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Symbol, myth and media: A hermeneutic approach to mass communication theory.

Teofil N. Canji

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SYMBOL, MYTH AND MEDIA:
A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

by

Teofil N. Canji

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Communication Studies in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1994
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ABSTRACT

SYMBOL, MYTH AND MEDIA:
A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

by

Toofil N. Canji

This thesis outlines a hermeneutic approach to mass communication theory by drawing a parallel between ancient myths and the modern mass media. By applying Paul Ricoeur’s theory of myth to the media, three similar characteristics are suggested: concrete universality, temporal orientation and ontological exploration. These three qualities expose media’s symbolic function, that is, the media functions as a disclosure of the relationship between humankind and the sacred. Once established as symbolic, an interpretation of a specific text is necessary for the completion of the myth-based hermeneutic analysis. This thesis elaborates this last step with an analysis of the apocalyptic film, Until the End of the World.
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INTRODUCTION

When an attempt is made to bring the relatively articulated concept of "myth" into the area of "media"... it is necessary to reconsider both "myth" and "media" in order to get at relevant data.

Marshall McLuhan

The Purpose of this Study

The attempt to conceptualize the mass media's place, role and influence in culture has taken many forms in media scholarship. One conceptualization, which has become a growing research paradigm, draws a comparison between the function of myth in ancient societies and the function of the media in modern society.\(^1\) Myth as a model for mass communication has been an alternative approach to media analysis based on theories in cultural studies. Its aim is to reflect and elaborate the central themes in the narratives circulated in culture by the mass media. However, a controversy continues to surround the proper place of myth within a philosophy of culture. This has resulted in

\(^1\) In the context of this study, to allow for a more thorough analysis, the mass media will be articulated by the medium of film in the dramatic narrative form
different schools of thought within myth-based media analysis. That is, since the definition of myth shapes and influences the approach to and analysis of the media, different frameworks for describing and explaining the media have resulted. In this thesis, I explore one definition of myth and its implications for the study of the mass media, thus adding another framework through which to view the media in modern culture. The myth-based approach I expound is based on the definition of myth supplied by Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur's definition of myth stands in contrast with most other definitions of myth. His unique and insightful observations provide fertile ground for the investigation into the juxtaposition of myth and the media. Thus, the examination and application of Ricoeur's definition adds new and valuable insights into the role which the mass media play in modern society.

The Structure of this Study

The myth-based model as part of the theoretical development in media analysis is outlined in chapter one of this study. Chapter one explains the general concerns of the myth-based model through its contrast with the linear effects
model, which has dominated much of media analysis. A further review of structural and semiological media analyses, which are myth-based, will show the need for a new look at myth and its relationship with the media.

Chapter two elaborates Paul Ricoeur\'s theory of myth. His theory provides an alternative to the structural and semiological definitions of myth reviewed in chapter one. Ricoeur\'s theory is based on the assumption that mythic narratives act as a symbol. The character of myth is further elaborated around three characteristics, its paradigmatic dimension, its temporal and narrative dimension and its intention of ontological exploration. Connections are then made between these three dimensions of myth and similar dimensions found within mass media narratives. Such a theoretical framework establishes a unique position from which to view the mass media in contemporary culture.

Chapter three further explores Ricoeur\'s theory of myth. As part of his theory, Ricoeur argues for the necessity of a hermeneutic. That is, the understanding of myth should not be limited to its functional characteristics, there is a further necessity for the interpretation of specific myths. This hermeneutics of myth provides a methodology for the analysis
of media narratives. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to hermeneutics and its concepts of understanding and explanation. Understanding is identified as the goal of hermeneutics. The hermeneutic circle, the hermeneutics of finitude and the hermeneutics of suspicion, all key concepts in Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy, are also introduced to help readers deepen their understanding of the hermeneutic method. Finally, the hermeneutic task is exemplified by three models, that of the actor, the painter and the listener.

Chapter four applies Ricoeur's theory of myth through the examination of the contemporary apocalyptic vision. Using the hermeneutics of myth applied to the media text, *Until the End of the World*, Ricoeur's contribution to media theory is established. Elaboration of the meanings associated with modern apocalyptic myth will provide unique insights into, and a deeper understanding of, the present historical moment. Marked by political instability, social anomie, environmental decay, increasing personal alienation, along with a headlong rush towards the turn of the millennium, western culture provides an atmosphere in which apocalyptic visions flourish. In this chapter the understanding of the modern apocalyptic
myth unravels one small but important part of self and culture.

Finally, chapter five concludes the study with a summary of the significant contribution which Ricoeur’s theory makes to media studies, and introduces questions for further research consideration.
CHAPTER ONE
MYTH AS A MODEL FOR MASS COMMUNICATION

Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes: the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to tensions and achievements of growth and change.

Raymond Williams

Introduction

Engaging Marshall McLuhan's maxim "the medium is the message"¹ many communication scholars have addressed the problem of culture and its increased reliance on the electronic media. As western culture shifts from a predominately literary or print culture to an electronic or media culture the structure and relationships in society are transformed. That is to say, the mass media increasingly permeate most aspects of everyday life with profound effects. Alvin Kernan, discussing the relationship between media technology and cultural change, for example, argues: "The primary means of communication and getting information not

only shape the entire social world but are woven into the fabric of individual life and consciousness, a critical part of the sustaining reality and the primary image of the self in the world.\textsuperscript{2} Perception, cognition and identity, therefore, are essentially aligned with communication media. Consequentially, the rigorous understanding of the bond between the mass media and culture becomes an important area of investigation.

Efforts to address this relationship in the wake of theories such as McLuhan's have resulted in the reexamination of the dominant models used in explaining the process of mass communication. These models provide frameworks for scholarship and research, that is, they identify key factors and variables in the conceptualization of the process of mass communication. As a result, models establish an elaboration of the premises of the role, place and influence of the media in society.

James Carey, a prominent media theorist, distinguishes between two broad perspectives which underlie approaches in

the study of the mass media. Carey identifies one perspective as following a transportation or transmission model and the other perspective as following a myth or ritual model. A historical survey reveals the transportation/transmission model as the predominant tradition in North American media research. Based on a definition equating communication with transportation, communication is seen as "a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control."³ According to such an approach, media research became preoccupied with studying the impact or effects of media messages on audiences.

This formulation of communication allied the communication discipline with the behavioural sciences: "Mass communication has made a massive investment in behavioural science, not only methodologically and procedurally, but also in terms of theoretical assumptions about how social formations and communications are to be analyzed."⁴


Dissatisfaction with what some theorists considered a narrow view and definition of communication led to the development of a new framework through which to study the mass media. The new cultural studies approach to communication follows what Carey calls a mythic or ritual model in which "communication is viewed as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed."\(^5\)

This alternative approach signifies a shift in many spheres of media scholarship. Myles Breen and Farrel Corcoran, scholars who trace the theoretical developments in communication studies, summarize the momentous change as a shift from behavioural psychology to cultural anthropology, from a definition of communication as persuasion to that of shared beliefs and cultural maintenance, from the study of attitude change to the study of culture, and from a linear effects model to a model of myth and ritual.\(^6\)

Employing the myth/ritual model in the analysis of the mass media, communication scholars sometimes make a helpful distinction between the two in order to confine the

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boundaries of study. The study of myth in modern critiques of the media usually refers to the analysis of meanings circulating in society. The study of the mass media as ritual, on the other hand, usually incorporates the analysis of cultural practices. While it is as impossible to separate myth and ritual completely as it is to separate belief from action, in this study the model for mass communication and thus, for the bond between the mass media and culture will be described as myth-based rather than ritual-based or the more cumbersome myth/ritual-based. On a theoretical level therefore, I agree with Lawrence Hatab who claims, "The most fruitful use of the mythic-ritual correlation would be to understand myths in the broader sense of the coincidence of thought and action or lived world."  

Furthermore, those who examine the theoretical implications of proposing an analysis of the media based on the mythic model are faced with the enigma of providing a definition of myth. Although myths are certainly as old as civilization scholars still have not come to a consensus over what myth is. Increasingly, however, scholars have overcome

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the congestion of definitions of myth by suggesting that there are different types of myths which manifest themselves in different forms and fulfill different functions. This pluralistic view of myth still leaves the question for communication scholars: which properties of myth should be used to define the media?

Structural and Semiological Approaches to Myth and Media

Structural and semiological theories dominate myth-based media analysis. These theories can be best identified in the work of John Fiske and Douglas Kellner, two prominent media theorists. A brief review of their application of myth to media analysis illustrates inadequacies in such views and thus the need for a new perspective in the formation of the relationship between myth and the media.

Fiske, following a structural approach, identifies two functions similar for both myth and the mass media. First,

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9 Presented here is only a brief critique of the use of myth in the theories of Fiske and Kellner, not their full media theories. Also, it should be noted Fiske and Kellner are not the first to use these types of myth-based media analyses, their analyses are used here as exemplary cases.
they give a concrete expression to an abstract contradiction. Second, they serve as logical tools to mediate and overcome that same contradiction. Fiske’s myth-based analysis of the Western genre explains these functions more fully.

Myth and media first converge in the function of giving a concrete representation of an abstract binary opposition. For example, within the Western genre the actions and general values of the characters, as well as, the camera angles, composition and locations, act as concrete representations of abstract binary oppositions. The most basic opposition is culture:nature. Fiske explains: “the scene of Indians attacking a white homestead is a concrete metaphorical transformation of the opposition between culture and nature.”

A further analysis reveals other oppositions and contradictions stemming from the culture:nature distinction: “In the Western genre culture:nature is transformed into indoors:outdoors and is structurally associated with values such as law and order:lawlessness, white:Indian, humane:inhumane, and so on.”11 The deep structural level of


11 Ibid.
the narrative, thus, explains the components and logic of the plot.

The second function which the media shares with myth is the mediation of the oppositions found in their narratives. In the Western genre, Fiske claims, the hero mediates the binary oppositions. The hero mediates these contradiction by being on both sides of the culture:nature opposition. For example, he shares characteristics of both the 'whites' and the 'Indians.' He is at home both on the homestead, in culture and on horse back, in nature. This, for Fiske, is the primary function of myth and thus the media: to mediate and overcome contradictions.

Fiske's myth-based structural approach has a major flaw: he describes myth's character but ignores its meaning. That is, Fiske describes the narrative of the Western genre very well, but does not tell us what the narrative means, that is, its philosophic or existential importance. For example, in the Western genre when Fiske makes a distinction between white:Indian, he has identified an opposition which describes the forces at work in the narrative, but not why it is significant, only that it is there. The recognition of binary oppositions and the mediating role of myth is already the
recognition of some significant problem or meaningful proposition about the relationship between culture and nature. Fiske, excludes any analysis of these meanings in his structural approach.

The disregard for these meanings is more clearly expressed in John Van Den Hengel's general critique of structuralism. His critique is directly applicable to Fiske's analysis. Van Den Hengel claims that the structural approach falls into a "for-the-sake-of-the-text" fallacy. By this he means that structuralism confines its analysis to the codification of elements in the text. There is no attempt to go beyond the form of the text in order to understand the text's message. Van Den Hengel explains:

The structuralists concentrate their efforts in analyzing a code or structure underlying the narrative. They recognize a relationship between this code and the narrative structure of the story. However, in their search for a depth-structure of the narrative, they look behind the narrative features of the story. The meaning of the story lies not in the narrative dimension, which they call its surface meaning, but in the underlying code. The code is the real meaning of the story. The surface features are only the dressing, the envelope, for the underlying structure.12

Structural approaches, such as Fiske's, by differentiating between surface and "true" or structural meaning, equate the content of the text with the code of the text. In doing so an important area of analysis is closed off. When the text has meaning only within itself nothing can be said of the meaning of the text for individuals and for their culture. This "outside" component of the text, that is, its message, is not elaborated in Fiske's myth-based analysis. Such an exclusion makes it necessary to find an alternative approach in our analyses of the media, an approach which includes the message of the text, that is, its existential importance and significance.\(^\text{13}\)

Douglas Kellner is another media theorist who uses a myth-based analysis of the media. His semiological approach identifies myth as a type of language, a specific form of communication. The language which both the media and myth speak, Kellner argues, is depoliticized speech. By this he means that mythic and media languages work to naturalize history, obscuring social and political realities. This

similarity, Kellner claims, leads to the conclusion that the mass media provides the present age with the equivalent counterpart to ancient mythologies.

To illustrate his theory, Kellner uses the example of the television coverage of presidential elections:

During network coverage of Presidential elections, images of red-white-and-blue, the flag, and a map of the U.S. showing the election returns project mythologies of democracy, or popular participation in government, and a national mandate for the elected President. Excluded are the facts that less than half of the eligible voters vote, that there is usually little political choice offered, that special interests control the political process in America.¹⁴

The media, therefore, share the same double function as myth: "they point out objects and events (description), and impose certain attitudes and values (prescription)."¹⁵

Myth, and thus the media, for Kellner, are a source of duplicity. Both are implicated in propagating dominant ideology with no regard for reality. However, Kellner's position is a cause for concern. By claiming that myth is no more than the propagation of the ideology of the established social order, Kellner limits his analysis. He applies his

¹⁵ Ibid.
theory only to the dominant media, which mythologize and suppress political realities. The alternative media, on the other hand, he views as a source of liberation, that speak of reality. However, the distinction between what is "true" reality and what is not, becomes increasingly blurred. The line between the two is not as discernible as Kellner hopes.

Furthermore, Kellner's myth-based analysis of the media is one-dimensional. He decodes media texts as either domination or liberation. In doing so he recognizes only one component of the media text—the ideological component. Such an analysis fails to recognize the richness and complexity of the nature and function of the media in society. A view of media simply as ideological, therefore, puts unnecessary limits on media meanings.

Lastly, Kellner's myth-based analysis takes an inappropriate attitude toward the text. Kellner approaches the text not to learn from it, not to be open to another perspective, but rather to impose his own domination over the meaning of the text. He approaches the text not to submit to its revelatory power, but to present his own views on the ideological "reality" found in society. Kellner's approach thus, is essentially negative. His analysis limits and
Myth as a Model for Mass Communication

determines media as nothing more than ideological tools of the dominant classes.

The concerns raise over the practice of myth-based media analyses make it necessary to come to a view of myth and media which extend the critiques of Fiske and Kellner. Such a view should concentrate on the existential significance of the media text, without limiting in meaning or attitude the nature of those texts.

Conclusion:

Increasingly, communication scholars are turning to the concept of myth to explain the role, function and meanings of the mass media. Although several frameworks have been developed for such an analysis, after a brief review of the most popular, the structural and semiological, these approaches are seen to have some shortcomings. In order to properly describe the mass media as mythic it seems necessary to find another definition of myth, one which better reflects the richness and complexity of the media's place in culture.
CHAPTER TWO
PAUL RICOEUR: A THEORY OF MYTH

It is significant that a philosophy of symbol and myth is occurring now, in an age characterized by forgetfulness of the knowledge of the sacred and a time when language is more technical... Modern man has open to him the option of either emptying the language through radically formalizing it or renewing it with fullness of meaning that comes through contact with the myths and symbols which reveal man’s bond with the sacred.

Marilyn Thie

Introduction

Scholarly analyses of the media following the myth-based model take many forms. Each of these analyses outlines properties which the mass media share with myth. As a result the theory of myth one uses determines one’s view of the media and their place, role and meaning in contemporary society. Therefore, fundamental to any media analysis is a dynamic view of myth which accounts for the diverse and complex structure and function of the mass media.

In this study, Paul Ricoeur’s theory of myth will be employed to delineate the view of myth on which our media analysis will be based. Ricoeur’s theory integrates much of
the thought on myth, providing both a comprehensive and distinctive perspective. The elaboration of the perspective used in this thesis will occur in two stages. First, an investigation of the unique and distinctive character of Ricoeur's theory will be developed with a further outline and expansion of three of myth’s fundamental characteristics. Second, Ricoeur’s definition of myth will be transposed to offer an incisive view of the structure and function of the mass media in modern culture.

Ricoeur’s Theory Of Myth

Ricoeur’s theory of myth finds its distinctive character in being able to accommodate a critical view while not reducing myth to an irrational form. As such, his definition differs from the typical definitions of myth. The prevailing view of myth is that of a fictitious or imaginary story which denotes a false belief. This modern definition establishes a dichotomy between myth and rationality. Such a view finds myth to be an irrational and ancient form which has been transcended by historical and scientific explanation. Myth, therefore, is related to that which is false. That is, myth
acts as an inadequate and illusory explanation of historical and natural events.

Ricoeur, however, reaffirms myth as important and viable to modernity. In doing so he differentiates between the etiological and symbolic functions of myth. Ricoeur states: "My working hypothesis is that criticism of the pseudo-rationality is fatal not to myth but to gnosis."¹ Therefore, according to Ricoeur, myth's primary function is not to explain the workings of a physical reality. Rather, the primary function of myth is to symbolically represent an existential reality.

Accordingly, Ricoeur describes two attitudes which may be taken towards myth. One may aim to eliminate myth from the modern world view as a primitive, irrational and anti-scientific discourse. This follows the dominant and popular definition of myth as etiological. As an alternative approach, one may recognize myth as separate from "the pseudo-knowledge, the false logos of the myth, such as we find expressed, for example, in the etiological function of

myths. To separate gnosis from myth, then, is to recognize the symbolic function of myth.

Ricoeur claims that the symbolic function of myth consists in "its power of discovering and revealing the bond between man and what he considers sacred." Such a conception of myth, however, might be hidden for the media scholar in unfamiliar language. The sacred is an area where media scholars rarely tread. To explicate, let us first consider Ricoeur's meaning of symbol and then the idea of the sacred.

Ricoeur's explanation of the symbol follows what most would consider a symbol, that is, an expression within which is found a reference to something other than itself. Ricoeur, therefore, describes the symbol as having a double meaning or two levels of signification. The literal signification points beyond itself to something which is other than itself, but which is also manifested in itself. The literal signification reveals the second level of signification, the symbolic. The literal and symbolic significations, however, should not be viewed as two different significations but as a movement from one to another. Ricoeur explains:

2 Ibid. p. 162.
3 Ibid. p. 5.
Yet for one who participates in the symbolic signification there are really not two significations, one literal and the other symbolic, but rather a single movement, which transforms him from one level to another and which assimilates him to the second signification by means of, or through the literal one.  

Myth, for Ricoeur, acts as a symbol for the disclosure of the bond between humankind and the sacred. The sacred here does not necessarily mean the supernatural, but rather that which is set apart or consecrated. The sacred in this sense is often contrasted with what is profane, that is, what is common and ordinary. The sacred is, therefore, where meaning and significance are found. The sacred understood in this way can be defined as the ultimate concerns of existence. To exemplify, Ricoeur states, "It is the same to say that the sky manifests the sacred and to say that it signifies the most high, the elevated and the immense, the powerful and the orderly, the clairvoyant and the wise, the sovereign and the immutable." As a symbol the sky means something quite different from the physical blue expanse over our heads.

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5 For further elaboration of the sacred's relationship to meaning and significance see Hatab, *Myth and Philosophy*, pp. 21-22.

Furthermore, the sky is sacred in that it takes on special importance and meaning for a culture which views it in the symbolic fashion described above. Myth is the means through which expression is given to the concerns of existence or what humankind takes to be of vital importance.

Restored to this sort of legitimacy, myth can be said to constitute an unique dimension of human meaning. That is, myth is not distinctive for its elaboration of historical consciousness; a movement from mythical and religious to scientific and rational thinking. Myth, rather, is a special use of language which exposes a dimension of human experience not available in scientific or rationalistic modes of language. Myth as a language must be understood as legitimate and necessary for understanding the totality of human experiences in ancient and modern cultures.7

Established as a language, or more precisely as a specific expression of language, Ricoeur outlines the character of myth. Myth's symbolic function has three characteristics or dimensions which Ricoeur refers to as a

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three-fold irreducible function: (1) concrete universality, (2) temporal orientation and (3) ontological exploration. Since Ricoeur's explanations of these dimensions are both brief and only given in terms of specific myths of evil, we will turn to other theorists for further elaboration on Ricoeur's point of view. What should be kept in mind is that the framework of functions or the character of myth outlined by Ricoeur provides a dynamic way in which to view the function and form of the mass media in contemporary society.

The Paradigmatic Dimension of Myth

The first function of myth is to place humankind into one ideal history, that is, to represent humankind as a concrete universal. Ricoeur claims, "Through the figure of the hero, the ancestor, the Titan, the first man, the demigod, experience is put on the track of existential structures: one can say man, existence, human being, because in the myth the human type is recapitulated, summed up." That myths contain ideal types, or archetypes has been elaborated by many. For further explanation of the significance of this

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characteristic and in order to supplement Ricoeur's theory we will turn to the ideas of Bruce Lincoln\(^9\) who summarizes much of the research on the paradigmatic dimension of myth.

Lincoln describes the paradigmatic nature of myth not in terms of the characters in the story, but of the story itself. As will be shown this is not so much a difference from Ricoeur as it is a subtle difference in focus. We turn to Lincoln because his ideas are insightful. After some explication, his ideas will be linked more closely to Ricoeur's explicit proposal of the archetypal figure in myth.

Lincoln claims that myths are paradigmatic in that they formulate and order the world through the telling of existential concerns. Instead of following a history/myth, rational/irrational, truth/superstition dichotomy which is usually associated with the popular definitions of myth, Lincoln identifies narratives as either Fable, Legend, History or Myth according to truth-claims, credibility and authority. As shown in figure one, pure fictions would be labeled Fable; other narratives received by an audience as accurate accounts of the past, but without credibility are

labeled Legend, and with credibility. History. It is only those narratives with truth-claims, credibility and authority that are considered Myth.

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Figure #1: “Forms of Narrative Expression.” In Bruce Lincoln, Discourse and the Construction of Society, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.24.

Myth, as such, is differentiated from other narratives by its authority over reality. Myth, therefore, makes claims not only to the status of truth but also to the status of paradigmatic truth. Lincoln explains, “Myth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors can then construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed.”

Lincoln sees his conception of the authority of myth as similar to Bronislaw Malinowski’s description of myth as

\[10\] Ibid. p. 24.
social charter and Clifford Geertz's characterization of
religion as model of and model for reality.\footnote{11}

Lincoln and Ricoeur agree that myths are paradigmatic.
However, they explain the paradigmatic nature with slightly
different focuses. Lincoln focuses on the story being
paradigmatic. Ricoeur concentrates on the characters in the
story being paradigmatic. What Lincoln adds to Ricoeur is a
description of the nature of the paradigmatic. Appropriating
Lincoln's explanation we find that the representation of
humankind as concrete universality in mythic narratives is
two-fold. Humankind is both reflected and constructed. That
is, the characters in the myth are both models of humankind
and models for humankind to follow.

This paradigmatic nature of myth offers a fuller
explanation for an elusive aspect of myth. Myth is often
described in overly exaggerated and mystical terms. For
example, one theorist states that myths have a "tenacious
hold upon the imaginations of men."\footnote{12} Another theorist claims:

\footnote{11} Lincoln describes Bronislaw Malinowski, \textit{Magic, Science and
Religion}, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948, pp. 93-148; and Clifford

Paul Ricoeur: A Theory of Myth

"myths wield great power."13 Still another finds myths to be "resonant with the unconscious."14 These descriptions all offer insights into the nature of myth. However, I believe, they can all be summarized in the better explanation, proposed by both Lincoln and Ricoeur, which finds that myths function paradigmatically.

The Temporal Orientation of Myth

Ricoeur describes the second function of myth as temporal orientation. Using the specific example of the myths of evil, he explains: "The universality of man, manifested through the myths, gets its concrete character from the movement which is introduced into human experience by narration."15 This temporal orientation of myth simply means that experience is given expression in the form of a story. Experience and knowledge are placed in time through characters, geography and action giving myth its narrative form. There are two important aspects of narrativity which

will be examined. First, the cognitive process of narrative knowledge must be understood in contrast to the logic performed in the abstract, scientific mode of knowledge. One must not confuse one form of knowledge with the other, nor hierarchically prioritize one over the other. Second, the dramatic narrative form drives to a wholeness of expression; that is, the narrative form functions as a gestalt. The attributes of mythic narrativity identified by Ricoeur, once again, need to be elaborated using several other theorists.

The most common attitude towards knowledge is that it grows progressively. Myth as a form of knowledge, therefore, is often described as being superseded by scientific rationality. Recent scholarship however suggests that this is not the case. Claude Levi-Strauss, a leading anthropologist, was among the first to suggest that mythic thought was not inferior to modern scientific thought. He claimed that, "the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied."16

Beginning with Levi-Strauss there arose a new understanding of myth. This understanding was based on the view that conceptualization associated with myth differed from other forms of conceptualization, namely that of abstract reasoning. The idea of myth as a form of knowledge based on narrativity rather than abstraction dispels the historical misunderstanding of the knowledge as progress and the subsequent proposal of the irrationality of myth. Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, explains the history of knowledge not as a progression but as two differing forms of understanding. He states of narrative and logico-scientific understanding:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (although complementary) are irreducible to one another. . . . Each of the ways of knowing, moreover, has operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification.17

One way in which narrative differs from abstraction is in its expression of the world. Contrasting the narrative and abstract element of cognition one finds that mythic

expression forms a gestalt. The narrative form of myth discloses a totality of meaning while abstract reasoning only provides an understanding of distinctive elements. A.J.M. Sykes elaborates on this difference, stating: "Myth conveys the perception of a whole, of a complete entity. Rational analysis and description can proceed only by describing the parts that make up the entity; the sum of these parts will not necessarily convey a perception of the whole."\(^\text{18}\) Sykes continues: "Within a concise story format myth describes a perception of a situation and its complex of beliefs and values."\(^\text{19}\) Myth as a dramatic narrative, therefore, operates as a gestalt. Abstract reasoning atomizes. This gestalt characteristic of myth provides a vision of the world which is entire and absolute.

The gestalt function of mythic narratives can further be explained through the analysis of the structure of the narrative form. The structure of narrative is often elaborated by claiming it has a beginning, a middle and an end. This characteristic points out the exclusiveness of


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
meaning in mythic narratives. That is, each myth claims to provide the one and only genuine and authentic conception of the world. Thus, each myth forms an all encompassing image of the world; it provides a beginning, a middle and an end of meaning and of understanding of the subject matter. Donald Polkinghorne describes this gestalt function in terms of temporality:

The registering of relationship by the narrative schema results from its power to configure a sequence of events into a unified happening. Narrative ordering makes individual events comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute. The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension and by identifying the effect one event has on another, and it serves to cohere human actions and events that affect human life into a temporal gestalt.\(^{20}\)

Myth’s Intention As Ontological Exploration

The narrative character of myth differs from abstraction not only in its gestalt expression of the world but also in its subject matter. Ricoeur identifies this third dimension of myth as ontological exploration. Again, describing the myths of evil he states, “the myth tries to get at the enigma

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of human existence, namely the discordance between the fundamental reality--state of innocence, status of creature, essential being--and the modality of man as defiled, sinful, guilty. 21 Ricœur's specific illustration emphasizes that the primary intention of myth as symbol is ontological.

Most typically myth is associated with cosmological concerns. That is, myth is described as primitive science. Primitive man without scientific tools had to describe natural phenomenon in fanciful ways. An ontological view of myth differs greatly from such an explanation of myth. This can be exemplified by contrasting scientific and mythic subject matter.

The abstract scientific mode of knowledge adopts an attitude of disengagement and distance. It explains events and phenomena in terms of generalizations and universal laws. Myth remains joined to the lived world of goals, motives and agents. Mythic explanation is thus more attuned to the significance and importance of events and phenomenon. For example, an abstract scientific understanding of the change of seasons would explain a change in the tilt of the

21 Ricœur, The Symbolism of Evil, p. 163.
earth's axis. A narrative understanding of the change of seasons exhibits more existential concerns. What does the change of seasons mean for the individuals and the community involved?

Hans-Georg Gadamar recognizes such a function in myth when he states, "Myth neither requires nor includes any possible verification outside of itself." What myth conveys must be separated from what is verifiable. That is, while some myths, such as the myths concerning origins or creation, may have a verifiable content this is not their primary function. What claims to be the truth in myth is not the story "but what it means for the fate of man, his expectations and his hope."

Harold Oliver further explicates the intent of myth by contrasting referential and relational paradigms of viewing reality. Myth's intent is not to image reality as referential. Such a view imposes rational judgment, making

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23 Ibid.

one able to claim myths as either true or false. The intent of myth rather is to image reality as relational. In order to understand myth, Oliver claims, one should not assess its rationality but enter the mythic experience with understanding. Analysis, therefore, is not of the truth or falsity of the myth but of the meaning and significance of the myth.

Myth and the Mass Media

Ricoeur's elaboration of myth and its dimensions offers a powerful framework through which to understand the form and function of the mass media in contemporary culture. Within such a framework the mass media are raised to a new level of importance. The mass media become as significant as storytelling and myth-making were in ancient and oral cultures. Furthermore, such a view centers any elaboration of the mass media within a culture analysis. The nature and status of culture become of primary concern and are revealed by the meaning given to and found within the mass media.

Understood in a mythic framework, such as that of Ricoeur, the mass media are seen to function symbolically. That is, the mass media point beyond their literal meaning to
give expression to that which modern culture considers important and of vital concern. A certain complexity is thus added to the study of the media, a complexity which respects the complex dynamics of culture. No longer is the process of mass communication viewed as simply linear, getting a message from here to there. Nor is the primary question the effectiveness or persuasiveness of a media message. Rather, a mythic framework steeps the analysis of the media in a deeper concern, a concern for the meaning humans give to their existence. Mass media narratives in such an approach gain import and value since they are viewed as giving worth to culture.

It is not a great leap to recognize the specific dimensions Ricoeur gives to myth in the contemporary mass media. A short explication of these connections reaffirms the study of the mass media within a mythic framework.

By claiming the mass media serve a similar paradigmatic function in modern culture as myths served in ancient and oral cultures, I mean that cultural values, lifestyles and world view are oriented by the mass media. The media serve not only to demonstrate the prevailing outlooks of society, but also to cultivate cultural norms and values. Michael Real
pinpoints such a paradigmatic function when he describes the mass media as "super media." He states:

> The loved and hated media become part of our very-selves. The media tell us who we are; they give us aspirations. They tell us how to get that way; they give us technique. And they tell us how to feel that way even when we do not; they give us escape. . . . Media do not simply present cultural products for consumption; they provide much of the stuff through which we construct meaning and organize our existence.  

The mass media, therefore, can be said to be paradigmatic in that they provide models, ideals and archetypes for living in contemporary society.

The mass media also have a temporal orientation similar to that which is evident in myth. This temporal orientation of myth was connected to its narrative form. Experience and knowledge in the narrative form take place in a time frame structure or its plot, that is, experience is given characters, geography and action. One consequence of viewing experience and knowledge within a time framework or narrative mode is that it produces a gestalt, a complete vision of the world. The temporal quality of media narratives is responsible for bringing viewers into the presence or region

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of the story. A common experience of media viewing is being “caught up” in the story. This living in the aura of the story or entering the world of the story is an act of participation. The temporal orientation of media and mythic narratives are similar in that both require participation. Such participation establishes boundaries for meaning. What is known and investigated is bound within the story.

When viewed in the context of the mass media, the third dimension of myth, its ontological exploration, relocates analysis from the realm of objectivity to the realm of meaning. The focus is shifted from scientific logical concerns to existential concerns. The mass media, therefore, are not viewed as an attempt to mirror the events of the world. Nor should the process of mass communication be described in terms of the effectiveness or persuasiveness of the message. The media, viewed as ontological exploration focus attention on a different aim. This aim is to place humankind within a world of meaning. As a result of engaging the mass media as a narrative there is a shift in the form of knowledge away from objective scientific knowledge. This shift reveals a different set of concerns. Janice Rushing summarizes this attitude in relation to the media when she
states that "we are now able to distinguish what might be called 'objective truth' or historical explanation and other kinds of truth expressed in the important stories of our time, and that we do not expect these stories to perform the objective function." Ontological exploration viewed as the aim of inquiry into the mass media reaches beyond the area of empirical observation. What the media disclose is a world of meaning. In and through this world of meaning possibilities of existence for humankind are created and disclosed.

Conclusion

The fundamental question in any mythic conception of the media is which characteristics of myth do the mass media exhibit? Paul Ricoeur, proposing that myth be defined as symbol, outlines three characteristics of myth. The paradigmatic, temporal and ontological characteristics of myth are shared with the modern mass media.

By distinguishing between symbolic and etiological functions, Ricoeur's definition of myth, revitalizes the concept of myth for modern times. No longer is myth linked

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26 Janice Hocker Rushing, "On Saving Mythic Criticism," Communication Studies, 41/2, Summer 1990, p. 139.
with falsehood, but with the utmost concerns of the community. Viewing the media within such a perspective assigns a dynamic and powerful understanding to the role, place and function of the mass media in society.
CHAPTER THREE
HERMENEUTICS AND MASS MEDIA INTERPRETATION

We analyze our life-world to understand our destiny, the givenness of our being, not to free ourselves from the restriction of our historicity. The freedom we could achieve is the freedom of honesty about the forces already at work within us, whether we like it or not, rather than the freedom of a (pretended) causa sui.

Merold Westphal

Introduction:

As a complement to his definition of myth, Paul Ricoeur argues that any analysis should also include a hermeneutic. Thus, although his definition of myth follows definitions found in the phenomenology of religion, Ricoeur takes important steps to move beyond the concerns of phenomenology into the concerns of hermeneutics.

Phenomenology, Ricoeur argues, is only the first stage in the understanding of myth. At this first level of thought a disinterested spectator is concerned with comparing one myth with another. Hermeneutics transcends this phenomenology of myth through its involvement with a specific myth. Therefore, Ricoeur notes about moving beyond a
phenomenological analysis into a hermeneutic one: "We now have to enter into a relationship with symbols that is both emotionally intense and at the same time critical. To do so I must leave the comparatist point of view aside, I must follow the exegete and become implicated in the life of one symbol, one myth."¹

Ricoeur's purpose for entering hermeneutics and the subsequent personal involvement with a myth is to establish a critical belief. Ricoeur does not want to return to the period of immediacy of belief in myth. Neither does he find the critical skepticism toward myth, found in modernity, appropriate. Ricoeur proposes a third path. Through hermeneutics a second immediacy or a critical belief is established. Such a position is made possible by the nature of the symbol. The symbol—and it must be remembered that myth is merely a second order symbol, a symbol in dramatic form—incorporates a dynamic, it gives meaning while needing intelligent deciphering. Ricoeur summarizes this challenge of the hermeneutics of myths through his maxim, the symbol invites thought. He explains:

Hermeneutics and Mass Media Interpretation

The symbol invites: I do not posit the meaning, the symbol gives it; but what it gives is something for thought, something to think about. First the giving, then the positing; the phrase suggests, therefore, both that all has already been said in enigma and yet that it is necessary ever to begin and re-begin everything in the dimension of thought.²

To bring myth into a thoughtful reflection, therefore, one must enter hermeneutics and construct a work of understanding that aims at deciphering the symbol.

Our own study follows Ricoeur into hermeneutics.³ Both an involvement in and an interpretation of one media text exemplifies Ricoeur's full treatise on myth and its application to media analysis. Applying Ricoeur's hermeneutics of myth to the media text, Until the End of the World, provides a critical understanding of the apocalypse in contemporary society. However, before an explication of the symbolism of the apocalypse can properly begin, we must map the procedure of analysis through a further exploration of hermeneutics.

² Ibid. p. 288.

³ The description of hermeneutics in this chapter follows the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur and Merold Westphal, a Ricoeur scholar.
Hermeneutics vs. Traditional Social Science Methods

Hermeneutics, as a method, differs greatly from the analysis most often used in the social sciences and media analysis. The core of this difference is based on contrasting views of knowledge. Traditional social scientific methods have been based on the hypothetical-deductive model of explanation found in the natural sciences. Such a model accepts a dualism between the mind and the world. Calling such a view of knowledge objectivism, Richard Bernstein explains:

Objectivism has frequently been used to designate metaphysical realism--the claim that there is a world of objective reality that exists independently of us and that has a determinate nature or essence that we can know. In modern times objectivism has been closely linked with an acceptance of a basic metaphysical or epistemological distinction between the subject and the object. What is "out there" (objective) is presumed independent of us (subjects), and knowledge is achieved when a subject correctly mirrors or represents objective reality.\(^4\)

The application of objectivism to media analysis concludes both that meaning is independent from the reader, that is, meaning is found exclusively in the text and that

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the text has only one true meaning. Such a view is reflected in one of the most popular methods of media studies, content analysis. Content analysis proposes to answer the "What" question in the communication research paradigm: Who says What to Whom with What Effect. In order to answer this question content analysis forms a research technique that is an "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." ⁵

Hermeneutics offers a fundamentally different approach to media content. This alternative is predicated on a view of knowledge that is interpretive rather than objective. Within the hermeneutic perspective, therefore, the meaning of the text is not independent from, but bound to a social and historic context. This shift in perspective changes the aim of analysis. While content analysis is concerned with the objective description of manifest content, hermeneutics concerns itself with the meanings and values created in the media and their relation to the rest of life, or as Richard Palmer explains: "Hermeneutics is the system by which the

deeper significance is revealed beneath the manifest content.”

To differentiate between these two views it is often helpful to differentiate between the text as a work, and the text as an object. Palmer, for example, notes: “Insofar as they [texts] are objects, they are amenable to scientific methods of interpretation; as works, they call for more subtle comprehensive modes of understanding.” The difference between the text as an object and the text as a work can also be viewed as the difference between scientific and humanistic methods. These methods have separate goals. The goal of the scientific methods is explanation or making causal connections. The goal of the humanistic methods is understanding or making meaningful connections. Although in everyday usage explanation and understanding are used synonymously, in this methodological context explanation and understanding become technical terms representing two distinct intellectual goals.

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7 Ibid. p. 8.
Two examples given by Merold Westphal may help to further elucidate the exercise of these terms. First, taken as a technical term it can be said that it is impossible to "understand" the movements of planets or positrons. However, an "explanation" of these phenomena is possible. Their movements can be summarized, most probably, in a mathematical formula. Second, we may further specify the difference between explanation and understanding by distinguishing between movement and behaviour. Westphal illustrates, stating: "There is an important difference between 'my hand rising above my head in the shape of a fist' and either 'my making a gesture of political defiance' or 'my signaling, as a referee, that it is fourth down.'" Thus, two different levels of description exemplify the difference between explanation and understanding. Explanation is limited to a quantifiable description of movement. Understanding, on the other hand, is a description of the reason behind the movement, or the behaviour which determines the movement.

The distinction between explanation and understanding is easily appropriated to media analysis. Following our example,

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explanation states that one’s hand has been raised in the shape of a fist. This equates with the “What” question in the communication paradigm: Who says What to Whom with What Effect. It reflects the manifest content of the text. Understanding deals with the meaning beneath the manifest content. Understanding thus changes the “What” question to “So What.” Its purpose is to configure an answer—“it’s the fourth down.” This subtle difference in questioning brings us to a new, deeper and richer level of analysis which is needed in the examination of human works.

The Nature of Understanding

The above introduction to hermeneutics contrasts with traditional social scientific methods, establishing as its purpose understanding. To further explicate hermeneutics as the approach to media analysis that will be used in this thesis, we must conduct a more in-depth examination of the nature of understanding. By grasping the concepts of the hermeneutic circle, the hermeneutics of finitude and the hermeneutics of suspicion, we will find understanding to be circular, finite and full of hidden motivations.
Understanding always involves reference to that which is already known, therefore, the nature of understanding can be said to be circular. This circular nature of understanding is explained as the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is often illustrated as a relationship between a whole and its parts. The meaning of a sentence, for example, falls into such a relationship. The meaning of a sentence is understood through the analysis of its words (parts). However, the words get their meaning by being part of the sentence (whole). The hermeneutic circle can also be seen in expressions other than the sentence. Charles Taylor, for example, explains the hermeneutic circle when applied to a text in the following way:

We are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the reading of partial expressions depend on those of others and ultimately the whole.  

The symbol, as well, comes under the constitution of the hermeneutic circle. The symbol gives meaning while needing a further interpretation for its meaning. The positing of

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meaning and the further thinking needed for the articulation of meaning, that is, the hermeneutic circle, reflects certain boundaries to understanding. These boundaries are further explored under the hermeneutics of finitude.

The hermeneutics of finitude points out that the hermeneutic circle should not be thought of as a vicious circle. It is only mistaken for such when there is an appeal for some brute data necessary for empirical investigation or for an ultimate beginning to thinking. Such a foundation to understanding is denied since one can only justify claims of a correct interpretation by referring to other texts. These other texts, however, fall into the same problem of justification as in turn they rely on other texts for justification. Therefore, by recognizing the finitude of understanding we avoid what Ricoeur calls: "The harassing backward flight of thought in search of the 'first truth,' and still more radically, of inquiry after a radical starting point that might not be a first truth at all."\textsuperscript{10}

The finite nature of understanding makes possible a multiplicity of interpretations for each text. The

\textsuperscript{10} Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics, p. 192.
limitations to human understanding do not allow for one final and absolute interpretation of the meaning of a text since interpreters come to the text from a multiplicity of traditions. This plurality of interpretations, made possible by the finite nature of understanding, does not, however, mean that all interpretations are equally good. Rather, Westphal notes that a new attitude toward the text is made necessary. He explains that "the appropriate rigour [in interpretation] is not that of the subject who seeks to master its object, but of a servant who seeks to be at the disposal of the truth that comes to light in what is being interpreted."¹¹

A further critical aspect is introduced to understanding through the hermeneutics of suspicion. Not only is understanding bound by our finiteness, but it is also distorted by our lack of self-awareness. Hermeneutics, thus, is not only aware of a plurality of perspectives, but also of hidden desires.

Ricoeur identifies three masters of suspicion: Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. These three explicate hidden desires found in the unconscious. Ricoeur explains: "What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their 'conscious' method of deciphering coincide with the 'unconscious' work of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to unconscious psychism."\(^1\)

Recognition of the effects of the desire of "the will to power," "the imperialism of the dominant class" and "the libido" set certain constraints to understanding. That is, understanding becomes tempered through our hidden desires and unconscious motivations. The suspicion in hermeneutics challenges the integrity of the intention of a text by asking questions about motivation and function. Showing a discrepancy between the professed meaning of a text and the actual use of its meaning illustrates one way the hermeneutics of suspicion can be used. That is, it shows that understanding is not impartial, it is caught up in the illusion, ideology and power structure which is part of the life-world of each individual. These structures distort our

understanding. The hermeneutics of suspicion warns us that
texts, or for that matter interpretations, include hidden
desires. These desires need to be understood as a
characteristic of understanding and incorporated into the
process of hermeneutics.

Textual Hermeneutics: Three Models

In hermeneutics, unlike other media analyses, there are
no recipes or a progression of steps to follow in order to
practice and arrive at understanding. However, Westphal
points out that the activity of understanding is similar to
the activities of the painter, the actor and the listener. An
investigation of these activities can provide some guidelines
or examples for us to follow in our hermeneutic reading.

Westphal first points to the activity of the painter as
a model to follow in hermeneutics. Painting is a similar
activity to understanding in that it is involved more with
creativity and interpretation. The painter's canvas acts as a
representation of the world, that is, painting is the
activity of re-imaging the world onto canvas. Understanding
embodies the same process. The concern of understanding is
not with pronouncing judgement on the text, but with viewing
the text with an artist's vision, to re-present and re-image the text.

The second activity Westphal compares to the exercise of hermeneutics is acting. In playing a part the actor is in effect interpreting. The success of this interpretation depends the actor's ability to use "sympathetic imagination." Using the example of the part of Lady Macbeth, Westphal explains, "the actress (re)feels the motivations and intentions of Lady Macbeth and (re)enacts her deeds and her consequent torment. In doing so, both she and her audience come to understand Lady Macbeth."\(^{13}\)

The interpreter's task is similar to that of the actor's. An understanding of a text involves a participation like that of the actor playing Lady Macbeth. That is, the ability to understand a text involves the ability to use sympathetic imagination. Interpretation and understanding both involve participation with another perspective.

The final example Westphal gives is that of a good listener. Westphal eloquently explains the traits of a good listener:

\(^{13}\) Westphal, *God, Guilt and Death*, p. 11.
If I am a good listener, I don't interrupt the other nor plan my own next speech while pretending to be listening. I try to hear what is said, but I listen just as hard for what is not said and for what is said between the lines. I am not in a hurry, for there is no preappointed destination for the conversation. There is no need to get there, for we are already here; and in this present I am able to be fully present to the one who speaks.\textsuperscript{14}

The characteristics of the good listener are important characteristics in understanding. Understanding a text involves listening to it. This in no way means that one accepts the text at face value. However, engagement with the text is not hostile, nor full of accusations. For as Westphal states, the purpose of hermeneutics "is not to win the case but to free understanding from self-deception."\textsuperscript{15}

Conclusion

Hermeneutics, as Ricoeur argues, is a necessary step in the understanding of the meaning and significance of myth. The hermeneutics of myth begins with an personal involvement with one specific myth. This involvement provides the opportunity for thoughtful, yet critical reflection.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p. 12.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
Hermeneutics and Mass Media Interpretation

If one accepts Ricoeur's mythic definition of the media one subsequently enters the concerns of hermeneutics. Its aim is understanding. Such a goal stands in stark contrast to other types of social scientific analyses. Asserting that understanding is interpretive not objective, hermeneutics recognizes our understanding to be bound by our finitude and our hidden desires. The understanding of a specific media text, therefore, does not include coming to some ultimate conclusion about its meaning. Rather, the purpose of a hermeneutic analysis is to interpret the meaning of a text in light of the forces at work within the text and ourselves. Thus, through a hermeneutic analysis we ultimately come to a better understanding of the meanings which shape our culture.

To carry out such an analysis, three qualities are needed. The interpreter should have the perception and vision of the painter, the empathy of the actor and the skills of the good listener. Ricoeur's hermeneutic, therefore, describes qualities which are equally compatible with ancient texts and modern mass media texts.
CHAPTER FOUR
INTERPRETING A MEDIA APOCALYPSE

Things fall apart: the center cannot hold.
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere.
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand...

William Butler Yeats

Introduction

To further establish the value of Ricoeur's theory of myth for the analysis of media narratives this chapter will apply it to one media text. Although the mythic quality ascribed to the media has as many applications as there are media narratives a new look at the meanings associated with apocalyptic media texts seems timely. The rising anticipation of the change of the millennium and the momentous shift in the world's political climate (i.e. the end of the cold war) make this so. Where recently, nuclear war and communism were envisioned as threats to end civilization, this is no longer a common fear. New forces and new interpretations of the significance of these forces have changed the popular vision of the apocalypse. In this chapter, by applying Ricoeur's
theory of myth to the film *Until the End of the World,* an updated framework of apocalyptic meanings will be elaborated and analyzed.

Wim Wenders' film, *Until the End of the World,* provides us with a contemporary apocalyptic vision. Taking place at the turn of the millennium, the film charts both the life of Claire Tourneur and the demise of a nuclear satellite, which has fallen out of orbit and is threatening to crash into the earth. When applied to this film, the myth-based analysis outlined in previous chapters will show a thoroughly modern view of many of the traditional themes associated with apocalyptic visions. Such an elaboration will enable us to come to a better understanding of the contemporary apocalyptic imagination.

Interpreting the Apocalypse

The history of apocalyptic visions includes many themes and images. Often, therefore, different definitions for the term "apocalypse" are suggested. Barry Brummett, a scholar

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1 Beyond the necessity of a new look at the modern apocalyptic vision, this film has been chosen for a specific personal reason. I have thoroughly enjoyed all the Wim Wenders films I have seen and could not pass up the opportunity to introduce others to one of his works.
who analyzes the apocalypse from a rhetorical perspective, identifies three general meanings. He points out that some scholars use the apocalypse as a category to mean a cataclysmic end to the world. Others use the apocalypse to mean an upcoming disaster or crisis. And for others, the apocalypse simply means, a transition, either from this world, era or state of being to another. These different connotations are further complicated by the assortment of genres which allude to the apocalyptic: eschatology, jeremiad, millenarianism. While scholars usually distinguish between these terms and the apocalypse, such a division does not take into account their blurring in the popular mind. For example, not many in the general public make an effort to differentiate between eschatology, the study of the end, and the apocalypse; jeremiad, a call to change in order to avoid dire consequences, and an apocalyptic message; or millenarianism, the belief in a coming one thousand year utopia and apocalypticism. The apocalypse and its meanings, at best, are confusing.

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To escape this muddle, a look at the Greek root of the term "apocalypse" may be the best help in supplying an overarching definition. This in turn helps to make better sense of the multiple meanings and uses of the term apocalypse, as well as, the many images and themes involved with apocalyptic visions. Apocalypse comes from the Greek word apokalupsis. Its meaning is described below:

apo [from or away]
kalupsis [covering] from: kalupto [to cover]
kaluma [veil]

The proper etymological definition of apocalypse, therefore, is "to uncover" or "to unveil." A close synonym is revelation.

Such a definition leaves the questions: What is to be unveiled? Uncovered? Revealed? Traditionally, these questions have been answered epochally, that is, it is a future time which is unveiled. Thus, the apocalypse provides a revelation of things to come. Such a definition broadens the use of apocalypse away from a specific event such as a cataclysm or crisis. It also limits the apocalypse to an exploration of a certain type of transition, the transition from this time to another. Only a definition of the apocalyptic as a revelation of things to come includes all of the complex of themes and
images which have battled to influence our vision of the future.

However, while apocalyptic texts propose to truly expose future events, they should be viewed as speaking of the present moment. They spring from a certain situation which makes possible the revelation of things to come. The ultimate question asked of the apocalyptic text should not be what does the future hold, but what does it mean that such a text is possible at this time? The world which the apocalypse explores, therefore, is not some future paradise or cataclysm, but the world of the present day. That is, through the unveiling of things to come the apocalyptic text comments on the state of present day society.

A further defining characteristic of the apocalypse is found in the tension between two ideals. These ideals can be described as utopian renewal and cosmic collapse. On the one hand, the hope for utopian renewal reveals an optimistic view of the future. A reign of joy, prosperity and peace is to come. On the other hand, a determined cosmic collapse reveals a pessimistic view of the future. A reign of tribulation, destruction and chaos is to come. Apocalypses have usually exhibited one of these two ideals. For instance, Lois
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Parkinson Zamora, a scholar who studies the apocalypse in popular culture and literature, outlines both ideals in the apocalyptic visions of American life. She argues that utopian hopes drove much of the European immigration of North America:

The New World's promise exerted irresistible attraction upon many Europeans who came to convert the Indians, to find that golden New Jerusalem called El Dorado, to exercise the religious, political and economic freedom impossible in the Old World.³

However, the utopian hopes with which Europe had endowed North America, based on an optimistic apocalyptic vision, have not remained. Zamora further argues that in this century a more pessimistic view of the future has become predominant. Perhaps the best examples come from literary negative utopias described by George Orwell in 1984, and Aldous Huxley in Brave New World. More recently, the threat of nuclear war, environmental destruction and the perception of a decaying society are images which emphasize a cataclysmic view of the future.

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The example of the two ideals in American apocalyptic visions given by Zamora is, of course, only a general historical trend. A closer inspection of specific apocalyptic visions reveals that each particular vision includes both ideals and that it is the tension and arrangement between the two ideals which form the optimistic or pessimistic meanings given in the apocalyptic vision.

For example, the utopian vision in the early immigration of North America is clearly optimistic. However, it gains its optimism in contrast to the then European situation. The optimistic hopes of America stood in contrast to the religious, political and economic hardship in Europe. America represented a hopeful future. Europe represented a path toward destruction to be avoided.

Likewise, overtly pessimistic apocalyptic visions also involve optimistic imagery. A pessimistic apocalyptic vision stems from a moment of exigency, a moment where social anomie and disorder are so devastating only destruction can ensue. This can be exemplified by the apocalyptic visions popular
during the French and American revolutions. At these times the future was envisioned as cataclysmic. Even so, within their specific visions a new era would begin with the utter destruction of the present one. A far-off new and hopeful future could only begin with destruction. Once endured, the present and proximate hardship would open to a glorious future. Hope and judgment, peace and catastrophe, order and chaos, utopian renewal and cosmic collapse, it is the tension and arrangement between these ideals which form the structure and meaning of apocalyptic visions.

Until the End of the World

Until the End of the World is a German, France, Australian co-production film directed by Wim Wenders. Wenders, associated with the New German Cinema movement, has enjoyed international film making success. His best known films Paris, Texas and Wings of Desire have won major prizes at the Cannes film festival.

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*Until the End of the World* is based on a science fiction story Wenders originally conceived of on a visit to Australia in 1977. Financial and logistical problems, as well as opportunities to work on other projects delayed the completion of the film until 1991, when it was released.

The following interpretation of the film, *Until the End of the World*, seeks to elucidate an understanding of the contemporary apocalyptic vision. By plotting the tension and arrangement of the traditional themes of apocalyptic visions, that of utopian hope and cosmic cataclysm, two distinctive characteristics are revealed. First the modern apocalyptic vision is linked to a struggle with technology. Second, this struggle is found to be ambivalent. That is, while at times we fear technology and understand its destructive capacity, a capacity which at times is out of our control, we also recognize technology as a possible solution to our problems. Therefore, the modern apocalyptic vision, unlike traditional apocalyptic visions, is neither overtly positive nor negative. The modern understanding of the apocalypse holds the possibilities of both cosmic destruction and utopian renewal.
The images of cosmic cataclysm and utopian renewal are most visible in the film in the forms of a nuclear satellite which is threatening to crash into the Earth and a camera, worn as a helmet, which is used to make the blind see again. At first glance, the camera seems to be linked with the image of utopian hope. After all it is a technology which renews one’s vision. It seems to speak of a future where technology will overcome the problems of today. In opposition to this first positive image of technology given by the camera, the renegade nuclear satellite in the film seems to represent a technology of destruction and cataclysm. The satellite causes political and social frenzy throughout the world over the possible fatal consequences of its crash. However, a closer examination of these dominant images is needed in order to reach beyond these first impressions and delve deeper into the modern meanings associated with the apocalypse.

Let us first take a look at the cataclysmic theme represented by the nuclear satellite. Afterward I will make some further connections between the satellite imagery and apocalyptic meanings.

As mentioned, a first look at the image of cataclysm in the film reveals a global danger in the form of a renegade
nuclear satellite. The satellite, once a sign of technological progression in the frontier of space becomes a threat to humanity. Its possible crash into the earth certainly would be fatal. Understandably, the world is in panic. The satellite causes traffic tie-ups as people evacuate cities trying to scurry out of the path of destruction. No one is sure what to do about the satellite. The Pentagon wants to shoot it out of the sky. Many fear this will set off a chain reaction causing all the other nuclear satellites orbiting the Earth to explode. Eventually, even with this danger, the satellite is shot down. The destruction of the satellite, however, only brings about more chaos and anxiety. The nuclear blast caused in the destruction of the satellite destroys all electro-magnetic circuitry, which makes it impossible to communicate with other possible surviving communities. The film's characters wonder if they are the only ones left on Earth, if the cities of the world are still standing, if their parents, children and friends are alive, or burned or sick. An ominous future is pictured as a white flash, caused by the explosion of the satellite, envelopes the screen and an ensuing quiet settles over the earth.
While the nuclear satellite certainly seems to represent a cataclysm, this is only one part of the satellite imagery in the film. A more complete understanding of the modern apocalypse is found by looking at the other image of the satellite. The other image of a satellite is found with Claire, the main character in the film.

On several occasions throughout the film Claire is compared to a satellite. For instance, at the beginning of the film as we are shown an orbital view of the Earth, Gene, Claire's husband, narrates: "1999 was the year that the Indian Nuclear satellite went out of control. No one knew where it might land. It soared like a lethal bird of prey. The whole world was alarmed." As Gene continues his narration, one realizes the orbital image of the Earth shown on the screen could also refer to Claire: "At the time she was living her own nightmare. The same dream arrived each night. She was gliding over an unknown land, pleasantly at first. But then the gliding would turn to falling." This parallel continues in Claire's waking hours. The film follows Claire through several countries and continents, including Europe, Asia, North America and Australia. Claire, it could be said, orbits the Earth. As well, at the same time the
satellite is shot out of the sky, Claire is in an airplane. The blast, because of its destruction of electro-magnetic circuitry renders the airplane's engine inoperable. Thus, both are in the sky together and shot out of the sky together, further establishing the relationship between Claire and a satellite. Finally, the film ends with another metaphoric representation of Claire as a satellite. Claire is seen in a spacecraft orbiting the earth keeping vigilant watch over the oceans for pollution crimes. The other characters in the film, by way of video conference call, sing Happy Birthday to Claire. Such a finish suggests a re-birth, a new beginning, a new hope for the Earth. Nevertheless, even with the renewal of hope a new threat of cataclysm is introduced--pollution.

The above look at the satellite imagery in the film reveals two contrasting views of the impact of technology on the fate of the world. On the one hand, the fate of the world is out of our control. Technology can destroy us. This is signified by the renegade nuclear satellite. On the other hand, the fate of the world is in our control, technology can be used to save us. This is signified by Claire, and her
metaphoric representation as a satellite at the conclusion of the film.

While the satellite imagery turned from being a menacing threat to the world to a hopeful protector of the world, an opposite reversal takes place when we investigate the imagery of the camera. At first glance the camera is a sign of hope and renewal. It is the technological hope for the renewal of eyesight. It signifies a change from blindness to sight, from darkness to light. These are strong positive metaphors for the possibilities of technology.

The hopeful possibility of the camera's technology takes on two specific functions. First, it is hoped that the camera will enable Edith Faber, the matriarch of the Faber family, to see once again. Second, it is hoped that the camera will bring the divided Faber family together. The description of this use of the camera in the film enforces the themes of the modern apocalyptic vision.

To begin with, the camera serves as a strong image of hope. It enables one to see again. The positive associations with the camera are used in the specific case of restoring the sight of Edith Faber. In order to see again she must wear the specially designed camera, which fits over the head and
eyes as bulky headgear. Sam, Edith's son travels around the world collecting images of family and friends. By recording the biochemical event of seeing, the camera, hooked up to a special computer, transfers Sam's visual recordings to Edith.

However, while the camera has the potential to restore vision, through its actual use it destroys vision. For example, while collecting images with the camera Sam almost goes blind. Claire, as well, in her use of the camera, finds that it creates a great strain on her eyes. Thus, the camera, which began as a hopeful sign of progress into the future reveals an actual destructive side to its use.

A second purpose of the camera is to bring the Faber family together. The family will work together to restore the sight of Edith. Sam and his father, Henry, however, have one argument after another. For example, when Sam arrives at the laboratory in the small Australian village, after his long journey of collecting images with the camera, Henry accuses him of dilly-dallying in his travels. An expected happy reunion does not take place, but serves to exemplify the ongoing tension between father and son.

The camera experiment eventually takes its toll on the Faber family. Edith dies from the strain associated with the
use of the camera. Sam and Henry are not reconciled. Therefore, while the technology promised to bring about a life long dream for the Fabers, both the restoration of Edith’s sight and the restoration of the family fails.

A final application of the camera occurs after the death of Edith. Henry begins to use the camera to make visual images of dreams. He claims the camera can make pictures of the soul. Once again there are positive potentials with his research. A further understanding of the human mind may be achieved. However, such a project turns into a debacle. Ethical concerns are raised by the Australian aboriginals. They strongly object to having their dreams invaded. The aboriginal scientists leave the laboratory, boycotting Henry’s new experiment. Even so, Henry with the help of Sam and Claire continues his research. After initial success, however, the experiment disintegrates. The experiment ends in ruin with the researchers addicted to video screens, watching their own dreams. Thus, the imagery of the camera, once a sign of the utopian potential of technology, becomes a sign of the destructive potential of technology.

The contemporary apocalyptic vision, elucidated in the interpretation of the film, Until the End of the World, is
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best described as ambivalent. That is, the future has both the potential to be utopian and cataclysmic. A comparison of the camera and the satellite imagery in the film suggests this apocalyptic ambivalence.

Within each of the images there was a marked reversal of potential. On the one hand, the satellite in its nuclear form could have destroyed the world, but instead, in the form of Claire, ended as a guardian of the earth. On the other hand, the camera had the technological potential to provide a utopian future, but instead brought destruction and disarray.

As well, our interpretation seems to suggest both personal and external forces determine the apocalypse. This is most evident in the satellite imagery. The external dimension of the apocalypse, represented by the renegade nuclear satellite, reveals that the technology and the possible cataclysmic end of the world is not within human control. The personal dimension of the apocalypse, represented by Claire as a satellite, reveals that technology and a future utopia is within human control. Thus, the overall satellite imagery suggests both personal and external forces determine the apocalypse.
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The Mythic Quality of the Media

A closer inspection of how Ricoeur's theory of myth applies to the film, Until the End of the World, will further explain the approach outlined in this thesis. The following, therefore, elaborates some of the implications of defining the function and characteristics of the film according to the function and characteristics of myth outlined by Ricoeur.

In his definition, Ricoeur claims that myth serves a symbolic function, that is, myth points out or reveals a bond between humankind and the sacred, or at least what it considers sacred. This function of myth, when applied specifically to our film text, Until the End of the World, is illustrated in the concerns of the apocalypse. The film acts as a confession. It confesses the place, situation and meaning of humankind in its relationship to the apocalypse.

The analysis of the media, in light of sacred meanings, however, may seem a lofty ideal for what many consider "mere entertainment." Thus, the applicability of a myth-based media analysis should be questioned. For instance, maybe Until the End of the World deals with the sacred, but what about the standard Hollywood fare or the seeming mindless programming
on television? What does Beavis and Butthead have to do with the sacred, some may ask.

By defining the media, and in our case a specific film, as mythic, as disclosing a bond between humankind and the sacred, one does not automatically engage in a glorification of the media's meanings. Asserting that the media is mythic is an argument for the importance of the place the media holds in contemporary culture, not for the importance of any specific media content. Even though it holds this sacred place, this might reflect an impoverishment of what we consider sacred today. This is why Ricoeur demands an interpretation of myths. Only by discussing the meanings which form our bond to the sacred can we come to an understanding of ourselves and our culture. If our meanings are impoverished, this will be plainly exhibited in the interpretation.

Ricoeur's definition, furthermore, allows for a certain elasticity to the consideration of myth. Ricoeur qualifies his definition claiming that myth reveals a bond between humankind and what they consider sacred. Such a qualification

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allows for different interpretations of myth. That is, Ricoeur does not take an absolutist position. He recognizes that some people may find some texts mythic while others may not. In a myth-based media analysis this definitional qualification suggests that there is a mythic potential or component in each media text. Thus, we should not place ourselves in a position to govern over the meanings people give to media texts by claiming that a text is mythic or not. Rather, we should begin to understand culture and ourselves by giving attention to the mythical potential ascribed to each text.

Specifically, in the film Until the End of the World, we find the manifestation of the sacred in the apocalyptic theme. The sacred, as will be remembered, is best understood as that which is set apart, consecrated. Contrasting the sacred with the mundane, the everyday or the common, brings to light this meaning of the sacred. "Therefore, to say that the apocalypse manifests the sacred is to say that personal and global destiny signifies humankind's highest concern. Thus, the future is set apart as a momentous and special time."
The sacred within the film is illustrated through the actions of the characters. The apocalypse is found to be set-apart, consecrated and of utmost concern. That is, human destiny and the destruction and protection of the world has special significance. Through their actions the characters exhibit a deep-rooted concern about the apocalypse. They worry both for their own fate and the fate of the world. For instance, the Fabers are single minded in their pursuit of a technological "cure" for Edith's eyesight. Through such a pursuit they are insistent on a future which will bring about the restoration and renewal of their family. Their actions show a steadfast concerned for their own destiny, a sacred attitude toward their own familial apocalypse.

Another example of the apocalypse as sacred is found in Claire's concern for the fate of the world. At the conclusion of the film, Claire joins Green Space. She orbits the world in a spacecraft patrolling the oceans for pollution crimes. The future fate of the earth is important and significant for Claire. She acts as a protector and preserver of the world for future generations. Thus, the future is viewed as a time set apart, a consecrated time which is not to be taken for granted. Claire's action expresses the apocalypse as sacred.
The apocalypse, as a sacred concern, and the exact dimensions and meanings of humankind's link with it, is elaborated through the three characteristics which Ricoeur ascribes to myth and which we will ascribe to the film, *Until the End of the World*: concrete universality, temporal orientation and ontological exploration. A review of these dimensions will further elaborate the features of the myth-based media analysis outlined in this thesis.

The first characteristic which we give to the film is concrete universality. Concrete universality was said to provide a paradigm or model for society. That is, the characters in the film are not only particular but also universal. For example, Claire is not only Claire, but a representation of all of humankind. This paradigmatic nature was further described as being a "model of" and a "model for" culture. Thus, Claire is not only a reflection of humankind, but also a model for humankind to follow.

A review of the character of Claire makes evident her representation of humanity. The clearest illustration of Claire's representation is in her travels. In the film Claire is restless. She leaves home and travels around the world searching for Sam. She finally ends up orbiting the Earth in
a spacecraft. On closer inspection Claire's travels metaphorically represent humankind's search for meaning. Thus, the path Claire follows can be said to be the typical universal search for meaning and significance, a road which all humanity travels.

Humanity's search for meaning begins with an internal angst. A discomfort with the situation or place one finds oneself in. Claire represents this in her restlessness. Although she has all she would want at home, she decides to leave. On an intuitive level she knows her search will lead to some type of spiritual or mythic realization.

The second stage of humanity's search for meaning is the search itself. The search for meaning and significance is a journey toward finding one's place in the world, a place with both self-fulfillment and purpose. Claire's travels represent this search. She hopes that she will find purpose and meaning in her life by helping Sam and the Faber family in their experiment to restore Edith's eyesight. However, Claire's hope to find meaning is not satisfied with the Faber family experiment. Rather, her involvement with the Fabers only brings more confusion, doubt and dissatisfaction. She must look elsewhere to find purpose and meaning.
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Finally, humanity's search for meaning concludes with finding one's place in the world. Claire finds this fulfillment and purpose by protecting the earth from environmental crimes in an orbiting spacecraft. Thus, Claire through her internal angst, her search for meaning and her concluding fulfillment, is not only on her own particular journey, but is also on a journey representative of all humanity. That is, she travels on the same path as does all humankind.

Claire not only represents humankind's search for meaning, but also vividly portrays a model for all humanity to follow. As described, at the conclusion of the film we find Claire has joined Green Space and is in a satellite over the Earth patrolling the oceans for pollution crimes. By taking this personal responsibility for guarding the world she is a model for all humanity to follow. Every individual should be aware of their responsibility to protect the world, a necessary responsibility in order avoid the destruction of the planet. Thus, the Claire character exhibits the double function by which I defined concrete universality, that is, she provides both a model of and a model for humanity.
The second characteristic of myth which is present in the film is temporal orientation. The temporal orientation function puts archetypal or paradigmatic characters into a time structure. Thus, the film orients, that is, arranges in time the elements of the plot. Temporal orientation is tied specifically to the dramatic narrative form. Therefore, what temporal orientation simply means is that myth realizes itself as story. Recognizing myths as stories however, does not mean that all stories are myths. Nevertheless, Ricoeur does not outline a specific temporal orientation to myth other than that found in the dramatic narrative form. This should not be surprising since myths come to the modern age and to modern sensibility only in their dramatic narrative form. If there was ever any other distinctive temporal orientation it would be impossible to re-capture. That is, we can not go back in time to view a myth as it was originally viewed. However, it is still possible to hear the message of myth. Thus, the course Ricoeur follows in his theory is not to find a distinctive temporal orientation in myth, but to capture the message of myth in its final incarnation as a dramatic narrative.
Ricoeur's direction in his theory of myth has direct consequences for our myth-based media analysis. Using his definition it seems impossible to differentiate between myth and story. Myth, therefore, should not be viewed as a subsection of the dramatic narrative form, but rather as a way of viewing that form. When one describes a story, or in our case a film, as mythic, it is in order to expose a unique and an important area of that story for analysis. The area to be investigated is humankind's bond with what they think is sacred.

Furthermore, temporal orientation creates a specific meaning. It is not difficult to see how this function works in Until the End of the World. Through the telling of a story, the characters and elements of the plot—Claire, the Faber family, the satellite, the camera—orient themselves with one another, that is, a relationship is developed between these elements of the story. This orientation gives the story its meaning. For instance, in the film, Claire is revealed as a metaphor of a satellite. This particular meaning is possible because of the time structure of the narrative. Claire's character is oriented to the satellite through the stories time structure. However, it is improbable
that one would attempt to interpret Sam Faber as a metaphor of a satellite, for Sam and the satellite have a different orientation or relationship in the story and thus he has a meaning different from Claire and the satellite.

Third and most fundamentally, myths function as ontological exploration. They seek to reveal the nature and condition of humankind's existence. That is, myth tries to get at the mystery and enigma of being. In the specific case of *Until the End of the World*, the film probes the expectancy of being in terms of the destiny of world. The modern vision of the apocalypse is thus explored.

This characteristic of myth brings us back to the description of myth's overall function, the disclosure of a bond between humankind and the sacred. The dimension and character of this bond has an ontological bearing. That is, the film explores the meaning of humankind's relationship with the apocalypse. Humankind, in the film, is described as in an apocalyptic struggle with technology. This was specifically shown in the potential of technology to both destroy and save the world. One image in the film which represented both the potential destructive and utopian nature of technology was a satellite. Cosmic destruction was
represented by a renegade nuclear satellite as throughout the film it was poised to destroy the world. The utopian hope of technology was revealed at the conclusion of the film in the form of a guardian satellite or spacecraft. Claire acted as the world’s protector, orbiting the earth in this spacecraft. Thus, humankind was suggested to have an ambivalent view toward the apocalypse, that is the future holds both the potential for cataclysm and utopia.

Finally, it should be noted that the film, Until the End of the World, defined as myth, identifies a specific analytic focus. The specific concentration of our analysis is not of the medium of film but of culture. The use of film in our myth-based analysis is only as cultural data. Ignored are the specific characteristics of film, those things which distinguish film from other media. Also ignored is the evaluation of the film as a work of art. The acting, editing, cinematography, and narrative consistency is not reviewed nor judged. Therefore, in our interpretation of Until the End of the World, we learn little about the medium of film, but learn much about culture, especially a contemporary view of the apocalypse.
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Conclusion

The mythic function of the mass media reveals the bond between humankind and the sacred. This chapter examined a specific media text and the bond revealed within that text. As an apocalyptic text, *Until the End of the World*, explored the human concerns over the potential destructive and utopian uses of technology. The contemporary apocalyptic vision, thus, was described as ambivalent. That is, the modern view of the future is neither overtly positive nor negative, it holds the possibility of both destruction and utopia.

The mythic quality of this text, following Ricoeur's definition of myth, provided a reflection not only on the modern meanings associated with the apocalypse, but the larger concern of a dynamic understanding and conceptualization of the mass media in modern culture.
CONCLUSION

A Summary of Findings

The theoretical question of the place, role, and influence of the mass media in modern culture animated much of this thesis. This question is increasingly answered by media theorists within a mythic perspective. That is, the media's place, role and influence in modern society is similar to myth in ancient societies and thus specific modern media texts carry mythic meaning.

In light of such a comparison, this thesis outlined Paul Ricoeur's theory of myth and its possible application to the area of media studies. Such an outline was necessary to provide a dynamic and distinctive conceptualization of the mass media in modern culture.

While mythic perspectives on the mass media have flourished in the past few decades, a new view was necessary to compensate for some shortcomings. That is, when investigating mythic perspectives on the mass media it was found they were based on inadequate theories of myth. Hence, they had limitations when used in the analysis of the media.
Conclusion

The structural and semiological models, two popular mythic perspectives, exhibited some of these inadequacies.

The structural model, exemplified in the work of John Fiske, excluded the meanings of media texts. Although explaining the elements of a media narrative and their alliance with a culture:nature distinction, Fiske did not consider the significance, the existential importance, of media texts. He simply reflected the text's culture:nature distinction as part of the basic structure of the mind.

The semiological model, as exemplified in the work of Douglas Kellner, also drew on a limited theory of myth. Kellner argues that the media give only a false perception of reality. To remedy media falsehood, the alternative media should have a larger role in story-telling and information distribution. However, the distinction between false perception and reality, is an elusive dichotomy. The lines between the two are not readily demarcated.

The properties of myth which Fiske and Kellner outline are inadequate for a full description of the mythic quality of the media. However, since Ricoeur's mythic theory deals with meanings without their automatic denigration, he is able to overcome some of the limitations of the structural and
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semiological models of myth. Therefore, Ricoeur's theory provides a distinctive view of myth from a positive yet critical perspective. His outline of the properties of myth, furthermore, is more in tune with what I consider the modern traits of the mass media.

If the media and ancient myth share some of the same characteristics, then what are they? The three traits which myth shares with the mass media are concrete universality, temporal orientation and ontological exploration. These traits describe the function of myth as symbolic. Myth is a symbol of humankind's bond with the sacred. That means myth, as well as media, symbolically reveal humankind's relationship to what they consider their utmost concerns.

Ricoeur goes on to argue that the understanding of myth is not complete until one enters into the sphere of a specific myth. Thus, Ricoeur's characterization of myth takes steps to move beyond a phenomenology into a hermeneutic of myth. In this study, we follow Ricoeur into hermeneutics through the analysis of a specific media text.

The elaboration of the meanings and significance associated with the film, Until the End of the World, further explains Ricoeur's theory of myth in application to the mass
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media. As a symbol of the link between humankind and the sacred, the film investigates the apocalyptic consequences of technology for the fate of the world. The application of Ricoeur’s theory of myth to the film depicts the three traits of myth as evidenced in the mass media. By outlining Ricoeur’s mythic theory and its application to the media, a dynamic and distinctive conceptualization of the mass media in modern culture was made.

For Further Investigation.

While the application of Ricoeur’s theory of myth establishes a conceptualization of the place, role and function of the media in modern culture, it also opens some possibilities for further investigation.

More research is necessary on the difference between narrative and non-narrative forms. Ricoeur suggests that myth is defined partly by its narrative form. However, since the media do not use narrative exclusively, where do these other programs fit?

Another area of study is in new media technologies. Research is necessary on media forms other than the traditional ones. A mythic perspective applied to virtual
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reality and the information super highway seems a promising type of investigation into the analysis of the meanings and significance of their role in modern culture.

Finally, more application of the mythic perspective to a variety of media texts is necessary. These applications will extend our understanding of the influence and meaning of the media in modern culture.
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APPENDIX
UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD: A PLOT SUMMARY

Production Information

Directed by: Wim Wenders
Screenplay by: Wim Wenders and Peter Carey
Produced by: Jonathon Taplin and Anatole Dauman
Released by: Warner Brothers
Running Time: 157 minutes
Rated: R

Introduction

An orbital view of the Earth begins the film as the narrator explains:

1999 was the year that the Indian nuclear satellite went out of control. No one knew where it might land. It soared above the ozone layer like a lethal bird of prey. The whole world was alarmed. . . Claire couldn’t care less.

At the time she was living her own nightmare. The same dream arrived each night. She was gliding over an unknown land, pleasantly at first. But then the gliding would turn to falling, and the falling into panic, and then she would wake up. In the fall of 1999 Claire Tourneur woke up in some strange places.

With a start Claire wakes. Disoriented she finds herself in the aftermath of a party. A large video screen blares music for some of the leftover party guests. Claire, stumbling, finds her shoes and leaves.
Appendix: Plot Summary

Raymond and Chico

Claire drives across the Italian border into France. Her personalized dashboard computer service announces a thirty minute traffic jam. The renegade nuclear satellite is causing tie-ups as people flee the sites of possible impact. Impatient, Claire leaves the main highway. The electronic map service announces she is leaving the map zone data base. She is on her own.

Claire speeds through the plains in the south of France enjoying the open road. As she overtakes a slower car the driver throws out a beer bottle. It shatters Claire’s windshield. She swerves and collides with the other car. Both cars are damaged in the crash. Claire’s car, however, is still drivable. The occupants of the other car, Raymond, who is injured, and Chico, ride with Claire to a rural hotel.

Chico and Raymond are bank robbers. They convince Claire to transport their stolen money to Paris. They offer her twenty five percent of the take. Claire demands thirty. In order to track Claire on her trip a Mitzooy 272 tracer is attached to the yellow satchel containing the money.
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Claire Travels to Paris

While waiting for a replacement windshield Claire makes a video phone call. In the next graffiti-scrawled booth a man is having trouble with his eyes. Claire tries to help him by looking for debris in his eyes. Nothing is found. The man thanks her and leaves. Moments later another man runs up looking for the first man. Claire notices he has a gun. She claims she has not seen anyone.

Claire meets the mysterious man with the eye trouble again in the mechanic's shop. He asks her for a ride to Paris just as she is about to leave. His pursuer is close behind. He slumps in the seat of Claire's car to avoid being seen. They set off for Paris together. On the trip Claire's passenger explains he has borrowed money which he can not pay back. His lenders are out to kill him.

Nearing Paris Claire falls asleep, the best sleep she has had in weeks. While Claire sleeps the fugitive steals money from the yellow satchel. Arriving in Paris they part ways. Leaving, the fugitive finally introduces himself as Trevor McPhee.
The Dance Around the Planet

Claire arrives home after what we find out is a three month absence. Her husband, Gene, guilty of infidelity, welcomes her after their separation. Claire tells him about the stolen money she is transporting. Together they count, wrap and store the money in the refrigerator. In the process, Claire discovers that she has been robbed by Trevor. He has, however, left an IOU, a tape of singing pigmy children which they had listened to on their drive into Paris. Claire is upset because she had trusted him.

Even with the money and the possibility to do anything she pleases Claire begins to get restless. One day she happens to see the man who was chasing Trevor at a subway stop. Eavesdropping she hears Trevor's address in Berlin. She flies off to Berlin to find him.

In Berlin, Claire finds Trevor at his uncle's house. She warns him that he is still being pursued. In fact the man is outside the apartment. Trevor promises to meet her at her hotel later, after he makes his escape. Later, however, there is no trace of Trevor. Claire has been stood up.
To find Trevor again Claire hires a missing persons detective. The detective finds out that Trevor McPhee is wanted by an opal mining syndicate for theft. The detective, hoping to collect the reward offered for Trevor’s capture decides to help Claire. He traces Trevor to Lisbon. Claire and the detective hop on the next plane to track him down.

In Lisbon, Claire surprises Trevor in a restaurant. Trevor is suspicious. He thinks that Claire is an agent. Claire explains that she is trying to save his life. She has hired a detective to track him down. Trevor says he wants to talk to Claire alone. He negotiates with the detective to allow for himself and Claire to go for a walk. Trevor gives the detective an opal for security. For further security they are handcuffed together. Even so, Claire and Trevor escape from the detective following them.

The detective traces Claire and Trevor to a hotel room. He bursts in with his gun drawn vowing not to lose the reward money for the capture of Trevor. Trevor, however, manages to escape, feigning he has a gun of his own. Against Claire’s protests Trevor leaves her handcuffed together with the detective. He leaves the opal but takes all of her money.
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The detective continues to trace Trevor's escape to Moscow. He and Claire decide to follow. Broke, Claire calls home telling her husband to wire money to a Moscow hotel. Gene himself shows up with the money in Moscow.

The chase continues, relying on the detective's computer tracking system. Unfortunately, there is a malfunction in his program. His computer does not seem to work in the Eastern block. They must use a local agency to continue the search for Trevor. Using a more complex system, they find that Trevor is not Trevor McPhee, but only using his identification to travel. Trevor's real name is Sam Faber. He is wanted for industrial espionage by the American government. They are offering a $500,000 dollar reward for his capture.

Claire manages to further trace Sam onto a trans-Siberian train. She follows, leaving Gene, her husband, in Moscow. Claire, however, is unable to find Sam.

Claire meets up again with Gene in Tokyo to renew the search for Sam. Gene has traced him to a Tokyo hotel. Exploring the hotel for herself, Claire finds Sam tied and gagged in a sleeping cubicle. She unties him. A gun fight with presumed bounty hunters ensues. Sam manages to escape.
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with Claire. Gene and the detective, try to pick up Sam and Claire’s trail by wandering the streets of Tokyo. The detective finally suggests that they go to Australia, to where opals are mined. He thinks that they can pick up Sam’s and Claire’s trail there.

Sam and Claire

Sam and Claire end up in a traditional inn in a small Japanese mountain town. Sam’s eyesight has deteriorated to the point where he cannot see. The owner of the inn helps restore his sight using the herbs from his garden.

His sight restored, Sam begins to confess to Claire. He tells her that his name is really Samuel Faber. He is the son of Henry Faber, a scientist, who has invented a camera which can make blind people see. Sam’s mother is blind. Sam is traveling around using the camera to collect images for her to see. The U.S. government, in whose lab the camera was developed wants it, but Henry Faber does not trust the uses they would put it to. The U.S. government is now chasing Sam trying to steal the camera back. Sam admits to Claire that all he wants is for his mom to see and for his dad to know that he loves him.
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The camera, which fits like bulky headgear over the eyes, records the biochemical event of seeing. The more one concentrates the more clearly the computer can read and transmit the experience of seeing. One drawback, Claire finds out, is that the process is painful. After trying the camera for only a minute Claire's eyes are sore and burning. She understands why Sam has almost gone blind.

Together Sam and Claire travel to the States to collect more images. Claire records Sam's sister with the camera. While in San Francisco, however, they get robbed by a used car salesman. Needing more money Claire calls Chico. Chico shows up with money and all three set off for Australia.

Meanwhile, the world is in panic over the renegade nuclear satellite. The Pentagon threatens to shoot the satellite out of the sky. Critics fear this will set off other defensive satellites. The United Nations is in disarray, horrified at the prospect of what might happen.

Gene, already in Australia meets up with Sam in a dusty, dry small Australian town. This, their first meeting, erupts into a fist fight. The police promptly throw them in jail. Gene warns Sam that he will kill him if he hurts Claire. Sam denies being a spy or a jewel thief.
Also in Australia is the bounty hunter, Bert, who has been chasing Sam all along. Finding Claire in a airplane hanger he interrogates her using his favourite weapon, a truth drug. Claire outwits him by speaking in French, which he does not understand. Chico and an Aboriginal friend of Sam’s interrupt the interrogation, freeing Claire and tying up Bert. David, the aboriginal takes the bag containing the camera from Claire to keep it safe for Sam.

Sam and Gene are released from jail the next morning. Waiting for Gene is the private detective. They give Sam a lift to the airport hanger. Sam and Claire fly off not telling anyone where they are heading. Chico, Gene and the detective, however, are able to follow. The yellow satchel with the tracing device is still with the camera. They are able to track Sam’s final destination using the Mitzoooy 27Z.

Sam and Claire are flying to meet Sam’s parents. While in the air the plane’s engine unfortunately fails. The nuclear satellite has been shot down. The nuclear blast has destroyed all electro-magnetic circuits.

Landing safely in a deserted part of Australia, Sam and Claire begin to walk to their destination. They wonder if they are the only ones alive left on Earth. They eventually
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meet up with a pickup truck. The pickup has a hand-cranked diesel engine so it has not been affected by the nuclear blast. Sam and Claire meet Gene, Chico and the detective again. They are also traveling in the pickup. Together they finally arrive at the village where Sam’s parents live.

The Grief of Seeing

The pickup arrives at a small Australian village inhabited by the Mbantu tribe. Next to the village, in a cave is Henry Faber’s laboratory. Sam’s mom, Edith is waiting for him. She is pleased to meet Claire. Henry, Sam’s father, however, when meeting Claire excuses her for keeping everyone waiting for Sam’s arrival. The antagonism between Sam and his father is obvious.

Both Sam and his father want to transfer the images Sam has collected immediately. Some of the scientists working in the laboratory advise against it since both Sam and Edith are exhausted. Nevertheless, the experiment goes ahead. The process requires the downloading of the data from the camera to the laboratory’s computer. Sam then must look at the images he has recorded again. The computer compares the brain activity of the second scene with the first extracting only
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what is relevant to the image. Finally, the data is transferred to the receiver.

Sam unfortunately is unable to concentrate. They are unable to get a reproducible image to send to Edith. The experiment is a failure. Henry blames Sam. Sam becomes upset and begins to quarrel with his father. They are both upset and bring up old grievances in their fight.

Christmas 1999 passes unnoticed. Everyone feels anxiety over the fate of the Earth. No one knows if the cities of the world are still standing, or if their parents, children or friends are alive, or burned or sick. Everyone shares the same fears except for the Fabers. Their experiment is more important to them than the fate of the world.

Sam blames himself for the failed experiment. This only causes more anxiety, increasing his lack of concentration. Claire becomes determined to help him. She volunteers to recover the images which she had recorded with the camera. Her recovery of the images is much better than Sam’s. The experiment is successful. Edith sees her daughter and granddaughter whom Claire recorded in San Francisco. However, the experiment must be cut short. Edith must stop because the receiving of the images hurts her eyes. Everyone is jubilant
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at the success. After Claire’s success Sam is also able to recover the camera’s images. The project continues revealing more and more of the world to Edith.

Edith finds the images she sees both exhilarating and confusing. The images are disorienting and unpredictably sad. She lost her sight when she was eight years old. Her childhood friends have aged fifty years in a minute. The world they move in is darker and uglier than Edith could ever imagine. Edith keeps these feelings to herself so as not to appear ungracious. Her grief is only for those who have the eyes to see. The strain of receiving these images begin to take its toll on her physically.

Claire in the meantime worries over the side effects that the experiments might produce. She is told that Henry Faber cares only about winning the Nobel prize. Henry’s project has far-reaching implications. He is able to capture visual information straight from the brain. Using this process he can extract dreams and watch them as one views television.

On December 31, 1999 members of the village set up an antenna to an old crystal radio set they have found. With great relief they find out that the world is still alive. On
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during New Year’s eve the village celebrates this news with extra vigour. While the village celebrates, however, Edith lies on her death bed, Henry at her side.

Dreaming and Its Image

After Edith’s death Henry Faber pursues a new line of research. He uses the camera technology to exhibit dreams. The bio chemical workings of the brain can now be shown as images. Henry describes it as seeing the human soul. Most of the aboriginal research staff leaves, contesting the ethics of the invasion of their dreams.

Henry, Sam and Claire all participate in having the computer display their dreams. Claire has the most success. The computer considers her technically compatible. They work around the clock. While one of them sleeps, the others huddle around video monitors waiting to see a dream. The research very quickly becomes addictive. Although the research begins with the three working together they quickly become isolated from one another. They each have their own monitor which plays back their own dreams. Each lives to see their own dreams. The only thing they care about is having fresh batteries to keep their video monitors functioning.
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Gene, after recognizing the addiction, tries to save Claire. He takes her away from the research lab to an isolated home. Claire will not let Gene help her. She only begs for batteries so that she may see her dreams again. Gene hopes that giving her a book he has been writing will help. The book recounts their experiences since the announcement of the renegade satellite. Claire reads it and it seems to help although she wonders what will happen next.

Henry Faber's laboratory is finally found by the U.S. government. Henry is taken back to the States. Sam manages to escape into a maze of hills. Claire and Sam never see each other again. Although Gene and Claire return to Europe they do not get back together. They do, however, remain in touch with each other. Gene calls her on her thirtieth birthday. Claire is working with Green Space. She orbits the Earth in a space craft keeping vigilant watch over the oceans for pollution crimes. Using a conference call line, Gene, Chico and the detective sing her Happy Birthday.
VITA AUCTORIS

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