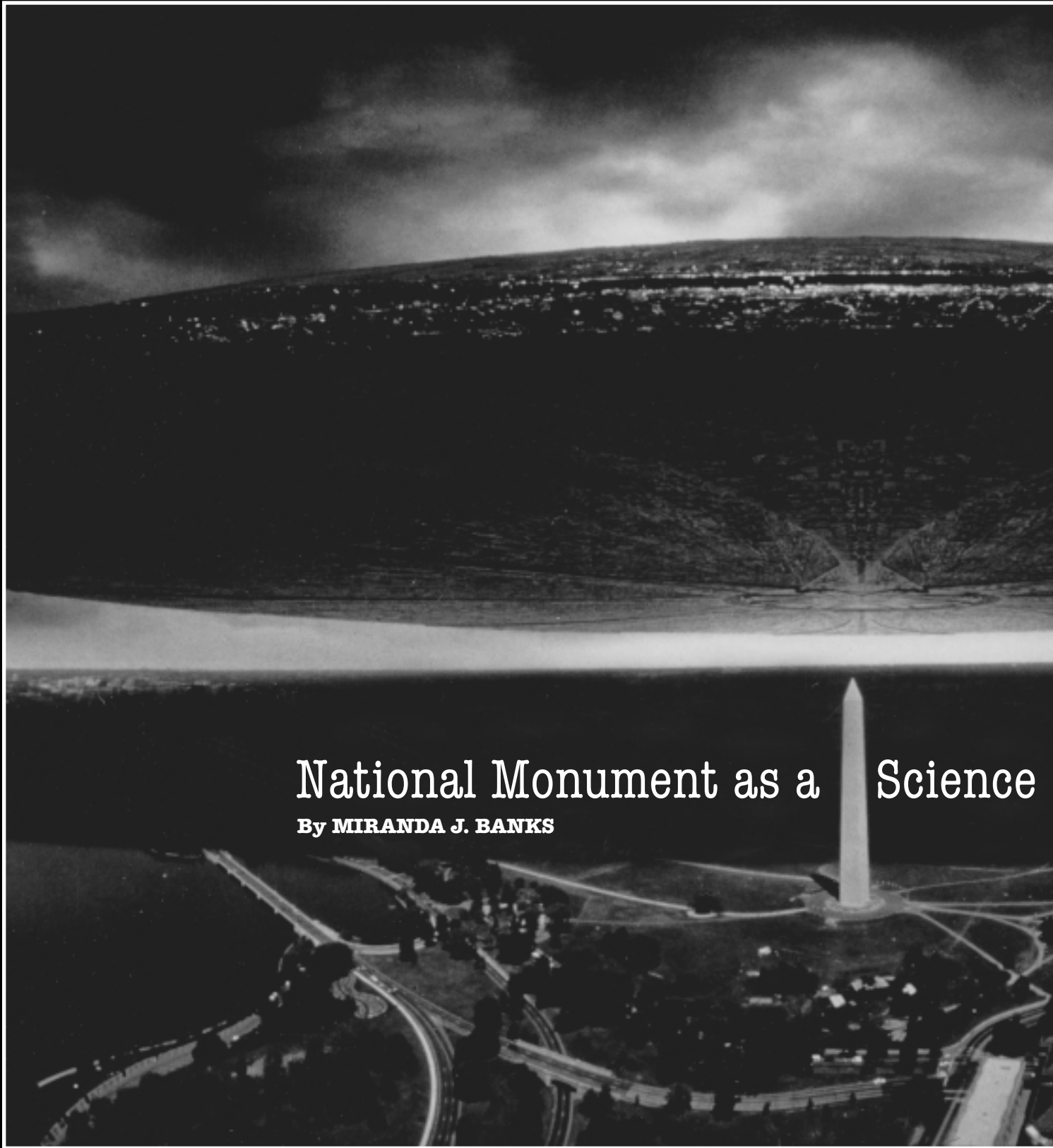


# Monumental



## National Monument as a Science

By **MIRANDA J. BANKS**

# Fictions

An alien spaceship dwarfs the monuments of the Washington Mall in *Independence Day*.



Fiction Space

*Abstract:* The representation of national monuments in science fiction film can celebrate or distort their traditional symbolism, for the sake of pure spectacle and to embody universal ideals. Three models for how monuments are portrayed are outlined: as a specific landmark, as a site of mass destruction, and as a ruin of civilization.

*Key words:* Lincoln Memorial; national monuments; science fiction films; Washington, D.C.; Washington Monument

In *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, Robert Musil argues, “There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen—indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention” (61). James E. Young attempts to tease out the contradiction presented in Musil’s argument:

It is this “finish” that repels our attention, that makes a monument invisible. It is as if a monument’s life in the communal mind grows as hard and polished as its exterior form, its significance as fixed as its place in the landscape. For monuments at rest like this—in stasis—seem to present themselves as eternal parts of the landscape, as naturally arranged as nearby trees or rock formations. (13)



In the final battle sequence in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, a spaceship crashes into the Capitol.

Historically, monuments have been erected by groups or nations to recognize a person, an ideal, an event, or a group of people. The normative function of a monument is to serve as a testament of social or national memory and to symbolize larger cultural, social, political, or national themes such as liberty, power, democracy, independence, justice, progress, equality, or patriotic valor. As Young explains, the power of a monument is in its commitment to serve the cause of memory and in the permanence of this commitment. Yet, it is precisely because of its fixedness in the landscape that, to those who see the monument, it becomes invisibly part of the landscape. National monuments in particular do not change daily, or even yearly; they only change through age (decade after decade) or in times of environmental, political, or social peril.

One way, however, in which monuments can become revisualized or re-remembered is through the cinema. Films can often offer their audiences the opportunity to see with new eyes the world—the spaces—in which they live. When Jefferson Smith (James Stewart), in Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, arrives in the

nation's capital, he is overwhelmed by the majesty of the city's monuments. As he gazes in wonder at the Lincoln Memorial, he reminds Saunders (Jean Arthur) of the ideals that were the inspiration for these buildings and monuments. Wilbur Zelinsky, in *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism*, contends that the construction and placement of monuments are designed to both overpower and inspire the viewer:

The tableau of twentieth-century Washington superbly expresses the role of the metropolis vis-à-vis the country and the world at large. The theatrical ensemble of majestic vistas and plazas, great phalanxes of embassies, government and national association offices, heavily symbolic architecture . . . sophisticated landscaping and nighttime illumination of crucial structures, and the regiments of statuary—all these and other elements combine to overpower the viewer. One's first pilgrimage to Washington can be a blinding religious experience, a rite of communion. (179–80)

While not everyone has had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C. (and those who live there may have forgotten the power of these monuments), cinema allows its viewers to review (as if for the first time) these national sites

and reinvigorates their sense of awe and patriotism. Zelinsky's statement points also to a larger issue, that monuments are used to represent something larger than simply the structure itself; the national monument is a metonym for the both the power and ideals of the state.

The national monument, in itself, has been explored for its symbolic resonance in aesthetic, cultural, historical, and architectural analyses, but how has its physical presence, as well as its symbolism, been mobilized through the cinema? What is it that viewers are seeing—literally and figuratively—when they see the Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument, or the Lincoln Memorial on the screen? Why does a filmmaker choose to use a certain monument in a film?

James Young argues that monuments can tell as much about the past that they celebrate as they do about the artists who created them, the time and place in which the monuments were erected, and how the past is both constructed and viewed (8). By looking at how monuments are used in American cinema, one can gain insight into the themes presented in the narratives and the project of the filmmakers, as well as into the genres out of which the films emerge. Virtually all of the monuments mentioned in this article are visually obtrusive, freestanding, outdoor structures; rarely are they buildings with uses beyond that of luring visitors to celebrate the nation or national heroes. Part of their power is their ability to evoke the sublime for their visitors by affirming a sense of patriotism and awe in the majesty of a building so grand and permanent in the landscape. When using culturally specific, nationalistic spaces, filmmakers are often trying to evoke just that sense that will lead viewers to consider certain themes or motifs within the narrative.

While Frank Capra's films or political thrillers immediately come to mind, I prefer to put this theory to work in a genre that may seem perhaps a bit less obvious but in fact proves to be one that uses the national monument in varied and profound ways. I

begin by locating the national monument in the iconography of the science fiction film. It is then possible to look at three ways in which monuments are used over time in those films: as a locator or landmark of the space of the nation's capital, or in the case of the Statue of Liberty, one of the largest U.S. cities; as a site of mass destruction; or as a relic of the past or a ruin. Each of these uses of national monuments has been employed in science fiction films in ways that foreground the use of special effects—one of the most significant of the aspects that define the genre. My intent is to identify the complex uses of national monuments, showing how science fiction films have often used or undermined the normative functions of monuments so as to inspire awe in the viewer and to present larger themes.

The national monument has created a space for itself within the visual vocabulary of the American science fiction genre. Genre is often used as a way in which to categorize and explore popular cinema, and polemically, as a way to discuss relations of films to the culture whose images it both reflects and co-creates. What proves particularly useful in this discussion is a reading of the visual vocabulary, or iconography, of the science fiction film. In "The Imagination of Disaster," Susan Sontag explains how it is the experience of the visual that makes science fiction films unique:

Science fiction films are one of the purest forms of spectacle. . . . We are merely spectators; we watch. . . . Things, objects, machinery play a major role in these films. A greater range of ethical values is embodied in the décor of these films than in the people. Things, rather than the helpless humans, are the locus of values because we experience them, rather than people, as the sources of power. According to science fiction films, man is naked without his artifacts. They stand for different values, they are potent, they are what gets destroyed, and they are the indispensable tools for the repulse of the alien invaders. (218)

In the science fiction films studied here, national monuments gain the power of Sontag's "things." The

The audience sees  
the monument with  
new eyes via the  
use of special  
effects, and the  
image becomes  
spectacle, a moment  
that is foregrounded  
in the science  
fiction film.

national monument serves as a material testament to national ideals; seeing these stable monuments infused with timeless values in unstable situations presents to the viewer a visualization of the transience of all things, including the ideals and power that the country holds dear. The national monument, rarely explored as a specific site within the cinematic city, proves particularly compelling as a cinematic space in the science fiction film.

Most national monuments can be found within city walls. In part, this is because the city is the locus of civilization and the site of the nation's power. Thus the city plays a significant role in many science fiction films whose narratives attempt to reconcile the power of the human with that of the alien or unknown (Sobchack, *Screening Space* 63). The city has often been read as the citadel of a nation's power. It is where politics, architecture, culture, and technology are showcased as the greatest achievements of civilization. The monument is a condensation of this range of associations; furthermore, it is a site of profound nationalism, and stands both as an artifact and an extension of the nation. Although my focus is on the American landscape, countless science fiction films use easily recognizable foreign landmarks in montage—from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, to the Kremlin in Moscow, to Big Ben in London—to show the international scale of the

events taking place within the film. These single spaces speak not only to the residents' experience but rather show the solidarity of all nations: What happens to one will happen to all. In "The City and the Imaginary," Donatella Mazzoleni traces the different layers of the space that the body inhabits and grows into. Starting first with the individual, she redefines the body to include the hands and feet moving out into the space around it, to clothing, to the house. Mazzoleni's final extension is her defining of the city as the body's Double:

Like the house, it is also, in some way, a lived space, anthropomorphic. We can speak of a city as long as the totality of those who produce and live a collective construction constitute a collective anthropoid body, which maintains in some way an identity as a "subject." (293)

Film scholars have discussed the city as a character in film noir, but narrowing this description to Sontag's statement on the importance of artifacts in science fiction films allows a new reading of the national monument. In the genre, when a city is in peril, it is often expressed through a shot of a static monument in a distressed or unfamiliar state. The viewer, aware of the ideals for which the monument stands, reads the image as a signal that not only is the city at risk but the national body and the nation as well. Historical processes of transformation of the genre itself can be seen within each film's use of the monument to help define the filmmaker's approach to his subject as well as to locate the film itself in its place and time within the history of the genre and the nation. While exploring these categories, I wish to point to the "moment" that all of these films share: The audience sees the monument with new eyes via the use of special effects, and the image becomes spectacle, a moment that is foregrounded in the science fiction film.

#### Monument as Locator and Landmark

In 1951, Klaatu and his robot Gort arrived in Washington, D.C., by flying



**Imminent destruction:** The alien spaceship is about to strike the White House in *Independence Day*.

saucer in Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Radio and television announcements track the ship's position as it flies toward the U.S. Eastern seaboard and to the nation's capital. Radio announcer H. V. Kaltenborn, playing himself, declares that all is still peaceful within the city, "There are signs of normalcy. The beautiful spring weather. The tourist crowds around the public monuments and other buildings." The film then presents a montage of tourists and citizens at the Lincoln, Washington, and Jefferson monuments. Then a low mechanical sound, deeper and more ominous than that of a plane, is heard throughout the city. Tourists, dwarfed by the monuments, look up to see a luminescent saucer pass over the Capitol, across the Mall, over the Washington Monument, and finally land on a baseball field in the center of the city. Within moments of its landing and up until Klaatu and Gort's departure, the spaceship, like the national monuments, becomes yet another of Washington's tourist spots (Torry 16). When Bobby gives Klaatu a tour of the city, he asks if they can also go by the spaceship, as if it were the latest in a line of the city's top attractions.

The use of the capital's national monuments serves two purposes in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. First, the monuments are specific locators, signs that serve to make the actions both realistic and of national significance. Second, they serve as a visual device to remind the audience of the national ideals that are juxtaposed with the world's response to the alien's requests. The use of national monuments in the beginning of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* locates the film within the realm of the known world—within an identifiable national context. This serves to make the implausible arrival of aliens more believable. If they are shown in the same frame with something immobile and grounded, such as the Capitol or the Washington Monument, the image becomes a film "truth." Director Robert Wise explains:

I think the fact that it was made in our capital, that you see very familiar sights such as the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Monument, the Capital Building [*sic*], all of these things, gives the film a great anchor in reality. I think it was a big plus. (qtd. in Szebin 38–39)

The audience is awed by the image of the familiar placed in the frame with

the alien, the unreal, a juxtaposition that is a hallmark of the science fiction film and its commitment to visual virtuosity—when the budget allows. These images also act as a presage of impending catastrophe. Although Klaatu and Gort visit in peace, their second trip to Earth would mark the destruction of the planet for the greater good of the universe—unless the countries of the world come together in peace.

Seen as a film of the Cold War era, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* presents Washington, D.C., both as the typical American city and as the historical site of the nation's greatest men. On their tour of the city, Bobby takes Klaatu to the Lincoln Memorial. Staring up at the imposing statue, Klaatu reads the Gettysburg Address with respect and veneration: "Those are great words. He must have been a great man. That's the kind of man I'd like to talk to." Yet the leaders of the day will not meet with him. Here the film presents the contradiction between the ideals of the nation's fathers (and those who built monuments celebrating their words and deeds) and the state of the nation in the contemporary day. The film uses national monuments as a reminder of the nation's ideals and presents a warning that the monuments, and thereby the nation, are in grave danger if the United States does not join the nations of the world—and the universe—in peace.

This practice of using the monument as a locator or visual reminder of national ideals has continued in later, often low-budget, science fiction films—for example, *Them!* (David Weisbart, 1954) and *The Brother from Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1984). In the 1950s, filmmakers who could not afford to film in Washington, D.C., often used a distant shot of a landmark through a window or back-projection through car windows to locate the scene. For example, in *Them!* the Capitol looms in the distance behind Dr. Harold Medford as he lectures on ants to men in military uniforms. The national building framed in the window serves as a landmark, locating the action in Washington, D.C., but also

explains to the audience that the emergence of these mutant ants is in fact a national crisis that could destroy the entire national body.

Three decades later, John Sayles's *Brother*, a young black alien, lands on Earth and emerges out of New York Harbor at Ellis Island—the site where European immigrants (read: “aliens”) into the United States first landed. As *Brother* climbs to land, the Statue of Liberty is clearly seen in the background. *Brother* fearfully turns his head toward the monument as he surveys his new surroundings. While presented to the audience as a playful pun at first—extraterrestrial alien (science fiction) versus immigrant alien (social critique)—within the context of the entire film, this choice of landing site is crucial. By using Ellis Island as *Brother*'s point of entry, Sayles metaphorically juxtaposes the experience of European immigrants and that of African Americans. Like the alien/young black man who finds acceptance in Harlem but is “othered” within the larger society, African Americans are refused access to the promises given other immigrants. The extraterrestrial *Brother*, who has come to Earth to be free, is hunted by two (white) men dressed in black. By using the Statue of Liberty and *Brother*'s arrival at Ellis Island, Sayles informs his audience of the larger theme in the film of the alien/other in American society by placing his science fiction premise in a national, social space.

### Monuments under Attack

In science fiction films, the single alien poses little threat to Earth, but when many aliens enter the Earth's atmosphere, they usually come to attack, take over, or obliterate the planet. It is as if these films present the second coming of *Klaatu*—the *Armageddon* (Ruppersberg 32–38). These films speak to the concerns of their historical era: for example, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (Fred F. Sears, 1956) as a Cold War tale that celebrates the powers of the American military, and *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996) as a story that brings the divided citi-



In *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, a spaceship hovers near the White house.

zens of the nation (and thus the world) together by reinscribing the dominance of American patriarchy. In these films, the audience sees the city, and in particular the nation's monuments, under attack. Vivian Sobchack, in “Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science Fiction Film,” explains how these images of civilization's greatest achievements effortlessly “laid low” by alien destructive forces are used to create science fiction's aesthetic of destruction (Sontag 44):

The city's aspiring verticality, its lofty architecture, its positive “highness” that thrusts civilization toward transcendence and the future is—through privileged special effects—debased and brought low, and in a *mise-en-scène* that is bustling with contemporary activity and traffic and empathetically temporalized as “now.” (10)

Whether it is a flying saucer castrating the Washington Monument, an alien triumvirate of ships decapitating the White House, or an alien spaceship taking out the entire Washington Mall, the special effects are awe-inspiring and the emotional effect of watching the destruction of these symbols overwhelms audiences with shock, panic, and yet, a strange pleasure in the spectacle.

One of the most destructive battles

to take place on screen in the 1950s was between the aliens and earthlings in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. When Dr. Russ Marvin and his team of scientists send rocket satellites into space, ancient humanoid aliens come to Earth to find out whether the earthlings are trying to attack them. The humans respond with gunfire and the aliens plan their attack, telling all countries to prepare to surrender the planet. The final battle takes place in the center of Washington, D.C. While there are some human casualties, the aliens focus their death rays against the city's national monuments rather than at the people themselves. James Young's work on monuments offers insight into why the filmmaker's choice here is so crucial to the reading of the entire film and to science fiction as a genre:

By themselves, monuments are of little value, mere stones in the landscape. But as part of a nation's rites or the objects of a people's national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul and memory. For traditionally, the state-sponsored memory of a national past aims at affirm the righteousness of a nation's birth, even its divine election. . . . Indeed for memorials to do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state's seemingly natural right to exist. (2)

Instead of attacking the citizens, the aliens destroy the buildings that memorialize the nation's greatest leaders. The flying saucers, designed by special-effects animator Ray Harryhausen, fly over the Lincoln Memorial, land in front of the White House, then return to the skies to attack the Washington Monument, destroying building after building along the Mall, finally shaving off the top of the Capitol. However, because the filmmaker presents humans as the species that has been divinely selected (these are Hollywood films), humanity prevails against all odds. In the end, human technology (Dr. Marvin's sound-wave gun and the military's weaponry) saves the world and the final saucer is destroyed. In the face of such destruction, the science fiction film still offers hope that while monuments may fall, in the end human civilization will prevail.

Premiering forty years after *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* is similar in both its premise and approach. This becomes particularly clear when the first of the alien ships arrives in Washington, D.C. Its presence is first experienced in the city when the spaceship's shadow crawls up Lincoln's figure in the Lincoln Memorial, falls over the buildings along the Mall toward the Capitol, hovers over the Washington Monument, dwarfing the obelisk, finally coming to rest over the White House. It is worth noting here that the spaceship's course is in fact an impossible route. The shadows on the Lincoln Memorial necessitate that the spaceship be coming from the east, yet the next shot shows the ship traveling east toward the Capitol. This in some manner may show that it is not verisimilitude that the director was after, but rather that he presented the monuments and buildings in the order that would make them the most dramatically effective. Interestingly, throughout this entire sequence not a single person is seen, yet the images speak to the vulnerability of the entire nation and the ideals and aspirations embedded in these buildings. This again holds true when the aliens attack the White House; their concern is not to kill the leader of

The mass  
destruction of these  
national buildings  
and monuments  
encapsulates  
visually the fear  
of the transience  
of all things,  
including humanity.

the nation but rather to destroy the building that houses the aura of the nation's executive power.

After the first series of attacks on Washington, New York, and Los Angeles have taken place, the next day dawns on New York City. The Statue of Liberty lies with her face down in New York Harbor, "water gently lapping at Lady Liberty's nose," as the World Trade Center Towers lie crumpled in the distance burning, and the massive alien spaceship looms overhead, moving toward the center of the city (Prokop 77). Again, used as an entrance to the nation for the alien, as in *The Brother from Another Planet*, and as the nation's first line of defense, the statue physically details the extent of the destruction and the fear that liberty for the world and the nation has been defeated.

The mass destruction of these national buildings and monuments encapsulates visually the fear of the transience of all things, including humanity. Susan Sontag argues that the pleasure of these science fiction spectacles derives from the audience's ability to "participate in the fantasy of living through one's own death, and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself" (44). In this way viewers are able to experience their own deaths through the destruction of the city, which through the destruction of national monuments heralds the death of the national body.

But, in the end, there is retribution—through the use of highly sophisticated, technological machinery (often designed by a single man)—and resolution, as peace is declared again in all of the wounded cities of the world.

Interestingly, when the White House is destroyed in *Independence Day*, Air Force One becomes the new site that holds the aura of the nation's executive power, thus assuaging the fears of the transience of the "body" of the nation. As flames shoot up behind the airplane, the President flees the city, and Air Force One becomes a mobile ruin.

### The Monument in Ruin

This fear of the transience of modern urban civilization has often been imagined in the science fiction film, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s when the United States was experiencing domestic social unrest. Around the nation (and the globe) people were re-evaluating social institutions, demanding that no person should be deprived of his or her civil rights. People marched on Washington, lining the Mall, and standing on the steps of the nation's monuments challenging others to reinvestigate their understanding of the values and ideals on which the nation, and these monuments, were erected. Science fiction films of this era reflect these social concerns by imagining alternative worlds where modern society has been erased or abandoned and a new community—with new ideals and aspirations—has emerged. Vivian Sobchack discusses this transformation of the science fiction city in "Cities on the Edge of Time":

Thus many of the films of this period . . . imagine the old ideal model of cities like New York and Washington, D.C., in a fantasy of the "body in pieces," their monuments and buildings now fragments and potsherds strewn on an abandoned landscape on a radically altered planet. The aspiring city, once the center and architectural symbol of civilization, has fallen in ruins, is no longer functional, is no longer the center of human activity. (13)

In the late 1960s and 1970s, science fiction films that present Earth in the

future used national monuments as reminders of a long-discarded or erased past. These monuments, which have no meaning for the new civilians, become powerful symbols of all that has been lost and force the audience to consider what brought civilization to its end.

*Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968) tells the story of a group of NASA astronauts who, by way of a tear in a space-time continuum, arrive at a desolate planet (actually Earth) where apes are the dominant species and mute and illiterate men are their slaves. Apes have evolved dramatically, but humans have reverted to a crude existence. Taylor, a tall, blond, strong, white male, is the only astronaut to survive in this new world. He is the only human able to speak. Taylor is treated by the apes as if he were the savage animal. In this ape civilization, the roles are reversed from contemporary American society, and it is the white male who becomes the slave, the unwanted Other. When Taylor and his female companion Nova, with the help of two chimpanzee doctors, escape into the Forbidden Zone, Taylor believes that they are escaping into a world of freedom where he will be his own master and, with Nova, can begin a new human civilization. But in the film's final sequence, Taylor stops his horse and gets down on his knees as he stares up at the half-buried, battered Statue of Liberty thrown up against the sandy beach. It is only then that Taylor and the audience realize where he has been the entire time. As he raises his hands, Taylor screams out, "Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home, All the time it was—We finally really did it! . . . You maniacs! You blew it up! Oh, damn you! God damn you all to hell!"

The impact of this final sequence in *Planet of the Apes* is twofold, implying both that man has brought his own destruction upon himself and that a return to civilization, as Taylor and the audience know, is impossible. Taylor sees in this image of the Statue of Liberty that man has destroyed his own race; that they have used the Bomb, and it has, as was feared, obliterated all of human civilization. But the crumbled monument that once stood



**The broken Statue of Liberty looks down on the devastated Taylor (Charlton Heston) and his companion, Nova (Linda Harrison), in *Planet of the Apes*.**

for liberty serves also as a ominous signal to Taylor that humans can never return to their former state as members of a sophisticated civilization. Eric Greene, in *Planet of the Apes as American Myth*, explains:

The statue of the giant woman in front of Taylor and Nova is symbolic not only of U.S. history but also of mother nature. No hope for a new beginning in an idyllic paradise is offered because a pitiless nature has wiped out its mistake and the apes have risen to take over. . . . By encountering the statue just as they have begun their journey to start a new life together, they discover the evidence of the fall from grace before they even reach the garden. . . . The message of the Statue of Liberty is here inverted from "come in" to "stay out." They cannot start again because the destruction in front of them would ultimately be their end. (53–54)

The history of the human race has negated any chance for humanity to begin again. Taylor and Nova's destiny has been predetermined; humanity has failed to survive and can never return to its civilized past. The Statue of Liberty, which for decades greeted immigrants into a nation that was committed to freedom and opportunity for all, here rests broken and battered in the Forbidden Zone, warning Taylor that the freedom and the human community that he seeks can never triumph again. *Planet of the Apes* shows its audiences the arbitrary nature of racism, and through its final image, expresses the horrific result of man turning against man.

Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* (2001) speaks to the original film



through its similarly shocking final sequence at the foot of an American monument. U.S. Astronaut Leo Davidson (Mark Wahlberg) emerges from his crashed spaceship and enters a hostile world, where apes rule over humans, yet this planet with its multiple moons is decidedly not Earth. Here Davidson returns to Earth having traveled back in time, only to land on a planet like his own but with frightening details changed. At the end of the film, Davidson returns to Earth, and his spacepod crashes in Washington, D.C., at the steps of what seems to be the Lincoln Memorial. But when Davidson's eyes turn upward at the monument, the body memorialized has changed, and now it is his enemy, the chimpanzee General Thade. This final image of the Lincoln/Thade Memorial initially works as a reference to the first *Planet of the Apes* film, as a clever way to create the same shock value though a recontextualization of a common landmark that locates the hero in a specific place. This memorial not only parallels the humans as ape trope but also presents to the audience a ruin through a monument that never was. Thade has replaced Lincoln; this is an entirely new monument, not just a restructuring of a face. By choosing Lincoln, the film speaks to the values of this new Earth community, as a symbol of its inhabitants and their perception of heroism worthy of memorializing: the Great Emancipator Ape that led other apes to freedom, ostensibly through the destruction of the entire human population on Earth.

*Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) imagines a post-apocalyptic future civilization where its citizens have no memory of their past and their lives are controlled by a computer that sends them to their death through the mechanism of the Carousel at the age of thirty. Hermetically sealed in this biodome city—which in fact looks much like an overgrown shopping mall, escalators included—these young citizens live a life of pleasure, but they have no free will. Those who choose to escape death at the Carousel become runners and attempt to leave the city in search of a mythical place

Ultimately, these  
visions of  
monuments in  
science fiction  
films provide  
the audience the  
opportunity to  
experience an  
alternative time  
and space with  
a sense of  
verisimilitude.

called Sanctuary. This imagined city of the twenty-third century is presented as a place where fears of the 1970s have become reality: Humans are controlled by technology, and young people live a life of extravagance, unconcerned about the world around them. When he is sent by the computer to seek Sanctuary, Logan and his companion Jessica venture beyond the domed city walls to the world outside. The couple travels for days until they finally reach the ruins of an ancient city: Washington, D.C. Logan and Jessica innocently stare up at the Lincoln Memorial overgrown with vines. They are completely unaware of who this monument celebrates or what its significance is; yet the image's resonance is not lost on its audience. Although Jessica and Logan may be unaware, the filmmaker's choice of the Lincoln Memorial equates the couple's escape from the city's master machines and their search for Sanctuary with the Underground Railroad. In each journey, Lincoln is seen as the Great Emancipator.

The national monument is designed to resist age and to preserve the memory of its past, present, and future citizens. The science fiction film allows the audience the opportunity to see via special effects what Washington, D.C.,

would look like if these "eternal" spaces were abandoned. The realization of the vulnerability of civilization reverberates in the images of Logan and Jessica wading through the swamp-like Reflecting Pool toward the Washington Monument, now overgrown with plants, and finally to the doors of the Capitol, where hundreds of cats take the places of the congressmen who used to walk through its halls. Unlike the Statue of Liberty in *Planet of the Apes* or *Independence Day* or the Washington Monument in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, the monuments in *Logan's Run* have been abandoned, not destroyed. In his article "Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture," Kurt Forster defines ruins as "structures which have outlasted their usefulness" (11). In *Logan's Run*, these sites are ruins because of neglect; the nation has disappeared, and the meanings of its monuments have been lost along with its people. While even the Old Man cannot remember who the men are whose portraits line the walls of the Capitol (or even that the building is the Capitol), he does explain to Logan and Jessica the concept of the family, which they then share with the people of the Domed City. In this union between the young couple, a sense of hope is created at the end of the film (unlike either version of *Planet of the Apes*) that perhaps the old city—and its monuments—may someday be revisited, resurrected, and revered once more as a meaningful spectacle.

### Monumental Spectacles and Special Effects

Science fiction as a genre has always been at the forefront of using cutting-edge technology. Using every technique available—animation, model-making, and now, digital technology—the science fiction film has endlessly showcased new dramatic spaces, always seeking to answer the question, "What would happen if . . . ?" Special effects are perhaps most impressive when one component of a single image is a part of the familiar world and another part is fiction. In virtually all of the films discussed here, science fiction

animators, production designers, and computer engineers worked in unison to create a sense of contiguity between the space of the "real" national monument and the space of the imagined change to which it is subjected. Often, it is this image that elicits the most delight from the science fiction film fan: the moment in which the technology itself is foregrounded and the visual drama is fetishized. Vivian Sobchack explains what it is about this moment in the science fiction film that makes the climactic image doubly exhilarating for its audiences:

The satisfaction comes from seeing the visual integration of actual and impossible in the same frame, from the filmmaker's ability to make us suspend our disbelief at the very moment we are also wondering, "How did they do it?" (*Screening Space* 141)

Sobchack describes this as the science fiction film's simultaneous collision and collusion between the real and the fake, between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The pleasure for the science fiction fan is twofold. The audience is awed by the action and the image as it relates to the narrative as well as by the technical virtuosity of the special effects. By using a specific national monument as the site of this dynamic interchange, the image gains another layer of resonance within the narrative—that of the meaning of this action in relation to the national body and the ideals for which it stands. Whether it is used as a site of action, destruction, or ruin, the national monument in science fiction films encapsulates visually the grand and social themes that run through the narratives of the genre. Ultimately, these visions of monuments

in science fiction films provide the audience the opportunity to experience an alternative time and space with a sense of verisimilitude. The science fiction film allows the audience to sit back and revel in the spectacle of the special effects and experience transformation, death, or destruction of the world from the safety of their seats.

The national monument offers the cinema an aesthetically awe-inspiring image that evokes ideals that resonate far beyond the confines of the frame. The national monument, already a part of the national imaginary, becomes a site of condensation and displacement. The Statue of Liberty, the Washington Monument, and the Lincoln Memorial serve as physical embodiments of aspirations and ideals, and as such carry with them a series of associations related to the nation and the political body. By engaging with the sites and meanings of these national monuments, science fiction filmmakers from the 1950s to the present day have mobilized this architectural genre to express or challenge larger national discourses of their own historical era. There is still more to be explored here. From Jefferson Smith gazing at the Lincoln Memorial in search of inspiration to Brother arriving at Ellis Island and staring at the menacing figure of Lady Liberty, the national monument offers extraordinary opportunities for the filmmaker to interrogate its significance, to celebrate its spectacle, and to offer the audience the opportunity to see, revisit, the spaces where national memory is contained.

#### WORKS CITED

Forster, Kurt W. "Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture." *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 2–19.

- Greene, Eric. *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race and Politics in the Films and Television Series*. Jefferson: McFarland, 1996.
- Mazzoleni, Donatella. "The City and the Imaginary." *Space & Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. Trans. John Koumantarakis. Ed. Erika Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993.
- Musil, Robert. "Monuments." *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*. Trans. Peter Wortsman. Hygiene: Eridanos, 1987.
- Prokop, Tim. "Fireworks." *Cinefex* 67 (Sept. 1996): 58–84.
- Ruppersberg, Hugh. "The Alien Messiah." *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. Ed. Annette Kuhn. New York: Verso, 1990. 32–38.
- Sobchack, Vivian. "Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science Fiction Film." *East-West Film Journal* 3.1 (Dec. 1986): 4–19.
- . *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987.
- Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster." *Against Interpretation*. New York: Dell, 1969. 212–28.
- Szebin, Frederick C. "In Space No One Can Hear You Sing." *Cinefantastique* 29.10 (Feb. 1998): 38–45.
- Torry, Robert. "Apocalypse Then: Benefits of the Bomb in Fifties Science Fiction Films." *Cinema Journal* 31.1 (Fall 1991): 7–21.
- Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.
- Zelinsky, Wilbur. *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.

---

MIRANDA J. BANKS is a doctoral candidate in UCLA's Department of Film and Television. Her dissertation is a study of television's female action heroes.

---

