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"They Can't Occupy This Country":
A Symbolic Anthropological Approach
To Extraterrestrial Encounter Narratives
In American Culture

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Abstract

The mediums of film and television, both fiction and non-fiction, have significant influence on the construction of modern American culture. In the case of fictional media, public perception and experience is related to symbolic constructions that correspond to non-fiction subjects. In American culture, the extraterrestrial is given cultural significance as a symbol, in certain narrative incarnations, which poses a threat to the American values of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These three values can be encompassed by the ideology of autonomy, and the ET can be seen as an encompassing symbol in opposition to autonomy. American media and culture are the primary focus of this study because, although themes of alien contact and encounter are also embedded in Canada and many other Western nations, the American media and entertainment industries are firmly established, have the broadest reach, and have the most impact worldwide.

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Introduction   **Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness:**
                      America Versus the Alien

> The world at large, nature, the facts of life, whatever they may be,
> are always parts of man's perception of them as that perception is
> formulated through his culture. The world at large is not, indeed
> it cannot be, independent of the way in which his culture formulates
> his vision of what he is seeing. There are only cultural constructions
> of reality, and these cultural constructions of realities are decisive
> in what is perceived, what is experienced, what is understood.
>
> --David Schneider *in* "Notes Toward a Theory of Culture"

The American mediums of film and television, both fiction and non-fiction, have significant influence on the construction of modern American culture. To borrow from Schneider, these media are core to what is perceived, experienced, and understood by the American public. In the case of fictional media, public perception and experience is related to symbolic constructions that correspond to non-fiction subjects. Fiction is a culturally efficient way to explore various facets of human experience through creative and artistic means not confined by the non-fiction constraints of accepted "fact."

The concept of "fact," something which is accepted to be indisputably true, in Western culture is primarily a product of science. Science has been used over the past few hundred years to explain away many previously accepted truths and relegate them to the status of myth. There are, however, facets of human experience that remain outside current scientific factual explanation, such as some types of mental illness, the unexplainable remains of some ancient civilizations, and many aspects of outer-space. These sorts of unexplained phenomena are often the key subjects of fiction precisely because of this position outside 'true' science. The science fiction genre of media utilizes,

if not entirely co-opts, the rhetoric of science in order to create new myths to explain the

unknown and misunderstood aspects of the modern world. Since the characters and

events addressed in fantasy and mysticism have already been explained away by science

and are no longer acceptable tropes to use in explanation of the unknown, the creators of

fiction have adopted the rhetoric of the acceptable, which is hard science, to explore this

unstable terrain: the language and themes, as opposed to the hard facts, of science are

used to create fictional accounts of unexplained phenomena.

One of the tropes which incorporates science to confront the inexplicable is the

phenomenon of human encounters with alien beings from outer space. These encounters

include all forms of contact, from random sightings, to single abductions, to full-scale

planetary invasions. In order to come to terms with the cultural phenomenon of alien

encounters, science fiction (henceforth referred to as SF) appropriates the language and

themes of science in order to explain unusual experiences of what Jodi Dean, in "The

Familiarity of Strangeness: Aliens, Citizens, and Abduction," refers to as 'border

crossings':

> Like fairy lore and religious mythologies, abduction stories describe the
>
> interventions of non-human folk in human lives. They are stories of border
>
> crossings, of everyday transgressions of the boundaries that demarcate the limits
>
> that define reality. As such, in the demystified societies of the present they
>
> provoke skirmishes with the arbiters of the real, with science, law, and the press.
>
> (33)

In American culture, the alien presents a challenge to these 'arbiters of the real,' the institutions of science, government, and the keepers of national identity. The alien is given cultural significance in its narrative incarnations as it poses a threat to these things.

As will be discussed in Chapter One, a major concern in the study of the cultural significance of alien encounters in film and television is related to media influence and the ways in which media represents and perpetuates national ideologies. American media and culture are the primary focus of this study of alien obsession because, although themes of alien contact and encounter are also embedded in Canada and many other Western nations, the American media and entertainment industries are firmly established, have the broadest reach, and have the most impact worldwide. A study of alien encounter themes in Canadian culture and media would perhaps be more limited in terms of examples of experiential narratives in non-fiction media, and certainly in terms of fictional narratives in entertainment media. Since American media is the most pervasive, it potentially has the most influence worldwide. Because of this potential, it is important to understand the ideologies disseminated in American media.

American ideology is epitomized by one word: autonomy. More specifically, the ideology of autonomy is supported by the American motto of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These are the three pillars of the ideology, "the unalienable rights," which have upheld the American ideology of autonomy since the introduction of the Declaration of Independence. To apply the motto to this study, the alien represents a threat to these rights. ET encounter narratives are popular in media because the alien symbolizes that which threatens the integrity of these three pillars of the national motto. It is important to note at this point that this study focuses on ET encounter narratives

wherein the alien represents a threat to the U.S.A. as a nation. More positive narratives of encounter will not be discussed, although they do present other themes encompassed by the alien as symbol, because they are simply beyond the scope of this study. This study is going to look specifically at ET invasions as a vehicle for the American right of passage from semi-autonomous to autonomous state. Every time the U.S.A. overcomes the alien, it reasserts its independence, its autonomy, and the superiority of its ideology. American assertion of autonomy is the main point and focus of this study. The alien is the antithesis of this assertion. It is not surprising how prevalent these themes are, since media, fictional or otherwise, has always been used as an outlet to express and respond to national fears, such as the fear of outside forces, in the U.S.A (Dean 7). Among other things, the alien symbolizes biological weapons and infectious disease, terrorist invasion and colonization by foreign forces, and identity disorders including mental illness and paranoia. All of these occurrences, each having a case precedent in American history, threaten the success of the human species. According to most alien encounter narratives in film and television, *genus Americanus* is the front line of defense. This is because the alien, most simply put, is anything that is in opposition to the American way of life.

These threatening ET encounter narratives make up a complex, and various narrative complexes that carry cultural similarities make up a genre. Genre is developed through repetition of narrative structures. Specific genres, like SF, are often used as marketing tools, as is discussed by David Olsen and John Ramirez in "X-Philes: Imagination of Millennial Anxieties":

> The more recent trend towards cultural studies extends genre criticism's
>
> identifications of characteristic structural and narrative properties that undergrid

science fiction film and television production and marketing. Cultural studies

have enabled the critical dialogue to advance beyond parameters of production

and into the less-charted realm of science fiction's *cultural instrumentality* or the

social uses of its reception, consumption and appropriation. Thus, the study of

science fiction proceeds on two distinct and complimentary fields of inquiry—

what science fiction is as genre and what it does as cultural artifact. (4)

This usage of genre as a marketing tool is linked to the further development of genre

through the production/reception cycle of media consumption. Media consumption is one

aspect of the cultural context of alien encounter narratives in film and television.

In Chapter Two, the theorists and theories of symbolic anthropology are used to

develop a theoretical framework upon which to structure the discussion of ET encounter

narratives in film and television. This chapter applies the theories of Victor Turner, David

Schneider, and Clifford Geertz in a symbolic anthropological approach to ET encounter

narratives in film and television. Part of this approach is the contextualization of the

symbols from the fictional narratives in American culture at large. It can be seen through

symbolic anthropology that the narratives are removed, through symbolic construction,

almost entirely from quotidian reality while still corresponding to occurrences and

experiences based in that reality. Furthermore, these symbols provide a reflection, in

symbolic terms, of the current fears and desires of the society from which they are drawn.

It is important to recognize that alien encounter narratives occur in two major and

very distinct cultural contexts: one, in the context of people's perceived real experiences,

and two, in the context of culturally specific narrative fiction. The existence of the

narratives in two streams is a major part of the cultural contextualization of the symbols

narratives in two streams is a major part of the cultural contextualization of the symbols found in the narratives. Another aspect of contextualization is the historical context of alien encounter narratives as discussed in Chapter Three. Like the cultural context, the historical context is important for a better understanding of the meanings attached to the narratives. First of all, alien encounter narratives occur, as was stated earlier, in two distinct forms: intentionally fictional, and claimed experiential. The historical context of the fictional narratives is embedded in the history of the claimed experiential narratives; the cultural context of the fictional narratives includes all research and debate in the cultural sphere surrounding the experiential narratives, including the blurring of the fiction and non-fiction accounts. This aspect includes the debate surrounding the media's influence on alleged accounts: have these accounts spawned the fiction, or have the accounts been modeled after the fiction? That this debate can take place, that this sphere of discussion can even be open to public discourse, is due to the strong emphasis placed on freedom of thought and speech in American society. Although people are free to tell their stories, often stories of alien encounters are placed on the margins of acceptable topics, believed by some, scoffed at by others. Because of their position between belief and disbelief, these stories form the basis of the development of the modern myths surrounding the alien encounter phenomenon. A major theme of the alien encounter phenomenon is the theme of alien invasions of earth. Within the fictional narratives of ET invasions are found the symbols related to the aliens that threaten Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Firstly, one of the most media pervasive, historically situated, and socially paralyzing fears is the fear of infectious disease, and by extension, biological warfare.

This presents a threat to 'Life,' the first pillar of the American motto, and is the subject of Chapter Four. The alien is characterized in many encounter narratives as a symbol of infectious disease, and is therefore a symbol of fear in opposition to the desire for 'Life,' and as Dean states, the future of humanity: "At a time when talk of the future is ever present, the alien accesses a host of associations with technology, conspiracy, violation, and the changing face of the real. More specifically, alien abduction narratives highlight with particular effect concern about the future of the species" (10). The alien as a symbol for disease can be seen in SF texts such as the films *The X-Files* (1998) and *Dreamcatcher* (2003). Themes of quarantine and genetic engineering for the purpose of biological warfare are also linked to the alien as a symbol of the fear of infection in opposition to the desire for 'Life.'

Secondly, the deeply held value of 'Liberty' has recently been threatened in a very concrete way by the events of September 11, 2001. In Chapter Five, the threat of terrorism is shown to present a threat to 'Liberty.' Fear of invasion, captivity, and colonization is historically and culturally motivated. It follows logically that this fear would be addressed in fiction and non-fiction media. The themes of invasion and terrorist action are indeed primary themes in ET encounter narratives. The alien as an invading, colonizing force is the symbol for the fear of invasion, the threat to 'Liberty,' as can be seen in SF texts such as the films *Independence Day* (1996) and *War of the Worlds* (2005). The alien from outer space is a direct symbol for the alien from another culture or nation; it is not only symbolic of the fear of the unknown, but of the fear of the 'other,' as Dean explains: "Denaturalizing the strange and alien even as it literalizes it, the UFO discourse provides a means for grappling with the foreign unlikely to explain or analyze

abduction accounts, moreover, the closer the alien gets, the more foreign it becomes"
(16). The alien is reduced, as is the terrorist, to an inhuman other. By reducing it, it
becomes easily opposable and easily vilified. Within the narratives the U.S.A. asserts its
strong faith in the ideology of 'Liberty,' and centres itself as the world defender of
freedom.

Finally, issues of identity and how they affect the right to 'The Pursuit of
Happiness' are discussed in Chapter Six. In the context of this study, the pursuit of
happiness is not the pursuit of material gain but the pursuit of personal betterment and the
preservation of autonomous national identity. Individuality is an important part of this
national identity. On the other hand, the alien is shown to be an identity thief, wielder of
mind control technology, and responsible for the American loss of individuality, all of
which can impede the pursuit of happiness. SF texts that include these themes are the
film *The Faculty* (1998), the television series *The X-Files* (1993) and *South Park* (1997),
and the mini-series *Taken* (2002). Themes explored in these alien encounter narratives
include links between identity and hybridization, between identity and mind control,
brainwashing, identity theft, and loss of individuality.

The alien symbolizes threats to 'the American way.' It embodies all that is in
opposition to 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.' It is presented in nationalistic
terms through nationally specific media, and pervades every aspect of contemporary
American culture. The alien is *the* other, that which is not American.

Chapter One   **Extraterrestrial Encounters: Their Niche in American Culture**

It may be noted by any occasional consumer of mass media that the subject of extraterrestrial encounters (ET encounters) has come to comprise its own little niche in the fictional media market. As it has gained in popularity, the subject has gained in visibility, and so can be assumed to have some importance to media consumers in general. What this study aims to do is explore the importance of ET encounters in American fiction and what this might reveal about American culture. American media is the focus of this study because the American entertainment industry is the most prolific in North America, and arguably, the world. As such, the ideology inherent in its entertainment products is widely disseminated, and should be discussed. The American motto of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" is central to this ideology because it emphasizes autonomy. The motto is important to the study of ET encounter narratives because autonomy is a key theme in the narratives. Finally, because ET encounter narratives occupy their own special niche in American fiction, their cultural value can be better understood through a study of genre since genre is the cultural category such narratives occupy in media.

U.S.A.: prolific producer of fiction

American media is important to study because American-produced examples of fictional media products, such as film and television, are the most prominent in the North American entertainment industry. Therefore, it is safe to assume that examples of ET encounter narratives occur most often in American media. Because of the abundance of material, American fiction is easy to access, and has a daily presence in the lives of most North Americans. While fictions produced in nations such as Canada, Britain, and

Mexico are available in movie theatres, at video stores, and on cable television, American

fictions are more prevalent for many reasons.

One reason, according to Colin Hoskins and Stuart McFadyen, is that the U.S.A.

has enjoyed a history of a healthy domestic market for its entertainment products

(Canadian Journal of Communications online). For example, while Canada and the U.S.

are both developed countries, the population sizes are vastly disproportionate with

Canadian citizens numbering around 32.6 million and American citizens numbering

nearly 300 million (Statistics Canada online; U.S. Census Bureau online). These figures

indicate that there are potentially 268 million more media consumers in the U.S.A. than

in Canada.

Adding to the financial support of the domestic market, American entertainment

products are also popular in international markets. For example, Tom O'Regan discusses

the popularity of American television in Australia as being partially the result of the

similar histories of colonization and expansion shared between the nations of Australia,

Canada, and the U.S.A (89). According to O'Regan, the historical conditions influence

the cultural conditions that predispose such nations to identify with the structures,

themes, and subjects of American television (89).

Finally, this international appeal is also related to the fact that American fiction is

primarily produced in English: "The fact that English comprises much of the largest

linguistic market, while it is the second language in many more, is another plus" (Hoskins

and McFadyen online). The preeminence of American fiction in English, together with

many English-speaking markets internationally, provides the ultimate opportunity for the

already healthy domestic market to thrive internationally.

It is also important to study American fiction because of its demand in the international pop-culture market specifically. For example, O'Regan compares British and American television "within the international system" as "the UK supplying the best 'highbrow' television, [and] the US supplying the best 'popular' programming" (85). 'Popular' programming is important to study because it provides an indicator of the topics and themes that are most in demand by consumers at any given time. Hoskins and McFadyen also recognize the dominant role of American fiction in popular culture:

> In television the spread of commercialism, and the associated objective of
> audience maximization, is leading to an increased demand for the entertainment
> attribute provided by the escapist fiction series, 'fast food entertainment,' that
> U.S. producers specialize in producing and in which they already have a well-
> established brand name. (Canadian Journal of Communications online)

While it is unclear from this statement exactly what television shows are meant by 'escapist fiction series,' generally accepted genres include situation comedies like *Friends* (1994 - 2004), teen dramas like *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), and science fiction (SF) series, including the *Star Trek* franchise (*Star Trek* 1966-1969; *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 1997-94; *Star Trek: Voyager* 1995-2001; *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1993-99; *Enterprise* 2001-05). Narratives of ET encounters such as *V* (1983) and *Stargate SG-1* (1997--) can easily be considered in this category as well.

However escapist they may be, these kinds of fictions should not be overlooked in academic scholarship. Not only do they provide an indicator to producers and marketers of what is currently in demand, they also provide a cultural indicator to scholars of

current ideology, or attempts to subvert ideology. It is important to understand the
ideology of a nation in order to better understand the fiction produced by that nation.

Influential ideology: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness

One of the guiding lights of American ideology has been and still is the principle
of autonomy. The desire for autonomy was the catalyst for the formation of the
independent nation of the United States of America, formerly a group of British colonies.
Under the rule of King George III of England, the inhabitants of these colonies felt that
they were being ruled by someone who was far removed from their everyday reality, and
someone who interfered with and suspended their self-governing activities on a far too
regular basis (Archdeacon 82). Although there were 'loyalists to the Crown,' the majority
of inhabitants in the colonies felt that British rule severely compromised their rights and
freedoms and in 1776 delegates from each of the colonies, among them Thomas Jefferson
and Benjamin Franklin, drafted a document titled "The Declaration of Independence"
(Archdeacon 81-82; Maier 48). The document was approved by 'state' representatives on
July 4th, which is now the American national holiday recognized as Independence Day.

Integral to the "Declaration of Independence" is the assertion that autonomy is an
inherent right that must be defended. Although the punctuation varies in different
transcripts, the following is the commonly reprinted second paragraph of the Declaration:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they
> are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these
> are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. –That to secure these rights,
> Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the

consent of the governed. –That whenever any Form of Government becomes

destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it . . .

(Indiana University online; Archdeacon 81; Maier 236).

Some of the American ideological fundamentals introduced in this passage are equality,

autonomy, and democracy. While equality and democracy are essential to American

ideology overall, the scope of discussing all three components is staggering and so this

study will focus on autonomy and the relationship between autonomy and the

"unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

First, it is important to define each of these rights and what they will represent in

terms of this study. Each is inextricably linked to both personal and societal autonomy.

For example, with regard to the right to Life, even in preliminary drafts of the

Declaration, the right to defend one's safety was a prominent theme. Pauline Maier

provides some examples of these preliminary drafts of "The Declaration of

Independence." One example of a draft reads, "the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the

means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and

safety," while another draft reads "the enjoying and *defending* life and liberty" (emphasis

added 134; 167). Because of the emphasis on self-defense and safety, the right to Life

will be applied in this study as the right to be born and exist without undue hindrance. It

refers to an individual's right to protect his or her safety, to defend one's self from

physical and emotion harm. Furthermore, it refers to the right of American society to

collectively defend itself against threats to the lives of its individuals.

Secondly, Liberty, in the broadest sense, refers to freedom. In terms of this study,

liberty will be used to refer to American citizens' freedom to choose, within lawful

means, where and how to work and live without constraint from outside forces. It refers to the right of individuals to think and act freely, while at the same time referring to American society's right to defend their autonomy from any attackers.

Finally, the right to pursue happiness, while often associated with materialist aspirations, is more complex and is related to the individual's right to pursue personal betterment, be it through material, intellectual, or emotional avenues. Furthermore, it is the right to pursue betterment autonomously, on one's own merits, with the goal of personal achievement. For American society at large this is the American Dream, the ultimate accomplishment of personal autonomy that societal autonomy affords. In the context of this study, the Pursuit of Happiness refers to the value American society places on the individual's ability to pursue happiness through self-improvement. Daniel Howe employs this definition in *Making the American Self* (1997):

> The opportunity for self-construction, though far from universal, has been more widespread in the United States than elsewhere, and the discussion of it has occupied a particularly prominent place in American attempts at national self-definition. It is invoked in the Declaration of Independence as the right to the pursuit of happiness. Thus it is related not only to our individual but also to our collective project of self-construction. (17-18)

This process of self-construction is accomplished through psychological well-being, which is related to the individual's right to pursue happiness through identity formation, self-construction, and individualism.

These three rights, the "unalienable rights" of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness," will be discussed at length later in this study in terms of how they can be

applied to the subjects, themes and motifs of ET encounter narratives. The rationale

behind a study of ET encounter narratives in American fiction is that the ET is alienating

Americans from these unalienable rights. The narratives' location in the niche market of

science fiction (SF) provides a defined unit of study for the cultural values repeated in the

narratives. Hence it is important to look at genre studies because the SF genre is the

media category which includes ET encounter narratives in film and television.

Genre theory

Genre is a cultural category that communicates a coherent, consistent set of

meanings to its faithful audience. This consistent set of meanings is determined by the

subjects, themes and motifs that are reproduced and reinforced by a phenomenon that will

be termed herein 'the production/reception cycle.' Repeated instances of genre product

delimit, set, and reinforce the boundaries of a given genre. This process of repetition

determines the structure of genre. Furthermore, repeated instances of specific narratives

types within a genre, ET encounter narratives or technology-out-of-control narratives for

example, determine the structure of narrative complexes within that genre.

Within the extensive body of genre theory there are numerous definitions of

genre. The most important aspect of any definition is that it must be useful to its

particular employer. For example, structuralist Jonathan Culler defines genre as "a set of

literary norms to which texts may be related and by virtue of which they become

meaningful and coherent" (145). With regard to genre and television, Graeme Burton

writes that there are two ways of approaching TV genre: one way covers ". . . those

programmes which work to a formula which includes repeated characteristics,

protagonists, themes, backgrounds, situations . . ."; the second way ". . . is a much looser

one of category, in which there is nothing like a substantial formula but there are very general repeated features" (86). Finally, Jason Mittell provides a definition that can cover genre across media: "A category primarily links discrete elements together under a label for cultural convenience. Although the members of a given category may all possess some inherent trait that binds them together, there is nothing intrinsic about the category itself" (172). This statement proclaiming the 'cultural convenience' of genre addresses the function of genre based on repeated 'traits' as a means of categorical distinction. For example, a work of literary fantasy, like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, is still generically categorized as fantasy in its animated and filmic adaptations. The importance of this cross-medium generic categorization is that it demonstrates how many of the same basic defining generic elements not only cross works, but also cross mediums. A category of genre definition, while frayed and loose around the edges, can have some fairly stable characteristics.

Genre as a category, however, does require a kind of unspoken agreement between producers and receivers, and between receivers in common, in order to be an effective media category: "The function of genre conventions is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative and thus to permit both compliance with and deviation from accepted modes of intelligibility" (Culler 147). There is in the constitution of genre much negotiation of the elements and motifs that are characteristic to any particular genre. Genre as a category has a flexible basic structure, or as Todorov refers to it, a 'grammar,' that permits modification:

Todorov treats the question of genre in his *Introduction a la literature fantastique.* His fundamental argument claims that a 'grammar' of literary forms is as necessary as a 'grammar' of narrative itself. All writing takes place in the light of other writing, and represents a response to the 'world' of writing that pre-exists and therefore stands as the *langue* to its *parole.* However, unlike other structures, the literary structure permits the *parole* to modify the *langue.* (Hawkes 101; his emphasis)

In this statement the *parole* is narrative and the *langue* is genre. There is some flexibility in specific narrative themes and motifs that do not change genre demarcation, although the subjects, such as the aliens and androids of SF, tend to stay the same. It is important that these subjects stay the same because such genre ". . . texts have meaning for those who know how to read them -- those who, in their encounters with literature, have assimilated the conventions that are constitutive of literature as an institution and a means of communication"(Culler 50). The use of genre as a means of communication can be seen fully in the production/reception cycle. It is important to define genre in this way because it helps to give readers/viewers/ listeners a concrete system to organize the way they think about media, and to understand categories of what the media presents to them as consumers. The concept of genre is used by anyone and everyone involved in any sort of textual entertainment -- even if the average consumer of entertainment does not think of it in these terms.

Genre as tool: producers and receivers

Genre is the link between production and reception. It is what keeps the cycle going because it becomes a medium for communication between the producer and the

consumer. When an audience receives a new series, it automatically categorizes the series based on recognition of previously defined generic contexts. The generic context is made up of all connotations and associations made by the subjects, themes and motifs of the series itself, as based on previously received television series. The audience feedback, through letters to the producers, market research focus groups, and internet fan groups, may incite modification to a series, or the production of entirely new series based on previously successful models. Through this kind of contact, the processes of production and reception rely on a kind of "feedback loop" from one process to the other to add, alter, and incorporate new bits of narrative and technology, among other things. This process of change throughout the cycle rejuvenates a genre and keeps it interesting to viewers.

This cyclical process of genre constitution through production and reception is often facilitated by the laws of supply and demand: "Of course one of the most significant features of the nature of literature is the fact that the concept of genre is as useful to the consumer as to the producer" (Hawkes 103). Genre is used by producers of entertainment to satisfy consumer's demands for a specific *kind* of entertainment, by marketers to sell entertainment as a product to 'market niches,' and by consumers to help, for example, make that essential choice of what to rent at the video store. Mittell summarizes this process: "Genres transect these boundaries, with production, distribution, promotion, and reception practices all working to categorize media texts into genres" (173). At every phase, meanings, connotations, and defining 'tags' are attached to the entertainment 'product.' It is an unending cycle that can either alter or maintain the generic status of the product. This cycle easily allows for changes in genre definition,

as the cycle goes through many stages. Each group of people involved in the media

product may add, change, and generally renegotiate the boundaries they believe delimit

the genre that is of particular interest to them. For example, the production company

might decide that it is acceptable for children to see a certain amount of violence; the

marketing team may agree with this and encourage it; however, when a violent product is

presented to the consumer, the level of violence may be rejected as inappropriate for

children, and the program must be categorized under a different genre at the retail level in

order to satisfy consumers because it does not conform to *their* definition of the

"Children's" genre. This is a highly simplified, and probably somewhat inaccurate,

scenario, but it demonstrates the basic process of generic change.

Because of its power to renegotiate generic boundaries, consumer reception is the

driving force behind generic production. Reception is largely influenced by social factors

such as current events. Other influences include received meanings as they may or may

not have been intended through the production process, including intentional and

unintentional intertextuality. Burton defines intertextuality as "a kind of cross-referencing

system which may be seen in the text" (83). Intertextuality is a very important concept

with regard to genre studies as it is the primary factor in determining similarities between

works. For example, even though a particular work may include references to other

genres, it does not affect the other, more primary intertextual elements that cause a work

to be included in any one particular genre. For example, even though *The X-Files*

includes a detective-drama-type partnership in the main story arch, there are enough SF

elements (alien abduction, half-human creatures, technology that acts of its own accord)

to hold it firmly under the SF category and not remotely under any other. This overarching repetition of subject matter is what makes genre product so popular.

This leads back to genre as an indicator of supply and demand. The popularity of a specific show, which results in the marketability of that show, influences the decisions TV companies will make regarding the types of shows they want to produce and run. If a show is successful, it is likely that companies will produce shows similar to it in order to cash in on its popularity (Burton 87). This generates Burton's 'general repeated features,' which basically defines intertextuality as well. Films and/or television series that intertexually reference one another with these 'general repeated features' become a genre through the process of categorization.

The process of categorization is very important to the marketing of media works. Genre categories can be used to market, for example, television programs to specific audience niches like children or SF fans: "Genre product is easy to market because its features are already known and understood by its 'buyers'"(Burton 87). This demonstrates how the context of any media instance is understood by its receivers thoroughly through its cultural associations. One can only understand a narrative, and thus a genre, through his or her particular cultural lens: "Genres, then, are essentially culture-bound, 'relative' phenomena" (Hawkes 104). Genre is constituted by a kind of cultural grammar that is commonly understood by its viewers. Burton also discusses the importance of cultural relevance to consumer-receivers:

> Genres have key elements and conventions which produce a formula of some kind
> for each one. But what matters is what these elements signify—what they say

about social preoccupations, or about beliefs and values. What matters is how

genres transmit and reinforce such values—ideologies—so widely. (33)

The success of a genre is dependent on its marketability by producers, who must learn to

understand the current cultural interests of consumer-receivers, as Christy Burns writes in

"Erasure: Alienation, Paranoia, and the Loss of Memory in *The X-Files:*" "Many filmic

constructs derive from an amalgamation of images in the American unconscious, tapped

by Hollywood's more successful writers, directors, and producers" (209). Genre product

is successful because each genre seems to tap into its own niche of cultural

consciousness.

Because fictional media is an overwhelming system in itself, it is important to

first isolate from its ever expanding mass specific categorical units, such as genre, in

order to study any particular subject, theme or motif. Once genre is understood, and the

subjects, themes and motifs decided upon, a study of the ideology behind fictional media

can be undertaken. Fictional media is important to understand because it is such an

integral part of contemporary life in North America. Through fiction and ideology, ET

encounters have found their niche in American culture.

Chapter Two   **Anthropology of the Text: Literature Review and Methodology**

In order to provide a discussion of the cultural implications of ET encounter

narratives in American fiction, it is important to first set out a method of investigation.

The theoretical frameworks of symbolic and interpretive anthropology provide a way of

studying the symbols that convey social values and ideologies in cultural systems such as

media. Three of the main theorists of these schools are Victor Turner, David Schneider,

and Clifford Geertz. Their theories of symbols are very useful as a framework through

which to discuss ideology in ET encounter narratives. These theorists are also pertinent to

this study because they each advocate a holistic approach to symbolic analysis, insisting

that it is important to always relate the particular unit of study to the cultural whole.

Therefore, the methodology outlined herein is applied to the subject of ET encounters,

first with regard to American culture at large and second with regard to fictional

narratives in particular.

Symbolic and interpretive anthropology

According to Paul Erickson, symbolic anthropology is "the anthropological

school, associated with Victor Turner, espousing the view that social solidarity is a

function of the systems of symbolic logic that connect people, especially during ritual"

(187). Complimentary to this school is the school of interpretive anthropology which is

"associated with Clifford Geertz, espousing the view that culture is lived experience

integrated in a coherent, public system of symbols that renders the world intelligible"

(Erickson 173). Both of these schools of thought are useful to a study of ideology in ET

encounter narratives because the narratives are constructed based on culturally

meaningful symbols such as the alien, the UFO, the abduction, and the invasion. These symbols, as prominent symbols in the SF genre, are an integral part of the cultural system of fictional genres, which is the primary cultural system being explored herein.

However, these symbols are not only present in the cultural system of fictional genres, but can also be seen in narratives told by people who believe they have experienced ET encounters firsthand. For the purposes of this study, these will be called experiential narratives, as opposed to fictional narratives, so as not to negate the often unexplainable experiences of those who tell the narratives. Experiential narratives, which will be discussed at greater length later in the study, are important to look at because they demonstrate the pervasiveness of the symbols of ET encounters in American culture in general. This crossing of narrative streams, both fiction and experiential, is another reason why both symbolic and interpretive anthropology are appropriate frameworks for the study of ET encounters because the main theorists, Turner, Geertz and David Schneider, emphasize the cultural "network" function of symbols. As Erickson writes:

> What differentiates symbolic and interpretive anthropologists from their colleagues working in explicitly materialist or ecological traditions is their relentless insistence that social and cultural worlds are held together by interpenetrating networks of symbols, each of which is a carrier of cultural meaning. (131)

The symbols of ET encounter narratives interpenetrate with symbols from other SF narrative complexes, such as technology-out-of-control narratives, and with symbols from other cultural phenomena, such as government conspiracies and unexplainable

mental illnesses. Symbolic and interpretive anthropology are both effective frameworks

because they are holistic in their approach to culture.

Victor Turner

To begin with, Victor Turner, a British anthropologist, is generally considered to

have written some of the seminal works of symbolic anthropology. Turner was "heavily

influenced by Emile Durkheim's dictum that social cohesion was achieved 'organically,'

through the interpenetration of a given society's component parts" (Erickson 131). Turner

built on this theory, emphasizing the importance of cultural symbols as the vehicles of

this 'interpenetration' (Erickson 132). Although Turner was a prolific author, his most

important works to note for this study are *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu*

Ritual (1967) and *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982).

First, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* is a collection of papers

written by Turner about the "ritual system of the Ndembu people of northwestern

Zambia" (1). In these papers he develops his key concepts of dominant and instrumental

symbols, and liminality. Dominant symbols, Turner states, are dominant because they

appear throughout a particular cultural ritual and tend to cross into others:

> Dominant symbols appear in many different ritual contexts, sometimes presiding
>
> over the whole procedure, sometimes over particular phases. The meaning-
>
> content of certain dominant symbols posses a high degree of constancy and
>
> consistency throughout the total symbolic system . . . (*The Forest . . .* 31).

Elaborating further, he also states that dominant symbols have three major properties: 1.

"condensation", where "many things and actions are represented in a single formation";

2. "unification of disparate significata," which refers to the ability of a major symbol to

unify and embody ideas and concepts, or facts and qualities, that have nothing else in common; 3. "polarization of meaning," which refers to a sort of continuum that has at one end the "ideological pole" and at the other the "sensory pole", at which "the meaning content is closely related to the outward form of the symbol" (*The Forest . . .* 28). To better define these poles, Turner writes: "At the sensory pole are concentrated those *significata* that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings; at the ideological pole one finds an arrangement of norms and values that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories" (*The Forest . . .* 28). Turner states that dominant symbols, because of these properties, are largely socio-cultural symbols that provide social coherence in the broad ideological sense. Instrumental symbols, he states, are symbols used to achieve a more specific socio-cultural goal:

> In other words, each ritual has its own teleology. It has its explicitly expressed goals, and instrumental symbols may be regarded as means of attaining those goals. For example, rituals performed for the overt purpose of making women fruitful, among the instrumental symbols used are portions of fruit-bearing trees or of trees that possess innumerable rootlets. These fruits and rootlets are said by Ndembu to represent children. (*The Forest . . .*32)

Both of these concepts are important because while the dominant symbols link a given ritual to general cultural concerns, instrumental symbols contribute to the particularity of each ritual.

According to Turner, though orderly itself, ritual leads to a state of temporary disorder, a state which he terms liminality (*The Forest . . .* 93). In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual,* Turner introduces the concept of liminality as social existence

outside of regular social structure: "If our basic model of society is that of a 'structure of positions,' we must regard the period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation" (93). He discusses it in terms of ritual, especially rite-of-passage rituals, where a person or group of people move from one 'state,' via a transitional period of liminality, to another 'state'(*The Forest . . .* 94). Turner defines 'state' as "any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized" (*The Forest . . .* 94). He illustrates this concept of liminal transition from one state to another with examples of tribal society coming-of-age-rituals, and the symbols used in these rituals.

While the above is a brief summary of Turner's initial discussion of liminality, the following includes a summary of his use and continuation of the concept in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. In this book Turner discusses the role of "drama" in culture, be it in the form of a tribal ritual or a work of literature, and how it is used to create a liminal space for members of society. He uses the theory of comparative symbology to apply his concepts of liminality and communitas to "modern industrial and post-industrial societies" as well as tribal societies (39).

Comparative symbology, to begin with, approaches the study of symbols by comparing how symbols work in relation to each other, both as individual symbols and as systems of symbols. According to Turner, comparative symbology

> *is* involved in the relationships between symbols and the concepts, feelings, values, notions, etc. associated with them by users, interpreters or exegetes: in short it has *semantic* dimensions, it pertains to meaning in language and context. Its data are mainly drawn from *cultural genres* or *subsystems* of expressive culture. These include both oral and literate genres, and one may reckon among

them *activities* combining verbal and nonverbal symbolic actions, such as ritual

and drama, as well as *narrative* genres, such as myth, epic, ballad, the novel, and

ideological systems. (*From Ritual* . . . 21; Turner's emphasis)

Comparative symbology then, is an approach that can be used to look at and compare the

cultural meanings and values attached to the symbols that make up the subjects, themes

and motifs within any expressive cultural product, such as film and television, which is

used to communicate ideology.

Furthermore, Turner states that an experience with an expressive cultural genre,

be it participation in a ritual or a trip to the theatre, is to varying degrees a liminal

experience. The liminal experience consists of three phases: separation, transition, and

incorporation. For example, the following is an explanation of how the three phases of a

liminal experience can apply to a trip to the theatre: separation occurs when the

participant steps inside the theatre and selects a seat because the participant is separating

him or her self from quotidian existence; transition, the liminal phase, occurs while the

participant is watching the drama unfold on stage because this is providing the participant

with an experience outside of his or her normal social role – their role in social structure

is temporarily suspended while the play is performed; incorporation occurs when the play

is finished and the lights come up, all the participants temporarily united for having

shared in this experience while others lived a regular social structural existence (Turner,

From Ritual . . ., 24). The use of the concept of liminality in this example is less concrete,

due to the loose nature of the ritual action, than it would be if applied to, for example, a

coming-of-age tribal ritual:

When used of processes, phenomena, and persons in large-scale complex

societies, [the use of the term 'liminality'] must in the main be metaphorical. That

is, the word, 'liminality,' used *primarily* of a phase in the processual structure of a

rite de passage, is applied to other aspects of culture—here in societies of far

greater scale and complexity. (Turner, *From Ritual . . .*, 29-30)

What this means, in other words, is that unlike a coming-of-age ritual where the

participant is incorporated back into tribal society in a new structural position, i.e.

adulthood, the theatre visitors are incorporated with their social roles unaltered, having

experienced a phase of liminality nonetheless. The phase of liminality in the later case

has more to do with how the symbols in the drama reflect or affect the participants'

cultural values and ideology than actual societal structure.

Finally, Turner discusses the temporary result of the liminal experience,

communitas. Communitas, defined by Erickson, is "a term employed by Victor Turner to

refer to the ritual fusion of individuals into a collective identity" (163). This occurs

because the participants in a liminal experience have shared something intense, outside of

quotidian experience, where they where unbounded by conventional social rules.

Communitas occurs when participants are no longer self-conscious of their social status

based on the confidence that can be generated in the period of anti-structure:

"Communitas, in the present context of its use, then, may be said to exist more in contrast

than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more 'liberated' way of

being socially human . . ." (*From Ritual . . .* 51). Because of the disruption of social

order, identity can become unstable, which may or may not be a positive thing. In some

cases, it means that rank and office are relinquished, which is a negative experience for

those in power, but provides freedom and mobility for others: "Communitas tends to be

inclusive—some might call it 'generous'—social structure tends to be exclusive, even

snobbish, relishing the distinction between we/they and in-group/out-group, higher/lower,

betters/menials" (*From Ritual . . .*51). Whether the experience is positive or negative, all

participants are united for a time through their experience of liminality, eventually to

incorporate to the same or altered positions, depending on the liminal experience.

David Schneider

While Victor Turner is a major figure of symbolic anthropology, David Schneider

and Clifford Geertz are the two seminal theorists of interpretive anthropology (Shore 32).

For example, Schneider's theory of symbols as set out in his article "Notes Toward a

Theory of Culture" (1976) is complimentary to Victor Turner's theory of symbols in *The*

Forest of Symbols. In this article, Schneider explores the role of culture in social action,

looking primarily at the relationship between cultural symbols and cultural norms. He

defines culture "as a system of symbols and meanings" (197). Furthermore, Schnieder

states that "culture constitutes a body of definitions, premises, statements, postulates,

presumptions, propositions, and perceptions about the nature of the universe and man's

place in it" (203). Schneider's key concepts of interest to this study are the concept of

epitomizing symbols, which is akin to Turner's dominant symbols, and the concept of

galaxies of symbols.

To begin with, Schneider's concept of "a galaxy" of symbols refers to a cluster of

symbols and their meanings as they exist for some socio-cultural purpose (214). For

example, a galaxy of symbols may be related to how narrative complexes structure a

genre. Narratives containing the same or similar symbols are generally categorized under

the same genre. Differences in clusters of symbols and their arrangements result in different genres. This is a microcosm of Schneider's theory, but is still applicable, as Schneider states that "if a cluster of symbols and their meanings can be shown to have some features which distinguish it from other clusters, then the probability arises that a total system may be discerned which is distinct from other total systems" (Schneider 214). Hence one genre may be differentiated from another. In a broader sense, one cultural area, such as media, may be distinguished from another cultural area, such as agriculture. In the broadest context, one culture, such as American culture, may be distinguished from another culture, such as Indian culture, as Schneider states in his article (215). Beyond distinguishing one system from another, the galaxy theory of symbols is important because it is a way of looking at the relationships between symbols in a particular galaxy. As Schneider notes, these symbols may exist in relationships that include opposition, duality, hierarchy, and contradiction, just to name a few; furthermore, according to Schneider, "it should be stressed that these concepts rest on the premise that any symbol has many meanings, on the premise that symbols and meanings can be clustered into galaxies, and on the premise that galaxies seem to have core or epitomizing symbols as their foci" (217-218). This leads to Schneider's second important concept herein, the concept of epitomizing symbols.

Epitomizing symbols, as they will be termed herein, although Schneider is uncomfortable with saddling the concept with a label, are socio-cultural symbols that unite disparate and diverse meanings within a cultural system (Schneider 215). One example, according to Schneider, is the concept of *equality* in American culture (215). This is because under the banner of equality all other American values, whether

contradictory or complimentary, can be discussed in overarching national terms as symbols within the galaxy of American nationalism, as Schneider states: "I have offered the hypothesis in *American Kinship* that each galaxy has its central, core, key, master, unifying, dominant, or epitomizing symbol. I use this array of words on purpose, and I am careful to avoid becoming committed to any one of them" (214). Schneider's reluctance to commit to a term stems from his idea that the epitomizing symbol may work slightly differently in different contexts. However, the important point to note is his theory that each galaxy of symbols is characterized by an epitomizing symbol that is evident in all symbolic operations of that galaxy.

Clifford Geertz

The other major, and arguably more famous, theorist of the interpretive school is Clifford Geertz. Of particular importance for this study is his book *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (1983). In the essays included in this book Geertz addresses many topics including the evolution of theory and actual systems of culture. Of particular importance to this study is Geertz's theory of the "native's point of view" because it provides an overall theoretical approach to culture, while Turner and Schneider provide more specific operations that can be used to construct a methodological approach to studying symbols in narrative.

Geertz's concept of the "native's point of view," herein applied to American mainstream culture, is not the idea of "getting inside the heads" of subjects, but the idea of understanding the culture "by searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another" (58). In order to see the full

scope of an individual's point of view in a particular culture, according to Geertz, it is important to perform a kind of "dialectical tacking" between the broadest context of the subject and the most particular of details, always relating the part to the whole (69). Geertz discusses this action, in a rather patronizing tone, as a self-question-answer game:

> . . . when a meanings-and-symbols ethnographer like myself attempts to find out what some pack of natives conceive a person to be, he moves back and forth between asking himself, "What is the general form of their life?" and "What exactly are the vehicles in which that form is embodied?" (70)

In the context of this study, the ethnocentrically termed "pack of natives" is the American public, the "general form of their life" is American culture in general, and the vehicles of embodiment are ET encounter narratives in fictional media. Geertz's theory of "dialectical tacking" is used to contextualize the narratives in their broader place in American culture.

Cultural context: 'dialectical tacking,' liminal experience, and communitas

To employ this concept of 'dialectical tacking,' it is advantageous to look first at the broader context of the subject of ETs in American culture. As was stated earlier, ET encounter narratives occur both in fiction and in experiential streams. The existence of ET narratives in the total cultural system, not just the fictional cultural system, i.e. the system of genres, testifies that the alien and its adjacent symbols are powerful in American culture. The capability of the SF genre to unify consumers and believers through its plots, themes, and characters is due in large part because these elements are constructed by a system of loaded symbols which hold similar, and similarly poignant, meanings for a large range of viewers. This is because the themes and motifs, expressed

symbolically through the fiction, correspond to occurrences and experiences based in reality. The two streams of narratives form a dialectic relationship, each complex influencing and reinforcing the production of the other, as will be discussed at length in a later section of this study. Both narrative streams are successful because they have "tapped into" a system of symbols that is strongly embedded in American culture.

The symbols of ET encounter narratives, however, are not the symbols of quotidian experience. The alien, the UFO, and the government conspiracy are all symbols of the unknown, potentially harmful things that exist in the universe on the threshold of experience. This idea of the threshold of experience is related to Turner's theory of liminality, as any liminal experience occurs on the threshold of moving from one state to another "through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" (*From Ritual . . .* 24). In the broader cultural context of ET encounter narratives, it is important to briefly discuss liminality both in terms of how people perceive experiential narratives and in terms of how viewers experience the fictional narratives.

In terms of perceived experience, a person's perceived lived experience of alien encounter or abduction is certainly liminal because it is an experience not encompassed by regular social structure, i.e. it is a "period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation" (*The Forest . . .* 93). However, as Turner states in *From Ritual to Theatre,* because it is not a liminal experience that is the result of a prescribed ritual it is a metaphorical liminal experience, one from which incorporation does not include a new social status (29-30). Furthermore, it is generally a personal experience, one for which communitas can only be achieved when people who have experienced similar things come together to share those experiences.

Likewise, viewers' experience of ET encounter narratives is also a liminal experience in the metaphorical sense. According to comparative symbology, the experience of viewing a drama creates a liminal space because it forces viewers to step out of regular social structure and experience a narrative removed from real life that has the power to either reinforce or disrupt their social ideologies (Turner, *From Ritual* . . . , 24). ET encounter narratives, then, provide a liminal space because they disrupt normal American experience and social order by relating to the viewers narratives outside common experience which are characterized by contact with aliens from outer space and the possible occurrences that might result from that contact. Furthermore, ET *invasion* narratives in particular provide American viewers a *"rite de passage"* because every ET invasion presents a threat to American autonomy. The invasion of and fight against the ETs provide the state of liminality. These themes represent America's rite of passage from semi-autonomous to autonomous nation. Every time the USA defeats the alien invaders, it rises again like a phoenix from the alien ashes to reassert and reinforce American independence. This is, perhaps, why the theme of alien invasion in film and television is so popular.

The result of this metaphorical liminal period is communitas of the viewers through their experience with the text. Often, this communitas does not last long, usually only long enough for viewers to discuss their feelings about the text. Communitas is the feeling of unity generated among people who share a liminal experience, and when this unity is generated by art, such as theatre or film, Turner calls it *"ideological communitas,"* of which he states: "Here the retrospective look, 'memory,' has already distanced the individual subject from the communal or dyadic experience. Here the

experiencer has already come to look to language and culture to mediate the former immediacies . . ." (Turner, *From Ritual . . .*, 48). This is because a viewer can only discuss an experience with the text in terms of what he or she remembers of the text, and how the text attains meaning through his or her cultural lens. The 'immediacy' Turner mentions is the actual textual experience, for example, the communal act of watching a film in a movie theatre. It is when people are leaving the theatre, all thinking about what they have just seen, that ideological communitas occurs. According to Turner, ideological communitas is an instance of "an interruption of that experience of merging action and awareness (and centering of attention) which characterized the supreme 'payoff' in ritual, art, sport, games and even gambling" (Turner, *From Ritual . . .*, 48). It can be argued that what Turner means by this statement is that ideological communitas occurs during the time of reflection immediately after a liminal experience when the action, for example that act of watching a film, is being metabolized and understood by participants. The 'payoff,' so to speak, is this understanding of the text.

> *Vehicles of embodiment: a theory of symbols as a methodological approach to ET encounter narratives in film and television*

Now that the properties of liminality and communitas have been discussed in relation to ET encounter narratives, the next step is to turn to a more specific aspect of study, which in this case is fictional ET encounter narratives in film and television. In order to apply the above anthropological theory directly to these narratives, it is essential to first set out a methodological approach to discussing the narratives in terms of their symbolic constructions. The approach taken herein is guided by Turner's concepts of dominant symbols as set out in *Forest of Symbols,* and Schneider's concepts of

epitomizing symbols and galaxies of symbols as set out in "Notes Toward a Theory of Culture."

At this point, a brief review of the scope of this study will be provided in order to contextualize the methodology. To begin with, it is the intention of this study to explore the importance of ET encounters in American fiction to reveal how these narratives relate to American values and ideology. Fiction, and more specifically, genre fiction, is the chosen unit of study because it is a pervasive cultural system that is related to ideology. As the focus of this study, the cultural value of autonomy has been chosen because it is a banner, in the same way that Schneider's example of 'equality' is a banner, under which all other American national values can be discussed. Furthermore, the American motto, defined in the Declaration of Independence as the 'unalienable' rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, consists of three major cultural symbols that can be used as a guide to discussing the importance of autonomy to the American public. Fictional ET encounter narratives in particular provide an interesting and telling unit of study when discussed in terms of how they present, through the symbols that make up the narratives, American autonomy and possible threats to that autonomy.

Therefore, the first step is to determine which examples of ET encounter narratives in film and television best represent American attitudes about autonomy with a focus on symbolic threats to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. For example, with regard to Life, narratives are selected based on the presence of gruesome threats to physical safety and existence; with regard to Liberty, threats not only to physical freedom but also to the freedom of choice; with regard to the Pursuit of Happiness, threats to an individual's right to pursue personal betterment and self-construction. This being

determined, the following narratives will be used to discuss the following cultural

symbols: regarding Life, the films *The X-Files* (1998) and *Dreamcatcher* (2003);

regarding Liberty, the films *Independence Day* (1996) and *War of the Worlds* (2005);

regarding the Pursuit of Happiness, the film *The Faculty* (1998), the television series *The*

X-Files (1993) and *South Park* (1997), and the mini-series *Taken* (2002). The textual

analyses are split into three discussions, one each for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of

Happiness.

In each discussion, two dominant/encompassing symbols will be considered:

autonomy as the dominant/encompassing symbol of American culture, and the alien as

the dominant/encompassing symbol for threats to American autonomy, and therefore,

through the encompassing nature of autonomy as symbol, threats to American culture.

Both terms, dominant and encompassing, will be used interchangeably throughout the

following sections of this study. These two dominant symbols are in opposition to each

other. Throughout each discussion the dominant nature of these two symbols will be

demonstrated by exploring the galaxies of symbols that surround each dominant symbol

within the chosen narratives.

Although each discussion is guided by one of the three symbols of the motto,

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, these are not to be considered dominant

symbols. Each of these is to be considered a symbol within the galaxy of symbols

surrounding the foci of autonomy. Accordingly, many symbols in the galaxy surrounding

the foci of the alien will also be discussed, most of these making up the encounter

narratives themselves, for example alien infections, UFOs, and government conspiracies.

The symbols in the galaxy of autonomy and the symbols in the galaxy of the alien will be

discussed in terms of their relations to each other within each narrative and how this comments on American ideals, values, and fears. The symbol relations that will be looked at include opposition, duality, hierarchy, and contradiction. All of these relationships contribute to the symbols of the galaxies as relating to the dominant symbols.

Furthermore, Geertz 'dialectical tacking' will be applied within the discussions of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness to show explicitly how the alien and it's supporting symbols are representative for real, and/or perceived, threats to American autonomy. Within each section, the focus will shift between discussion of the texts and discussion of American culture. The symbols and what they represent will be the links between the two discussions, demonstrating how ET encounter narratives present American ideology, threats to ideology, and how Americans deal with these threats. It is hoped that by employing this method, ET encounter narratives will be contextualized within American culture and their cultural relevance will be revealed.

Chapter Three **Contact and Beyond: The Historical and Cultural Context of Alien Encounter Narratives**

When discussing narrative in terms of cultural symbols, it is important to understand the experience that these symbols mediate. Alien encounter narratives occur in two streams: fictional and experiential. The experiential narratives provide a historical context for the fictional; the fictional provide a cultural context for the experiential. It is a dialectic cycle with each type of narrative influencing the production of the other. As a cultural phenomenon, experiential narratives have spawned an entire subculture in North America of people who believe that they have encountered, been abducted, and are a part of plans for the colonization of Earth by aliens. This subculture is fueled, not only by the fictional representation of these beliefs in film and television, but also by two opposing camps: those who believe aliens have contacted earth, and those who believe it is we who will make first contact through communication technologies. The subculture and research are integral to modern American culture because their existence demonstrates how close people hold their 'unalienable rights' to 'Life, Liberty, and The Pursuit of Happiness.' They are concerned that these rights may be endangered by the perceived threat of alien encounters, and rally not only around the leisure activity of watching fictional narratives, but also around their right to express fear and desire in experiential terms.

The alien as cultural phenomenon

The alien is a cultural phenomenon because it is used as a symbol to represent many things, from putting a face to the vastness of space, to representing acute unexplainable physical trauma. A cultural phenomenon can be defined as a concept or idea that spans and includes an array of cultural aspects. The alien as a cultural

phenomenon exists in culture not only as fiction, but also as a potential reality. The alien exists in unexplainable personal experiences, in reporting in non-fictional media (newspapers, documentary films, magazines, etc.), and extensively in fictional media (television, film, novels, comics, cartoons, etc.). People utilize the alien as an expression in everyday speech ("You were so late I thought you were abducted by aliens!"), and as a symbol on posters, t-shirts, art in restaurants and other public buildings, and on motifs on stationary and greeting cards. There is virtually no facet of public life in North America that has not at least been touched by the idea of extraterrestrial beings. As such, the little green or grey alien, with the balloon shaped head and disproportionately large eyes, has become a powerful cultural symbol.

While virtually all of society is touched by it, some groups place more value on it than others, and even mobilize around it. These are the people who make up the subculture which believes in the existence and/or claim to have had some experience with extraterrestrials (ETs). For the most part, these beliefs and experiences are not considered credible in mainstream society. As is often the case with subcultures, there are negative connotations attached by society onto any group of people who relate to certain symbols in a specific way, not only with regard to preferences of types of entertainment, but also with regard to personal beliefs and experiences. However, this specific way of relating to symbols outside mainstream society is the way members of the subculture exercise their rights to freedom of expression, and in essence, their right to 'Liberty.' While free to believe, this group of people who claims to believe and/or have had contact with extraterrestrials has generally been positioned low on the hierarchy of socially accepted knowledge.

However, this is not a new phenomenon. Narratives including ETs have been constructed ". . . almost from the beginning of recorded history. Between the fifth-century B.C. flowering of Greek civilization and 1917, more than 140 books and thousands of essays, reviews and other writings had been devoted to discussing whether or not other inhabited worlds exist in the universe" (Crowe xiii). Over time, many human accounts have evolved, becoming a conventionalized narrative complex as the symbols have become more consistent. This process of turning random accounts and speculations into a complex of experiential narratives is akin to the process of ritual, which conventionalizes certain beliefs and practices related to those beliefs. These processes can be thought of as 'ritualization' and 'narrativization.' Ritualization occurs through the process of emotional investment and resulting actions, reproduced through repetition. Narrativization occurs through the process of production and reception of a narrative which is consistently reproduced through intertextuality of symbols in the narrative.

Furthermore, the consistent repetition (intertextuality) of symbols is part of the narrativization of both streams of the ET encounter narrative. To return to an earlier point, the theoretical approach of comparative symbology is tied to the process of contextualizing, culturally and historically, the symbols in a narrative:

> Comparative symbology does attempt to preserve this ludic capacity, to catch symbols in their movement, so to speak, and to 'play' with their possibilities of form and meaning. It does this by contextualizing symbols in the concrete, historical fields of their use by 'men alive' as they act, react, transact, and interact socially. Even when the symbolic is *inverse* of the pragmatic reality, it remains intimately in touch with it, affects and is affected by it, provides the positive

figure with its negative ground, thereby delimiting each, and winning for

'cosmos' a new territory. (Turner, *From Ritual . . .* , 23)

This aspect of the theory is especially useful since it pertains to symbols which are

"*inverse* of pragmatic reality" such as the symbol of the little green man, which is

symbolic for a multitude of very *real* concerns.

Historical context of experiential narratives

To employ this theory of comparative symbology, it is important to contextualize

the phenomenon of experiential alien encounter narratives in the Twentieth Century. The

first accounts were recorded in the late 1940s; these accounts focused primarily on the

UFO component, explaining in detail the appearance and construction of the spacecraft

(Showalter 190). Later accounts included more abduction narratives than simple UFO

sightings; according to David Jacobs,

> . . . since the mid-1960s, when the abduction phenomena first came to public
>
> attention, tens of thousands of sometimes terrified people have reported either
>
> being abducted or having strong suspicions that they may have been abducted.
>
> Like UFO witnesses, these individuals represent a cross section of cultural,
>
> economic, educational, and political levels in society. (3)

Furthermore, in her book, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*, regarding

contemporary cultural 'hysterias,' Elaine Showalter states that "second-wave abduction

stories began in 1966, when an interracial couple named Barney and Betty Hill told of

being abducted while driving . . ." (190). The Betty and Barney Hill story is cited by

many authors of non-fiction writing on the subject of alien abduction as being the

'grandparent' of current experiential narratives.

However, the Hills' account was not conceived in isolation, as at that time aliens dominated the plots and themes of the SF genre: "During the following week Betty Hill became obsessed with the idea of UFOs and began reading books on the subject. Eventually she began having recurring nightmares" (Grayson 75). Books were not the only media influencing the Hills at the time, as "researchers have since speculated that the Hills incorporated imagery from a movie, *Invaders From Mars* (1953), and TV programs about space aliens" (Showalter 191). The very existence of this type of speculation demonstrates the power of media influence: are our experiences *reflected* in media, or are our experiences *shaped* by media? This speculation also demonstrates the principle of the production/reception cycle, as the Hills received what was produced, and then reproduced what they received in their own terms.

In the next decade, the 1970s, the experiential narratives began to demonstrate common themes. By this time there were people claiming to be experts in the field of study of alien contact and abduction. They called themselves 'ufologists.' These " . . . ufologists, reporting their work in magazines and journals, speculated that Beings from other planets were visiting earth to investigate human sexual functioning" (Showalter 191). From the 1970s to the present time, the theme of reproduction, among others, has become a conventional aspect of both experiential and fictional encounter narratives, "an aspect credulous journalists as well as professionally invested ufologists take as the strongest evidence for its reality and legitimacy" (Showalter 191). This conventionalization of the experiential narratives is also part of the process of narrativization of alien encounter.

Jodi Dean discusses how the process of conventionalization of alien encounter

narratives continued in the 1980s:

> Over the last decade, stories of alien abduction have worked their way into
>
> mainstream culture. Although abduction accounts have been part of UFO
>
> literature since the case of Betty and Barney Hill was documented in the mid-
>
> sixties and have appeared every once in a while in the popular press, sustained
>
> public attention to abduction started up first in 1987 (the year of the televangelism
>
> scandals, the Iran-Contra Hearings, Wedtech, and the stock market crash). (3)

'Sustained public attention' was achieved by the crossover of alien encounter themes in

fiction and non-fiction media venues. One operation of the media is that, as demonstrated

by the case of Betty and Barney Hill, it *textually* blurs fictional and real experience by

facilitating the duplication of themes, motifs and plots both from personal account to

fictional narrative, or from fictional narrative to personal account. For example, Colin

Manlove writes that some fantasy ". . . implies that the very distinction we make between

the 'textual' and the 'real' is questionable, and that experience is an indeterminate blend

of the two" (163). This lack of distinction is an important aspect of alien encounter

phenomena as quite often it may be that the text is determining the reality.

Furthermore, this 'textual blurring of fictional and real experience' supports the

earlier assertion that production and reception act as a ritual. The ufologists'

encompassing use of the reproductive symbols of alien abduction is reminiscent of Victor

Turner's observation of participants of ritual:

> I consider it legitimate to include within the total meaning of a dominant ritual
>
> symbol, aspects of behavior associated with it which actors themselves are unable

to interpret, and indeed of which they may be unaware, if they are asked to

interpret the symbol outside its activity context. (*The Forest . . .* 27)

The people involved in the ritual attribute contextual meaning to the symbols just as those

involved in the production/reception of the experiential narrative attribute contextual

meaning to the symbols. For example, Turner states that participants in the Ndembu

coming-of-age ritual use the milk tree as the encompassing symbol for that ritual, as well

as many other rituals, although they cannot explain the symbol's specific significance to

outsiders. Likewise, those who relate experiential ET narratives cannot explain the

significance of any specific element of the narrative. In another aspect, meaning is

attributed through the actual *plot* structure of the narrative. There are some writers, like

Showalter, who argue that the plot structure has been artificially constructed by abductees

in order to accomplish legitimacy through coherence; for example,

the basic elements in this plot were first outlined by David Jacobs, the Charcot of

alien abduction, who has worked hard to establish a system and structure in the

narratives; his book *Alien Encounters* even provides a diagram of the abduction

experience from start to finish, which he calls the 'common abduction scenario

matrix'(Showalter 191).

The important point here is not that a structure can be established but that the structure

that is established is carefully arranged and plot elements attributed in order to legitimate

the meaning that people invest in it. This is true of fiction as well, since the fictional alien

encounter narratives tend to adopt the structure of the experiential narratives in order to

draw viewers who will attribute to the fiction the same meanings, and hence invest a

larger amount of emotion. The tendency of consumers of media to prefer narratives that

contain consistent narrative elements again demonstrates the hierarchy of knowledge, and demonstrates that emotional investment needs to be 'systemized and structurized' in order to be accepted as a kind of knowledge. Once accepted and legitimized, both by the individual and the group, emotion leads to belief.

Cultural context of ET encounter narratives

Belief in the existence of extraterrestrials has been repeated over time and is expressed in common by many people. Because of the possibility that extraterrestrial civilization is much older than ours, physicist and ET researcher Frank Drake postulates:

> Surely from this would come a richness of knowledge, even wisdom, that would
> help us achieve a higher quality of life, save our resources, give us sophisticated
> information we would like to have, and within years rather than hundreds of
> years, or thousands, which it might take us to achieve these same results through
> our own research. (88)

Drake believes in this so strongly that he has spent most of his adult life developing various calculations for the probability of ET life (Lemonick 45).

Belief in ETs in contemporary America has become religious, although not institutionalized in the sense of an organized religion. Instead, it has taken on the aspects of ritual satiation of the human need to connect to something bigger, and hence "the UFO offers a satisfying blend of techno-futurism, religion, and a spiritual quest which is personally motivated and does not require a commitment to an externally imposed set of social rules" (Hodgkinson 15). This is, in part, why the SETI (Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute) building looks like the Creation Museum; but instead of Biblical

references on its walls it has an autographed picture of Jodie Foster from the film

Contact, which was based on the novel by Carl Sagan (Koerner and LeVay 159).

It is interesting to note here that there are many organizations dedicated to various

aspects of extraterrestrial phenomena. The two most worthy of mention here are the

above mentioned SETI, and an organization called the International Centre for Abduction

Research (ICAR). SETI and ICAR are interesting because they seem to be two sides of

the same coin. On the one side there is SETI, which was founded by physicist Frank

Drake, and has a mandate to search for extraterrestrial life through the strictest confines

of scientific methodology (in order to preserve the legitimacy of the research and results).

SETI is involved in *the search* for ETs. On the other side, ICAR was founded by history

professor David Jacobs, and was founded on the belief that we do not have to search for

ETs because the ETs have already found us:

> The International Center for Abduction Research (ICAR) is an organization
>
> devoted to the dissemination of trustworthy information about UFO abductions.
>
> The ICAR will provide accurate information to therapists and lay individuals who
>
> are interested in abductions, and help them cope with the variety of problems that
>
> arise from the use of hypnosis and other memory collection procedures. David M.
>
> Jacobs is the Director of the ICAR and there is a small Board. (*ICAR*
>
> http://www.ufoabduction.com)

SETI, which was for its first year of operation funded by NASA, claims that it is a

physical impossibility that ETs have already had contact with earth, citing that the

distances are just too great (*Phantom Quest* video). ICAR dismisses this attitude of

impossibility, insisting that it is irrelevant. The ET phenomenon has far greater

implications in realms beyond hard science, such as human psychology and its cultural manifestation. This opposition is almost akin the science versus religion opposition: one side claims legitimacy through rationality while the other claims legitimacy through experience, although Jacobs does state the following on the ICAR website:

> I wrote most of the information on this web site based on more than 38 years of UFO research. In addition, since 1986 I have conducted nearly 900 hypnotic regressions with abductees. I have tried to be as objective and as "agenda free" as possible. I have no New Age, spiritual, religious, transformational, or transcendent program to promote. I try to stay as close to the evidence as I can. However, there is no possibility that I have avoided error. The majority of evidence for the alien abduction phenomenon is from human memory derived from hypnosis administered by amateurs. It is difficult to imagine a weaker form of evidence. But it is evidence and we have a great deal of it. Still, readers must be skeptical of what I say and of what all others say in this tangled arena of alien abductions, hypnosis, popular culture, and memory. Abduction researchers are mainly amateurs doing their best to get to the truth knowing that objective reality may elude them. (*ICAR* http://www.ufoabduction.com)

In either case, since there is no hard evidence one way or another, attitudes, ideas, and narratives regarding the ET phenomenon are perpetuated and changed through the human activity of production and reception.

Participation in the production/reception cycle, as with participation in ritual, results in a bonding with the symbols. Many of these symbols are so powerful that they exist in both reality and in fiction. For example, SETI uses giant parabolic radio

telescopes to "detect messages" from space (Rood and Trefil 147). These were portrayed in the film *Contact* and are shown repeatedly in *The X-Files,* and have thus become a symbol for contact itself. This bonding of a subculture to certain symbols is a major part of systems of belief and is expressed in many ways, including fiction. Furthermore, once established and supported through a system of symbols, it is difficult to undermine belief, especially on the basis of "don't believe everything you read" logic. This logic, which includes "everything you see on TV," runs parallel in both religious and scientific discourse, especially when concerned with the existence of extraterrestrial beings.

Despite all skepticism, subjects of belief are prolific in our textual cultural products: "Hollywood, once obsessed with all things biblical, now locates its epics on the frontiers of science. Innumerable movies have dealt with intelligent extraterrestrials in one way or another"(Koerner and LeVay 160). The shift here is a shift in symbolism in society, and hence also a shift in the symbolism in its fictional products. The shift is from a focus on Christian symbols in the majority of fictional narratives to a focus on scientific symbols in the majority of fictional narratives. This is *not* a shift away from the general subject, which is that of a system of knowledge based on *belief* as expressed in fiction. Neither has the structure changed; the narrative structure *exchanges* symbols the way people exchange currency. For example, the relationship between the symbols of angels and aliens is not one, according to structuralist Roland Barthes, of equality but of equivalence in meaning (112). This can be thought of it in terms of exchangeability of the elements. The meaning is not identical, but their value as 'place holders' is. The elements, either aliens or angels, while they are attributed with different meanings, hold the same weight and status in the narratives they occupy (Barthes 112-3). Thus, as the

experiential narratives of a culture change, the fictional narratives and those symbols integral to them change as well. The fictional and experiential narratives are bound in the cycle of meaning exchange through symbolic repetition and reinforcement.

With regard to this concept, Victor Turner writes: " . . .I formulate symbols as social and cultural dynamic systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form . . ."(*From Ritual* . . . 22). Psychologist Carl Jung expresses the same idea in different, yet more specific, terms:

> The fact is that archetypal images are so packed with meaning in themselves that people never think of asking what they really do mean. *That the gods die from time to time* is due to man's sudden discovery that they do not mean anything, that they are made by human hands, useless idols of wood and stone. (13; emphasis added)

Here again, Jung is demonstrating how meaning is attributed; here though, he is also stating that it may not *stay* attributed. Any system is dynamic and, as Turner states, open to degeneration *or* rejuvenation. With regard to the experiential stream of narrative, Showalter also recognizes the component of attribution of belief to the symbols of extraterrestrial narratives: "Or maybe we're witnessing the birth of a folk religion, with aliens functioning much like the angels who have sprouted all over the country as the millennium approaches" (199). This process of using supernatural phenomena to articulate meaning is what Barthes terms 'mythic speech,' which he also states changes diachronically in cultural context:

> Naturally, everything is not expressed at the same time: some objects become the prey of mythical speech for a while, then they disappear, others take their place

and attain the status of myth . . . one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of the mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things. (110)

One can think of alien encounter narratives, as they exist in both streams, as becoming established and functioning today the way myth did hundreds to thousands of years ago. However, the fictional stream also has the added dimension of its production being consumer driven. The experiential narratives are attributed with so much emotional investment that it creates a demand for the expression in fictional terms as well.

Investment, though not in contemporary market-economy terms, was also a part of the system of myth. People devoted time and energy into performing the rituals the myths induced. Similarly, people's emotional, temporal, and material investments into their experiences of ET phenomena are substantial, and indicate an unmet need for either identification with a common community *or* connection to a bigger picture/higher power. This need has led to the *social process* of establishing these meaningful connections through the symbols of alien encounter narratives. This process is very similar to that of the process involved with mythology. It involves the hierarchy of accepted knowledge, and a conflict between 'believers' and non-believers: "Any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system" (Barthes 131). This fact system versus semiological system conundrum between believer and non-believer is very apparent with regard to the alien encounter phenomenon as well.

Although these two sides are largely irreconcilable, structrualist Terrence Hawkes

introduces the concept of *verum factum*, which helps to explain the conundrum. It means

"that which man recognizes as true (verum) and that which he has himself made (factum)

are one and the same" (13). Hence, the symbols that believers take as the central, *factual*,

tenets of their system of knowledge are also the symbols that non-believers recognize as

the central symbols of specific, generic, *fictional* narratives:

> . . . even if no UFOs hover in our heavens, belief in extraterrestrial beings has
>
> hovered in the human consciousness for dozens of decades. Although the moon
>
> and Mars are as barren as giant bricks, moonlings and Martians long ago began to
>
> invade our culture and influence our thought, and they now occupy increasing
>
> roles in our cinematic and literary creations. (Crowe xiii)

As symbols in both fiction and non-fiction media, ETs have a powerful effect on human

thought and also action. The symbol of the alien has come to encompass an entire

alternative subculture, and remains still an encompassing symbol of the unknown for

society at large. As a symbol of the unknown, the alien presents a threat to the American

way of life, the ongoing struggle for perfect autonomy, and the rights of 'Life, Liberty,

and The Pursuit of Happiness.'

Chapter Four　　　　**"A Silent Weapon for a Quiet War:" Life, Infection, and Conspiracy in *The X-Files* and *Dreamcatcher***

As a symbol, the alien holds a certain amount of power in the American cultural consciousness. The alien is a symbol that is open to the attribution of many meanings since its existence is not a proven, scientific truth. Because of this, producers of fiction use the alien not only as a way to make social or political statements but also to tap into the cultural consciousness and portray it in fictional media in a way that will draw the most viewers, and hence the most profits. In order to do this, producers must use the alien to represent the most pervasive of American fears, threats to autonomy and the unalienable rights to 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.'

Of these three, 'Life' is the most immediate and essential. It represents the right to be born and exist, as was previously stated, without undue hindrance. Accordingly, it refers to one's right to protect him or her self from threats to his or her existence. Personal safety and the right to protect it are very important parts of American ideology. In many ET encounter narratives, the alien represents a direct threat to the survival of both the individual and humanity in general. The ways in which the alien presents a threat to life can be seen as symbols for the fears Americans feel regarding real and plausible threats to life. On the other hand, the people who fight these threats to life, whether it be the alien first hand or the earthly governments involved, work as symbols within the galaxy of autonomy. As the next turn in dialectical tacking, it is time now to move from the alien in culture to the alien in narrative. The narratives explored herein are the films *The X-Files* (1998) and *Dreamcatcher* (2003).

The X-Files

The plot of *The X-Files* is based on FBI Agent Fox Mulder's (David Duchovny) quest to reveal a government conspiracy to cover-up sanctioned alien colonization of Earth. The alien colonization occurs via a fatal infection or 'virus' that enters the human body through a mobile, oily black liquid. In this film, the alien encompasses the symbols of death by uncontrollable infectious disease and its relation to untrustworthy people in positions of power. In opposition to this, autonomy encompasses the right to defend physical safety, the right to disclosure of information that may affect that safety, and the right to subvert authority when it threatens these things.

Infectious disease

One of the secondary symbols in the galaxy of the alien is infectious disease. Because it represents a concrete threat to life, such as the AIDS, Anthrax, and Ebola viruses, infectious disease is a powerful tool of fear. The producers of *The X-Files* capitalize on this public fear of violent infection, and portray the alien virus accordingly. The use of infectious disease a symbol for threats to life is an effective way to reach the American audience, since infection, according to Ann Becker, has posed a threat to American autonomy since the War for Independence: "Rumored British use of biological warfare, controversy over the need for inoculation, and attempts to control the spread of smallpox all influenced the progress of the War for Independence" (383). Infection was a weapon used by the British, a force the Americans saw as oppressive, to quell the American fight for sovereignty. In this way, the infectious alien becomes a symbol for hindrance to American autonomy.

After the oily black substance infects, the alien virus uses human body elements, such as muscle, bone, fat, and minerals, to 'gestate' an alien clone. When the clone is ready, it bursts from the human host. In an effort to prevent a particularly graphic scene portraying this, The Cigarette-Smoking Man (William B. Davis) tells alien DNA researcher Ben Bronschweig M.D. (Jefferey DeMunn) to administer a vaccine to a fireman who was infected while trying to save a boy who fell into an ancient pit, wherein the alien virus had lain dormant for centuries. The vaccine is not administered in time, the fireman dies, and Ben is torn to shreds by the resulting alien clone. The boy, the fireman, and Ben are also secondary symbols. The boy represents the average American citizen, the fireman the American hero, and Ben the arrogance of the government. However, the virus is fatal to all three characters, showing itself to be an indiscriminant and uncontrollable killer, a characteristic that supports the alien as threat to autonomy.

Untrustworthy authority

Ben is a symbol for the arrogance of the government, government conspiracy, and cover-up within the galaxy of the alien. Ben is a scientist who was hired by a group of super-elite men called The Partners who are not only aware of the alien infection, but are involved in a conspiracy to introduce it to Earth's population. Ben's job is to combine alien and human DNA in an effort to make a vaccine so that the aliens can populate earth without killing every last human. Ben and his parent agency are examples of untrustworthy authority which is, according to Despina Kakoudaki, a common theme in recent 'disaster films' such as ET encounter films. The commonness of this theme in SF indicates that Americans harbor skepticism toward the unknown elements of government that they may not have voted into power. According to Kaoudaki, ". . . a major theme of

the films is the responsibility of the scientists and the companies / governments that support the experimentation with DNA. The virus DNA link would then allow us to think about the microscopic as the realm of threat here . . ." (122). While Kakoudaki is not limiting her discussion on DNA experimentation to ET DNA, parallels can be drawn between ET DNA experimentation in fiction and the public fear that world governments are experimenting with varying strains of virus DNA for the purposes of biological weaponry. Any authority that would put the health and well-being of the public at risk is untrustworthy and a threat to public autonomy should the virus leave the lab.

Furthermore, The Partners' involvement in the alien colonization of earth is entirely for the purpose of preserving the elite, which is in opposition to the public's desire for disclosure of information relating to their safety. This is also symbolic of America's distrust of certain kinds of authority, revealing the tension between the public and the sectors of the government that are not democratically voted in. For example, as soon as the alien infection was discovered by the boy that fell into the pit, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is a real U.S. government agency but in *The X-Files* is controlled by The Partners, swoops in with a bio-containment camp consisting of white tents and unmarked tanker trucks. When the alien 'out-break' is contained, the FEMA team sets up a new playground over the bio-containment site. This playground is a symbol of cover-up in *The X-Files*. The symbols of the bio-containment camp, Ben's murder by the alien, and the playground cover-up are related in a contradiction—The Partners are interested in allying themselves with the alien colonizers for their own benefit, while the thing they are allying themselves to is causing damage to their organization. They are protecting the very thing that intends to destroy them.

Furthermore, the bio-containment camp and the playground are involved in a relationship that is both complimentary and presents a duality. The bio-containment camp is a symbol of the conspiracy, which is complimentary to the playground as a symbol of cover-up. However, they are also involved in a relationship of duality because the playground is also a symbol for the American value of childhood innocence, which is the opposite of the dark dealings of FEMA. Furthermore, the bio-containment camp is a symbol for the limitations of human ability to control the world through science, as Kakoudaki discusses in relation to disaster films in general: ". . . we see disaster films that posit human or government responsibility at some point in the destruction, through negligence or, more often, a secret plan. Interestingly enough, these films thematize the limits of the biological sciences: what delivers the destruction are the viruses . . ." (122). In *The X-Files*, the limits of science and control over its objects must be kept secret at all costs, or a mass panic will ensue.

The right to defense and disclosure

In opposition to the above symbols in the galaxy of the alien are the secondary symbols in the galaxy of autonomy. In *The X-Files*, Agent Mulder is the embodiment of the right to protect one's self and one's society, as he tells his partner Agent Dana Scully (Jillian Anderson): "If we fail to anticipate the unforeseen or expect the unexpected in a universe of infinite possibilities we may find ourselves at the mercy of anyone or anything that cannot be programmed, categorized or easily referenced" (*The X-Files*, VHS). Mulder's reluctance to be left "at the mercy of anyone or anything" demonstrates the value he places on personal and societal autonomy through the ability to protect one's own safety. The ability to protect safety is related to the fight against untrustworthy

authority for the disclosure of information. Through their positions as FBI agents, Mulder and Scully have a privileged position in the fight for disclosure. In American culture, mostly due to media coverage, the FBI badge is a symbol of social power, granting the bearer access to secure buildings and authority to take charge in emergencies. In *The X-Files* the symbol of the FBI badge is involved in a hierarchical relationship with other kinds of credentials. For example, Mulder and Scully are consistently denied access to places and people that they want to see. This is because The Partners are more powerful than the FBI, and indeed, are often in control of its actions and operations. However, Mulder and Scully cannot be condensed down to the symbol of the FBI badge. Because they continue to subvert the confines of FBI protocol in their actions, they set themselves up in opposition to, not as subordinate to, The Partners. As symbols in the galaxies of autonomy and the alien respectively, Mulder and Scully represent the right to life, and the right to protect life, in opposition to The Partners who represent conspiracy and untrustworthy authority.

The right to subvert authority

Mulder and Scully are not, however, the only characters in opposition to The Partners. The character Alvin Kurtzweil M.D. (Martin Landau) writes extensively in an attempt to disclose The Partners' actions to the public. Kurtzweil persuades Mulder to listen to him in a scene set in a back alley, behind a bar, late at night. The setting symbolizes the dark and covert nature of the information, and the danger of subverting authority in the fight for disclosure. Kurtzweil says that the alien infection is "a plague to end all plagues, Agent Mulder. A silent weapon for a quiet war. The systematic release of an indiscriminant organism for which the men who will bring it on still have no cure."

This theme of alien infection and government conspiracy is common in ET encounter narratives, and parallels the fear of genetic engineering of infection by world governments for use as biological agents. Again, it demonstrates the American public's distrust of secret government actions and elite operations.

This fear is not unfounded as in 2001 the U.S. government "rejected the protocol to the bioweapons treaty" which was intended to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) on international regulation of biological weapons (Dando and Wheelis 40). Dando and Wheelis speculate on the many reasons for rejecting the protocol, including the possibility that the U.S. rejected the protocol in an effort to reassert American independence from international regulations, i.e. subverting international authority. However, "a more ominous explanation is that perhaps the United States rejected the protocol not just because it is conducting secret, offensively oriented 'biodefense' programs, but because it is committed to continuing and expanding them" (Dando and Wheelis 40). As in *The X-Files,* the secret biological experiments pose a threat to Life since they are undisclosed and the biological agents are uncontrollable, and may be accidentally leaked into the public sphere.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the character of Kurtzweil closely resembles real life conspiracy writer Leonard Horowitz. For example, Horowitz has spent years researching and writing his own brand of conspiracy theory relating to the development of biological weapons of war. The paranoid tone of his writing is similar to the tone of Kurtweil's admonitions to Mulder, as the dedication to his book *Emerging Viruses AIDS and Ebola: Nature, Accident or Intentional?* reads: "DEDICATED TO THE SEEKERS OF TRUTH and those who, regardless of risk, labour tirelessly to tell it." Ultimately, this

example relates back to *The X-Files* by providing an example of the kind of real-life occurrence that inspires and informs the themes, motifs and characters in SF. Americans are fascinated by conspiracy theory, especially when involvement in it provides a sense that the average American may have some power to protect his or her life, and quality of life, ultimately asserting autonomy to protect the American's inalienable right to life.

Dreamcatcher

Like *The X-Files,* the plot of the film *Dreamcatcher*, which is based on a novel by Stephen King, involves alien colonization and repopulation of earth, and government attempts to cover-up contact. However, unlike *The X-Files*, the government does not need to cover-up collusion but wants to suppress information. In *Dreamcatcher*, the alien encompasses symbols of infection and stigmatization. In opposition to this, autonomy encompasses the right to protect one's self and others from physical harm, and like *The X-Files*, the right to subvert authority when it impedes that ability.

Infection

To begin with, a supporting symbol in the galaxy of the alien is the alien as infection. As in *The X-Files*, the actual physical symptoms are gruesome, and the ultimate result is the gestation of an alien clone that takes the life of its human host. The infection appears when four friends, Henry (Thomas Jane), Jonesy (Damian Lewis), Pete (Timothy Oliphant), and Beaver, (Jason Lee) go to their hunting cabin for a weekend. Once there, they notice a red rash accompanied by extreme gassiness that plagues human, and non-human, inhabitants of their rural surroundings, showing it to be an indiscriminate infection like the one portrayed in *The X-Files*. The rash and the gassiness are complimentary symbols because the rash is symbolic of impurity while the gassiness is

symbolic of bodily processes and the removal of impurities as waste products. In

Dreamcatcher, the impurity and the removal of the impurity, the gassiness, are symbolic

for the lack of control humans have over their own bodies, how humans often do not even

have autonomy from their own biological processes. This is especially the case in the

event of contracting an infectious disease, which through this lack of autonomy over

one's own body presents a threat to one's physical safety.

An example of this is when Beaver and Jonesy, while in the woods hunting, meet

an infected man, Rick MacCarthy (Eric Keenleyside) and bring him back to the cabin.

Soon Rick's symptoms reach the bursting point. In *Dreamcatcher*, when an alien leaves

an invaded body it does not tear through the abdomen as in *The X-Files* but leaves

through the anus, causing a profusion of frothy excrement-like blood to cover the

surrounding area. This is portrayed when Beaver finds Rick dead on the toilet in the

cabin's blood covered bathroom. Beaver flips Rick off the toilet and is greeted by a

bloodied anus, and a turd-with-teeth swimming in the toilet. Rick's death on the toilet is

not unprecedented, as Ed Regis, in *Virus Ground Zero: Stalking the Killer Viruses with*

the Centers for Disease Control, cites a real-life case of Ebola where a "victim, it was

said, died in his outhouse, and his body slumped down into the opening and fell to the

bottom" (154). In real-life as in the ET narrative, the symbols of the toilet, human waste,

and infection are involved in a hierarchical relationship of things to be feared as they

present uncontrollable bodily functions that pose a potential threat to life. Rick dies in the

bathroom, which is at the bottom of the hierarchy, because the bathroom is a symbol for

both waste removal and clean-up. The alien is found in the toilet because the toilet is a

symbol for controlling and removing waste. However, the toilet is higher on the hierarchy

of waste because it is considered to be dirty, and dirtiness is almost always associated

with infection. People who carry infection are generally considered to be dirty, and are

stigmatized as such. This is indicative of Americans' fear of their own waste since

infectious disease can be caused by contact with waste. Waste is dirty. In this hierarchy

of symbols there is the duality of dirty/clean, and also infected/clean. Americans are

afraid of infection not only because it is a direct threat to life, but also because it causes a

feeling of shame and dirtiness.

Stigmatization

The feeling of shame is the result of the stigmatization of the infected. In

Dreamcatcher, stigmatization occurs when the area affected by the alien infection is

quarantined. While Beaver and Jonesy are taking care of Rick McCarthy, a black

helicopter, a symbol for covert operations, swoops down near the cabin and a soldier in a

bio-hazard suit shouts at the men through a mega-phone: "This area is under temporary

quarantine. You must stay where you are. Glad you're OK. This situation will be

resolved in 24 to 48 hours." Quarantine is a threat to autonomy because it restricts the

movements of all individuals in the quarantined area, whether they are infected or not. In

a broader cultural context, according to Kirsten Ostherr, because of advances in medical

science the restrictive aspect of quarantine is less related to the treatment and prevention

of the spread of infection but is a practice instituted by authorities to gain control over the

movement and location of citizens:

> While the development of microbiology enabled newly successful forms of
>
> treatment and prevention of contagious diseases based on laboratory identification
>
> of disease-causing microorganisms, techniques for quarantining the sick also

became increasingly specialized. Thus the practice of shoring up boundaries

through quarantine that had characterized public health up to the 1880s was

reasserted even at this revolutionary moment of discovery and expansion. (7-8)

Ostherr is critiquing the practice of quarantine because it may be used as a mechanism of

control instead of a necessary measure during medical emergencies. In *Dreamcatcher*,

those who are not infected are confined with those who are, greatly increasing their

chances of infection, and hence is a threat to life. Blue Unit demonstrates the 'practice of

shoring up boundaries' by asserting their authority to confine everyone instead of testing

civilians and releasing the uninfected. There is a duality inherent in the symbol of

quarantine as a threat to life and autonomy however, because quarantine is the restriction

of the few for the protection of the many.

In *Dreamcatcher,* the quarantine is instituted and enforced by Blue Unit, the

paramilitary team in charge of containing and suppressing ET encounters. At the head of

this organization is Col. Abe Curtis (Morgan Freeman) and Lt. Owen Underhill (Tom

Sizemore). They quarantine the sick and healthy alike in a barn. In a scene is shot through

the visor of Owen's biohazard helmet, the two officers take a walk through the barn. The

frame of this scene is restricted by the confines of the frame of the visor and the view is

slightly obscured by the "ripple" effect of the clear but very thick biohazard plastic. The

most prominent sounds in this scene are those made by the Owen's bio-hazard air

filtration system, children crying, and Abe's reassurances to the infected that the situation

is under control. What Owen sees, and consequently what the viewers see, are average

Americans with lesion-like rashes all over their faces. This intimate perspective lends a

sense of immediacy to situation. The immediacy is reinforced when Gosselin (Campbell

Lane), the owner of the barn and adjacent General Store, approaches Owen and shouts: "You can't do this to people in America!" Gosselin represents the American public and the value they place on their right to life; Owen and Abe represent an authority that impedes that right, even if it is contradictory in that it is for the benefit of society at large.

These themes of quarantine and stigmatization demonstrate how dealing with infectious disease can be political. Built into American politics and ideology, the Right to Life is a national standard. The alien in *Dreamcatcher* may be threatening the survival of humanity, but this is not what is important. What is important is that the alien is a threat to *Americans*. This nationalizing of the threat is an important value in American culture, as Yaseen Noorani writes of American defense strategies in general that "sheer existence is the only standard allowed, and protecting the existence of the nation / state is the only orientation politics can have" (20). This is paralleled in *Dreamcatcher* because Abe is so opposed to the alien infection, on account of its threat to Americans' lives, that his intentions are to destroy all traces of it, even those infected Americans who may survive. This makes dealing with the alien a nationalized issue as Abe makes his position clear to Owen: "Those poor schmucks. They drive Chevrolettes, shop at Wal-Mart, never miss an episode of *Friends*. These are Americans. And the idea of slaughtering Americans . . . turns my stomach. But I'll do it. I'll do it because it needs to be done." Abe is waging a personal war on the aliens on the moral grounds that they pose a threat to America. This is his attempt to legitimize the killing of the quarantined citizens. Noorani discusses this kind of situation in American politics:

> The introduction of morality into the nonmormal realm of self-preservation makes

matters worse, indeed vitiates the state of war entirely by condemning the enemy

as an immoral and inhuman agency that must be terminated. Such moral claims

for prosecuting a war are designed to veil ulterior motives, such as greed, or

indicate internal fissures in the state, the posturing of political parties to gain

power through control of the government's authority to wage war. (19)

In *Dreamcatcher*, Abe's passion to wage war indicates "internal fissures in the state" as

he is making the rules up as he goes along, and is eventually removed by a higher

military power that stops the killing of the quarantined citizens.

The right to self-protection and subversion of authority

The higher military power is made aware of Abe's personal war by Owen, who

disagrees with his superior officer's shoot-first policy and subverts Abe's authority by

going above his head. This demonstrates the right to protect one's and other's personal

safety, and is a symbol in the galaxy of autonomy. Owen is not he only character that is

symbolic of the fight for life, as the four friends, Jonesy, Beaver, Henry, and Pete, are

often portrayed as protecting the physical safety of others. Jonesy and Beaver exercise

this right when they protect infected Rick, who tells them: "Thank-you for taking me in."

Beaver replies, "Anybody would've." Rick responds, "Maybe. Maybe not." Rick's words

belie his understanding of his society's fear of infection. He is aware that infection is a

threat to the right to life, and that stigmatization is a mechanism of self-preservation in

the face of that threat. The two men do not stigmatize him, unfortunately to their own

disadvantage. Herein lies another contradiction: the alien may encompass stigmatization

and confinement, which is opposed to autonomy, but acceptance and inclusion of the

infected may result in death, which is also defeats the right to life. The difference is this:

autonomy is threatened by quarantine when people do not go into it by choice but are

forced into it. It is the lack of choice that is opposed to autonomy. The choice to help the

infected, even with a fatal result, is still a choice and therefore in line with autonomy.

Chapter Five   **"Up Yours! :" The Fight for Liberty in *Independence Day* and *War of the Worlds***

The most pervasive of American ideologies is the ideology of independence, the ideology of autonomy. Based on this ideology is the belief that American citizens have certain rights. These rights are epitomized by the American motto, as found in the Declaration of Independence, which states that every citizen has the right to 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.' ET encounter narratives can be seen as constructed of symbols that represent threats to Americans' autonomous exercising of these rights. First, the alien is an encompassing symbol for infectious disease and the links to governmental experimentation, cover-up and conspiracy, which represents a threat to 'Life.' Second, the alien is an encompassing symbol for the terrorist "other," and acts of terrorism which present a threat to 'Liberty.' In the context of this study, Liberty refers to freedoms such as the freedoms of thought, action, and movement. As a symbol in the galaxy of autonomy, liberty also refers to American society's right to defend these freedoms through the use of agency and sacrifice, both of course, autonomous choices, not culturally coerced decisions. All of this works toward a reassertion of American independence, which can be seen in the films *Independence Day* (1996) and *War of the Worlds* (2005).

The alien as the terrorist "other"

In order for Americans to reassert their independence, that independence must come under attack. While threats to independence are a major cultural anxiety, it can be argued that it is an anxiety that is essential to the perpetuation of American values such as freedoms of speech, religion, and choice of government, such as democratic political

process. Therefore, the invading ET presents a symbol for restriction and oppression of rights in dualistic opposition to autonomy. The invading ET must not be a figure of sympathy to Americans. It must be utterly inhuman, utterly irrational, utterly unsympathetic. It must represent everything that Americans devalue. To be a symbol of 'the terrorist,' the ET must be totally "othered." It must not be a figure that Americans can relate to or have empathy for in any way. It must be worthy of a good "nuking."

Independence Day

This is exactly the case in *Independence Day* when an ET mother-ship, one-third the size of earth's moon, positions itself outside earth's atmosphere and dispatches smaller ships to earth's major cities, at the ready to attack. These UFOs are symbolic for alien origin which signifies they are not encompassed by American ideology. This is reinforced when the ships begin destroying earth cities. For the most part, the ETs advanced technology allows them to overcome earthlings without hand-to-hand combat, but one ET pilot is captured and brought to the Area 51 ET research facility. Here it narrowly escapes becoming a lab-rat by taking 'hostage' alien researcher Dr.Okun (Brent Spiner) and telepathically speaking through him to the U.S. President Thomas Whitmore (Bill Pullman):

> President: I know there is much we can learn from each other, *if* we can negotiate a truce. We can find a way to co-exist. Can there be a peace between us?
>
> Alien: Peace? No peace.
>
> President: What is it you want us to do?
>
> Alien: Die . . .die . . .

This exchange effectively installs the U.S. president as a symbol for rational diplomacy, positioned hierarchically above the single-minded alien bent on destruction. As will be discussed more fully, this violent irrationality is a part of the American cultural construction of the terrorist.

War of the Worlds

War of the Worlds likewise involves a wholesale ET invasion and reduction of the alien to inhuman "other." This 2005 film, directed by Steven Spielberg, is the latest installation in a cultural narrative that has been continuously readapted. Although the alien has been symbolic for various specific threats to Western ideologies within the reincarnations of this narrative, it has remained culturally relevant for over a century, which is a testament to the power of the alien as an encompassing symbol of threats to those ideologies. The narrative began with H.G. Wells' 1898 novel, and has been perpetuated through such adaptations as Orson Welles' 1938 radio play and Byron Haskin's 1953 film. The 2005 version begins with a voice-over introduction by Morgan Freeman, again casting the alien as a violent force that cannot be reasoned with: "Yet, across the gulf of space, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic regarded our planet with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us." This characterization taps into the fear of something or someone of alien origin, something or someone who does not know or understand the American way of life, and may therefore not work towards the preservation of it.

In SF, the primary method of coping with such a threat is to reduce it to an opposable entity. This is also a coping mechanism used in American political culture, as Theo Farrell posits: "foreigners and fear therefore are integral to the reproduction of the

United States' imperial identity" (12). Foreigners, in this designation, are groups of people who are brought up under a different ideology than that of the U.S.A. In other words, "foreigner" includes anyone who is not steeped in the ideology of autonomy which includes individuality, personal liberty, and the ability to pursue personal betterment. These values make up American identity, and in order for this identity to be perpetuated it must be constantly reasserted. It can only be reasserted in the face of opposition, which is the foreign "other" who encompasses all values other than those that are inalienably American. This reassertion is one of the primary operations of the symbols in SF as the alien is a symbol for the reduction of the foreigner, specifically the foreign terrorist, to unreasonable 'other.' Despina Kakoudaki discusses the unreasonable ET as a political symbol in the film *Men in Black* (1997):

> Also, nobody is negotiating or is expected to negotiate with fifty-foot cockroaches; their total lack of recognizable humanity makes war against alien invaders legitimate in ways that other wars are not and allows a use of force, including nuclear weapons, that no political narrative, at this point, would find acceptable (121).

This is the case in *Independence Day* when the president orders a nuclear strike on the ETs, of course only after the ET rejects his offer of peace and co-existence.

The ET of alien origin is reduced to an easily opposable entity in the same way that American political rhetoric reduces the terrorist to an opposable, non-diplomatic entity, as Yaseen Noorani discusses in "The Rhetoric of Security":

> Rhetorically speaking, terrorism is the ideal enemy of the United States, more so than any alien civilization and perhaps even more so than the tyrannies of

communism and fascism, terrorism's defeated sisters. This is because terrorism is depicted in U.S. rhetoric not as an immoral tactic employed in political struggle, but as an immoral condition that extinguishes the possibility of peaceful political deliberation (13).

Aliens are symbols for terrorists because they cannot be approached on diplomatic terms. They are irrational. They do not deal in discussion and diplomacy, which are supporting symbols in the galaxy of autonomy; they deal in violence, which is a symbol in the galaxy of the alien.

The alien as encompassing acts of terrorism

The acts of terrorists are not only intended to inflict physical harm, but are intended also as a means of perpetuating fear that institutes a kind of internal policing, thus restricting freedoms at a psychological level. Terrorists accomplish this by choosing targets that are often ideological symbols to Americans. This is also used in ET encounter narratives. *Independence Day* and *War of the Worlds* both portray possible terrorist targets as the targets of the ETs, but they portray different kinds of targets.

Independence Day

In *Independence Day*, the targets are national symbols that work to symbolize America at the global level. The first target of the ET attack is Earth's satellites, which interrupts American broadcasting signals. Satellites are symbolic for international coordination and sharing of information. The ETs turn this against earth, disrupting communication and cooperation, and use the satellites to coordinate their attack. The ETs usurp all signals and use them for ships to communicate with each other and share in the countdown to destruction. This strategy is discovered by TV station technician David

Levinson (Jeff Goldblum): "They're using our own satellites against us." This shows the ETs as a symbol for infiltration and as restricting the freedom of information on a global scale. This infiltration undermines America's ability to participate in the free exchange of international communications. Furthermore, the first targets of destruction are major cultural landmarks. In New York, the ETs start with the Empire State building, a symbol freedom of enterprise, and in Washington D.C. they hit the centre of the oval office and move on to other national buildings and monuments, like the Abe Lincoln memorial, all of which symbolize democracy, which is the freedom to choose and change government.

War of the Worlds

War of the Worlds, on the other hand, portrays the target as being "Main Street U.S.A.," to borrow the Disneyland term, and the 'average American.' This does not attack the U.S.A.'s global position, but its internal integrity. First the ETs enter long-buried terrestrial crafts, "tripods," by riding lighting strikes, or Electrical Magnetic Pulses (EMPs), into the ground. The buried crafts symbolize the alien's infiltration into the very foundation of American society, undermining avenues of transportation, commerce, and community. The scene that introduces these crafts shows one as it slowly unburies itself through the concrete of a typical neighborhood street. As it rises, it causes a physical split of homes, small business, and the church of the neighborhood. The tripod's ability to destroy these things is a supporting symbol in the galaxy of the alien, and is symbolic of an attack on freedom of lifestyle, freedom of enterprise, and the freedoms of thought and religion. These ETs are more interested in targeting the physical and ideological infrastructure of American society than the broad overarching national symbols that are recognizable the world over. The physical affect on the town is this splintering of

buildings; the physical affect on the citizens is a crematory zapping which reduces the citizens to ashes. The scenes portraying this are reminiscent, according to Jason Vest, of the ashes of the Twin Towers after the September 11 attack (68). Particularly poignant in the 9-11 context is the scene when Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) runs down the street toward his home through clouds of the ashes of his friends and neighbors, his fellow Americans. The symbol of average Americans is supported by the hanging of an American flag from the porch of every house on his street. When he returns to the relative safety of his home to find his children, he is covered in the cremated remains of these people. The ET attack on American infrastructure is further developed in a later scene when a mass of travelers trying to escape the alien warpath are stopped at a train crossing – the train speeds by, flames shooting out of every window and crevice. The tripods also attack and destroy the ferry they were trying to board. By making a priority of destroying transportation systems, the ETs effectively impede American freedom of movement.

The ETs' attack on American infrastructure is interesting because politically, Americans view themselves as the centre of world ideology. They believe that if every culture was similar to American culture, world peace could be achieved. By attacking American infrastructure, the ETs are attacking Earth's ideological centre. The ETs are further symbolic of terrorists because their purpose is to limit American freedom by destroying cultural structures, such as the home, small business, religion and transportation, that allow those freedoms:

> The United States is the animus of the world order and the power that sustains it. For this reason, any threat to the existence of the United States is a threat to world peace itself, and anything that the United States does to secure its existence is

justified as necessary for the preservation of world peace. In this way, the

existence of the United States stands at the centre of world peace and liberal

values, yet remains outside the purview of these values, since when under threat it

is subject only the extra-moral necessity of self-preservation. (Noorani 14)

In order to defeat the terrorists, Americans must place themselves at the centre and

everyone else at the margin.

In order to defeat the ETs, they must do the same. They must constantly create a

dichotomy of self-other in order to continually define the centre of power as America.

Every time the aliens are defeated, the U.S.A. reasserts its independence, and reaffirms

the liberty that comes with being the centre. Indeed, who is truly autonomous except for

the centre? Hence, when President Whitmore orders a nuclear strike on the ETs in

Independence Day he is justified because it will preserve the U.S., not to contribute to

U.S. global domination but, according to the American perspective, to preserve global

harmony. Furthermore, Spielberg chose to release *War of the Worlds* "just before the

Independence Day holiday of 2005" (Vest 67). Although the invaders in *War of the*

Worlds were defeated by Earthly bacteria and not American military might, the

Americans still asserted their right to independence by actively and aggressively pursuing

their national survival. The violent struggles against alien invaders portrayed in these

two films reassert American independence from oppressive forces, centre America as the

global keeper of peace and liberal values like democracy, and position America as the

Earth's protector.

Agency and sacrifice as supporting symbols for autonomy

Independence and domination cannot be achieved or maintained however, without the belief in personal and national agency. Agency is the ability to take action or exert power so that an end is achieved. Agency is a supporting symbol in the galaxy of autonomy because it comes about through choice. An American citizen has the right choose the actions he or she will take in order to achieve his or her ends. On a broader scale, the repeated actions of autonomous citizens allows for a national conception of agency, that the state, as composed of many individuals, can act on behalf of the nation in order to achieve generally accepted national goals. While democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion allow for disagreements and differences of opinion, there is on the national whole the unspoken agreement that the state will act in the best interests of the nation. Therefore, for the betterment of the nation, individual citizens will often employ their sense of personal agency, and sacrifice their personal safety, for the protection of the nation.

Independence Day

The opening scenes of *Independence Day* present the U.S.A. as a nation that values agency as the ability of the state to set national goals and take steps to achieve those goals on behalf of it citizens. The first scene of the film depicts the moon landing, which is a particularly American symbol of progress. The moon landing is a symbol of national agency because Americans acted in such a way as to achieve their goal of being the first in space. The shot is composed of the American flag stuck into the lunar surface in the background, and a plaque that reads, "We came in peace for all mankind" in the foreground. Again, this shows the creation of the nationally accepted ideology of

America centering itself as the global representative of Earth (Noorani 14). America is also at the global forefront of making contact with ETs. In *Independence Day*, the shot directly following the moon landing is a shot of the giant SETI radio telescopes, which were previously discussed, in New Mexico. These radio telescopes are symbolic for America's agency in the search, since searching is an active pursuit with the goal of achieving contact. This symbol is in opposition to the alien as terrorist since the invasion is not the result of the American search for peaceful contact. The U.S.A. is further centered when the U.S. organizes the world-wide counter-attack against the alien invaders. The character of President Whitmore is symbolic for the U.S. centering through agency, agency being exercised through the counter-attack, as is demonstrated in his speech to the gathered Americans ready to fight the ETs:

> In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world, and you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind . . . Perhaps it's fate that today is the 4th of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom, not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution, but from annihilation. We're fighting for our right to live, to exist, and should we win the day, the 4th of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but the day the world declared in one voice, we will not go quietly into the night . . . Today, we celebrate our Independence Day!

Unfortunately, the symbols of progress and agency, the moon landing and SETI, are contradictory to the alien, which demonstrates violent aggression, when it actually makes contact. The negative results of these exploratory missions to outer space can be seen as analogous for terrorist activity as being the antithesis to American imperial endeavors

overseas. This demonstrates that perhaps Americans have been so interested in overseas endeavors that they have grown complacent to threats to the security of their own ideologies, which must be constantly reasserted in order to stay strong:

> In addition to all the questions raised about security measures, intelligence failures, accountability in foreign-policy decision making, and the like, the atrocity of September 11 also forces citizens of democratic countries to ask themselves how strongly they are committed to democratic values. Their enemies may believe in a chimera, but it is one for which they have shown themselves all too ready to die. (Boroumand and Boroumand 16)

When Americans fail to reassert their commitment to 'democratic values' at home and abroad, they leave themselves open to physical and ideological assault.

However, a perceived lack of commitment is also related to Americans' belief that such sacrifice must not be sanctioned by the state but must be a personal choice. From the American perspective, if a terrorist dies for his/her cause, it is to be considered a 'suicide mission' because American's perceive it as a coerced decision. However, if one of their own citizens dies for the nation they consider it sacrifice because it was an autonomous choice. In *Independence Day*, one such sacrifice is portrayed when Vietnam veteran, pilot Russell Casse (Randy Quaid), makes the independent decision to fly a missile into the destroyer-beam of one of the UFOs. Over the radio, his last words reveal that his sacrifice is to ensure the future freedom of his children: "Do me a favor. Tell my children I love them very much. Alright you alien assholes, in the words of my generation: Up yoouurrs!"

War of the Worlds

War of the Worlds addresses national and personal agency as well. To begin with,

Ray Ferrier introduces the concept when he sings "The Star Spangled Banner," a symbol

for American agency and resistance in the fight for independence against the British,

while watching the ETs invade earth through EMPs. Furthermore, many of the scenes of

resistance are set near colonial houses and farms, which is reminiscent of the original war

for independence. One of these homesteads is used as a hold-out for Harlan Ogilvy (Tim

Robbins), who harbours Ray and his daughter Rachel (Dakota Fanning) for a short time.

Harlan tells Ray: "We're the resistance, Ray. They can't occupy this country.

Occupations always fail. History has taught us that a thousand times." Fighting the alien

reasserts the importance America places on freedoms like democracy. Because these

freedoms are believed to be inherent, any threats to them present threats to their status as

inalienable, and in turn the whole of the ideology upon which America was built and is

perpetuated. Therefore, Americans must employ their personal agency in the fight against

would-be oppressors. For example, Ray cannot hide in the house long, as it is infiltrated

by an ET probe. He and others are captured by a tripod that sucks people up and turns

them into human mulch. Ray gets sucked up, and before he is pulled out by his fellow

Americans, he pulls the pins on two grenades that destroy the tripod but lets its captives

free. By exercising agency through violence, Ray achieves the most basic of freedoms,

the freedom from captivity.

How people react in certain situations is their assertion of agency. If they fight an

attack, terrorist or alien, that fight is a representation of agency. Agency is a tool in the

fight for autonomy. Sometimes sacrifice is the embodiment of use of agency. Ray's son

Robbie (Justin Chatwin) asserts his personal agency when his first impulse in reaction to the invaders is to join the army so he can fight them. Ray makes a personal sacrifice, like Casse, when he allows his son to leave his protection and pursue this avenue of agency. Where Casse sacrifices his own life for his children, Ray sacrifices his ability to protect his child in order to allow him autonomy. In a way, this is a representation of national agency at work. It is shown through the duality that freedom of the nation comes at the expense of the individual. It is a sacrifice of the few for the greater good of the whole: "Outside the collective self in its ordered condition, individual lives are characterized by servitude and misery and are not worth living. For this reason, the nation, the collective self, is worthy of individual sacrifice" (Noorani 17). Sacrifice, in the American context, is a choice made by individuals in order to preserve the American way of life.

However, in these two films, agency is exercised in the face of an apparent lack of preparedness for the ET invasion. This lack of preparation should not be dismissed as America's belief that the ETs come in peace. It should be a warning to the U.S. that terrorism is a directed attack, often in retaliation of their imperialist endeavors overseas. The warning in these films seems to be that American values, as well as American bodies, need to be better protected at home, as Vest makes note in his commentary on *War of the Worlds*:

> Spielberg . . . makes shrewd symbolic commentaries about the deepest anxieties of American culture. The film is a vibrant, terrifying, and observant examination of how American democracy, generosity, and liberty are the most precarious of ideas and institutions when under assault by alien aggressors. (68)

Democracy is the freedom of choice of government. It is the freedom to never be ruled by a perpetual dictator. It is a symbol for the flexibility and the possibility of changing a government when it no longer serves the people. The ability to change the government is built into American ideology and provides a chance to exercise agency. Therefore, both the terrorist and the alien must be defeated because their domination over America would mean an end to American democracy and the introduction of perpetual restrictions, the ultimate threat to Liberty.

Chapter Six   **"That Wasn't Stan:" Aliens, Identity, and the Pursuit of Happiness**

While the American motto of 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness' is the guiding light of American culture and ideology, there is no stronger influence or motivational force than the 'Pursuit of Happiness.' The pursuit for happiness is not simply the pursuit of financial gain or personal prestige. The pursuit of happiness is far more closely linked to the process of each citizen's identity construction through continuous reinforcement of cultural values and autonomous pursuit of personal betterment. Accordingly, the pursuit of happiness is a major supporting symbol in the galaxy of autonomy. In opposition to autonomy, the alien presents a threat through its supporting symbols of identity theft, mind control, and loss of individuality, all of which can impede the pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, the alien as identity thief and wielder of mind control is symbolic of American skepticism regarding various mechanisms of government control which have the power to restrict people's freedom of thought and expression, thus obstructing their ability to pursue means of enjoyment. The pursuit of happiness is essentially the right to accomplish goals on one's own merits without the intervention of the state. It is the individualism, not the state sanctioning, of the pursuit of happiness that makes it worth believing in. Individualism is major component of American identity. The alien is a threat to American identity because it represents alienation from individuality, one's motivation, and ultimately one's actions. These symbols and themes are seen in the film *The Faculty* (1998), the television series *The X-Files* (1993) and *South Park* (1997), and the mini-series *Taken* (2002).

Identity: individualism as the result of autonomous conformity

A person's ability to experience happiness is one of the primary drives behind the desire to work, the desire for leisure, and the desire to pursue relationships with other people. A person's identity is made up of a combination of these things, and this identity is what enables the person to understand how he or she fits into the social environment:

> [Identities] are internalized self-designations that are associated with positions that individuals occupy within various social contexts. Identity is thus a critical link between the individual and social structure because identities are designations that people make about themselves in relation to their location in social structures and the roles that they play by virtue of this location. (Turner, J. 369)

When people feel happiness as a result of the social interactions they are involved in, their identities are confirmed by the positive interaction and they will therefore have a desire to perpetuate similar interactions. This provides a sense of where people 'fit' and forms a cycle of identity reinforcement (Turner, J. 370). It is very hard to be happy when one does not know where he or she 'fits,' or does not have the ability to understand and comprehend the social structures surrounding her or him.

The apparent conformity, or 'fitting,' required in positive identity formation may seem contradictory in the context of individualism, individualism being the ideology that every person is free to make choices regarding lifestyle, belief system, occupation and the like. However, conformity and individualism are not necessarily contradictory social factors. Even the ideology of individualism requires a consensus on a large scale in order to stay dominant, as Noorani discusses: "The national self, therefore, mirrors the self of each of its members and grants them self-completion by making their internal values into

social reality. This strong conception of the nation underlies notions of national

independence, self-determination, and sovereignty" (17). Without widespread conformity

to the ideal of individuality, it would cease to be the dominant ideology and a more

strictly regulated set of identity factors would be adopted. Some of these factors are

religious affiliation, forced military service, and stringent gender roles, just to name a

few.

The idea that all Americans must work toward the perpetuation of individualism

for the betterment not only of individuals but for society is not new. Howe traces the

history of this ideology, drawing from the philosophies of all major figures of American

history. One example Howe cites is, "as a Whig, Lincoln worked to create a social order

that would facilitate individual self-realization as he understood it" (139). What this

refers to is that the structure of American society has, from the beginning, built-in factors

that maintain the unity and integrity of that structure while allowing as much personal

freedom to citizens as possible. The pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of self-realization.

The fact that American society allows all citizens, regardless of gender, class, or race, to

pursue self-realization supports its drive for over-arching national autonomy.

Identity theft

This is not to say that the pursuit of happiness is equally easy for people of

different genders, classes, and races. Self-realization, self-construction, the pursuit of

personal betterment, however one wishes to phrase it, is far more difficult for some than

for others. Immigrant minorities in particular are often treated as a threat to established

ideologies that serve the purposes of mainstream America. This is because the

incorporation of foreign ideologies has the potential to alter existing American national

identity. This theme is addressed in symbolic terms in ET encounter narratives. In many

narratives, the alien invades and overtakes a human body, which in this case is symbolic

for the body politic of the U.S., creating a hybridized identity: the being looks

human/American, but does not act as normal humans/Americans do. As Christy Burns

discusses, the ET is again reduced to the 'other' in opposition to the American

mainstream, but it is a cultural 'other,' threatening not the lives of Americans, but their

identities:

> Paranoiacs symptomatically insist on their individuality and perceive a
>
> conspiratorial world to help them consolidate their imaginary, psychic boundaries
>
> and in US culture the multicultural other as 'alien' (illegal or otherwise) serves as
>
> the negative double that both threatens and then affirms (as a locus of negative
>
> identification) the paranoiac's identity. *The X-Files* simultaneously plays on this
>
> oscillation in American identity while also triggering an implicit cultural-
>
> psychological analysis of its more oppressive constructions of racial and cultural
>
> 'others.'(197-8)

While *The X-Files* will be discussed more fully later, it is important o note that, by using

the 'other' as an identity datum, the alien, ET or immigrant, is a symbol in opposition to

dominant identity and therefore symbolizes identity theft. The alien that changes ideology

changes the process of positive identity reinforcement and therefore threatens to create a

new 'centre.'

Taken

The alien as identity thief threatening to redefine the centre is shown in the

miniseries *Taken*. In *Taken,* it is the alien as hybrid that threatens to steal the privileged

identity of white middle-class America. To begin with, some of the locales of this series correlate to areas of high anxiety related to illegal aliens entering the U.S. across the Southern border. Burns postulates that "aliens may tacitly be those frightening beings who drop from outer space, but this cultural phantasm operates as a thinly disguised anxiety about illegal aliens who cross national borders, allegedly abduct jobs, and create 'mutant' children through miscegenation" (197). In *Taken,* it is the 'mutant' children that pose the greatest threat. In a scene set in 1947, supposedly the year of the Roswell UFO discovery, a Texas family takes-in a hurt, but very human looking, transient who goes by 'John' (Eric Close). John is actually an ET involved in the crash whose objective is to 'cross-pollinate' human and alien species. He does this by seducing the mother, Sally Clarke (Catherine Dent) and promptly disappearing, but leaving with Sally a bi-species child, Jacob Clarke (Anton Yelchin). In this case, the alien, John, *does* come in peace. He is not a terrorist out to destroy American infrastructure by blowing up monuments. He is a migrant, infiltrating American society through 'miscegenation,' gaining a foothold through his affair with Sally, and through their son. Although John himself returns to his place of origin, through blood/kinship ties he has created a legitimate claim on Earthly existence for his offspring, and therefore his species. Without lasers and pyrotechnics, the alien successfully integrates.

But this integration is not without ideological implications. Nor is it a smooth and simple integration. Sally may love and accept John, but the state does not. John is driven away by the U.S. military before Sally even knows she's pregnant. Furthermore, ideologically, their child is shown to be an 'other' as well. As Jacob grows, he becomes less and less like any of his peers. He has extrasensory perception (ESP), the ability to

read people's minds, and shows low emotional response. More so than the ESP, this low emotional response is considered un-American. Like the terrorist, the American-alien hybrid is shown to be less feeling, less compassionate, less sympathetic, and therefore, less human. Most importantly, American identity is closely tied to patriot passion, strong love of 'freedom,' and the motivation to pursue happiness. If someone is unimpassioned and unemotional in these areas, they simply do not fit the bill. According to American ideology, they do not love America, and therefore are not American. For someone like this to call him or herself American is in opposition to accepted American identity.

Because Jacob is so different, his human sister Lisa (Emily Bergl) wants to send him to a 'special school.' She argues with Sally that he should go because he is 'different.' Although Lisa loves him, she still sees him as an 'other': "When was the last time you saw him laugh or cry or smile? When was the last time he gave you a hug?" This unemotional attitude is so out of place that even Jacob's own sister believes he should be separated from the normal structures, i.e. public school and his home community.

However, Jacob looks and, other than his uncanny abilities and lack of expression, acts like the majority. He can 'pass' within the mainstream. This is, perhaps, the most frightening aspect of the hybrid. The obvious alien is an easy target. Just as the UFO is a symbol for unknown origin and unknown technology, the ugly ET is a symbol for aggressive threats and ugly intentions. The hybrid child that looks more human than alien, like the interracial-child that looks more 'white' than minority, can be accepted into mainstream society, but presents a latent threat: they appear to fit the culturally constructed national identity, but they do not necessarily identify with it. This positions

them as a possible double-agent. They are in a position to steal national identity by incorporating ideologies other than those that constructed the identity in the first place. They may cause change in society that is not welcome as it presents a threat to social identity, and therefore a disruption in the pursuit of happiness, at least for members of the mainstream.

Mind control

Although hybridity threatens the pursuit of happiness by threatening to disrupt mainstream identity formation, it does not threaten individuality. In some cases however, the ET does threaten individuality. It does so through mind control which threatens to take everything away and replace it with nothing, which is even scarier than replacing the status quo with a new order. Identity is not only changed, it is erased. In ET encounter narratives, mind control is the ultimate disruption of a person's autonomous motivation to pursue personal betterment.

The Faculty

For example, in *The Faculty,* the alien is supported by mind control while the fight for autonomy is supported by distrust of authority. In *The Faculty*, the aliens take over the faculty members of a high school before infecting anyone else. This demarcates a definite line of authority as the aliens understand that the teachers have the authority in this social structure to put the students in a position where they can be easily controlled. In order to control humans' minds, the aliens must infect their bodies. The teachers are in a position to institute the mass infection of the students, who can then infect their families, and so on and so forth. Because the teachers infect the students with a 'vaccine,'

something supposedly beneficial to the students, resistance looks like rebellion. Burns

discusses the significance of the alien in positions of authority in social structure:

> In fact, in a paranoid gesture, any radical externalization of alienation suffices to
>
> salve momentarily the discomfort with identity instability, and so the alien may be
>
> found conspiratorially within (in governmental, supposedly protective structures)
>
> and without (in outer space or outside the boundaries of the normative culture).
>
> (197)

This applies directly to *The Faculty*: at what time in North American society is a person's

identity more unstable than during high school? Here, the ETs are found 'conspiratorially

within' the 'supposedly protective structure' of the school system. Here, the ETs are, as

in *The X-Files*, a symbol for untrustworthy authority.

The ETs accomplish their disruption of the adolescent pursuit for belonging, for

example, in a scene wherein student Casey Connor (Elijah Wood) is told by his parents

that he needs to see a psychiatrist, and also has all his privileges revoked, when he tells

them: "The teachers, something has happened to them." Casey is telling his parents about

an observation he has made about adult identity, but they are inclined to trust in the

authority granted the teachers rather than the observations of their own son. By sending

him to a shrink and revoking his privileges, Casey's parents send him the message that he

is not yet able to understand adult social structures.

However, what Casey has observed is that the teachers have become cold and

dispassionate and seemingly derive no pleasure from their interactions with anyone. The

ETs invade the teachers' bodies in order to control their minds. Like Jacob, the only

identifying feature of an alien presence in these people is the lack of emotion. However,

unlike Jacob, who is very much an individual, the teachers have lost the personality traits that made them unique and interesting. They no longer make individual choices regarding the coping strategies they employ to the mundane details of their jobs and families. Just the same, the teachers must retain all the memories and knowledge required to remain functional in the social system so that they can stay in positions of power where they can impede the human pursuit of happiness by infecting and controlling the population, one person at a time. In *The Faculty*, this mind control is sanctioned by authority, and authority is therefore untrustworthy.

South Park

Another example of ET encounter and mind control is seen in the pilot episode of the animated television series *South Park* (1997--). This episode, "Cartman Gets an Anal Probe" (Pilot), uses the theme of oppressive, controlling technologies to show how the alien can control humans' minds and actions. In this episode, Eric Cartman has a dream that he was pulled from his bed and taken to an alien ship. His friends tell him he was abducted but he refuses to believe it. The school cook, Chef, asks the boys if they saw the alien space ship. They all say "Fat boy did!" referring to Cartman. Chef tells the boys that Cartman "probably got an 'anal probe'": "That's when they put this big long hoop-a-joob up your butt . . . you children watch that fat boy now. He could be under alien control!" Later, while the boys are walking down a street in South Park arguing about which is more important, Kyle's abducted brother or Cartman's flaming flatulence, Cartman swears: "I know it was just a dream. I know I didn't have an anal probe. And I know I 'm not under alien control!" As he says this he is struck by a jolt of electricity from above and starts dancing to a 1930s Judy Garland show tune. His face is drawn in a different,

vintage cartoon style with crescent shaped eyes and round red cheeks. He dances to the

tune, which is very out of character. This is a silly, but exemplary, instance of mind

control tactics in an alien encounter narrative that completely circumvent any will the

character has of pursing his own interests. When the aliens say dance, Cartman dances.

Mind control works to control a person's motivation. If an American citizen is under

mind control, from either an alien or an American authority, it removes the citizen's

motivation to pursue self-construction, and therefore alienates him or her from the right

to pursue happiness. In the above example, the alien technology is the mechanism of

control, and therefore it is a supporting symbol in the galaxy of the alien. This reveals

American anxiety regarding technologies that may be developed that have the power to

control people. While the alien-human hybrid is a symbol for the fear of cultural change,

the alien technology is a symbol for the fear of technological change.

Loss of individuality

There is one more area related to the alien and the threats it presents to the pursuit

of happiness. If the pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of personal betterment and self-

construction, then, in an American context, it is the pursuit of developing fully one's

individual identity. In many ET encounter narratives, the ET is not encountered in an epic

technologically based battle, but is encountered inside one's self. On the one hand, this is

a symbol for the internalization of ideologies that were not chosen by the individual but

were the result of conditioning. In this way an individual may be alienated from their

right to pursue self-construction autonomously. Despite this, many of the internalized

ideologies work toward maintaining the unity of society, and therefore the individual may

be alienated from some choice but is ultimately preserved through the maintenance of the social structure that allows individuality.

On the other hand, because individuality is such an important part of American ideology, people do fear the loss of it. The alien that is internalized is a symbol for the loss of individuality that comes from conformity that is not related to individuality but is related to a more stringent set of cultural constructions and restrictions. From the American perspective, 'other' cultures may require gun registry, mandate military service, or dictate religion, but American culture, in theory, allows for freedom within these and other such spheres. A human who is not allowed to make life-style choices based on motivations of like or dislike loses some of her or his human characteristics. In terms of SF, Burns characterizes the alien-inhabited human as lacking in passions of like or dislike:

> Fear of the visual double is a particularly intent anxiety for the paranoid [in American society], and in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as in several of *The X-Files* episodes, the aliens can perfectly mimic the human's outer form. Lacking the 'core' of emotion, however, they become easily manipulatable zombies, willing to work at governmental or alien direction. Indeed, morphs, clones, and scientifically contained alien-human hybrids are indistinguishable from the 'real' humans in *The X-Files*. A similar fear of the loss of individuation, which also haunted the 1950s, now defines both ends of American culture. (214)

The fear of loss of individuality is the fear of the loss of identity, since most people define their identity in part based on their desires which ultimately fuel the pursuit of

happiness. If people cannot define themselves, then they cannot pursue what makes them happy.

The X-Files

In *The X-Files* television series, most human-alien hybrids are genetically engineered clones with no inherent individual defining characteristics. In "Colony" (2.16), although the hybrid clones are not emotionless, they appear identical. They are not emotionless because they live in fear that they are being systematically hunted down by a bounty hunter of extraterrestrial origin who can take on the appearance of any human he chooses. This character is a symbol of identity theft, while the clones are a symbol of loss of individuality. The clones are called 'The Gregors' because that was the name of the original. They are employed in the manufacture of human-alien hybrid clones while posing as abortion doctors so that they have easy access to fetal tissue, as is explained in "Endgame"(2.17) by a clone posing as Mulder's abducted sister, Samantha:

> Samantha: Through hybridization they've been working to erase that aspect which
>
> has forced the community to scatter, their identical natures.
>
> Fox: All the clones worked in abortion clinics. Why?
>
> Samantha: Access to fetal tissue. Though the biologies are incompatible, they
>
> finally found a way to combine human DNA with alien DNA.
>
> Fox: And this man, why has he been sent to kill them?
>
> Samantha: The experiments weren't sanctioned. It's considered a dilution of their
>
> species, a pollution of their race. So a bounty hunter was dispatched to destroy
>
> them and terminate the colony.

Both the aliens and the humans are afraid of the hybrids, not only because they disrupt the identity formation of either species, but because the hybrids are all the same. The clones are a symbol for loss of individuality through the use of alien, or unknown and out-of-control, technology. Technology is impersonal, inhuman, and the aliens are aligned with technology because they display no personal, individual traits. Furthermore, they are products of technology, and technology is a symbol for what humans can do, not what they are. Elspeth Kydd discusses the fear of identity disruption in both species in her article "Differences: *The X-Files*, Race and the White Norm":

> The colonizing forces of *The X-Files* represent the invasion of the human body in
> an endeavor to take over Earth. It undermines the integrity of individual identity,
> producing an ambiguous invasion in which human identity and purity are no
> longer assured, the lines between us (the human) and them (the alien), no longer
> clear. (72)

This blurring of identity lines both through hybridization and loss of individuality is the most effective way the alien infiltrates American society by threatening Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. More so than biological infection or whole scale invasion, threats to identity shake the construction of nation to the foundation. Burns discusses this kind of invasion, the kind that threatens individualism, as erasure: "In *The X-Files*, erasure not only necessitates a physical disappearance, a deletion of evidence or removal of bodies; it requires psychical excisions of memory and of emotions, and it threatens to alter our very minds" (Burns 199). Although the Gregor clones are attempting to genetically engineer differentiation among themselves, they are not doing so in an effort to preserve human individuality. They must imitate the individuality already apparent in

the population in which they wish to pass. The aim of the Gregors is the same as the other

ETs in *The X-Files*: to repopulate Earth. The method they choose is less gruesome than

those that gestate through infection, but is far more insidious since genetic alteration is

far less sensational, and less easy to combat.

The Faculty

Finally, this erasure of individuality as an alien occurrence is also shown in *The*

Faculty as one by one the resistance fighters are converted and assimilated. When

football team captain Stan (Shawn Hatosy) runs out of the resistance stronghold in the

high school to try to kill the ET leader, he is not killed but returns and asks to be let in.

Stokely, who is characterized as socially marginal and unpopular, refuses despite in-

group ramifications for not letting in the most popular boy in school. Marybeth (Laura

Harris), alien leader in human disguise, tells Stokely that she should have let him in.

Stokely replies: "That wasn't Stan. They took away who he was." Marybeth suggests:

"Maybe they just bettered who he was. Cleared away his confusion." Unfortunately for

the alien invaders, identity is not confusion, it is essential, and that is why even those who

are socially marginal fight to keep it. Unemotional, unimpassioned, and unmotivated: the

alien is everything that impedes the Pursuit of Happiness.

Conclusion **Verum Factum**

Alien encounter narratives in film and television are what we make of them. They can simply be mindless entertainment, or they can provide a mirror of the current cultural climate. The alien encounter phenomenon in American culture is surrounded by many meaningful structures, and it is hoped that the preceding chapters have served to show how pervasive the narratives are and how important it is to understand how the narratives hold a meaningful place in society. It is important to understand the things we are bombarded with in both fictional and non-fiction media. It is also important to understand why we are bombarded with them. In many cases certain topics are addressed again and again because they are successful as consumer products, and successful consumer products can be used as a gage of what is important to a particular culture. Consumer response reflects current cultural ideals, desires, and fears. Alien encounter narratives, both experiential and fictional, provide a gage of what the American societal climate is at present. Many of the present issues in the current consciousness represent a kind of take-over—a kind of limitation of freedom.

Alien encounter narratives exist in both experiential and fictional streams. The two streams feed off each other in a kind of dialectic feedback loop where the fiction influences the accounts and the accounts influence the fiction. The reason the two streams can have so much influence over each other and exist in this sort of cycle is because the symbols in each kind of narrative are the same, imbued with the same meanings and attributes in both streams. For example, the alien is a powerful, all-encompassing symbol for the unknown. In both streams the alien abducts, invades, probes and inserts. The alien has highly advanced biology and technology. The alien is unknowable and hence may be

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