5-13-2016

# Apocalypse & Affect: Political Passivity in Film and Television Representations of Nuclear Holocaust

W W. Rooks

# Apocalypse & Affect:

## Political Passivity in Film and Television Representations of Nuclear Holocaust

**By**

**W. W. Rooks**

**Capstone Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies**

**Cultural Studies Program**

**School of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

**Columbia College Chicago**

**May 13, 2016**

Abstract

Within the expanding canon of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic film and television, this project studies the subgenre that makes use of nuclear holocaust as a narrative device or setting in order to understand how, rather than engaging audiences with the dire off-screen politics that inform such films, it imposes a sense of political passivity on its characters. Similarly imparted is an assumption of that same sense for the audience. In this way, the framing of modern apocalyptic narratives meet an "affective limitation," which is a concept steeped in the examination of media as a potential tool to motivate political action (Massumi 232-233). Since the United States' implementation of the atomic bomb as a weapon of war, nuclear holocaust has provided creative writers and filmmakers with an important new thematic landscape in which to explore the human condition. This project highlights a correlation between three distinct increases in nuclear-themed apocalyptic cultural productions relative to historical instances of geopolitical tensions among nuclear-armed nations. The expansion of the genre and the transition to post-apocalypse decontextualizes those tensions through increasingly unlikely scenarios. However, there is a disturbing imbalance between the growth in demand for the apocalyptic genre and audiences' relative lack of political engagement. This imbalance is perpetuated, in part, by media productions' tendency to be ahistorical, depoliticized, and affectively passive.

Key Words: Media & Film Studies, Apocalyptic Literature, Foreign Policy, War History, Atomic Weapons, Nuclear Holocaust, Post-Apocalyptic Literature, Affect

Introduction

The Doomsday Clock reads three minutes to midnight. Humankind's fragile perception of time is broken. Dozens of hydrogen bombs have airburst over populated cities including: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Denver, Atlanta, Seattle, Kansas City, and on. In a blinding flash, each of America's capitals, historical sites, economic centers, and cultural hubs are reduced to cinders, rubble, or little more than clouds of radioactive dust. Without them, the United States of America is no more, and, as it follows, the world, too, is no more. Or: Humankind has narrowly deflected a fatal blow, and civilization must be rebuilt. For better or worse, society can now be redefined in a ways that eschew certain, shall we say, limitations.

Either way, these events have not actually occurred at least not at the time of this writing. At present, New York City buzzes and Wall Street gambles. Warming winds snake through the streets of Chicago. Members of Congress delay, make deals, and delay. The rich get richer. The middle-class evaporates. The poor get poorer. For now, the event of global nuclear annihilation exists solely in the social imagination, and, during key historical intervals, this unique social fear transitions to media productions. For now, the world's nuclear arsenals remain unspent, and everything is fine.

The maintenance of this status quo takes place inside the complex workings of American culture. The history of the United States' industrialization, particularly as it relates to the development of weapons of war, is integral to the growing dominance of a militarist and imperialist mindset. These ideologies are then reflected and reinforced textually: first, in instances of future-war fiction, and, now, as an ever-growing genre of apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian film and television. On two fronts, hegemonic ideologies (i.e.

imperialism, militarism, capitalism) and the affective framing of film and television, which tend to reinforce said ideologies, shape American culture.

This essay argues that a relatively small and select group of professionals defines the strategy and positioning of both fronts, which forms the status quo. To illustrate this political stasis, I will perform case studies on key nuclear-themed films at three moments in U.S. history. Films like *On the Beach*, *Panic in Year Zero!*, and *Dr. Strangelove* tend to reveal how a general sense, a fear, of nuclear annihilation translates to the screen after the weapons were initially used in 1945 and leading up to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. A similar fear is imprinted on film and television during the reheating of the Cold War throughout the 1980s. In this instance, the ABC production of *The Day After*, the ABC News panel discussion that followed, as well as Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* serve as the primary objects of study. Lastly, the 2006-2008 CBS series *Jericho* is the post-9/11 object; one that is overshadowed by expansiveness of the genre's growth as well as the events of 9/11 and the wars that followed, which, in a way, further distort the atom bomb's significance in the social imagination. In other words, fear is now wholesale, and there are innumerable ways to imagine apocalypses. Yet, only some of those imaginings relate to the way in which apocalypse can be realized through humankind's perfectly capable means. Each instance evidences a growing imbalance between the market demand for apocalyptic media and the relative lack of political engagement one might expect given nuclear weapons' potential for real-world devastation.

## Theoretical Frameworks

Antonio Gramsci's writings, as they relate to Intellectual and the State, provide an understanding of the levers that manipulate hegemony. The former is defined by Gramsci as the process by which "[every] social group… creates together with itself, organically, one or more

strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (Gramsci in Storey 77). In the world of film and television, the intellectuals consist of any professionals (e.g. company presidents, writers, technicians, assistants, etc.) involved in media production, which is then instilled with and inseparable from their own ideologies, albeit to varying degrees. Regarding the latter, the "State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci in Storey 80).

In other words, Gramsci's State consists of the institutions and institutional practices that foster the production of apocalyptic films, and, when referenced, this essay adopts Gramsci's broader definition of the State. That is to say, the State is not exclusive to local, state, and federal governments, but necessarily expanded into the non-governmental workings of the nation's culture. With this understanding, the only way for any media production to be framed is through the ideological encoding of the intellectuals who promote or, at least, do not hinder the creation of new media. Once produced, the messages represented tend to reconfirm the ideologies of the intellectuals who are perceived to have authority by the audience.

As a function of this process, representations of nuclear holocausts tend to do two things: confirm the military might of those with nuclear arsenals (namely the U.S.), and coerce allied classes (i.e. the working class, intellectuals across economic sectors) into tacitly accepting the social, political, and economic status quo (Gramsci in Storey 75). In their own way, each film referenced in this essay meet these qualifications, and, with few exceptions, the larger apocalyptic genre tends to make messages about past and present geopolitical tensions less clear.

Gramsci applies military science to political science in order to distinguish the degrees of political struggle within a society. In the chapter “The Art and Science of Politics,” a collection of Gramsci’s writings draw links “between the concepts of war of manoeuvre and war of position in military science and the corresponding concepts in political science” (Gramsci in Forgacs 227). The former represents “the trenches” militarily, or, politically, the direct confrontations between dominant and subordinate classes, which often result in significant political upheavals such as the French or Russian Revolution (Gramsci in Forgacs 225-228). The latter “is not, in reality, constituted by the actual trenches, but by the whole organizational and industrial system” (Gramsci in Forgacs 226-229). Gramsci continues, “The war of position demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people. So an unprecedented concentration of hegemony is necessary, and hence a more 'interventionist' government, which will take the offensive more openly against the oppositionists and organize permanently the 'impossibility' of internal disintegration with controls of every kind, political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic 'positions' of the dominant group, etc.” (Gramsci in Forgacs 230). Comparatively, the war of manoeuvre is paradoxically avoided through film and television representations of nuclear holocaust, and the subgenre reinforces the hegemonic strategy in the war of position.

In the context of this essay, the war of position takes place through the political messages encoded in the nuclear holocaust subgenre within the larger apocalyptic genre. At times, the subgenre produces films and television that are oppositional to the continued maintenance of nuclear arsenals, and, at others, there are those that confirm the status quo. However, the overall apocalyptic genre tends to conceal or decontextualize the politics of humankind’s ability to realize an actual apocalyptic event.

Each aspect of Gramsci's hegemony, the State, Intellectual, and War of Position and Manoeuvre, are instrumental in shaping ideologies relating to Western dominance, and, through Western media, these ideologies thrive in perpetuity. In his essay "Popular Culture and the 'turn to Gramsci'," Tony Bennett reaffirms the inherent politics of culture productions. The use of Gramscian theory in this context highlights the "political emphasis within the study of popular culture," and makes it "possible to [analyze] popular culture without adopting a position that is either opposed to it or uncritically for it" (Bennett in Storey 85). In other words, the relative quality of the cultural object in question is not necessarily the issue. However, the politics of their production and consumption as well as the political messages within them play a more important role in understanding how this particular political struggle (i.e. nonproliferation, reduction to zero) takes place.

Another primary focus of this project examines how the threat of nuclear attack is generally perceived over time, and how fluctuations of social somatic experience are negotiated through media. Whatever they might be, our individual feelings towards cultural objects and practices help shape their meaning in a larger social context. In the chapter titled "Structure of Feeling" in *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams challenges the notion that culture be solely determined by the social, political, and economic structures of its relative time. Instead, he suggests that there is a "structure of feeling" present in "literature, art, science, and philosophy" (R. Williams in Harding 35). Indeed, film and television in the subgenre in question are created as literature and art, informed by science and philosophy, and, ultimately, influenced by a history of geopolitical conflicts. Raymond Williams goes on to describe this concept as being "as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity" (R. Williams in Harding 36). While traditionally regarded as fleeting, the dominant

iteration of emotions plays an important role in the shaping of culture for individuals, and, on grander scale, a shared feeling can motivate changes in the social structures of society or encourage their stasis. Williams' writing regards affective responses as an essential part of the cultural and meaning-making processes. With that understanding, culture comes to include affect, and, in turn, affect becomes unavoidably linked to politics. In this way, each of our partly deliberate, partly constructed feelings have a politics.

Again, Williams' structure is hardly as fixed as the word implies. He reflects on the way in which this "structure of feeling" forms through intergenerational patterns, which are categorized into three parts: within the lived experience of those in a historical era, in "the recorded culture" of that era, and through "the culture of the selective tradition" (R. Williams in Harding 37). The latter refers to the ways in which the cultural preferences of one generation frame those of the next.

In *The Country and the City*, Williams thoroughly explores the physically and culturally changing landscape of Great Britain over several generations. In the chapter titled "A Problem of Perspective," he likens his observations to riding an escalator that was set in motion beginning in the late 1700s, and, at a quickening pace, it has continued through the 19th Century as England industrialized and expanded its empire (*The Country and the City* 9-10). He writes, "It is clear, of course, as this journey in time is taken, that something more than ordinary arithmetic and something more, evidently, than ordinary history, is in question (*The Country and the City* 10). In other words, Williams finds that it is not enough to simply count the years and transcribe events as they happen, but to carefully scrutinize how his own "structure of feeling" and other ways of being influence culture. As a temporal analysis, this project studies how the nuclear holocaust subgenre spans each of Williams' cultural epochs. Raymond Williams' escalator

metaphor emphasizes a general momentum towards social and technological progress, yet the practical reality of and relative ambivalence towards nuclear holocaust, at any scale, calls into question such progress.

A Brief History of Industrialized Warfare & Selecting for an Apex Weapon

Witnessing an atomic blast is as frightening as it is awe-inspiring. However, the instantaneity of its spectacle conceals the complexity of its history. This section explores the invention of the atomic bomb as one of the industrial era; a remarkable period of history wherein humans moved from horseback to flying A-bomb wielding B-29 Superfortresses.

It is one invention, the atom bomb, that transitions humanity into an entirely new epoch of history and culture. Carl Sagan, a distinguished cosmologist and an outspoken critic of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, once wrote that, "if you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe" (Sagan 218). In a similar sense, the evolving sociopolitical contexts that piece together such an invention as the nuclear bomb best frame its cultural significance. With this understanding, this section broaches a discussion that links industrialization with the construction of an apex weapon by a military industry that selects for increasing devastation. Equally important, the past use and perpetual coercion of nuclear weapons stocks can be challenged as a disastrously flawed, yet effective, component of imperialism. In a remarkably brief period of human history, the span from industrialized warfare's emergence to a nuclear apex takes place roughly over the last century and a half. Accordingly, there are crucial moments and movements in Western history and tradition that lay the geopolitical and technological foundations for a world that would later become atomic. By reading history in this manner, the mythic imagery of the bomb is pierced. Its iconic mushroom

cloud is pulled from the social imagination, and, once again, it is concretized into the sum of its parts.

Historically, it is clear that the Old World and the New have shared a great deal. At times, this movement of people and ideas has resulted in degrees of social progress, but it has also sundered and destroyed Native America, enslaved generations of Africans, and often exploited newly arrived immigrants. No less true in the Americas is the fact that "[technology], in the form of weapons and transport, provides the direct means by which certain peoples have expanded their realms and conquered other peoples" (Diamond 231). Going forward, who, exactly, benefits from said expansion and who suffers because of it are important questions to consider.

In the New World, European colonizers technological advantages and continuous inventiveness made their movement unstoppable, and, in a way, brought about the continents' first realized apocalypse in the form of Native genocide. In part, the domination of North and South America took place on the literal backs of horses. Author Jared Diamond highlights their effectiveness in the chapter titled "Collision at Cajamarca": "The shock of a horse's charge, its maneuverability, the speed of attack that it permitted, and the raised and protected fighting platform that it provided left foot soldiers nearly helpless in the open" (Diamond 74). In no small way, European animal husbandry and a foreign beast of burden played a significant role in the initial colonization of the Americas.

However, as industrialization took hold a horse's utility was challenged repeatedly. In Europe, the "[vast] networks of shining rails, running along embankments, across bridges and viaducts, through cuttings, through tunnels up to ten miles long, across mountain passes as high as the Alpine peaks, the railways collectively constituted the most massive effort of public building as yet undertaken by man" (*The Age of Empire* 27). Railroads made few geographical

barriers unconquerable, and accelerated the movement of goods, people, and, during conflicts, troops and artillery. In the U.S., railroads played an important role in mobilizing both the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War, and, during Reconstruction, this infrastructure both physically and metaphorically helped reunify an otherwise divided nation. Of course, these are simply two of many ways in which the West has shaped itself and the world.

Parallel to these technological advancements, weapons undergo a coevolution. Jared Diamond writes that, as Europe industrialized, some "[contemporary] European rulers… despised guns and tried to restrict their availability," but this initial hesitation "never got far… where any country that temporarily swore off firearms would be promptly overrun by gun-toting neighboring countries" (Diamond 247). This domination by force was also the case in the Americas, although it was never a question of eschewing gun use, but, rather, one of a weapon's effectiveness. From muskets to repeating rifles and pistols to fully automatic machine guns, the desire for more capable killing tools is clear in these well-known technological transitions. To this day, the same transition can be seen in every other military technology. Since the American Revolution and throughout the United States' history of warfare, its expansion has been stoked in increasingly advanced small arms fire, and its Empire forged in the exponentially devastating impact of artillery and explosives.

As it relates to the nuclear holocaust subgenre, industrial progress in the United States culminates in The Manhattan Project, where hundreds of thousands of people were mobilized to invent one thing: the atomic bomb. Not only was the Manhattan Project an unprecedented technical achievement, but it also set new precedents in terms of governmental budgeting and secrecy. Regarding the figures, the Manhattan Project's success, after three years, came "at a cost of $2 billion" or "over $20 billion today" (Diamond 232). While much of his writing intends to

challenge the notion that “inventions supposedly arise when a society has an unfulfilled need,” Jared Diamond considers the Manhattan Project an exception to the rule due to the perception of an arms race between the U.S. and Nazi Germany (Diamond 232). Although the project was certainly not fated, the United States of America was in the unique position of having, all at once, the budget, the industrial infrastructure, workforce, a more or less agreeable government, and the assistance of foreign scientists, which, ultimately, resulted in the project’s success. With this understanding, the lines between serendipity and intention are clear.

From the top-down, Western militarism and imperialism, parallel to other aspects that tend to define the Western world (e.g. liberalism, capitalism, neoliberalism, etc.), have expanded at a feverish pace since the Industrial Revolution; most notably, the United States of America has emerged as the global hegemon. In *The Sorrows of Empire* chapter titled “Imperialisms, Old and New,” Chalmers Johnson distinguishes militarism from the military, saying it is “the phenomenon by which a nation’s armed services come to put their institutional preservation ahead of achieving national security or even a commitment to the integrity of the government structure of which they are a part” (Johnson 24). Johnson writes, “Imperialism is hard to define but easily recognized.” Yet, imperial ideology is perpetuated by those who “hold military and civilian posts in the imperial power, trade with the dominated peoples on structurally favorable terms, manufacture weapons and munitions for wars and police actions, and provide and manage capital for investment in the colonies, semicolonies, and satellites that imperialism creates” (Johnson 28). In other words, the hegemonic militarist and imperialist ideologies within the United States have propelled themselves into the larger world, and the ever-coercive, ever-forceful nuclear arsenal reinforces the Empire.

What this history reveals is an entire moving and living world enshrouded by the atomic bomb's blast, so much so that, in an instant, an entirely new epoch was cleaved into human history. It is clear that many historical external pressures and influences spurred the United States in a very specific direction, but it is perhaps less clear that the internal pressures of entire nation, knowingly or not, facilitated in the bomb's construction and developed a culture that preserves it. Furthermore, it prompts the question: If we are capable of innovating such a destructive device, are we equally incapable of dismantling it?

## Future-War as Practice, Fiction, and Genre

Each culture tends to develop their own stories of genesis and apocalypse, and, as a result, apocalyptic narratives have never been far from the social imagination. For over 2000 years, there are those who believe that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse will break the first four of seven seals, which will initiate the apocalyptic prophecies foretold in the final chapter of *The Bible*, "Revelation." More recently, the whole of humankind is four years past due for the much anticipated and poorly understood Mayan calendar foretelling of the world's end. However, it is worth mentioning that this project will not address the content of religious texts directly. This is not to deny their influence on this genre or on culture in general, but, rather, it is an attempt to temper the perception that religious texts, namely Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are, somehow, the origins of apocalyptic storytelling. Instead, this project analyzes the blending of future-war and apocalyptic film and television emerging from a Western post-industrial to postmodern perspective.

Early work in the future war genre was strongly influenced by imperialist and colonialist notions of race. Fueled by growing xenophobia in the West as well as the pseudo-scientific

concept of social Darwinism, a number of authors in the late 1800s and early 1900s highlighted the fears of an eroding genetic purity among Anglo-Saxons. Author Paul Williams in *Race, Ethnicity, and Nuclear War* details this trend in his examination of writings such as Max Nordau's 1892 *Degeneration*, Arnold White's 1901 *Efficiency and Empire*, the British government's 1905 pamphlet titled "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire," and Madison Grant's 1916 "The Passing of the Great Race" (P. Williams 26). Each lament certain social and political changes of the industrial era such as rapid urbanization, the racial tensions of Reconstruction, and the perception of emerging threats from non-Anglo nations, particularly China and Japan. Such writings, some overtly promoted by the State, reveal how racial, ethnic, and nationalistic tensions are perpetuated in textual forms.

Of course, the page rarely delimits the influence the ideas written on them. One particularly relevant military strategy were those of "future-war stories," which evolved in the duress of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 (P. Williams 29). As the convergence of different styles, future-war works are typically ideologically driven narratives that are part historical and part fictional. This practice is a manner of narrativizing one's existing military intelligence in order to determine resource requirements or potential casualties, among other things. Simply put, it is strategizing through fiction writing. The impetus of future-war as a military strategy plays an important role in shaping the content of fictional writings.

Some authors of the industrializing Western world found new creative space in writing future-war narratives as they began to imagine real nations or populations as fictional enemies. A few relics of this sort show that challenging humanity's existence in print fiction serves as a compelling way to confront other issues plaguing society, some of which the authors themselves were oblivious. In the early 1880s, author Samuel Rockwell Reed imagined a reignited conflict

between the United States and Great Britain. Author Pierton W. Dooner's *Last Days of the Republic* revolved around the "Yellow Peril" or, in other words, a fear of Chinese immigration as a preliminary tactic to overwhelm the United States (P. Williams 30-31). William Delisle Hay's 1881 story *Three Hundred Years Hence* tells of the "Xanthochroi" (i.e. Germans, Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, Finns, Slavs, and "Light Celts") who perpetrate what amounts to genocide using "the Chicago Bullet," which was described as an airdropped superweapon (P. Williams 31). This particular example adds rather frightening complexity to the paradox of whether life imitates art or vice versa, and there are aspects within these works of fiction that entertain certain ideas that would later come to fit all-too-well with actual world events. Not all future-war narratives were rooted in racism, however: H.G. Wells' 1914 *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind* frames the source of our ultimate destruction as a collective inability to match our technological advances, particularly weaponized radioactive elements, with socially just ones (P. Williams 36).

It is in John Ulrich Giesy's 1915 book, *All for His Country*, where race, military history, and future-war fiction intersect in a rather shocking way. Giesy's writing tells the tale of America's humiliating defeat in a war with Japan, and, as a term of surrender, all Japanese-Americans were to be granted citizenship as well as property and marriage rights (P. Williams 35). If it is not clear, these terms were a negative consequence from the author's perspective. Once as a way of formulating military strategy, future-war stories evolved as form of social commentary and creative practice, which have a rather fascinating and frightening history of transitioning between the realms of fiction and nonfiction. Clearly, future-war fiction escalated from conventional war, to genocidal, and, at its apex, apocalyptic.

The term apocalypse and its accompanying synonyms (e.g. annihilation, cataclysm, holocaust, Armageddon) speak to us of an existential end, and, yet, the source of such an end

remains contested or entirely ambiguous. In *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, David Robson analyzes the "apocalyptic poles" within a Derridean framework (Robson 75). He writes that "the negative pole is associated with the 'literal' fact of wartime devastation," and, though he concedes no "unequivocally positive" pole, apocalyptic texts persist in what Derrida refers to as a "fabulously textual" state (Robson 75). In other words, the referent event within this genre of film is necessarily and paradoxically absent. No text that references apocalypse, whether it is *The Bible* or *Quran, On the Beach* or *Jericho*, signifies the actual end of humankind, but merely one concept, one hypothesis of an end.

The apocalyptic genre is always framed in a setting of global destruction, and it introduces a narrative where the characters' struggle to survive moves the film or series along. Within this genre, the strain of nuclear holocaust films emerge, which make use of human technology and sociopolitical intention to inform their storylines, as nuclear bombs are targeted at populated cities or military and economic sites. It is at this locus where the textual and practical strategies that define our ability to enact nuclear annihilation become blurred within the realm of fiction.

There is an important difference in the way political agency and passivity are constructed between apocalyptic films like *Night of the Living Dead* or *Armageddon*, which focus on alien actions as threat, and, nuclear holocaust narratives like *The Day After* or *The Sacrifice*, which focus on human actions as threat. In each film, an apocalyptic event actively affects the characters; the entire genre is predicated on such events happening to an entire populace even if only a select group are represented on-screen. However, the zombie apocalypse or alien invasion films often forego questions of motive, where nuclear holocaust apocalypse stories depend on intentional action, unintentional action, or neglectful inaction. In other words, either we act on

others, or others act on us. Even in fiction, the events in the latter examples are contained within the non-fictional realm of human technological ability, social interactions, and geopolitical tensions. There is a reasonable assumption that nuclear holocaust can take place on screen as much as it can occur between the ten nations that now have arsenals of nuclear weapons.

Apocalyptic films can be traced back to the early 20th Century, and this particular subgenre, the nuclear holocaust film, can be traced back to a few low-budget films of the early 1950s. In *Nuclear Movies*, Mick Broderick provides a comprehensive guide to the genre, and he notes that, after the bombs were dropped, "a few films did manage to make some fort of reference to the new bombs and the shroud of secrecy surrounding their development," although "the press and radio were better suited to address the spontaneous public reaction" (Broderick 4). Since its emergence, the apocalyptic genre's overall growth is observable, and nuclear holocaust is presented as merely one of many potential ways in which the human race experiences its doom. The end of the world is as open-ended as the human imagination, and, as a genre, it has expanded to include asteroids, zombies, viruses, and so forth. Each of these apocalypses are either equally capable of arresting all of human life or being thwarted by humankind's resilience and ingenuity, as the case may be.

Primarily, what the evolution of this genre reveals is a social fear in transition from personal prejudices or neuroses into a textual form. The earliest examples, for all their insistence on racially determined conflicts, conceal the much more influential role of a militarist and imperialist mindset in the West. Chalmers Johnson, in the chapter titled "The Roots of American Militarism," points out that the United States' "brutal colonization of the Filipinos … had a powerful impact on the Japanese," which led to their own attempts "to lead an anti-Western Asian renaissance" as well as imperialist intentions of "exploiting the weaker nations of East

Asia" (Johnson 43). He continues stating, "Their emulation of other 'advanced' nations in taking the imperialist route would lead ultimately to war with the United States" (Johnson 43). Ironically, this subgenre has everything to do with the results of that war without ever addressing them directly. There is an unavoidable intersection with history and the burgeoning future-war genre because one is the part that moves the other, one cog adjacent to the next.

The Atomic Era in Action: Deciding, Bombing, Reporting, Enduring

Still, the fog of war looms over history, and two facts are undeniable: we built the bomb, and we used the bomb. This section seeks to unpack aspects of the atomic bombs' use as a physical instrument of military force, as a coercive dialectical instrument, and each of their influence over individuals. Indeed, only two populated cities in the world have experienced the horror of atomic warfare, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and only the United States of America has smashed atoms in order to inflict intentional harm on others. Yet, the discourse surrounding the United States' decision to use the Bomb has been traditionally justified along strategic and, even, moral lines. Author Eric Hobsbawm writes, "The dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was not justified as indispensable for victory, which was by then absolutely certain, but as a means of saving American soldiers' lives" (*The Age of Extremes* 27).

The United States' victory in Japan was inevitable, however the methods by which victory was achieved was in question. The Truman White House issued a press release shortly after the bombs had been dropped on August 6, 1945. The text reveals that there was a lost opportunity to "spare the Japanese people from utter destruction" when the Japanese declined the terms of surrender at the 1945 Berlin Potsdam Conference, and the destruction of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki served as a second, more aggressive, round of "negotiations" ("Truman Library" 3). The decision was made, and, ultimately, the blame fell upon the Japanese.

The notion that the bomb's use was inevitable was quickly disseminated through the United States' media outlets. In other words, the status of the atomic bomb quickly became a dialectical instrument of the press. The following is a particularly revealing excerpt from the August 6, 1945 issue of the *New York Times* article "New Age Ushered" by Sidney Shalett:

> Not the slightest spirit of braggadocio is discernible either in the wording of the official announcements or in the mien of the officials who gave out the news. There was an element of elation in the realization that we had perfected this devastating weapon for employment against an enemy who started the war and has told us she would rather be destroyed than surrender, but it was grim elation. There was sobering awareness of the tremendous responsibility involved.
>
> Secretary Stimson said that this new weapon "should prove a tremendous aid in the shortening of the war against Japan," and there were other responsible officials who privately thought that this was an extreme understatement, and that Japan might find herself unable to stay in the war under the coming rain of atom bombs.

President Truman's decision could have only been enacted through the network of U.S. military and the incontestable ethos of soldierly duty. In an article about the passing of Brigadier General Paul Tibbets, Jr., pilot of the atomic-bomb-wielding *Enola Gay*, journalist Mike Harden reflects on Tibbets' life, actions, and their consequences. In the article "Pilot didn't regret A-bomb," Tibbetts states:

> We didn't have a choice, but that gets lost when people today look back on the bomb from the vantage point of the 21st century. It's easy to look at that old

> picture of a mushroom cloud in a history book and say, 'My God, how could we have done that to those people?' But, some of the people saying that today wouldn't be here if their grandfathers or great-grandfathers had been part of an offensive on Japan designed along the lines of the D-Day landing at Normandy.

However, this is little consolation to the generations lost in atomic fire, and this argument does not accurately address the shift in dialogue that would occur had a land invasion of Japan taken place. In whichever form the justification is made, the devastation wrought by Fat Man and Little Boy created a new branch of warfare designated as atomic or nuclear. Yet, the arguments that have developed after the fact fall flat when one considers that, historically, the United States is not at all averse to engaging in conventional warfare.

Conspicuously absent is the voice of both nations' greater citizenry. In his 2015 article titled "70 Years After Hiroshima, Opinions Have Shifted On Atomic Bomb Use," author Bruce Stokes of the Pew Research Center compiles the public opinion polling data on whether "the use of atomic bombs on Japanese cities in 1945 was justified" (Stokes). The former is U.S.-based, and the latter includes opinion polling from both the U.S. and Japan. The data shows that, between 1945 and 2005, those in the U.S. who "approve" of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fell from 85% to 57% (Stokes). While that is a considerable decrease, an overwhelming majority still approve, which is a testament to the justifications rendered early on. Although a multitude of factors might have influenced this shift, perhaps the harsh binary of approval or disapproval is not easily indexed to the dissemination of an instant death by fire or not-so-instant death by radiation poisoning. In the second data set including respondents from both the U.S. and Japan, those in the United States who viewed the bombings as "justified" fell from 63% to 56% between 1991 and 2015, while the number dropped from 29% to 14% in Japan

(Stokes). Although opinions have shifted as the author suggests, there is still a vast majority of approving responses in the U.S., which is juxtaposed by a significant decrease within Japan itself.

While the discussion of strategy was intentionally limited to the highest echelons of government, the public has little else to cling to except their friends, families, and a fear that each of them might not be there in the coming days or weeks. The nonprofit Nuclear Threat Initiative is an organization that, in their own words, exists to "address the growing risk of catastrophic attacks with weapons of mass destruction and disruption - nuclear, biological, radiological, chemical and cyber" (NTI "About"). The NTI has collected, analyzed, and published personal experiences during the Cuban missile crisis. The first account comes from former Senator Sam Nunn and present NTI co-chairman who, prior to his involvement in government and NTI, was "stunned" by the "tension [and] possibility of a nuclear conflict," which he considered a "formative experience" as a young adult. Senator Nunn's experience during the Cuban missile crisis that spurred his intention to become involved in the U.S. government, and, later, the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Mark York recounts his experience: "As a then 8 year old I remember Mom stocking up on can goods and water. She also bought a cow bell. She would stand on our back porch and ring it like crazy. Then all of us kids playing in the neighborhood would run home wondering if Nikita [Khrushchev] was dropping a nuclear bomb on us, right then. For a small child it was a very scary time." ("The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: What's Your Story?"). Recalling Raymond Williams' structure of feeling, these personal accounts of dread is directly related to the threat of nuclear annihilation, and, at a grander scale, this fear pervades populations and culture. The perception of the multigenerational fear of nuclear annihilation may have led to decreasing

numbers of the atomic bomb's approval, but the dominant, yet dangerous, ideologies within the most capable nuclear-armed nation persist despite such changes.

Case Studies

The following case studies correlate with three historical instances where threats of nuclear annihilation reverberate through the social strata, from the State to individual experience to representations in popular culture. As previously discussed, the use of atomic weapons had a profound effect on the world, regardless of one's relative status within it. The following case studies represent examples of the nuclear holocaust subgenre, and, in each, both the complications and the paradoxes of nuclear weapons are displayed. In *Nuclear Movies*, Mick Broderick points out that "the complex film industry apparatus which gatekeeps, bankrolls, produces, distributes, advertises, and exhibits their commodities is chiefly fostering such attitudes," where the lines that demarcate "mere entertainment," "fiction," and vicariously experiencing nuclear holocaust are blurred (Broderick). However, if any degree of critical dialogue is initiated by this genre, it is then overwhelmed among increasingly unlikely tales of the apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian genres.

As the data suggests, the booms of the nuclear subgenre tend to be centered on the ascension of perceived nuclear threats into the social imagination. The busts tend to take place during periods of prolonged Western foreign intervention in the form of conventional warfare, whether it is the Vietnam War through the mid-1970s, the Gulf War in the early 1990s, the Iraq War from 2003-2011, the United States' ongoing military presence in Afghanistan, or the current tensions within and around Syria. Periods of peace are more difficult to parse. However, the

genre as a whole, meaning all apocalyptic-themed media productions, has experienced immense growth over since its emergence.

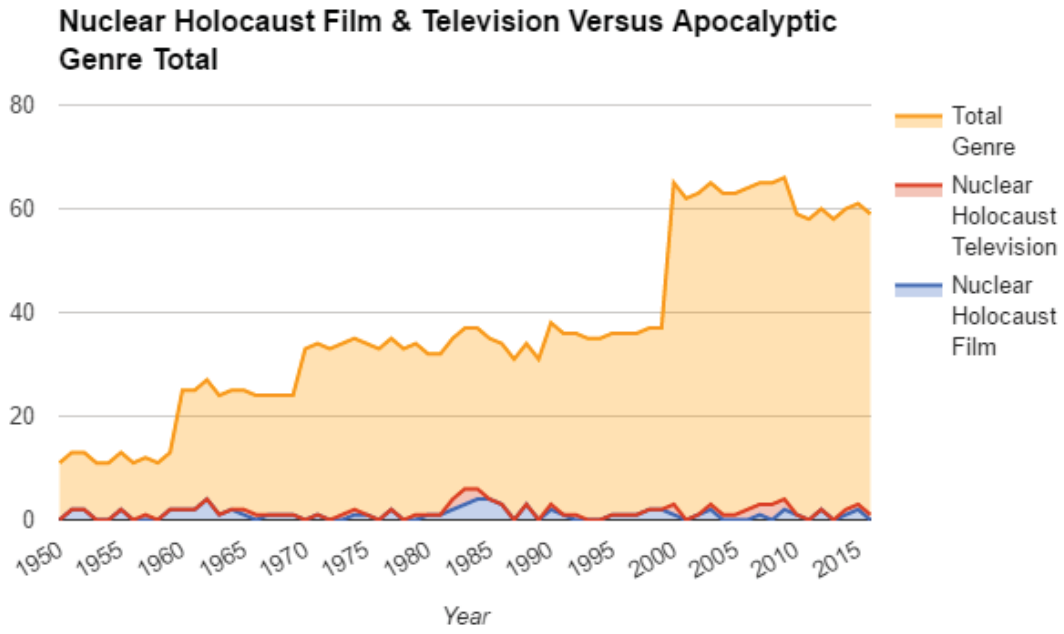



**Figure 1.** *The above graph reveals the significant growth of the apocalyptic genre as a whole since its emergence in Western media. Prior to 1950, four apocalyptic films were produced worldwide: The End of the World (1916), End of the World (1931), Deluge (1933), and Things to Come (1936). Since, the genre's growth has experienced a steady series of booms, but the most noticeable growth occurs from the year 2000 to present day.* (Figure composed by author).

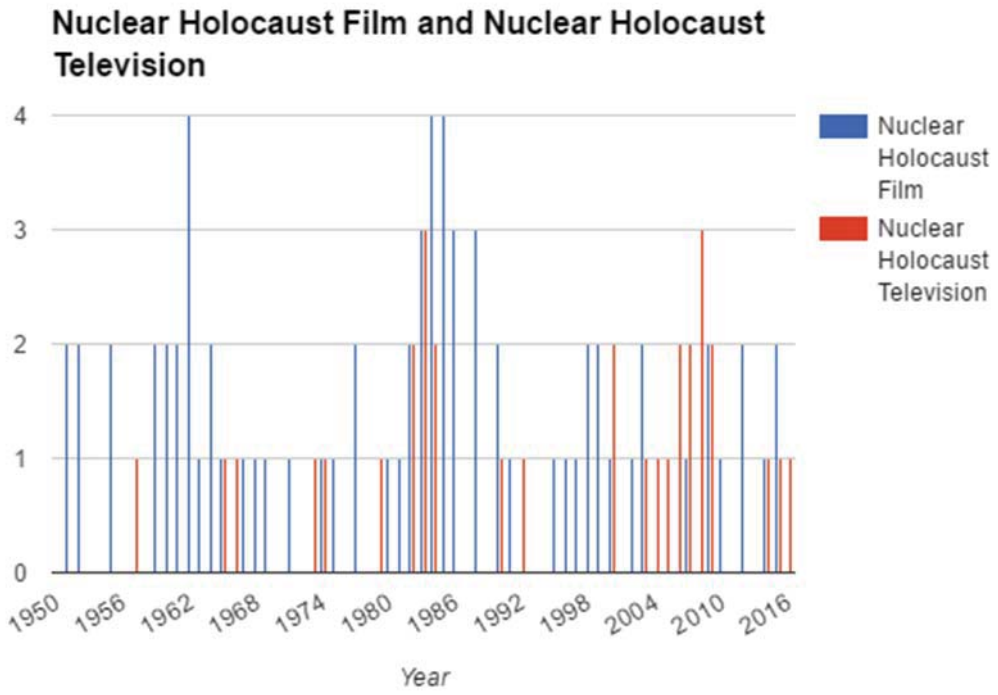



**Figure 2.** *This graph shows the annual number of nuclear holocaust-themed productions in film and television as a subset of the total genre. The blue line represents film productions, and the red line represents television programs. There are distinct increases in production over the course of crucial historical events in U.S. history. 1) From 1959 to the mid-1960s, there is a noticeable increase in film production. During this period, the U.S.S.R launched the satellite Sputnik I in 1959, and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis took place. 2) Over the course of the early-1980s, there is an observable increase in production during another instance Cold War brinksmanship enflamed by the increasing bellicosity of President Reagan (e.g. "Evil Empire") as well as newly funneled money towards the military industrial complex. 3) Post-9/11, both the collapse of the World Trade Centers and the perceived threat of Iraqi WMDs became significant in the social imagination.* (Figure composed by author).

Centered on this first spike in production is one of the most decade-defining geopolitical events: the Cuban missile crisis. In a particularly blistering period of the Cold War, the titan forces of the United States and U.S.S.R. faced off. Hobsbawm in *The Age of Extremes* cites the Soviet scholar Fedor Burlatsky to suggest the crisis began when "Soviet leader N.S. Khrushchev decided to place Soviet missiles in Cuba to offset the American missiles already in place across the Soviet border in Turkey (*The Age of Extremes* 230). Hobsbawm describes the event as "an entirely unnecessary exercise [that]… almost plunged the world into an unnecessary war for a few days," and one that came "at the cost of racking the nerves of generations" (*The Age of Extremes* 230). Much of this had to do with the constriction of information at the upper governmental levels. Diamond writes in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* that "[even] in democracies today, crucial knowledge is available to only a few individuals, who control the flow of information to the rest of the government and consequently control decisions" (Diamond 267-268).

Now, the accumulation of information at the top tiers of a society and government is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but, in the United States, there is a common assumption of at least a degree of government transparency. Unfortunately, this assumption has tended to be idealistic rather than a realistic assessment of how the State works. Diamond notes, "information and discussions that determined whether nuclear war would engulf half a billion people were initially confined by President Kennedy to a ten-member executive committee of the National Security Council that he himself appointed; then he limited final decisions to a four-member group consisting of himself and three of his cabinet ministers" (Diamond 268). This retention of information combined with the proliferation of social fear reveals important contradictions as it relates to the subgenre in question. How can so few hold the positions that make a life or death

decision for so many, perhaps the entire human race? Conversely, how can the mass consumption of apocalyptic media appear to affect so few?

Each case study represents different iterations of essentially the same issue: nuclear holocaust. However, the political messages encoded in them vary in terms their literary genre, method of delivery, effectiveness, and intention. In no particular order, the following films illustrate the span of the genre's characteristics. Kubrick's 1963 *Dr. Strangelove* uses dark comedy and satire to skewer nuclear weapons' use as deterrence and the central component of mutually assured destruction policy. In 1962, *Panic in Year Zero!* debuted as a nuclear holocaust survival drama where the Baldwin family perseveres through a nuclear attack by holding true to their American values. The 1959 film *On the Beach*, ABC's 1983 *The Day After*, and Tarkovsky's 1986 *The Sacrifice* are melodramatic pictures who underscore the personal implications of a massive tragedy. From 2006-2008 on the CBS television network, *Jericho* serially introduced elements of action, suspense, and conspiracy to sudden nuclear strikes. In some cases, they depict the definitive end of humankind, and, in others, rebuilding a post-war civilization drives the narrative. In each, a disconnect between the characters and the political realm exists, and the events related to the nuclear attack is mediated through radio or television. If there is another link to reality other than the presence nuclear arsenals, it is this notion of a general political disconnect.

Stanley Kramer's 1959 *On the Beach* is arguably the first big budget, big-name nuclear holocaust film to emerge from the world of cinema. The film features such prominent actors of the time as Gregory Peck, Anthony Perkins, Ava Gardner, and Fred Astaire, and, with an estimated budget of $2.9 million, *On the Beach* has grossed $11 million as well as $5.5 million in rentals ("On the Beach"). This degree of investment reflects that of other big-budget films in

this era. In 1960, Fred Knudtson and Ernest Gold were nominated for Academy Awards for Best Film Editing and Best Music Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture, respectively ("On the Beach"). Clearly, those involved at each level of the production of this film took great care in not only navigating the sobering content, but also creating a profitable and prestigious cultural product.

*On the Beach* follows several characters as they come to terms with the final days of humankind, and the film is set in the last remaining speck of civilization: Australia. The film opens declaring that "the atomic war is over," and, despite there being "no life reported elsewhere," a traditional white nuclear family appears on-screen in a conspicuous lack of distress (*On the Beach*). Common in many of these films are scenes of pre-apocalypse or post-apocalypse that provides a glimpse into what an ideal, pre-war life might look like. City life is bustling as people try to maintain some degree of consistency. Peppered throughout the film are scenes of people conspicuously exercising in futility whether it is a servant straightening a perpetually lopsided painting, a desperate search for one last love, or engaging in what amounts to be a reckless death race. Moira Davidson (Ava Gardner), a woman seeking someone to share her last moments with, looks to rekindle a relationship with an emotionally defeated Dr. Julian Osborne to which he responds, "With so little time left, my sense of value has changed." Osborne's rejection of Moira takes place shortly after newly widowered Commander Dwight Lionel Towers, played by Gregory Peck, also turns her down. During this exchange, Osborne was intently working on fixing up the vehicle that he would later race, and, ultimately, use to commit suicide. Similarly, scenes of characters flirting with death, preceding its inevitable sweep over Australia, are exceptionally stirring. Lt. Holmes and his wife have several difficult discussions that, in a way, reflect some of the classic stages of grief, including denial, anger,

bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In the end, they come to understand that suicide is a more preferable end compared to slowly succumbing to radiation poisoning. Much of the film balances the characters' preoccupations with maintaining a normal life with one that has been forever changed by the impending cloud of radiation. An important notion within these scenes is the juxtaposition between the haste in which nuclear holocaust takes place and the lingering pace of the radiation. In other words, the immediacy through which the decision to launch followed by the war itself stands in stark contrast to their long-lasting effects.

During one scene approximately halfway through the film, a number of characters, including Julian Osborne, speculate about the world's circumstance from the safe, yet isolated, setting of a submarine. One after the other, the thoughts and concerns of the crew become known as they state, "somebody ought to write a history of the war," "I want to know who started it," and "I wish someone had stopped it." This exemplifies a consequential dialogue on the use of nuclear weapons that has the potential to be internalized by the audience. It is in this same scene that the character Julian Osborne asks a most important question: "Who would have ever believed that human beings would be stupid enough to blow themselves off the face of the Earth?" Lieutenant Peter Holmes responds, "I don't believe it even now." Osborne continues by pointing out, "The trouble with you is you want a simple answer, and there isn't any."

After a brief moment of reflection, he continues by saying, "The war started when people accepted the idiotic principle that peace could be maintained by arranging to defend themselves with weapons they couldn't possibly use without committing suicide. Everyone had atomic bombs and counter-bombs and counter-counter-bombs. The devices outgrew us; we couldn't control them." In this scene, Fred Astaire's portrayal of his character Julian Osborne reads as if he is trying, yet failing, to rationalize himself out of an inescapable nightmare. Ebbing away

from his digression, he answers the initial question regarding how the war had started, which he ultimately attributes to an over-anxious "poor bloke" who misread a radar screen as an attack. The crew sits in silence, perhaps realizing that any one of them or someone like them might have been that "poor bloke." Human error of the highest fault likely put the world to rest under a blanket of radiation.

The messages conveyed towards the end of *On the Beach* read as a warning to the audience. People by the dozens gather around a dispensary under a banner that reads, "THERE IS STILL TIME… BROTHER." Dispensed are the much sought after suicide pills. As the irradiated clouds creep towards Australia, Julian Osborne parks his beloved vehicle in a sealed barn, puts it in neutral, and steps on the gas, flooding the area with the much more preferable carbon monoxide. Lieutenant Peter Holmes and Mary Holmes ultimately choose to take the pills for themselves and their infant, and they each fall asleep peacefully. It follows that similar instances of suicide are taking place all over the continent. Perhaps, by committing suicide, these characters have exercised a final politically agentive act. In other words, they, rather than the State, took their lives. The film closes on desolately empty streets, and on the same dispensary seen early except that it is conspicuously empty. Still, the final scene is of the banner reading, "THERE IS STILL TIME… BROTHER." Off-screen, it is a warning yet to be heeded.


Between the 1959 debut of *On the Beach* and the next case study, the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War escalated. In 1959, the Soviet's Sputnik I became the first manmade satellite. The U.S.S.R. mission's success demonstrated their ability to compete and succeed in the space race, and their delivery methods (i.e. rockets) could reach new heights. Four years later, the tensions between the United States and the U.S.S.R. further intensified, when the Soviets Union attempted to relocate nuclear missiles to Cuba.

Ray Millard's 1962 *Panic in Year Zero!* emerges from the shadow cast by the Cuban missile crisis. American International Pictures and Santa Clara Productions produced this instance of imagined nuclear holocaust with an estimated budget of $225,000, but information on its financial success or failure is not readily available ("Panic in Year Zero!"). Considering its temporal proximity to the Cuban missile crisis, it would not be a wild supposition that people simply were not interested in revisiting the palpable terror of near-annihilation, even on-screen. The film's likely rejection is supported by the fact that *Panic in Year Zero!* was re-released a few

years later under the new title *End of the World* ("Panic in Year Zero!"). Additionally, the film industry was especially adept at quickly and cheaply producing films and getting them into circulation. In this case, *Panic in Year Zero!* portrays the Baldwin family's story of survival after Los Angeles is suddenly attacked.

*Panic in Year Zero!* is unique in its recoiling from the critical dialogue begun by *On the Beach* and, later, continued by *Dr. Strangelove*. Throughout the narrative, even though civilization is fundamentally in turmoil, dominant aspects of American culture are perpetuated, and the State is ultimately preserved. Common tropes like rugged individualism in the male lead, and the cowed and, at times, hysterical mother and daughter characters are particularly unmistakable. Paradoxically, each trope is somehow immune to large-scale nuclear devastation. Similar to a deer caught in headlights, *Panic in Year Zero!* reveals a specific kind of response to the kind of fear induced by nuclear holocaust: standing still, becoming entrenched in dominant culture.

The film begins innocently enough with the four members of the Baldwin family preparing their recreational vehicle for a vacation, however, shortly after their departure, an impossibly bright flash of light winks at their backs. Los Angeles lie under a towering mushroom cloud. The first contemplations of the main characters as well as the world at large are revealed. Standing witness to the utter destruction of one the United States' major metropolises, the daughter, Karen (Mary Mitchel), can barely form a complete thought when she states, "I thought when it happened we'd all be…" (*Panic in Year Zero!)*. Even in its brevity and intentional display of naivety, this instance begs the audience to consider the presumptions about apocalyptic circumstances. Down the road, the unmoved father Harry Baldwin (director Ray Millard), speaks to a motorist who happened to be closer to the strike. In an attempt to gauge the

destruction, Harry Baldwin asks, “How bad was it?” In response, the motorist states that he “heard L.A. being torn apart and watched it being tossed into the air.” It is in these first instances where characters reflect, however briefly, on the world-changing event that had just occurred, and it is the only time that any substantive critical dialogue takes place. In another scene, a radio broadcast announces an “unofficial” message about a nuclear attack. These brief scenes encode a noticeable lack of contemplation regarding the implications of a nuclear strike, and the radio, unscathed, continues to be the arbiter of the State. In other words, it is not enough for the Baldwin family to have witnessed the mushroom cloud itself. The State, through the radio, still deems an observable nuclear attack as official or unofficial.

Throughout the rest of the film, the aforementioned dominant aspects of American culture are reinforced and, subsequently, perpetuated in relation to the degree of social breakdown following the attack on Los Angeles. The first sign of such breakdown can be observed in the increasingly reckless driving of motorists “flowing out of L.A. like lava out of a volcano” leading to what Harry Baldwin describes as “a second Exodus.” Bringing their own escape to a halt, the family must stop for fuel, and their first experience of post-bomb violence takes place. In this scene, a desperate motorist slugs an unawares gas station attendant over a four-dollar bill, and, acknowledging the severity of the situation, Harry Baldwin responds to his wife’s criticism of his lack of courage by stating, “My mother didn’t raise me to be a hero - not for four bucks.” At this point, not only has the population begun to resort to thieving and assault, but it has also recoiled in its ability to defend or stand up to such violence. (Never mind the fact that this was likely the case prior to a hydrogen bomb hitting L.A.).

In response to all of this, Ann Baldwin, the mother (Jean Hagen), reveals that she does not require further coaxing into being frightened, neither by Mr. Baldwin’s behavioral

justifications nor by the increasing instances of savagery in their world. In response to her revelations, Harry Baldwin states, “That’s a safe way to be.” Harry Baldwin’s continuous reaction and reciprocal savagery to what he perceives and defines as a threat directs much of the remaining narrative. These threats include an oblivious store clerk, who is promptly taken advantage of by the Baldwins. Knowing that currency has lost all value, they leave with $190.03 worth of supplies, and, in return, Harry offers his “free” advice that the storeowner hide what remains of his inventory. Another threat is the ceaseless flow of traffic, which is met with a literal wall of fire after Harry and son pour gasoline across a highway. Most important, three antagonistic young men have several run-ins with the Baldwin family.

Through his confrontation and defeat of such threats, Harry Baldwin is able to lead his family to the safety of a cave. In this new setting, Mr. Baldwin and his family stop to reflect on their fortunate escape and relative safety in the moment. Preceded by a proper Christian prayer, Harry Baldwin gives a short speech to his family: “Now, the unknown has always been man’s greatest demoralizer. Maybe we can cope with this by maintaining our sense of values; by carrying out our daily routine the same as we always have. Rick and myself, for instance, will shave every day. Although in his case, maybe every other day. These concessions with civilization are important. They’re our links with reality, and because of them we might be less afraid.” In contrast to the sobering monologue given by Fred Astaire’s in *On the Beach*, Harry Baldwin reaffirms an adherence to the pre-war status quo, and further assesses that the preservation of civilization can only occur by continuing their familiar practices.

The primary antagonists in the film, aside from the perpetrators of the bombing of L.A. of course, are a group of three young men who are intent on taking advantage of anyone who happens to cross their path. These characters reiterate a common aspect of boy culture from a

post-nuclear holocaust setting. In “Boy Culture,” E. Anthony Rotundo describes how white, middle-class American boyhood developed, and how, in adolescence, young boys attempt to reverse “men’s and boy’s roles, giving younger males the power to disrupt the lives of older males and forcing the elders to do their boyish bidding” (Rotundo 350). The clear difference is that these boys are able to eschew mere pranks, and impose their own will in much more violent ways. Where boys might have once dared to go steady with Harry Baldwin’s daughter, they can now attempt to assault her in the absence of the father’s authority and state-enforced rule of law. Where they might have stolen something as a ruse, theft became the means of survival and dominance. Now, there is no argument that, within the narrative, Harry Baldwin and his family are thwarting a small band of thieving and murderous young men. However, what is reified here, ultimately, is a particular brand of masculinity separated from the follies and wiles of adolescence or young adulthood. In other words, Harry’s is a brand that knows best. Ultimately, the film deflects the audience’s anger towards a younger generation of survivors rather than the perpetrators of the war itself.

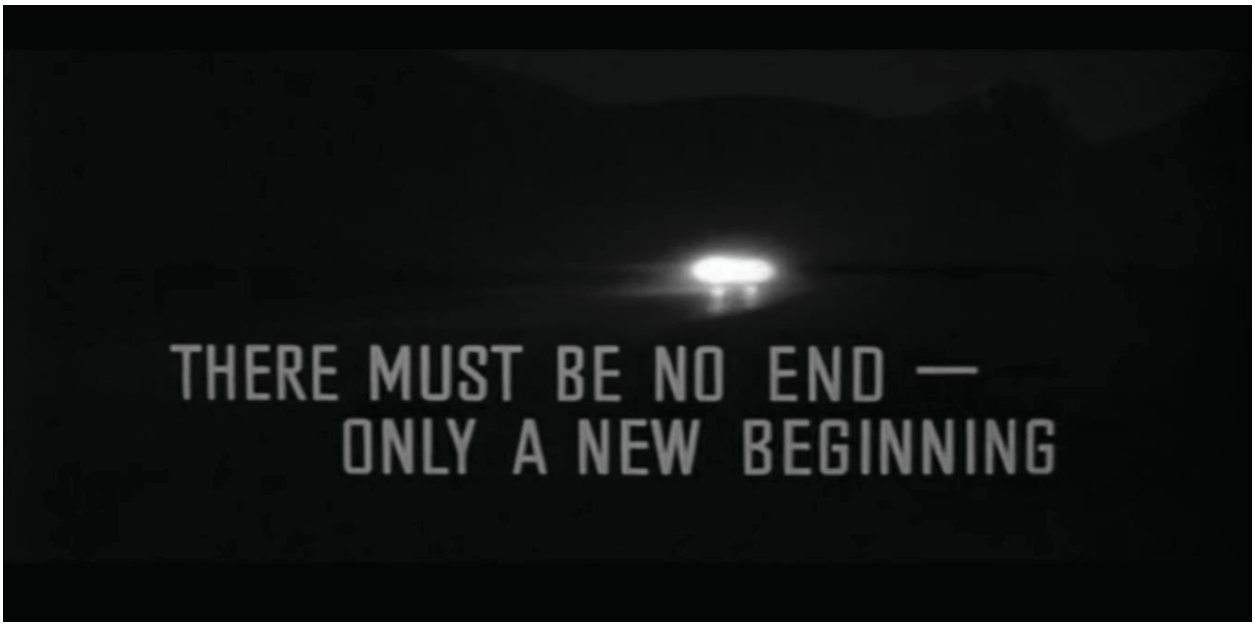
Still, the immediate threats on the ground are mere feints to a deadly strike that has already landed. Even if Harry Baldwin is a strong leader who is simply looking out for his family, Los Angeles and other metropolises have been “torn apart.” Even if his rugged individuality led his family to the safety of a cave and, eventually, back to the open arms of the State, so many lives (and ways of life) were, paradoxically, carefully and carelessly “tossed into the air.” All of the characteristics intended to be admirable about Harry Baldwin made him no less the passive victim to large-scale state violence in the form of nuclear holocaust, and, of course, this passivity certainly extends through the film’s representation of a social hierarchy. What appears as dominant is not a dominance at all in the broader scheme of the film.

As *Panic in Year Zero!* continues, the ongoing conflict between the Baldwin family and the band of bachelors reaches its apex. After discovering a slain couple that had sought refuge in their abandoned camper, the Baldwin men determine that they must bring justice to those responsible (i.e. the antagonists). Shortly after, they storm the nearby cabin that the young men have occupied, killing two and rescuing a young woman held captive. As the Baldwin family and their new surrogate recover, the remaining bachelor discovers the bullet-ridden bodies of his cohorts. Seeking his own revenge, the last antagonist corners the Baldwin son along with the rescued girl, and, after a physical struggle, the antagonist lay dead and Rick wounded.

In order to save Rick, it is decided that the family must leave the safety of the cave to seek medical assistance. After chancing across a physician, the doctor points them in the direction of an intact area of civilization in a town called Wheaton, and he suggests that they "stay on the back roads, and "keep your gun handy... [because our] country is still full of thieving, murdering patriots." Although the Baldwins heed his advice, another vehicle in transit to Wheaton forcibly brings them to a halt. However, after a brief moment of suspense and a few warning shots, the Baldwins discover that they have found their way back to the arms of the State. The presumed assailants turn out to be legitimate U.S. soldiers. After permitting their passage, one remarks, "That's five more," and the other says, "Yep, five good ones." Despite Harry's brutality, deception, and his involvement in multiple murders, he immediately and unquestioningly becomes legitimized as "good." Harry's actions and insistence on adhering to their pre-war routines resound in the minds of the audience, and the political implications of the film promote maintaining, as much as one can in a crisis, the status quo.

This notion is made exceptionally clear in the closing scene. Although the concluding message of *Panic in Year Zero!* is imparted in a similar way, it contrasts with the ending of *On*

*the Beach*. The final message displays text that reads, “THERE MUST BE NO END – ONLY A NEW BEGINNING.” Recalling the cautionary text of *On the Beach*, this message implies that time is not necessarily a factor in cases of a nuclear attack, and that careful consideration of nuclear threats can be disregarded. Ultimately, the State cannot end. It can only begin anew.




In response to Enlightenment philosopher Hegel’s notion “that all great historic facts and personages recur twice,” Karl Marx writes, “He forgot to add: ‘Once as tragedy, and again as farce’” (Marx 12). The same can be said for the early instances of this subgenre. Five years after *On the Beach* and two years after *Panic in Year Zero*, Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* debuted, and, since, the film has become one of the more genre-defining examples of nuclear apocalypse films. Much of its success is precisely due to its satirical nature. In *Reelpolitick II*, Beverly Merrill Kelley writes, “Kubrick was taking a big chance by attempting satire… [but] the Motion Picture Academy and the usual film industry suspects showered *Dr. Strangelove* in prestigious honors. Hollywood wasn’t

surprised. When ticket buyers plunked down $5million to see the picture, they were impressed. But nobody was interested in a dark and chilling suspense story like *The Manchurian Candidate* at a time when the economy was in overdrive, the middle class was getting fat, and the future looked rosy" (Kelley 287). As farce, nuclear holocaust became a huge success, and Kubrick's interpretation has had a lasting impact on popular culture. In fact, the film's influence was so great that "when President-elect Reagan toured the White House in 1980, he was sorely disappointed to discover that the War Room from *Dr. Strangelove* was nowhere to be seen" (Kelley 283). Clearly, films within this subgenre can have a lasting impact on its audience, but the degree to which it influences policy is questionable.

Referring back to the graphs, the 1970s proved to be a bust in the nuclear holocaust subgenre. Only five films that use nuclear war in as prominent aspects to their narratives were produced: *Glen and Randa* (1971), *Zardoz* (1974), *A Boy and His Dog* (1975), *Damnation Alley* (1977), and *Wizards (1977).* Also important is an increasing vagueness in the referencing of nuclear weapons' use. In some instances, it is explicitly stated or shown (e.g. *Glen and Randa, A Boy and His Dog*), and, in others, it is loosely implied (e.g. *Zardoz*, *Wizards*). Regarding production, it is difficult to speculate why writers, audiences, and film production companies determined this decade to be unfit for further additions to this fictional canon. However, examining certain shifts in the sociopolitical landscape gives some insight.

Following the Cuban missile crisis and throughout the remainder of the 1960s, both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. cooled off in terms of rattling their irradiated sabers. Instead, there is a turn back to conventional and proxy warfare within foreign nations. In *The Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm recounts this period as one that "saw some significant steps to control and limit nuclear arms: test-ban treaties, attempts to stop nuclear proliferation (accepted by those who

already had nuclear weapons or never expected to have them, but not by those building their own nuclear arsenals like China, France and Israel), a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) between, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., [and] even some agreements about each side's Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABMs)" (*The Age of Extremes* 243). Of course, this respite from the incessant drums of war was very brief as the United States ramped up its involvement in Vietnam. Hobsbawm goes on to examine "two inter-related [sic] developments [that] now seemed to shift the balance of the superpowers" (*The Age of Extremes* 244). The first development concerns the "defeat and destabilisation [sic] in the U.S.A., as that country launched itself into [the Vietnam War]," which "demoralized and divided the nation, amid televised scenes of riots and anti-war demonstrations; destroyed an American president; led to universally predicted defeat and retreat after ten years (1965-75); [and] the isolation of the U.S.A." (*The Age of Extremes* 244). With so much political upheaval at home and the undertow of conventional war abroad, it is no wonder that more immediate existential threats surged to the forefront of the social imagination.

However, in the 1980s, a second bout of nuclear tension takes place during the latter part of Cold War, which correlates with another boom in the subgenre's production. Such tensions coincide with the "the policy of Ronald Reagan… [which] can be understood only as an attempt to wipe out the stain of felt humiliation by demonstrating the unchallengeable supremacy and invulnerability of the U.S.A., if need be by gestures of military power against sitting targets" (e.g. developing or Third World nations), or the "crusade against the 'Evil Empire' to which… President Reagan's government devoted its energies" (*The Age of Extremes* 248). At the same time, films like *First Blood* (1982), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), and *Rambo III* (1988) as well as *Rocky III* (1982), *Rocky IV* (1985), and *The Terminator* (1984) reflect an attempt, however overexerted, to reclaim a lost sense of masculinity and a bruised national ego through

textual means. However, some films attempt to reinvigorate a critical dialogue of nuclear weapons' use despite the flood of rhetoric regarding American exceptionalism both on and off screen.

As the graph revealed, many more films in the apocalyptic genre and nuclear holocaust subgenre were produced at this time, but there is one in particular that is worth highlighting: the 1983 ABC production of *The Day After*. Written by Edward Hume and Directed by Nicholas Meyer, this made-for-television film featured actors like Jason Robards, JoBeth Williams, and Steve Guttenberg. *The Day After* portrays the increasingly contentious political and military conflicts between NATO and the Soviet Union, which, ultimately, results in the sudden conclusion to mutually assured destruction policy. The film is set in different locations across Kansas, and the story follows several survivors' journey through the ensuing chaos.

*The Day After* opens with command and control officers being briefed, and the introduction continues with a montage over rural America, schoolchildren, hardworking Americans on farms and factories, baseball diamonds, football fields, cityscapes, monuments, parks, lakes, and recreational centers (*The Day After*). Nearly every wholesome aspect of the U.S.A. is on display. Announced to no one in particular, the radio reports news of a Soviet military buildup in response to Warsaw Pact training exercises, and, in the background, information about this development are worked into the film. *The Day After* settles into its locations within Kansas.

Understandably, the characters are making plans, whether it is moving to Boston to attend school, planning a wedding or fishing trip, or simply working. The young engaged couple softly discuss sex under the audible umbrella of baseball game being watched by the young woman's father. People go about their business just as they had in the days, months, and years

before. Elsewhere, the radio announces that an "emergency security council meeting between [the] US and Russia" is taking place, and, after the negotiations fail, the border between East and West Germany are closed. The situation continues to escalate, where every movement and countermovement is regarded as an act of war. NORAD sets alert to DEFCON 2. Airman Billy McCoy (William Allen Young) stationed at a nearby missile silo discusses the sudden disruption of him and his girlfriend's plans, and, with a quick embrace, the conversation turns to their fear of the tense situation in Europe. Between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., blame trades hands, followed by threats, and then casualties. Moscow is evacuated, and the Soviet Union invades Western Germany. Within moments, a series of events have sealed humankind's fate to nuclear holocaust.

The dissonance between the life of U.S. citizens and the political and military maneuverings of the U.S. government is clear. American life is clearly at the forefront of this picture, and many of the characters carefully consider the implications of the geopolitical events taking place. Others ignore them. However, the political decisions that frame and enact nuclear holocaust continue in the background unabated. In other words, the political realm and the realm of lived American life continue parallel to one another, and, up to the point of nuclear attack, the realms are clearly distinct from each other.

The two halves are suddenly made whole when three nukes airburst over advancing Russian troops, and U.S. bombers and ICBMs hastily fly away from Kansas. As it follows, a similar departure is taking place from the airfields and silos in the Soviet Union. According to Joe Huxley (John Lithgow), the world ends approximately thirty minutes after launch. No one is free from the grip of utter chaos and fear, and the screen is flooded with futile attempts to seek shelter. The film briefly transitions to a relatively quiet panorama of a city, presumably Kansas City, and, then, it happens. One after the other, the audience experiences the bomb from its own

perspective: as a blinding flash, an irradiated burst, an all-consuming and unprejudiced wave of fire. The lives of countless people are reduced to skeletal imprints on the screen. Mutually assured destruction has run its terrible course.

Throughout the rest of *The Day After*, the characters are left to pick up the pieces of a broken world, while radiation breaks down the tissues in each of their bodies. Steven Klein (Steve Guttenberg) ventures out into an irradiated world in order to seek help for the Hendry family (Clayton Day, Antonie Becker, et al.) who provided him shelter prior to the attack. Billy McCoy, whose plans and girlfriend were forever lost in the bomb's blast, joins a huddled mass of now-homeless refugees. Even the rule of law and justice are shattered as rumors spread of firing squads quelling rampant looting, rape, and murder. Dr. Russell Oakes (Jason Robards) cobbles together a makeshift trauma center that becomes increasingly prone to acts of desperation and violence. Allison Ransom (Amy Madigan) has a sobering discussion with Dr. Oakes about her unborn child and the drastically different quality of its post-apocalyptic life. She delivers a despairing monologue:

> "Hope for what? What do you think is going to happen out there? You think we're going to sweep up the dead and fill in a couple of holes and build some supermarkets? You think all those people left alive out there are going to say, 'Oh, I'm sorry. It wasn't my fault. Let's kiss and make up?' We knew the score. We knew all about bombs, we knew all about fallout. We knew this could happen for forty years. But nobody was interested."

As is the case with so many other aspects of pre-war life, hope has clearly faded, and, throughout the remainder of the film, it never returns. All of this is despite of radio messages proclaiming

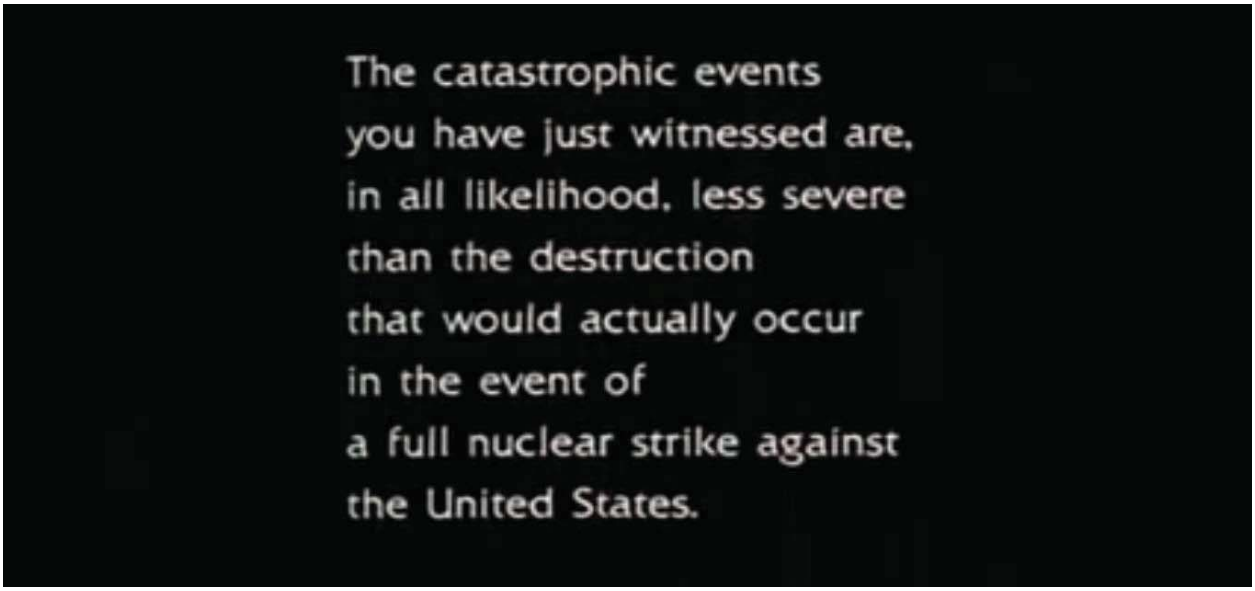
"equal devastation to Russia," that "America has survived," and that nothing can defeat the principles of liberty. Each message does little to comfort the listeners.

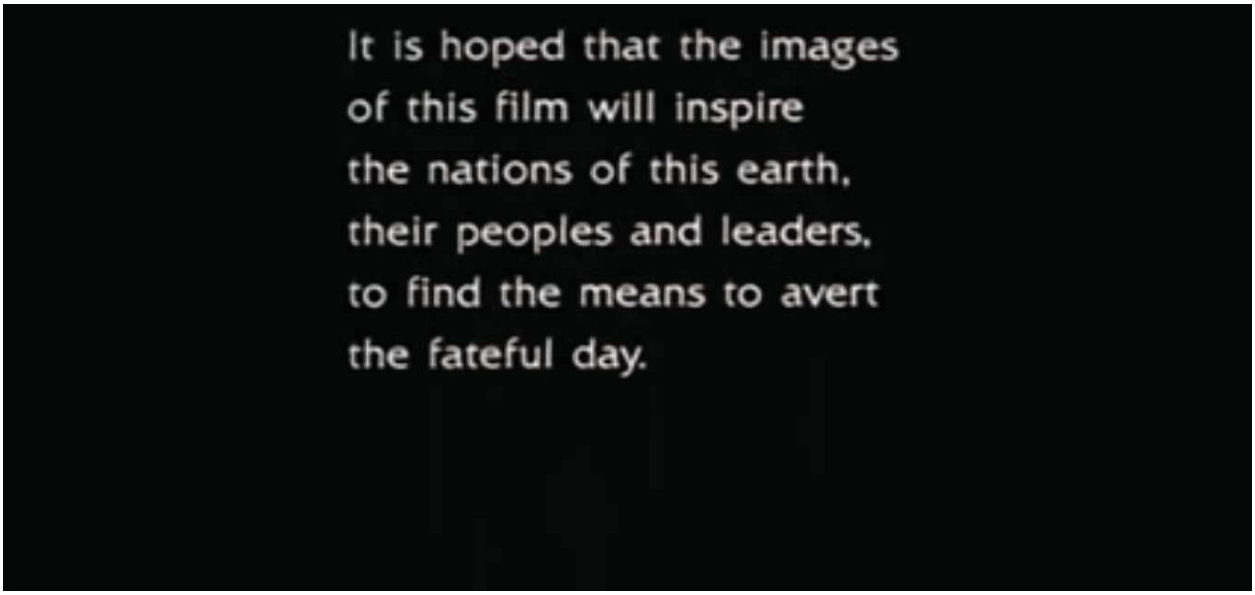
Klein, McCoy, and Dr. Oakes become increasingly ravaged by radiation. Their appearance becomes gaunt, their skin sloughs, hair falls out in clumps, and mental faculties deteriorate. It is Dr. Oakes journey to find his home and, likely, final resting place that evokes the most despair. Unable to assist the masses of sick persons, he ventures from the hospital into a chaotic and irradiated world. He loses consciousness at one point, witnesses a violent death by firing squad, and, in a state near dementia, reaches his home to find it inhabited by refugees. Oakes screams at them to leave this once-significant place. In response, a refugee offers him food. Dr. Oakes is both utterly defeated by the status of his former home and deeply moved by this nameless man's gesture. Each are understandably overwhelmed, and both Oakes and the man embrace each other and weep as the camera pulls away to reveal miles of desolation.

*The Day After* also concludes with epigraphical text:

> The catastrophic events you have just witnessed are, in all likelihood, less severe than the destruction that would actually occur in the event of a full nuclear strike against the United States.
>
> It is hoped that the images of this film will inspire the nations of this earth, their peoples and leaders, to find the means to avert the fateful day.

Unlike the conflicting messages between *On the Beach* and *Panic in Year Zero!*, *The Day After* is clear in its final message. Heeded or not, the call to action is explicitly stated in the end. Among so much on and off-screen rhetoric about American exceptionalism, this case study inserts a thought-provoking and emotional critical dialogue on the possibility of nuclear holocaust.




In addition to its content, what made *The Day After* unique was the hour and a half long discussion following the film on ABC News special edition of *Viewpoint* hosted by Ted Koppel. He prefaces the program by stating, “There is some good news. If you can, take a look outside the window,” and posing the Charles Dickens-esque question: “Is this a vision of the future as it will be, or as it may be? Is there still time?” This familiar question is an echo of the one posed by

*On the Beach*. The discussion panel includes Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, philosopher, theologian, and author Elie Wiesel, William F. Buckley, Jr. of the *National Review*, astronomer and author Carl Sagan, Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, and Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Eliciting Gramsci's War of Manoeuvre, this discussion among a variety of representative intellectuals reveals, however briefly, the way the war is fought. After the introductions, the program segues to a brief interview with the then-present Secretary of Defense George Shultz who is posed the same Dickens-esque question to which he answers: "Neither. That is not the future at all. The film is a vivid and dramatic portrayal of the fact that nuclear war is simply not acceptable, and that fact- and the realization of it- has been the basis for the policy of the United States for decades now." Shultz concludes his answer by saying that this is "based on the idea that we do not accept nuclear war, and we've been successful in preventing it." Koppel concedes that his answer is satisfactory in the context of a journalist-Secretary of State dialogue, however he goes on to ask what his response might be if Shultz were speaking to his own son or daughter. The answer remains the same. Koppel continues the interview by reflecting on the intergenerational concern "not so much the policy, but the presence of so many nuclear weapons, so many nuclear warheads in the world."

As a follow up, Koppel asks a critically important question: "With so many of them, is it not inevitable that at some point or another they will be used, and, if not, why do we need them?" Shultz replies, "The only reason that we have nuclear weapons, as President Reagan said in Japan recently, is to see to it that they aren't used. We have to provide a balance, so that others who have nuclear weapons, particularly the Soviet Union, realize that what could happen to us could happen to them - and would happen to them." Rather unconvincingly, Secretary of State Shultz attempts to temper his justification for deterrence with the potential for policies of

reduction to reach zero nuclear weapons. If it is unclear, deterrence or, as it more affectionately referred, mutually assured destruction is the policy that attempts to keep in check foreign nations' nuclear arsenals, namely the U.S.S.R. Shultz's answers deflect both the criticisms within the film and Koppel's own away from discussing the potentially apocalyptic repercussions of the policy of deterrence. In other words, the dialectical messages in *The Day After* are immediately preempted and distorted by a voice advocating for the preservation of the political status quo.

Another touchstone filmmaker, Soviet-born Andrei Tarkovsky, debuted *The Sacrifice* in 1986. Released by the Swedish Production Institute in Stockholm and Argo in Paris, this particular film was one of two that Tarkovsky produced outside of the Soviet Union (Martin 165). There are parallels between Kubrick and Tarkovsky, which exist in their challenging bodies of work as well as their attempts to challenge a global nuclear state, albeit through drastically different methods. Where *Dr. Strangelove* was darkly comedic, Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* returns to the bleak melancholy of a world lorded over by atomic weapons. In what would turn out to be his last film before passing away, Sean Martin writes, "Tarkovsky uses the film to settle accounts with the modern world and, as such, *The Sacrifice* has the unmistakable air of being a last testament" (Martin 171).

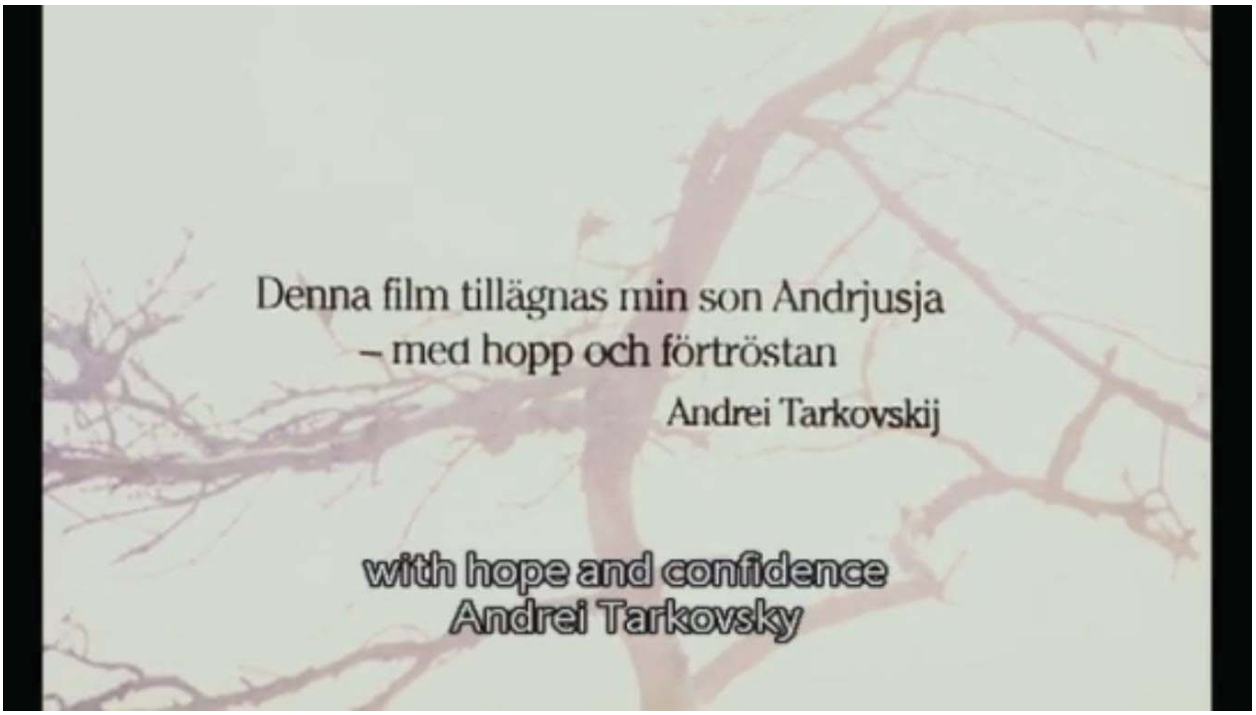
In *The Sacrifice*, several key scenes challenge the nuclear state, highlight certain paradoxes of its continuance, and focus on the inherent passivity of characters' post-event pleading. The story's main character is Alexander (Erland Josephson) who is accompanied by his wife Adelaide (Susan Fleetwood), daughter Maria (Guðrún Gísladóttir), Otto the postman (Alan Edwall), Victor the family doctor (Sven Wollter), two servants Julia and Marta (Valérie Mairesse and (Filippa Franzén), and, perhaps most importantly, his son Little Man (Tommy Kjellqvist). Little Man is a boy who is mute throughout most the film "due to an operation on his vocal

cords" (Martin 166). In terms of conveying a sense of urgency, Alexander's soliloquies appear to be speaking directly to the audience. As the Nordic winds gently sway the landscape, Alexander, sitting against a tree, laments the state of the world as "a society governed by fear and power," "a dreadful disharmony between our material and spiritual development," and that "he is fed up with talk - quoting *Hamlet*'s 'Words, words, words' - and wishes somebody would *do* something" (Martin 167).

The film periodically includes interludes of casual conversations among Alexander, his family, and guests when World War III suddenly interrupts. Similar to the other case studies, the post-war messages transmitted through television or radio are particularly revealing. While the television announces the initial event, the radio can later be heard stating, "The only dangerous enemy in our midst at the moment is panic. It is contagious, and won't allow itself to be ruled by common sense. Order and organization, and nothing else, good citizens. Only order… order… against this chaos." In an act of desperation, Alexander "goes into his study and prays that if God will restore things to how they were that morning, he will sacrifice all he hold dear, destroy his home, give up Little Man and never speak again" (Martin 168).

Despite the radio's calls for order, the characters' lives, particularly Alexander's, continue to spiral into chaos as the film transitions between scenes that at attempt to resemble pre-war normalcy, visions of post-war chaos, a hallucinatory fever dream, and a nightmarish reality. *The Sacrifice* highlights the fleeting status of sociopolitical structures thought to be immovable, which, in crisis, are entirely subject to the sway hedonistic tendencies. From this nightmarish reality, Alexander awakens to find that God had held up his end of bargain, and, thus, Alexander must hold up his. With the world spared a nuclear WWIII and Little Man's future ensured, Alexander "piles chairs up in the porch," "[covers] them with a tablecloth," and

"sets light to the cloth and watches the house burn as Adelaide, Victor, Marta and Julia run towards him" (Martin 170). Believed to have gone mad, Alexander is subdued, and enters an ambulance to be taken for evaluation. Having sacrificed everything, as was his deal with God, the film closes with a dedication to Tarkovsky's son "with hope and confidence" in him and for the future (Martin 170). Even a bleak and discordant picture such as this holds out hope that awareness, through impactful narratives, can affect political change. Although *The Sacrifice* inserts its own critical dialogue into the canon, there Tarkovsky's popularity is relatively limited, and there are certain barriers to engaging with his challenging work.




Three years after *The Sacrifice*, the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 became one of the most significant moments in modern history, and, among many other things, it had quite an impact on future film and television. The 1990s, similar to the 1970s, experienced a particularly

noticeable subgenre bust, and this is very likely due to a definitive ending of Cold War tensions between the U.S. and now-former U.S.S.R. Once again, the U.S. pivots to conventional war in Iraq during George W. Bush, Sr.'s presidency, and relatively smaller military engagements in Somalia and Kosovo during Bill Clinton's two terms.

Post-9/11: The Atomic Bomb among New Signifiers of Fear

Fifteen years later, the events of September 11, 2001 remain a fresh wound; one tended with heartfelt sympathy as well as violent overexertion. What made 9/11 uniquely impactful was both its brazenness as well as its live coverage. America stopped, and watched, tuned-in to terrorism. Of course, foreign wars, political upheaval, and domestic terrorism had been televised since Vietnam, but not since Pearl Harbor had foreign agents attacked the U.S. on continental soil. The crumbling and smoldering Twin Towers were in New York City, but their destruction was also projected through screens across America and the globe. Once again, a deeply felt fear consumed the social imagination, introducing a competing signifier associated with that fear.

Debuting in the fall of 2006, the CBS series *Jericho* presents audiences with the tale of a small town perspective of a sudden nuclear strike from the fictional town of Jericho, Kansas. The series was created by Stephen Chbosky, Josh Schaer, and Jonathan E. Steinberg, and features actors like Skeet Ulrich, Lennie James, Pamela Reed, Gerald McRaney, Michael Gaston, Darby Stanchfield, and so on ("Jericho" IMDB). While it only survived for one and one-half seasons, it still managed to pick up six award nominations from various critical bodies, although none were wins ("Jericho"). *Jericho* is as unique in its tale as it is in its oddity among post-9/11 narratives.

The show itself was received with mixed reviews. In a way, it is though audiences and critics alike did not quite know what to do with *Jericho*; as if it were a gift to some, but one that

was neither expected nor wanted to others. For example, Metacritic has contrasting reviews of Season 1 with "metascore" of 48 out of 100, which is "mixed or average based on 30 critics" ("Jericho" Metacritic). Meanwhile the users review's rate *Jericho*'s first season as an 8.6/10 ("Jericho" Metacritic). Despite *Jericho*'s relatively limited 29-episode run and tepid critical response, the series introduces some unique criticisms related to potential nuclear holocaust.

For the purposes of this project, the pilot episode will serve as the close reading portion of this case study, and it will include brief excerpts of scenes that take place later in the series. In the pilot episode, *Jericho* begins, very much like its predecessors, with a glimpse of pre-war life and, very much like mid-2000s primetime television, with a cross-promotional soundtrack. The male lead, Jake Green (Skeet Ulrich) arrives in Denver by train, and, then, he makes his way to back to Jericho, KA in his 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner. Over the radio, the President can be heard addressing Congress on the topic of "global violence." The pilot transitions to a bar in Jericho where an out of place city slicker, Mimi Clark (Alicia Coppola), laments the quaint surroundings, which goes largely ignored by many of the other patrons including the bartender, Mary Bailey (Clare Carey), and Jake's older brother, Eric Green (Kenneth Mitchell). On a school bus, an elementary school teacher, Heather Lisinski (Sprague Grayden), leads her students through the verses of the song "Old MacDonald." Arriving in Jericho, Jake happens across an old flame Emily Sullivan (Ashley Scott), and comes to learn that she is engaged with an investment banker from Chicago. Departing amicably, Jake continues to his family home to discuss his inheritance, which is being withheld by his father, Mayor Johnston Green (Gerald McRaney), and mother, Gail Green (Pamela Reed), due to their perception of Jake as irresponsible. An off-duty police officer, Jimmy (Bob Stephenson), sits at home with his wife and children, and watches the President's ongoing address to Congress.

After introducing the main characters of *Jericho*, the pilot's pace quickens. The President's speech is overlaid upon seamless transitions of the characters' perspectives. Trailing in and out, the Commander in Chief declares, "... [An] ocean of hatred has created much division in our great nation, and, yet, we all know that these divisions pale in comparison to the fundamental dangers posed by the threat of terror. We have an eternal commitment to leave the world a better place for our children and grandchildren. This has always been our promise and this will always…" (*Jericho*). Two children play hide and seek, and, panning up to a rooftop hiding spot, a boy is stunned by the sight of a mushroom cloud towering above the Rocky Mountains. Siblings Stanley and Bonnie Richmond (Brad Beyer and Shoshannah Stern) witness the strike from the porch of their family farm home. Jake Green hastily departs from Jericho after an argument with his family, and he is thoroughly distracted by the nuclear blast. To each of their misfortune, the driver of an approaching vehicle is as well. Elsewhere, the elementary school teacher, Heather, leans towards the school bus window to view the mushroom cloud, and the driver, in awe of its spectacle, loses control of the vehicle. On radios and televisions alike, only static floods the airwaves and the world is thrown into chaos.

The pilot episode plays out in a way that is very similar to the previous case studies. It transitions from a period of peace, through the shock of a nuclear attack, and into survival mode. Thrust into the fog of war, speculation abounds in Jericho. The Mayor wonders, "This could have been a test, it could've been an accident … one explosion does not make an attack." Rumors circulate about which of the United States' enemies might have been so bold: China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, terrorists? The shattered State later reports that the nuclear strikes were coordinated by Iran and supplied by North Korea, and that the United States reciprocated the exchange of nuclear weapons. However, many in Jericho are suspicious of the official

message. The series progresses in a way that sets a variety of increasingly difficult, yet localized, obstacles (e.g. food shortage, disease, inter-township conflict) in front of the people of Jericho, and, on a broader scale, a few characters try to piece together the mystery behind the attacks.

This mystery sets *Jericho* apart because the narrative delivers the consequences of nuclear proliferation back to its source: the United States of America. As Jake Green and double agent Robert Hawkins (Lenny James) discover, the perpetrators of the attack were not Iran and North Korea as it was originally reported, but, instead, a government-corporate entity, Jennings & Rall, conspired to violently recreate a country centered on their own interests. Jennings & Rall come to dominate every aspect of the life, whether it is supplying food, medical supplies, or security. A former corporate head is even nominated as President for the reformed government. However, the people of Jericho resist Jennings & Rall's overbearing influence as best they can at the local level, and, eventually, they successfully seek the bombs' sources in order to expose J&R.

The political implications of *Jericho* offer its audience a nuanced way of thinking about nuclear weapons' use by focusing on faults within the United States, rather than deflecting blame on to a geopolitical rival. The first criticism levied is against the impotence of present State authority, and its inability to protect even itself from nuclear strike. The second aims its focus at the increasingly influential role of corporations within government, further supplanting the will of the U.S. citizenry. During the mid-2000s, squaring blame upon the United States, even in fiction, was a rather radical and risky move for the showrunners. In a larger context, it is a risk that did not pay off. *Jericho* portrayed characters capable of resisting and opposing the status quo, and, then, it was cancelled.

Conclusion: The Role of Affect and What an Effective Narrative Might Look Like

If a technologically achievable and geopolitically determined apocalypse had a referent event, it was when the very first mushroom cloud towered from the Earth. It was when J. Robert Oppenheimer observed that "a few people laughed, a few people cried, [and] most people were silent," and in his epiphany: "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds" (Oppenheimer). It took place in the deserts of Nevada, the barrens of Kazakhstan, over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, now, within ICBMs in silos and aboard B-2s and submarines stalking the globe. Contained within each of these bombs is an avoidable moment. Applying critical theory to that moment is key to preventing it. Whether examining popular culture or politics, theory builds conceptual avenues to potential practical solutions. However, in order to discover effective answers the appropriate questions must be asked. In other words, it is imperative that both producers and consumers of media consider "Gramsci's original question: 'what prevents miserable life experiences from forming mass critical consciousness?'" (Gramsci in Peet, 14).

In the context of this essay, the corresponding question concerns whether the atomic apocalypse subgenre can motivate audiences to disarm its real-world potential. The short answer is that it must, although it is certainly more complicated than that. History alone has led to limited political intervention. Jean Baudrillard reinforces the notion that a political event, by itself, cannot motivate larger action, but it is through the media's interpretations, signification, and dissemination of the event that determines an audience's' motivations. He argues, "[political] events already lack sufficient energy of their own to move us: so they run on like a silent film for which we bear collective irresponsibility" (*The Illusion of the End* 4). In other words, the manners in which media contextualize and analyze, absent discussions of bias, frame the ways in

which audiences' formulate their affective responses, then their opinions about the implications of an event.

The difficulty with nuclear holocaust is that it lies before of us, veiled by future's fog. However, this has not ceased the production of nuclear holocaust narratives, and, conversely, must not necessarily hinder future productions of politically engaging and affectively influential narratives. Off-screen, the world's superpowers have threatened each other with nuclear holocaust on many occasions. Two instances of atomic annihilation mar the United States and humankind's history, and, yet, the significance of this history is lacking relative to its scope. Baudrillard observes that, over time, media distorts history through the "precession of simulacra," which undergoes four transitions: "it is the reflection of a basic reality; it masks and perverts a basic reality; it masks the absence of a basic reality; it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard in Storey 412). The nuclear holocaust subgenre certainly persists as "its own pure simulacrum" to perilous effect. However, if Baudrillard's precession reveals the ways in which media distorts reality, then tracing a path back through simulacra can potentially lead to narratives that are more effective. In other words, the subgenre must be redirected towards representations that are as close a "reflection of a basic reality" as possible. Media makers must revisit history accurately, contextually, and affectively.

In conclusion, the role of media in motivating political change or promoting its stasis have real world and, possibly, existential consequences. In *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi writes that mass media's potential to move audiences is its sole purpose, and that "[media] transmissions are breaches of indetermination" (Massumi 43). Meaning, the purpose of media, in its various forms, is to insert itself into the audiences' decision-making process. A simple example of this purpose is through advertisements or commercials, where media

motivates spending. However, the greater concern is that of motivating resistance and opposition. Massumi continues, “mass media are massively potentializing, but the potential [to resist] is inhibited, and both the emergence of the potential and its limitation are part and parcel of the cultural-political functioning of the media, as connected to other apparatuses” (Massumi 43). Again, media can and does motivate its audiences, but to what end remains at issue. Reclaiming, redirecting, and intervening in the potentializing force of media may be one of the last ways to affect change.

Works Cited

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of the End*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Ed. John Storey. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. 409-415.

Bennett, Tony. "Popular Culture and the 'turn to Gramsci'." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Ed. John Storey. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. 85.

Broderick, Mick. *Nuclear Movies: A Critical Analysis and Filmography of International Feature Length Films Dealing with Experimentation, Aliens, Terrorism, Holocaust, and Other Disaster Scenarios, 1914-1989*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991.

*Jericho*. Writers Chbosky, Stephen, John Schaer, and Jonathan E. Steinberg. CBS. 20 Sept. 2006.

*Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden. Columbia Pictures, 1963.

Gramsci, Antonio, and David Forgacs. *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*. New York: New York UP, 2000.

Gramsci, Antonio. "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Ed. John Storey. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. 75-80.

Harden, Mike. "Pilot Didn't Regret A-bomb." *The Columbus Dispatch*, 2 Nov. 2007. Web. 08 Apr. 2016.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. *The Age of Empire: 1875 - 1914*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.

Hobsbawm, E. J. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage, 1996.

Johnson, Chalmers. *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*. New York: Metropolitan, 2004.

"Jericho." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. 21 Mar. 2016. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0805663/>.

"Jericho: Season 1." *Metacritic*. Metacritic. 3 Apr. 2016. <http://www.metacritic.com/tv/jericho>

"Jericho: Season 2." *Metacritic*. Metacritic. 3 Apr. 2016. <http://www.metacritic.com/tv/jericho/season-2>.

Kelley, Beverly Merrill. *Reelpolitik II: Political Ideologies in '50s and '60s Films*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Koppel, Ted. "ABC News Viewpoint." *ABC News Viewpoint*. ABC. 20 Nov. 1983.

Martin, Sean. *Andrei Tarkovsky*. Harpenden, Herts: Kamera, 2011.

Marx, Karl, and Daniel De Leon. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon.* Trans. Daniel De Leon. Mountain View, CA: Socialist Labor Party of America, 2003. "Marx." Web. 27 Mar. 2016. <http://www.slp.org/pdf/marx/eighteenth_brum.pdf>.

Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002.

*On the Beach*. Dir. Stanley Kramer. Screenplay by John Paxton, based on the novel by Nevil Shute. Perf. Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, Antony Perkins. United Artists, 1959.

Oppenheimer, J. Rober. "Now I Am Become Death..."" J. Robert Oppenheimer. The Atomic Archive. <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Movies/Movie8.shtml>.

Peet, Richard. *Geography of Power: The Making of Global Economic Policy.* London: Zed, 2007.

Robson, David. *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*. Ed. Richard Dellamora. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1995.

Rotundo, E. Anthony. *The Children's Culture Reader*. Ed. Henry Jenkins. New York: New York UP, 1998.

Sagan, Carl. *Cosmos*. New York: Random House, 1980.

Stokes, Bruce. "70 Years After Hiroshima, Opinions Have Shifted On Use of Atomic Bomb." *Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center, 04 Aug. 2015. 11 Apr. 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/04/70-years-after-hiroshima-opinions-have-shifted-on-use-of-atomic-bomb/>.

"The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: What's Your Story?" Nuclear Threat Initiative, 16 Oct. 2012. 02 Mar. 2016. <http://www.nti.org/newsroom/news/cuban-missile-crisis-50-whats-your-story/>.

*The Day After*. Dir. Nicholas Meyer. By Edward Hume. Perf. Jason Robards, JoBeth Williams, Steve Guttenberg. ABC, 1983. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yif-5cKg1Yo>.

"The Day After." *IMDb*. IMDb.com. Web. 14 Feb. 2016.

*The Sacrifice*. Dir. Andreĭ Arsen′evich Tarkovskiĭ. By Andreĭ Arsen′evich Tarkovskiĭ. Swedish Production Institute, 1986.

"Truman Library: The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb Online Research File." Truman Library: The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb Online Research File. 08 Mar. 2016. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1945-08-06&documentid=59&studycollectionid=abomb&pagenumber=1>.

Williams, Raymond. "On Structure of Feeling." *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. John Storey. London, U.K.: Routledge, 2009. 35-49.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.