The Jewish were the least

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48 Garelik, Glenn. "The Great Hudson Valley UFO Mystery." *Discover*, Vol. 5, No. 11, November 1984: 22-23.

49 mcRoe, (November 29, 2000). Re: greys. Posted to Alien Abduction Discussion Group, Alien Abduction Experience and Research web site: http://www.abduct.com/discuss.htm.

> of all the nations- (and were even slaves) and so God freed them and used them to make His will known- so that they would be a "Light" to the other nations. It was intended not for them to preach and convert others, but to SHOW God in action to other nations. . . The least important is always the most important in God's eyes. Maybe aliens can't believe how rich our planet is, and all our resources we have, yet we are the dumbest of all the galaxy- Go figure.[50]

On a more extreme level, the Alien Bases on Earth site (http://www.earth-today.com/) maintains that the gray aliens (in this case, "the Greys") are in league with the Jews in a worldwide conspiracy:

> Whom would you elect to help you destroy the world, if you were coming from "outside"?...The elected ones! Well, if you came to conquer, you would elect some very able people to help you. No one better to find than the Jews. (No prejudices for this race, as my parents both were Jews). They were known enemies of the Catholic Church and the nobility. Some centuries ago these were the Powers in the European civilization. It is also known that as they were not allowed to own land, they became extremely able in the money business. Divide and conquer, has always been in use. The Jews did just that! These Protocols have been known for about a century, and no one has been able to do anything about this situation. How come? Simple, they were, and ARE helped by the Greys. Otherwise so very few people, only a tiny percentage of the Jewish race, would have been killed long ago. We even know the names of some of them, and still, things go on. All this secrecy is due to the terror that they all have (Jews and the Greys alike) of US, THE PEOPLE OF EARTH, IF WE WAKE UP![51]

According to this site, one of the ways the Jews will undermine Christian civilization with the help of the aliens will be to foster freethinking, atheism, skepticism, and religious discussion.

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50 Lilaug, (December 6, 2000). Re: My Experience... Posted to Alien Abduction Discussion Group, Alien Abduction Experience and Research web site: http://www.abduct.com/discuss.htm.
51 Alien Bases on Earth web site: http://www.earth-today.com/sion.htm.

The varying degree of reference to traditional religion in alien abduction narrative indicates that there are indeed feelings of uncertainty among some individuals about the nature of religious faith in the presence of an inexplicable experience that involves visions of bizarre scientific experiments and invasive technology. But as the development of exochristology indicates, the concerns of intelligent life existing outside of Earth are quite old, and one of the areas where the myths of yesterday meet, conflict, and combine with the technologies of tomorrow is in the genre of science fiction. In the balance of this thesis, I will detail how science fiction narratives have formed much of the twentieth century's experience with respect to the alien and supernatural realms, with particular focus given to the first alien invasion narrative, H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

V. Fantastic Flying Machines and *The War of the Worlds*

While recent sightings of unusual, flying objects in the sky are sometimes linked to the "Extraterrestrial Hypothesis" (ETH, for short) that postulates a non-terrestrial intelligence assembled these craft, this theory only began to emerge in the late 1940s. Sightings of flying machines were reported in countries all over the globe since the 1880s. One of the most popular series of sightings happened in the USA in 1897, when communities reported seeing large dirigibles with loud engines, capable of out-running and out-maneuvering any known aircraft at the time. But instead of believing the ships to be the work of space aliens, many explained them as the work of mysterious inventors. At this time, the image of the heroic inventor was at its peak, and members of the general

public were busy accommodating their lives to revolutionary technologies such as the telegraph, railroads, electric lights, and photography, which were associated with great individuals such as Thomas Edison. These sightings later shifted primarily to Europe, and the purported sightings of unusual aircraft proliferated in Great Britain from 1909 to 1913. This time, though, the mystery inventor no longer sufficed as an explanation for these vehicles; instead, the new culprits were foreign spies and other representatives of Germany's growing military presence.[52]

This era of rapid technological growth in the Western world during the 19th century did not go unnoticed by storytellers and myth-makers. Early in this century, the genre of science fiction got its start with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which told the story of a humanoid creature brought to life through the mechanical assembly of spare parts from dead bodies by a great and tragically flawed scientist. The creature later rebelled against his human creator.[53] Following in Shelley's footsteps, Jules Verne spun tales of travel to fantastic places via means of equally fantastic technologies: a powerful canon shot a capsule to the moon in one story, while a submarine traveled to the bottom of the ocean in another.[54] Towards the end of the 19th century, yet another author, H. G.

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52 Rimmer, 132-133.

53 While this narrative could be seen as a cautionary tale against the modern proliferation of science-created technologies, the means by which Shelley brings her fictitious monster to life, a bolt of lightning, harks back to ancient myth. It also shares common traits with other mythic narratives such as Pygmalion, where a creator brings an inanimate creation to life.

54 In this particular narrative, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), characters initially mistake the submarine for some kind of sea monster. The characters' use of analogy between a concept from Burke's first realm of words ("animality") to describe an unknown entity is comparable to those who described the early locomotive as an "iron horse."

Wells, explored the possible ramifications of technology, and his speculations would result in one of the most popular narratives in the science fiction genre: *The War of the Worlds*.

The War of the Worlds was published in 1898, and it chronicled the fictitious invasion of Earth by technologically advanced beings from Mars. Other authors before and after Wells contemplated the possibility of intelligent life among the stars (namely from Mars) in their works. For example, in Camillie Flammarion's *La fin du monde* (1894) and George Griffith's *Olga Romanoff* (1894), Martian scientists warn the people of Earth of approaching danger and assist in avoiding catastrophe.[55] In Kurd Lasswitz's *Auf zwei Planeten* (1897), Martians arrive on Earth as a sort of guardian angels, morally and technologically superior and intent on guiding humanity to a higher level of development, predating characters like Klaatu and men like George Adamski.[56] As opposed to prior attempts by philosophers and theologians who pondered the notion of intelligent forms of life by using their own belief systems to frame such speculation, these science fiction narratives served as a way of coming to grips not only with the possibility of technologically capable extraterrestrial life but with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin's work removed humanity from the pinnacle of existence, where it was placed by many religions, and some scientists and fiction writers suggested that evolution could happen on other planets and that it could yield beings that were superior to

55 Guthke, 353.
56 Ibid., 368-392.

humanity. But where Wells differed from other writers was that he was the first to portray such alien beings actually invading and potentially conquering Earth, making *The War of the Worlds* the first extraterrestrial invasion narrative.[57] In other words, other writers placed humanity on other levels of biological, social and technological development in response to Darwin's findings that humanity is simply another species of animal that changes over time through interaction with the environment and other animals. Wells pushed this new view of humanity to its most terrifying extreme, suggesting that all of humanity could be invaded, subjugated, and possibly rendered extinct by a non-terrestrial race of beings. Through science fiction, Wells used scientific theory to confront the human species with a vision of its own irrevocable finality, something even the most apocalyptic religious narratives would never do.

Yet for as incredible as Wells' story may sound, he used many everyday events that surrounded him to write this book. The most crucial of these events was the unification and militarization of Germany, which fueled the paranoia behind the aforementioned airship sightings in Britain of roughly the same era.[58] Another key event that inspired Wells occurred in 1894, when Mars was under intense astronomical observation due to its close orbital proximity to Earth. An Italian astronomer, Giovanni Schiaparelli, reported seeing "canali," meaning "channels" on the planet's surface, but the

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57 Hughes, David Y. "*The War of the Worlds* in the Yellow Press." *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 283.
58 Brians, Paul. "Study Guide for H. G. Wells: *The War of the Worlds*." June 13, 1995: http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/science_fiction/warofworlds.html.

word was mistranslated as "canals," leading some to believe that technologically capable life might exist on Mars.[59] Wells also wrote *The War of the Worlds* as a commentary on the British Empire, using the metaphor of invasion to draw parallels between the Martians' treatment of Earth and Britain's treatment of its colonies. Shortly before the publication of *The War of the Worlds*, the British all but exterminated the indigenous inhabitants of Tasmania, an island off the coast of Australia, when they converted it into a penal colony. To explicitly connect the human colonizers to the Martians, Wells writes the following in his narrative (the wording revealing the racial politics of the day):

> And before we judge of them (the Martians) too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?[60]

To add realism to his narrative, Wells was influenced by other novelists of his time. The growth of Germany's military power initiated a series of novels predicting war in Europe, starting with George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871).[61] This genre of "imaginary war" was very popular in the four decades leading up to World War I, and these books depicted the fictive invasion and conquest of England by France or Germany. Indeed, it has been suggested that the popularity of works such as *The Battle of Dorking*

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59 Guthke, 350, 369.
60 Ibid., 266.
61 Hughes, David Y. and Harry M. Geduld. Introduction. *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 20. See also Brians, http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/science_fiction/warofworlds.html.

reflect the guilty fears that resulted from Britain's aggressive colonial policy. In the case of *The War of the Worlds*, "with brutal poetic justice, Britain suffers an invasion of a technological sophistication and indifference to native values that reiterates what Britain visited, say, upon the Tasmanians."[62] Many of these books were written in a semi-documentary fashion to add believability to their narratives. Wells employed this technique on two levels. He tells the story from a first-person perspective, giving his detailed accounts of the Martians and the havoc they wreak a stronger sense of verisimilitude, a sort of "I know it's real because I lived through it" perspective. Also, Wells carefully linked his alien invasion to specific places in England with which his readers would be familiar, thus making the tale more vivid and more imaginable. (One can trace the exact path of the Martians' invasion by studying early versions of British Ordnance Survey maps.)[63] So, just as ancient civilizations used language to link geographic areas to the heavens and divine beings, Wells used his vivid written descriptions of actual locations to link these places to fictitious extraterrestrial beings that were in actuality symbols of humanity at its worst.

Wells' use of war metaphors, which follow both Burke's and Lakoff and Johnson's theoretical frameworks, develops a new vocabulary of terms and ideas to flesh out the Martians as his novel progresses through its narrative, making his narrative's world seem possible. However, while Burke's theory, which suggests that language

62 Hughes and Geduld, 20.

functions like a feedback loop to create words that describe the supernatural and intangible which in turn affect the rest of language, Wells' Martians are hardly supernatural or intangible. In the world he creates through words that relate to the ordinary and everyday, as well as the larger socio-political context, he makes scientific theory and speculation come to life. The existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life has yet to be proven; like most other science fiction authors before and after him, Wells merely extrapolated from what he knew of astronomy, biology and technology. But by taking this extrapolation and the language it employs to its most vivid extreme and applying it to metaphors of war, science and technology gain a symbolic status. Much in the way that scientific theory and technological development were wreaking havoc on many people's perceptions of what the "real world" meant to them, the symbolic Martians wreaked havoc on a symbolic world. Adding poignancy to this simulated conflict, Wells remained true to the details of the England of his time, making the symbolic representation of scientific theory and technology appear to have a mind of its own, running rampant across the actual countryside. This is similar to how earlier cultures crafted supernatural gods and monsters through the application of the elastic functionality of language to specific geographic locations as a way of rooting the symbolic in the real, addressing cultural fears and hopes, and establishing historical and ideological authority. (This also establishes a discursive connection to the features that are found in the accounts given by UFO eyewitnesses and

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63 Dickenson, Elyse A. *The Forrester Papers: A War of the Worlds Concordance*. Wilton, CT: Dickenson, 1989. 7.

alien abductees that use scientific and technological terminology and metaphor to symbolize fears and plead for validity, and to merge the details of the fantastic with the details of the mundane.) Furthermore, by deliberately linking his scientific extrapolation to metaphors of war, Wells fused science and technology to contemporary political concerns of colonization and foreign military attack, issues that were already greatly influenced by technological development. The relationship between the invasion narrative in *The War of the Worlds* and wars in the real world play a recurring theme throughout this narrative's subsequent adaptations, long before the Cold War incited fear of foreign objects in the sky.

In the opening pages of the narrative, before the ordinary world plunges into chaos when a destructive scientific element arrives, metaphors and terms from Burke's first three classes of words that describe the known world are extended to describe the mysterious presence of the Martians. The grim shape of things to come is aptly summed up in the opening paragraph:

> No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days. At most terrestrial men fancied there might be other men

> upon Mars, perhaps inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.[64]

Before he describes how the Martians themselves appear, he already uses human physical analogies to bring these abstract alien creatures to frightening life. They "watched" man from afar; they have "envious eyes," and their "minds" and "intellects" "draw plans against us." He addresses humanity's projection of its colonial impulse (sometimes achieved through "missionary enterprises") into the stars. Furthermore, by linking this description to sentences that describe human affairs as complacent, assured and (most pointedly) departed, Wells prepares the reader to have his/her conception of the world and the words used to describe it suspended and altered, into a state of "great disillusionment."

The War of the Worlds begins when the narrator, who remains anonymous throughout the novel, visits his friend Ogilvy, an astronomer. They watch explosions on the surface of Mars; even though these explosions signal an impending invasion, Ogilvy scoffs at the notion that these were signs of intelligent life on that planet. After the Martians land on Earth and begin their destruction, the subsequent story follows the narrator as he searches for his wife among the war-torn ruins of Britain. At one point, he hides in an abandoned building and observes the Martians as they work with their

64 Wells, Herbert George. *The War of the Worlds*. 1898. In *The Complete Science Fiction Treasury of*

incredible technology and feed on the blood of human beings. In addition to his frequent juxtaposition of vivid descriptions of human suffering and wreckage with detailed accounts of Martians and their technology, thus blurring the line between the possible and impossible, Wells employs words from Burke's first three classes of words to describe the fourth class world of the Martians. He points out what the aliens lack (hair, external noses, teeth, ears and chins) and what they possess (lipless, drooling mouths and oily, pulsating skin). To give these descriptions an extra sense of plausibility, Wells uses scientific vocabulary (sort of a modified version of Burke's first class of words) to detail the aliens' anatomy and biological functions:

> The internal anatomy, as dissection has since shown, was almost equally simple . . . Strange as it may seem to a human being, all the complex apparatus of digestion, which make up the bulk of our bodies, did not exist in the Martians. They were heads—merely heads. Entrails they had none. They did not eat, much less digest. Instead, they took the fresh, living blood of other creatures, and *injected* it into their own veins . . . The physiological advantages of the practice of injection was undeniable, if one thinks of the tremendous waste of human time and energy occasioned by eating and the digestive process. Our bodies are half made up of glands and tubes and organs, occupied with turning heterogeneous food into blood. The digestive process and their reaction upon the nervous system sap our strength and color our minds . . . But the Martians were lifted above all these organic fluctuations of mood and emotion.[65]

In this and other sections of the narrative, words such as "glands," "digestion," and "physiology," terms that are used by the sciences to describe numerous living organisms, are used to detail beings that do not actually exist. This mixing, matching and distortion

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H. G. Wells. New York: Avenel Books, 1978. 265.
65 Ibid., 349.

of familiar physical attributes and terminology to create new, horrifying monsters is reminiscent of ancient mythic beasts such as dragons and demons; at one point, the narrator compares the Martians' tentacles to the Gorgon, a monster from Greek myth.[66]

The narrator's observations of Martian anatomy and capabilities, such as their ability to communicate telepathically, prompts him to recount a magazine article he had read predicting that the brain, eyes and hands will be the only necessary organs in humanity's future evolution.[67] (Note that this is over a half-century before alien abductees would report encountering aliens with large, round heads, big black eyes, and long, spindly arms.) This is actually a reference to an article written by Wells himself, "The Man of the Year Million," which first appeared in print in 1893 in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.[68] In other words, Wells had already predicted the distant future of humankind in another work and by making a direct comparison between this vision and the Martians, Wells uses *The War of the Worlds* to dramatize the dismal outcome of human development and its dependency on technology, a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.[69] He even goes so far as to have the narrator say that the Martians "descended from beings not unlike ourselves"[70] and that "we men, with our bicycles and road-skates, our Lilienthal soaring-machines, our guns and sticks and so forth, are just in the beginning of the evolution that the Martians

66 Ibid., 276.
67 Ibid., 350-1.
68 Hughes, David Y. and Harry M. Geduld. Notes on *The War of the Worlds*. *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 218.
69 Wells' pessimistic view of humanity's future evolution can also be seen in *The Time Machine* (1895).
70 Wells, 351.

have worked out."[71] (Thus, Terry Matheson's connection of the mythic images of alien abduction to subconscious fears of technology comes trailing far behind the writings of Wells, who originally made explicit comparisons between a sexless, emotionless, technologically-advanced invading aliens to a possible, grim future for humanity.) [72]

This comparison of the present state of Martians to the future of humankind is not a unique idea. In three novels that pre-date *The War of the Worlds—Across the Zodiac* (1880) by Percy Greg, *A Plunge Into Space* (1890) by Robert Cromie, and *Journey to Mars* (1894) by Gustavus W. Pope—Martians are used to represent a possible future for humanity. As Karl S. Guthke summarizes: "The Martians . . . afford us a preview of our future, and in every case this future of ours, the Martian present, is regarded critically as a development that, while it is inevitable, leads in a false direction, toward a perfecting of the species that is undesirable because it eliminates what "we" see as the essentially human values."[73] This linking of humanity's future to a dying race of technologically superior beings from the stars through the use of scientific terminology and reference to humanity's current technological capabilities also follows the aforementioned habit of ancient cultures to believe that their cultural artifacts (namely, cities and temples) had prototypes and counterparts in the heavens.

While Wells' use of scientific language to create fictitious creatures is parallel to Burke's explanation of how ancient cultures detailed and expressed their belief in the

71 Ibid., 352.
72 Oddly enough, Matheson makes no reference to *The War of the Worlds* in any of its incarnations.

supernatural, and while his notion that such creatures reflect humanity's future is similar to Eliade's findings of religious reverence of the stars, Wells himself was very skeptical of religion, namely of the claims made by Christianity.[74] His skepticism is reflected in the curate, a character who accompanies the narrator across war-torn England in several chapters in *The War of the Worlds*. Convinced that the Martians are a sign of God's wrathful apocalypse, the hysterical curate prays frantically to his chosen deity for forgiveness; at one point, he even refers to the Martians as "God's ministers."[75] He is finally killed by the aliens in a touch of fatal irony: a drinker of God's blood himself, the curate meets his end when his own blood is drained and consumed by the Martians. Just as the colonial empires of Europe destroyed the indigenous cultures and religions of Africa, Australia and the American continents, sweeping numerous gods and their respective cosmologies "out of existence in a war of extermination," the Martians show similar apathy towards Christianity and its god when they decimate England, suggesting that a god is only as powerful as the military might and savvy of his followers. The Christian-centric extrochristological view of the universe is not only absent in this narrative, it is completely obliterated. Furthermore, by inserting a religious figure who becomes a useless, hysterical victim in the face of science run amok, Wells suggests that religion is ill equipped to handle the burden of scientific and technological knowledge.

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73 Guthke, 373.
74 Hughes, David Y. and Harry M. Geduld. Introduction. *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. 10.
75 Wells, 310.

On the other hand, Wells was also aware of what incredible trauma a relentless military invasion from a faceless adversary would have on an individual. Thus, to emphasize the narrator's muddy and frightened state of mind in midst of the relentless onslaught of the Martians, Wells' frequently shows this character making reference to biblical images and whispering prayers of his own as a way of coping with the invasion, even after he shouts at the quivering curate, "What good is religion if it collapses under calamity?"[76] This contrast in characters—the nervous curate, who feels that the Martian invasion is some kind of punishment from God, and the narrator, who ends up praising God when the invasion ends—emphasizes Wells' criticism of the fickle, contradictory nature of religion, especially in the face of personal trauma and military, colonial conquest.[77] Yet Wells' wording through the mouth of the emotionally shocked narrator of the twist ending, where the Martians are not defeated by human technology but by microscopic bacteria, opens itself to a one-sided interpretation: " . . . the Martians—*dead!*—slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared . . . slain, after all of man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon his earth."[78] This innovative, unique ending to a terrifying story that Wells himself connects explicitly to the Judeo-Christian god in a positive light made it into most of the subsequent versions of *The War of the Worlds*, often

76 Ibid., 310.
77 Hughes, David Y. and Harry M. Geduld. Introduction. *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. 13.
78 Wells, 380.

worded faithfully, while the curate character, the close comparison of the Martians to (future) humans, and Wells' direct indictment of Euro-centric colonialism were discarded.

After the Martians are found dead, the narrator reflects upon what has happened since the invasion, and closes the story with this conclusion:

> At any rate, whether we expect another invasion or not, our views of the human future must be greatly modified by these events. We have learned now that we cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a secure abiding place for Man; we can never anticipate the unseen good or evil that may come upon us suddenly from outer space. It may be that in the larger design of the universe this invasion from Mars is not without ultimate benefit for men; it has robbed us of that serene confidence in the future which is the most fruitful source of decadence, the gifts to human science it has brought are enormous, and it has done much to promote the conception of the commonweal of mankind. Be that as it may, for many years yet there will certainly be no relaxation of the eager scrutiny of the Martian disk, and those fiery darts of the sky, the shooting stars, will bring with them as they fall an unavoidable apprehension to all the sons of men.[79]

Wells' ending articulates the full extent of how humanity's worldview has changed due to the arrival of the ultra-scientific and -technological, "the unseen good or evil" that can descend upon humanity from the skies (metaphors and words from Burke's second class). But for as foreboding as this ending may sound, Wells includes a brief glimpse of utopia: that the Martian invasion promoted "the conception of the commonweal of mankind" and provided "enormous gifts" to science suggests that such an apocalyptic attack was ultimately for the good of humanity, a sort of wake-up call from the stars that will lead to global enlightenment and scientific advancement and away from

79 Ibid., 387.

the worship of the supernatural. In fact, this idea has actually been used by others when speculating how world peace can be achieved in modern society. In a speech given in 1917, John Dewey, a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, stated, "Some one remarked that the best way to unite all the nations on this globe would be an attack from some other planet. In the face of such an alien enemy, people would respond with a sense of their unity of interest and purpose."[80] A few decades later, towards the end of the Cold War, President Ronald Reagan mentioned in a speech that, "In our obsession with antagonisms of the moment, we often forget how much unites all the members of humanity. Perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us realize this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world."[81]

H. G. Wells died in 1946, before terms such as "UFOs," "flying saucers" and "alien abduction" would become common in the lexicon of pop culture. While Wells did not intend to use his work to create a new system of storytelling that some believe (and supposedly experience) to be literal fact, the disconnection between an author's motive and the interpreted meaning of his text has proven to be a common trait in print media. What remained in his narrative, what was altered, and what was left out in subsequent adaptations of his narrative will be discussed in the following sections.

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80 Dewey, John. Speech made at Imperial Japanese Mission, New York, 1917. Printed in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Intercourse and Education, Foreword by Elihu Root, Publication No. 15, The Imperial Japanese Mission.

81 Reagan, Ronald. Speech made to the 42nd General Assembly of the United Nations, Sept. 21, 1987.

VI. Little Green Men, Big Yellow Journalism

The War of the Worlds found immense popularity after its first publication, and it has the distinction of never being out of print.[82] But in 1897 and 1898, shortly before *The War of the Worlds* was published, the story was subjected to its initial adaptations and revisions. *The War of the Worlds* was printed twice in unauthorized, serial form in American yellow journals, the New York *Evening Journal* and the Boston *Post*.[83] The sensationalistic nature of an alien invasion complemented America's impending war with Spain, and the true nature of the Martian canals was still an issue of debate, with noted astronomer Percival Lowell recently staking his professional reputation that an intelligent Martian civilization created those canals. Furthermore, Wells' use of up-to-date scientific language fit well with yellow journalism's appeals to the pseudoscientific.[84] Of course, deletions and additions were made in these versions of the narrative without Wells' permission to make the story more relevant to American readers. In the *Evening Journal*, the Martians destroyed New York landmarks such as the Brooklyn Bridge, St. John's Cathedral, Columbia University, and Grant's Tomb; in the *Post*, the Martians did the same thing in Boston, attacking churches, institutions of learning, historical mansions and monuments, and government buildings.[85]

Wells had used language to create alien invaders of Britain; the yellow journalists

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82 Dickenson, 8.
83 Hughes, David Y. "*The War of the Worlds* in the Yellow Press." *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. 281.
84 Ibid., 283.
85 Ibid., 285-86.

in America then demonstrated that the first person, semi-documentary style and pseudoscientific prose found in *The War of the Worlds* could in turn be rewritten to fit other nations, political situations, and print forums. They placed a fictional war next to articles about a (potential) real war in the pages of a newspaper, which is parallel to Wells' effective combination of human confusion and suffering and alien biology and technology in his narrative. Yet in their revisions of *The War of the Worlds*, the yellow journalists overlooked Wells' commentary on Euro-centric colonialism and the ineffectiveness of religion in the face of science and technology; instead, they used religion as a rallying cry against the Martians for their readers. Here, the Martians ignore military targets and deliberately destroy American churches and cathedrals, becoming "simply the antichrist rampant."[86]

In his examinations of the problems surrounding hermeneutics and the interpretation of texts in the social sciences, Paul Ricoeur notes that unlike spoken language, where the speaker's intentions and meaning of the discourse naturally overlap and that the discourse is specific to ostensive situations, text literally removes itself from the time and place of its author. In this case, "what the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of its

86 Hughes, David Y. "*The War of the Worlds* in the Yellow Press." *A Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds*. 287.

author."[87] Because *The War of the Worlds* has yet to be out of print since its original publication over a century ago, the novel is no longer limited to a late 19th century English-speaking audience, making its basic story available for reinterpretation into countless movies, books, video games and television shows.[88] For Ricoeur, this would indicate that *The War of the Worlds* and the meaning that was originally attributed to it by its author and intended audience has exceeded and transcended the social conditions of its production and thus can be re-enacted in new social contexts. Such durability and omnitemporal relevance of *The War of the Worlds* indicates that it no longer refers strictly to the world of H. G. Wells, his intentions and his time, but it has gone on to create a world of its own. Thus, this text yields new references and fresh relevance, and new interpretations can be applied to determine its meaning. What makes Wells' narrative so remarkable is not only its longevity but its indirect influence over post-World War cultures, to the extent of convincing the military to seriously consider and investigate the threat of alien invasion and convincing individuals that their personal lives have been invaded by an extraterrestrial presence.

The refusal of subsequent versions of *The War of the Worlds* to include all of the author's original details and intentions while still employing the overall formula would help promote such deviance. A similar example can be found in Scott Robert Olson's

87 Ricoeur, Paul. "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text." In *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective*. Ed. Joyce Appleby, et al. New York: Routledge, 1996. 370.
88 The most faithful interpretation of *The War of the Worlds* to date is Jeff Wayne's *The War of the Worlds: The Musical*, a two-record album released in 1978. The complete lyrics for this work can be found at http://homepages.go.com/homepages/c/o/m/combustiblemoo/wotw.htm.

Hollywood Planet. In exploring the polysemic nature of media texts, Olson looks at how Ronald Reagan used Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the USA" as part of his patriotic, flag-waving 1984 presidential campaign:

> In counterpoint to the downbeat lyrics, the music itself was driving, rhythmic, and hypnotic, not unlike a military march. It sounded inclusive and negentropic and was certainly omnipresent at the time, rendering it polysemic. Furthermore, the song was associated by listeners with Springsteen's image against a huge American flag in the music video and on the album jacket, an image often used by politicians as a visual shorthand for patriotism. Part of Springsteen's appeal lies in the way he mumbles and croaks his lyrics, which in this case, meant that the only clearly intelligible line of the song was its ironic refrain, "Born in the USA, I was born in the USA," but without the other lyrics, this chorus is drained of its irony. . . . Other pop songs have also found an oppositional reading become the dominant one, such as "Every Breath You Take" by the Police and R.E.M.'s "One I Love," both of which are frequently read as sweet love songs.[89]

In this sense, the misreading of Wells' text is partially due to the nature of specificity. Wells' criticism of religion and colonization only occurs with certain characters, locations and scenes. The easy removal of these elements allowed for the removal of Wells' commentary while remaining true to the alien invasion narrative. Also, since Wells placed what could be interpreted as a positive portrayal of religion in the same sentence of the narrative's resolution, subsequent adaptations could claim to be worthy of *The War of the Worlds* name by including word-for-word recitations of the "God, in his wisdom" quote. The audiences of the later versions see/hear America invaded by a menacing alien power and saved by their deity (as opposed to being saved by science and

technology), not an allegory of human brutality and critique of religion as the author originally intended.[90]

Further complicating this issue is the text of *The War of the Worlds* itself, its usage of metaphor and manipulation of Burke's four classes of words. The novel heavily employs scientific language, which is ostensibly grounded in the physical world, to vividly create the Martians, who were only supposed to exist on the symbolic level; thus, several layers of meaning can be unfolded when it is deciphered, resulting in a hermeneutical problem.[91] Then there are Wells' tantalizing hints of utopia at the end of the novel. Wells implies that future utopia will be achieved through scientific and technological knowledge (even if it had to happen under the most dangerous of circumstances), but he never details in the narrative how this society of peace and tolerance is organized and implemented. Because of his lack of detail regarding the post-invasion utopia, he creates a considerable disjunction between the fictional world and the real world, a common attribute of utopian narratives. Therefore, even though Wells' use of the science fiction genre to explore the issues of colonialism, science and the future of humanity, his fleeting reference to the "commonweal of mankind" that arises due to the humility imposed by the invasion is just as impossible as the narrative's Martians. If a subsequent adaptation leaves out the critique of religion and instead emphasizes the futility of humankind's military technology against

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89 Olson, Scott Robert. *Hollywood Planet*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999. 171-72.

90 On the other hand, in the case of Orson Welles' radio show, if Welles' script had focused on putting forth a social message that required deep thought, it would have been robbed of its persuasive, impulsive power that convinced many people that aliens were actually invading America at that very moment.

the Martians' and the role of God's bacteria, *The War of the Worlds* could easily be rewritten to claim that religious faith, not scientific research, will ultimately provide humanity with victory and utopia. On the other hand, the insertion of the plastic concept of utopia into this invasion narrative could be pushed to the opposite extreme, that scientific dreams of social perfection can only be fulfilled through inevitable alien contact, a recurring theme in the alien abduction phenomenon.

One of the most popular reinterpretations of *The War of the Worlds* was performed on the radio on the Halloween eve of 1938, when Mercury Theater of the Air enacted their own version of the narrative. The results of this performance not only demonstrated the power of mass media technology and the spoken word, but it also proved how timeless and applicable the basic story of alien invasion was to the human experience.

VII. "Fake Radio 'War' Stirs Terror Through U.S."

At the time of *The War of the Worlds* broadcast in the 1930s, radio served as a popular form of mass entertainment. Of the 32 million families living in the United States, 27.5 million had radios, a much greater proportion than had telephones, automobiles, plumbing, electricity, newspapers or magazines.[92] Radios distributed popular entertainment and were the primary source of news for half the people in the nation. The government regularly utilized radio to make listeners feel closer to government leaders; President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made great use of the radio for

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91 Ricoeur, 369-76.
92 Swanson, Glen E. "The War That Never Was." *Starlog*, Dec. 1988, #137: 36.

his "fireside chats," reassuring the American people in the midst of the Great Depression.[93] Orson Welles, producer of Mercury Theater, chose Howard Koch to write the script for *The War of the Worlds*, insisting on an updated revision. Like the yellow journalists and their interpretation of *The War of the Worlds*, Koch changed the location from England to America—namely, New Jersey—which would guarantee recognition among the American audience. To pick a Martian landing site, Koch blindly dropped a pencil on a map and the small town of Grover's Mill was selected. Not only did it sound rural, but it was close to Princeton, where an observatory was located.[94] Koch wrote the script as if it were an actual occurrence (just as H. G. Wells wrote his narrative in semi-documentary fashion), structuring the first half of the narrative as a series of special news reports interrupting a "regular" program of dance music.[95] Like the novel, the reports begin by chronicling a seemingly unthreatening scientific oddity occurring on Mars. Orson Welles played Professor Richard Pierson, an astronomer at Princeton's observatory. Pierson is not only similar to Ogilvy in the original novel (a self-confident scientific skeptic who becomes a terrified true believer after the Martians land), but he also becomes the narrator in the second half of the show. The news reports slowly build, as fictitious reporter Carl Philips describes the crash at Grover's Mill and the subsequent destruction. Effective voice acting and sound effects heightened the tension. In an hour, the Martians

93 O'Callaghan, Scott. "*War of the Worlds*: Why the Hoax Worked." *Space.com* web site, Oct. 29 1999: http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/phenomena/war_worlds_hoax_991029.html.
94 Dickenson, 8.
95 "Little White Lies" was the title of one of the songs played.

would meet their end through terrestrial bacterial infection, and Welles explained that this whole program was simply a Halloween special, "Mercury Theater's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying 'boo!'"[96]

It has been estimated that between four to twelve million people were listening to the show that evening, and at least a million were convinced that an invasion from Mars was really happening.[97] Many refused to wait for the second half to air, packing the roads, hiding in cellars, loading guns and wrapping their heads in wet towels to protect themselves from Martian poison gas. The broadcast contained several explanations that it was a just a radio play, but if audience members missed the beginning of the show the next explanation did not arrive until forty minutes into the program.[98] Furthermore, all one had to do was listen to other stations to realize that all was well. Interestingly enough, the highest percentage of frightened listeners was on the West Coast, while the lowest was in New England. Despite the nation-wide panic, no one was injured, although one suicide attempt was reported.[99] Eleven years later, radio station HCQRX in Quito, Ecuador performed its own version of the same program. The reaction to *The War of the Worlds* in this area of the globe in 1949 shares similarities to how people reacted earlier in North America, with one significant difference. When the listeners learned that the broadcast

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96 *The War of the Worlds*. Prods. Orson Welles and John Houseman, The Mercury Theatre on the Air, October 30, 1938. A complete transcript of the broadcast can be found at http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.
97 Dickenson, 8.
98 Sanes, Ken. "*War of the Worlds*, Orson Welles, and The Invasion from Mars." *Tranparency* web site, 1999: http://www.transparencynow.com/welles.htm.
99 Dickenson, 9.

was a hoax, a mob attacked the El Comercio Building that housed the radio station and burned it down, killing fifteen people in the process.[100]

While the central premise of Martians invading Earth remained the same, this version of *The War of the Worlds* touched on a few issues that vividly inhabited the minds of the American public at that time. America was still in the midst of an economic depression. World War One had passed since *The War of the Worlds* was originally written, and many of the fears H. G. Wells considered while writing his work—the rise of German military power, the use of poison gas in warfare—had become realities. In 1938, Germany again marshaled its military might, preparing for war in Europe. Kristallnacht, the attack of Jews throughout Germany, occurred only ten days after the Mercury Theater broadcast, and Poland would be invaded less than a year later. (In an ironic future development, Orson Welles was on the air in 1941, when the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor forced him to interrupt his broadcast to announce the news of the large-scale attack. At first, many listeners refused to believe his news, remembering how he fooled America with *The War of the Worlds*.)[101] Such tensions were accented by the close proximity of this particular "invasion" to many of the listeners. Like H. G. Wells' faithful use of British geography for his novel, Koch's use of an actual town in New Jersey allowed people in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and the entire state of

100 Swanson, 44.
101 O'Callaghan, Scott. "*War of the Worlds*: Why Do We Fear Martians?" *Space.com* web site, Oct. 29 1999: http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/phenomena/war_worlds_fear_991029.html.

New Jersey to hear about places near them being attacked by Martians.[102]

Orson Welles' manipulation of the radio is still similar to Lakoff, Johnson and Burke's understanding of how certain kinds of language are recycled into forming new kinds of language to describe the intangible, although in this case it is not just how the language is employed, but how it operates in relation to sources of authority and information. In 1947, Princeton psychologist Hadley Cantril published a report in a volume entitled *The Invasion from Mars* as part of a research effort to understand why some people panicked over the broadcast and others did not. He noted that many people at the time, especially those in lower income and educational brackets, had become more dependent upon radio than newspapers for the news. "We have so much faith in broadcasting," one person commented. "In a crisis it has to reach all the people. That's what radio is here for."[103] He also looked at how the style of discourse used in the broadcast—ordinary programming, news interruption, ordinary programming—was common enough in radio, after the radio reporting of the Munich crisis in September 1938, that it easily pulled the average listener into the story. Some listeners did not pay attention to the program until something that caught their interest was said, while others assumed that Mercury Theater was pre-empted by the "news" they were listening to. As the narrative progressed, "townspeople" gave eyewitness accounts to "reporters"; "scientists" made astronomical observations; "military men" discussed the strategic

102 O'Callaghan, http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/phenomena/war_worlds_hoax_991029.html.

situation; and "government officials" issued warnings to the public and delivered patriotic speeches. The actors sounded convincing, speaking in the specialized languages of their "professions" where they are "experts," representing prestigious institutions such as the National History Museum in New York City or the Signal Corps of the New Jersey State Militia. (All of these institutions and their representatives are legitimate carries of Burke's second realm of words, thus making Welles' metaphorical jump into the fourth class of the fantastic more plausible.) In assisting with the descriptions of particular situations, colloquial expressions and specificity of detail were used. When the less credible elements entered the narrative, the actors indicated that they too had difficulty believing what they were "seeing," in turn adding a deceptive sense of honesty to their accounts.

Overall, Cantril could not find a singular reason as to why people panicked over the broadcast, but he offered several explanations. Much depended upon how familiar the listener was with the conventions of radio, his/her willingness to check other sources of news or to question the content of the broadcast itself to determine its validity, and his/her state of mind. What stood out in the broadcast for Cantril that determined its effectiveness, though, were a combination of a tense social environment and its presentation through a media channel that could facilitate a blurring of genre (drama and theatrics—the fictive—and the news—the real):

> The prolonged economic unrest and the consequent insecurity felt by many of the listeners was another cause of bewilderment . . . Why didn't

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103 Cantril, Hadley. *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. New York: Harper Torchbook, 1966. 70.

> somebody do something about it? Why didn't the experts find a solution? What was the cause of it anyway? Again, what would happen, no one could tell. Again, a mysterious invasion fitted the pattern of the mysterious events of the decade. The lack of a sophisticated, relatively stable economic or political frame of reference created in many persons a psychological disequilibrium which made them seek a standard of judgement for this particular event. It was another phenomenon in the outside world beyond their control and comprehension . . . The war scare had left many persons in a state of complete bewilderment. They did not know what the trouble was all about or why the United States should be so concerned . . . What could happen, no one could foresee . . . The Martian invasion was just another event reported over the radio. It was even more personally dangerous and no more enigmatic. No existing standards were available to judge its meaning or significance. But there was quick need for judgment, and it was provided by the announcers, scientists, and authorities.[104]

The fact that radio accomplished this kind of response in such a short amount of time puts a different spin on Ricoeur's observations of how meaning is attributed to text. In this example, H. G. Wells' original intentions had already been reinterpreted by Orson Welles, who seemed more intent on presenting an effective Halloween radio broadcast, doing the radio's equivalent of saying "boo," than telling an allegory of brutal imperialism or contemplating controversial scientific thought. However, Welles (as his character, Dr. Pierson) recites a monologue towards the end of the broadcast that comes close to detailing how an individual would feel after watching the destruction of his culture to make way for another culture, thus briefly touching on Wells' concerns regarding Euro-centric colonialism:

> All that happened before the arrival of these monstrous creatures in the world now seems part of another life. . . a life that has no continuity with

104 Ibid., 194-195.

> the present, furtive existence of the lonely derelict who pencils these words on the back of some astronomical notes bearing the signature of Richard Pierson. I look down at my blackened hands, my torn shoes, my tattered clothes, and I try to connect them with a professor who lives at Princeton, and who on the night of October 30, glimpsed through his telescope an orange splash of light on a distant planet. My wife, my colleagues, my students, my books, my observatory, my. . . my world. . . where are they? Did they ever exist? Am I Richard Pierson? What day is it? Do days exist without calendars? Does time pass when there are no human hands left to wind the clocks?[105]

Nevertheless, the unsettling lesson that invasions waged by technologically superior cultures against technologically inferior cultures render the religions and gods of the latter disposable is also ignored in the radio show.

How the public reacted to this radio show demonstrates some contradictions in how the influence of religion and science are perceived by the public. If anything, *The War of the Worlds* broadcast showed that many who listed to the show equated scientific authority with military and political authority. On the other hand, there are two key references made to religion during the course of the show. In an Emergency Broadcast, the Secretary of the Interior tries to persuade the American public into "placing our faith in God we must continue the performance of our duties each and every one of us, so that we may confront this destructive adversary with a nation united, courageous, and consecrated to the preservation of human supremacy on this earth."[106] This is followed by the conclusion, when Pierson finds the Martians dead from bacteria, prompting the recitation of the line that "the Martians were slain, after all man's defenses had failed by

105 Welles and Houseman, http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.

the humblest thing that God in His wisdom put upon this earth."[107] This implies a cause-and-effect relationship, that it was the Secretary of the Interior's rallying cry for faith that saved humanity from the Martians, not military technology or scientific insight. Yet even though Pierson denotes the bacterial infection as some kind of divine intervention, his conclusion of what the invasion signifies is a combination of pessimism and utopia, siding on the side of scientific speculation and evolutionary theory similar to Wells' original pessimism:

> Before the cylinder fell there was a general persuasion that through all the deep of space no life existed beyond the petty surface of our minute sphere. Now we see further. Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life spreading slowly from this little seed-bed of the solar system throughout of the solar system throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space. But that is a remote dream. It may be, that the destruction of the Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, is the future ordained perhaps.[108]

In his study of *The War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, Cantril found that some believed that the invasion they heard was the beginning of the end of the world, a punishment sent here by God.[109] In this sense, people lived up to H. G. Wells' criticism of religion, even though the curate character they were emulating was absent from Orson Welles' interpretation of the narrative.

Whether he was aware of this or not, Welles engaged in an altered form of oral communication. His and his cast's words and inflections were being sent to millions

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106 Ibid., http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.
107 Ibid., http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.
108 Ibid., http://members.aol.com/jeff1070/script.html.

listeners simultaneously but, unlike Ricoeur's observations that in a spoken discourse a speaker's intentions and meaning of discourse overlap and remain grounded to current situations, Welles and company were geographically removed from their listeners. In essence, they retained the immediate emotional power of oral communication while at the same time adopting the contextual displacements that occur with written communication, even if Welles did manipulate the listeners' expectations through the very process Ricoeur is describing. Dorothy Thompson most effectively summarized what Orson Welles, Howard Koch and the Mercury Theater group accomplished with the oral/textual medium of radio in her *New York Tribune* Column:

> All unwittingly, Mr. Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater of the Air have made one of the most fascinating and important demonstrations of all time. They have proved that a few effective voices, accompanied by sound effects, can convince masses of people of a totally unreasonable, completely fantastic proposition to create a nation-wide panic. They have demonstrated more potently than any argument, demonstrated beyond a question of a doubt, the appalling dangers and enormous effectiveness of popular and theatrical demagoguery. Hitler managed to scare all of Europe to its knees a month ago, but he at least had an army and an air force to back up his shrieking words. But Mr. Welles scared thousands into demoralization with nothing at all.[110]

What Thompson overlooked was that Welles actually *had* something that could frighten the masses: talented actors; a well-written script full of effective language; the media system of radio, which has great subtlety and enormous reach; and the active imaginations of the confused public, which were ready for war and could accept the

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109 Cantril, 179-185, 191.
110 Sanes, http://www.transparencynow.com/welles.htm.

scientific concept of intelligent, technologically advanced beings from other planets.

Upset with how Orson Welles revised his narrative, H. G. Wells cabled from London: "It was implicit in the agreement that it (*The War of the Worlds*) was to be used as fiction and not news."[111] Yet many of the scientific, technological and military predictions he made in his novels became news anyway: his visions of tanks, aerial bombing, nuclear war, gas warfare and industrial robots all came true in one form or another, and he lived long enough to see the atomic age begin with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What he would not live to see was how the narrative he created would become the source material for a global phenomenon in the 1950s.

VIII. *War* on Film

The War of the Worlds appeared on the big screen in the early 1950s in a film adaptation produced by George Pal. By this time, many of Wells' original predictions of future military technologies had come to pass in the first and second World Wars, and the fear of worldwide atomic devastation permeated America's Cold War with Communist Russia. Coincidentally, the film's release in August 1953 came a few weeks after the settlement of the Korean conflict.[112] Before the opening credits roll, a brief narrative is given, accompanied by a montage of news reel footage, that sets the tone of how some at that time perceived the relationship between war and science and technology:

> In the first World War and for the first time in the history of man, nations combined to fight against nations using the crude weapons of those days.

111 Dickenson, 9.
112 O'Callaghan, http://www.space.com/sciencefiction/phenomena/war_worlds_fear_991029.html.

> The second World War involved every continent on the globe, and man turned to science for new devices of warfare, which reached an unparalleled peak in their capacity for destruction. And now, fought with the terrible weapons of super science, menacing all mankind and every creature on Earth, comes *The War of the Worlds*![113]

After the credits, the narrator recites a monologue similar to the first paragraph Wells' original novel, a monologue that was also used to begin the radio broadcast. However, this pre-credit narrative makes no reference to alien threats or intelligent life among the stars; instead, the narrative firmly links warfare, mass destruction and science, articulating a pre-existing fear in the minds of the viewing public that did not necessarily require an metaphorical alien to articulate.

As in other versions of *The War of the Worlds*, only certain scenes, lines of text and the resolution are preserved in the film to justify its link to the original novel, and almost all of Wells' characters are gone. In the movie, the Martians first land in California, not England, New York, Boston or New Jersey. Like the radio version, the narrator of the story is a scientist; this time it is Dr. Clayton Forrester, a renowned specialist in astro and nuclear physics from the Pacific Institute of Science and Technology (or Pacific Tech, for short), who is central to the narrative. Unlike the novel, characters of scientific and military backgrounds dominate the cast, as they are the primary opponents of the Martian invasion, and they meticulously study and strategize against the Martians throughout the film. The script strives for a global range to enhance the fear,

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113 *The War of the Worlds*. Dir. Byron Haskin. With Gene Barry, Ann Robinson, and Less Tremayne. Paramount Pictures, 1953.

featuring lines of dialogue that refer to Martian landings and attacks occurring all over the world. In the middle of the film, an extended voice-over narration describes in detail what various nations around the world are doing to combat the alien menace. In the visual montage that accompanies this voice-over, shots of Hollywood-made Martian terror are juxtaposed with stock footage from actual military conflicts, blurring the line between the real and the fictitious. In other words, unlike the novel and the radio show, where the manipulation of expectation and belief through language and imagination made the invasion seem real, the movie enters the realm of the visual manipulation to add a layer to plausibility to the narrative. This storytelling technique dovetails with the flying saucer hysteria of its day, which yielded countless photos and home movies to enhance and prompt acceptance of supposed encounters with unidentified and possibly alien aircraft. The original Martian tripods are replaced by hovering, saucer-like war machines for the movie adaptation, possibly to identify more closely with the popular conception that if aliens arrive on Earth, they must be piloting flying disks. Also, unlike the previous novel and radio versions of the narrative, where characters scoffed at the notion that aliens were arriving on Earth, the characters in this version, from small town citizens to reputable scientists, are ready to accept that what landed on their planet is of alien origin, suggesting the incorporation of a prior UFO context. In fact, the predominance of military and scientific characters in this script parallels how the U.S. government handled the UFO phenomenon at that time.

Despite the considerable number of scientist characters, the film's narrative reflects a sort of grudging relationship between science, the common individual, and religion. When the Martians land with their "terrible weapons of super science," they rudely interrupt the idyllic life of the small town of Pine Summit, California, where common small-town folk enjoy simple pastimes such as square dancing (which the Martians disrupt with a power outage). Among the first casualties from Pine Summit at the hands of the Martians is Pastor Matthew Collins of the community church. He tries to make peaceful contact with the Martians, believing that "if they're more advanced than us, they should be nearer to the Creator for that reason,"[114] a standard exochristological assumption. Yet when he approaches a pulsating Martian war machine, reciting scripture and holding up a Bible, he is vaporized, prompting the military forces surrounding the Martian crash site to open fire. In the film's climax, Dr. Forrester wanders the evacuated streets of Los Angeles after being attacked by a mob, searching for his fellow Pacific Tech scientists and Sylvia Van Buren, Pine Summit librarian/Pastor Collins' niece/Dr. Forrester's love interest, before the Martians destroy the city. Remembering a foreshadowing story that Sylvia told him about where she went when she was lost as a child, Forrester begins to look through the churches, where people are huddling, praying, listening to sermons, singing hymns, and tending to the wounded. He finds some of his injured colleagues in one church and Sylvia in another; both churches are untouched by

114 Ibid.

the Martian destruction or the human riots. But just as the Martians attack the latter church, the war machines begin to fall to the ground. The bacteria had taken hold of the Martians, and as he leaves the church to examine a dead Martian, Forrester mutters, "We were all praying for a miracle."[115] Church bells begin to ring in the soundtrack and as the narrator recites the standard refrain, that "the Martians were killed by the littlest things, which God in His wisdom put upon this Earth,"[116] a collective "amen" is heard, and the movie ends.

This reverence for religion appears to contradict Wells' criticism of religion in his original novel. In the end, the scientists are forced to take refuge in the church as all of science and technology (even the atom bomb) had seemed to fail, and God appears to step in just in the nick of time. Even Sylvia, who is introduced in the film as having a Master's degree in Library Science and that her thesis was on modern scientists (hence her familiarity with and admiration of Dr. Forrester), appears to have her faith unshaken by science and reinforced by the invasion. In one scene, where one Pacific Tech scientist tells the others that the Martians have been estimated to take over the world in six days if the atom bomb fails against them, Sylvia states, "The same number of days it took to create it."[117] This creationist viewpoint stands in sharp contrast to the scientists, who cite evolutionary theory earlier in the film when speculating what the Martians might look like. It could be that these appeals to faith made by the makers of this film were made not so

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.

much in response to possibility of intelligent life on other planets, but in response to the secular orientation of the Communist government in the Soviet Union, for which the Martians symbolically stand in place in the film. Since both the United States and the Soviet Union had military forces that were nuclear-capable through the employment of science, appeals to religion was the only thing that the American filmmakers could cite that separated "us" from "them" and in turn superior to this threatening Other. Of course, since the fear of the Soviet's technological superiority fueled the military's interest in the flying saucer phenomenon in the first place, this film adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* and its particular orientations towards science, technology and religion fit in perfectly.[118]

Yet to label *The War of the Worlds* film as pro-religious and anti-scientific is premature. For example, the motivation behind Pastor Collins' approach towards the Martians is severely flawed, since he is shown sitting in on a military briefing beforehand that explicitly detailed the menacing news surrounding Martian landings in other parts of the world, either "reports of destruction and massacres" or "once they (the Martians) begin to move, no more news comes out of that area."[119] Furthermore, he cites the grim twenty-third Psalm as he walks towards the Martians, as if anticipating his own death; this suggests more of a bizarre martyr complex than a genuine appeal for peace on Collins' part. Also, the behavior of the scientists portrays them as competent and intelligent. In

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117 Ibid.
118 It should also be noted that during this era, the words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance.
119 *The War of the Worlds*, 1953.

one of the few scenes that is somewhat faithful to the original novel, Dr. Forrester and Sylvia become trapped in an abandoned farmhouse where they secretly observe the Martians. From this encounter, Dr. Forrester secures a piece of Martian technology and a sample of Martian blood, which he promptly brings with him to Pacific Tech for study. Through the sample, the scientists learn that the Martians are "anemic," and Dr. Forrester suggests the possibility of biological warfare both before and after the atom bomb fails. "We know now that we can't beat their machines," he states. "We've got to beat *them*."[120] This strongly suggests that if God's bacterial "miracle" would not have happened in the film, the scientists would have created one of their own anyway. Hence, while the devoutness of the American public is explicitly valued in this film, so is America's scientific prowess at a lesser degree, even if both employ conflicting ideologies. While many may feel that the United State's superiority can be attributed to its devotion to a particular deity, the country's economic and military dominance stems largely from its employment of science, an ideology that is not explicitly dependent upon the belief in any supernatural beings.

Since the 1950s, the flying saucer phenomenon expanded to include accounts of alien abduction. Even though the narrative conventions of these accounts parallel those used by Wells and other science fiction authors, thus suggesting that their true origin is in science fiction and not science fact, alien abduction has gone on to generate its own

120 Ibid.

myths and rituals. The best example of this contradictory blend of spirituality, scientific speculation and fictitious narrative can be observed by comparing the recent histories of two different cities: Grover's Mill, New Jersey and Roswell, New Mexico. In these locations, the reinterpretation of the basic *The War of the Worlds* narrative scenario steps out of the written and hypothetical world and into actual space, each with similar yet different orientations.

IX. A Tale of Two Cities

Since Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* broadcast in 1938, Grover's Mill had become a regular tourist attraction. "Most every year for the fifty years (since the broadcast), curious visitors and members of the press have asked us to recount the time when this community was panicked by invaders from Mars," commented Douglas R. Forrester, former mayor of Grover's Mill and chairman of a local committee responsible for a local monument that commemorates the first landing site of the Martian Invasion, a $15,000 bronze statue featuring a Martian Fighting Machine, Welles at a microphone and a family huddled around a radio. "One of the reasons we endeavored to present this commemoration was to set the record straight: the good people of Grover's Mill and West Windsor responded the same way other listening audiences responded. Some were perplexed, some were amused and some were alarmed. We wanted to turn what some have considered an awkward moment in our history into something charitable and

worthwhile."[121] In 1986, Forrester and others founded the War of the Worlds (WOW) Commemorative Committee to prepare a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the broadcast, which was held from October 27-30, 1988.[122] Among the festivities were a 27-ride carnival, fireworks, parades, the Martian Festival, an art show reception, the Martian "Panic Bike" race and the "Panic 10K Run and 2 Mile" race, and a masquerade. The "Flight of Fancy," a black tie dinner dance, helped raise money to restore the Grover's Mill pond and fund scholarships for students pursuing careers in broadcast. Panels included "Could It Happen Again?" and "Should We Go To Mars?" Among the celebrities present for this event included Howard Koch, Garrison Keillor, illusionist the Amazing Kreskin, and the principle cast of the *War of the Worlds* television series. Memorabilia and merchandise were sold, including a Martian Punch, a creation of a local bar.[123] To complement this event, Otherworld Media and National Public Radio (NPR) updated Koch's original script for a remake of *The War of the Worlds* radio drama to keep it consistent with the culture 1988 (yet another revision). Aired on October 30 of that year on NPR stations, this remake featured performers and radio personalities such as Jason Robards, Steve Allen, and Douglas Edwards.[124]

A few years later in New Mexico, another town held its own fiftieth anniversary celebration regarding aliens. From July 1-6, 1997, Roswell held *UFO Encounter '97: The*

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121 Flynn, John L. "The First Martian Landing Site in Grover's Mill, New Jersey." *Sci-Fi Road Trips* web site: http://www.towson.edu/~flynn/martian.html.
122 Ibid., http://www.towson.edu/~flynn/martian.html.
123 Dickenson, 10.
124 Dickholtz, Daniel. "On the Battle Front." *Starlog*, Dec. 1988, #137: 34.

UFO Crash 50th Anniversary. Unlike the citizens of Grover's Mill, many in Roswell believe that their alien crash landing is real. According to newspaper accounts, on July 8, 1947 (just days after Kenneth Arnold's sighting), Major J. A. Marcel, an intelligence officer of the Roswell Army Air Field (RAAF), announced that the crashed remains of a flying saucer had been recovered from a local ranch.[125] The following day, Brig. Gen. Roger M. Ramey clarified the story, saying the wreckage actually came from a downed weather balloon.[126] At the time, the citizens of Roswell were not convinced that the wreckage was of extraterrestrial origin. According to a newspaper story published on the day of the announcement that interviewed people about what they thought of the matter, "The reactions ran the gamut from scoffs at the whole idea to serious thoughts that they represented experiments by the government. No one interviewed thought they came from sources outside the United States."[127] (In a sense, the Roswell newspaper completed what the yellow journals started when they altered the text of *The War of the Worlds*; however, instead of keeping the real international war and the fictitious interplanetary war in separate news columns, Roswell brought the military and the aliens together into one story.) Decades later, after countless flying saucer movies, blurry photographs of UFOs, and alien abductee accounts, a book written by Stanton Friedman was published in 1980 that brought Roswell back into the UFO lore. In this version of the story, the craft was in

125 "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch in Roswell Region." *Roswell Daily Record*, July 8, 1947: 1.
126 "Gen. Ramey Empties Roswell Saucer." *Roswell Daily Record*, July 9, 1947: 1.
127 "Roswellians Have Differing Opinions On Flying Saucers." *Roswell Daily Record*, July 8, 1947: 1.

fact extraterrestrial and that the military retrieved its remains and five aliens, one of which survived the crash. Subsequent accounts included the possibility of a second extraterrestrial crash landing on the same night and accusations that the government concocted the weather balloon story to hide the truth.[128]

Roswell held its first *UFO Encounter* festival in 1995, the brainchild of Stan Crosby, a fourth-generation Roswell resident.[129] For its fiftieth anniversary, the festival featured events similar to those at Grover's Mill, such as the Alien Chase 5K/10K Walk & Run, the UFO Cycling Classic, the 1997 UFO Crash & Burn Extravaganza, and the Roswell Daily Record UFO Banquet. But because many believe this crash actually happened, other events assumed a more concentrated approach, sometimes blurring ancient religion with modern science. For example, the Roswell Community Little Theater presented *Ezekiel's Wheels*, a one-act play that connected the biblical records of "wheels in the sky" in the Book of Ezekiel to contemporary UFO lore. The festival's UFO Conference featured some of the celebrities of the UFO circles, including Erich von Däniken, the author of *Chariots of the Gods?* which suggested that ancient cultures and their religions were in contact with extraterrestrial civilizations, and Whitley Strieber, author of the *Communion* books that chronicle his own abduction experiences. This symposium also featured speakers such as John Hunter Gray and Lance Strong Eagle Crawford, who presented Native American beliefs of the existence of extraterrestrials

128 Clark, Jayne. "This UFO site in N.M. beaming in on some down-to-earth dollars." *Reading Eagle*, June 9, 1996: F11.

through ceremonial demonstrations and lectures.[130]

In addition to the festivals, Roswell recently constructed two UFO-related museums: the International UFO Museum and Research Center and the UFO Enigma Museum. The International UFO Museum distributes *The Jim Ragsdale Story*, a package that consists of a 44-page book, a one-hour video and a T-shirt. Supposedly, Jim Ragsdale, a New Mexico truck driver, was the last surviving person to see the Roswell flying saucers, and this package details his account of this encounter, which he kept secret until shortly before his death in 1995, when he confessed to his daughter. According to his story, he saw the flying saucer with his girlfriend in 1947 and gathered some debris from the craft, which he showed to some of his friends. However, his girlfriend's ensuing death in a mysterious car crash, the eventual death of the friends who saw his evidence and a burglary that claimed his recovered debris convinced him to keep his story a secret out of fear for his life. While the timing of this confession and lack of evidence and eyewitness to confirm it is questionable, members of the International UFO Museum are convinced of its validity. "I don't think a man on his death bed would tell his daughter about how he was fooling around with some girl in the woods unless the whole story was true," stated Max Littell, the producer of *The Jim Ragsdale Story*. "He had no motive for lying. I just don't see how a man could sit on his death bed and lie to his daughter."[131]

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129 Ibid., F11.
130 *Roswell UFO Encounter '97: The UFO Crash 50th Anniversary* brochure.
131 Nelson, Dave. "Confession adds fuel to UFO theory." *South Plains*, June 30, 1996: 5D.

Of these two cities, Grover's Mill is the precursor to Roswell, and popular fiction provided the narrative structure for firm UFO believers to use as they select and emplot their historical accounts. Yet the subsequent additions to *The War of the Worlds* story (government conspiracies, ordinary citizens and ancient cultures having direct contact with aliens, persecuted witnesses of the truth) have gained so much currency in the imagination of pop culture that they have gone on to reshape the original narrative itself.

X. The Best of Both *Worlds*

In 1988, Paramount produced a short-lived syndicated television series called *War of the Worlds*. This version of *The War of the Worlds* served as more of a sequel to the 1953 movie than the original novel, so by this point almost all of Wells' original themes, characters and situations are gone. In this version, it turns out that the invaders were not from Mars but instead used Mars as a staging area for the Earth invasion. While fleeting references are made to religion throughout the series (each episode in the first season uses a phrase from the Bible as its title), no significant assertions or criticisms are made. However, the aliens in the first season regularly recite what appears to be their cultural motto, "To life immortal," implying some kind of belief in spiritual transcendence from the physical. In the second season, the aliens are shown worshipping the Eternal, a floating, disembodied presence that resembled a giant cyclopean jellyfish. While this makes no direct commentary on Earth-bound religions, it does suggest that the religious beliefs practiced by the technologically advanced aliens is somehow misguided and false

in comparison to the religious beliefs practiced by the technologically weaker humans, especially since the aliens are completely defeated in this version.

The *War of the Worlds* series chronicled the adventures of a top-secret team of scientists and military officials assembled by the government to fight the aliens, who have been resurrected from their bacteria-induced slumber through exposure to toxic waste. Throughout the series, the heroes would search through top-secret government files and storage facilities to learn more about the aliens, while the invaders, who regularly referred to each other as "comrade," waged a guerilla war from their base at an abandoned underground nuclear test site. With these elements of covert Communism, nuclear technology gone awry, and covert government projects, this version of *War of the Worlds* served as a sort of bookend to the cooled Cold War in real life. It also became the point of direct crossover between H.G. Wells' original concept and the flying saucer hysteria it helped to generate, even if the series' connection to Wells' novel is fleeting. In one episode, "He Feedeth Among the Lilies" (2/4/89), the scientists interview people who have had close encounters of varying degrees with the invaders. One interviewee, who experiences missing time, is placed under hypnosis by the scientists, where she details what sounds like an alien abduction experience, whimpering things like, "They're . . . they're hurting me . . . they're putting something inside me."[132] In another episode, "Dust to Dust" (1/28/89), the scientists find a connection between the aliens and ancient Native

132 Lazarus, Tom. "He Feedeth Among the Lilies." *War of the Worlds*. Prod. Jonathan Hackett. Paramount Pictures, February 4, 1989.

American culture on a reservation.[133] (One can only guess what H. G. Wells would have thought of this free association between a colonized people and the aliens he helped to create as part of his commentary against colonialism.) The Grover's Mill/Roswell link comes full circle in "Eye for an Eye" (11/4/88), when the scientists discover that Orson Welles' radio broadcast was part of a government-produced cover-up of a real alien invasion. They even visit the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the radio broadcast in Grover's Mill, where they interview surviving New Jersey militia members about what really happened in 1938. According to one survivor, "Orson Welles trivialized one of the greatest moments of our life. No one really remembered what happened; all they remembered was the damn radio show."[134] In short, this episode's narrative suggests that Welles' broadcast of a fictitious invasion served to divert attention away from a real alien invasion, protecting people from a global panic (Grover's Mill's "weather balloon"), even though the broadcast caused people to panic anyway.[135] The fictitious elderly survivors of the fictitious crash landing at Grover's Mill in 1938 complained that a fictitious government plot discredited their alien experiences, while the 'real-life' elderly survivors of a 'real-life' crash landing at Roswell in 1947 complained that a 'real-life' government plot discredited their alien experiences.

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133 This 'link' between aliens and Native Americans was also explored in other science fiction television series such as *The X-Files*, *Dark Skies* and *Star Trek: Voyager*.

134 Lazarus, Tom. "Eye For An Eye." *War of the Worlds*. Prod. Jonathan Hackett. Paramount Pictures, November 4, 1988. It is interesting to note that with this episode, the assertion is made that the novel and radio versions of *The War of the Worlds* are 'false' while the Cold War influenced versions, the film and the TV series, are 'true.'

As the Grover's Mill/Roswell association demonstrates, the gradual evolution of the narrative conventions H. G. Wells originally used in *The War of the Worlds* shows an interesting relationship between the tangible physical world and the conceptual subjective world. Whatever Wells' intended his original narrative to be, it has laid the foundation for a belief system that pulls from both scientific theory and vocabulary and ancient myth and religion. In this sense, the critique Wells made of religion, namely the Christian faith, in relation to science is incomplete. The belief systems promoted by modern institutionalized religions may indeed be ill equipped to deal with the social impacts of future developments in the field of science. However, science is not immune to the human impulse to search for the ideal, provide it with a narrative and a human-like 'face,' and ground it in some physical manifestation, no matter how impossible the ideal really is or how weak its associations are to the human consciousness and the physical world. Furthermore, the alien narrative that was initiated by Wells and sustained throughout the 20th century is heavily tinged with the militaristic and political directives of invasion, colonization and conquest. Either the aliens engage in an outright campaign of death and destruction, as they do in each of *The War of the Worlds* adaptations and imitations, or they merely demonstrate their superiority through a demonstration of their scientific knowledge, as in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Both of these narratives show that technology is power, either through aggression or persuasion. This stands in contrast to

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135 A similar 'history' was suggested in the 1984 movie *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension*.

religion, which maintains that faith and allegiance to certain supernatural beings/forces is power; yet both science and religion can articulate their ideologies through mythic narratives that emphasize the coexistence of the fantastic with the mundane, which leads towards occasional overlaps between the scientific and the spiritual in the mind of the individual. Nevertheless, with the demonstration of power comes the promise of utopia, which is examined specifically in relation to the alien abduction phenomenon in the next section.

XI. Emplotment and Preordained Truth

With its long interests in the science fiction genre and sensationalist portrayals of social events, Hollywood has not been without commentary on the alien abduction phenomenon. Like the flying saucer movies of 1950s, movies that depicted dramatizations of supposed alien abductions began to appear in the 1970s. Among the more famous and recent titles in this subgenre include *The UFO Incident* (1975), *Communion* (1989), *Fire in the Sky* (1993), and *Roswell* (1994). (This list also includes countless television documentaries on UFOs that feature dramatized recreations of alien encounters.) The most popular of these movies is *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). Written and directed by Steven Spielberg, this film did not depict a specific UFO encounter but instead built its narrative on a number of such reports. In this film, an Everyman-type character, Roy Neary, encounters a UFO during a blackout. He shortly learns that other UFO sightings have occurred (which the government is covering up), and

he leaves behind his wife and children to find a rock formation, Devil's Tower in Wyoming, where he feels something fantastic will happen.[136] Indeed, something does take place—the first contact between the benevolent alien crew of a massive, chandelier-like spaceship and the U.S. government, the meeting of heaven and earth at this sacred mountain. Among the beings that emerge from the ship include the crew of Flight 19, a squadron of five TBM Avenger planes that vanished in the Bermuda Triangle in 1945. At the end of the movie, Neary and a dozen astronauts board the ship to accompany the aliens back into their utopian space, his mythic quest for extraterrestrial enlightenment accomplished. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* became so popular at the box office that it was re-released in 1980 with additional footage.

By adding the upbeat, utopian, special effects-heavy ending and making reference to other paranormal events, Spielberg embellished upon the average alien abduction narrative. He included as his technical advisor Dr. J. Allen Hynek, a popular ufologist who wrote *The UFO Experience*, the 1972 book that coined the term that served as the movie's title. Hynek even makes a cameo appearance at the end of the film, calmly smoking a pipe as the aliens land.[137] (Spielberg also wanted in his film Jacques Vallee, a French ufologist who worked with Hynek on another UFO book, *The Edge of Reality*, in 1975.)[138] These embellishments—a unified explanation of paranormal phenomenon that was hidden by

136 The Devil's Tower has long been considered a sacred site by over twenty tribes in the Plains Nation, thus establishing yet another pop culture-imposed link between the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas to aliens.

137 Gardner, Martin. "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." *New York Review of Books*, Jan. 26, 1978. Rpt. in Martin Gardner's *Science: Good, Bad and Bogus*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1989. 349.

the military and scientific branches of the government; the presence of UFO experts and believers at the arrival of the aliens in which they believe; and open access to all alien secrets, including a free ride into space—function as a sort of conclusion to the incomplete UFO encounters that Spielberg used as his source material. By improvising an ending, he gave the accounts a specific kind of meaning. In terms of Eliade's work, Spielberg created an inclusive, complete celluloid epic about a mythic quest to a sacred center where absolute reality (in this case, a reality that features tiny gray aliens) is experienced, based on the Word given by true believers in the modern-day paranormal.

Between the ideas promulgated by Wells' original invasion narrative, its subsequent adaptations and the ensuing abduction phenomenon, certain narrative patterns emerged and were manifested in locations such as Roswell, New Mexico and films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Furthermore, these patterns developed through the media's progressive manipulations of language, sound, and images and in the context of a rapid succession of tense socio-political situations. In short, a single novel caught the attention of individuals around the globe, convincing many that what started out as the literary components of H. G. Wells' fictional tale were in fact fragments of a real experience and by the 1950s, this new experience formed a historical narrative in itself. Hayden White argued that narrative is a meta-code, a universal human trait through which

138 Ibid., 351.

messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted.[139] Yet real events do not arrive in the form of a story; instead, the selection and omission of details in a narrative help shape the meaning of the events in the recounting of historical events.[140] The awareness of such selection would encourage researchers of historical narratives—historiographers—to attempt to understand what kind of notion of reality led the narrator(s) to represent in the account what he/she/they thought to be real events.[141] Often, historical narrators do not rank events in terms of their world-historical significance, but in terms of culture-specific significance, which is not universal at all; such limited concerns make historical narratives possible by tying the universal to particular cultural contexts.[142] White speculated that the legal system of the culture in question would have a strong impact on how historical narratives are formed and how meaning is attributed to them, since legal systems shape human relationships and mutual expectations, which in turn create tensions, conflicts, struggles, and resolutions. This indicates that narrativity moralizes reality and articulates possibilities for good in relation to the social system in which it exists; in other words, "narrativising discourse serves the purpose of moralizing judgments."[143]

The overall meaning of a narrative is determined by the kind of story that is being

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139 White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1987. 1.
140 Ibid., 3-4.
141 Ibid., 6.
142 Ibid., 9-10.
143 Ibid., 22.

told or "explanation by emplotment." Emplotment is the way by which a series of events detailed in a story is slowly revealed to be a story of a particular type.[144] Many UFO stories, both fictional and "factual," involve an individual's search for the truth: the secrets behind a UFO sighting or alien abduction, the reality of a sinister government cover-up, the strategic weakness of an invading alien force, or contact with a benevolent extraterrestrial intelligence. In most narratives, the resolution of this quest is utopia. According to White, these narratives would fall into the category of Romance plot structure:

> The Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it—the sort of drama associated with the Grail legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology. It is a drama of the triumph of good versus evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall.[145]

With the growing pervasiveness of the alien abduction phenomenon, this plot structure has gone beyond the realm of personal accounts, pop culture mythology and cinematic narratives. For example, in a report entitled *Unusual Personal Experiences*, ufologists Budd Hopkins, David Michael Jacobs and Ron Westrum used the findings collected from a Roper survey (another exalted narrative form in our culture) to convince the skeptical psychiatric community of the reality of alien abductions, and that individuals reporting such claims should be taken seriously. In their survey, they asked respondents

144 White, Hayden. "Introduction: The Poetics of History." *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. 7.

if they could remember:

a. Seeing a ghost
b. Feeling as if you left your body
c. Seeing a UFO
d. Waking up paralyzed with a sense of a strange person or presence or something else in the room
e. Feeling that you were actually flying through the air although you didn't know why or how
f. Hearing or seeing the word TRONDANT and knowing that it had a secret meaning for you
g. Experiencing a period of time of an hour or more, in which you were apparently lost, but could not remember why, or where you had been
h. Seen unusual lights or balls of light in a room without knowing what was causing them, or where they came from
i. Finding puzzling scars on your body and neither you nor any one else remembering how you received them or where you got them
j. Having seen, either as a child or adult, a terrifying figure—which might have been a monster, a witch, a devil, or some other evil figure—in your bedroom or closet or somewhere else
k. Having vivid dreams about UFOs [146]

According to the survey's conclusions, if the respondent answered "yes" to four or five of the key symptomatic questions (questions d, e, g, h, and i) then that individual was probably a UFO abductee. Two percent of the people surveyed fit this criteria (119 people out of the sample of 5,947); extending this figure to the total number of Americans represented by the Roper sample, the authors suggest that 3,700,000 people in the U.S. (excluding children, the populations of Hawaii and Alaska, and anyone living in shared, institutional quarters) could be alien abductees.[147] While other factors could be

145 Ibid., 8-9.
146 Hopkins, Budd, David Michael Jacobs and Ron Westrum. *Unusual Personal Experiences*. Las Vegas: Bigelow Holding Corporation, 1992. 21-22.
147 Ibid., 48.

considered to explain the combination of these symptoms, the 'truth' behind these personal experience is made clear in the opening line of the report: "This Roper survey, conducted between July and September, 1991, suggests that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of American men, women and children may have experienced UFO abductions, or abduction related phenomena."[148] In a supplementary commentary, John S. Carpenter, a psychiatric therapist from Missouri, endorses the report's conclusions:

> I have interviewed many wonderful people—including schoolteachers, policemen, business, college professors, and community leaders—and found no psychotherapy which would even begin to explain these (alien abduction) reports. This is reminiscent of how the immensity and complexity of the problems of family incest and child abuse were first doubted and disbelieved—until the growing number of reports finally forced the consideration of these issues by the mental health community. Are these hoaxes? What purpose is there to a hoax if the individual is fearful of telling others and avoidant of publicity? It is our own disbelief that set and defines the boundaries for what we accept comfortably as reality. How can we *know* for certain all that can or cannot exist? How egocentric are we to believe that we are the only intelligent life in the universe—and that if there is anyone else, we would certainly locate them *first* . . . Thousands are coming forth with very few reliable individuals in which to trust or seek credible answers.[149]

In other words, by using the vocabulary of and making comparisons to well-documented traumatic cases from the field of psychology and attaching it to speculation of the existence of extraterrestrial life, *Unusual Personal Experiences* converts ordinary individuals who have had unusual personal experiences into heroes of a science fiction

148 Mack, John E. "Mental Health Professionals and the Roper Poll." Hopkins, Budd, David Michael Jacobs and Ron Westrum. *Unusual Personal Experiences*. Las Vegas: Bigelow Holding Corporation, 1992. 7.

149 Carpenter, John S. Commentary. Hopkins, Budd, David Michael Jacobs and Ron Westrum. *Unusual Personal Experiences*. Las Vegas: Bigelow Holding Corporation, 1992. 51-54.

narrative. So, regardless of whether the aliens have come to invade or to enlighten planet Earth, the common individual becomes a potential harbinger of truth and progress to the rest of humanity. By selecting vague attributes as units of measurement to determine one's status as a possible alien abductee, inflating the projected number of possible abductees to a sizable 3,700,000, and promoting alien abduction as a believable source of patients' neurosis to trained psychiatrists, Hopkins, Jacobs and Westrum reshape the abduction formula into a heroic narrative in which anyone can participate. This is similar to Orson Welles, who merged the trusted language and conventions of radio with the pseudoscientific scenario of alien invasion to the point where "people were stuck in a kind of virtual world in which fiction was confused with fact,"[150] literally becoming characters in the story. This is also similar to H. G. Wells himself, who used scientific terminology to tell a story of nonexistent aliens through the eyes of a faceless, nameless narrator, a position that could be inhabited by anyone. Furthermore, by combining scientific musings of technologically sophisticated life on other planets and space travel with the Romance plot structure, a plot structure idealized by the Judeo-Christian faith, it is easy for science fiction writers, alien abductees and UFO enthusiasts to weave in and out of scientific theory and religious myth when constructing a narrative or to, say, place a messianic Jesus Christ and alien invaders in the same conceptual universe, even if colonial history would suggest a bleaker scenario.

150 Sanes, http://www.transparencynow.com/welles.htm.

What alien abduction accounts often overlook are serious considerations of other possible explanations of what might have happened to the abductees. For example, some psychologists suggest that false memory syndrome, sleep paralysis, or "metachoric experiences," a type of hallucination in which the whole world of the percipient (the person who is having the experience) is replaced by a psychological image, could be responsible for accounts of paranormal phenomena.[151] (However, if the false memory syndrome argument—the thinking that people subconsciously fabricate alien abduction memories to cover traumatic experiences such as sexual assault—is accurate, then Wells' decision to create Martians to symbolize human brutality touches a much deeper issue that he originally intended, thus explaining some of the lasting appeal behind *The War of the Worlds*. After all, it has been reported that abductees are more apt to have had a history of sexual or other forms of abuse than the general public.) [152] Michael Persinger, a neuroscientist at Laurentian University in Ontario, is using pulsed magnified field technology to explore the possibility that unstable activity in the temporal lobes of the brain brought on by magnetic disturbances from earthquakes and thunderstorms could induce one into having an experience akin to alien abduction.[153]

A recent *Newsweek* article provides the most telling finding that reports of alien sightings and encounters go up every time a Hollywood movie about the paranormal or

151 Rimmer, 144.
152 Matheson, 56-57.
153 Blackmore, 29-31.

a *Communion*-like book enters the public sphere.[154] The recent popularity of films like *Independence Day* (1996), television shows like *The X-Files*, and widely-hyped pseudo-documentaries like *Alien Autopsy* (1995)—each of which made reference to government conspiracies and Roswell-like scenarios—would thus explain the recent surge in alien abduction reports. This lack of serious consideration of alternative explanations to alien abduction exposes the problem with the heavy emploted historical accounts of UFO phenomena and their promised utopias:

> The historical narrative . . . reveals a world that is putatively "finished," done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world reality wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as "found" in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques.[155]

Hence, organizations such as NICAP, people like George Adamski, and the citizens of Roswell may be looking for the "truth," but the truth has already been preordained: someday, somehow, the sightings and encounters with aliens will be validated by being proved real, their wonderful technological secrets will be revealed, and utopia will be attained. But as Hayden White would argue, such a focused narrative structure imposed on real events reveals a desire to find coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure in life. Unfortunately, "the notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origins in

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154 Marin, Rick. "Alien Invasion!" *Newsweek*, July 8, 1996: 54.

wishes, daydreams, reveries."[156] This parallels Ricoeur's observations on utopia that, for as valuable as they may be for considering alternative possibilities for social order, it often becomes escapist fantasy. In other words, "utopia is fancy—the completely unrealizable. Fancy borders on madness. It is escapism and is exemplified by the flight in literature."[157] So for as much as believers in the UFO phenomenon want to demonstrate the absolute reality of its existence to the general public, their goals will remain invariably linked to the dreams and imagination of H. G. Wells and a fictitious book he wrote about men from Mars.

XII. The War of the Possible Worlds

What H. G. Wells created in his original invasion narrative was a simulation of a scientific theory taken to the worst extreme, which was made plausible through the manipulation of metaphor and scientific language, as a way of articulating the fears and concerns of his day. This simulation spread throughout the public consciousness through effective mass media texts, such as Orson Welles' radio adaptation that attached new meaning to the narrative by using it as a catalyst that provoked people to act out their fears of foreign invasion. Later on, Kenneth Arnold's flying saucer sighting and the military and public apprehensive response to it reflected the fears of the nuclear age and the burgeoning Cold War. This prompted many to use Wells' idea of invading aliens as the explanation

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155 White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." 21.
156 Ibid., 24.
157 Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. 310.

for this sighting, an explanation on which Hollywood capitalized to create two more adaptations of *The War of the Worlds* that were greatly influenced by the socio-political concerns of the time. At its heart, this simulation of scientific theory represents the fears about science, technology, invasion and military conquest. This is why the alien invasion narrative (and subsequently the alien abduction narrative) is distinctly a Western, post-industrial nightmare. As the world colonizers from Europe learned, military power is only as strong as one's technological power, which has largely become rooted in science. The military conflicts and colonial victories of recent centuries were made possible by railroads, telegraphs, gunpowder, airplanes, and atomic bombs, with genetically engineered biological warfare and computerized military technology currently waiting in the wings. But like the supernatural beings of previous cultures, the alien cannot be clearly seen, located, or even touched; it also cannot be erased or harnessed by technology, since it is humanity's technological superior. As Wells' knew when he first wrote his invasion story, members of a dominant nation, gender and ethnic group are afraid that a superior military, technological force will do to them what they have already done to others. In this light, it is no surprise that the United States would so rapidly adopt this British narrative to articulate its current fears. Note that in one of the latest alien invasion films, *Independence Day*, the aliens are defeated by two Americans who place an electronic virus (the word "virus" itself being a metaphor in this context) into the aliens' computer system, as opposed to a bacterial infection into their biological system. (Could it be that

computer gurus such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates are smarter than a race of beings that is capable of interplanetary travel?) Therefore, no matter how many times the alien invasion tale has been told, either as a fictional narrative or an eyewitness account, the military, colonial, scientific and technological subtexts of the original *The War of the Worlds* will remain the same as long as technology determines the status of a nation. This also prompts the adoption of the technologically advanced extraterrestrial as part of that nation's cosmology.

But certain aspects of the alien abduction phenomenon that borrows heavily from Wells suggests that the ideological conflict between science and the belief system of religion, which is another way of understanding a culture's power and dominance, is not so clearly defined. Throughout the history of *The War of the Worlds*, various perspectives of science and technology and their relationship to religion were presented, from Wells' original criticism of religion to the film adaptation's praise of American piety.[158] From the occasional reference to spirituality and religious myth in abductee accounts to the adoption of the Romance plot structure, it appears that the religious and the scientific can coexist in any number of combinations in an individual's subjective understanding of the world. Examples of this overlap is most vividly seen in some of the more popular modern science fiction epics: works such as the *Dune* and *Star Wars* sagas take place in environments that

158 In one segment of the film, it is mentioned that members of the Hindu faith in India are forced to relocate to Tibet to escape the oncoming Martian invasion. This stands in contrast to the ending of the film, where American Christians stand their ground and remain mostly untouched by the Martian war machines, which somewhat implies that non-American, non-Judeo-Christian religious belief systems are inferior.

are overrun with technology, yet their protagonists employ mysticism to guide and enhance their actions. Currently, one of *The War of the Worlds*' successors, *The X-Files*, is continuing to use metaphors, scientific language and words to evoke the supernatural to address the fears and ideological conflicts of the day. Not only do the protagonists on *The X-Files* (once again, agents from the government) search for the scientific and technological government-hidden secrets behind alien abductions; they also explore new paranormal phenomena every week, ranging from ghosts and demons, blurring the line between the supernatural and the scientific. Even the show's resident skeptic, Special Agent Dana Scully, exhibits inconsistencies in her search for scientifically credible answers—her skepticism quickly flags when faced with a situation that arouses the more mystical areas of her Catholic faith.[159]

To keep *The X-Files* current, some of the phenomena explored in this series share a close resemblance to real-life headlines: flesh-eating viruses, genetic engineering, covert medical experimentation, and parasitic infections of city water supplies have both been seen on *The X-Files* and the evening news. "*The X-Files* plays upon the fears of the 90s," says Hayden Dawson, a co-director of an *X-Files* fan club. "They raise questions about areas we're just starting to get scared about."[160] Hence, with science provoking fears in the real world, it is no surprise that *The X-Files*' fictional narrative also hinges upon the utopian notion that the world will become a better place once the heroic agents expose the

159 See episodes such as "Revelations" (12/15/95) and "All Souls" (4/26/98) for examples.
160 Sexton, Jim. "No Rest for the Eerie." *USA Weekend*, May 12-14, 1995: 4.

corrupt government agency that is hiding the truth behind alien abductions, telepathy, ghosts and all other hyperscientific and paranormal phenomena (another unification of all unexplained things) to the public. To find a quick, comprehensive, spiritually gratifying and easy to understand answer to solve all the complex, impersonal problems raised by science and the technology it generates would be the ideal panacea for average modern individual, a supreme manifestation of *deus ex machina*. (Note that the two phrases that are most closely identified with this series is "The truth is out there," representing the utopian dream of attaining the absolute truth, and "I want to believe," which is featured on a flying saucer poster in one of the agent's offices the stresses faith in the unprovable.) On the other hand, in other utopian narratives and accounts that place the aliens as benevolent guardian angels and examples of enlightenment for humankind, then the aliens literally become the gods from the machine, a source of reassuring guidance in a world entangled in incomprehensible technology and science.

Because the alien invader is technological in nature (as opposed to other supernatural beings, who never needed technology to demonstrate their powers), its logical place is within media technology. We may not see the aliens themselves, but we can see the blurry photos, video footage, and film and TV depictions of their space ships. We may not board their vessels, but we can read about people who have in books and web pages, people who use carefully selected language that sounds just as credible as the next authority figure. The media have helped to promote and sustain the story of the alien

through the selective combination of actual worlds and possible worlds. In fact, this combination of the actual and the possible in the realm of media production technology was the subject of Warren Buckland's article, "Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg's digital dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism." Using the *Jurassic Park* films as examples, Buckland frames his analysis of film critics' negative attitudes of modern-day special effects through the philosophical debate between actual and possible worlds. As Buckland summarizes, logical positivists believe that the actual world is all that matters and that non-actual objects or possible states of affairs lack meaning because they do not match the immediate experience. On the other hand, modal logicians see possible worlds as offshoots from an actual state of affairs. Reality from this perspective is not made up of a fixed area of facts, but a convoluted structure of sub-systems where only one of which is factual. While these possible worlds have a different ontological status, they allow us to see the contingency of historical, cultural, and scientific events.[161] Thus, "non-actual possibilities make perfectly coherent systems which can be described and qualified, imagined, and intended and to which one can refer."[162]

To demonstrate how the media creates immersive worlds where the possible interfaces with the actual, Buckland looks at how Steven Spielberg's blockbuster movie adaptation of the *Jurassic Park* novel was accompanied by print and television journalists

161 Buckland, Warren. "Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg's digital dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism." *Screen* 40.2, Summer 1999: 180-181.
162 Ronen, Ruth. *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 25. As quoted in Buckland, 181.

pondering the possibility of cloning dinosaurs. One television program on BBC even felt compelled to ask, "With genetic engineering advancing at a startling speed, what if scientists were able to recreate the extinct species?"[163] Even though that was the plot of the film, Spielberg created very realistic dinosaurs that could seamlessly interact with human performers through digital technology that, for as effective as it looked, did not yield one living prehistoric creature. Nevertheless, the media hype surrounding the possible, digitally created world of *Jurassic Park* prompted some to reassure the public that despite the convincing nature of science fiction in the movie, real science was not nearly as advanced. In an interview in *New Scientist*, paleontologist Douglas Palmer added that, "Speculation on the viability of recreating dinosaurs from fossil DNA endures despite its extreme improbability."[164] Ben Macintyre of *The Times* wrote, "Even the relentlessly serious-minded *New York Times* felt moved to reassure its readers in an editorial that 'scientists will not have the capacity any time soon of resurrecting the dinosaurs.'"[165] Such responses are a testament to the power of electronic/digital media as it mediates with our beliefs: just as Orson Welles did on the radio before him, Spielberg was able to enhance a small possibility (cloned dinosaurs) into a vividly detailed virtual world, complete with real human beings. Even though there were technical shortcomings in both narratives (the lack of visual images in *The War of the Worlds* and the common

163 *Spielberg and the Dinosaurs*, 12 July 1993, BBC1. As quoted in Buckland, 181-2.
164 Palmer, Douglas. "Dr. Faustus meets the Dinosaurs." *New Scientist*, vol. 139, no. 1880, 1993: 43. As quoted in Buckland, 182.
165 Macintyre, Ben. "Mad Scientists on the Loose." *The Times*, 25 June 1993: 14. As quoted by Buckland, 182.

knowledge of Hollywood special effects in *Jurassic Park*), they were able to stir enough human imagination and emotion through their reference to contemporary issues, concerns and beliefs, ultimately convincing the public that what they heard/saw was real/possibly real. As Buckland concludes:

> The spectator's system of belief can be characterized in terms of 'What if,' 'As if', or 'What might have been' propositional attitudes. The modality of these propositions indicate that . . . the existence of possible worlds is mind dependent. . . . Possible worlds exist in so far as they are thought of, hypothesized, imagined or assumed. Nonetheless, possible world theory is not merely concerned with the possibility in thought of unactualized states of affairs, but with the probability of occurrence of the unactualized but possible state of affairs. This is what makes films that articulate a possible world so compelling: the probability of occurrence of scientists finding dinosaur DNA and 'growing' dinosaurs from it, are presented as if they are mind independent—that is, actual states of affairs. The power in the presentation of a possible world is increased when it is actualized on the movie screen with the aid of special effects, which create the perceptual illusion that the possible world is actual. The spectator's belief system regarding films that articulate possible worlds can therefore be characterized as a combination of modal propositions (descriptions of possible worlds) and declarative propositions (which describe the actual world).[166]

This recognition of the importance of belief in constructing possible worlds from the actual world is key to understanding religious belief, scientific theory, and their relationship with each other. Both supernatural beings and extraterrestrials and their technology do not necessarily have to exist; they simply need to be presented in a manner that is convincing to the individual to encourage belief. These concepts can be made conceivable in metaphor, articulated in scientific theory, written in holy scripture, linked

166 Buckland, 191.

to cultural/national identity and historical events, manifested in sacred locations and rituals, or projected in media-generated images, as long as there is some plausible link to the actual world. Since both ideologies depend upon belief and follow similar narrative patterns, the religious and scientific can overlap or be revised, even if actual scripture, history or scientific theory would negate such relations. For example, in addition to the "ancient astronauts" theory, the extraterrestrial-centric idea put forth by Erich von Däniken to explain the more mysterious aspects of ancient cultures, other ancient supernatural legends have recently been reconsidered in scientific terms. Hence, it is not uncommon to read about the Bigfoot and Yeti legends rethought of as possible missing links or the Loch Ness Monster imagined as some kind of surviving aquatic dinosaur (in other words, mythic monsters meet Charles Darwin).

However, if Wells' narrative and its permutations found their way into the minds of the general public through particular channels of mass media, it is possible that this formula could take on additional dimensions as electronic media becomes more interactive. The radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* and subsequent alien abduction books, television and movies took advantage of uncertainty and confusion that media can generate through their adoption and alteration of words/images: the image may look real and the narrative may sound plausible, but are they actually real? Virtual reality (VR) technologies, where real-life situations are simulated in detail for interactive training sessions, have already yielded another kind of physical response: simulator sickness, or

as leading cyberspace philosopher Michael Heim refers to it, Alternate World Syndrome (AWS). In his book *Virtual Realism*, Heim points out that AWS occurs when an individual switches between sensory information received from the virtual world and sensory information received from the real world, causing a sort of cognitive disconnection. Heim compares AWS to motion sickness or jet lag, in the sense that each is brought on through prolonged immersive exposure to technology. As Heim more specifically puts it:

> AWS is technology sickness writ large because virtual reality (in the strict sense used by virtual realists) brings the human being over the threshold into the artificial world. The human being entering a full-blown virtual habitat for work or play must exit and reconfigure the senses in order to resume life in the primary world, then later reconfigure when reentering the virtual world, etc. . . . AWS occurs when the virtual world later obtrudes on the user's experience of the actual world, or vice versa. AWS is technology sickness, a lag between natural and artificial environments.[167]

In other words, AWS occurs "when the responses ingrained in the one world (the real world) step out of phase with the other (the artificial world)."[168] (It could be argued that AWS is a physical embodiment of the metaphorical conflict and philosophical debate between actual and possible worlds, manifesting itself as an illness, of all things.) For this reason, some pilots cannot use simulators, and those who can are grounded for days after their simulated experiences. In fact, the problems caused by AWS rule out many pilots from upgrading their licenses to more powerful aircraft through simulation training. This has also led many military researchers to the conclusion that the general public cannot

167 Heim, Michael. *Virtual Realism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 182-83.

spend hours inside of VR environments without experiencing serious side effects.[169]

Yet Heim sees similarities between the symptoms of AWS (nausea, headaches, flashbacks and disorientation) and alien abduction accounts.[170] Like Matheson, Heim acknowledges the alien abductees' observations of their captors using of technology in a threatening, indifferent manner. Yet in these visions Heim eagerly sees a utopian future: "The fascination and pain of the UFO phenomenon shows us only the first glimpse of our ultimate merger with technology. The assault of change means that we must listen to those whispering elders (the aliens) who show us how technologies like VR can be used to cure the sickness they cause, or at least help us adapt. . . . The UFO Elders may be lending us guidance through the gift of VR."[171]

What Heim overlooks is that if this new electronic medium has the potential to fool the senses, or at least influence them to the point of inducing severe physical illness, the mass hysteria induced by Orson Welles' radio broadcast would pale in comparison to what these VR technologies could generate. It is one thing to alter words/images through the manipulation of texts, sounds and photography; but to alter these realms as part of generating an intimate subjective experience through the distortion of the senses could result in new hallucinatory "close encounters" that would further blur the line between

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168 Ibid., 182-186.
169 Ibid., 53. See also Simon Penny's essay, "Virtual Reality as the End of the Enlightenment Project" (1992), which can be accessed online at http://www-art.cfa.cmu.edu/penny/texts/VR_Dia.html, as well as Eugina M. Kolasinski's U.S. Army Research Institute technical report 1027, "Simulator Sickness in Virtual Environments" (1995), which can be accessed online at http://eserver.org/cyber/simsick.html.
170 Ibid., 182.
171 Ibid., 197, 199.

reality and imagination. Interestingly enough, some VR programs are based upon ancient religious perspectives with the deliberate intention of invoking the cognitive and physical displacement that can occur though sacred ritual practice. For example, one VR project is named *GhostDance*, after the ritual created by the Plain Indians when their tribes were teetering on the edge of extinction due to the invasion of the Europeans. The project features some ritualistic elements, complete with floating, disembodied images and ceremonial music; a free-floating technological utopia that is largely disconnected from the grim spiritual, cultural, historical and colonial baggage that formed the basis of its namesake.[172] In another project, *PlaceHolder*, users have the chance to participate in metaphysical animistic ritual through inhabiting the virtual body of a snake, a crow, a spider or a fish, and the user has to adjust her physical movements to fit the anatomy of the creature.[173] As Heim describes it:

> By assuming first-person features of that animal world, the participant emulates the shaman's power to identify with the critter world. Traditionally, the shaman goes to the mountains, meditates and dreams, and leaves the body when guided by an animal spirit that empowers the shaman with supernatural vision. . . . If you stand outside the virtual world of *PlaceHolder*, you can watch helmeted people flap their arms like wings, caw with their voices like crows, and bend over and dive like birds from the sky. You see the human body fully engaged in a virtual world. They belong to a world of animal flight, animal sight, animal movement. These bodies are not just going through the motions; they are responding to events in their perceptual fields.[174]

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172 Holtzman, Steven. *Digital Mosaics: The Aesthetics of Cyberspace*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. 103-116.
173 Heim, 68-74.
174 Heim, 71-72.

Whatever primal or cultural fears that *The War of the Worlds* narrative/formula was capable of tapping (which itself is a sort of "ghost dance" for Euro-centric culture), the "perceptual fields" engaged by VR technology will make these fears much more vivid and accessible to the mind. Imagine experiencing in full tactile, emotional detail a re-creation of a frightening/reassuring abduction experience as reported/programmed by a firm believer of UFOs, as opposed to simply reading an account, looking at a blurry photograph, and/or watching a UFO documentary. In this case, the ufologists' assertion of the relativist approach to truth would come full circle, and the aliens that H.G. Wells built through words on paper would become fully immersive experiences for the masses. (In an odd way, though, the virtual Martian invasion of Earth would finally become complete—no bacteria could stop it, and it would be made possible, not hindered by, man's technology.) In fact, psychologists at the Emroy School of Medicine in Atlanta are using a VR system that consists of a computer program, a headset with earphones, a "thunderseat," and a sound platform to treat patients with disorders such as fears of heights, flying and thunderstorms, to post-traumatic stress disorders.[175] Since ufologists are already imitating the language and techniques employed by therapy culture in treating and publicizing alien abductee accounts, who is to say they will not use VR technology as part of their practices? So, while it may be easy to scoff at the responses that were generated by *The War of the Worlds* radio broadcast and *Jurassic Park*, these could be the

175 Fox, Maggie. "Virtual Reality Helps Overcome Common Fears." Reuters, August 4, 2000: http://dailynews.yahoo.com/h/sc/?u.

precursors of the interactive, immersive digital worlds of tomorrow.

Given the nature of human imagination, as long as fear and uncertainty (or a desire for hope, as seen in narratives such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) remains strong in the public mind, fact and fiction will continue to be blurred and possible worlds will continue to be generated. Of course, for possible worlds to be convincing, they would have to incorporate elements from the actual world to maintain plausibility in the mind of the viewer. So as science and technology continue to open up new possibilities into everyday life, which already consists of social, political and spiritual concerns, an endless stream of possible worlds and their narratives will be created in varying combinations. H. G. Wells' alien invasion scenario is just one example of how a narrative can assume a life of its own, finding distribution through mass media, plausibility in public discourse (in this case, scientific theory regarding alien life), and a certain state of reality in the mind of the beholder. From this conclusion, a number of new questions should be considered. What is the relationship between science and the media? How much does science fiction affect actual science, and how does one firmly draw the line between the two? How does science fiction combine myth and religion in its narratives, and how does this reflect modern culture? To what degree does science fiction educate the public about science fact? What is public education doing in its science and literature curriculums to inform students of the impact of science and science fiction on industrialized, technology-dependent culture? A number of other issues could also be further explored here in the

context of mediated technology, such as the nature of human belief—namely its formation of and through language, culture, location and imagery—and the relationship between religious and scientific ideology, namely how one belief system influences the other.

Of course, in light of Heim's comments, another area of inquiry for researching alien abduction and its relationship to science fiction and mass media would be in simulation theory. *The War of the Worlds*, from the novel to the radio show to the movie version, were simulations of a war, with the Grover's Mill celebration acting as an acknowledgement of Wells' and Welles' texts as simulations. The Roswell celebration, the *Unusual Personal Experiences* report, and documentaries and books that chronicle UFO sightings and alien abduction reshape the alien invasion scenario into a hyperreality of its own, an endlessly reproducible experience that turns the alien into a seemingly independent social actor. The subtext of this hyperreal, simulated alien presence—a threat of invasion and conquest—shares a relationship with modern developments in warfare technology, which render war itself into a simulated experience that echoes numerous science fiction scenarios of mechanized war. As Bill Nichols observes in his essay "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems":

> The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) represents a vast Battle of the Cyborgs video game where players compete to save the world from nuclear holocaust. Reagan's simulated warfare would turn the electromagnetic force fields of fifties science-fiction films that shielded monsters and creatures from the arsenal of human destructive power into ploughshares beyond the ozone. Star Wars would be the safe-sex version of international conflict: not one drop of our enemy's perilous bodily fluids, none of their nuclear ejaculations, will come into contact with the free world. Reagan's simulation of war as a replacement for the reality of war

> does not depend entirely on SDI. . . . Each time, we have had the evocation of the reality of war: the iconography of heroic fighters, embattled leaders, brave decisions, powerful technology, and concentrated effort rolled into the image of military victory, an image of quick, decisive action the defines the "American will." These simulacra of war, though, are fought with an imaginary enemy, in the Lacanian sense, and in the commonsense meaning of an enemy posited within those permutations allowed by a predefined set of assumptions and foreign-policy options. . . . These simulations lack the full-blown, catastrophic consequences of real war, but this does not diminish the reality of this particular simulation nor to force with which it is mapped onto a historical "reality" it simultaneously effaces. Individuals find their lives irreversibly altered, people are wounded, many die. These incredible punctuation marks across the face of the real, however, fall into place according to a discourse empowered to make the metaphoric reality of the simulation a basic fact of existence.[176]

Given *The War of the Worlds*' long-standing relationship with modern military history and its "terrible weapons of super science," further investigation is needed of the possible connection between the fear of the hyperreal, technologically advanced extraterrestrial threat to national security and the military technology that is progressively turning warfare into a mechanized experience that employs vivid simulations to verify (and justify) its reality.

As for the alien abductions themselves, even if enough physical evidence accumulates to unquestionably prove these abduction claims and UFO sightings were solely the products of mass hysteria and perceptual misjudgments, the ufologists' argument will by that time rely solely on relativist truth, beyond the point of recall. Blurry photos of disk-shaped objects in the sky and big-budget movies of alien invasions gave

176 Nichols, Bill. "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems." *Electronic Culture:*

the public a new class of images and language to associate with this phenomenon, carrying the confused, paranoid mind further into the chaotic, uncosmicized regions of imaginative innerspace from where H. G. Wells' Martians originated. The new computerized media of VR has the potential to continue this pattern, enabling media to progresses deeper into the realm of immersive, interactive simulations, becoming more effective and immediately accessible to all five of the senses, and generating new commentaries and subjective experiences to add to UFO lore. At that point, entertainment technology will exceed the power of its predecessors. Furthermore, with the underlying need to stay on the cutting edge of science and technology to maintain socio-economic and military power, and the sciences continuing to explore the more remote areas of human experience, such as genetics, artificial intelligence and quantum physics, chances are that yet another historical narrative, complete with its own bogeyman or sky god, will arise. If this pattern of thinking remains consistent, it could be that our high-tech interactive media and our myth-making imaginations may someday help us to succeed in scaring ourselves us to death, waging a simulated war against a disembodied yet hyperreal enemy. For as discouraging as this may sound, some people are ready for these possible changes in pop culture cosmology, such as John Price, the owner of the UFO Enigma Museum in Roswell. "If it turns out they can prove it (the Roswell flying saucer) was a spy balloon, we'll have a spy balloon festival. We're flexible." [177]

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177 Clark, F11.

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