

Extreme Parenting: Recuperating Fatherhood in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005)

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Surrounding the release of Steven Spielberg's science-fiction blockbuster *War of the Worlds* (2005), a widely mediated publicity still featured star Tom Cruise with his arm protectively placed around the shoulders of young co-star Dakota Fanning, as they gaze heavenwards in bewildered wonder. **[INSERT FIGURE hamad.1 HERE]** The widespread promotional use of this image, as opposed to one showcasing its genre, spectacle or blockbuster credentials to greater effect, manifestly indicated that fatherhood and familial relations would be thematically prominent. This thematic bent was commensurate with recent developments in Spielberg's output and, as this chapter will ultimately contend, with a current trend in depictions of screen fathers, manifested across the spectrum of Hollywood's male star led genres.

One way of understanding the film's thematic preoccupation with fatherhood is as a continuation of Spielberg's longstanding concerns with fragmented and troubled families, through his output over time via recurring character types and scenarios like the inadequate father and child in peril. Spielberg scholars identify these as authorial concerns¹ arising from his autobiographical investment in broken families and troubled fatherhood.² *War of the Worlds* is thus a logical entry to his extant filmography in thematic terms, featuring a Spielbergian narrative impetus striving towards reuniting a fragmented family, in which the

father no longer has a place. He shepherds his children away from danger and toward their mother amidst the crisis of an alien invasion, while transforming and rehabilitating his paternal credentials, which are initially presented as inadequate. Versions of the inadequate father populate Spielberg's films from his first cinematic outing *The Sugarland Express* (1974), in which a fugitive father abortively attempts to reunite his family. By *War of the Worlds* the irresponsible father and narratives of paternal redemption were established Spielbergian tropes.³ Recently these figures and themes appeared in *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) and *Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg, 2003), which integrate the recuperation of their characters' inadequate fatherhood into their overarching narratives. Both screen fathers respectively lose their families due, it is suggested, to workaholic tendencies, but their fatherhood is redeemed upon each film's conclusion. Time has thus heralded the requirement that failing fatherhood, derogated at the outset of these narratives, be recuperated. Thus, it is in keeping with Spielberg's larger oeuvre that *War of the Worlds* is framed as a domestic crisis, that its protagonist is a failing father, and that his fatherhood is recuperated as the narrative progresses, charting what Joshua Gunn describes as his "gradual ascent" to the status of "good father."⁴

Inadequate fatherhood has thus always been thematically prominent in Spielberg films, though the recuperative imperative is a more recent development, as is the co-dependently constituted transformation of the protagonist's fatherhood within the overarching narrative: Ray needs a crisis to stage his paternal rehabilitation. This is not to say that thematizing troubled fatherhood is specific to Spielberg. Rather, narratives centered on male parenting have, as Yvonne Tasker notes become a "prominent feature"⁵ of contemporary film, and

“male parents are frequently presented as *failing* their children.”⁶ The following chapter, then, addresses how fatherhood is represented over the course of *War of the Worlds*.

After a prologue, the film begins in present day New Jersey, as we are introduced to dockworker Ray Ferrier (Cruise) finishing a twelve-hour nightshift.⁷ Thereafter, he is quickly established as a divorced, estranged failing father; having sped home in his Shelby Mustang race-car, recklessly charging around corners through broken stoplights, he unexpectedly finds his pregnant ex-wife Mary Ann (Miranda Otto) with current husband Tim (David Alan Basche), waiting with his children, 16-year-old Robbie (Justin Chatwin) and 10-year-old Rachel (Dakota Fanning). During their transfer to Ray’s care for the coming weekend, we learn key things about all of them, and their relationships, that establish the terms of Ray’s currently derogated fatherhood, as he makes several missteps that leave his paternal credibility wanting. The first sets the tone for the tensions that follow. Ray had forgotten their eight o’clock arrangement, appearing at eight thirty to find them annoyed, though unsurprised, at his failure to appear at the pre-arranged time.

Robbie ignores Ray as he exits Tim’s car, and disavows his fatherhood, calling him “Ray” to his father’s chagrin.⁸ The tension in this frosty exchange mounts during their awkward subsequent backyard game of catch (notable given the common deployment of this activity as a visual shorthand to signify father-son bonding),⁹ which takes place over a conversation about Robbie’s homework. Ray clumsily attempts to assert paternal authority, eliciting hostility, disdain and anger from Robbie, culminating in a broken window. Ray’s failure to communicate effectively in this context is particularly pointed given the gender specificity that typically accompanies sporting allegories of parenting.¹⁰ Rachel is introduced as a visual

spectacle of contemporary girlhood through brightly colored costuming and girlish accessories, greeting Ray with fonder indulgence, but it later emerges that she does not think of him as someone who can “take care” of her. Her precocious wise-beyond-her-years knowingness¹¹ (ordering “health” food, offering advice on how to “get through” to Robbie, confidently explaining how the body expels splinters) is articulated alongside neuroses, allergies, phobias and physical ailments suggesting both a degree of self-reliance, and also deep-seated vulnerability.

Inside, Mary Ann highlights Ray’s domestic shortcomings, lamenting his empty fridge, another indication that he was unprepared for them. This paternal misstep is compounded, following Mary Ann and Tim’s departure, when he devolves responsibility for feeding his children (a basic act of responsible parenthood) onto them, leaving them to manage while he sleeps, with a curt instruction to “You know, order.” Notwithstanding his tiredness following his shift, Ray’s sullen withdrawal to bed and indifferent response to Rachel’s inquiry as to how they will eat in the absence of either adults or food marks his fatherhood as immature, underlined via textual motifs like his car, and costuming. He wears a hoodie, cap and leather jacket, appropriate in his occupational context, but also notable for its similarity to Robbie’s outfit, and difference from Tim’s, connoting Ray’s curtailed maturity, but also class difference.

Noteworthy in this introductory sequence is the juxtaposition of Ray’s class position with Tim and Mary Ann’s, exacerbated later in a scene at their luxury suburban residence, in contradistinction to Ray’s working-class neighborhood and home. Tim’s socio-economically superior status is flagged repeatedly as Ray sarcastically admires his new car, Robbie goads

Ray that Tim pays for his education, and Rachel gloats about Tim's gift of bedroom TiVo, one implication being that the wealth and privilege of middle-class life with Tim and Mary Ann have instilled a sense of entitlement that his modest means and lifestyle would have precluded.

Ray's derogated working-class masculinity thus represents what Susan Faludi, considering the socio-cultural undermining of the "role of the family breadwinner,"¹² highlights as men's "loss of economic authority."¹³ Meanwhile, the snappily dressed, groomed and consumerist Tim embodies "ornamental culture"¹⁴ that she argues strips men of gender specific "meaningful social purpose,"¹⁵ through emphasis on acquisition, appearance and purchasing power, which she posits as feminine traits compared to the utilitarian "functional public role" of Ray's hardy hands-on occupation, aligned instead with devalued masculinities.¹⁶ Tim's occupation is unspecified, but his success as the new father, relative to Ray's failures, is articulated through material trappings of middle-class family life, alongside his sensitive fathering of Rachel, indicated by their mutually affectionate parting greeting, which Ray observes resentfully.

This economic disparity communicates the devaluation of Ray's fatherhood emphasized by his dually derogated class position and masculinity; he is shown neither to fulfill the traditional role of provider, nor to evince nurturing "new man" fatherhood, that might offset this failing from a feminist viewpoint.¹⁷ This continues a tendency of contemporary Hollywood to characterize "the white male as victim" of, among other things, feminism, represented through the suggestion that Mary Ann has discarded Ray, and through currently modish masculinities represented by Tim who fulfills requirements of fatherhood that Ray

does not: he provides, is present, is emotionally effusive and tactile, and has the children's attention and affection.¹⁸

Ray thus exemplifies Nicola Rehling's observation that "class . . . always cuts across white heterosexual masculinity. . . pointing to the fact that white male power is always dependent on economic status."¹⁹ His class is bound up with his derogated fatherhood, both in Mary Ann's eyes (she bemoans the children's shared bedroom in a dig at his small house), and the children's (as per their materialist put-downs). Sympathy for Ray is hence elicited by an "appeal to victim status," while his derogation, illustrated by the low esteem in which he is held by his upwardly mobile ex-wife and over-privileged children, is accounted for by his shortcomings as a father.²⁰ The film thus lays out the parameters of Ray's fatherhood with some ambivalence as to where the culpability for its inadequacy lies: with Mary Ann, and by implication with white middle-class femininities associated with feminism, or with his inability to reorient his outmoded fathering to changing conceptualizations of ideal masculinity.

Mary Ann and Tim depart, leaving Ray with the children and an apprehensive instruction to "take care of our kids." He cockily retorts "Mary Ann, you got *nothin'* to worry about," with misplaced confidence. This introductory sequence thus sets the terms of Ray's awkward relationship with his children, contextualizing his description in promotional materials as a "less-than-perfect father."²¹ The scene communicates his good intentions, but also his inept attempts to put them into practice, and his marginal role in his children's lives. It thus primes the audience for the subsequent transformation of his fatherhood through a scenario that will mobilize and test his protective paternal instincts, moving him from self-oriented to largely

selfless; in extreme circumstances, he will do whatever necessary to protect his children, especially Rachel. This scenario, the film's overarching narrative and principal link to its literary source (H.G. Wells' 1898 novel) and cinematic precursor (Byron Haskin's 1953 film), depicts aliens invading earth and attempting to annihilate humanity. Here, this premise is a spectacular device framing Ray's paternal rehabilitation, charting his changing relationship with his children as their level of danger escalates, and the situation intensifies.

Building up to the attack, Ray's parental ineptitude continues to manifest itself through his initial attempts to manage the situation. Upon waking, he is outraged to hear Robbie has stolen his car, and rushing outdoors after him, observes bizarre weather, the first indication of something amiss. Sheltering under a table after lightning strikes beside the house, Ray's nervous unease panics Rachel, and she asks, "Are we going to be ok?" Presented with this transparent plea for reassurance, a distracted Ray exacerbates Rachel's anxiety: he answers, "I don't know." He leaves her home alone to locate Robbie. Finding him, he makes sure that Robbie is safe, before reproaching him over the car and sending him to watch Rachel while he investigates. The ground trembles, and a metallic tripod arises out of the ground, annihilating everyone in sight, although Ray makes it home safely. Washing his face in horrified realization that it is covered in human ash, he calms himself, and his protective paternal instincts are mobilized. The attack thus sets the scene that will allow his fatherhood to take center stage, as he is required to protect his children from a real and imminent threat, and shepherd them to safety.

Gripping Rachel's hand, Ray strides purposefully to the only functioning vehicle in the vicinity, and they flee. Notably, the car is a Plymouth Voyager people-carrier, reminiscent of

Tim's higher-end "safe looking new vehicle."²² Its connotations of safety, family, and mature responsible driving can be juxtaposed with those of Ray's Shelby Mustang, tellingly coveted by the teenage Robbie, conversely signifying speed, recklessness, youth, immaturity, and irresponsible driving. Textual motifs and mise-en-scene thus contribute to the articulation of Ray's ameliorating fatherhood. Arriving at Mary Ann and Tim's house, they find it empty, but take shelter there. Next morning Ray finds the surrounding area destroyed, and learns from a passing news crew that the extent of the destruction is massive and the scale of the invasion global. He carries Rachel to the car, telling her not to look and uttering reassurances, in a progression from his earlier mishandling of the lightning strike. As they journey to Boston, more evidence of Ray's alienation from the daily practicalities of parenthood emerge, revealing his ignorance of Rachel's allergies and bedtime routines, with which Robbie appears familiar, and his inability to defuse her panic attacks, which given Robbie's matter-of-fact deployment of rehearsed calming strategies, are evidently frequent.

En route to Boston, Ray and Robbie argue over his refusal to call him "Dad." Then, having stopped for a bathroom break for Rachel (taking Ray slightly aback as the practical realities of parenthood gradually begin to figure in his self-realization as a protective *paterfamilias*), Robbie attempts to join a passing military convoy in the counter-attack against the invaders. They argue, Robbie railing against Ray's inadequate fatherhood and what he perceives as his self-oriented actions, accusing him of taking them to Boston not to protect them, but to be rid of them. Back on the road, Ray attempts to make peace by allowing Robbie to drive. Encountering crowds of pedestrian refugees, Robbie wakes a sleeping Ray who tellingly does not stir until he calls him "Dad." The car is commandeered, but Ray's paternal protectiveness

and desperate cries of “Where’s my son!” and “All I want is my daughter!” ensure that for the moment they remain safely together.

They cross the Hudson river (surviving an attack on their ferry) and Robbie heads straight for another military unit, battling an army of tripods. Ray momentarily leaves Rachel to pursue and restrain Robbie, but faced with the threat of losing her to a well-meaning couple who think she is alone, he is presented with the dilemma of letting Robbie go, or losing Rachel. Given the film’s interest in proving Ray’s paternal worth, this is best achieved through Rachel, so Robbie is removed from the equation, to allow for this. Robbie runs toward the battle, and Ray runs to retrieve Rachel, scooping her up with the desperate explanation “I’m her *father*.” This development initially appears anomalous, and to undermine narrative cohesion, especially given that contemporary Hollywood narratives of families-in-peril, like *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009), which is otherwise strikingly similar in terms of its apocalyptic premise and linked narrative of paternal redemption, often prioritize staying together. Nevertheless, removing Robbie can be understood as a step towards the completion of Ray’s ascent to the status of good father.²³

Robbie is less suitable than Rachel as a vehicle for Ray’s paternal rehabilitation. Ray’s struggling fatherhood must compete with his manifestly more competent pseudo-fatherhood, making him his rival in terms of paternal credentials. Thus, Robbie’s presence hinders the narrative and discursive centralization of Ray’s fatherhood. The film emphasizes Ray’s practical and interpersonal paternal failings. Conversely, it has presented Robbie and his pseudo-parenting, as a preferable point of comparison, certainly in Rachel’s eyes; following Robbie’s first attempt to break from his father to join the military, she frankly and

ingenuously asks, “Who’s going to take care of me if you go?” Robbie’s pseudo-paternal protectiveness of Rachel causes him to relent (this time). Suppressing his rebellious teenage persona, he re-assumes his pseudo-parental role and embraces her, soothing her rising panic at the prospect of his imminent departure and her abandonment to Ray’s care. Meanwhile, a crestfallen Ray is positioned at the edge of the frame, physically apart from this exchange, and excluded from consideration as a suitable alternative guardian, making clear not only that Rachel does not view her father as a care-giver, but also that his attempts to fulfill the role of father-protector, since the crisis began, have not yet changed her mind-set. This moment thus communicates the state of their relationship and the valence of Ray’s fatherhood, preparing the audience for Robbie’s subsequent departure, which facilitates an intensification of Ray’s protective paternal instincts towards Rachel, and ultimately the revalidation of Ray’s fatherhood in his children’s eyes. **[INSERT FIGURE hamad.2 HERE]**

Following his separation from Robbie and reunion with Rachel, Ray accepts shelter from Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins) who has become unhinged by the crisis, having lost his own family. Ray puts Rachel to bed, recalling an earlier bedtime scene, in which he left Robbie to do this, dismissing her tersely with “No more talking.” This time he sits with her, whispers gently, and tearfully sings a lullaby. Commensurate with his hitherto hands-off fatherhood he knows no lullabies, but makes do with a song he does know, in a small but significant gesture towards his changing sense of paternal responsibility and attentiveness to parental obligations. Notwithstanding the trauma of losing Robbie, he suppresses his feelings to comfort Rachel, and makes her feel safe and secure under the circumstances. Her quiescent approval also marks a turning point, as she now looks to him to be fatherly in a way she previously did not.

Ogilvy takes an unnerving interest in Rachel, putting Ray on edge and his paternal protectiveness into overdrive. After narrow escapes from an alien probe and aliens themselves, which are almost bungled by Ogilvy, Ray takes a drastic step; blindfolding Rachel, encouraging her to sing to herself, he murders Ogilvy, in an extreme act of paternal protectiveness. During the night they encounter another probe. Ray immobilizes it with an axe, but turning to find Rachel gone, he rushes outside to meet a tripod, which, to Ray's horror, plucks the reappeared Rachel from the ground. Using himself as bait, Ray allows himself to be taken as well in order to find and rescue his daughter. Dropped in a metal cage, he finds Rachel in a catatonic state, which he is able to bring her out of by gently repeating her name as he cradles her face in his hands. Inside the cage, he shields her with his body to prevent her being taken once more, and then facilitates their escape by exploding a grenade in the alien's innards, risking his own life in order to get close enough to do so. Ray's worthiness as a father and credentials as a hero are thus affirmed through his successful enactment of action oriented protectionism in this scene. Thereafter, the remainder of the journey to Boston is elided.

Arriving to find the aliens dying due to their vulnerability to bacteria, Ray performs a final act of paternal protectiveness. Shielding them both from a collapsing tripod, he holds Rachel, reassuringly repeating the words "It's ok. It's going to be ok," again recalling an earlier scene, prior to his currently ameliorated parenting, in which he blunderingly offered no reassurance to Rachel's anxious entreaty - another gesture towards then-and-now differences in Ray's parenting before the crisis versus after. Another comes next in the final scene, as Ray delivers Rachel safely to her mother on the street outside her grandparents' home. They

come to the door, trailed by Tim, relieved to see this reunion. Nobody speaks, and as Ray prepares to approach Mary Ann with the news about Robbie, he too appears on the doorstep. In contrast to his steadfast refusal to acknowledge Ray in the earlier equivalent scene, Robbie runs enthusiastically into his incredulously joyful father's arms. Ray's final moment places him in two-shot close-up, tearfully embracing Robbie with a quietly euphoric smile. Comparing the scenes that bookend their story we thus see that Robbie, as well as Ray, has developed over the course of the narrative, changing the terms of their relationship, to the benefit of Ray's paternal self-worth. This exemplifies what Tasker identifies as a representational recurrence in contemporary popular cinema, that "intensive male parenting is presented as transformative for both men and children."²⁴ **[INSERT FIGURE hamad.3 HERE]**

This scene has been compared with the ending of iconic western *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956).²⁵ In this search, rescue and protect narrative, having safely delivered his abducted niece to the family homestead, a door closes on Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), shutting him out of the domestic sphere, excluding him from family life. Notwithstanding assertions that *War of the Worlds* ends with Ray similarly "alone,"²⁶ with "no place for him"²⁷ in the reconstituted family, this is not entirely the case. *War of the Worlds*' ending depicts Ray locked in his son's embrace, smilingly contentedly. The only person in the family dynamic physically removed from this reunion is Tim. This is not to suggest that *War of the Worlds* reconstitutes the broken nuclear family to include the biological father, as *2012* does, but it does ultimately emphasize the revalidation of Ray's fatherhood, with optimism for an ameliorated relationship with his children henceforth. He is powerless to reunite with Mary Ann, but has salvaged his paternal validity in his children's eyes, proving himself worthy of

their hitherto withheld respect, through successfully taking on the role of paternal protector vis-a-vis Rachel. Thus, in testing the limits of Ray's fatherly devotion in extreme circumstances, the film charts his development from inadequate father and marginal figure in his children's lives, to devoted protector who will stop at nothing to keep his child safe. Ray's heroism is therefore showcased, not through spectacular action, but through single-minded determination to remove his children from danger, and to make good on his agreement with Mary Ann to "take care of our kids." It is localized, personalized and specific to his fatherhood.

Alongside *War of the Worlds*, there has emerged a cognate cluster of thematically and structurally comparable male star led films, including *Signs* (M. Night, Shyamalan, 2002), *Road to Perdition* (Sam Mendes, 2002), *Hostage* (Florent Emilio Siri, 2005), *Live Free Or Die Hard* (Len Wiseman, 2007) and *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008), to name only some. These films depend upon similarly contrived scenarios that recuperate failing fatherhood through enactment of paternal protectiveness in extreme circumstances, whereupon the reconstitution of a normative familial unit is not the point of the protagonist's narrative journey, so much as the revalidation of his initially derogated fatherhood. These extreme scenarios depict the redemption of inadequate fathers, deflecting feminist critiques of masculinity, by positing the male's fulfillment of the role of father-protector as compensating for domestic and interpersonal failings. *War of the Worlds* is a notable entry in this cluster, marked by tropes, themes and motifs that recur in screen depictions of fatherhood across the spectrum of Hollywood's genre output.

This is not to suggest that these films are without precedent, in terms of thematically foregrounding fatherhood and family, which have always been structuring themes in Hollywood films. Introducing his survey of familial representations from the silent period through the mid-2000s, in which he charts the extent to which “the constitution or disruption of family is structurally central,”²⁸ Murray Pomerance notes that “the family... has always been, a central feature of screen depictions,”²⁹ while Stella Bruzzi charts and contextualizes shifts in depictions of fatherhood over time.³⁰ There are also precedents to the current cycle of father oriented extreme parenting films,³¹ in which the high stakes scenarios germane to the action genre, provide “the motivation for and the resolution of changing masculine heroisms,” as well as staging grounds for narratives of motherhood,³² a parenting paradigm sidelined in *War of the Worlds* and cognate films, commensurate with Tasker’s observation that father centered narratives are frequently “accompanied by the marginalization...of mothers.”³³ She also highlights the usefulness of the concept of postfeminism for understanding recurring themes in the depiction of contemporary screen fatherhood.³⁴ The discourse of fatherhood in *War of the Worlds* can similarly usefully be understood in postfeminist terms.

The defining features of postfeminism remain contested, debated and fluid, and a catchall definition articulating its nuances and complexities remains elusive.³⁵ However, aspects of how it has been conceptualized enable particular understandings of fatherhood in *War of the Worlds*. In relation to a major structuring debate of postfeminism, representation and recuperation of fatherhood exemplifies what Rosalind Gill calls, an “entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas,”³⁶ drawing upon Angela McRobbie’s notion of the “double-

entanglement”³⁷ of postfeminism, regarding its circuitous and ambivalent relationship to feminism.

In identifying, critiquing and rehabilitating a bad father, *War of the Worlds*' depiction of fatherhood is one of many examples of cultural responses to “feminist calls for equity in childrearing.”³⁸ However, through the disapproving Mary Ann we also see, as Tasker and Diane Negra contend with regard to postfeminist culture more broadly, that “feminism is constituted as an unwelcome, implicitly censorious presence,” so its “concerns are silenced,” as she is removed from the narrative.³⁹ Thereafter it becomes a “structuring absence”⁴⁰ at once demanding the amelioration of Ray's fatherhood, but succumbing to an ideological double-bluff as Ray and his fatherhood take on “discourses of (particular versions of) feminism... [but] do so without giving up their centrality in the narrative.”⁴¹ Thus it seems to account ideologically for the androcentric (or male centered) depiction of parenting we are left with upon Mary Ann's departure, but with manifestly patriarchal (in terms of the social significance of fatherhood) undertones, given the discursive emphasis on the traditional role of father-protector in his rehabilitation, and Ray's ultimate fulfillment of this role.

Films like *War of the Worlds* participate in the postfeminist practice of taking feminism “into account”⁴² seeming to transcend the need for a politicized feminist stance by, for example, presenting Tim as an example of the “new nurturing masculinity”⁴³ that circulated culturally in feminism's aftermath. The film also accords a high level of social power to the female, via the socio-economically elevated middle-class woman (Mary Ann), and what it presents as a concomitant “loss of power for men,” (Ray occupies a weak position socio-economically and domestically) while gesturing towards the “tenuous assumption that all men previously

occupied equally elevated positions of social and economic power”⁴⁴ via class tensions.

However, socio-economic power and domestic competence are initially presented as mutually constitutive, prior to the formulation of an alternative postfeminist masculinity, for Ray, facilitated by the extreme circumstances in which he effects his paternal recuperation. Thereafter, his fatherhood is accorded a measure of ideological flexibility with regard to the imperative to reconstruct his masculinity according to Tim’s model. Thus, the recuperation of Ray’s fatherhood, commensurate with conceptualizations of postfeminist masculinity as an ideologically unstable or ambivalent gender discourse, can be negotiated by positioning it as “not the signifier for the re-masculinisation [sic] of contemporary culture – a straightforward rejection of second-wave feminism that can be easily identified as part of the backlash – but, in contrast, an unstable and troubled subject position that is doubly encoded.”⁴⁵ Although tensions are unresolved and there are ideological instabilities in Ray’s postfeminist fatherhood, through his enactments of protective paternalism and growth as a father in terms of maturity and competence, Ray is left sharing a much more level playing field with Tim, in terms of the ideological valence and cultural viability of their respective parenting paradigms.

In contemporary popular cinema, fatherhood is a prominent feature of screen masculinities, due in part to the relative ease with which it can be disingenuously represented as a politically innocent state, and hence negotiated as a feature of ideal masculinity. This takes place through common sense appeals to paternal love, loyalty and protectiveness, mobilized by crisis scenarios, and by virtue of the extreme circumstances to which genre narratives give rise. *War of the Worlds* is a notable example among many in which masculinity is articulated through a recuperative narrative and a structuring gender discourse of postfeminist fatherhood.

Notes

¹ Lester D. Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 7-8; Andrew Gordon, *Empire of Dreams: The Science Fiction and Fantasy Films of Steven Spielberg* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 260; Peter Krämer, “Steven Spielberg,” in *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors Second Edition*, ed. Yvonne Tasker. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), Taylor & Francis e-Library Edition, 378; Nigel Morris, *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg: Empire of Light* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2007), 7; Frederick Wasser, *Steven Spielberg’s America* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 5.

² Joseph McBride, *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* (New York and London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 72, 219-220, 393-394.

³ Krämer, “Steven Spielberg,” 378.

⁴ Joshua Gunn, “Father Trouble: Staging Sovereignty in Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25:1 (2008), 11.

⁵ Yvonne Tasker, “Practically Perfect People: Postfeminism, Masculinity and Male Parenting in Contemporary Cinema” in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, ed. Murray Pomerance (London: Wallflower, 2008), 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷ *War of the Worlds*, DVD, directed by Steven Spielberg (2005; London: Paramount Home Entertainments UK, 2005).

⁸ This motif also signifies derogated fatherhood in *Live Free Or Die Hard* (Len Wiseman, 2006) and *2012* (Roland Emmerich, 2009).

⁹ E.g. *Field of Dreams* (Phil Alden Robinson, 1989).

¹⁰ Anna Gavanas, *Fatherhood Politics in the United States: Masculinity, Sexuality, Race, and Marriage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2004), 113-120.

¹¹ This trope characterizes daughters of single fathers marked as immature, irresponsible and/or inadequate in *Dan In Real Life* (Peter Hedges, 2007), *King of California* (Mike Cahill, 2007), and *Smart People* (Noam Murro, 2008).

¹² Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man* (London: Vintage, 2000), 595.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 595.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 598.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷ Regarding the “new man” on film see for example Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2005), 146-151.

¹⁸ Nicola Rehling, *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary Popular Cinema* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), p 21.

¹⁹ Rehling, *Extra-Ordinary Men*, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹ “About the Film,” WarOfTheWorlds.com, accessed October 15, 2010.

²² *War of the Worlds*.

²³ Gunn, “Father Trouble,” 11.

²⁴ Tasker, “Practically Perfect People,” 181.

²⁵ Friedman, *Citizen Spielberg*, 155; Wasser, *Steven Spielberg’s America*, 207.

²⁶ Morris, *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg*, 354.

²⁷ Gordon, *Empire of Dreams*, 263.

²⁸ Murray Pomerance, “Introduction: Family Affairs,” in *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, ed. Murray Pomerance. (London: Wallflower, 2008), 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁰ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*.

³¹ E.g. *Terminator 2* (1991), *Dante’s Peak* (1996), *Armageddon* (1998); see Karen Schneider, “With Violence in Necessary: Rearticulating the Family in the Contemporary Action-Thriller,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 27:1 (1999): 2-11; Tasker, “The Family in Action,” in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 252-266.

³² E.g. *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1996), and *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003, 2004); see Tasker, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 65-88; Angela Dancey, “Killer Instincts: Motherhood and Violence in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Kill Bill*,” in

Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture, eds Ann C. Hall and Mardia J. Bishop. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 81-92.

³³ Tasker, "Practically Perfect People," 176.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁵ Overviews include Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1-50; Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 249-271; Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 66-89.

³⁶ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 255.

³⁷ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004): 255.

³⁸ Tasker, "Practically Perfect People," 176.

³⁹ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, "Introduction: Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture," in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Karlyn, cited in *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹ Kathleen Karlyn, cited in *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴² McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," 255.

⁴³ Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 85.

⁴⁴ Tasker and Negra, "Introduction," 4.

⁴⁵ Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism*, 143.