from:

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Metaphysical Media

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Possessed and Dispossessed by Mass Media

The world is all the richer for having a devil in it, so long as we keep our foot upon his neck.

—William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)

The Devil in the Bullet

Occult traditions are the heritage of enigmatic beliefs, the knowledge and practices regarded as irrational and bizarre by mainstream society and largely discarded by it. Belief in demon possession is an example. Widespread until the end of the sixteenth century, it was no longer acceptable by the twentieth century to suppose that a person's soul could be suppressed or evicted from his or her body, allowing a discarnate entity, spirit, or "devil" to take up residence. In 1972, a short while before the release of the film *The Exorcist*, the Roman Catholic Church had abolished the practice of ousting a possessing devil. It had become an occult practice. Yet, the following year, exorcism was no longer an esoteric and forgotten ritual because of its display in a widely popular film. When *The Exorcist* opened to packed cinemas in 1973, secret rituals that had been known only to a few select members of the clergy and then abolished were suddenly part of the popular vernacular. Interest in the occult practice of exorcism grew. (See fig. 1.1.)

By 1999, the United Press International reported that the Vatican had developed new guidelines for the process of exorcism, the first update of the ritual since 1614. By the turn of the twenty-first century, it appeared that the number of exorcism rituals were increasing, with hundreds of Protestant evangelical rites occurring in the United States. Fordham University sociologist Michael Cuneo believes popular books and movies provided models for possession, which resulted in revising the once obscure occupation of the exorcist. Addictions, compulsions, and depressions were no longer considered the psychological problems of

Fig. 1.1. Linda Blair as the demon-possessed Regan in *The Exorcist* (1973). Warner Brothers. Photo courtesy of Photofest.

evidence of demon possession from earlier ones. The modern exorcism became a recovery program with a supernatural bent. Attending these exorcisms as part of his research, Cuneo even suggested that for some cases, the process of exorcism was therapeutically useful.

In 1973, I was working for a small NBC affiliate in Alabama when I began hearing about the odd effects of the motion picture *The Exorcist*. Some audience members watching the film vomited, left the theatre terrorized, or became convinced that they were possessed by demons. Although such effects were rare, occurring to only a handful of the many people that viewed the popular film, they were astonishing enough to become the topic of American news reports and for the British Board of Film Classification to ban the movie.[1] I was aware of no one in my community who suffered such an extreme effect of watching the film, yet its influence on some audience members in other communities became a featured news item on my station's local newscast. *The Exorcist* renewed old concerns about improper media influence.[2] Some parents, teacher groups, and concerned citizens believed that if a film produced hysteria in one audience member, it must—to some degree—have a similar effect on us all. This theory of direct media influence on a mass society is a vintage, much criticized, and yet enduring concept about the effects of media on audiences. The notion of direct media effects can be compared to possession itself. The "devil" media eject or suppress the audience's "mind," replacing it with the whims and will of those forces behind the media to which the possessed public responds helplessly. The theory

proposes that mediated content triggers an immediate, predictable, and uniform response on defenseless people. Though the concerns underlying the concept of direct media influence are more often about the viability of democracy and the media's responsibility to ensure an informed electorate, or about whether media violence directly impacts social violence, there is a lesser but parallel worry for the healthy psyches of a media-influenced population. The anxiety about audience reaction to *The Exorcist* in 1973 was based on parallel assumptions about the direct impact of mediated messages.

Because human beings are biologically similar, the reasoning goes, we must be emotionally similar as well. The idea of direct media effects assumes that there is very little negotiation or discussion among audiences about the messages in popular culture. The social changes during the last century detached some people from traditional ties to church and family, a type of isolation that several critics believe left young people particularly vulnerable to media influence. This perceived vulnerability promoted a general discussion about the direct influence of popular media on socialization and a coincident discussion about the influence of media stories like *The Exorcist* on the religious imagination. When individuals are separated from one another, confused about their role or purpose in life, this theory suggests, dominant and authoritative media messages can easily induce audiences' beliefs and inspire audiences' behavior.[3]

When it opened in 1973, *The Exorcist* shocked some audiences with its sensory onslaught of avant-garde imagery. Author and producer of the film William Peter Blatty intended *The Exorcist* to be an uplifting work, reassuring a skeptical modern public about the absolute existence of God by rendering a portrait of the Devil (Kermode, "Exorcist" 43).[4] Never mind that the movie's message ultimately restated a fundamentalist religious position, some religious groups condemned *The Exorcist* and similar movies as vectors of spiritual pollution. As Drury observes of the period, the motto of those who denounced *The Exorcist* appeared to be "mention the devil and he will appear" (97). With their criticisms based on the assumptions of direct media influence, those who denounced the film for glorifying the Devil were themselves proof that audiences actively interpret and form opinions about the meaning and impact of a movie, at times without even watching it. Plenty of people did watch *The Exorcist*, however, waiting in long lines for tickets. This became another concern for critics, because the "bullet theory," or concept of direct media effects, also gauges media success by numerical superiority: the bigger the audience, the larger the influence. A successful movie must have a

large box office draw. This was certainly true of *The Exorcist*, which brought in unprecedented crowds with its combination of violence, magic, and nasty visuals. The film placed "cheap thrills in the context of serious work," producing an enduring cultural image of a possessed preteen vomiting in a priest's face (Paul 84). The movie received ten Academy Award nominations following the original 1973 release and won an Oscar for best adapted screenplay. The undeniable critical and economic success of *The Exorcist* inspired sequels, books, television programs, additional movies with related themes, and a twenty-fifth anniversary rerelease.[5] Clearly, the movie touched a responsive nerve in audiences and a corresponding fiscal nerve in producers.

Noticing the popularity of this film, critics who longed for a more paternalistic media system reiterated the dilemma of our capitalistic scheme: the economically successful media product might not be socially healthy for most or even aesthetically bearable for others. The commercial structure of the American media system means an audience can choose what it finds interesting and affordable. Rather than watch programs a government committee selects for the public good (or because of the influence of a lobby), audiences consume what they like. The result, say critics, is a gluttonous public feeding on the "mind candy" of a frenzied cultural diet rather than reasoned consumption of balanced and enriching fare. Critics believed impressionable young children and teens, just beginning to form their ideas about the world and how it works, were particularly vulnerable to disturbing films like *The Exorcist*. Other popular horror movies of the era helped to reprise discussion similar to the great comic-book scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, in which fear of a government-controlled media contended with the fear of media-warped children (Muhlen; Thrasher; Wertham; Warshow).

Though the concept of direct media influence has fallen out of favor with most scholars, the outmoded concept continues to fuel the anxiety of ordinary people, particularly as it relates to popular media and stories about the occult. Observers remain troubled that popular culture, especially movies and television, are the major spiritual force and ethical guide in children's lives (Rust and Wagner).

In addition to concern about the stories in popular media, some anxieties centered on media technologies themselves as the primary risk. This concern is that not only are the messages dangerous but the technology that transmits them is itself a powerful, dark force that can overtake individuals. Technology, like tarot cards and Ouija boards, becomes the very instrument that lets the Devil in.[6] Like the "magic bullet" theory, which

asserts a direct link between media and their effect on audiences, the idea of media as evil presents human beings as defenseless in the path of powerful technology. In this instance, the "bullet" is not simply a mediated message but the system that delivers it. Some have taken the idea of technology as evil to the extreme. For example, one story in online version of the supermarket tabloid *Weekly World News* reported the fears of a Savannah clergyman who believed the personal computer is yet another device through which Lucifer and his minions can poison human souls. According to this thinking, the more powerful computers become, the more dangerous they are to the spiritual well-being of ordinary people who use them. Reverend Jim Peasboro suggested that any PC built after 1985 has the storage capacity to accommodate evil intelligence and disclosed cases from his own congregation where people "became in touch with a dark force whenever they used their computers. . . . One woman wept as she confessed to me, 'I feel when I'm on the computer as if someone else or something else just takes over'" ("Is Your Computer"). The idea here is clearly a fear of being "directly possessed" through media technology. Upon the initial release of *The Exorcist*, the Reverend Billy Graham suggested ominously that there was a dark power in the film that went beyond its story, hinting that the spirit of the Devil resides within the celluloid. Blatty responded to Graham's alarm that the film had uncanny power: "There is a power to move you and have a disturbing effect on the viewer, which is greater than the sum of its parts. It's enormous and mysterious but, my God, it's not the power of evil."[7]

The Occult and the Obstinate Audience

In contradiction to the idea of direct media influence is a concept of audience members as complex negotiators between media and effects. Media scholars first noticed a limited media influence as it concerned the effect of radio and newspaper endorsements on voting behavior. But there were other areas in which media influence was also less powerful than might be presumed. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's prime-time preaching during the 1950s and 1960s might be considered successful by some accounts but didn't convert all viewers. The Reverend Robert Schuller's ministry, begun in 1955 in a drive-in movie theater, would discover its congregation through the airwaves and become a highly rated religious program by 1998. Yet even Reverend Schuller's charismatic television presence on the *Hour of Power* (1955–) doesn't persuade every audience member to accept his message.[8] Advertisers had realized long ago that not every viewing of a commercial resulted in a purchase. The observation that many

media attempts to persuade audiences often fail caused scholars to reconsider the notion of the media's ability to have a direct impact on a mass society.

Many scholars will agree that media communication is more complicated than a simple linear model would suggest. An unambiguous message rarely rolls effortlessly and unabated from sender to receiver, where it gets the intended response. Media writers and producers may be oblivious to the latent messages they send. Some messages may be incomplete or obtuse. Audiences may be unaware of the messages they've received or miss their intent altogether. The narratives of mass consumption, the stories told through movies and television, are the result of many layers of the communication process: human involvement, human response, understanding, and misunderstanding. Confusion, misinterpretation, and negotiation are possible at every juncture. Audiences may be as active and inventive as media writers and producers in the process of creating meaning for media messages. For example, Callie Khouri, screenwriter for the popular film *Thelma and Louise* (1991), observes that audiences don't always react to a movie in the expected way. She was troubled by the response of an audience to a scene in her movie where the character Louise, a world-weary waitress, shoots and kills a man who only moments before had attempted to force himself on her friend. "When I first viewed my own movie with an audience and the shooting occurred, the audience cheered," Khouri explained,

> and I was stunned because I had expected—hoped for—a completely different reaction from the audience—[one] of realization that this character had just sealed her fate in a very horrible way, but instead they burst into applause. I was terrified. I realized I can't control how my work is perceived—that people bring to it what it is they come from.[9]

Even when audiences fully understand the communication intentions behind a media message, they may still refuse to accept, believe, endorse, or act upon it. If the process of watching film or television is a creative one, some audiences may be creating alternate scenarios from the images they see, "writing" entirely new scripts in their imaginations. Raymond Bauer noticed the many defeats of media attempts at persuasion and referred to this phenomenon as "the obstinate audience." It seems that audience members do indeed filter the meanings of messages through a shield of personal experiences and beliefs. Some audience members may belong to groups with opinion leaders or have influential friends who can alter the intended effects of mass media. The idea of an obstinate audience

denies the notion that media influence is as immediate and as verbatim as a writer or producer might intend. This newer concept suggested that there are many variables involved in audiences' responses to what they hear and see. Audiences may selectively edit, reinvent, or mentally argue with media messages. They may choose to turn away from them altogether, never exposing themselves to the messages. This was a reassuring concept. If the audience is obstinate, not only is democracy safer, but critics need not be so concerned about the direct influence of media violence or other potentially harmful messages. Similarly, if families and friends help audience members interpret and filter what they see, occult material disbursed through popular media should be much less of a threat. Contemporary audiences more savvy about the methods of media production may have an additional "filter" allowing them to be less persuaded by media contents. The "bad aesthetic" film is a case in point. Low-budget horror movies originally produced with the intention to terrify often have the opposite effect, empowering adolescents to laugh at what was meant to be scary. Clumsy film and television treatments of occult themes establish a following among audiences who enjoyed feeling superior to both the film's poor aesthetic as well as its occult message. Some within these audiences have indeed become "aesthetic skeptics," unwilling to suspend disbelief even for mainstream films because they like the position of domination over the media experience that the critical outsider enjoys.

Yet, American media critics were still concerned. Lonely young people, curious about the taboo, seeking out media messages about magic and the supernatural, might still be vulnerable audiences. Believing that many audience members are without strong interpersonal filters and not stubborn enough to resist compelling media narratives, some feared the obstinacy of a media system that distorts religious people, making the heretics the heroes (Gahr). Others noticed the tendency for Hollywood to tell stories predicated on the "reality" of the supernatural (Hess), even within a "culture of disbelief" (Carter).

The Uses and Gratifications for Occult Narrative

Some people began to see the expansion of cable and alternative media in the 1970s and 1980s as a healthy indication that a stronger diversity of messages and audience options would mean a less powerful, more diluted media influence. Though the questions of why audiences make the choices in media content that they do and how audiences are gratified by those choices had been studied earlier, the 1970s and 1980s brought new interest

in the ways audiences select and employ media. This "uses and gratifications" approach argues that audiences actively select media content to satisfy their own needs, an essential factor determining media effects (Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren). Uses and gratifications research examined relationships between individual audience members' personality traits and media choices. Studies found that audiences experiencing social or psychological problems used media to resolve those problems. Often the research was concerned with social isolation and the ways lonely individuals found gratification in media use. The research suggested that an audience member's psychological disposition and social circumstances influence habits of media use. These factors, along with judgments about past media experience, shape expectations about media content, which continue to determine an audience member's choices (Rubin). For example, curiosity about the taboo, a need for magic and ritual, a quest for meaning in a disposable culture, or simple boredom might be factors leading audiences to media messages about the occult and the supernatural. Because occult themes are more often the department of popular culture than high culture and are rejected by authoritative critics, adolescent audiences may consider these taboo topics more intriguing and glamorous. Occult themes are not frequent topics of discussion among parents, teachers, and their charges. With no appointed intermediaries to guide young audiences' understanding of what they consume, many critics regard popular culture as not only aesthetically inferior and escapist but dangerous.

Even with an expanding number of media outlets, more variety of media content, and audiences that might be considered more active consumers, critics held out even less hope for "highbrow" or superior content as the 1980s progressed, expecting a continuing deterioration of aesthetic tastes and cultural standards as programmers looked to schedule whatever content was cheapest and appealed to the largest audience (Winston 480). Though most of the concern about media influence concentrated on the effects of media violence and the atrophy of cultural ideals, a parallel concern pondered the effects of media on faith and the spiritual life of audiences. Some critics worried that media or "electronic churches" were replacing traditional worship. Others believed more channels might lead to wider exposure for cults. Relaxed, rested, and comfortable in front of their home televisions, individuals might be more receptive to cult messages than they would be if accosted on the street by a smiling cult member (Dobson). Most vigorously criticized on its debut in 1980 was MTV (Music Television) for its violent, erotic, and dreamlike imagery. Conservative groups felt that heavy metal music and the diabolic imagery exhibited on MTV were serious threats to the spiritual well-being of general audiences. During the 1970s and 1980s, devil hunters found Satan everywhere in popular culture: in movies, books, comics, and the lyrics of rock music played backward. If producers of popular culture looked to attract audiences, then the abundance of paranormal subjects in popular culture must be in response to some perceived audience need or desire. Research on effects of paranormal themes in media indicated physiological arousal in audiences and a postviewing anxiety for some (Cantor; Cantor and Sparks; Sparks, Nelson, and Campbell), arousal effects that some audiences might actually seek out (E. Edwards, "Ecstasy").

As the new millennium neared, critics continued to voice concerns that certain media contents threaten the well-being of audiences. Such items of popular culture as Pokemon[10] and the Harry Potter trilogy[11] excited sentiments to boycott the movies or ban the books and subsequent movies the books would instigate. (See fig. 1.2.) This fear was articulated primarily by Christian conservatives distraught with the notion that the Pokemon media and Potter novels glorify "dangerous" alternative religions and witchcraft. For example, one woman wrote the editor of a North Carolina newspaper warning that Eastern mysticism inspired the Pokemon phenomenon: "There is occult energy involved, tapping into water, fire, leaf and wind energy. You can supposedly achieve enlightenment and success from Pokemon and the demonic realm" (Pulliam). For the monist who cherishes the one Bible-revealed truth, Pokemon, Harry Potter, and movies like *The Exorcist* served to remind the orthodox that there was a spiritual war to be waged. Some critics felt that this repetition of narratives about the supernatural might combine to create a cultural insistence on the authenticity of the occult, helping to break down the obstinacy of audience belief (Sparks, "Paranormal Depictions"). Through repetition, the stories of popular culture tend to validate a certain perception of the world rather than improve it, reiterate old stories rather than initiate new ones, and help to cultivate audiences' perceptions of the world in which they live.[12] Media discourse is one process in the cultural negotiation of ideology, that "articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs that can be abstracted as a world-view or class outlook" (Williams 109). Some media scholars believe that widespread and frequent repetition of similar media texts can have a forceful impact on social consensus (Gerbner) as well as a powerful effect on individual conviction (Noelle-Neumann). When media narratives feature ghosts, angels, witches, demons, and other supernatural events, they comment

on the metaphysical, the nature of a world we cannot directly know. If media narratives repeat similar concepts, these concepts are likely to become part of the predominant worldview. In an era in which knowledge of an experience substitutes for experience itself, moving-image media can have a powerful influence on what audiences think they know. The assumption is that if audiences consistently hear other people describe supernatural experiences in documentaries and frequently see fictional characters interact with magic in the movies, the repetitions combine to shape a cultural insistence on their authenticity.

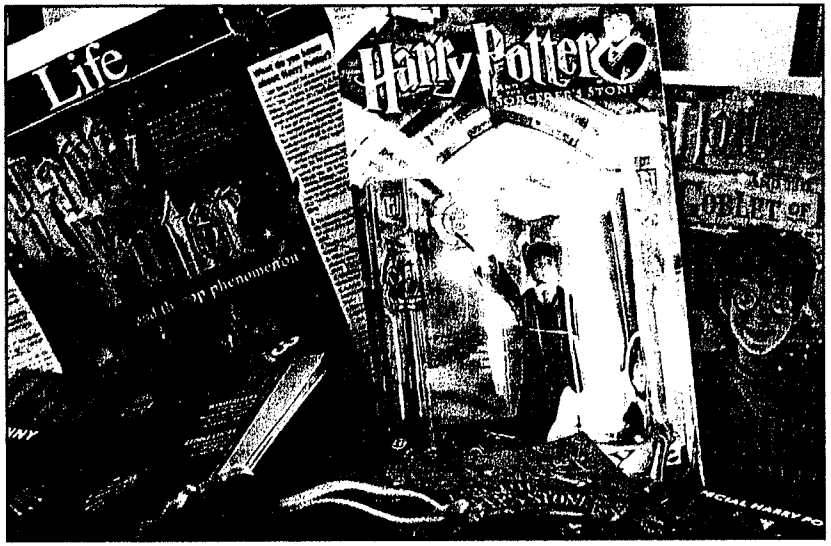

Fig. 1.2. Harry Potter merchandise based on the popular children's series, a demonstration of media marketing. Photo by E. D. Edwards.

David Hess (120–41) believes that Hollywood is primarily a defender of the paranormal. He argues that American movie narratives frequently reject skeptical interpretations and ask audiences to accept a paranormal reading for events within the narrative. Particularly when the paranormal appears in the horror genre, skeptical characters are depicted as foolish when they cling to their skepticism. This reading of horror movies has some validity. During the course of a typical horror tale, the paranormal, which makes its existence known and "real" in the story, causes the authoritative forces of science and society to appear helpless, even silly. The skeptic in the narrative must convert to belief or be defeated.

However, Hollywood narratives about supernatural events are not always one-sided in support of paranormal explanations. Within the

broader scope of American media, there is discourse in the dramas, contradictions for audiences to negotiate. Even though the idea of exorcism may have spread through media repetition of the theme, not all media stories endorse the idea of possession. For example, an episode of a 2002 television series, *Glory Days*, demonstrates the contradiction.[13] The television program paid homage to *The Exorcist* by revisiting the film's visual style in some scenes, rehashing its story of possession, and making overt references to the original movie and the case that inspired it. Yet, the plot supports skepticism over belief by revealing the possession as a hoax. Similarly, news reports about the increase in exorcism at the end of the twentieth century clearly blamed social tensions over supernatural ones as reasons for the seeming proliferation of exorcisms in the United States (Rotschild; Fountain). The public was reminded that *The Exorcist* is only a movie after all. While the practice of exorcism appears to have increased in America in the decades following the movie, it's still far from a widespread phenomenon. The percentage of the population requesting the ritual remains a tiny one.

Media as "Tribe"

For modern audiences, the consumption of media has become one ritual central to socialization and the dissemination of sacred and secular myth. Even so, sacramental needs may not always be fulfilled by remaining a member of the audience and simply watching. There may also be a need to participate. By watching, audiences receive the myths but don't engage in the ceremonies that recognize individuals as members of a tribe. During the 1980s, 1990s, and into the new millennium, ordinary people seemed to have a desire for media fame, to become a recognized member of the media "tribe," to be revealed, recorded, and distinguished by the camera. Television began to respond to this need for participation in the media tribe with so-called reality programming. Public confession on television brought notoriety, and it substantiated and authenticated an ordinary individual, even if it meant that individual must show the most embarrassing and private moments to the nation. Modern life might seem pointless at times, but appearing on television even in the most trivialized way offered a wink at significance, acknowledgment as an initiate into that sacred clan of media personalities.

Audiences choosing to remain outside the screen also appeared to have developed a desire to hear others acknowledge guilt; to see the spontaneous, unscripted interactions of ordinary people dealing with challenging and wicked situations inside the public venue of media display. Seeing

these "average" people exposed, members of the audience could have a moment of superiority. These twin desires for public notice and private arrogance accompanied the rise of reality media in the 1990s, as talk shows like *Jerry Springer* and programming like *Survivor* and *Real World* came into vogue.[14] The attention such programs gave to the "average" life was brief, arbitrary, and cheap, but some audiences seemed eager to watch, even to participate. People appearing on television could become famous for no other reason than the drama of that public appearance. Through exposure in the media, the ordinary individual would no longer be average but would become a celebrity. If traditional ties to interpersonal "tribes" of family and friends were weak or extinct, or if an individual felt socially isolated and confused about a purpose in life, that person might feel a greater need to belong to the mediated tribe. Eager for that fifteen minutes of validation in a culture that celebrates the individual, some audience members might become desperate for the media to notice them as unique and cherished; or if not cherished, at least noticed. In this sense, the media could unintentionally add to a powerful psychological problem.

Critics will often blame the exotic portraits of occult ritual found in film and television for the bizarre, even violent, behavior of some teens. When young people turn away from sanctioned values and beliefs to dabble in shockingly dramatic occult ritual or to dismay society with public violence, media fantasies often get the blame. Yet, more than inspiration from any music, film, or television imagery, the need to participate, to be recognized and validated, may be the real inspirations for the violence of situations like the Columbine High School shootings and the copy-cat violence that followed at other schools. Even the suicide of the teenage pilot mimicking the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center may have been the result of a desperate need for notice, regard, and purpose, though news coverage of September 11 inspired that specific violent behavior.[15]

If there is a devil in American media, it may be in the predilection to make us see ourselves as base and ordinary, unable to compare favorably with the glamour, talent, or beauty of media stars. Media personalities are noticed, remembered, adored, and sometimes respected. Removed from the bitterness of everyday frustrations, they seem smarter, more attractive, with more money, greater athletic prowess, more enriching experiences, and more interesting stories than most of us can hope for. Their lives end and begin again; they age, yet seem immortal. Ordinary men and women are no match; the standard is too high. The real devil

may reside in the propensity of popular media to make poor and average citizens see themselves as repulsive and unimportant. Their resources may be too meager to purchase the corrective remedies commercials promise will cure their degraded condition and bring beauty, pleasure, or approval. American media let the "have-nots" know what they are missing, so that a have-not individual may eventually come to reject the possibility of personal happiness or acceptance in an idealized, media-defined world.

In a scene cut from the original release of *The Exorcist*, Father Lankester Merrin (Max von Sydow) and Father Damien Karras (Jason Miller) have a discussion during a lull in the exorcism ritual. Father Karras asks why an ordinary, sweet-faced young girl should be selected as the Devil's victim. "Why this girl?" Father Karras asks, "it makes no sense." After a moment, Father Merrin explains, "I think the point is to make us despair. To see ourselves as animal and ugly. To reject the possibility that God could love us."

Yet, media images may paradoxically suggest that the ordinary individual can accomplish a moment of media notoriety and even social power, and that the effortless way to achieve entry into the media world is to flaunt an embarrassing moment, expose personal failure, perhaps even adopt violence. By embracing the genuinely degraded condition, an unexceptional individual is guaranteed attention. People do not need to be beautiful, talented, or clever to drop their pants or wield a gun.

When ordinary lives can't compete with the media ideal, the hopeful initiate looks for alternative routes to validation.

The Occult and Social Anxiety

We define the occult as the remnants of *abandoned* religious beliefs. However, contemporary neopagan movements and similar alternative religious groups have reactivated various occult traditions that had once been abandoned. The result was an occult renaissance at the end of the twentieth century in America that mirrored the spiritualism of the late nineteenth century. New Age, Wiccan, neopagan, and new evangelical charismatic groups began to surface (Howard).[16] As American audiences searched for meaning in a bewildering era, alternate religious groups enriched the landscape with various hopes and spiritual visions. Many of these visions fueled the conflicting currents of mass media stories.

When change in society is rapid, people may be forced to reevaluate their choices, their roles, and their beliefs about established institutions, including religious institutions. This was certainly as true at the end of

the twentieth century as it was at the end of the nineteenth. Rumors about the dangers of new technologies, scientific discoveries that altered old assumptions, advancements in medicine, changing social roles, and rapid shifts in the ethnicity of a population combine to create social anxiety. For example, when Darwin's concepts about the origins of the species emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it laid suspicion on the existence of God as traditionally viewed. Having evolved along with the rest of the cosmos, humankind lost the status of a privileged creation cast in the divine image. This was a disturbing idea for the Victorian era, yet an idea still largely confined to discourse among the educated elite. Tensions that had only begun to crawl to the surface at the end of the nineteenth century were standing upright and walking by the end of the twentieth. As scientists began deciphering the three billion units that make up human DNA, the human body no longer seemed a sacred vessel of the soul, but territory on which biotech companies could stake a patent claim (Sagoff). By the start of the new millennium, people learned that humans share DNA with lettuce. Films and television programs about the supernatural provided a comforting space, where audiences could continue to indulge in a world propelled by a magic that held humanity at its center. Media stories allowed audiences to suspend time and become emerged in a miraculous world of personal gods and spiritual purpose, even if scientific findings cast doubt on such a world. Paradoxically, media narratives about the supernatural may also have functioned to weaken alternative ideologies and even some aspects of orthodox belief by reducing these to popular-culture myths.

The obstinacy of the occult to persist in modern media may be related in part to what Alper describes as the "God" part of the brain. Recognizing that every culture from the earliest records of humankind have believed in some sort of spiritual reality, Alper suggests that human spirituality must emanate from a congenital trait passed from parent to child. Human beings have an awareness of their own mortality. To counter the anxiety of this knowledge, Alper believes, the cognitive centers of the human brain are "wired" to perceive reality with spiritual determination, so that human spirituality has evolutionary origins. What creates social issues is the different ways that spirituality becomes articulated. Though some audiences may be shocked or disgusted by media narratives about the occult, others embrace the message that there are genuine supernatural forces in this world. The popularity of messages about the supernatural may reflect both audiences' and producers' dread of becoming dispossessed by the meaninglessness of a profane existence.

During times of social stress, audiences' reliance on media communication increases. Though recognizing that media are hardly "devils" dispossessing individuals of their reason, scholars have come to recognize the dominance of mass communication in satisfying the needs of audiences. Audiences depend on media to answer questions, to help shape attitudes, to decide what's important, to expand belief systems, and to clarify values.[17] Even in their entertainment function—perhaps especially in the entertainment function—media stories assist audience members in the quest for identity and inspire the meaning that audiences bring to their lives.[18] For example, when asked their religious affiliation on the 2001 census forms, many Britons wrote in "Jedi Knight." So many professed to believe in the "force" as depicted in the American *Stars Wars* films that the government had to create a category of "Jedi Knight" when compiling census results.[19] There's no denying that media have power. Indeed, after a movie is finished, it may for many years continue to launch new ideas, discussion, and misapprehension, just as the Warner Home Video re-release of *The Exorcist* inspired new deliberation and review of a twenty-five-year-old movie (Kermode, "Exorcist"; Hibbs). Film and television, as Walter Lippmann might say, put "pictures in our heads," and some of these pictures become enduring cultural icons.

C. Wright Mills observed that communication stands between human consciousness and existence, influencing what we know about our life and the meaning we bring to it (333). In the twentieth century, media communication became both the agent of human knowledge and the delegate of social consensus. In addition to making audiences think about certain things, powerful media messages tapped emotions and "other processes over which individuals have little voluntary control" (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 165). If emotions are the doorway to our spiritual life, media communication may stand alongside interpersonal rituals as a path to that door. Not only the valve between human emotional experience and human understanding, media communication might also be the agents that arouse our spiritual dispositions and shape our understanding of a metaphysical world. This would make media communication—moving-image media in particular—very powerful indeed.

Out of Body

Transmission and Transcendence Through Popular Culture

There are half hours that dilate to the importance of centuries.
—Mary Catherwood, *Lazarre* (1901)

The patron saint of television, Clare Offreduccio, was born into Italian nobility in 1194, centuries before television technology would be developed. She defied her parents and ran away from her family's palace to take the veil and follow St. Francis of Assisi. She would later become the founder of the oldest women's order, the Order of the Poor Ladies (Gibeau). At the end of her life, confined to her bed, too sick to attend mass, the dying nun saw a vision of the liturgy on the wall of her room. She could see and hear the service as if she were actually attending the mass. Although the thirteenth-century nun had been credited with many miracles, it was this "out of body" vision that caused Pope Pius XII to declare Clare Offreduccio the "patron saint of television" in 1958. The miraculous ability to have a vision of something happening in another place or time was wondrous in the thirteenth century, but it has become prevalent today through the use of communication technology. Though this technology surrounds contemporary life, moving-image and sound media still seem to retain a strange sense of mystery and connection to those things we can't explain. To the naive mind, media technologies are themselves miraculous.

I remember as a young girl having a discussion with my grandmother about her early film experiences, experiences that astonished and confounded her. Born in 1898 of immigrants from Norway, she had seen theatrical plays but was completely baffled when her parents took her to see a black-and-white silent film in 1912. The film bewildered her. She couldn't understand why the actors looked so "pasty" and was astounded by how quickly those sickly looking actors changed clothes and scenery.

When her parents tried to explain that she was seeing a film, she could only grasp the phenomenon as something wizardly. She had trouble understanding her early media experience because it didn't seem to be limited to the physical world as she knew it, by the natural decrees of time and space. The technology, as her parents attempted to describe it, made no sense to her, but magic, the kind that powered flying carpets or turned pumpkins into coaches, was something she understood. She decided that it was magic she had seen.

I knew how my grandmother felt because of my own early experiences with magical thinking and the new medium of my childhood: television. I was quite small when my family bought a television set, and I became a faithful viewer of *Captain Kangaroo*, which was already a well-established children's program when I began watching it.[1] The captain created a fanciful world where sock puppets seemed alive and invisible hands drew pictures on a magic drawing board. Occasionally, he would read aloud letters from viewers. I desperately wanted Captain Kangaroo to have a letter of mine to read aloud. I carefully wrote him a note and made a drawing, folded these together, stuffed them in an envelope addressed to "Captain Kangaroo," and slid the envelope under the television set, where I expected it would be wondrously whisked away to the captain's imaginary world. I was disappointed when program followed program and the captain never elected to read my letter or show my drawing to the viewing audience. Many years later, when my family moved the television set to replace it with a new one, I found the letter still under the set, yellowed with time. My childhood missive had never been magically spirited through the television set to the captain's mailbox, as my child's logic supposed it would be. I tell this story because it illustrates how a naive mind conceives the technology of television and motion pictures as wizardly devices. If they can transport our imaginations, which seem so real to us, surely they might transport material things.[2]

Because our communications technologies seem to be beyond the physical limitations of time, space, and physical substance, a child might easily assume the technology has supernatural capacities, not only to miraculously transport items of substance but to eclipse death. For example, on September 13, 2001, following the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Diane Sawyer reported on ABC News the plaintive account of a young child who lost her father to the attack and was confused by reports of victims who had used their cell phones to contact loved ones before they died. The child wondered why her mother couldn't just use a cell phone to contact her father in heaven.

Children aren't alone in thinking that communications technologies may have metaphysical connections. In the 1970s, Beth Bentley examined a collection of narratives from people who believed they had received telephone calls from deceased loved ones. Jeffrey Sconce's book *Haunted Media* provides numerous examples of belief in "electromagnetic mysteries," where mysterious new technologies are thought to open telegraph lines to supernatural worlds (21–44). Communications media that can empower an eerie form of bodied disembodiment seem nothing less than magical.

At the end of the nineteenth century, various predictions suggested that the world was about to enter a true period of enlightenment. People believed that as our technologies matured and human beings mastered various problems through science, we would come to reject our superstitions and fully embrace scientific reason. The expectation was that as we stepped into the twentieth century, humankind would advance, and—with scientific wisdom—divest our culture of childish magic and superstitious artifacts. Yet, one of the earliest uses for the newly developing technologies of photography and motion pictures in the late 1800s was to produce hoaxes in an attempt to reinvigorate and profit from ancient superstitions. In darkened rooms, "mediums" used the new film technology for faked seances, projecting images of deceased individuals on smoke columns or walls to create the illusion of contact with spirits. Through use of the new technology, magicians created the illusion of "real" magic (Barnouw). As the motion picture industry developed and understanding about the technology of motion picture photography matured, audiences abandoned these fraudulent seances, knowing the sorcery was counterfeit. However, movies continued to tell supernatural stories, relaying the folklore if not the belief.

Not long after people had abandoned faked seances, more scientific minds came to consider that if a supernatural world does exist, it might be revealed through "wondrous" communications technologies. In 1920, the man who invented the phonograph and the first motion pictures, Thomas Edison, related that he had started work on an "apparatus" so delicate that if personalities existed in another domain, they would have an opportunity to express themselves. "I cannot conceive of such a thing as a spirit. Imagine something which has no weight, no material form, no mass; in a word, imagine nothing," Edison was careful to add. Yet, Edison conceived the possibility of entities grouped together as a collective to form the human personality, just as cells cluster to form the organs of the body. If the grouped entities remained assembled after a person died, then the personality might survive death and might communicate with

the living (Lescarboura 446). Edison believed his scientific apparatus would be a better means of communication than raps or tilting tables.[3] Though we know little about the success of Edison's supernatural communication apparatus, his other technological contributions have been highly successful—if not in contacting other dimensions—at least in replaying supernatural narratives. In this sense, Edison's inventions did connect living audiences with ghosts.

One consequence of occult themes in popular film was that some elements of the occult would no longer remain hidden. Some previously occult rituals became adapted and transmitted so frequently in media stories that they became clichés. Half a century later, supernatural themes would find new and bigger audiences in television, which created its own magical narratives, sometimes as weekly series, as well as through broadcasting older films. A full century later, supernatural narratives were more dominant than ever, continuing as subjects of film and television, but also becoming prevalent on computer media. Technopagans declared the true habitat for gods and spirits to be the newly discovered realm of cyberspace, and thousands of websites offered Internet users information, discussions, and personal stories about the supernatural.

The media tell us stories about the occult, about those wonders beyond human understanding, revealing secret knowledge that was formerly known only to the initiate. Yet, through the wonders of broadcast, cable, film, and the Internet, the secret knowledge of the initiate—even the master—becomes available to all. The media provide audiences with anecdotal knowledge of wondrous incidents concurrent with experiences that extend human senses.

Our media experiences are similar in some aspects to the folk belief that the human spirit can travel unfettered by the physical self through astral projection or out-of-body states. Through media use, individuals need not go on a "true" psychic voyage to know what it is like to suddenly be in another time and place. While watching a film or television narrative, audience members break free of the restrictions of the physical world to travel spiritually and emotionally wherever the media take them.

Media Technology, Immortality, and Extension of the Senses

Stories about the supernatural told in film and television may reflect human understanding of a metaphysical world, but moving-image media allow ordinary people to share in these extraordinary events. The images execute and project the fantasies, making them seem real, at least while audiences are engaged in the media-viewing process and the "suspension

of disbelief" that allows them to become engrossed in storytelling and drama (Brockett). From early in the history of film, the ability to create double exposures told us how a detached spirit might look. Camera effects showed us how a wizard might appear and disappear. Green screens and special camera angles made the impossible seem possible. Digital video effects would later sharpen and magnify media capabilities to make supernatural visions more convincing. While moving-image media have never been hesitant to emphasize supernatural stories, the technology used to render the narratives and the very process of watching may be as important in shaping popular discourse about the supernatural as the stories themselves. For example, one prominent supposition about the nature of hauntings, which was not widely articulated until after the development of film and electronic media, was that ghosts were tragic emotions *recorded* on the damp electrical fields of an area where misfortune occurred (Lethbridge). Just as images can be recorded on videotape, some people came to believe passion could be recorded on the atmosphere, thus explaining apparitions. It seems reasonable that the very properties of recorded media inspired this idea about what causes hauntings, as movies and television narratives perpetuated the folklore. Another popular explanation for apparitions was that "ghosts" were alternate lives on a "channel" that had somehow slipped its frequency. Engineers even refer to signal interference or the weaker of competing broadcast signals as "ghosts." Clearly, some people have found in the properties of electronic media possible metaphors, if not explanations, for anomalous events.

Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan suggested that human beings may be more affected by physical characteristics of media technology than by media contents. McLuhan proposed that media characteristics create the conditions of human perception (*Understanding Media*). He believed it was the logical, left-to-right, linear constraints of print media that cause people to perceive their world in a logical, linear way. Film and television allow audiences to see a world of rapidly changing shifts of location, time, and perspective, influencing a less logical, more emotional perception. Popular media become extensions of human senses beyond our biological limitations. For example, in the film *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), audiences cross the globe, one moment viewing a Haitian spirit ceremony and then in the next moment watching as pharmaceutical chemists sit down to a business dinner in New York. Even within a scene, the perspective can shift rapidly, from a wide shot of dancers to an emotional close-up of the spirit doctor's face. By extending the physical senses to impossible dimensions, media provide audiences a near-metaphysical

adventure. Perhaps even more than as annexes to human senses, as expansions of human sight, hearing, and touch, but through engaging the imagination, media also engage human metaphysical faculties.

Media properties additionally allow human beings to transcend mortality, to continue speaking and acting after death through visual recordings. Interestingly, we define the word *medium* in English as the agent through which something is transmitted, in the way that newsprint, film, videotape, and satellite waves transmit ideas, but we also use the word to designate a person who claims occult power to communicate with the dead or with spirits. In this sense, film, television, and sound recordings become a "medium" both as an agency of transmission and as a channel of occult power. They can allow the living to feel as though they have had contact with those who have died. Through the manipulation of recordings, deceased talent can even achieve "new" performances.

An interesting case of postmortem performance occurs in the 1983 film *Brainstorm*. Actress Natalie Wood died before the filming of the movie had been completed. The film's director, Douglas Trumbull, used outtakes from scenes shot earlier, a stand-in, and reversed camera angles to produce a performance that Natalie Wood never created while she lived.

Not only does *Brainstorm* provide an example of deceased talent continuing to speak through the medium, but the movie's narrative comments on the supernatural aspirations of media technologies. The film tells the story of scientists who realize the full ambition of media to extend human senses through a virtual-reality system that reaches all the senses, not just sight and sound. This "wondrous technology" makes recordings of all the sensory input of an experience. When a spectator replays the recording, the virtual system sends sensory input directly into that person's brain, engaging the spectator in a mediated experience that has the full effect of reality.[4] With such a device, a physically handicapped person might enjoy the sensation of running, a blind person could relish any view, and a deaf person could enjoy sound and music. Interestingly, the movie ends up suggesting that the real ambition of such technology is not to fully experience life without limitations but to experience death in life. One of the scientists, Lillian Reynolds (Louise Fletcher), has a heart attack and dies while recording her death on the virtual-reality machine. This allows her co-worker, Michael Brace (Christopher Walken), to glimpse the afterlife through a playback of this recording. However, in order to do this, he must turn off some of the sensory input, because otherwise he would also experience a heart attack and die. By this, the film suggests that death is a sensory experience that only the aural and

visual senses can survive. Of course, these two senses are the peculiar bias of moving-image media.

Computer gaming extends the senses in a manner similar to film and television but permits physical interaction with the narrative. In the video games *The 11th Hour* (1996) and *The 7th Guest* (1994), a player becomes an actor visiting a haunted house. The player is no longer a detached voyeur, but an active performer who can make changes in the events he or she witnesses. In the game *HEXX: Heresy of the Wizard* (1994), the player can learn to "use magic" and "cast spells" in an adventure to save the spirits of the four gods imprisoned by an evil wizard. It is imaginary, yet in this virtual world, the players' use of "magic" has consequences for the outcome of their individual narratives. The players know what it might feel like to cast a spell and see their sorcery have a measurable impact within the environment of the game.

The characteristics of media experience, which directly involve audiences through emotion, imagination, and intellect, are the very type of experiences the ancient wizards wished to control through magic. Media experience, like "psychic travel," is a disembodied state much like the astral body depicted in folklore. To achieve emotional travel through media, audiences learn to disengage the ego, to suspend disbelief, and to become connected with the mediated experience. As McLuhan noticed, "we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace" (*Understanding Media* 3). This sensory expansion was the occult ambition of the ancient wizard. Through expansion, the wizard could become the sum of all things, absorbed in the universe.

The technopagan movement, a branch of the new paganism that surfaced in the latter part of the twentieth century, accepted and celebrated new technologies as tools for enlightenment or as instruments to be used in neopagan rituals. In the book *City Magick*, Christopher Penczak explains to modern pagans how the television set or office computer can become the focus of a neopagan altar, adding that entertainment centers are handy places to store magical items like candles and stones. The book provides diagrams for how the modern shaman or "CyberWitch" might set up such an altar. He also explains how the television might be used as a spiritual tool and includes in the book exercises for "TV scrying," a form of divination in which the practitioner gazes into some reflective surface like that of a crystal ball, a bowl of water, or a television screen. After gazing for a while, the practitioner's mind slips into a trance, supposedly opening up a psychic channel. Penczak strongly recommends substituting the television or computer screen for more traditional surfaces

like the crystal ball. "A television makes an excellent surface for the modern practitioner. There is no better icon from the urban age than the magick of the TV." He writes: "The static on the TV can be used as your ritual tone to enter gnosis," meaning that intuitive state through which the neopagan intercepts knowledge. (See fig. 2.1.) Penczak goes on to explain that the television set can also be used as a conducting medium for ritual prayer:

Fig. 2.1. In a neopagan altar, the television set becomes an instrument for divination. Photo by E. D. Edwards.

> I have found the TV to be a medium for magick traveling over distance, much like a photograph or voodoo doll used in traditional magick. In some ways the television can replace the crystal ball as a divining surface. On a mundane level it brings such terrible information to us about the world. Although we need to be aware of these atrocities, they often convey a feeling of helplessness. . . . When I see a tragedy, my immediate response is to help. . . . At other times my reasonable response is magick. When sending healing energy to a war-torn area or disaster zone, I go right up to the TV and send my intent through the image to the actual people and place needing it. It can work with any spell. . . . When doing money magick, watch or tape the stock market report. Then send your intention for increased property through the image. . . . Transform your TV from a tool of dis-information and hypnotism to a global healing device. (110–12)

More than sacred tools, for some technopagans, the frequencies of broadcast and the cyberspace of the Internet are endowed with metaphysical reality. Electromagnetic waves are not merely the conducting medium for broadcast messages; they are the interstate for angels. For the technopagan, cyberspace is more than a virtual environment; it exists as a spiritual paradigm.

Media Use and Archaic Time

McLuhan's "global village" is the reemergence of a communal space created by the properties of electronic media. McLuhan noticed that because of our media experience, modern people have returned to the sense of time enjoyed by archaic or tribal peoples, where time was always "present" time. When technological breakthroughs have become "so massive as to create one environment upon another . . . to give us instant access to all pasts," there is no history (McLuhan and Zingrone 325). We experience a present, cyclical time.

Audiences consume media stories, but the stories are never completely consumed, never quite history. By watching the cable network Nick at Nite's TV Land, we can instantly jump backward three or four decades to watch old television series. We might switch cable stations to American Movie Classics (AMC) or the History Channel and go back even further in time; and then just as easily switch to the Cable News Network (CNN) and watch a "live" or current event. We need not worry too much about missing something, because media narratives are reproduced and rebroadcast. News stories may be reincarnated as film narratives or docudramas; films become television series; television stories get retold as

films; film narratives get remade as newer film versions. Through repetition, cliché becomes archetype. Through media experience, audiences have the opportunity to live in many cultures and many times all at once, contributing to what Pico Iyer calls the "global soul," a citizen adrift not in a "global village" but in a "global city, with all the problems of rootlessness and alienation and a violent, false denaturing that we associate with the word *urban*" (28). This global-media city is a place paradoxically afloat in time, yet relentlessly docked to clock and schedule.

In *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade distinguishes the Judeo-Christian "historical" time from the archaic or primitive conception of a cyclical time that was in harmony with cosmic rhythms. In the primitive conception, time is a continuing series of cosmic cycles. The primitive individual has an archetypal memory and doesn't record specific events or associate them with a particular date or hour. Like the moon, which waxes and wanes, all things are perpetually becoming and then reverting to an original state, only to "become" again. Upon death, the primitive individual loses personal memory to also become the archetypal ancestor (47). Personal memory has no value; time is mythical. This is time like that in Hazrat Inayat Khan's observation: "In reality there is no such thing as time; it is we who have made a certain conception of it. There is only existence . . . an eternal continuity of life" (182).

In contrast, the Judeo-Christian concept of "historical" time is one-way, or linear (Eliade, *Myth* 104). Individuals and their actions are considered unique and are valued as singular. History is acknowledged. Time is irreversible. It is a goal-oriented concept in which things are not continually becoming but are finished. The world is finite. In linear time, life's tasks are not an arrangement of repetitive rituals to be experienced but a progression of chores to be completed.

Characteristics of film and television media suspend the flow of historical time for audiences, removing them from linear time and projecting them into the mythic, archaic moment. More than the instant access to history, audiences experience media—beyond time—as disembodied observers. Spectators can journey backward into history through the technique of "flashback" or be projected into a distant future. Shooting and editing techniques can cause time to speed up, letting a character zip unnaturally across the screen; slow down, as in slow motion; or freeze a character's action altogether. A lifetime can be compressed into two hours; generations can be condensed into a miniseries. Through repeats and syndication, the lives of characters in television series are also cyclical, not ending with the season or even cancellation of the show. By using

such a device as a videotape recorder, audiences can fast-forward and rewind, replaying an instant over and over. On film and in television, time is never irreversible; never quite gone. By their very properties, moving-image media return audiences to that tribal world of cosmic cycles and primordial archetypes, energizing the archaic conception of time. The ABC broadcast of the millennium celebration, a full day of replaying midnight revelries across the world, provides a prime example.

The year leading up to the new millennium was one filled with pessimistic and apocalyptic stories informed by a linear world concept. Under the linear model, the duration of the world is limited; its demise is foretold by a series of cosmic and historical calamities (Eliade, *Myth* 126–27). Concerns for the Y2K bug, a computer glitch that, it was feared, would render helpless most computer-governed systems, combined with a general end-of-the-millennium anxiety in the days before the century's end. For example, a January 1999 issue of *Time* reported the growing Y2K survivalist thinking in America as some families stockpiled canned goods and candles, waiting for the crumple of civilization, the collapse of public utilities, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to swoop down from the skies. Yet, even as ABC broadcast news stories about Y2K and reported the restless fears of some fundamentalist groups, the network promoted a full day of New Year's celebrations. A report by Robert Krulwich on the nightly news told audiences that the last millennium had ended as uneventfully as any ordinary day, with most people unaware that a new millennium had even begun. There was deliberation about when the new millennium actually would begin, discussion about the Chinese New Year, and talk about other alternate calendars, all reminders that dates are social constructs and not cosmic truths. Then on New Year's Eve, the ABC network provided continuous coverage of the new millennium, as television crews followed midnight across the globe. Viewers in America on Eastern standard time watched at 8:00 AM as Australians counted down to midnight and celebrated with fireworks (but experienced no millennium crisis). In a comforting effacement of time, television audiences saw the fireworks and pageantry from country to country, sometimes in instant replay, throughout the entire day. As the day progressed, people were reminded to renew themselves with New Year's resolutions. If the resolutions failed, there would be a certain cheer in knowing the new year will come again: world and self are continuously reborn. Finally, in New York, the glittering ball—a symbolic regeneration of the world—descended on Times Square to the exuberant cheering of crowds. Never mind if we happened to look away or were taking a bathroom break, there would be an instant replay later.

Though audiences experience media narratives in archaic time, in contrast, the business aspects of media are defined by linear, one-way time, with emphasis on schedules and deadlines. Commercial television even divides time into discrete segments that can be sold to advertisers. If a thirty-second slot is not sold, it must be filled with public service messages or self-promotion and represents a business opportunity forever missed. Once gone, that thirty seconds can't be reclaimed and sold at a later date.[5] It is the peculiar paradox of moving-image media that one environment contradicts the other. Unlike archaic people, contemporary American audiences experience a mediated mythic time while living in the linear, historic time, which seems to evaporate. The larger environment of contemporary American life is linear and goal-oriented. As audiences annul time through mediated experience, historic time speeds past. George Lucas fans can see *Star Wars* (1973) replayed over and over, even as the moments of their own lives disappear. The paradox is that time can be annulled, but there is never enough of it. Some might observe that print media are as capable as audiovisual media of breaking linear time by allowing the reader to become absorbed in alternate worlds, to review and reread. However, McLuhan's work suggests that print media, with their logical and linear structure, prevent full immersion into archaic time. Print builds messages from letters, to words, to sentences, to paragraphs. This construction, along with grammatical rules, creates a perceptual environment for readers that is quite different from the tribal environment of moving-image media. Clearly, all media create conditions for audiences that can seem different from the physical spaces their bodies inhabit.

Media and Mythic Narrative

Just as media return audiences to archaic time, they also involve them with mythic narrative. Historians sometimes worry about the effect of television docudrama, concerned that dramatization might alter audiences' understanding of an event that has been shaped into a more forceful or entertaining but less accurate account. But such fears only show that historians miss the real intent of these programs. Within the archaic time of the media world, it isn't historical fact but the search for primordial paradigms to which audiences respond. What propels the dramatization of the historical incident on film or television isn't necessarily an attempt to instruct audiences with fact but rather to echo the archetype. For example, Eliade relates how the story of an accidental death in a Romanian village became transformed into a local myth with magical