

American Influence
-
Representations of Force and Saving in Alien Invasion Films



Independence Day. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

Els Verlinde 3015475
MA Thesis, American Studies Program, Utrecht University
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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. D.A. Pascoe
Second Supervisor: Dr. J. Verheul

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Fig. 1. Fire All! Still from *Independence Day* (1996). The moment when one of the UFOs fires its main weapon and the White House starts to explode. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

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Introduction

British Air Force Officer #1: It's from the Americans. They want to organize a counter offensive!

British Air Force Officer #2: It's about bloody time! What do they plan to do?
(*Independence Day*)

This quote comes from one of the better known alien invasion films from the 1990s. In 1996 this film was produced and released. In *Independence Day* the aliens have come to Earth to consume our resources, and since the humans might object to it and cause trouble for the aliens, they are planning to exterminate the human race. Shortly after the film's release it became apparent that the film was a major box office hit and would earn a large amount of money, an amount that would eventually mount up to "over \$300 million" (Felber). Dietmer Felber also mentions in his review of Michael Rogin's book *Independence Day, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Enola Gay* that the "densely written book deepens our understanding of the regenerative cultural work performed by blockbuster cinema and offers a critical perspective that renders transparent the ideological content of its seemingly empty special effects" (95). What Felber seems to indicate is that the cultural work done by *Independence Day* seems to resonate with ideas and images of the public that concern the role of America and Americans as saviors when the continued existence of Earth and humanity is at stake. *Independence Day* seems to be a clear illustration of what Godfrey Hodgson describes in *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*. He mentions that during the 1980s and 1990s there "was what seemed to me a new insistence that America be admired, almost worshiped. ... there was a new ... demand for uncritical assertion of national superiority" (Hodgson xii-xiii). There appeared to be a need for the continuation of the image of America's greatness, in spite of or perhaps because of the change that Hodgson noticed taking place in the general American mindset. However, when taking a step back from this particular

film and looking at several other alien invasion films, it appears that the same insistence on a continued image of, for instance, American culture values and morals, started as soon as science fiction films were being produced. Susan Sontag comments on this in her well known essay "The Imagination of Disaster". "[S]cience fiction films ... perpetuate clichés about identity, volition, power, knowledge, happiness, social consensus, guilt, responsibility" (Sontag 42). Another one of these perpetuated ideas seems to be the one that shows America and Americans as saviors of Earth and mankind. However, when giving this concept some closer thought, what is it exactly that these films show to the audience about saving? How is America represented as being capable of saving? What force is presented as being capable of the act of saving? How feasible is it that this force is actually capable of what it is presented as being able to do?

In order to be able to answer the question how feasible the notion is that America would be capable of the continued saving of Earth and mankind over such a prolonged period of time the following selection of films will be used. These films range from the early 1950s to recent productions. Some of these films are remakes of older versions. These remakes have been specifically chosen in order to see if the way in which the act of saving is represented has changed over the decades. Together with the other films as comparative material analysis might shed some light on whether it has and if so, how that has been done and what it might possibly reflect upon. The film selection consists of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and (2008), *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and (2005), *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and (1978), *The Invasion* (2007), *Independence Day* (1996) and *The X-Files: Fight the Future* (1998).

Since the topic of UFOs and aliens appears to so many people to be something that comes from the imagination and from dreams, it seems that psychoanalysis is a good place to start. Chris Vos mentions in his book *The Moving Past: Introduction to the analysis of Films*

*and Television Programs*¹ that “It is not exactly a new thought to approach film, especially those produced in the Hollywood dream factory, in a psychoanalytical manner”² (69).

However, since the field is rather wide, it is prudent to narrow it down to one person. The obvious choice would be Sigmund Freud, the founding father of this movement. However, Vos mentions that the Freudian approach used by Lacan, whose work was strongly influenced by Freud, to analyze film was not completely successful. This approach focused too much on “male voyeurism and fetishism” (Vos 69) and neglects the female side of the argument. It seems that Jung is better suited to the task. He used to be an adherent of Freud’s theories and was also a close friend of Freud. However, as Vincent Brome mentions in *Jung: Man and Myth*, due to a series of disagreements that mostly concerned their increasingly different outlooks on and interpretations of psychoanalysis, their friendship and professional relationship eventually stranded and came to an end (151-154). The disagreement originated in Freud’s much more material orientation, his strong interest in the “measurable world of science” (Brome 13). Jung on the other hand, was much more invested in and drawn towards less tangible and measurable subject of mythology and the unconscious.

Jung’s area of interest might have been the reason why he was also interested in the phenomenon of flying saucers and their occupants in the first place. Jung already started to study the appearances “as early as 1946” (McGuire vii). In his essay *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*, Jung mentions about this phenomenon that he thinks that the increased number of sightings is because in times of stress and turmoil this functions as an outlet for that stress (14). Also, aliens and UFOs have not always been taken very seriously, and Jung is one of the earliest psycho-analysts to give this phenomenon serious thought. Patrick Lucanio mentions in his book *Them or Us: Archetypical*

¹ *Bewegend Verleden: Inleiding in de Analyse van Films en Televisieprogramma’s*

² “Op zich is het niet zo’n nieuwe gedachte geweest om de film, zeker zoals die is geconcretiseerd in de droomfabriek van Hollywood, psychoanalytisch te benaderen” (Vos 69).

Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films that he uses Jungian psychology to analyze science because “Jungian psychology as a practical and meaningful methodology for the study of films which, like alien invasion film, have too often been excluded from critical assessment for vague and arbitrary reasons” (viii). That is why it is necessary to see what type of influence these films can exert through imagery and themes that are recurrent in almost each alien invasion film.

Apart from discussing the aspect of saving in alien invasion films, this paper will also take into account the driving force behind the act of saving, i.e. what force or forces help to successfully bring about that act. Considering alien invasion films in general, the one thing they usually have in common is that, in greater or lesser degree of clarity, an alien invasion on Earth always results in war or battle between terrestrial and extraterrestrial forces.

There is a philosophical approach that can be used to try and define how force is used, how it works and what outcomes there might be after the use of force. Simone Weil wrote such an essay on the force and its use, abuse and the consequences of its use or abuse. Weil is perhaps one of the less well-known French thinkers from the start of the twentieth century. Despite her early demise at 34, she left “religious and philosophical writings of great originality” (Hellman 1). As a person she was rather contradictory in her opinions on certain matters. This is also true of her opinion of war and battle. Dean Hammer and Michael Kicey mention this in their text “Simone Weil’s Iliad: The Power Of Words.” At first she was a supporter of anarchism in the “Spanish Civil War” but became let down with this, turned towards pacifism and turned around again when Germany was gaining strength (80). They also mention that “Her writings pull one into the world of a person whose search for truth and understanding was continually confounded by a fierce intellectual individuality, uncompromising sense of purity, refusal to subscribe to doctrine, and a sense of the paradoxes and contradictions of human existence. She evinces communitarian sympathies, but also a

continual ambiguity toward community life” (Hammer and Kicey 79). Her opposing viewpoints can perhaps be difficult to reconcile with each other, but this might also make her text especially well suited to use to analyze alien invasion films. She appears to be her own person and does not take anything for granted. This seems to be necessary since alien invasion films sometimes seem to take on a somewhat propagandistic nature when it comes to American society and its morals and values. Simone Weil’s independent thinking could give this counterweight.

In “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force” Weil looks at how force works in the poem *The Iliad* and also tries to define it. She wrote this essay shortly after the start of World War II and the invasion of France. She discusses force in relation to violence, and that once violence is being used, it will not stop being used.

[T]he human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to. ... Force is a[s] pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, it intoxicates. ... He that takes the sword, will perish by the word. (Weil 6-13)

Even though the aspect of force in Weil’s discussion is represented in many alien invasion films, it is not the only type of force that is present. Though Weil does not deal with how those other types of force work, her discussion provides a framework that enables to analyze and deal with those other types of force. Each chapter of this essay shall deal with a different aspect of force.

Firstly it is necessary to clarify certain terms and give a clear definition of what the word alien means for instance. This is also necessary for the definition of the alien invasion film as a genre. Patrick Lucanio defines in his book *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films* several typical lines of action that the films’ narratives tend to

take, though he also acknowledges that “Not all films can be conveniently classified according to each point in the outline” (26). Classifying and defining what constitutes alien invasion narratives is almost similarly complicated and tricky and open to personal opinion as defining what science fiction is, as is illustrated by the well known science fiction author Margaret Atwood.

I was talking to a much younger person about “science fiction.” ... This much younger person—let’s call him Randy, which was in fact his name—did not have a hard and fast definition of ‘science fiction,’ but he knew it when he saw it, kind of. ... “For Randy—and I think he’s representative—sci-fi does include other planets, which may or may not have dragons on them.” (Atwood 10)

It all depends on where the emphasis is put, but also on the topic of the discussion at hand. Alien invasion is a concept that needs clearer definition, because without it, it is difficult to determine what is being discussed. Different points of view are basically all feasible where it concerns the term alien and alien invasion. Alien invasion could imply what can be seen in the film *Avatar* (2009), for instance, where humans come to invade the planet of a race of humanoids, to whom the humans are the alien invaders taking over their living space. Alien invasion might also mean immigrants flocking towards a new land, for instance the immigration waves into the United States at the start of the twentieth century. The word alien is too broad, too all-encompassing, to start with. With aliens in this essay will not be meant people with a different nationality, who come from a different continent, or even from a different community or church within America. In this essay when the word alien is mentioned, what will be meant is a new life form that is being introduced. An initial division of new life forms might be said to be as follows: “The classical text is divided with regard to the source from which the invasion springs: terrestrial and extraterrestrial” (Lucanio 26). In this essay the definition used for alien will indicate a being not of this Earth, a being which is

not human and will also not be related to or spring from Earth flora or fauna. Alien in this essay will mean, unless otherwise indicated, an extra-terrestrial physical life form from outside Earth's atmosphere, whether that life form is bacterial or shaped as a living plant or animal organism, or indeed looks and acts like a human.

The main question to be answered is why America is always represented as savior and how is this done in alien invasion films. In order to answer the main question the following chapters will deal with the individual forces that are presented by those films as being capable of saving mankind, as represented by Hollywood.

The first chapter deals with the force of precedence. This chapter will look into the reason why certain themes, ideas and images keep reappearing in alien invasion films, whether those are films produced in the 1950s or after 2000. It appears that certain historical events and certain developments have had a strong influence on the representation of saving and these especially seem to put America forward as perpetual savior. Also, Susan Sontag mentions that things such as fantasy are a good way to deal with fear in increased periods of fear and stress. Jung has a similar view on this and adds to it that it is in those increased periods of fear that there were more sightings of UFOs and aliens than normal. Looking at this idea and American history in bird's eye view, it also seems to have a reflection in the topics of films produced in or near those periods. The production of alien invasion films is much higher in periods of war and other kinds of turmoil.

The second chapter will deal with what appears to be two general assumptions that are offered in almost every alien invasion film. These assumptions are that the Earth and humanity need to be saved, something which shows strong resemblance to and entanglement with the assumption that it will be the Americans who will save mankind, either by their invention or intervention. On the one hand alien invasion films show the audience that Earth is capable of saving itself. On the other hand, what these films also show that is that earth's

capability to save itself is not complete. This is because Earth can be damaged and will be unable to repair itself when humans are allowed to continue with their destructive behavior. Most of all, what becomes visible is that humanity itself needs to be saved, since it appears to have a tendency towards self-destruction.

The third chapter will deal with the aspect of force that is almost impossible to miss in the films and is also the one part that is classically seen as the embodiment of the definition of force. In each film, to a greater or lesser degree, the American military plays a part in saving the Earth, a part that also has precedence in American history. At times, they only seem to have a supportive role, and at other times, such as in *Independence Day*, the military play a decisive part in freeing the world from aliens. However, how feasible is this? America saved the world in the past with the help of its military, but will it be able to do so again?

The fourth chapter will deal with the part that science has in saving everyone from the aliens. Science is a force that is present in almost each film and, similar to the military, has precedence from the same period of American history on its side. Quite often science, and it always appears to be American science at that, provides a solution to the alien invasion problem, or at least provides a significant part of the solution. However, the question rises whether or not science really is capable of providing that many solutions, since great discoveries, such as for instance penicillin, are often dependent upon sheer chance and luck.

The fifth chapter deals with a type of force that appears to have been present since long before either science or the military were being hailed as the saviors of America and the rest of the world. The people that usually come up with the solution to the alien invasion problem, whether they be scientists, soldiers or civilians, are often seen as heroes at the end of the film. However, they were usually not seen in that light at the start of the narrative. Often they are outsiders in some way, the other, not worthy of attention. It appears, though, that it is this position of being an outsider that provides them with a fresh perspective, the fresh

perspective that as a force in itself in being able to succeed in deciding the problem in favor of the humans.

In the sixth and last chapter emotion will be dealt with. Emotion is presented in the films as one of the forces that is capable of saving the world. For instance love is presented as being capable of saving humanity and of being a reason why humans can be redeemed. However, it needs to be looked at how feasible this idea is, since there are several sides that can be argued. There are also films in which emotions have been, in one way or another, taken away from the characters and the question rises how that affects emotion in its capability to save.

Chapter 1: The Force of Precedence

“A typical science fiction film has a form as predictable as a Western, and is made up of elements which are as classic as the saloon brawl, the blonde schoolteacher from the East, and the gun duel on the deserted main street” (Sontag 42). In other words, what Susan Sontag seems to be indicating here is that there has been a continuation of the same type of images in film since the start of the cinema industry. It might be said that these images seem to be given precedence over other possible types of images. They appear to have become a force of precedence, a force that seems to have had a strong influence on the fact that America has been presented as the savior of Earth and mankind for so long. However, there is a second part to this force of precedence that is interlinked with this representation of America, a part that has had a determining influence in this matter. In order to understand completely what the force of precedence implies, the real-life historical events pertaining to American society need to be looked at. It appears that a good place to start is with Carl Jung’s work *Flying Saucers*. Jung had been interested in the phenomenon of flying saucers, and noticed early on that they seemed to have a specific preference for targeting the United States (Jung, *Flying Saucers* 11). One of America’s most well known events concerning aliens and spacecraft, something which is also repeatedly used throughout several different films, is the Roswell, New Mexico crash. “Unseen, something crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. Everybody is in agreement about this fact. What crashed has been a topic of controversy since 1980, when the event was discovered by UFO (unidentified flying object) proponents” (Jacobs 327). What happened there remains a mystery since two conflicting stories are circulating about what happened. On the one hand there are people the townspeople of Roswell who believe that what crashed in their town was a UFO and that four humanoid bodies were recovered by the military, who at first admitted that it was a UFO and later tried to cover the event up. “The Army Air Corps first announced that the wreckage was that of a ‘flying saucer’ and then

quickly said it was a weather balloon. The local people who witnessed its removal harbored suspicions that it was indeed a flying saucer” (Jacobs 327). However, despite their initial confirmation, the military later changed the story into the crashed device being a weather balloon and that that was all that happened (Joseph 132). Despite the topic’s late re-discovery, the mysterious circumstances that surround the Roswell crash might be the exact reason why this topic has become lodged rather firmly in the collective consciousness of alien related things. As Brad Joseph puts it, “Whatever happened, there is no denying its impact on American popular culture – the word Roswell is closely associated with aliens and UFOs for both believers and non-believers” (132). This impact can be seen in the way Roswell keeps resurfacing in any kind of representation of the topic. It could be concluded that Roswell has become part of the force of precedence.

This is, however, not the only aspect of the force of precedence that can be seen at work in alien invasion films. Susan Sontag mentions at the start of her essay that “Ours is indeed an age of extremity. For we live under the continual threat of two equally fearful, but seemingly opposed destinies: unremitting banality and inconceivable terror. It is fantasy, served out in large rations by the popular arts, which allow most people to cope with these twin specters” (42). Jung seems to support at least part of Sontag’s viewpoint. Jung mentions that he thinks that UFO sightings are part of a coping mechanism of the collective unconscious, a concept Jung explains in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. ... the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the

most part of *complexes*, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes. (Jung, *The Archetypes* 42)

In order to deal with the stress and strain of the heightened tension of international affairs (Jung, *Flying Saucers* 14), it projects its own archetypes.

When looking at production dates of science fiction and alien invasion films, it can be seen is that there are periods in which there is a heightened output of films with this genre, something that can for instance also be seen in the dates of remakes of certain films. *The War of the Worlds*, for instance, was first made into film in 1953. This was shortly after World War II ended and the world was now threatened with a new one that might become the superlative of the previous one, such as the Cold War with its ever present nuclear threat. The remake of *The War of The Worlds* was published in 2005, only a short period of time after what happened on 9/11 and there was again a heightened tension in international affairs and increased threat of terrorism. The same pattern repeats itself with other films, in each period between the end of WW II and now that had a significant increase in tension and fear.

These periods of tension and fear seem to always start when a war is afoot or already in progress. Looking at American history and the periods in which war caused tension and fear that can be connected to alien and UFO appearances, it appears that those periods almost all take place after the start of the twentieth century. H.G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* could possibly be called an exception, but it is a novel about and not a sighting of Martians and does therefore not count. However, he does indicate or implies the effects of certain matters that would, in combination with other situations and developments, eventually cause people to start seeing UFOs and aliens after the twentieth century. Among these things is the aspect of scientific development, an aspect of force that will be discussed in a later chapter.

Furthermore, the twentieth century is also the era when America became more involved in international affairs that would draw them to participate in several international wars, the start of which would prove to be World War II. Despite earlier attempts at staying out of the war going on in Europe, it was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that drew America into the war. Eventually America's participation became decisive for the outcome of the war. With the help of the Americans, Europe, and the rest of the world also, was freed from the Nazis. This also meant the definite end to isolationism, since in the years to come, other menaces would threaten the world and America took the lead in fighting these menaces. These menaces seemed to be centered around the threat of communism, something which the Americans thought would engulf the world. Fighting the communist threat meant more than only fighting Russia.

A brutal chapter in the fierce struggle with communism, the Korean War was allegedly an international 'police action' by the United Nations, but the United States manned the front lines in the order of battle. Lost to the West in 1949, the People's Republic of China ('Red China' to all but her allies) was perceived as the puppetmaster pulling the North Korean strings while behind Red China was the guiding hand of the Soviet Union. From command central in the Kremlin, the Sino-Soviet alliance gained force and moved forward, a red tide infused with a yellow menace, poised to thrust the dagger of the Korean Peninsula into the heart of Japan and from there move south to Indochina, then west to India and Pakistan, and inexorably eastward across the Pacific.

(Doherty 7)

In all these endeavors America appears to have been successful and came out of those fights unscathed, as Godfrey Hodgson describes in his book *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*: "America, alone, emerged strengthened by two world wars" (10).

“[T]he spectacular success of the United States” (Hodgson 10) seems to have added to an increased a sense of self worth, something which also appears to have lodged itself in the concept of American exceptionalism. “Americans have felt so proud of their nation’s achievements that they have wanted to socialize their children, and their immigrants’ children, with that national pride. Increasingly they have felt called upon to share their beliefs, including their belief in their own exceptionalism, with a wider world” (Hodgson 14). In a sense Hodgson here summarizes how the force of precedence seems to operate throughout American society. Though of course real life may not fully correspond with what the idealized image of America looks like, it is what is being broadcast to the world through Hollywood films.

As Dietmer Felber mentions about *Independence Day* in his review, “the film revives the idealized memory of World War II” (Felber 93). Though this might count strongest for *Independence Day*, it can also definitely be said of many of the other alien invasion films. Naturally it needs to be taken in to account that most of the well known alien invasion films were produced for the popular film market and things such as sales numbers needed to be taken into account. However, when looking at a film such as *Independence Day* and its major box office results, it appears that the idealized picture that is being shown in films is something that people like to see, is something that speaks to something in people that this is how they should be, what they should strive towards becoming. As Felber mentions, WW II has become a heroic ideal image, an image that finds its reflection in many films and appears to have initiated a rather imperative notion that America and Americans are the saviors of Earth and mankind. This image seems to have become part of American ideology, an ideology that is now being broadcast to the world through alien invasion film. Ideology is a rather flexible term though, as can be heard in the film *The X-Files: Fight the Future* (1998). In this film FBI agents Mulder and Scully still work together despite the fact that the strange

cases department named X-files where they first met has been closed down. The film starts with a building being blown up after they were late in discovering the bomb after a threat. When Mulder and Scully start to investigate the bombing, they discover a trail of well covered up evidence that leads them to people in high ranking places who have been working together with aliens to prepare an invasion on Earth. At some point Mulder is in conversation with the Well Manicured Man, who has from within the alien camp. He tells Mulder that “Survival is the ultimate ideology.” Something which fits in nicely with the projected image of America as savior, since saving implies survival.

This is an interpretation that is deepened even further by Seymour Martin Lipset’s definition of American ideology in his book *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. “Being an American ... is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth” (Lipset 31). Lipset also mentions the historian Richard Hofstadter who mentions something rather similar: “It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one” (Lipset 18). This quote could be seen to imply that to be an American is to be safe and will almost automatically imply survival. A notion that might be contested when taking 9/11 or the more recent Boston bombings into account.

Taking a different line of approach towards the force of precedence, it appears that it is not only the depiction of ideology that leaves a lingering sense of American mindedness after watching alien invasion films. The strong American sense that can be felt after watching alien invasion films is also brought about by the iconography of the film, the specifically American things that are shown. There are two approaches that are clearly visible. One of these appears to be product placement. Not all films make the same amount of use of product placement, such as for instance can be seen in *The X-Files*, where very little use is made of brand names overtly placed in the screen. One of the few names that does appear on screen is Freightliner,

a specific truck name. However, despite the fact that the word FBI is not a brand name, it is a specifically American organization though and it appears full screen regularly.

On the other hand there are films such as *Independence Day*. In this film the use of brand names borders on the propagandistic side. There is a large amount of specifically American products to be seen in full view, products such as Coca Cola or Winnebago. Also used is a Plymouth car, a product that, apart from being American designed, simultaneously refers to American history; referring to Plymouth Rock where the first settlers landed. Nowhere in the film do the filmmakers visibly use non-American products.

Naturally there are also such films as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008). In this film the alien Klaatu comes to Earth to warn mankind against the course they are taking internationally. In this version the ultimate power to save or doom mankind lies with the alien Klaatu, a non-American outsider. This seems to be reflected in the products that are shown on screen. There is a fair mix of products of non-American origins, such as LG and Honda, as well as specifically American products, such as Hummers and McDonald's.



Fig. 2. Where is the Restaurant. Still from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008). Klaatu and Helen Benson arrived at McDonald's in a hybrid Honda to meet with an alien that has been undercover on Earth for a long time. In this shot there is a clear view of both American and non-American brand names. Also, the protagonist using an eco-car fits in well with the eco minded message the film seems to exude. Copyright 2008 Twentieth Century Fox.

Despite the suggestion that emanates from the increased use of non-American products and the fact that the power to save seems to lie with a non-American, it is ultimately the American scientist Helen Benson who ensures the saving of mankind, something which will be further discussed in the chapter on the force of emotion.

The second approach that is used as a visible reinforcement of American centeredness comes from something different than products. Quite often some specifically American landmarks and monuments are used. Names or things such a panoramic view of New York showing things such as the Empire State Building, several skyscraper buildings and Central Park. Other familiar sites that come by on screen are for instance the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Hollywood Hills and the Brooklyn Bridge. Landscapes are also used to create that specific American image, though landscape-wise the images that are shown usually show the action or important events taking place in a desert. Deserts appear to have a specific reference to those things and events that made America more or less the global peacekeeper and policeman. Tom Vanderbilt writes in *Survival City (Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America)* that a change in use of and attitude towards the desert areas took place around 1942, when deserts started being used as “bombing range,” “race track” and “highway” (Vanderbilt 24). This increased functionality, as Vanderbilt calls it, also seems to encompass a new function as battle ground. In a large part of the alien invasion films, though not in all of them, the desert indeed plays an important part. In *Independence Day* Steven Hiller is being chased by an alien in a UFO whilst he is flying his F-18 over the desert. Hiller is an air force captain with an excellent track record and who would love to work for NASA so some day he could fly a space shuttle. However, his applications are being turned down, which could possibly have something to do with the fact that he is dating a woman who works as a stripper for a living. After both the UFO and airplane have crashed in the desert, Steven drags the alien through a scorching hot desert.

After some time he encounters a large group of caravans driving through the desert and he can get a lift to a base nearby in the desert which is never explicitly named, but which appears to be some kind of salt flat. The base that they arrive at turns out to be Area 51, a name which has gained quite some notoriety over the years and has become, like the Roswell crash, a force of precedence. It is often associated with government secrets and conspiracies, something which is used in several different films, even in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. This is a film which coincidentally also deals with aliens.

Area 51 is often associated specifically with the appearance or cover-up of aliens and UFO's. The name and the place of the base used to be a closely guarded secret. It is even difficult to find any kind of article or other type of secondary literature that explores this topic extensively. Despite all the secrecy, over the years it has somehow become clear that the base does exist, though it's exact purpose is still unclear. Since this is surrounded by secrecy, naturally it has become subjected to much speculation of people that quite often turn out to be conspiracy theorists or those who believe in the existence of UFOs and aliens.



Fig. 3. New Arrivals. Steven Hiller just arriving at the gates of what later turns out to be Area 51, where he is initially being denied access. It is not immediately obvious, but when looking closely, it can be seen that the surface area on which the vehicles are standing has a very light color which is sooner associated with desert instead of asphalt. In this instance it is rather likely that the location of Area 51 is somewhere in the Utah Salt Flats. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

Similarly to the location of Area 51 in *Independence Day*, in *The X-Files* the alien virus that provides the red line throughout the film, is found in a desert area in Texas. When agents Scully and Mulder pursue the trucks that were used for the damage control and

removal of anything that was deemed important by the person in charge of the damage control, they end up at a facility somewhere in the desert. In this facility the alien virus is being used for biological engineering on bees and corn, an operation that needs as much secrecy it can find, something which expands even further on the newfound functions of the desert as indicated by Vanderbilt earlier. For the purpose of secrecy the desert seems to be an excellent location, since there is very little to no chance that people will accidentally stumble upon what is happening in the facility or get infected with whatever it is that is being engineered there.



Fig. 4 Desert Illumination The light spots are the domes where the bees are kept and the vertical lines just visible in the lower half of the picture are the rows of cornstalks. On the right hand side of the picture the supplies train is approaching. As can be seen this is the only building that appear to be there for miles around. Copyright Twentieth Century Fox 1998.

In a sense, what can be seen in these films is that they mirror events that happened in real life and find justification there for using certain ways and means to solve a problem. A logical reaction since it has been used successfully before and might have a higher chance of success than trying something new. Furthermore, it seems that, in the repetition of using similar methods of solving things, it can also be seen that the UFO and alien phenomenon over the years developed a number of themes that started to recur on a regular basis. These topics, things such as area 51 and for instance the design and shape of UFOs and of how aliens in themselves appear to act, these things in themselves have become a force of

precedence. This also includes manners in which these themes are depicted in films. This force of precedence seems to ensure the perpetuation of its own use in films of this genre.

Another perpetuating theme, which seems to be the most pervasive one, is that in popular alien invasion films, produced by Hollywood, everything happens in or to America and Americans. This is a theme that ultimately result in the fact that there are always Americans involved when an alien invasion is afoot. This is such a strong recurring theme that when the setting is in for instant Moscow, as in *The Darkest Hour* (2011), it is a group of American teenagers who find the ultimate solution to helping overpower the aliens.

Precedence has been set by alien invasion films since the beginnings of the film industry in depicting events in a certain manner. This also includes the assumption that both Earth and humanity need to be saved from an alien invasion. Contemplation on this assumption causes the question to arise whether or not humanity and Earth actually need to be saved, an issue that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Do the Earth and Humanity Need to be Saved?

After watching the overtly pro-American film *Independence Day*, there can be absolutely no doubt about the fact that Earth and humanity can be saved and also need to be. What this film shows is that humanity is saved from annihilation and the Earth from being mined until all that will be left is barren rock. *Independence Day* is a film that presents its audience with a readymade reason why the aliens come here to Earth. However, as the title of this chapter already suggests, the important question that needs to be answered here is whether saving really is necessary.

Before the films will be analyzed to try and answer the question at hand, it needs to be mentioned that contact with possible extra-terrestrial life has not yet been made, let alone that it has been proven that alien life actually exists. *Independence Day*, along with every other alien invasion film, has to speculate and make assumptions about any possible reasons why aliens would want to come here on purpose. As long as contact has not been made, there is no certainty of knowing what that extra-terrestrial life form would be and whether they would be like us and strive for the same things, such as H.G. Wells proposes in *The War of the Worlds*. This is a point that needs some closer inspection, which will be done in chapter four.

The first aspect of the question that will be analyzed is the notion whether or not the Earth needs to be saved. *Independence Day* (1996), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) are films that agree on the point that the planet needs to be saved, though they differ on the reason why and on the type of action that will bring about saving. *Independence Day* shows that it is mankind that needs to save the Earth from enemy invaders, or it will be left empty and all natural resources depleted. A similar message comes from the alien messenger Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* from 2008, only here the message been slightly changed. The original film from 1951 was much more politically oriented, and was openly critical of policies and of nuclear developments. The 2008 remake is much more ecologically minded. In

this film mankind is damaging the planet and depleting all the natural resources, something which is a mirror image of reality. In both films, though, at the end of the film, Earth is still saved through human intervention, even if at first it was mankind that was causing all the problems.

The interesting and contradictory point to this assumption, however, is made by the film that is seen as the archetypical alien invasion story (Lucanio 25). *The War of the Worlds*, both versions, is the only film in the selection made for this thesis that so openly and unashamedly shows that the supposition that only mankind can save the planet is a faulty one. The original story, written by H.G. Wells, was first published in 1898. It was one of the first alien invasion narratives that received broad acclaim, especially after Orson Welles's radio broadcast had taken place and had made a rather large impact on the American population. Needless to say that when the film industry was growing and monster and horror films were on the rise, *The War of the Worlds* was also made into film. In the book *Them or Us* Patrick Lucanio calls Wells's work "the prototype" since it "defines the genre" (25). The reason he gives for this is that it is due to the simplicity of his idea "of an invasion from another world" (25).

The War of the Worlds has been made into film twice, the first time in 1953 and the second in 2005. There is some difference in how closely both films mimic Wells' text, sometimes the differences are down to some logical adjustments, such as the different time period. For instance, Wells' original text begins with "No one would have believed, in the last years of the nineteenth century..." (Wells 3). The 1953 version of the film starts with "No one would have believed in the middle of the twentieth century ...", whereas the 2005 version starts with "No one would have believed in the early years of the twenty first century ...". Other changes included, as Lucanio mentions, "added allusions to mankind's relationship with God" which he states would "undoubtedly ... have caused Wells to writhe in intellectual

agony” (26). These added allusions can, in all possibility, be ascribed to cinema’s “own strict and rigid delineation” (25) that was applied. It is also highly likely that these changes took place to increase public acceptance. After all, America is still a mostly Christian society and the message that mankind is incapable of saving itself or the planet it lives on might otherwise not have gone down very well with the public. The reason for this might be, as referred to in the previous chapter, American society has gotten used to being the savior, of embodying the ideology of survival. The “terrible weapons of super science” (*The War of the Worlds* 1953) are powerless against the force field around the alien craft, it protected them from anything that the humans could do to them or throw at them. This film, both versions of it, explicitly show that there is absolutely nothing mankind can do to change the situation or influence the invasion in any way. One of the standard ways in which humans tend to retaliate in any kind of threatening situation in films, is to send in the military to squash the problem before it can take over. Shortly after the start of both films it becomes clear that even the strongest and newest weapons are completely without effect. Many explosions blast across the screen, only to show that as soon as the smoke has dissipated that the alien enemy is still standing and very much alive and determined to continue, as can be clearly seen in figure 5. A military airplane used against the aliens now lies crashed underneath the advancing enemy UFOs.



Fig. 5. Did We Do Something Wrong? Still from *The War of the Worlds* (1953). The moment when the aliens start to move and the military has proven to be ineffective against the invaders. Copyright 1953 Paramount Pictures.

In this case, man is outdone by Earth itself, by the bacteria in the natural resources that the aliens intended to take over. Nature was more resourceful than humans and found a way around, or possibly through, their defenses. The force with which the Earth deals with the alien invaders is a solution that the humans would not have thought of, since their focus lay completely on technology. In the end it is Earth's bacteria that wield the force to save humans as well as Earth, with the voice over explaining that humans had already "long since become immune" (*The War of the Worlds* 1953) to those bacteria. In a way this film functions as a confirmation of the Gaia theory, as expressed by James Lovelock (Kirchner), that Earth as a "self-regulating organism" (*OED* "Gaia") is capable of saving itself.



Fig. 6. Goodbye Cruel World. This screenshot is from a scene at the end of *The War of the Worlds* (2008). At this point the aliens have already ingested Earth bacteria and are now dying from them since they have no resistance to them. As is visible the eyes have gone a cloudy and murky color, whereas earlier they were a shiny and clear black. Copyright 2008 Paramount Pictures.

A point of interest, though, is that in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* from 2008 the point of view that the Earth can save itself through self regulation is partly contradicted. This film seems to take the point of view that when mankind is allowed to freely continue with their chosen path of pollution and destruction they will ultimately disrupt the balance that nature needs to remain self regulating, something which Helen Benson expresses in distress as soon as she figures out what Klaatu's true intentions are. "You came to save the Earth from us." This statement very much shows that, together with her earlier assumption that saving the Earth meant saving mankind as well, Earth and humanity are seen as belonging together. However, Klaatu makes the distinction quite clear when he tells Helen Benson that:

This planet is dying. The human race is killing it. ... We can't risk the survival of this planet for the sake of one species. ... If the Earth dies, you die. If you die, the Earth survives. There are only a handful of planets in the cosmos that are capable of supporting complex life. ... This one can't be allowed to perish. ... We'll undo the

damage you've done and give the Earth a chance to begin again. (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008)

This film appears to argue that it might possibly be better were the human race to become extinct, since the only thing they appear to be able to do is destroy their own living environment. What becomes clear quite strongly is that, in this case, mankind is not capable of saving itself. In this sense Klaatu comes to Earth in the function of an alien messiah, since he comes here with a message that could save mankind if it were only prepared to listen. This situation is in a way strongly similar with that of Jesus. He came to earth with a message for the general good, but people were still unwilling to listen to him. Both versions of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* present the viewer with a message of salvation through a rather theological approach in the use of imagery and certain themes. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* shows that there is a very strong need for external intervention, something which Jung explains in *Flying Saucers*. "In the threatening situation of the world today, when people are beginning to see that everything is at stake, the projection creating fantasy soars beyond the realm of earthly organizations and powers into the heavens, into interstellar space, where the rulers of human fate, the gods once had their abode in the planets. Our earthly world is split into two halves, and nobody knows where a helpful solution is to come from" (14). In the case of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1953) Klaatu comes with a warning. In the 2008 version Klaatu tries to convey the warning, but finds that nobody wants to listen, causing him to put in motion the destruction of mankind.

The Christian minded theology that is present in both films appears to be strongest in the 2008 remake. Klaatu embodies the messiah role in more ways than just being a messenger. After initially having set the destruction process in motion, which takes the form of a big cloud of tiny insect like creatures that devour everything they sweep across, he also stops the destruction of everything on Earth. In order to stop the storm he has to walk out into

the storm in order to get to the orb that functions as his space ship and also as kill switch for the destruction cloud. This strengthens his messianic appearance since he sacrifices his body in order to stop the entire process, something which does not seem to come easy to him. It is quite clearly seen that Klaatu is struggling at the winds that are raging around him and are also destroying the human body he inhabits. Near the orb he is forced onto his knees and reaches out to the orb and touches it just in the nick of time, shortly before his body would have been destroyed and with his body his mind and spirit as well. After the storm has died down, Helen and her son Jacob watch the orb, and with it Klaatu, ascend into the skies and ultimately space. This simultaneously fuses the story of Jesus' ascension unto heaven after having been taken off the cross and also Jung's notion of Klaatu returning there where humans seek explanation for what happens in tough and stressful times (*Flying Saucers* 14).

However, there is another way of looking at the situation as presented. There indeed does not appear to be any question about the fact that humans indeed need to be saved, though a distinction needs to be made. On the one hand there is the type of situation in which humans need to be saved from themselves by someone else, as is shown in the 1953 version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, or there is the situation that mankind saves itself from its own bad actions and decisions. The 2008 version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* mostly seems to fall in the category of the latter. After all, it was Helen Benson who was the cause for the change of mind Klaatu had, who was the only person who had complete control over the process. Helen changed Klaatu's mind in the manner that Professor Barnhardt, the Nobel prize winning scientist with whom Klaatu discusses the future of the Earth, had advised her: "Change his mind. Not with reason, but with yourself" (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008). This seems to imply that mankind has the power to save itself, if only it really wants to and as long as there is at least one person willing to put a lot of effort into it. This shows the attitude of complete faith in mankind's own power that Jung writes: "Belief in this world and in the

powers of man has, despite assurances to the contrary, become a practical and, for the time being, irrefragable truth” (Jung, *Flying Saucers* 22). And it is this trust mankind has in its own powers that seems to extend to the fact that, despite that they are causing destruction themselves, they can also turn things around, something which Bertrand Russell also mentions in *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*: “Our present courses lead inevitably, sooner or later, to the extinction of the human species. We are not *doomed* to persist in the race towards disaster. Human volitions have caused it, and human volitions can arrest it” (28).

Bertrand Russell brushes upon the other side of how saving can be accomplished, namely by active human intervention. There are manners of saving that are represented as a force for survival, possibly salvation as well, presented in alien invasion films. These films show several different ways in which this saving can be accomplished, which is going to be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: The Force of Force: What can the Military Do?

An aspect of alien invasion films that is present in each film, is the fact that people seem to think that solutions that worked in the past will also work in the future. This might cause them to apply a type of force that could possibly be ineffective or inappropriate to a new situation, something which might lead to harmful situations, as Simone Weil points out in her essay. “In this work [*The Iliad*], at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to” (Weil 6). Alien invasion films show several different types of force that helped save certain situations in the past, or at least these films show what is thought of as being capable of saving. Simone Weil seems to have a rather different view from that which is being shown in alien invasion narratives. “The human race is not divided up, in the *Iliad*, into conquered persons, slaves, suppliants, on the one hand, and conquerors and chiefs on the other. In this poem there is not a single man who does not at one time or another have to bow his neck to force” (Weil 11). There is a rather large discrepancy between what Weil thinks and what alien films show. It seems that it is necessary to determine whether or not those forces from the films are indeed capable of saving and how feasible it actually is.

One of the forces that is presented by many alien invasion films as having the capability to save mankind from an invasion is also a force that has precedence in history and can be viewed as a rather classical force. In the past, both recent and longer ago, the American military machine has saved the world from several threats and invasions. Amongst these are for instance the Nazis, communist Russia and Vietnam. A more recent example could be Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. With a significant number of the battles connected to the examples victory was won by the American military. Such a list of victories gives enough reason for people to assume that whatever type of threat will come next, the American military will be able to resolve that situation as they did with all those preceding events. Naturally these

victories won by the American military make the Americans very proud of their soldiers. These two reasons taken together, provide sufficient reason for the fact that the military seems to appear in almost each film made about alien invasion on United States sovereign soil. The military are seen as holding an exemplary function and their actions are seen in a similar manner, something which is represented in one way or another in most alien films. An example can for instance be seen in *The War of the Worlds*. In the 1953 version the American military is the first to surround the aliens before they start to spread, and General Mann, communications liaison to Washington who is present at the scene of impact, remarks that “[W]e will have chance to observe them. This is the only place we have had time to surround them with sufficient force to contain them. What happens here will be a guide to other operations” (*The War of the Worlds* 1953). Despite the fact that it becomes clear quite soon after General Mann’s remark that the military is effectively useless against the alien invaders, what can be read in the General’s remark is that the American military is in the unique position to take the lead again in an attempt to save people from the invaders.

Looking at the role of the military, it can be said that this is the category that shows the most overt similarities with the majority of what Simone Weil discusses in her essay, since it mainly deals with the force of violence and its consequences in the Trojan war. In a first attempt at defining force, Weil shows in her essay that using and applying force usually brings forth more force, violence and ultimately death. “To define force -- it is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all” (Weil 6). What comes forward quite strongly in her essay is that she does not represent warriors as heroes, in the sense that is often seen in alien invasion films, something which is put into words by Dietmer Felber rather succinctly as being “resplendent in star-spangled glory” (Felber 94). “The victor of the moment feels himself

invincible, even though, only a few hours before, he may have experienced defeat; he forgets to treat victory as a transitory thing. ... [C]onquered and conqueror are brothers in the same distress. The conquered brings misfortune to the conqueror, and vice versa” (Weil 15).

Independence Day is a film that seems to contradict what Weil says. Out of all the films that have been used for this thesis, *Independence Day* is the only one that is “so unabashedly militaristic” (Felber 94), and also the only film that shows the military as the force that actively saves the Earth and humanity, despite all the casualties. According to Felber, one of the things this film does is that it “reinvents the imagined community of the nation and pursues a project of reassurance, redemption, rebirth, and restoration of innocence” (Felber 93). In a sense the ultimate ideology, as the Well-Manicured Man says in *The X-Files*, of survival has been achieved. However, something that can also be seen is that around the time *Independence Day* was released, whether this is despite or in spite of *Independence Day*, is that people dying in alien invasion films started to serve as a justification for the killing of the enemy, and that the deaths of a few are necessary to save the many, in a sense a depiction of the Machiavellian principle (*OED* “Machiavellian,” entry A) that the goal justifies the means.



Fig. 7. Size Doesn't Matter. Still from *Independence Day*. The moment right after the American Air Force has taken down one of the many UFOs hovering over Earth. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

In a sense, the way in which America is saved in *Independence Day* appears to be a reflection of a mentality that seems to originate from the Cold War; a mentality that basically means that in order to save, one needs to think in terms of destruction. As Vanderbilt mentions in *Survival City*, “The village, to be saved, had to be destroyed ... the aerial view had revealed the grim truth that the visualization of a city in its entirety was a visualization of a city that could be destroyed; a city that had become, in the intercontinental range and satellite tracking of the Cold War, a target.” (Vanderbilt 65-67). This logic of necessity can be seen in the fact that the President decides to fire a nuclear missile at the aliens as soon as he finds out that the aliens have come to exterminate mankind. The fact that this might cause even more deaths is regretted, but deemed necessary as can be seen in the remark made by General Grey, who is presented as one of the most trustworthy advisors to the President and is at his side throughout almost the entire film: “The major cities are deserted. Civilian casualties should be down to a minimum” (*Independence Day*).

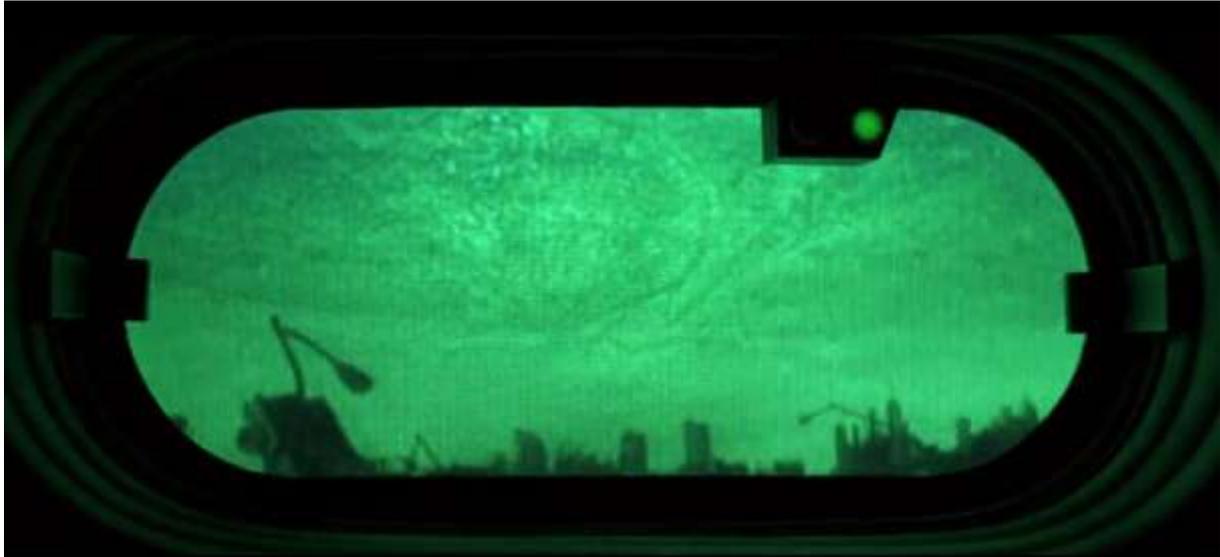


Fig. 8. Falling Out. This still is from the moment just after the nuclear missile has been fired at the UFO, visible in the shot in the curved lines in the green screen. The stumps at the bottom are what is left of the city. The green color of the view gives an extra ominous and unhealthy look to the situation. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

A similar attitude towards the loss of life in general can be seen in other films after *Independence Day* as well. One of the most clear differences can be seen in the 2005 remake of *The War of the Worlds*. There is a significant difference in the story the voice over tells at the end of the 2005 version of *The War of the Worlds* as compared to the 1953 version. In the new film there is an addition to the text, which mirrors this new attitude and change of mind, despite the fact that the victory was not won by the military. “By the toll of a billion deaths man had earned his immunity, his right to survive among this planet’s infinite organisms. And that right is ours against all changes, for neither do men live, nor die in vain” (*The War of the Worlds* 2005).

Despite the heroic image of the military that is often displayed, not all alien invasion films have a similar role of hero and savior assigned for the military, or other governmental departments for that matter. The film in which this can be seen most clearly is in *The X-Files: Fight the Future*. Here it is quite clearly and definitively shown that the government is not to be trusted and that includes all of its executive branches, those bureaus and agencies that put into action what is being thought up by the government. The sense in which military force is applied here is not by directly exercising violence, but apparently by covering up the bad or

evil things committed by others. For instance, when Agents Scully and Mulder want to examine bodies that were found after the bombing of a building, there is a soldier at the entrance to the morgue who denies them access to the bodies. As it later turns out, those bodies were ones infected with the alien virus and also looked rather slimy. In this instance the military is preventing the truth from emerging. It needs to be said, though, that in the case of *The X-Files*, the culprits are usually non-military people. The film gives the impression that high-ranking people within the FBI, people such as the Cigarette-Smoking Man, are the ones who are forcing situations, one way or another, to let their own plans succeed. In this sense *The X-Files* reinforces the image that the government is not to be trusted, something which is described by Seymour Martin Lipset as being a quintessential American character trait (Lipset 21).

Returning to Weil's earlier argument (15), what comes forward quite strongly in her essay is that she does not represent warriors as heroes, in the sense that soldiers are often represented in alien invasion films. This point of view is rather different from what *Independence Day* shows, though she has a valid point when she mentions that "[F]orce in its grossest and most summary form – [is] the force that kills" (Weil 7). Whatever the government decides to do in the film, it will eventually always lead to casualties, whether those are human or extra-terrestrial. And that is, according to Weil, a point where they are entering a dangerous area of reasoning. Violence is no longer presented as something that is best to be avoided, lest people should forget that they are dealing with life. "He who does not realize to what extent shifting fortune and necessity hold in subjection every human spirit, cannot regard as fellow-creatures nor love as he loves himself those whom chance separated from him by an abyss" (Weil 28). After all, those aliens are nonetheless living creatures, despite the fact that they want to exterminate the humans, which is not much different from what humans have tried to do to each other from time to time. The force of death and

destruction seem to have become so common that the flipside of it is no longer presented to us as Weil does, as something bitter and harmful. The blowing up of the alien mother ship could also be seen as a form of genocide, since during the film it is made clear that the mother ship carries the entire civilization with it. Naturally, this notion is something that carries little weight with it in Hollywood, since there are plans to start producing *Independence Day 2*, though these plans are still in the early stages and leaves much open for speculation.

Another point that needs to be addressed is how feasible it is that the military keep on winning all the battles that are thrown at them in alien films. Simone Weil uses *The Iliad* as a specific example to discuss aspects of warfare, but these aspects she singles out can also be applied to any other war or battle. This also means that what she says is applicable to America. Taking out the specific references to Troy and the poem, Weil's quote would then read "The human race is not divided up . . . into conquered persons, slaves, suppliants, on the one hand, and conquerors and chiefs on the other. . . there is not a single man who does not at one time or another have to bow his neck to force" (Weil 11). Keeping this in mind, it would seem that it is highly unlikely that America will always be able to resolve any apparent problem by using military force, since it might as easily turn on them as they would have used it on others, both in real life and in films as well.

However, military force is not the only type of force presented in alien invasion films as having the capability to save. One of the other types of force that is presented is that of science, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The Force of Science

Another force that is often supplied as being capable of the act of saving and which also has precedence in American history, is rational thinking and, most importantly, science. As Gerard DeGroot mentions in his book *The Dark Side of the Moon: The Magnificent Madness Of The Lunar Quest*, in the 1950s science, along with things such as television and cinema, was on the rise and everything seemed possible.

Science and progress were thought to be two sides of the same coin. Some people were anxious about what emerged from the laboratory, but most celebrated the new age of technology. The future promised revolutions in communication, medicine, engineering. Atomic physicists boasted of nuclear cars, submarines, and rockets. People would be made healthier, cities safer, and houses cleaner by the fruits of science. (DeGroot 10)

Not even the sky was going to be the limit any longer, because rockets were being developed and the possibility of travelling to outer space, and even possibly some day a trip to the moon, came closer at high speed. Jung adds to DeGroot's observation that: "Belief in this world and in the powers of man has, despite assurances to the contrary, become a practical and, for the time being, irrefragable truth" (*Flying Saucers* 22). Naturally this statement needs to be seen in the historical context in which it was written, several decades ago. Since Jung wrote this text science has made many discoveries and still holds a lot of promise for the future, though it has also become quite clear that science has its limitations and is not capable of solving everything. However, it appears that the attitude from the early 50s, as described by DeGroot earlier, has become incorporated in alien invasion films and is still being presented as one of the forces that is capable of and will ultimately help save mankind and the planet it lives on.

Science, the type defined by the *OED* in entry 5.b as "Natural and Physical Science", is the kind of science that DeGroot appears to have in mind which is also presented as being

capable of saving in alien invasion films. A clear example of this can for instance be seen in the film *The Invasion*, the 2007 remake of the classic *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). “Somebody finally realized there’s a war going on and the only way we’re gonna win it is in a lab” (*The Invasion* 2007).



Fig. 9. You're Breaking Up. Still from *The Invasion* (2007). Doctor Galeano shortly after his arrival at the Fort Detrick laboratory. Here he is about to start working on developing a cure. Copyright 2007 Warner Bros. Pictures.

This statement is made by Dr. Stephen Galeano, an American doctor. In this film the space shuttle Patriot crashes back onto Earth shortly after its launch, though it did leave Earth’s orbit shortly. In that short time some type of bacteria attaches itself to the shuttle. The bacteria is spread over a wide area, since the shuttle breaks apart during re-entry of the atmosphere. Once people get the bacteria into their system through ingestion, for instance by projectile vomiting into the face of non-infected people, or via blood infection, the bacteria takes over their bodies and those people become emotionless, they are capable only of pure rational thinking and acting. The infected people then start to work towards spreading the alien bacteria among as many people as possible. Carroll Bennell, the protagonist, discovers early

on in the infection process, along with many other people, that acquaintances are behaving strangely, that those people are not themselves. Together with her friends and doctors Ben Driscoll and Stephen Galleano, she uncovers what is happening. Stephen goes to Fort Detrick to help find a cure, while Ben and Carroll go look for Carroll's son Oliver who might hold the key to a cure because they suspect him to be immune. Ultimately the cure is found and the virus is eradicated.

The first two versions of the film differ from the latest remake on several points. The start of the first two versions of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* from 1956 and 1978 is similar to the 2007 remake. The first difference is in how the infection or take over starts. After the spores land on Earth, pods start growing; pods that eventually take over human bodies. In both earlier versions people start noticing changes in those around them, changes that inspire anxiety and fear in everybody, especially in the protagonists who discover what is actually going on. The manner in which each film continues and ends is different. The 1956 version has an open ending. The pods are still being spread by the people who have already been taken over, but Miles Bennell escapes from the village where it started and has a chance to warn some people, at which point the film ends. The 1978 version has a much more definite ending. In this version the protagonists keep in fighting the take over as long as they can, but ultimately almost everybody is taken over. The film ends with a scene that has become well known for its dark ending, a darkness that is quite unlike most other Hollywood film endings. At the end of the film Nancy, the friend of Donald Sutherland's character Matthew Bennell, appears to be the only person who has not yet been taken over by a pod. In a completely empty plaza, which emphasizes her loneliness, she sees Matthew walking by. Hoping that she is not the only uninfected person left, and because she trusts Matthew, she walks up to him, in the hope that he has not yet been taken over. However, he has already been taken and he reveals her to the other infected people by the silent scream.



Fig. 10. You There! Donald Sutherland as Matthew Bennell revealing Nancy by the silent scream. Copyright 1978 Twentieth Century Fox.

The type of medical inventiveness that is shown by the example from *The Invasion* is, as DeGroot mentions, what people trusted, and also still think that science is capable of always solving a problem. The 1956 and 1978 version appear to be somewhat closer to reality, in the sense that they represent science as being fallible, partly because of chance, but most importantly because its human practitioners are fallible. This can, for instance, also be seen in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951 and 2008). These films show distrust towards those in charge, similarly to that in *The X-Files*, is necessary because of the use to which those leaders put science. In both films science and scientists are used to subdue and control the alien Klaatu and to try and make him do what is decided for him by human leaders. In the 2008 version the scientist Michael Granier, a friend of Helen Benson, vehemently opposes the plans of the Secretary of Defense and refuses to cooperate. It appears that this scene is meant to show that scientists, and by extension science as well, are trustworthy and are ethically just in their use of science.

The scientists are also more accessible than politicians, or at least Professor Barnhardt is, which by extension almost automatically makes all scientists appear more trustworthy. In a way it seems that scientists are seen, or are at least presented as, being the more trustworthy leaders of the world since these are people that are more easily accessible and who are

presented as thinking about the better good for all society. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) Klaatu expresses his regret to Helen Benson at the fact that he couldn't speak to the world's leaders, which the film at first implies to be politicians:

Klaatu: I've tried to reason with you, I tried to speak with your leaders.
 Helen Benson: But those aren't our leaders. You wanna speak to one of our leaders, I'll take you to one. Let me take you. (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008)

Subsequently, Helen takes Klaatu to Professor Barnhardt, an American scientist who has won the Nobel prize for his work in biological altruism. Scientists seem to be the only people in the films who still have an open mind and are capable of seeing what is being done to the planet and see what we are doing to each other. They are the kind of leaders that are still accessible to talk to. The political leaders of all nations in both films are inaccessible, mostly due to the fact that the people around the President of the United States, seem to have an intense distrust of any foreign, weird or unknown person or entity who wants to talk to the President or any other leader. This shows an intense distrust of anyone who has similar or more advanced technology than humans do, since humans expect a human reaction which would imply that the technologically advanced party would attack. As Nagel explains in his essay "What is it like to be a bat?" why it is as good as impossible to understand or know what it would be like to be a different organism.

Our own [human] experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited. ... In so far as I can imagine this [being a bat] (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task. (Nagel 439)

As Nagel seems to imply, humans expect something with which they are familiar since they cannot know what another species might think or want. This is very vividly illustrated by what the Secretary of Defense points out in the film. “History has lessons to teach us about first encounters between civilizations. As a rule, the less advanced civilization is either exterminated or enslaved. I’m thinking of Pizarro and the Incas, Columbus and the Native Americans, the list goes on. Unfortunately in this case, the less advanced civilization is us” (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008).

The trust in science, as implied earlier by Jung (*Flying Saucers* 22), is not always completely justified. An interesting view on the trust in science, the fallibility of science and the impossibility for people to know or understand what it is that a different species might want from or do to humans, can be seen in *Mars Attacks!* (1996). In this film beings from Mars come to Earth and land in an American desert for reasons unknown. An American scientist develops an apparatus to communicate with the aliens at the request of the President. When the aliens are asked for their reason of coming here, they state that they come in peace, though after this statement they start to torch and kill everything and anyone in sight. One of the conclusions that can be drawn is that something went wrong with the machine. By further deduction this would mean that the assumption that science can solve any type of problem, of which communication would appear to be one of the biggest problems, is wrong. The fact that science and scientists can get it so overtly wrong should make people question whether their trust in science is not somewhat misplaced. For it seems that as a force for saving, science still seems to be too dependent on variable circumstances over which no control can really be exerted. Also, science is still being conducted by humans and humans are still prone to make mistakes every now and again.

Thinking about the example used earlier, of the ethical objections the character Michael Granier has to drugging Klaatu senseless, show a situation from which could be

deduced that science is something quite like the bible, it is open to interpretation and can be used to achieve different end results. Science can be seen as being neutral natured. Drugs could be used to heal someone, but they could also be used to, as was the intention with Klaatu, force people to do what someone else has in mind for them.

A good example of the neutrality of science and the non-neutral use to which science is often put, can be seen in the development of rockets. “It isn’t faith that makes good science, Mister Klaatu. It’s curiosity” (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 1951). As Professor Barnhardt mentions to Klaatu, curiosity can indeed lead to new knowledge and inventions. However, it is also possible that the opposite is achieved by it. For instance, in the case of Wernher von Braun the scientific development of his rockets started because his curiosity was aroused by science fiction books in his youth (DeGroot 13). The continuation of his curiosity, however, is not so innocent. In order to get funding for development he started working together with the Nazis. The end result was that many people, the workforce came from concentration camps, died because of the appalling working conditions. Apart from the less than salubrious beginnings of the German rocket, the research already executed was something which would later be used and extended on by the Americans. Soon after rockets became reliable, another concern was added after it became clear that nuclear missiles could be produced.

The concerns about the immense destructive capabilities and the lack of trust in the political executive people can be seen expressed by what Klaatu mentions to Professor Barnhardt.

We know from a scientific observation that your planet has discovered a rudimentary kind of atomic energy. We also know that you’re experimenting with rockets. . . . So long as you were limited to fighting among yourselves with your primitive tanks and aircraft we were unconcerned. But soon one of your nations will apply atomic energy

to space ships. That will create a threat to the peace and security of other planets. (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 1951)

Though this argument might come last, it is certainly not the least in importance. The role chance and luck play in the scientific solutions that solve the alien invasion problem, needs to be taken into account. It might not be the first thing that will be noticed amidst all the action that takes place in such a film, but it is important nonetheless. Science is not the completely fail safe solution that people want it to be. Quite often the string of events that lead to human victory in any alien invasion narratives is unlikely and improbable because of the amount of luck that is needed and chance discoveries that are done. Such a situation can be seen in for instance *Independence Day*. As David mentions about his discovery, which is seen as something resembling a stroke of genius by everyone: “All I did was stumble onto their signal.” If David had been sick that day and had to stay at home, or had he actually found a job worthy of his MIT education, he would not have found the signal and the film would have ended rather differently.

What can be concluded is that, indeed science has the inherent ability to solve any kind of problem that gets thrown its way. Science has the capability to do many great things, but also many terrible things can happen because of it. In alien invasion films science is usually put to good use, to advance mankind’s welfare in the sense that it helps save them from dying or being annihilated or taken over. However, science cannot always save every situation. The amount of luck needed in achieving human victory over the alien, can for instance be seen in the large amount of sloppy or reckless actions executed by the protagonists, illustrated by the infected Carroll Bennell who enters a locked down, contagion free area knowing full well that this might jeopardize all chances of success.

However, sometimes human victory over the alien invaders is actively brought about by something or someone alien, in the sense of being other and different from that which

everybody is focusing on. This aspect of the force of the other will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Force of the Other

The first white, Christian Anglo-Saxon settlers came to America because they were seen as other and unacceptable by society in Europe. It was that same attitude that drove those people out of Europe towards possible freedom in the New World, was continued by the settlers rather quickly after their arrival, as Ronald Takaki argues in his book *A Different Mirror: A History Of Multicultural America*. In this book Takaki discusses the colonization of America with specific emphasis on how different ethnic groups assimilated into American society. He shows that throughout American history the attitude of those first Anglo-Saxons was perpetuated, by making being white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant the standard of acceptance. Takaki calls this

the Master Narrative of American History. According to this powerful and popular but inaccurate story, our country was settled by European immigrants, and Americans are white. ‘Race,’ observed Toni Morrison, has functioned as a ‘metaphor’ necessary to the ‘construction of Americanness’: in the creation of our national identity, ‘American’ has been defined as ‘white.’ Not to be ‘white’ is to be designated as the ‘Other’ – different, inferior, and unassimilable. The Master Narrative is deeply embedded in our mainstream culture. (Takaki 4)

What Takaki emphasizes is that to be different is to be bad and unacceptable, basically to be worthless and not worthy of notice. However, as American history itself can show, it is exactly that group of people designated as the ‘Other’ that was the biggest driving force behind the growth and success of America as a nation. Slavery, for example, was instrumental in the rapid growth and success that came relatively shortly after settlers had started to come to the New World. The slaves working in the plantations provided the necessary labor to produce all the merchandise that yielded a lot of riches.

This too, though in a rather different context, is true for the characters of alien invasion films that are usually defined and branded as the 'Other' it would seem. There are different types of otherness to be seen in alien invasion. For instance, in the early days of film the actors that appeared on screen were almost without exception white, and mostly male. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* from 1951 not one ethnic minority, such as African American, Asian American or Mexican, is seen throughout the entire film. There is only one woman, Helen Benson, who receives a relatively large amount of screen time. In *The War of the Worlds* from 1953, only one Mexican appears on screen, but is killed early on in the film. He is hit by one of the aliens' rays and the only thing left of him is a grey body shaped outline on the ground. This again leaves only white people on screen. In later alien invasion films ethnic minorities appear more often on screen, become more balanced with white skinned actors. However, the fact that more ethnic minorities appear on screen, does not mean that they are instantly portrayed as the good guys that are seen as part of the group. To use a familiar example, *Independence Day* is such a film in which this becomes apparent. The first thing that can be noticed is that the President and the General Gray, both high ranking people in the government, clearly correspond to the image of white Anglo Saxon males that are seen as a part of the 'us' group. On the other hand there are Captain Steven Hiller, air force pilot, and David Levinson, MIT graduate and cable repairman. These two people are respectively of African American and Jewish descent. The obviously visible social difference and division shows that, despite the great progress that has been made between publication of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), and *Independence Day* (1996), society is still very much hanging on to the what Takaki earlier called the Master Narrative.

Looking at alien invasion narratives, the importance of the other is not something that initially attracts the attention, since the arrival of the aliens attracts all the attention. Lucanio's discussion of the different stages of a film that pass the viewer by on screen, seems to

illustrate this. A few of the steps that he outlines as being the standard pattern that alien invasion narrative follow are for instance

“ (1) Someone, usually the scientist hero, sees the invader appear on earth. (2) The observer, is not believed by those he tells; in many instances he is mocked and scorned. (3) Unexplained happenings occur, such as bizarre killings, people disappearing, and/or large scale destruction. (4) Society searches for rational explanations for the strange occurrences, but the observer’s explanations are rejected as unreasonable. (5) The scientist hero begins a lonely battle against the invader and the mocking society. The scientist is determined to save society in spite of itself.”

(Lucanio 25)

Lucanio mentions a few more steps, and all these steps taken together do seem to acknowledge a certain estrangement from society where it concerns the protagonist. However, Lucanio does not seem to fully realize or has overlooked the nature of that estrangement, that in many alien invasion films the protagonist is in some way almost always portrayed as the other. Diving a little deeper into the films, it becomes clear that the role of the Other, as defined and shaped specifically by American society, within the alien invasion narrative is crucial in solving the invasion problem and saving mankind.

Unlike what might initially be expected, ethnic minorities are not the only group to be displayed as being the Other in alien invasion films. White main characters, especially when they are going to be instrumental in alerting the world or providing the solution to the alien invasion, are portrayed as the other in some way. The first version of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* features a protagonist who, when ignoring the introductory scenes, can initially not be described as belonging to the category of otherness. The protagonist is Miles Bennell, a white man and a doctor, working in a small American town with people who seem to hold him in high regard. However, at the start of the film he is already positioned as being different

from general society, because he acts and appears to be mad. His message, he tries to warn the world about the threat of an alien invasion, sounds rather crazy and no one seems to want to believe it.



Fig. 11. But I Don't Want to Go Home. At the start of the film Dr. Bennell, the person in the middle, is mistakenly seen for somebody who has had a mental meltdown. Copyright 1956 Allied Artists Picture Corporation.

When a white Anglo-Saxon character is not portrayed as the other, he, or indeed she, is not going to be instrumental in solving the alien problem in any way. Out of the films used for this essay there is only one where the protagonist of the film is depicted as a sane and successful person throughout the entire film. In *The War of the Worlds* (1953) Clayton Forrester, a white, Anglo Saxon, university educated, Christian male has gained much acclaim with his scientific work and has even appeared on television.



Fig. 10. Hello There. This is a scene where Forrester meets Sylvia, his love interest in the film, for the first time. Though he looks somewhat like David from *Independence Day*, there is a clear difference in how Forrester is portrayed in the film. He is actively described and treated as a much respected scientist. Copyright 1953 Paramount Pictures.

As the protagonist in the film, he does not seem to fit the description of being the other very well. Though this seems to fit in with the trend very well, since, strictly speaking, Forrester does not provide the eventual answer that solves the problem of the alien invasion. It is Earth bacteria that kill the aliens and put a stop to the invasion. And bacteria are, despite their necessity in life, also the type of organisms that are generally seen as unwanted and could be typified as other. However, Forrester has more screen time than the bacteria do, therefore he is the person that leaves the strongest, actively heroic, impression.

In most films, the other is usually the one who has the voice of reason and is always at first completely ignored, sometimes even ridiculed. This is something Weil comments on in her essay. “[W]ords of reason drop into the void. If they come from an inferior, he is punished and shuts up; if from a chief, his actions betray them” (45). Words of reason in alien invasion films never really seem to come from any kind of leader, not until after the protagonist with the inferior social status has been able to convince them. It seems that such a situation can be seen depicted in *Independence Day*, where even the protagonist’s father does not want to believe him at first. David Levinson, the person who finds part of the solution to the alien invasion problem, tries to convey the importance of his message to his father Julius, who is enormously skeptical. They are on their way to the White House after David has found the hidden alien signal inside the satellites and wants to warn the government.

Julius Levinson: You think they don't know what you know? They know, believe me, they know. She works for the President, they know everything.

David Levinson: They don't know this.

Julius Levinson: Oooh, ooh, you're gonna educate them huh? So tell me something, you're so smart, how come you spend 8 years in MIT, to become a cable repair man? All I'm saying is they got people to handle these things. They want HBO, they call you.

(Independence Day)

It can be seen as an example of how the concept of the other seems to operate on two different levels. The first is on that of David's ethnic heritage, he is Jewish, and the second is in his deviation from standard, society accepted paths for people to take in their lives; of going to college and getting some well paid job, which is a path in life David did not take.

Julius' remarks are also an example of how people generally seem to think in and about situations of threat. The idea is that there are some very clever people somewhere, the traditional hero type, with all the proper credentials, someone who will have done all the proper things in life, who will save the day and will do it without breaking a sweat.



Fig. 13. Looking the Part. This still shows the moment when David is explaining how the aliens can be defeated. In essence that makes him a hero, especially because the plan works. In this picture he looks more like a somewhat confused person than somebody who thinks of how to slay the enemy. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

The other hero from *Independence Day*, Steven, is an African-American. African Americans have almost become one of the consummate others in American society, and are still seen as such despite improvement in their civil rights. This background of adversity and position of otherness seems to give Steven a fighting spirit that is seen to be overtly lacking in for instance the Secretary of Defense, a white man, who is at some point even called “a sniveling little weasel” by the President. Even though Steven is rejected by NASA several times, he get his chance to fly a UFO into outer space, something no one else has had the chance to do, would have the guts to do or would probably even be capable of doing. It is not the same type of fresh perspective as David has, but it is the type of out-of-the-box thinking, frontier exploration attitude, that eventually helps kill the aliens and save the Earth and mankind.



Fig. 14. Can I Get a Lift. Still from *Independence Day*. In this picture Steven Hiller is dragging the alien in his parachute through a scorching hot desert. The line of specks on the horizon is a group of Caravan drivers that will later give him a lift. This screenshot shows a strong visual separation between the protagonist and the rest of the group, even if that group consists of people living in trailers. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.

Usually the situation that people need saving from is not something they are willing to let go of without a fight. In this sense a fresh perspective can be provided by someone who can have an open mind to a message that they need to hear whilst not really wanting to hear it, of being able to hear what is necessary. This can for instance be seen in the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, especially in the 2008 remake. After the alien Klaatu has landed he tries to convey a message but people are not listening. Regina Jackson, the Secretary of Defense, actively blocks his access to the United Nations meeting and tries to resolve things in a traditional manner, drugging and interrogating the perceived enemy, and does not listen to what Klaatu wants. She does what she feels and believes to be necessary, which is to keep him in custody and to try and make him tell her what he intended to tell to the United Nations assembly. Helen Benson, the main character of the film, is willing to listen to the creature without preconceived notions of fear or trying to keep her own status quo, something which the Secretary of Defense does do. Women are, despite feminism and betterment in civil rights over the past few decades, still quite often seen as other. Despite her gender, in this situation Regina Jackson can be seen as representing white, Anglo Saxon protestant majority, and Helen Benson as the other, despite the fact that she teaches and researches astrobiology. The

cause for Helen's difference is because she is a widowed woman, who is also stepmother to a young African-American boy. At some point in the film Helen pleads with Regina Jackson to let her try and change Klaatu's mind.

Regina Jackson: He's come here to exterminate us hasn't he?

Helen Benson: You can't stop him. The only chance we have is if he changes his mind. You have to let me talk to him

Regina Jackson: What makes you think he'll listen to you?

Helen Benson: I don't know that he will, but I think that he trusts me. And I don't think that he wants to do this.

Regina Jackson: We have the situation under control. (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008).

The Secretary of Defense seems to have closed her mind to the possibility that things aren't the way she thinks they are, whereas Helen Benson has an open mind to other possibilities and is trying to get this across to the secretary.

What might be concluded from the aforementioned examples, is that the possible reason for a person who is classified as the Other to come up with the solution might be because people accepted by society seem to be stuck in the same way of thinking and acting. They seem to be unable to think outside the box. However, it seems that the people who are in some way or other ostracized by society are capable of this. In a sense these outsider heroes are like agent Mulder from *The X-Files*. Where agent Mulder is looking for explanations in the uncanny out of sheer conviction, something which has gained him the nickname "Spooky", the protagonists from other alien invasion films have learned that there is more to life than what the general population does or thinks, that there are other ways of looking at or dealing with life. Protagonists such as David, Steven and Helen find solutions by approaching the conventional range of possible explanations and solutions from a different angle.

Being an outsider and being ostracized by society must be very frustrating. However, it is that frustration that might prove to be the biggest motivator to want to strive for something better. Frustration is not the only emotion that might serve as fuel for someone's motivation. Every emotion could basically serve as a motivating force, which is something that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The Force of Emotion

When thinking about emotion as a force, at first it does not seem to have much precedence in American history, or at least not as overtly as science, the military and otherness have. In trying to find out how emotion as a saving force has precedence, it might be best to start at the beginning. In its definition of force, the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not mention much about emotion in connection with force. Entry 7.a of the definition of force states: “Of things (in non-material or moral relations): Power to influence, affect, or control (*esp.* men in their actions, sentiments, etc.). *to have force (to do)*: to avail” (*OED*). Emotion in this respect can be seen as something that is forceful, but it does not clarify in which way it does so, what effect it might have as a motivation for certain actions. Emotion can, for instance, be the motivating force to kill and destroy, but it can also do the complete opposite. It can inspire to persevere, to want to survive, help others survive and subsequently save them. Emotion has a strong presence in humans, and given the right circumstances, love can have the capability to save. It might even be said that especially love is a very strong motivator in situations of threat since it makes a person want to succeed, probably more than that person would want to in a non-threatening situation. In this sense it also has a strong connection with America in the sense of, for instance, America being a meritocratic society. One of America’s most well known and characteristic traits is that of the American Dream. The specifically American ideal is known over the entire world, it is one of the things that helps create the image of America as the land of golden opportunities. Even if you are but a shoe salesman or a factory worker, if you want to become the chairman of a multi-billion corporation, you can become just that. As long as you want it enough and are prepared to work hard enough for it, it is possible.

What can be seen very strongly in alien invasion films is that when a threatening situation presents itself, emotion is what gives the impetus to persevere, to try and keep or

regain the status quo. The type of emotion in this sense does not matter much, as long as the emotion is strong and is present. One of the first films that comes to mind where this can be seen is *The Invasion* (2007). In this film the protagonist, Carroll Bennell, tries to save her son at all cost. Despite the fact that it is dangerous for her to go and look for her son Oliver, she still goes into a city where the people infected by the extra-terrestrial bacteria outweigh the uninfected by far. After she has become infected herself, she tries to stay awake at all costs, because when she falls asleep the bacteria will take over her body and she will lose her emotional abilities, and that includes wanting to protect Oliver. In order to keep him from being murdered by the infected people, she is prepared to do things she objected to at various moments throughout the film. She now takes various pills and injects herself with adrenaline to stay awake. She also shoots people in order to keep them away from Oliver, even if that means shooting an infected friend.



Fig. 14. Stop, Or I'll Shoot! Still from *The Invasion*. Carroll Bennell is about to shoot some people who are threatening her and her son. The person she is now aiming at is her newly infected friend Ben Driscoll. Copyright 2007 Warner Bros. Pictures.

She does all of those things regardless, since it will help her achieve her goal. In this respect, a mother's love for her son makes the mother go on despite possible harmful side effects to herself. She is prepared to sacrifice herself for her child if necessary.

In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* the concept of motivation is explored even further. In the 2008 version, Klaatu eventually gets to talk to Professor Barnhardt, a Nobel prize winner and a leader of sorts, who basically says that humans did not save the Earth or themselves before, because they lacked incentive:

Professor Barnhardt: So it was only when your world was threatened with destruction that you became what you are now.

Klaatu: Yes.

Professor Barnhardt: Well, that's where we are. You say we are on the brink of destruction and you are right. But it is only on the brink that people find the will to change, only at the precipice do we evolve. This is our moment. Don't take it from us, we are close to an answer. (*The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008)

This incentive is now given to humans and the implication is made at the end of the film that things will change, though the film in that respect has an open ending and the viewer can never be sure of the outcome. Also, in this film the same type of love that Carroll Bennell has for her son is seen in Helen Benson as well. After the destruction process of Earth has already been put in motion by Klaatu, his mind is altered because of Helen's actions. When Helen sees that she and her son are dying, she pleads with Klaatu to save her son, but makes no reference to herself. It appears that this self-sacrifice is what helped Klaatu change his mind to give humans another chance, it revealed to him something that made it worthwhile to keep humanity alive.

Another aspect that can be seen in alien invasion films is that not having emotions, or having emotion taken away, does not delete the force that emotion has when it is still present. The concept of having no emotions is in a way so different and so alien to the human race that it is difficult to imagine how humans would be able to survive without it, or how we could function. Also, it is something that is unlikely ever to happen in real life. Therefore this situation is similar to what Wessel Fledderus argues about full nuclear warfare in his thesis “Instruments of Enslavement: Force in Nuclear War Literature”, something that has not yet happened.

“[T]he historical uniqueness of nuclear weapons demands a new discourse ... Since they are without historical context and beyond the reach of imagination, nuclear weapons cannot be accurately evaluated. The unparalleled destruction of a nuclear war defies scientific predictions, which can only put forward speculations and beliefs as to what will happen. ... [N]uclear war can only be looked at in text” (Fledderus 3).

This is also applicable to a state of pure rational, emotionless, thinking and acting in humans. It has not yet happened, therefore it will remain open to conjecture speculation. Its depiction in film is therefore often not consistent in the fact that emotions are still visible. This can for instance be seen in how Carroll Bennell’s ex husband reacts in *The Invasion*. He expresses that he had hoped they would be able to form a family again as soon as both Carroll and their son had been taken over by the bacteria. Perhaps he only used the word hope to express a certain idea, and not the feeling that is connected to it. However, his subsequent behavior seems to contradict this, since he becomes strongly enraged as soon as he notices that his plans are not going to work.

There are several other works of fiction, whether those are books or films, that speculate on the paradoxical nature of emotion and its eradication in humans. One of these works of fiction is the film *Equilibrium* (2002). The main idea of this film is that in the future

a serum has been invented that suppresses emotion and has ensured the creation of a peaceful and war free society. However, the danger that looms is when the serum is not taken at regular intervals the person falls back into a state in which he or she is able to feel emotion. In the end this is also the reason that the utopian, emotionless, society falls apart.

The ability to feel the force of emotions such as love and hate appears much more appealing and are much more familiar, it appears that people would do almost anything to be able to retain the choice to pursue a certain course of action or not. Even if that emotion and course of action is that causes problems for mankind. In a sense it appears that to not be able to have that choice seems as if a person's being American is taken away from them. In the instance of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, no matter which version, the absence of emotion seems to as an analogy to no longer being an American. No longer having the choice to work hard or to not seems to be the worst thing that could happen. To Americans the concept of not having that choice is alien, strange in the sense that they do not know what it would be like. To not be American is a frightening concept.

Apparently people would rather hang on to their emotions with all of the attached consequences rather than to take a leap and let go and make the change. In a way this paradox is similar to what Fledderus argues in his thesis. Fledderus mentions the paradox of having nuclear weapons, a paradox that bears remarkable resemblance to the paradox of wanting or not wanting to have emotions. "The existence of nuclear weapons is in itself a paradox, since they are created by those who do not want them. Even worse, they resist disarmament because of their incredible power. Now that they exist, nobody seems able to control them or destroy them, since everyone fears that they will be used against them. ... Since they are without historical context and beyond the reach of imagination, nuclear weapons cannot be accurately evaluated" (Fledderus 2-3). It appears to be unthinkable to America and Americans to not be

able to be what they are, therefore they can but speculate on what that would be like, but such a concept “cannot be accurately evaluated” (Fledderus 3).

Conclusion

The UFO, flying saucer and alien phenomenon is in itself a puzzling concept, though a concept that seems to be inextricably connected with America and Americans, despite the fact that, as Jung mentions in *Flying Saucers*, they were also spotted in countries other than America. He once wrote to a friend that he found it hard to determine what they might be or what they might indicate about those people who saw them or believed in them. Whatever it was the UFOs and aliens really were and are cannot be said for certain, though what can be made absolutely certain is that this phenomenon of extra-terrestrials and their scientific advancement are things that have become firmly lodged into American popular culture. One of the examples of alien invasion films that was immensely successful over the entire globe was *Independence Day*. This film shows the archetypical image of America as peacekeeper of and policeman to the world. However, this film is not the only one from the alien invasion genre that shows this image. By comparing and contrasting a number of films, it becomes clear that American culture and history play a pivotal role in how these narratives of invasion are told and solved, of how Earth and mankind are saved.

One of the first things that comes forward in alien invasion films, is that precedence as a force plays an immensely important role in how different aspects in these films are portrayed. It seems that most of the forces that are presented in alien invasion films stem from an aspect of American society. Each of the different aspects that is shown in these films as being capable of saving either Earth or humanity, has been, at some point in history, important to America as a country and the Americans as a people.

One of the periods from American history that has been very influential in how alien invasion films are made, and how certain themes are worked into the films, was World War II. Before World War II America kept very much to itself, but after they were drawn into the war, they appeared to turn much more outwards. Due to American intervention the war was

won, and they became seen as the great victors, especially also because after WW II there were more threats and wars in which they got involved and were solved by the Americans. The phenomena of aliens and UFOs were on the rise shortly after WW II for various reasons, probably because those were still uncertain times, as Jung mentions.

Another assumption that seems to stem from the different wars that America has fought and been involved in one way or another, is the fact that both Earth and humanity need to be saved. However, it seems that Earth is perfectly capable of saving itself no thanks to the humans, as can be seen in *The War of the Worlds*, in which is shown that nature wields its own forces for its own survival. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* seems to corroborate this view, though adds to it, that humans seem to impair or hinder the force of nature and keep it from saving itself. Earth would be capable of saving itself only if humans were to change radically or if they were to disappear altogether. The only group that really does need saving, are the humans themselves. There are different ways presented in these films as to how this saving should take place. Either it happens through a messiah type figure, such as Klaatu, or, and this appears to be the most popular and accepted idea, is that humans possess the force and capability to save themselves.

One of the forces that are presented as being capable of saving the Earth and mankind is the military. In the past the Americans have saved the world from Nazi and communist invasions, therefore it is logical that it should be thought that it is capable of saving the day again. However, not each film seems to have the same type of heroic role set apart for the military and its soldiers. Over the decades the different films that were made about alien invasion films seem to have more room for nuance, and it appears that the further away from World War II, the more nuance there is. Some films, such as *Independence Day*, do not hide the fact that they are quite overtly pro-military. On the other hand there are also films in which the military plays a less overt and important part. Sometimes the military is even

portrayed as support for covering up for the bad guys, as can be seen in *The X-Files: Fight the Future*, though it needs to be said that the role of the military in this film is quite small.

Another type of force that saves is science. Around the same time that World War II was resolved, science was on the rise and many of the developments that were happening seemed to promise a better, easier and more comfortable future. From World War II the beginnings of rocket technology emerged, a technology that blossomed under the nurture of the American state and promised to take mankind to the moon someday. People trusted science to be capable to do anything. This trust in the force that science could wield is very strongly mirrored in alien invasion films. It seems that with science on mankind's side, man is capable of overcoming almost each challenge that is presented in these films, despite the fact that science can also be fallible.

The position that people seem to hold who are deemed to be the other, the type of person who does not really fit into general society for one way or another, has a power of its own. The process of othering is something which has precedence in American history that goes a long way back, which can for instance be seen in the origins of racism in America. Being placed outside of society forces a person to look differently at things and to work harder and persevere longer for the things they want to achieve, because those things are harder to achieve for a person who is not fully accepted. Therefore it is almost certain that the person who will provide the answer to alien invasion is deemed as other, such as Steven Hiller, the African-American pilot from *Independence Day*, who volunteers to fly a UFO when that will help save the world.

The last force that is present in each film and is presented as being as being capable of saving the situation almost each time is emotion. Emotion as a force motivates people, to persevere in whatever goal they might want to achieve, as long as that emotion can be applied

to the right situation. In this sense emotion is one of the most time honored traditions of America, the one that means that anything is possible, as long as you want it enough.

One aspect that does not receive as much explicit attention in these films but is quite crucial to the success in saving, is the fact that in all films the Earth and humanity are kept safe by something more than just the previously mentioned aspects from the film. In each film it is shown that there is an inordinate amount of luck and chance needed as well, since there are so many aspects in these films that shows that only the slightest of things have to go wrong and the entire enterprise would be doomed to fail. One of the films that seems to show the most clearly, is *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* by comparing all three remakes. The first shows has an open ending in which the situation can still go both ways. The remake from 1978 shows that how easily the entire human race can be conquered, despite the amount of energy that will be put in fighting against complete take over. In the last remake, however, humanity is saved from being infected, though this happens only in the nick of time. As Simone Weil argues, nobody really possesses or is capable of wielding force, any type of force, for very long despite the fact that people will try to keep force under control. If things go according to plan, it's most likely down to luck or good fortune.

All in all there is a good deal of optimism in these films as is the tradition of the American Dream. What they show is that, in almost each case, the situation can be saved as long as people are prepared to work hard enough and also sacrifice certain things when the time and occasion calls for it. No matter how bad the situation, there is always a way out, and it is most likely that the person showing or helping people to get to the exit will be Americans.

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Fig. 16. Victory is Ours! Still from *Independence Day*. The moment right after David and Steven have returned to Earth after successfully infecting the alien mother ship with a virus and destroying it with a nuclear missile, thus saving Earth and humanity simultaneously. Copyright 1996 Twentieth Century Fox.