

n e w w o r l d o r d e r s

millennialism in the western hemisphere

The Apocalyptic Imagination Reborn: Atomic Bomb Cinema at the Dawn of the New Millennium

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I. Introduction

There are six main points that I wish to present to the reader at the very start of this paper. First, the cinema is the most eloquent voice or poetry for our most ancient narrative and symbolic traditions. Second, popular films about the Bomb are the most recent manifestation of the apocalyptic narrative tradition. Third, popular films, or at least Bomb films, are not evidence of the psychic numbing, nuclearism, or bipolar "cycles" that dominate the scholarly literature about the Bomb and culture. Rather, these films are a vital, healthy part our cultures and societies. Fourth, and perhaps most important to scholars of the millennium, the logic of apocalyptic and millennial thinking is no less a driving force in the critical and scholarly literature than in the films themselves. Fifth, an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural approach to scholarship is essential. Sixth, films about the Bomb suggest that Jewish thought and culture remains a surprisingly vital force in contemporary society, greater than most people, most Jews even, seem to believe.¹

This last, though not most important, point requires some elaboration. To the degree that it is useful to talk about Judaism as an entity distinct from Jews (without becoming completely a-historical), there is, I believe, a widespread tendency to conceive of Judaism's contribution to Western civilization only in the past or indirectly through Christianity. Daniel Boyarin points out that the liberal misnomer, Judeo-Christianity, "masks a suppression of that which is distinctly Jewish. It means 'Christian,' and by not even acknowledging that much, renders the suppression of Jewish discourse even more complete." And, Boyarin calls for a "revoicing of a Jewish discourse in the discourse of the West."² To call for a "revoicing" of a Jewish voices implies, of course, that the suppression of Judaism has never been complete; for, you cannot revoice a voice that does not already exist (any more than you can re-animate the extinct dodo bird). And this existence is seen no where more keenly than in the body of films that I call the *Atomic Bomb*

¹ In preparation for my presentation at The 12th Annual Klutznick Symposium, "The End of Days?: Millennialism from the Hebrew Bible to the Present" (Creighton University, October 10-11, 1999), I noticed that about half of the fourteen abstracts expressed a concern for specifically Jewish themes or issues. However, only two, possibly three, abstracts explicitly dealt with contemporary Judaism; that is to say, only 14%, or at best 21%, of the abstracts suggested contemporary Judaism was at all relevant to a discussion on millennialism, the Hebrew Bible, and the present. No one seemed particularly aware, let alone bothered, by this fact, until I pointed it out in my own presentation. This observation should not be misconstrued as a negative criticism of the conference organizers or participants. Abstracts are available at <http://puffin.creighton.edu/klutznick/abstracts.htm>.

² Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xi.

Cinema. By "this existence" I do not mean to suggest that most filmmakers are Jewish, that "Hollywood" is a Jewish industry, or any other such racial cliché. Rather, I am simply saying that a Jewish narrative tradition continues to make its presence felt, without being coopted by the dominant Christian narrative tradition, in films that are surprisingly popular.

In the main part of this paper, section III, I will describe then analyze, in brief, scenes from several key Bomb films. These films are from the years 1945-1964, that period of time which dominates the scholarly discourse on the Bomb and culture. In the conclusion, section IV, I will briefly mention more recent Bomb films that continue the apocalyptic narrative tradition. More importantly, I will discuss the implications of my analyses of Atomic Bomb Cinema to the broader discussion of the Bomb and culture and to some specific issues that concern millennial studies scholars. First, however, in section II, I will introduce the reader to Atomic Bomb Cinema, beginning with short definitions of the terms I employ.

II. Introduction To Atomic Bomb Cinema

Countless films, and other media, merely mention the Bomb. Thus, while characters in both Orson Welles' well known 1948 film *The Lady From Shanghai*, and the lesser known film *Suddenly* (Lewis Allen, 1954) make reference to the Bomb, I consider these two films at most tangential to Atomic Bomb Cinema. By "Atomic Bomb Cinema" I am referring to films where the Bomb is an explicit part of the *mise-en-scène* (i.e., the set or environment), theme, context, and/or the narrative. By "cinema" I am, for the most part, referring to what scholars call "classical" Hollywood style fictional, narrative films. (The "classical" Hollywood style is, however, a most imprecise concept; the production of "Hollywood" style films are, needless to say, not limited to that very small geographic area in California; and, purely "classical" films are not the only style of filmmaking in Hollywood.)³ The most distinguishing features of Hollywood style filmmaking are the seamless camera work and editing techniques that obscure the presence of the camera, and give the two dimensional film medium an appearance of life-like three-dimensionality. These techniques are used to help the spectator become more emotionally involved in the narrative, and maybe even forget — however briefly — that he or she is watching a film.

To understand Atomic Bomb Cinema it is not necessary to judge the relative value of Hollywood or the classical Hollywood style. Suffice it to say that while Hollywood is frequently condemned for relying on sensationalism and marketing strategies, it has produced a number of films of artistic integrity and lasting cultural importance. Indeed, some Bomb films have been acknowledged as exemplary, or even film art. Generally, however, in Atomic Bomb Cinema there is little radical variation from the "classical" use of the cinematic apparatus. This is to say, Bomb films are generally not marketed as conscious raising events or art, but entertainment; the Bomb is frequently a vehicle for reworking standard and often ancient narrative structures; and, while Bomb films must often devise unique filmic structures to tell their stories, as we will see in *On the Beach* (1959), there are only a few films that offer formal surprises. The surprises are

³ There is much debate over what "classical" cinema means. The definitive attempt to codify the "classical" Hollywood cinema is by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, 1985). This study ultimately fails because the statistics that are the very foundation of their methodology are highly flawed. In order to affect scientific objectivity, the authors use a coding technique to pick films at random. Once the authors have reduced the extant Hollywood filmography to a manageable number of films, however, they abandon their statistical methods and choose those films which prove their hypothesis; thus, they carefully ignore and fail to explain all the more numerous counter examples.

found in the unique twists that the Bomb gives to traditional imagery and narratives, and classical filmmaking techniques.

"The Bomb" is manifested in Hollywood films in a variety of ways — nuclear weapons, fallout, toxic poisoning, terrorism — and the anxieties these induce. Images and references to the Bomb are in turn found in almost every film genre, ranging from the obvious war and science fiction films to less expected genres, such as comedies, love stories, and westerns. There are even films that mix genres, such as musical/comedy and science fiction. In virtually every film we can also see the impress of older storytelling traditions, and the socio-historical environment in which the films are made. That is to say, Atomic Bomb Cinema is not a genre like the western, but a unique category of films that cross the boundaries of many genres. Atomic Bomb Cinema is, however, bound together by distinct, recurring themes. Thus, filmic representations of the Bomb are influenced by what one might cautiously call an "eclectic" gathering of filmic and storytelling modes, techniques, and social issues.

Before 1945, nuclear energy was well known to scientific and even science fiction circles. The first film depicting a nuclear technology, *By Radium Rays*, was released in 1914 film.⁴ The earliest film that is still widely circulated, however, is the 1935 serial *The Phantom Empire* with Gene Autry. Between 1945 and 1998, approximately 700 hundred foreign and domestic Bomb films were released in the United States. That's averages out to more than thirteen films a year, which is more than even the average young filmgoer sees in a year. Most Bomb films are popular, profitable, and often critical successes. Yet, they have been all but ignored by scholars, and when not ignored, grossly mischaracterized. Paul Boyer, in what is now a canonical text in the literature on the Bomb and American Culture, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, claims that "[a]fter 1963, the nuclear theme largely disappeared from TV and the movies," and that "[a]fter years of neglect, the movies and television rediscovered nuclear war in the early 1980s"⁵ Let us take a look at the facts about Bomb films, starting with the number of films released in the United States:

1950-1959:	154 Films
1960-1969:	133 Films
1970-1979:	89 Films
1980-1989:	148 Films

The per decade average is 131 films. The number of films released in the 1970s is only 32% less than the average for all four decades. While 32% is statistically significant, this does not suggest "years of neglect." When statistically normalized, we can see that the number of Bomb films generally exceed the number of all films released in a single year; when statistically smoothed, we see that the distribution of Bomb films do not correspond to Boyer's theory of what amounts to bipolar "cycles" of denial and paranoia, and that the films have generally been on the increase.⁶

Bomb films are frequently misunderstood because it is not a monolithic genre that came into being with the Bomb. Atomic Bomb Cinema is a complex phenomenon bound together by many recurring mythological, historical, and contemporary themes; and, by many narrative or storytelling traditions. Strictly speaking, few films express either a specifically Fundamentalist Christian or secular sense of the millennium; that is, a future specific time, date, era, or series of

⁴ Mick Broderick, *Nuclear Movies* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1991), 3, 56.

⁵ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 356, 361.

⁶ Boyer, *Ibid.*, xviii, 195, 352, 365.

events as part of some greater cosmological plan. One such film that does is the 1978 film, *Holocaust 2000* (AKA, *The Chosen*, or *Holocaust 2000: The Chosen*, Alberto De Martino, Italy and Great Britain). It is an English language film, or was at least post-dubbed, as is common in Italian filmmaking, in English, and stars Kirk Douglas. The film is quite literal in its use of Biblical or quasi-Biblical prophecy. Another such film is *Red Planet Mars* (Harry Horner, 1952). In this film, it is discovered that the Christ also appeared on Mars, but the people of Mars accepted Christ as their savior and thus (bourgeois) society has prospered and developed far beyond that of the earth; and, they have avoided the perils of the nuclear arms race. This revelation, suggesting that the time for humans to accept Christ has at last come, initiates a chain of events that brings about not only the collapse of the Soviet empire and the ascendance of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also the acceptance of a Fundamentalist Christian government in the USA. One might also consider *War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskins, 1953) millennial. At the end of the film the narrator explains that the invading Martians had no immunity to the bacteria that God created, as part of his plan, to defend humanity.

Perhaps the most famous Bomb film that is shaped by a distinctly Christian apocalyptic world-view, a film that is often thought of as apocalyptic, is *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951). An extraterrestrial comes to earth, adopts a pseudonym that is highly allusive to the New Testament figure Jesus Christ, "John Carpenter," is killed, temporarily resurrected, and exhorts the earth to righteousness. Other films since *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, e.g., *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1984 and 1991), have also had characters with the initials "J. C.," or in other ways allusive to Christ, but these characters are not so clearly messianic or supernatural. And, the structure of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is closer to a Biblical testament than to an apocalyptic narrative. Most Bomb films, moreover, are too vague and open ended to be considered specifically millenary. Quantitatively and qualitatively, the single most important theme in America's contribution to Atomic Bomb Cinema is, nevertheless, what John J. Collins calls "the Jewish Matrix of Christianity," that is, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*.⁷

The term *apocalypse* is generally misused. Even scholars as thoughtful as Susan Sontag confuse apocalypse with catastrophe and death, while Robert Torry confuses it with other narrative traditions such as *testaments* and *deluges*.⁸ The apocalypse holds out the promise of what Melvin J. Lasky would call a "revolution" or return to a prior and pristine state.⁹ That state is, however, new and different. In other words, we are talking about spiritual rebirth. In Greek, the word *apokalypsis* means *revelation*. David Miller tells us that the word suggests disclosing or uncovering something, "especially as in a dream or vision. . . ."¹⁰

In the apocalyptic world view, as Collins describes it, humans are bound to a world for which the forces of good and evil struggle, and are caught up in a preordained history that concludes with eschatological judgment. Collins states that the "genre is not constituted by one

⁷ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989).

⁸ Susan Sontag, "Imagination of Disaster," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), 209-225. Robert Torry, "Apocalypse Then: Benefits of the Bomb in Fifties Science Fiction Films," *Cinema Journal* 31 (Fall 1991): 7-21. Although different narrative traditions share common features, Torry, I think, wrongly labels apocalyptic *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), which is closer to a biblical testament narrative, and *When Worlds Collide* (Rudolph Maté, 1951), which is closer to a deluge narrative.

⁹ Melvin J. Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution: On the Origins of a Metaphor, or Some Illustrations of the Problem of Political Temperament and Intellectual Climate and How Ideas, Ideas, and Ideologies Have Been Historically Related*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

¹⁰ David Miller, "Chiliasm: Apocalyptic with a Thousand Faces," *Facing Apocalypse*, ed., Valerie Andrews, Robert Bosnak, and Karen Walter Goodwin, (Dallas: Spring Publications Inc., 1987), 5.

or more distinctive themes but by a distinctive combination of elements, all of which are also found elsewhere."¹¹ These elements are woven into recognizable narrative patterns in which the central character takes a spatial or temporal journey, history is recounted and foretold, a cosmological plan is revealed to the character and interpreted, and the character returns to exhort others to live in accord with the revealed plan.¹² To this list of elements, I would add the Jewish tradition of *tikun ha-olahm*, which is a commitment to repairing or restoring a fractured world, no matter how impossible the task. This tradition is, by the way, symbolized in the breaking of the wine glass in the Jewish wedding ceremony. (I am indebted to the learned Rabbi Mel Silverman for his careful reading of my work, suggestions, and insightful criticisms.) Characters with a commitment to repairing or restoring the world are, for example, far more¹³ common in Atomic Bomb Cinema than, say, Christ-like figures or characters with the expectation that a supernatural savior will return to earth and redeem the righteous.

As Collins demonstrates, once we understand the formal framework of the genre we can begin to explore its sociological, literary, or psychological contexts and functions.¹⁴ Apocalyptic narratives, Collins also shows, address issues such as persecution, culture shock, political powerlessness, social change, "the dismal fate of humanity," and death. The cosmological and "mystical component," however, ". . . is an integral factor in all apocalyptic literature." The language, therefore, is "expressive rather than referential, symbolic rather than factual." These narratives are poetic and articulate a "sense or feeling about the world" — just as do Bomb films.¹⁵ Apocalyptic narratives use the language of poetry and symbolic imagery to encourage survivance, evoke mystical knowledge, and criticize social conditions. It is not academic prose discourse.

In keeping with the tradition of the apocalyptic narrative genre, films about the Bomb draw from a wide variety of sources and adapt themselves to current conditions, in order to reach the widest possible audience. That is to say, we cannot expect Bomb films to be identical to earlier apocalyptic narratives. The apocalyptic imagination in our time takes many forms, including what psychologist Erik Erikson calls a *crisis*. Erikson explicitly states that a crisis is not a catastrophe. For individuals and societies, Erikson writes in 1968, a crisis is "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation." In an apocalyptic flourish, Erikson even describes the Bomb as a crisis of Edenic proportions (an idea apparent in Bomb films at least as early as 1954), and one that has engendered other crises in, for example, our ideas about technology, progress, and even gender roles.¹⁶

All this is to say that, while most scholars see these films as evidence of psychopathology, psychic numbing, nuclearism, or bipolar cycles of paranoia, I do not. Rather, I see these films as fulfilling the vital and healthy roles that all apocalyptic literature fulfills. The apocalyptic genre is, as I will soon demonstrate, vital and healthy precisely because it is a vehicle for: expressing the struggle to make troubling events meaningful, exhorting the viewer to survive and self-actualize under oppressive conditions, and criticizing contemporary social conditions.

¹¹ Collins, *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² Collins, *Ibid.*, 3-8, 22.

¹³ Private conversations with Rabbi Mel Silverman, including April and May 1993, July 1995, Costa Mesa, California; and, in a personal correspondence dated September 15, 1998.

¹⁴ E.g., Collins, *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ Collins, *Ibid.*, 205, 11, 14, 214.

¹⁶ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 16, 40-41, 261-262.

Let us now briefly examine scenes from several key films that exemplify the narrative and visual potentials of the apocalypse and the millennium in Atomic Bomb Cinema.

III. Key Films

1. *The Beginning or the End* (Norman Taurog, 1947).

The Beginning or the End is the first film to explore the cosmological importance of the atomic bomb. The film offers us a fictionalized account of the development and use of the first nuclear weapon. The film's narrative is built around the central character, Matthew Cochran, a fictitious graduate student who is somehow present at every high level decision and every key event, except the actual dropping of the Bomb, and he even offers the films' concluding revelation. Because of his crisis, his ambivalent feelings about the Bomb, he is the most likely character with which audiences will identify. Matt's crisis is resolved through, what would be to most audiences, his otherworldly journey into the inner workings of government, science, and the military. Then, while preparing the Little Boy nuclear weapon, Matt dies from accidental radiation poisoning. And, in the final scene, which takes place at the Lincoln Memorial, Matt's pregnant wife reads his prophetic deathbed letter. Matt, however, reappears and speaks the final lines of his own letter. In other words, Matt dies and returns as a supernatural being who recounts history, and interprets a revelation about the future. In this not too distant future, Matt tells us, humanity overcomes the horrors of the Second World War, and through science "man" does not usurp God's power, rather he harnesses the power of the atom in order to spread peace, abundance, and righteousness across all corners of the globe. Clearly, the film believes that a world fractured by war can be not merely repaired or restored, but improved. This is one of the few truly optimistic Bomb films. It is so optimistic that it is tempting to say it is not apocalyptic at all; for, the apocalypse or crisis has passed, and humanity has survived its most difficult test. Although not explicitly explained as a millennium event, the Second World War is described as a period of suffering culminating in simultaneously retributive and redemptive destruction by the Bomb. In turn, the Bomb has prepared the way for a glorious heaven on earth that is just within grasp.

2. *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954).

When the Soviet Union got the Bomb in 1949, America lost its small nuclear monopoly, a new crisis appeared on the horizon, and Atomic Bomb Cinema went into high gear. *Them!* is one of the most important films from this period. And, the film includes otherworldly journeys, into subterranean ant nests, revelations, and interpretations of symbols and dream-like experiences. Ants exposed to radiation from the first test of a nuclear weapon, in New Mexico, are not merely mutated into enormous creatures, but, their very life cycle is disrupted (a point often missed in the scholarly literature); consequently, the ants now pose a serious threat to humanity's existence. Similarly, the sleep cycle of a young girl, the only member of her family to survive an early morning ant attack, is severely disrupted, she goes into somnambulistic shock and wanders the unfamiliar desert. And, adults also find themselves in equally unfamiliar territory, such as rapidly changing gender roles. The ants, additionally, are referred to as possible portents of "a Biblical prophecy come true," one in which beasts rule over a ruined earth. Thus, the film develops an elaborate metaphor, one it takes quite seriously. Like the Sword of Saint Michael driving Adam and Eve out of Eden, the Bomb drives humanity out of its innocence and into a frightening new world of rapid biological and social change. *Them!* is important because it creatively reworks many elements into a visual apocalyptic text that is meaningful to modern, secular audiences. *Them!* clearly warns us that science has engendered a future crisis. *Them!* is

an important film that has inspired the imaginations of audiences, other filmmakers, and critics and scholars.

3. *The Story of Mankind* (Irwin Allen, 1957).

In the mid 1950s, the hydrogen bomb further energized apocalyptic Bomb films. Irwin Allen's 1957 film *The Story of Mankind* depicts a cosmological tribunal where the Devil and the Spirit of Mankind travel through history debating the merits of humanity. At question is whether or not the tribunal should allow mankind to destroy itself with the "Super H-bomb." At the end of the film, the camera gives us a close-up of the tribunal's authoritative-looking head jurist, and he quite literally warns the audience that it is responsible for its own survival. *The Story of Mankind* uses many apocalyptic elements, including the development of history, revelations, and judgments, to exhort mankind into living righteously.

4. *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957).

Both William Whyte's book *The Organization Man* and Jack Arnold's most famous film, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, appeared in 1957.¹⁷ The film's hero, Robert Scott Carey, begins to shrink after being exposed to insecticide and radiation. Carey takes an otherworldly journey that ends when he passes through a vent that creates Crucifix-like shadows on the wall, and then he sees the moon. Carey is even wearing tattered robes. And, at the end of the film Carey offers a breathtaking revelation of cosmos, one that incorporates Christian, scientism, and Taoist or Zen-like imagery. But, I will not argue that Carey is an explicit Christ figure; rather, the Christ-like figure is yet one more element in an elaborate symbology used to evoke in the audience even more profound ideas. These images are religious, alchemical, and mythological symbols of psychic transformation.¹⁸ Physicists Niels Bohr and J. Robert Oppenheimer say the Bomb is an essential part of humanity's development, and that the Bomb has a "Complementary" nature that will either destroy or save the world.¹⁹ In *The Incredible Shrinking Man* the Bomb sends an ordinary person on an otherworldly journey for mystical knowledge of himself, human nature, and the cosmos. In apocalyptic texts, mystical knowledge empowers the powerless by teaching how to transcend oppressive conditions and prevail over evil.

5. *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959)

Stanley Kramer's 1959 film *On the Beach* is oxymoronically praised as an apocalyptic Bomb film about the annihilation of humanity, which is antithetical to the apocalyptic imagination. The narrative suggests that everyone dies. But, where there is a camera, there is a camera operator and a narrative that continues. The film takes place mostly in Australia, the last industrialized nation to await death as radiation from a brief nuclear war spreads across the globe. Towards the end of the film, the unmarried Moira (Ava Gardner) stands on the dock as her lover, Dwight (Gregory Peck) sails back to his already dead wife and children in the USA. The camera records Moira's gaze, and, in highly clever use of editing techniques, continues to follow her gaze through the last scene. Thus, if the spectator identifies with Moira's point-of-view, she, at least, seems to survive in order to repent her failure to achieve happiness through marriage, and pine for her unrequited love. If, however, the spectator identifies with the perspective of the camera itself (the omnipresent, third-person, Hollywood style camera), then, one is left with a sense that we, the audience, have survived. At the very least, a story teller and an audience have survived to tell and hear the tale. This suggests that the apocalyptic imagination shapes formal cinematic structures as well as narrative. While *On the Beach* does not have an

¹⁷ William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957).

¹⁸ George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 45. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans., Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), 214-218.

¹⁹ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986), 778, 787, 789.

otherworldly journey or a revelation, in accord with the nature of the apocalyptic imagination the film fulfills the audience's need or desire for the experience of having survived nuclear annihilation. The film also exhorts the audience to righteousness through its treatment of Moira; and, like Horatio at the end of *Hamlet*, the camera survives to carry the warning message. *On the Beach*, moreover, has all the elements Mary Ann Doane says are common to the genre of 1940s women's films known as "weepies," including women who desire to desire.²⁰

6. *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960)

Peter Clecak, in *America's Quest for the Ideal Self*, shows that America is driven by three themes, or what he calls the Quests for Social Justice, a Community of Like Minded Others, and Personal Fulfillment. Furthermore, these Quests coalesced during the 1960s into The Movement.²¹ In George Pal's 1960 film *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells is frustrated with the injustices of his own time and feels himself to be on the margins of his own community. So, he takes an otherworldly journey to the future where he witnesses a nuclear war, the volcanic purging of the earth, and the rebirth of humanity. Wells then reveals and interprets his journey to his own people, but, like Cassandra, no one believes him. So, Wells returns to the future to rebuild a utopian society based on the principles of his own time. *The Time Machine* is, perhaps, our clearest example of *tikun ha-olam*. More importantly, in his own time, Wells cannot enter his married friend's home; but, in the future he does enter the Eloi's communal hall. The scene in which Wells finally crosses another's threshold is crucial. In *The Time Machine* nuclear war creates an apocalyptic rebirth of the world, and helps fulfill Wells' three Quests. That is to say, the hall represents not merely an opportunity for social justice and community, but personal fulfillment. The graphic layout of the hall and the objects in it, create a mandala, the symbol of psychic completion.

7. *Godzilla vs. the Thing* (i.e., *Mosura tai Gojira*, AKA *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, Inoshiro Honda, 1964)

A comparison with some Japanese Bomb films will, at this juncture in our discussion, help to bring into focus the apocalyptic nature of Atomic Bomb Cinema, at least in the USA. Japan does indeed have a millennial imagination.²² In Japanese millennial and apocalyptic narrative traditions, e.g., *Masse* and *Mappo*, the old world is completely destroyed before a new world is formed; but, this narrative tradition can be seen in only a few Bomb films. In Muneyoshi Matsubayahsi's 1961 film, *The Last War* (*Sekai Dai Senso*), Japan is literally rendered a molten rock in a nuclear war that destroys the world. There are also Japanese Bomb films that explore or co-opt a very Western sense of the millennium. In Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 animated feature, *Naushika of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no Tani no Naushika*), there is a prophecy of a very Christ-like figure returning to redeem a polluted world on the brink of self-destruction. The prophecy is fulfilled, the land is purified and restored to a near Edenic state, and an age of peace, harmony, and natural abundance is established. The redeemer, however, turns out to be female, which is very much in keeping with other Japanese traditions. Japan's Imperial

²⁰ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

²¹ Peter Clecak, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self: Dissent and Fulfillment in the 60s and 70s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 6-10.

²² Japan does have a history of millennial movements, though not as widespread as in the West. The most famous recent example of millennialism in Japan, Aum, is the most sensational but not the only such example. More recently, in a front page article, with accompanying color photograph, it was announced that at the prestigious Kyoto temple, Kiyomisudera, the Chinese character, or *kanji*, *sue* was chosen as the official character representing the year 1999. *Sue* (which has different "readings" or possible pronunciations) has several connotation and associations, however "end," as in *masse* or "the end of the world," is the most obvious meaning. *Asahi Shimbun*, (December 12, 1999), 1. See also, Jerome F. Shapiro, "Does Japan Have a Millenary Imagination?," *Kyoto Daigaku Sogoningengakubu Kiyo* (July 1994), 133-145.

family was established by a Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, and the Goddess Izanami gave birth to the land of Japan. *Masse*, *Mappo*, and apocalyptic or millennial imaginations have a place in Japanese narrative tradition, but they are not as strong as in the West. Other issues and traditions, both similar and different to traditions in the West, dominate Japan's contributions to Atomic Bomb Cinema.

Inoshiro Honda's 1964 film *Godzilla vs. the Thing (Mosura tai Gojira)* is exemplary in its expression of the concerns and symbolic systems that dominate Japanese Bomb films. In the film, both scheming entrepreneurs and Gojira threaten one of Mosura's eggs. A woman reporter, two tiny women from Mosura Island, and Mosura, lead the effort to rescue the egg. Eventually, two *yochu* or larvae hatch from the egg and encase Gojira in a chrysalis. Gojira then, as in most of his more than twenty films, falls back into the sea whence he came. In cultures throughout the world, both deep water and the womb-like chrysalis are symbols of psychic transformation. In ancient Japanese legal and mythological texts, however, the silk worm and women are intimately linked. Even today the Empress is the head of the silk culture.²³ Also, balance and harmony are extremely important concepts in Asian cultures. In these films, men have become too strong, and society is out of balance with nature; so, nature retaliates. Thus, the feminine element must assert itself and transform the masculine element in order to restore balance and harmony, as it does when the worms cocoon Gojira and then he falls back into the ocean. These themes structure most of Japan's Bomb films. And, this structure, what I call *the restoration of balance and harmony*, is very similar to the Jewish tradition of *tikun ha-olahm*, repairing or restoring and fractured world.

8. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964, Britain).

The period most often discussed in the scholarly literature, 1945-1963, roughly ends with Kurbrick's subversive apocalypse, the black comedy *Dr. Strangelove*. It is an enormously complex film, and it is impossible to give *Dr. Strangelove*, in this paper, more than a cursory analysis. What is important, to the point I am trying to make, is that all the elements of the apocalyptic narrative tradition, that we have seen in other films, are present, albeit frighteningly inverted. The viewer is taken on an otherworldly journey, in a B-52 on its way to drop nuclear weapons on the USSR, into the Pentagon's famous War Room, and into the mind of the psychotic general who initiates the attack on the USSR. The meaning of historical events and the otherworldly journey are interpreted. There is a prophesied future of the next one hundred years. And, most importantly, in the minds of these fictional world leaders, whom Kubrick's parodies, nuclear war is a clear opportunity for rebirth, not destruction. The rest of us, though, may not like who are to be reborn and inherit the earth.

IV. Conclusion

In the seventies, eighties and nineties there are many Bomb films that continue to evoke the apocalyptic imagination. Some of the more important films include *A Boy and His Dog* (L. Q. Jones, 1975), *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (George Miller, George Ogilvie, 1985, Australia), *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (Terry Gilliam, 1989), and *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, 1995). There have also been Japanese Bomb

²³ Donald L. Phillippi, trans., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 87, 404-406. Kunio Yanagita, trans. and ed. Fanny Hagin Mayer, *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 312. I am indebted to Dr. Kazuo Totani, advisor to the Imperial Household's silkworm farms, retired, for his insights into the history, science, and lore of the silk worm; and also to Professor Notoji Masako, of Tokyo University, and Sachiko Reese, of the Los Angeles C. G. Jung Institute, for their help.

films, including *Rhapsody in August* (*Hachigatsu no Rapusodi*, Akira Kurosawa, 1991), and *Godzilla Versus Mothra* (*Gojira vs Mosura*, Kazuki Omori, 1992), that continue to evoke the restoration of balance and harmony. There are also some Bomb films that clearly exploit the sensational language of the millennium, such as *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998). Nevertheless, even as we move closer to the next millennium and public interest is high (at least relative to earlier decades), Bomb films have not become more obviously millennial. The near constant production of Bomb films suggests, moreover, that there is a basic rate of concern over the Bomb; and, the apocalyptic narrative tradition remains the most important way to make the Bomb meaningful. Although Bomb films have not fueled or been fueled by a specifically millennial enthusiasm, responses to these films, as I suggested earlier, often have a millennial edge.

At the preview of Stanley Kramer's 1959 film *On the Beach*, the chemist Linus Pauling proclaimed: "It may be that . . . *On the Beach* is the movie that saved the world."²⁴ Similarly, William J. Palmer, in *The Films of the Eighties*, argues that the 1983 made-for-television movie, *The Day After* (Nicholas Myers), single-handedly changed the course of history.²⁵ The first recognized film scholar to link Bomb films to nuclear morality and ethics is Donald Richie, an authority on Japanese films. He denounces popular monster-movies because of their "very refusal to make a responsible statement" about the Bomb.²⁶ Expanding on this idea, Susan Sontag both established science fiction films as a legitimate subject for scholars and derailed further critical inquiry with her now famous declaration that popular Bomb films, Japanese Bomb films in particular, are "above all the emblem of an *inadequate response*" and only a "sampling, stripped of sophistication, of the inadequacy of most people's responses to the unassimilable terrors" wrought by the nuclear arms race.²⁷ But what is a responsible or adequate response, except by implication the critics'?

Again, some of our most respected intellectuals, from many different disciplines, have come out in force over the issue of the Bomb, especially when it comes to films that depict the Bomb. For instance, Dr. Helen Caldicott — a pediatrician who, in the 1970s, left her post at Harvard University to resuscitate Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)²⁸ — announces that "The World is on the brink of disaster." More to the point of this paper, she adds that we should "Never underestimate the subliminal and overt power of film and television!"²⁹ The cultural historian Paul Boyer, like Caldicott, decries Hollywood for contributing to the "cycles" of paranoia, and exhorts the reader to join the ranks of the righteously anti-nuclear to help in "driving back the shadow of global death" and destroy the "destroyer".³⁰ Historian and social critic Christopher Lasch similarly lays much of the blame for the ills of the "nuclear age" on the

²⁴ George P. Elliott, "Think Films: A New Hollywood Creation," *Esquire* (March 1960), 118. Subsequently cited by Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1968), 207; and, Joseph Keyerleber, "On the Beach," in *Nuclear War Films*, Jack G. Shaheen, ed., (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 31.

²⁵ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 11.

²⁶ Donald Richie, "Mono No Aware/Hiroshima in Film," *Film: Book 2: Films of Peace and War*, ed. Robert Hughes (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), 78.

²⁷ Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," 224.

²⁸ It is commonly believed that Dr. Caldicott established PSR. Paul Boyer, however, claims that Bernard Lown founded PSR in the 1950s (*By the Bomb's Early Light*, 353). Eric Semler writes that Lown founded PSR in 1961 but it "became dormant in the 1960s and was revived in the 1970s by Dr. Helen Caldicott." Eric Semler, et. al., *The Language of Nuclear War: An Intelligent Citizen's Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 220.

²⁹ Helen Caldicott, Forward to *Nuclear Movies*, by Mick Broderick (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1991), xiv-xv. First published in Australia, 1988.

³⁰ Boyer, *Ibid.*, 367.

"world of flickering images."³¹ Psychologist Robert J. Lifton — who writes about the so-called "inadequacies" of popular Bomb films — uses a distinctly New Testament, evangelical style in his writings and speeches to cast himself in the role of the gentle shepherd who is spreading *the good news* that will give us, the living dead who worship at the alter of nuclearism, salvation from our psychically numbed lives.³² Although Michael Ortiz Hill, the depth psychologist, also hints at psychic numbing and waxes apocalyptic, he is perhaps unique amongst this group of intellectuals. Hill is the only cultural critic, that I know of, to recognize the grip of the apocalyptic imagination on himself, and then consciously embrace it as a necessary part of human experience.³³ Additionally, James Berger, in *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, trenchantly argues that the seminal figures in postmodern theory are speaking in a very apocalyptic voice; and, I hasten to add, the cinema and the Bomb have played crucial roles in the formation of postmodern theory.³⁴ Of all the intellectuals writing about the Bomb, however, the most exemplary is the anti-nuclear philosopher Jonathan Schell. Evoking Sunday School lessons about choosing between good and evil, he writes that "Two paths lie before us." Even though insects are common images in apocalypses, I sometimes wonder if Schell was not inspired by that seminal apocalyptic Bomb film *Them!*; for, in his exhortation to anti-nuclear righteousness, he masterfully combines apocalyptic narrative structure, Manichaeic rhetoric, Paschal imagery, and 1950s' style Hollywood science fiction into visions of post-nuclear plagues of "insects and grass."³⁵

We must remind ourselves that well educated persons using millennial or apocalyptic rhetoric is hardly an unusual phenomenon. It is a curious thing in the West that, during times of intense social change and cultural anxiety, maverick intellectuals with great charisma leave the monastery to exhort the laity and their own peers with spectacular eschatologies. We have seen this throughout history in diverse groups ranging from Jews during the Babylonian and Hellenistic Diasporas to early and Medieval Christians. And now, we see this in our own time. But this phenomena is not limited to the professional intellectual. During the last US presidential elections the ostensible question was who (presuming the world is still here) would lead us into the twenty-first century. On May 31, 1995, the Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (World War II and Cold War hero) launched his successful bid for the 1996 Republican Presidential nomination by attacking Hollywood. Ironically, one of the most visible public figures to support Dole was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has appeared in at least five of the most spectacular and most profitable Bomb films.³⁶ Dole, however, was defeated by an incumbent Democratic opponent, William Jefferson Clinton, who was skillful enough to steal Dole's issues.

Cinema studies scholar Robert Sklar has shown that "For much of their history . . . movies had been a site of struggle over cultural power."³⁷ They still are. Elsewhere, Sklar makes it abundantly clear that in the struggle over cultural power intellectuals have never hesitated to

³¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984): 17, 19.

³² Robert J. Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, Revised (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 461-63, 570.

³³ Michael Ortiz Hill, *Dreaming the End of the World: Apocalypse as a Rite of Passage*. (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1994).

³⁴ James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), *passim*.

³⁵ Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1982), 65 and 231.

³⁶ *The Terminator* (1984), *The Running Man* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), and *True Lies* (1994).

³⁷ Robert Sklar, "Oh! *Althusser!*: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies," in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, ed. Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1990), 20-21.

demonize Hollywood.³⁸ They still do. And no where, as I have tried to demonstrate, is that more abundantly clear than in the scholarly and public discourse over films about the Bomb.

Atomic Bomb Cinema, I maintain, plays a largely positive role in our culture. It contributes to the assimilation of very complex issues surrounding the Bomb, related technologies, and their appropriate use. Most importantly, they encourage us to survive and analogically self-actualize under oppressive conditions. In his history of the atomic bomb, Richard Rhodes writes that, rather than achieving physicist Niels Bohr's dream of an *open world*, "The national security state that the United States has evolved towards since 1945 is significantly a denial of the American democratic vision: suspicious of diversity, secret, martial, exclusive, monolithic, paranoid."³⁹ (Is it any wonder that Robert Anton Wilson claims his and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus* novels about secret societies, conspiracies, and machinations, have increased in popularity?)⁴⁰ Few of us, that is to say, have any control over a weapon with the very real possibility of annihilating us all. This national security state is, I believe, widely experienced as a very oppressive condition. Within this political context, Atomic Bomb Cinema serves a very important function; for, as Collins points out, the apocalyptic genre is the language of an oppressed people. According to the tribal storytellers N. Scott Momaday and Gerald Vizenor, "Man tells stories in order to understand his experience, whatever it may be," and "should we lose our stories," we would lose our lives.⁴¹ Again, the problem is not Hollywood, and the remedy is not censorship or political or academic posturing. As Frank McConnell, in *Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature*, deftly shows, Hollywood is part of the solution. "Stories matter, and matter deeply," McConnell writes, "because they are the best way to save our lives."⁴² The problem is, therefore, that most scholars do not understand the language of Atomic Bomb Cinema. No one, or almost no one, is in denial over the fact that the Bomb is a frightening, dangerous human creation that could end all life on earth. If Atomic Bomb Cinema, including right-wing, pro-nuclear films, such as *Bombers B-52* (Gordon Douglas, 1957), is any indication of how people think, then at its very best the Bomb is a necessary evil. Atomic Bomb Cinema is, therefore, a storytelling media that contributes to a processes by which people struggle to make difficult issues more comprehensible, a process that helps people to make their lives more meaningful.

And yet, because these visual stories speak in a poetic, expressive language, one that must appeal to popular tastes, they have been repeatedly denounced by the intellectual elite. Critics and scholars have largely respond, ironically, in a rhetoric that can be inflammatory, even apocalyptic. The standard scholarly interpretative strategies are to look at Bomb films as evidence of nuclearism, a vast break in public consciousness, or covert political and religious propaganda, and therefore as a distorted representation of some nuclear reality. Such arguments seem to me to leave little room for irony, ambiguity, ambivalence, comedy, or debate. They are hopelessly Manichaeian, teleological, and tragic. They assume that people cognitively and emotionally experience and process events in the same way and at the same speed, and express

³⁸ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975).

³⁹ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 785.

⁴⁰ Robert Anton Wilson, interviewed by John Hockenberry, *Heat* (National Public Radio, June 25, 1990). Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, *Illuminatus*, Parts I, II, III (New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1975). Robert Anton Wilson, *Masks of the Illuminati*, (New York: Timescape Books, 1981).

⁴¹ Gerald Vizenor, *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 197-198, 262.

⁴² Frank McConnell, *Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3.

themselves in the same "discursive" form (as opposed to the "presentational" form).⁴³ All this is to say that, one would have hoped that the corrosive fallout, over both the academic and the general socio-political landscapes, from theorizing African-American culture as pathological would have taught other scholars a lesson.⁴⁴ And yet, pathology is the explanation that continues to dominate the scholarship on the Bomb and culture.

To argue, outside the clinical context, that people are psychically numb to their own experiences, or, conversely, paranoid, is to inappropriately extrapolate from a limited context to a global context. To argue that popular texts, films, or other expressive forms of culture, are merely another form of false consciousness that contributes to people's psychopathology, is reductive and dehumanizing. To argue that any person or text that is pro-nuclear, or not stridently anti-nuclear, is psychically numb or numbing, not only disempowers, it is a demonizing ad hominem that can only breed contempt. Thus, psychopathology arguments only widen an already wide gulf between intellectuals, a relatively elite and influential class, and those without resource or access to the political system. At the risk of raising a millennial voice — on the edge of an already unnerving precipice between one millennium and the next, can anyone imagine a more potent recipe for enflaming millennial violence?

In the Fall of 1999, I participated in two conferences on the millennium: The 12th Annual Klutznick Symposium, "The End of Days?: Millennialism from the Hebrew Bible to the Present" (Creighton University, October 10-11, 1999), and "New World Orders: Millennialism in the Western Hemisphere," sponsored by the Center for Millennial Studies (Boston University, November 7-9, 1999). At these conferences I found myself to be a newcomer on the margins of the formal study of religion and culture; a position that allowed me a certain critical distance. Three issues seemed to dominate both conferences. First, there was a great deal of discussion about how persons and institutions in positions of power, authority, or influence often respond to millennial movements in ways that only heighten the movement's members sense that The End of Days are upon us; and, such responses can, however inadvertent, fuel violent confrontation. Brenda Brasher, who spoke at both conferences, made this point repeatedly and eloquently. Second, the problem of recognizing when these authorities and institutions are operating under a millennial or apocalyptic logic of their own, one that can drive them into violent confrontation with largely non-violent groups. And third, ever present was the problem of recognizing that we research scholars are also subject to the grip of extreme, even irrational beliefs; i.e., at issue is finding a compassionate and responsible way to study individuals or groups whose beliefs may seem extreme or even irrational, without reducing the subject to an irredeemably frightening Other. Scholars in other fields have raised similar issues. In 1972 Robert Warshow trenchantly critiqued Left leaning American academe's disdain for popular culture, particularly the cinema; and, in 1983 Peter Clecak debunked the tawdry caricatures, in the scholarly literature, of American Fundamentalist religions.⁴⁵ And yet, in the dominant institutions of American and cinema studies, their voices have fallen on largely deaf, or at best hostile, ears. Thus, if it is not too brash of me to appropriate Boyarin's metaphor, it seems to me that the greatest contribution being made by scholars of the millennium to the discourse of Western scholarship is their

⁴³ Susan K. Langer, "Discursive Forms and Presentational Forms," *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 79-102.

⁴⁴ Wade W. Nobles, and Lawford L. Goddard, *Understanding the Black Family: A Guide for Scholarship and Research* (Oakland, California: The Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, Inc., 1984), *passim*; Joseph L. White, *The Psychology of Blacks: An Afro-American Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1984), *passim*; Berger, *After the End*, , xix, 192-197, 214-215, 248 n. 16.

⁴⁵ Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (New York: Athenum, 1972), 23-48. Peter Clecak, *America's Quest for the Ideal Self*, *passim*.

voicing or revoicing of a more compassionate, tolerant, scholarly voice. This voices, it again seems to me, is inspired by something like the spirit of tikun ha-olahm, the restoration of balance and harmony, or, perhaps, to paraphrase the seemingly omnipresent Richard Landes, a desire to create a dialog between the roosters and the owls.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Throughout the "New World Orders" conference, Richard Landes, co-founder and Director of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, would appear at the most opportune moment of any discussion to remind us of the meaning, from medieval symbology, of the Center's two ensigns. The rooster tells us to wake up, but when ignored he begins to talk like "chicken little;" and, the owl tells us it is not quite time yet to wake up, but when ignored he acts like an ostrich. The resulting discord between these two creatures' divergent messages can, Professor Landes reminds us, be disastrous for us all.