Chapter 10
The Emergence of "Atomodoxy" in Cold War Rhetoric and Science Fiction Narratives: Fear, Threats, and the Duties of Citizenship in an Atomic Age

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John Wayne played the Asian military leader Genghis Khan in the movie *The Conqueror* in 1956. Twenty years later, 91 members of the film's cast and crew had developed cancer. At least 50 died of it, including Wayne and fellow stars Susan Hayward, and Agnes Moorehead, and director Dick Powell. Another actor, a Mexican film star, Pedro Armendariz, developed kidney cancer within 4 years of his time with Wayne in the desert. He survived until 1963 when he shot himself through the heart after hearing from his doctor that he had terminal lymphatic cancer. No one can say for sure what caused this cancer cluster, but many attribute it to radioactive fallout from 11 atom bombs tested in the Nevada desert near the location where the film was shot. One of the bombs was four times the size of the one dropped on Hiroshima.

Back in 1956, radioactivity was almost something to joke about. Wayne even posed near the set for RKO Radio Pictures publicity shots with his bare-chested sons and a Geiger counter. The episode contextualizes prevailing ideologies, but how do these ideologies come to be? At what point did the epiphany occur in which the happy American male playing with a Geiger counter was displaced with tremendous suffering from even touching the radioactive sand? These same ideologies simultaneously circulated in the narratives of popular culture, specifically science fiction, where narratives create and sustain particular constellations of nuclear knowledge. The episode surrounding John Wayne and the filming of the movie *The Conqueror* is important because it is a narrative that presents one perspective of the time. Here we have a moment with a national superhero taking a stroll with his children while enjoying something new in the atomic age. This narrative was displaced with another that grapples with fears and threats—evidence that the picture changed.

This mythic milieu is particularly interesting because the same logic that circulated at the time was reproduced with a cast of heroes and villains. The 1950s science fiction attempted to provide a moral framework for adults, but especially children and teenagers concerning the duel intimidation of communism and nuclear

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threats. Though no causality is implied, tracing these moral lessons allows us to find out how a particular subjectivity emerges. My claim is that narrative analysis can and should be used to analyze historic episodes from the 1950s, an era rife with political and social conflict.

Walter Fisher provides tools that can aid the critical historian by exploring what constitutes this meaning in his landmark work *Rationality and the Logic of Good Reason*. For Fisher, good reason must meet two criteria: fidelity and coherence. Reason is the means in which we decide to either believe or not to believe a narrative that is presented to us. We must decide what symbols and signs of the communicative process are reliable to express a social reality. The narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amendable to all forms of human communication. Narratives are thus meaningful because they allow us to understand the actions of others. The narrative episodes, based on fact or fiction, are open to interpretation because of their argumentative goals.

When reading about nuclear and communist fears in the USA after World War II, a commonly used phrase is "fears, either real or imagined." Most work concentrated on the perceived real fears. This chapter attempts to identify and illuminate the imagined companion narratives of a world in the nuclear age. These narratives were created out of a fear of what could be rather than a fear of what was, a fear of philosophy rather than historical fact, and became the companion to facts that ultimately became conspiratorial truisms. This chapter refers to these instantly recognizable Cold War metaphors, opinions, and narrative constructs as *atomodoxies*.

Fisher claims the most compelling persuasive stories are in mythic form. This substantive feature is related to narrative fidelity. Furthermore, Fisher's "coherence" seeks for what is true to the way people and the world are in fact and value. Some stories are better in satisfying the criteria of the logic of good reason which is attentive to reason and value. Keeping these criteria in mind, I am going to analyze representative textual anecdotes that began circulating shortly after the advent of the atomic bomb including those evident in the science fiction movies *Them!* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. How does a good citizen respond to monsters and communists? What is victory? These examples are more than just entertaining stories for the public. Atomodoxies supplemented and provided scaffolding for the prevailing Cold War ideology and cast the Cold War and communism into mythic realities.

10.1 Narrative Analysis

Events on the world stage began to develop at a dizzying rapidity after the Second World War. The Republican Party secured the presidency and both houses of the legislature with an emphasis on Cold War national security. Republicans cast Democrats as weak on national security by hyping the threat of domestic subversion and stressing the liberation of communist-controlled Europe and Asia. Republicans also capitalized repeatedly on widespread anxieties by charging the White House of colluding with communists during both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations and claiming that Democratic containment efforts had "lost" China and Czechoslo-

vakia. Hollywood cashed in on these fears by releasing science fiction films that seemed to parallel many of the same themes and metaphors. Ten out of 12 American films produced during this decade that dealt with visitors from another world depicted the presence of aliens in our society hell-bent on destroying the foundations of American life. Only *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Cosmic Man* suggested that "others" might be benign or neutral.

To understand history requires an attitude of historical inclination. In order to understand a particular issue, the historian must be aware of the pressures and influences of other peoples' thoughts and behaviors as well as their understanding of specific issues and developments. Ernest Wrage claims that it makes no difference if an academic seeks "explanations for an overt act of human behavior in the genesis and moral compulsion of an idea, or whether [academics] accept the view that men seek out ideas which promote their interests and justify their activities, the illuminating fact is that in either case the study of ideas provides an index to the history of man's values and goals, his hopes and fears, his aspirations and negations, to what he considers expedient or inapplicable." Wrage does not separate truth from fiction. Facts do not always propel facts. The study of ideas helps us to discover why certain people may have done certain acts.

Wrage employs the word "idea" to refer to widely accepted formulations of thought as the product and expression of social motivations that encourages other ideas, and then to others. Ideas are the product of their social environment from which they arise and not mere entities that enjoy independent existence that "serve as objects of contemplation by the self-avowed or occasional ascetic…exclusive devotion to monumental works is hopelessly inadequate as a way of discovering and assessing those ideas which find expression in the market place." Ideas do not form in a vacuum but are the product of circumstances, time, and place.

Moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre observed, "Man is, in his actions and practice as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal." "Enacted dramatic narrative" becomes the "basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions." The storyteller's vantage point in time, values, and character positions the narrative to the audience, and the audience creates a "we" by identification. Fisher utilized this theory as a basis for his narrative paradigm—a synthesis of the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme—after concluding that the traditional views of rationality did not serve nuclear controversies.

The narrative paradigm maintains that human communication must be viewed both as historical and as situational. Each narrative competes with other narratives "constituted by good reasons, as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements." If human communication is to be considered rhetorical, it must take an argumentative form. Reason is to be attributed only to discourse "marked by clearly identifiable modes of inference and/or implication, and that the norms for evaluation of rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic. The narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making them amendable to all forms of human communication."

Fisher notes that narrative paradigm is related to both Bormann's concept of "fantasy themes" and Frentz and Farnell's language action paradigm. Bormann's

fantasy is "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfill a psychological or rhetorical need. These concepts translate into dramatic stories, constructed out of fact and faith, which constitute a persuasive force as well as the fabric of social reality for those who compose them. Borrman's primary contribution is his suggestion that fantasy chaining transcends small-group experiences. If small groups shared identities through group fantasizing, so might larger groups such as organizations, social movements, and societies. It is important to note that these fantasies can be fictitious in nature, especially when they are created out of physiological or philosophical fears of nonhistorical circumstances.

Frentz and Farrell's "encounters" are implicit matters of knowledge, aesthetic expectations, institutional constraints, and propriety rules that force a determined narrative structure within a given interpersonal environment. An "episode" is "a rule-conforming sequence of symbolic acts generated by two or more actors who are collectively oriented toward emergent goals." Fisher claims this is basically the process by which one or more authors generate a short story or chapter by deciding plot, nature, characters, resolutions, and meaning, and then importing these stories to others. These episodes then can take on stoic resistance to alternative episodes created by others who may have alternative goals.

Fisher notes that the Bormann and Frentz and Ferrell constructs enrich what he calls the narrative paradigm, the structure of which is:

1. Humans are essentially storytellers.
2. The paradigmatic mode of human communication is "good reason" depending on the situation, genres, and media.
3. Good reason production and practice is governed by matters of history, biography, culture, and character as well as the forces of Frentz and Ferrell's language action paradigm.
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of narrative beings and their ability to know if something rings true.
5. The world is a set of stories, which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation.

Reason is the means in which we choose to either believe or not to believe a narrative that is presented to us. We must decide what symbols and signs of the communicative process are reliable to express a social reality. Narratives are thus meaningful because they allow us to understand the actions of others. The narrative episodes, either based on fact or fiction, are open to interpretation because of their argumentative goals.

10.2 The Atomodoxy

Fisher's narrative analysis of the logic of good reason may have been the last brick in the wall of neo-Aristotelian rhetoric. The question remains of how we should deal with the logic of the macro-level irony of a time period. History has shown that many narrative episodes that originated with the atomic bomb later proved to be false, or at

least misleading. These imagined fears accompanied the bomb much like a gangster's companion and appeared in every Cold War theme, even those that are still in use today. A few cases of communist espionage such as the Ethel and Julius Rosenberg or Alger Hiss may have attracted the public attention, but the idea of mass infiltration of Soviet spies proved to be an exaggerated and distorted historical threat fallacy. A triumphant culture permeated America as soon as the atomic bombs dropped on Japan ended the war. America won militarily, economically, and indeed majestically with the ultimate weapon of both devastation and propaganda: the mushroom cloud. The twentieth century became the Age of America, and Japan got what was coming to it.

This culture was short lived when America almost immediately found itself in the center of an arm race with the Soviet Union and the belief that communist agents were communicating with the Department of State. America's Second Red Scare began shortly after the end of World War II and lasted through the late 1950s, an apparent consequence and response to a Soviet Eastern Europe, the Berlin Blockade, and the Chinese Civil War. The House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC) investigations led to several confessions of collusion by several high-ranking US government officials. The time was also characterized by heightened fears of espionage, sabotage, and communist influences on American institutions such as the media, military, and academia.

Proliferation and nuclear annihilation became legitimate military goals. The mushroom cloud itself became an image of power and fear. Nuclear fears morphed into a ticking time bomb when the Doomsday Clock premiered on the cover of the 1947 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* set at 7 min to nuclear annihilation. The closer this symbolic face of death came to midnight, the closer the directors of the *Bulletin* estimated the world was to a global disaster.

In its 60-year history of clicking away toward doom, the closest the clock ever came to midnight was 11:58 PM in 1953 when the Soviet Union and the USA tested thermonuclear devices within 9 months of each other. It was also a time of space ships and aliens as America sought out refuge and meaning in fictional espionage and radiation. Children began exchanging Children's Crusade Against Communism bubblegum cards in 1951, but 8 years later they were far more interested in Bullwinkle J. Moose and his sidekick Rocky the Flying Squirrel as they prevented the terrorist attacks of Pottsylvanian agents Boris Godunov and Natasha Fatale. The clock was rewound in 1960 for the first time back to the original 7 min to midnight when the USA and Soviet Union appeared eager to avoid direct confrontation in regional conflicts such as the 1956 Egyptian-Israeli dispute.

In 1964, Lyndon Johnson ran the infamous Daisy Spot where he told the nation, "We must either love each other or die." The political ad against Barry Goldwater featured a little girl counting off the peddles of daisy and ended with a nuclear explosion. The Doomsday Clock was reset 11:48 PM as American Napoleon Solo (Robert Vaughn) and Russian Illya Kuryakin (David McCallum) worked together to fight "thrush's" attempts to take over the world. The scientists continued to reset the Doomsday Clock up and down as American settled into Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) treaties, regional conflicts, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that hardened the US nuclear posture.

The clock reached 3 min to midnight in 1984 when US–Soviet relations reached their iciest point in decades. The clock reached its farthest point away from nuclear annihilation in 1991 when government officials on both sides claimed the Cold War was over. The clock did not stop for long at 17 min for India and Pakistan staged nuclear tests only 3 weeks apart in 1998. The next year James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) uncovered a nuclear plot while protecting an oil heiress in the *World is Not Enough*. The attacks on 9/11 caused another clock reset when new fears emerged of terrorists getting their hands on the enormous amount of unsecured—and sometimes unaccounted for—nuclear-grade material, most of which resulted from the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Wars continued to be measured by mushroom clouds the next year when Wolfe Blitzer interviewed Secretary of State Condi Rice in 2002:

> BLITZER: Based on what you know right now, how close is Saddam Hussein's government—how close is that government to developing a nuclear capability? RICE: You will get different estimates about precisely how close he is. We do know that he is actively pursuing a nuclear weapon. We do know that there have been shipments going into Iran, for instance—into Iraq, for instance, of aluminum tubes that really are only suited to—high-quality aluminum tools that are only really suited for nuclear weapons programs, centrifuge programs. We know that he has the infrastructure, nuclear scientists to make a nuclear weapon. And we know that when the inspectors assessed this after the Gulf War, he was far, far closer to a crude nuclear device than anybody thought, maybe six months from a crude nuclear device. The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't what the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

The clock and the cloud were constant reminders of how close we were to global nuclear war until 2007 when the clock also began reflecting climate-changing technologies, "new developments in the life sciences and nanotechnology that could inflict irrevocable harm." It was about this same year that Jack Baur (Kiefer Sutherland) stopped a terrorist plot to set off a suitcase nuclear device in New York City and prevented China from getting sensitive circuitry that could trigger a war between America and Russia. Not only was the fear of nuclear annihilation on display but also was the ticking clock before every commercial break and often during the narration of the TV program *24*.

The ticking clock, the image of the mushroom cloud, and the fear of the communists and nuclear terrorism are all examples of what I refer to as atomodoxies. An atomodoxy is a Cold War myth, theme, or metaphor that resulted from the opinions of experts and often-imagined conspiratorial fears of the populace that began shortly after the creation of the atomic bomb and never truly faded. The same memes appeared in both newscasts and the fictional media, and are equally recognizable in both adult and children entertainment, but have become so tightly knitted together that they have become dreadlocks of paranoia and fear. This is not to say that America was never in any danger from the Soviets. It was just that the danger was exaggerated and distorted by those with specific goals, be they political or social, during a time of historical crisis. These memes became representations of a conspiratorial reality.

Richard Hofstadter defines conspiracy as "a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most

fiendish character." This "style" or "way of seeing the world and expressing oneself" occurs during crisis moments over "long spans of time and different places." The paranoid idealists perceive history in apocalyptic terms, a convergence of history and a crisis moment. This conspiracy creates an opposition between the virtuous and a perceived enemy who cannot be mediated or compromised. This enemy is an active agent, free of "the toils of the vast mechanism of history." Decisive events become the consequences of will.

The true believer is concerned over these demonstrations and heroically strives to find evidence of wrong doings. The believer's intense rationalism compulsively creates order in a fantasy world that leaves "no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities." An atomodoxy is thus a Hofstadterian conspiracy: an amalgamation of historical fallacies, such that true believers "see only the consequences of power—and this though distorting lenses—and have little chance to observe the actual machinery."

The atomodoxy has deep roots that date back to America's Revolutionary War. As the American government became larger, more impersonal and complex, officials were increasingly scrutinized because "people became uncertain of what was who and who was doing what." Fundamentally, American secular thought was structured in such a way that conspiratorial explanations of complex events became normal, necessary, and rational. Early American conspiracy theories were shaped by a variety of factors including distance from power and the inability to gain knowledgeable information, but they became a cultural field of layered communication and provided an alternative historiography in which the status of ideologies were reworked and expanded. Ideas are thus withered to what George Washington called "rationalizations as masks obscuring the underlying interests and drives that actually determined social behavior." Conspiracy theories are rationalizations of the unknown that can lead to fearing a nemesis that may or may not be based in a real-world scenario. This fear can turn into a moral panic like it did during the atomic age.

Cohen's definition of moral panic has become the standard:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

Moral panic research tends to focus on how the media and public figures mobilize public opinion by exaggerating and distorting the threats, but Cohen claims that the social reaction is not enough to judge a moral panic; moral panic draws and evokes deeper or latent tension and fears. We can prepare rationally for what is known. Panic is created from what is unknown. Nuclear fear and panic is extreme because of the latent threat potential.

Baudrillard claims that it is not the direct threat of atomic destruction that confuses people, but the "deterrence that gives them leukemia." The world pretends to believe that atomic destruction could happen, or at least in the reality of the threat,

but it is exactly at this point where the empty signifier begins. The originality of the situation lies in the improbability:

> Deterrence precludes war—the archaic violence of expanding systems. Deterrence itself is neutral, implosive violence of meta-stable systems in involution. There is no longer a subject of deterrence, nor an adversary nor a strategy—it is a planetary structure of the annihilation of stakes. Atomic war, like the Trojan War, will not take place. The risk of nuclear annihilation only serves as a pretext, though sophistication of weapons…for installing a universal security system, a universal lockup and control system whose deterrent effect is not at all aimed at an atomic clash (which was never in question, except without a doubt in the very initial stages of the cold war, when one still confused the nuclear apparatus with conventional war) but, rather, at the much greater probability of any real event, of anything that would be an event in the general system and upset its balance. The balance or terror is the terror of balance.

Not only has there never been a truly atomic war, as Baudrillard envisions it, but also there never will be one since a total planetary annihilation is at stake. It is the risk that serves as a weapon because it justifies a system of destruction that will never be needed yet is rarely questioned. Baudrillard claims that this balance of terror is the true monster, a monster that we raced to create. Panic becomes the logical response to the monster that is no longer in our control.

The fiction begins with the idea that the danger will not be real as long as everyone behaves in certain and specific ways. It is the idea and not the reality that is in play. The result is the best system of control that has ever existed—the hyper-model of security. This is an example of what Tabako refers to as discursive irony that "appears on the macro-level of a whole discourse when the discourse's intrinsic contradictions are revealed." The control can be continually exploited, even though the empty signifier is revealed, because the metaphors and themes continue to work effectively. The problematic infallibility of atomodoxies controls the social through intimidation to conform to specific ideas and behaviors. Thus, all preparations for such a war, from duck and cover cartoons to tanks and submarines, are purely speculative and based on opinions or ideas: what Solomon calls the "objective reality of empirical need."

Precedent has already occurred to treat the nuclear war threat atomodoxy of as fiction. Derrida argues that such a conflict would be an event without precedent and would bring about the "total and remainderless destruction of the archive…the terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or a text." Nuclear war thus takes on a "fabulous textuality" since it only exists "through what is said of it." Since they cannot be known in advance, the view of "experts" becomes merely opinions that can cause panic rather than diminish it. Although Derrida is redefining rather than denying the nuclear referent, his argument still has an effect of fictionalizing the whole premise of nuclear annihilation and raises the status of literature that deals with it. Literature, even science fiction, occupies a space equal to sociological, strategic, and other modes of speculation if nuclear war can only be approached speculatively. Derrida even names modernists such as Mallarme', Kafka, and Joyce as being especially relevant to the age. If the fiction of nuclear war were as important as Derrida would lead us to recognize, then the fiction should be attended to and the literary canon reexamined.

Two atomic bombs have been dropped strategically to end a war, one on Hiroshima and the other on Nagasaki, but Derrida explains that these bombs ended a "classical," conventional war. Seed claims this idea categorically ignores the continuing debate over how to "narrativise" these two events (to speed Japanese surrender or to warn the Soviets of America's new technology). The obliteration of these two cities has been used as a means of measuring the possible annihilation caused by such a war, yet even the iconoclastic reporting of people like John Hersey—who claimed that clothes patterns could be seen on the bodies, eyes were turned into jelly, and the shadows of the atomized victims were imprinted on the walls of Hiroshima—and the fact that 130,000 people were vaporized in a single flash sounds like science fiction. There is no reason to doubt Hersey's writing since anyone who visits the Nagasaki Peace Museum would find that the reportage is consistent with the consensus view of what happened, but the graphic quality of Hershey's writing gives science fiction its comic book punch. This comic book punch is what pulses beneath the symbolic surface of atomodoxy.

The atomic bomb bisected history. The world would always be different and no one knew how exactly. This form of fiction would no longer be a charming, romantic expression of freedom and naïveté, but implosive imagery of Cold War conceptions of false realities that continue to plague the USA even as the century turned. From this "moment on," claims James Gunn, "thoughtful men and women recognized that they were living in a science fiction world." Isaac Asimov pointed to this paradigm shift as well when he claimed "The dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 made science fiction respectable."

10.3 The Nuclear Desert

Baudrillard claims America has a "primitive culture" since it lacks a rich historical and cultural past in which to root, and from which to reflect upon the present moment. Furthermore, America displays a primitive culture desert-like aura: "This country is naïve, so you have to be naïve…. Insignificance exists on a grand scale and the desert remains the primal scene." The desert is a place where there are no signs of human existence, leaving only the indifference of pure objects, neutrality, and dead images that characterize contemporary America. Baudrillard explained why the desert is fascinating, "It is because you are delivered from all depth there—a brilliant, superficial neutrality, a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture, an outer hyperspace, with no origin, no reference-points?" Every sign is a blur as it flies past on the southern portion of Route 66, resulting in the cultural vacuum of what appears to be an infinite space. America, for Baudrillard, is approaching a "vanishing point" of the social, meaning, truth, history, and reality.

With the atomic bomb, life emerges from the desert but in a significantly different form. The atomic fear began to swell through the nation as the media immediately conjured up images of vaporized cities. The dean of radio news commentators, H. V. Kaltenborn told his radio audience on the day of the Hiroshima bomb: "For

all we know, we have created a Frankenstein! We must assume that with the passage of only a little time, an improved form of the new weapon we used today can be turned against us." From the first day an atomic bomb was dropped on foreign soil, the prospect of global annihilation by self-created monsters was preparing the social consciousness.

Manhattan Project physicists participated in the cultural mytholization of their discoveries with the choice of Los Alamos for the Trinity Site. The choice deliberately situated the scientists on a mystic desert location that local New Mexicans called "the Magic Mountain" or "Shangri-La." The scientists convinced themselves that they were saviors who would end the war and usher in a new world of peace. The bomb exploded at on July 16, 1945, with "the brightness of several suns at midday" and forced a purplish mushroom cloud high into the atmosphere. Within 10 years, both Genghis Khan, as noted in the introduction of this chapter, and a colony of giant murderous ants the size of elephants roamed the same desert hell-bent on destroying humanity. Both left questions concerning the results of atomic fallout.

Like God, the atomic bomb apparently could create life as well as take it away. Two state troopers at the beginning of the 1954 movie *Them!* find a young girl wandering in the desert. The troopers create a plaster cast of a single footprint near the trailer where the little girl lived with her parents, and this cast is sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Washington for identification. Dr. Medford and his daughter Dr. Pat Medford (Edmund Gwenn and Joan Weldon) come to New Mexico after identifying the print as belonging to a species of ant that had mutated to a gigantic size. They find and destroy the New Mexico nest but after two young queen ants had already escaped. One of the ants starts a nest on a military ship at sea. After the ants kill the entire crew the ship is sunk and the invading ants are killed. Another ant makes her way to the Los Angeles drainage system. As the final nest is being destroyed, FBI agent Robert Graham (James Arness of *Gunsmoke* fame) asks the older doctor:

> Robert Graham: If these monsters got started as a result of the first atomic bomb in 1945, what about all of the others that have exploded since then?
>
> Dr. Medford: Nobody knows, Robert. When man entered the atomic age he opened a door to a new world. What we will eventually find in that new world, nobody can predict.

The atomic bomb opened a Pandora's box. Nobody could explain what was in store in this new age because the bomb changed all of the rules. The result was not only confusion and uncertainty of American power but also the fear of others getting the atomic bomb and using it on domestic cities. Fiction and fact merged in the desert. Is it no wonder that so much science fiction begins in wastelands such as deserts, Antarctica, or outer space?

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe emphasized "the impossibility of society" in their project to reformulate the Gramcian concept of hegemony in the light of social fragmentation of late capitalism. America during the 1950s experienced the emergence of an increasingly heterogeneous and antagonistic social field in which the proliferation of differences threatened to lead to a general crisis of identities. Robert J. Corber follows Laclau and Mouffe in conceiving of the social as both the

infinite play of differences and the attempt to fix or halt that play in a structured network of meaning:

> Although the social is always structured around a constitutive impossibility that necessarily thwarts any attempt to suture it as a totality, all social formations develop articulatory practices, or nodal points, that partially fix the excess meaning of the social in an organized and relatively closed system. For this reason, at the same time that the individual occupies a multiplicity of contradictory subject positions s/he also feels constrained to constitute from those positions a relatively stable, or hegemonized, identity.

The instability of the individual's subjectivity, its construction across variable axis of differences, is one of the necessary conditions for the hegemonic articulation of a partially fixed identity. The 1950s' science fiction filmic discourse constituted a nodal point that partially fixed the individual's identity in a relatively coherent and unified ensemble of differences. The prevalent pattern of Hollywood films of the 1950s was the attempted resolution of these differences in support of traditional hegemony.

The assimilating pod people from outer space who invade Santa Mira in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were characterized as not only hard working and vigilant but also deceptive and conforming. The main character, Dr. Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy), tells the story of how his life took a tragic turn after returning to Santa Mira from a medical conference. His office was beseeched with patients who claimed their family members were not who they appeared to be, almost as if they had been replaced by other people. He consulted with several of his colleagues who told him that these types of reports had been coming in all week, and they had concluded it must be some type of mass hysteria. When Bennell's friends show him a partly formed body they have uncovered in their home late at night, Bennell realizes that there may be some truth behind the stories. They quickly realize these bodies are the result of gigantic pea-pods strategically located all over town. The film ends with Dr. Bennell explaining to psychologists why he was trying to stop cars on the highways by yelling, "Listen to me! There isn't a human being left in Santa Mira. Look, you fools, you're in danger. Can't you see? They're after you. They're after all of us: our wives, our children, everyone. They're here already. You're next! You're next! You're next!"

In describing the meaning of the *Body Snatchers,* Thompson writes, "This film can be seen as a paranoid 1950s warning against those Damn Commies or, conversely, as a metaphor for the tyranny of McCarthyism or the totalitarian system of your choice)." However, Kevin McCarthy, who starred in the film, claimed that neither he nor the original Collier's Magazine serial writer Jack Finney, whose story the film was based, ever had McCarthyism or communist infiltration in mind:

> I thought that, gee this is about people who work on Madison Avenue. They have no hearts at all. These advertising people just turn out material and sell things and do it unemotionally…. I never had any idea that it had any political significance. That came afterwards. People began to find it politically suitable.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers emerges as more than just a work of science fiction, or a warning against communism, but a dramatization of such nonfiction works as William Whyte's *Organizational Man,* C. Mills' *White Collar* and David Riesman's

The Lonely Crowd. The aliens play the role of Riesman's "outer-directed" personalities who are motivated by desire to assimilate with each other rather than conform to traditionally established behavior. The disturbing aspect of the film was not that everyone was required to conform, but those who were formally in charge, the white patriarchy, also had to change.

The 1950s' science fiction served the same role as George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* performed in the preceding decade. Firstly, the novel and the films identified that there was both and Enemy (with a capital "E") and a conspiracy. Secondly, they identify the enemy as a sociocultural outsider—yet someone who might also appear to be "normal." Finally, they set the stakes as high as could be psychologically calculated: the total destruction of all life on earth. Further examination of the 1950s science fiction allows for several other atomodoxies to emerge. American scientific or sexual transgressions produced unbridled procreation that threatened the social, be it capitalism, private enterprise, of life itself. The monsters threaten the postwar depiction of humanity. Kaltenborn's Frankenstein was not the bomb dropped on Japan, but the bombs others created to balance out America's atomic power. This situation forced a confrontation with America's own shadow, a doppelganger that emerged from the dark. Failure to take seriously the charges of a domestic subversion/invasion would lead to the loss of life and the American nuclear juggernaut. Essentially, once the Frankenstein monster was created, a bazooka was still needed to kill it. All spaceships, giant ants, and pod people had to be destroyed. Only total commitment, not just containment, could save us.

While America owned some of the responsibility, its military prowess and ingenuity could prevail as long as everyone worked together in unison. This may be the most dangerous atomodoxy of them all. The prevailing assumption appeared to be that the Enemy was a hostile and duplicitous enemy devoid of emotions and individualism that carries out orders emanating from the hive (or Moscow). Indeed, the danger is in the balance of conforming versus the removal of liberty and freedom for the sake of security. The streets of Los Angeles had to be deserted to protect the populace from the invasion of giant ants. Evacuation in the modern world requires miles of cars in single file rows on the highways. In order to be protected from the monsters, citizens must act like the ants themselves, without emotion or individual empowerment. Security becomes the perfect alibi for undemocratic responses.

The hero is the one who witnessed the destructive forces and stood firm against the monster, but still worked within the system of the white Protestant patriarchy. This is the reason why the HUAC and Joe McCarthy *needed* insider witnesses. "Victory will be assured once Communists are identified and exposed," J. Edgar Hoover claimed to the HUAC, "because the public will take the first step of quarantining them so they can do no harm." In effect, Americans needed to know whom among them were to be destroyed. The quintessential hero is the sympathetic witness, innocent, truthful, and untainted by any political affiliation. Americans fooled themselves by thinking that they should be afraid of the communists. The communists did not create the ants in the desert any more than they grew the Santa Mira pods. Americans did that to themselves. If Kevin McCarthy is to be believed,

capitalism gone awry forces Americans to be conformists. A nonemotional Wall Street entices consumers to feed from a single source. When a squished grasshopper is not available, then Americans feed off of themselves by searching for phantom conspirators and saboteurs. The world was changing rapidly and American needed untainted hero witnesses who could save them. Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.

10.4 Conclusion

Artifacts from a given time can often be unpacked to reveal aspects of society that may be hidden to traditional historical methods. Understanding a time period requires knowledge of the ideologies grafted to these artifacts. An atomodoxy is a Cold War myth, theme, or metaphors that resulted from the opinions of experts and often-imagined conspiratorial fears of the populace that began shortly after the creation of the atomic bomb and never truly faded. They simultaneously circulated in the narratives of popular culture, specifically science fiction, where narratives create and sustain particular constellations of nuclear knowledge.

The atomodoxies revealed in this chapter are instantly recognizable to anyone with knowledge of either the 1950s or the science fiction produced in Hollywood during this time. These narratives serve as a didactic function by instructing the Polis on how to respond to an atomic void. These can be unpacked to reveal important moral lessons such as what is required to create a particular citizen who is willing to identify the threat and protect the homeland. Atomodoxies help us to analyze texts such as films and novels created during this time period, but they are not limited to organized fictional works. Fiction is never created in a vacuum but is the result of the context in which it emerged. Themes, myths, and metaphors can emerge to create an understanding of a suddenly chaotic world. They were not necessarily based on facts but on ideas that propelled public sentiment that may have been invisible as they paralleled history. They work like a companion to historical facts that can later be deciphered and argued.

Atomodoxy is a reimagining of the narrative analysis of history. As Fisher suggests, we believe certain things because they make sense to us through fidelity and coherence. We then share these narratives with others to create shared fantasies. The movie audience as well as policy makers must struggle over heroes and villains for this is how a society creates shared fantasies and visions that give structure to life. Hunter S. Thompson wrote, "Myths and legends die hard in America. We love them for the extra dimension they provide. Weird heroes and mound-breaking champions exist as living proof to those who need it that the tyranny of the rat race is not yet final." The strength and longevity of the Cold War atomodoxies die hard as well for the same reasons for they are the building stones of the myths and legends of the last half of the twentieth century. It is difficult to progress when the atomodoxies are so resilient to change.

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