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ABSTRACT

Noting that the television movie "The Day After" (aired November 20, 1983) is probably the most important of the films generating discussion about the issue of nuclear war, this paper describes a study that examined the rhetorical vision of nuclear war depicted in the film and the ways in which that vision corresponds to the images held by individuals. The paper first discusses statements made in a survey of 79 subjects attending the 1984 summer session at a California State University campus. An open-ended request for written statements resulted in brief essays giving subjects' depictions of a nuclear war and emerging themes. It then examines the fantasy themes that emerged in an analysis of the film, pointing out the ways in which the film depicts the fantasy themes and the ways those depictions differ from the images given by the survey subjects. Next, the paper examines the deep structure of the vision or the underlying frame in which the entire drama is placed, focusing on irony as the most suitable framework. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the similar vision shared by the film and the individual subjects. (HTH)

THE DAY AFTER: RHETORICAL VISION IN AN IRONIC FRAME

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> The tension in the room let up and all started congratulating each other. Everyone sensed "This is it!" No matter what might happen now all knew that the impossible scientific job had been done. Atomic fission would no longer be hidden in the cloisters of the theoretical physicists' dreams. It was almost full grown at birth. It was a great new force to be used for good or for evil. There was a feeling in the shelter that those concerned with its nativity should dedicate their lives to the mission that it would always be used for good and never for evil.[1]

This account of the successful detonation of the first atomic bomb near Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, captures well the feelings of power and awe that surrounded the development of nuclear power. The first use of the atomic bomb on a human population less than a month later at Hiroshima, however, ended hopes that atomic fission would be used solely to benefit humankind; it also raised questions about the role of nuclear power--questions the world would continue to confront in the following decades.

In the forty years since Hiroshima, the debate over nuclear arms has taken a variety of turns. The 1950s saw efforts focused on banning atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons. These efforts resulted, in 1963, in a limited test ban treaty that ended tests not only in the atmosphere but under water and in space as well.[2] During the 1950s, national attention was directed toward civil defense procedures, a concern which continued

into the next decade as an outcome of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.[3] Now, in the 1980s, the dangers of nuclear war again have become the subject of a debate of major proportions, not only in the United States but in countries around the world.[4]

The anti-war movement of the 1980s is more broadly based than were anti-nuclear movements of the past. The movement has attracted people of many political ideologies and from all walks of life, leading Rabbi Alexander Schindler, head of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to declare: "Nuclear disarmament is going to become the central moral issue of the '80s, just as Vietnam was in the '60s."[5] While part of the reason for the appeal of the nuclear freeze movement is that a nuclear war, by nature, would affect everyone, the resurgence of the movement at this time generally is attributed to the increasingly confrontative stance between the United States and Russia, the world's superpowers.[6]

The size, strength, and diversity of the anti-nuclear movement is evident in the amount of discourse generated about the issue and the variety of formats used to present this discourse to audiences. A major source of such discourse is organizations devoted to education and/or action on the issue, such as Physicians for Social Responsibility, Citizens for Social Responsibility, Educators for Social Responsibility, and Ground Zero. A proliferation of books about nuclear issues also attests to the contemporary significance of this topic. Probably one of the best known is Jonathan Schell's The Fate of the Earth, which was released with an unusually high first printing of 50,000 copies.[7]

In addition, groups that typically steer clear of involvement in political issues suddenly have joined the debate. Most prominent among these is the American bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, who drafted a pastoral letter to American Catholics on the morality of nuclear war.[8] The issue, too, became a major one in in the 1984 political campaign. Pollsters inevitably ask voters something about their views on the nuclear issue, and polls suggest that reducing the risk of a nuclear war is ranked as a major national goal for many Americans.[9] States also are voting on freeze initiatives designed to put pressure on Congress to promote and pass freeze legislation, and towns are declaring themselves to be nuclear-free zones.[10]

Probably the most visible and far-reaching format used to bring nuclear issues before the public is the medium of film. Films about nuclear war certainly are not new. Some of those made in earlier decades include The Beginning or the End, I Live in Fear, The Bedford Incident, On the Beach, The War Game, and Dr. Strangelove. In recent years, we have seen the release of several others, including The Atomic Cafe and Testament. Undoubtedly, however, the most important of these, if numbers are at all revealing, was the made-for-television movie, The Day After, shown by ABC on Sunday, November 20, 1983.

An estimated 100 million Americans watched the film, which depicted a Soviet nuclear strike on Kansas City and the aftermath for survivors in nearby Lawrence.[11] The program was widely advertised by the network before the showing and stimulated extensive discussions in newspapers and magazines, in schools and at community forums about the nuclear issue. An ABC poll re-

vealed that 53 percent of the sample viewed the film and an additional 40 percent knew about it.[12] A special report in Newsweek described the film's impact this way:

> "The Day After" has already emerged as the single biggest mobilizing point for the antinuclear movement, roused thunder from nuclear-freeze opponents who regard the film as a two-hour commercial for disarmament and inspired a nationwide educational debate about how to talk to children about the horrors of nuclear war.[13]

Much of the controversy and discussion surrounding the film centered on the fact that the graphic portrayal of nuclear war was being presented via television:

> By the time the unhappiest ending in the annals of broadcast entertainment unwinds next Sunday night, the very idea of what television can do may never be the same. This most cautious of mediums--that cozily safe piece of living-room furniture--will reach out and detonate a thermonuclear apocalypse in our communal psyche.[14]

Not only did The Day After generate much discussion in the media, but it has become the subject of much academic analysis as well.[15] To date, however, one aspect of the film that has not been fully explored is the rhetorical vision of nuclear war depicted in the film and the ways in which that vision corresponds to the images held by individuals in the population at large. In this paper, we attempt to establish the basic images

about what a nuclear war would be like and compare them with those presented in The Day After in order to determine the current rhetorical vision held about nuclear war. Understanding this vision can facilitate our understanding of the anti-nuclear war movement as a whole. To accomplish this objective, we have made use of fantasy-theme analysis.

The concept of the fantasy theme first was developed by Bales in his work with small groups and later expanded by Bormann into an actual rhetorical method for analyzing all forms of discourse.[16] According to Bormann, fantasy themes chain out through a group, indicating participation in a group drama. Fantasy-theme analysis assumes that individuals, in interacting with others, create symbolic realities on the basis of the dramatizations shared by group members. Some fantasy themes catch on and become part of a shared dramatization or "story" among large numbers of people. These stories are called rhetorical visions:

> A rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society. Once such a rhetorical vision emerges it contains dramatis personae and typical plot lines that can be alluded to in all communication contexts and spark a response reminiscent of the original emotional chain. The same dramas can be developed in detail when the occasion demands to generate emotional response.[17]

The analysis of a group's rhetorical vision, then, calls for an examination of the standard elements of a drama--the actors, the setting, and the acts. The interaction of these elements within a group determine what is and what is not legitimate "reality" for group members and can be used to gain insights into group cohesion, motives, emotional style, values, attitudes, and the like.

In this study, we are concerned with the fantasy themes apparent in The Day After and the degree to which they resonate with the vision that has chained out among the general population. A study of the various manifestations of fantasy themes about nuclear war--in this case, in personal statements and in film--seems important for several reasons. First, those involved as either proponents or opponents in the nuclear debate should be able to argue more effectively if they can tap into prevailing fantasy themes. Second, and perhaps of more interest, is that the nuclear-war debate hinges almost entirely on a rhetorical vision rather than on historical fact. In other words, with the exception of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there has been no use of atomic weapons, and all arguments--both pro and con--are speculative to some degree. Thus, the fantasy-theme approach seems not only appropriate for studying the anti-nuclear movement, but seems likely to provide some practical information and insights useful to movement activists as well.

The Day After, in particular, may embody some fundamental fantasy themes held in our culture. First, because it was a film made for and shown on television, it was widely accessible to a

large audience that might not have gone to see a film about nuclear war in any other setting. In fact, many viewers of The Day After may not have seen any previous depictions of nuclear war. Furthermore, since all media portrayals of an all-out nuclear war are hypothetical, film makers have some leeway in how they depict a nuclear disaster. We believe, however, that in order to produce a successful film--i.e., one that generates the desired emotional response--a film producer must tap into the prevailing fantasy themes of the culture.[18] In turn, the film itself may reinforce or add to the vision, especially to the extent that it stimulates interpersonal discussion in small groups, which may prompt further fantasy-theme chaining.

In this analysis, we are not attempting to establish a causal link between the fantasy themes presented in The Day After and those present in the imagination of the general population. In other words, we are not claiming that the film was responsible for the creation of current images of nuclear war. We do believe, however, that in our culture, the media not only embody but help create and maintain important fantasy chains and that the link between mediated and personal contexts deserves study. We know, for example, that an extraordinarily large amount of personal discussion followed The Day After, suggesting a strong link between the film and the public vision. The ABC's post-film poll showed that 78 percent of the viewers watched the film with someone else and that 82 percent discussed it with others. In fact, The Day After was more talked about than The Winds of War or Roots.[19]

Procedure

In order to ascertain the correspondence between the rhetorical vision of nuclear war currently held in American society and its depiction in the film, we used a two-step method. First, we conducted a survey to attempt to determine some of the fantasy themes about nuclear war present in society at large. We then analyzed The Day After, not only to determine if these themes also appeared in the film, but to see what additional themes the film embodied. In essence, we see this project as a comparative analysis of two kinds of discourse relevant to the vision of nuclear war. Our general goal is to construct that overall vision from the discourse studied.

The Survey

Our sample for the personal survey consisted of 79 individuals attending the 1984 summer session at a California State University campus. This was a particularly desirable group to have as a sample because of demographic diversity. We used both regular university summer classes to tap the typical student population and a group of senior citizens attending the Elder Hostel program. Although this sample is distinctly bimodal in age, its diversity enabled us to discover a more complete range of fantasy themes than might have been obtained from a more homogeneous sample.

The instrument used in this phase of the study consisted of an open-ended request for a written statement about nuclear war. Participants were given a form with the following instruction: "In the space below and on the back, write a brief essay telling

what you think a nuclear war would be like. Please do not take more than ten minutes. We realize that you may not be able to describe all aspects of what you think a nuclear war would be like, but we are really just interested in your first thoughts. Do not discuss this task with others until you are finished."

We asked instructors to pass out our questionnaires in their classes. In order to avoid experimenter bias, instructors were told no more about the study than what was printed on the survey form. Instructors were asked to give subjects ten minutes to complete the statement. Instructors also were asked not to discuss the task before the questionnaires were turned in.

We recognize that a more elaborate procedure such as interviews might have elicited fuller statements of the rhetorical vision. Limiting the writing time to ten minutes, however, was a more economical procedure that enabled us to question a larger number of people, and it did result in a list of the most salient themes. As will be apparent in the results, this procedure generated a wide range of statements about nuclear war and, in composite, told a rather elaborate story.

After the forms were completed, the instructors were asked to read a debriefing statement, which told of our specific interest in the film The Day After. Participants also were invited to sign up to receive a copy of the results of the research.

The individual statements about nuclear war were content analyzed according to theme. We first began by listing all the statements made by each subject. We defined a statement as a declarative proposition with one subject and a simple predicate. Thus, statements represented single, undivided thoughts about

some aspect of a nuclear war. In listing statements, we used subjects' language in most cases, but where more than one statement was embedded in a sentence or clause, we created what appeared to be the intended propositions. This procedure yielded 339 statements.

We next classified each statement into apparent theme categories, according to the basic elements of a rhetorical vision--the actor, the scene, and the plot. Seven actor categories, six setting categories, and fifteen plot categories were isolated. In addition, a fourth group of "General" statements was established for statements that did not specifically address actor, plot, or scene categories (e.g., "The idea of a nuclear war is ludicrous.") Only four percent of the statements were not understandable, indecipherable, or irrelevant. In all, four general theme categories, seven actor categories, six setting categories, and fifteen plot categories were isolated. The theme categories, along with sample statements, are listed in Tables 1 and 2. This content analysis was not only a means of discovering possible fantasy themes, but a valuable heuristic device for our analysis of the film.

Film Analysis

A film-analysis guide was developed from the theme categories discovered in the content analysis of the subjects' statements. This guide consisted of a list of major fantasy-theme categories (actor, scene, and plot), the several fantasy-theme categories relevant to these, and subcategories, along with sufficient space for notes. We reviewed the film scene by scene,

each taking notes and discussing possible placement of the film's depictions within the fantasy-theme model reflected in the guide. Our objective was not a mere counting of filmed depictions, but the establishment of the manner in which the film addressed the theme elements. We watched for themes not evident in the personal statements as well, so as not to be confined by the pre-established fantasy themes.

Images of Nuclear War

In this section, we discuss the rhetorical vision that emerged from the two parts of our study. We address the personal statements and the film analysis in turn.

Personal Statements

An amazingly wide range of statements was produced. Our analysis yielded 25 fantasy theme categories and 85 subcategories, exclusive of "general" statements. Categories and frequencies are outlined in Table 1. Certain theme categories seem especially important based on the frequency of their appearance.

Another feature of our survey analysis is the apparent variance in the degree of specificity of responses. A large number of statements were highly global, dealing with the general horror of nuclear war, its incomprehensibility, the general death and destruction that would result, or some other non-discriminating image. Others were quite specific, making statements about rather detailed images. Examples of the various kinds of statements are listed in Table 2.

In composite, we suggest that a rhetorical vision con-

sisting of two levels emerges from the content analysis of our survey. The fundamental drama--and thus its first level--emphasizes plotlines and scene, with the actors assuming a secondary and passive stance in the drama. In the drama that follows, which we refer to as the second level of the rhetorical vision, characters become more active in coping with the devastation they face.

The dominant plotline laid out in this vision is the process of destruction imparted by the dropping of the bomb. A total of 86 statements described some form of destruction--by far the largest action category. Death also is a substantial action theme, with 50 statements dealing with death generally or in a specific manifestation--as immediate or gradual.

While on the surface, death and destruction might appear to be scenic elements, they are described in ways that suggest they are considered the action--i.e., "90% of everything would be burned and destroyed" and "Many thousands would die immediately." Thus, we are treating the act of destruction as a plot theme, while recognizing that its outcome--rubble, debris, and the like--clearly are scenic properties. Interesting to note is that the statements usually do not describe the force that is imparting the destruction. It is, of course, the bomb, but its implicit rather than direct presence in the scenarios, combined with the use of passive rather than active voice in many of the statements, heightens the "victimage" stance in which the participants envision themselves.

Just as the antagonist is not often alluded to, so there seem to be no heroes per se in this vision. There is little

opportunity for genuine heroics or for the opportunity to assume control over a dangerous or difficult situation, once the bombs are dropped. The impersonal nature of the bomb as villain also minimizes the extent to which the actors can influence the direction of the drama. In other words, they cannot control if and when the drama occurs. They can only be the passive and random recipients of whatever damage the bomb brings.

The person-as-victim theme is so strong that the only choice mentioned is really no choice at all because it is that between life and death. Several participants in our survey mentioned preferring death to life in the event of a nuclear war; statements such as "I would rather be dead than to survive a nuclear holocaust" and "Survivors would wish they were dead" are representative. Several of these statements are in the active voice, in contrast to many of the other actor, scene, and plot statements. It is almost as if the actors portrayed in this drama can have control only to the point of expressing a preference--and even that preference, if fulfilled, means one has made a negative choice.[20] No matter what, the actors cannot be winners in the drama; there is no card they can play that would be a match for the power of the antagonist.

The scene reinforces even further the passivity of the actors, since they are forced simply to respond to the effects of the blast. The scene constrains and dictates their actions. The most prominent setting elements to emerge were "limited resources and service," "radiation and pollution," and "blast effects" such as firestorms, flying objects, noise, and heat. Less prominent

aspects of the scene are the concept of a nuclear winter and general congestion of highways and streets.

The scene, then, is one in which life is very different than before the blast. The contrast between pre-war life and the current setting is apparent in the statements of our particiants and is reflected in the numerous times references to the world or civilization "as we know it" are made: "Civilization as we know it would disappear" and "It means the end of the world as we know it." One of the most vivid and personal expressions of this theme is the following: "I could see myself walking around what was once my neighborhood and just freaking out." Clearly, then, the setting theme here is one of contrast. Although dealing with a world devastated by the bomb, this scene is placed beside the scene of the familiar, everyday world we know, and the contrast serves to magnify the intensity and extent of the devastation.

At the first level, then, the rhetorical vision that emerges is one dominated by act and scene, with the bomb serving as an impersonal perpetrator and humans as passive victims. The vision shifts slightly after the immediate effects of the blast are over, the debris has settled, and anyone still alive emerges. Scene remains dominant, but survivors attempt to cope more actively with what the world has become. The plotlines no longer are those concerned with the process of destruction, but with the process of coping with the destruction.

With the shift in emphasis of the plot themes, we see a corresponding shift in actor themes. One thread of this vision sees survivors as taking control, mutually aiding one another in order to ensure the continuation of the race: "We are a race of

survivors--we would close ranks and help each start over . . . ." Equally possible, however, is the opposite alternative--that the shortage of resources (already a dominant feature of scene) would be so massive that violence would become the dominant coping response. One of our subjects aptly summarized this possibility: "People would fight against each other in order to survive." In the first possibility--that of mutual aid--the actors begin to dominate the scene, while in the violent scenario, the scene continues to be a dominant motif that overshadows the acts of the people involved.

The Day After

The rhetorical vision that emerged from our survey was in essence the same as that presented in the film. The difference is a matter of emphasis rather than substance. Also, these two kinds of discourse--personal essays and film--necessarily tell their stories in different ways. The film is a lengthy treatment relying heavily on visual effects, while the personal statements are brief descriptions of the themes that came to mind most readily. In sum, the survey statements and the film seem to be merely different discursive expressions of the vision summarized in the last section. Rather than repeat that vision here, we point out the ways in which the film depicts the fantasy themes the ways those depictions differ from the images reflected in the statements.

The Day After is organized into three segments, characterized as life before the attack, the attack, and the post-attack struggle. This pattern sets up a sharp contrast between ordinary

life as we know it and the devastation of nuclear war. Although the same division was not as apparent in the personal statements, in part because of the structure of the survey question, the comparison of the post-bomb situation with present-day life was found there too.

There seems to be, then, a contrasting rhetorical vision that often is placed beside the vision of a nuclear war--a vision of how life is now. In the film, the escalating crisis and subsequent attack intrude upon and disrupt the daily lives of the characters, making these everyday events important symbols of the world that we take for granted. The pre-war characters are actively in control of their lives, the scene is one of ordinary middle America, and the plot is mundane life--a haircut, a wedding rehearsal, surgery, a visit to an art gallery. After the attack, the characters are depicted as passive victims, suffering pain and death, out of control in an alien land. The contrast between these two images is important for understanding the drama of nuclear war.

We turn now to the specific elements of the rhetorical vision--the actors, plotlines, and scenes. In the survey, the actors were passive victims. Similarly, in the film, the vision that emerges has the characters able only to respond to what happens: they have no influence over the course of the events. The bomb is an undifferentiated and impersonal antagonist, against which the characters are powerless. The film leaves ambiguous the exact details of how the bombs came to be dropped, adding to the sense of impersonality as well as lack of control.

The victimage theme is graphically portrayed in the film in the form of radiation illness, blindness, crippling wounds, burns, death, and separation.

Separation is a particularly strong theme in The Day After. Important to note in this regard is the emphasis placed on family bonds in the pre-attack segment of the film. This bonding was depicted in a variety of ways, one of the most curious of which was that at least three instances of love-making were included in the script. The various depictions of family bonding set the viewer up to experience family separation as particularly wrenching. The airman searches in vain for his wife and child; the Oates family is completely separated as a result of the attack; and although the farm family is able to stay together for a time, they, too, are separated when the children are sent off to Lawrence for medical attention and the father is killed by trespassers.

The victimage theme is so strong that several survey participants noted the preferability of death over life. Although this choice is not featured in the film, neither is it ignored. When the farmer's wife tries to comfort him by saying, "We're lucky to be alive," he responds, "We'll see how lucky that is . . . ."

The statement that death may be preferable to life reflects a kind of choice, as noted in the last section, but it is not the only choice in the face of nuclear attack, according to the discourse we examined. Taking charge and exerting control come in the film's scenarios for survival, in which people join together to reconstruct civilization. As in the survey state-

ments, two possible approaches to survival are presented in the film. On the one hand, there is survivor violence, with people fighting one another--still victims of the situation. The farmer, for instance, uses his shotgun to protect his family in the cellar, only to be shot later by trespassers. The movie also depicts fights over water and food, and rumors of firing squads turn out to be true. On the other hand is the possibility that victims will work together in order to exert control and restore a sense of normality to the world, a scenario also depicted in the film.

This latter activity is shown in several ways. Dr. Oates and the other medical personnel try to keep the hospital functioning. Just after the attack, Oates tells those at the hospital that they must work with the staff in order to survive, and Oates himself works to the point of exhaustion to help as many people as possible. In another scene, a stranger intrudes upon the farm family sheltered in their basement. They are initially anxious but eventually let the stranger, a student trying to get home from the university, into their enclave. This act turns out to be of mutual benefit. In the final scene of the film, Oates tries to evict a trespasser from the rubble of his house, but in an act of compassion, the man reaches out to hand Oates an orange.

Dr. Oates, the main character of the film, seems to embody both of the survival extremes. At times he is oriented toward humanitarian concerns, and at others he is selfish and self-protective. He orders the hospital doors closed at one point

because of overcrowding and lack of staff. Later, he says to let as many into the hospital as possible.

Just as the actor themes parallel those of our survey, for the most part, so do those of the plotlines. The destruction and death scenario is especially strong in the film, as it was in the personal statements. The dramatic scene after the attack is one of devastation. Kansas City is wiped out, as we see at the end of the film, and even in remote areas where blast effects are not great, everything is covered with radioactive ash, the soil is contaminated, and dead animals and people lie about the landscape.

While there is much physical destruction--especially at ground zero--the film suggests that destruction will not be total. Some buildings remain standing, some animals survive, and even a few of the characters make it to the end of the film without evidence of injury or illness. Furthermore, as the film implicitly suggests via the farm family who retreats to their cellar, survival is possible if you stay in an underground shelter until radiation levels decrease.

The scenic elements of the film serve to reinforce the actor and plot themes. Scenic elements are especially salient in the film because of its visual effects. The attack sequence itself is interesting from a scenic perspective. Lasting about four minutes, it depicts an image of numerous blasts, mushroom clouds (twelve shots in all), fire storms, flying objects, vaporized people, and electro-magnetic effects. These depictions illustrate many of the statements of our survey participants.

"Radiation and pollution" and "limited resources," two of

the most frequently mentioned themes in the survey statements, were also major developments in the film. The falling radioactive ash covers the people, animals, buildings, vegetation, and ground. Throughout the story, the atmospheric radiation is measured and reported, and it does not decrease at the rate expected. The inadequacy of medical supplies and services at the University hospital is perhaps the single most central focal theme of the film. At one point, Dr. Oates declares that their hospital may be the only one operating within a hundred miles and that they had better prepare for a rush of sick and injured people. This statement, in addition to the depictions of struggles for food, water, and shelter, makes the limitation of resources obvious.

Irony: The Deep Structure of the Vision

Having established the basic rhetorical vision of nuclear war embodied in this discourse, what remains is to examine the deep structure of the vision or the underlying frame in which the entire drama is placed. Cragan and Shields argue that three basic rhetorical dramas exist at the meta-level--the pragmatic, the social, and the righteous. Further, they suggest that these three orientations are responsible for producing the basic rhetorical visions that emerge in regard to a particular issue or conflict.[21] The deep structure is, in short, the guiding force of any drama.

The rhetorical vision of nuclear war, however, does not fit well into any of these three deep structures: none is powerful enough to justify the drama. The strongest source might

be righteousness, but the limited number of references to who started the war and the rationale for doing so--both in our sample and in the film--suggests that this is not the foundational meta-theoretical stance underlying this rhetorical vision. We maintain that a fourth frame is necessary to explain the deep structure of this particular vision--the frame of irony.

Irony not only seems capable of explaining the essence of the nuclear-war vision by definition, but several references in our sample and in the film also point to the existence of the ironic frame. Interesting to note is that we placed all such statements in the "General" category because they did not deal with specific actor, scene, or plot elements, further supporting the existence of irony as a meta-theoretical framework. The strongest such statement was, "The war itself I would hope to be in vivid technicolor (best saved for the 4th of July)." This is almost a classic ironic statement. Others include, "The idea of a nuclear war is ludicrous," "It would be the most explicit act of stupidity every committed," and "We deserve everything we get if we start a nuclear war."

Irony is characterized by incongruity between what is expected and what occurs. In its narrowest form, it is a specific figure of speech in which words express a meaning different from their literal denotation. Irony also can take the "pose of ignorance" of a Socrates--i.e., a dramatic technique useful for bringing an audience to view something in a particular way. Or, it can be viewed as a general outlook or framework from which to view the contradictions or inconsistencies of life.[22]

But irony involves more than than simply the placing

together of incongruous experiences. It involves the assumption of a particular role on the part of the audience--that of ironic detachment. To grasp irony, we must separate out the two meanings involved--the literal and the intended. This act is possible only from a detached standpoint; if we cannot step back from the words, we cannot see them in their two senses.[23]

Somewhat paradoxically, however, this detachment produces a cohesive bond between audience and rhetor. A close partnership exists when those involved share the interpretive act of irony. Booth explains:

> The very intricacy of our interpretive act builds for us, when we manage to do it right, a tight bond with the author . . . . Even though some readers or listeners may be left by the wayside, those who come along will be clamped inexcapably into the author's patterns--they will in fact have the illusion of having built each point for themselves.[24]

Burke goes even further in terms of stressing the cohesion that results within the ironic frame. He notes: "True irony . . . is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within, being consubstantial with him."[25] The audience and rhetor, then, share a strong commitment and identity as a result of the process of irony.

In addition to cohesion between audience and rhetor, detachment carries with it a sense of superiority in that we are able to grasp, often very quickly, the various levels of meaning

involved. This sense of superiority contributes further to the cohesion of the audience.: "'We' are the insiders, we know what we know, we have seen the wheels within wheels that make this complex and mysterious world go round."[26] Brown argues that the sense of detachment and accompanying susperiority result in a transforming point of view--i.e., we see something quite differently as a result of the ironic frame. Such transformation, then, serves as a way of changing attitudes and influencing value choices.[27]

The outcomes of irony--detachment, cohesion, superiority, and transformation--were evident in The Day After and bear directly on the nuclear war issue in important ways. First, the film contains several scenes that lead the viewer to take an out-of-frame view of what was happening. In contrast with scenes that drew the viewer into the experience of the characters, these accented distance. In one scene, the airman seeks shelter in a store. In the foreground is an old-fashioned scale--the type that tells your weight and reads your future for a penny. A sign on the scale, still standing, reads, "Character Readings--Your Future?" The astute viewer will chuckle and ask, "What future?" In another example, the pregnant woman, asked to explain why she is holding back on giving birth, delivers a rather lengthy commentary about the future of her child. Her speech is ironic in tone; at one point she asks if we can now simply sweep up the dead, fill in the holes, and build supermarkets. Here she captures the frame of reference which the audience likely shares--the incongruity between human experience as we know it and what is being experienced in this particular vision. Detachment and

distance are crucial in order for the comparison being made here to work.

The sense of detachment, however, goes further in the film. It places each of us as viewers in a position of superiority. We are not simply characters in the drama or its observers. Rather, the villain--the choice to unleash nuclear bombs--is contained within us. This level of irony is especially strong in the film and is set up early when Oates and his daughter visit an art gallery. Viewing a Chinese painting, the daughter discusses the difficulty of figuring out the angle from which to view the landscape because Chinese painters want you to be <u>in</u> the landscape itself.

To suggest that this is a reference to the options we have in terms of the nuclear issue may seem far-fetched were it not for the fact that this becomes a recurring theme in the film. Not only does Dr. Oates flash back to this particular scene near the end of the film, but camera shots reinforce this point at crucial scenes. Immediately before the nuclear attack, the camera zooms back so we see only the skyline of the city in the distance. That scene is punctuated by the flash over the city. Again at the end, the camera moves from a close-up of Oates kneeling in the remains of his house to a panorama of the destroyed city. Nowhere else in the film are such distant camera shots used. They serve to take us out of the frame and to view the irony of what is happening with greater clarity than the characters themselves might. Ultimately, the film suggests, we do have a choice, and the frame or deep structure offered by irony

reveals to us what this choice is: We can remain in the landscape, caught up in the particulars of the drama, or we can move outside of it, realize where the real villain lies, and take measures now to ensure that the nuclear drama remains fiction.

Conclusion and Implications

This study has revealed a basic vision of nuclear war in both personal statements and in the film, The Day After. That the different formats--a film and personal statements--seem to reflect the same vision validates the existence of a core vision about nuclear war that has chained out in our society. A logical next step, which is beyond the scope of this essay, is to determine the nature of the vision as it is manifest in other kinds of discourse, such as books, articles, and speeches. Such examinations, combined with studies of other films, will improve our understanding of the nature of the nuclear war vision.

In addition, this rhetorical vision needs to be compared with those that chained out during popular and unpopular wars of the past as well as during the so-called "Cold War."[28] There well may be similarities, and most certainly are dissimilarities, among the rhetorical visions of the war genre. Such information also may shed light on the distinctiveness of the nuclear-war vision.

An understanding of this vision carries important implications in several areas. First, it suggests that the fantasy themes of nuclear war need to be taken into account by both proponents and opponents of nuclear defense. It can provide clues as to which concerns are most important to address, the

argumentative strategies to use in dealing with those issues, and how best to conceptualize one's audience. We suggest that neither side has dealt adequately with the meta-structure of irony, although the opponents probably have made better use of such tactics, if the bumper sticker, "One nuclear bomb can ruin your whole day," is at all representative.

If the ironic frame functions as we have suggested, it should be capable of producing and maintaining a highly cohesive audience while still capable of bringing in new and uncommitted audiences. This dual task is crucial to but often problematic for many social movements--how to sustain the converts while retelling the story for those who have just arrived. Irony seems able to meet the need of incompatible audiences without a loss of power or impact. In part, the economy of irony is responsible, a value which Booth describes well:

> . . . it is an almost incredibly economical form of communication . . . . If in describing it 'straight' I try to include some account of the cultural preconceptions on which the silent communion depends, I find that I need two or three hundred words at a minimum, and even then, of course, the emotional force has been dissipated.[29]

The potential use of irony as an actual rhetorical strategy for social movements needs to be studied more fully, if its functioning in the nuclear ware movement is at all indicative of its force and capabilities.

Furthermore, this study accents the importance of analyzing fantasy themes as they appear in more than one form of discourse.

Fantasy-theme analyses of single pieces of discourse such as films are interesting but by themselves cannot reveal the rhetorical vision in its fullness. Along the same line, we must remember that fantasy themes are chained out through interpersonal communication and that the rhetorical vision is not just something reflected in public discourse; it is to be found in the images of private citizens and manifest in private discourse.

Fantasy themes, the fabric of the rhetorical visions of our culture, provide important insights into how people think and what they talk about when confronting issues of the day. Hopefully, this study has contributed to our understanding of the vision giving rise to and arising from the discourse of nuclear war so prevalent in today's society.

TABLE 1

FREQUENCIES OF FANTASY THEMES BY CATEGORY

Grouping	Fantasy-Theme Category	Subcategory	Frequency*
ACTOR			50
	Physical effects		12
		Being crippled	3
		Blindness	2
		Burns	2
		Inability to breathe	**
		Bodily deterioration	
		Nausea	
		Radiation effects	
		Torn skin	
	Death preferred to life		10
		(no subcategories)	
	Confusion		10
		General confusion (chaos)	6
		Things happening too fast to comprehend	
		Governing agencies confused and ineffective	
		Confusing blast with earthquake	
		Panic following confusion	
	Suffering		5
		General suffering	2
		Suffering near center of blast	
		Pain	
		Delayed suffering	
	Separation		4
		Separation from family	3
		Abandoned children	

*In order of magnitude.
**Empty cells in this column indicate only one instance.

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Mental effects		4
	General emotional response (shock)	2
	Delayed bad memories	
	Guilt	
Prior fear (being afraid of nuclear war before it happens)		3
	(no subcategories)	
Other		2
	Survivor selfishness	
	No winners	
SETTING		51
Limited resources and services		19
	Medical assistance not avail.	6
	Lack of food and/or water	4
	Utilities out of commission	3
	General lack of life resources	
	No defense measures	
	Too few people to care for injured	
	No government services	
	Economic collapse	
	Lack of shelter	
Radiation and pollution		13
	General pollution of resources	4
	Radiation in atmosphere	4
	Radiation spreading	3
	Radiation contamination	2

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Blast effects		8
	Firestorm	2
	Mushroom cloud	
	Noise	
	Heat	
	Silence first	
	Flying objects	
	Craters	
Nuclear winter		6
	Darkness (no sun)	3
	Cold	2
	Nuclear winter (general)	
Congestion		3
	Highways and streets clogged	2
	Crowds of evacuees in outlying areas	
Spiritual hereafter		2
	Beginning of hereafter	
	Day of Judgment	

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

PLOT			192
	Total destruction		51
		(no subcategories)	
	Death		50
		General death (unspecified)	24
		Gradual death	14
		Universal death	8
		Instant death	4
	General (undesignated) destruction		20
		(no subcategories)	
	Survival		16
		Not all killed	4
		Difficulty of life among survivors	4
		Mutual aid among survivors	3
		Survival in remote areas	2
		Survival in areas of world not involved in war	
		Only few survive	
		Leaders housed underground	
	Local destruction		15
		Area of blast	9
		Populated areas	3
		U. S. and U.S.S.R.	2
		Remote areas (downwind)	

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Recovery		10
	New age of civilization	5
	Pioneering--return to simplicity	2
	Later functioning of govern.	
	Rise of dictatorship	
	Need for world government	
Survivor violence		6
	Violence over resources	3
	Survivors fight each other	3
Military action		6
	Penetration of defenses	2
	Exchange and escalation (war not limited)	3
	Strikes on launch pads only	
Nonhuman survival		5
	Evolution to new life forms	3
	Survival of bacteria	
	Survival in oceans	
Short war		4
	(no subcategories)	
Other		9
	War not limited	3
	No warning	2
	Nuclear accident	
	Radio provides information	
	Laws wiped out	
	Flight to countryside	

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

GENERAL COMMENTS	32
Nuclear war is incomprehensible.	13
Nuclear war is horrible.	12
Nuclear war is ludicrous.	5
Nuclear war will not happen.	2
UNCODABLE (illegible, not understandable, off task)	14

TABLE 2

THEME CATEGORIES AND ILLUSTRATIVE STATEMENTS

Groupings	Theme Categories	Illustrative Statements
ACTOR	PHYSICAL EFFECTS	There would be a lot of blind people. Bodies would begin to decay before they died.
	DEATH PREFERRED TO LIFE	I hope I would be killed. Death would be preferable to survival.
	CONFUSION	There would be confusion. Nobody would realize what had happened.
	SUFFERING	The suffering would be great. Survivors would suffer untold pain.
	SEPARATION	There would be abandoned children. One might not find friends and family.
	MENTAL EFFECTS	Those in areas not destroyed would be doomed to a lifetime of nightmare memories and revelations of effects of the holocaust. I could see myself . . . just freaking out.
	PRIOR FEAR	Just thinking about it is scary enough. The very thought of having to live with this makes our life and family living fearful of life itself.

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

SETTING	LIMITED RESOURCES AND SERVICES
	There would be no food or drink for many. Medical, health, and ambulance operations would be disrupted.
RADIATION AND POLLUTION	
	Destruction would be followed by massive pollution of all water, air, and food. Radioactive energy will fill the air.
BLAST EFFECTS	
	There would probably be mushroom clouds. Objects would become flying objects.
NUCLEAR WINTER	
	Nuclear war would be followed by nuclear winter. The temperature of the world would drop below freezing due to blockage of the sun.
CONGESTION	
	Highways and streets would be hopelessly clogged. Clogged highways, broken down vehicles, everyone trying to escape.
SPIRITUAL HEREAFTER	
	After the war and the end of this world, the Day of Judgment will begin. It may be the beginning of the hereafter.

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

PLOT	TOTAL DESTRUCTION	Vast destruction with much of the population either dead or dying. A nuclear war would be the worst and final disaster of the world.
	GENERAL DEATH	One might not live. Millions would be dead.
	GRADUAL DEATH	Death for those who live outside the immediate blast would be gradual. Individuals who were safely sheltered would eventually die when they were forced out of their shelters into a hostile environment.
	UNIVERSAL DEATH	Eventually everyone would die. There would be no survivors.
	INSTANT DEATH	Most people would die instantaneously. Many thousands would die immediately.
	GENERAL DESTRUCTION	The destruction would be extensive. A nuclear war would be devastating.
	SURVIVAL	There may be survivors. Probably more remote areas would survive.

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

LOCAL DESTRUCTION

A nuclear war would show its worst effects at the center of the blast.
Cities will be destroyed.

RECOVERY

Later, governing agencies might again start to function.
Perhaps in ages to come a new world would emerge and grow.

SURVIVOR VIOLENCE

Violence would result from fighting for rare food.
People would fight against each other in order to survive.

MILITARY ACTION

Strikes would be made on launch pads without cities being the primary targets.
The U.S. would send off all their nuclear war heads and others would hit us in all major cities.

NONHUMAN SURVIVAL

Some bacteria might survive.
If any life would remain it would probably be in the oceans.

SHORT WAR

It would last perhaps all of 20 minutes.
It would be short.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Nuclear war is like hell.
It is almost inconceivable to visualize what a nuclear war would be like.
It would be the most explicit act of stupidity ever committed.
Being an optimist, I do not think it will ever happen.

Notes

[1]Hans G. Graetzer and David L. Anderson, The Discovery of Nuclear Fission (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), p. 108.

[2]For a discussion of the events and arguments surrounding the test ban treaty, see Robert A. Divine, Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Debate: 1954-1969 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[3]Norman Moss, Men Who Play God: The Story of the H-Bomb and How the World Came to Live with It (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 280.

[4]For a summary of the current anti-nuclear movement, see James Kelly, "Thinking About the Unthinkable," Time, March 29, 1982, pp. 10-14.

[5]Kelly, p. 10.

[6]Kelly, p. 12.

[7]For a review of Schell's book, see "Second Thoughts on Schell," Time, May 3, 1982, p. 79.

[8]Richard N. Ostling, "Bishops and the Bomb," Time, November 29, 1982, pp. 68-74, 77.

[9]Evan Thomas, "Highs for Mondale and Reagan," Time, December 26, 1983, p. 13.

[10]See, for example, Nancy Newcombe, "Nuclear-Free Bylaw Fails, Resolution Stands," Amherst Bulletin, September 12, 1984, p. 3, about the efforts of the town of Amherst, Massachusetts, to declare itself a nuclear-free zone.

[11]"Estimated 100 Million Watch 'The Day After,'" Eureka Times Standard, November 24, 1983, p. 1.

[12]Social Science Research Unit, "The Social Impact of The Day After: A Summary of Research Findings," Marketing and Research Services, ABC, n.d., p. 2.

[13]"TV's Nuclear Nightmare," Newsweek, November 21, 1983, p. 66.

[14]"TV's Nuclear Nightmare," p. 66.

[15]For examples of convention papers written about The Day After, see Larry Vinson and W. James Potter, "Who Watched the TV Movie The Day After?," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, Chicago, November 1984; and J. Clarke Rountree, "The Discussion after 'The Day After': A Hexad of Argumentative Loci," paper presented at the Burke Conference, Philadelphia, March 1984. One of the many convention program on the subject was "Nuclear War and the Media," presented at the International Communication Association convention, San Francisco, May 1984. Many forums were held, too, at which scholars from a variety of disciplines analyzed and discussed the film and its impact. One such forum was held at the University of Iowa, where the campus radio station hosted a discussion of the film. Professors of communication, anthropology, and journalism participated. See "Media Forum on the Event of 'The Day After,'" Iowa Alumni Review, January/February 1984, pp. 12-13.

[16]See Robert F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1950); and Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (December 1972), 396-407.

[17]Bormann, p. 398.

[18]Nicholas Meyer, director of The Day After, describes the process of making the film in "'The Day After': Bringing the Unwatchable to TV," TV Guide, November 19, 1983, pp. 6-12.

[19]Social Research Unit, pp. 6-7.

[20]Interesting support for the "death-over-life" preference comes from a recent action taken at Brown University. Students voted to ask the student health center to stock cyanide pills so students can could commit suicide during a nuclear war rather than die from fallout. The proposal was placed on a student council ballot after more than 700 students signed a position of support. See "Brown Students ask College to Stock Suicide Pills in Case of Nuclear Attack," Daily Hampshire Gazette, October 13, 1984, p. 8.

[21]John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields, Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Approach (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1981), p. 40.

[22]David Kaufer, "Irony and Rhetorical Strategy," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 10 (Spring, 1977), 91-92.

[23]Wayne C. Booth, "The Pleasures and Pitfalls of Irony: or Why Don't You Say What you Mean?" in Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1978), p. 6.

[24]Booth, p. 11.

[25]Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 514.

[26]Booth, p. 12; and William R. Brown, "William Rogers: Ironist as Persuader," Speech Monographs, 39 (August, 1972), 183.

[27]Brown, p. 191.

[28]See, for example, John F. Cragan, "The Origin and Nature of the Cold War Rhetorical Vision 1946-1972: A Partial History," in Applied Communication Research (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1981), pp. 47-66.

[29]Booth, p. 12.