

Running Head: THE ISLAND

“You Do Not Want to Go to the Island:” A Rhetorical Panorama of “The Island”

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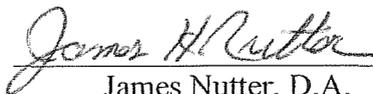
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Abstract

The first glance at the tropical haven emerging from the luminous teal waters arouses an awe of such a paradise. The inhabitants of a facility in the Michael Bay film, *The Island*, daily abide in that awe, assured in their eminent continuance succeeding a lethal global contamination. Their perception, however, is limited.

The inhabitants are components of a rhetorical vision and their view of the Island is less that panoramic. Through a rare analysis of film, the device of Fantasy Theme Analysis, devised by Ernest Bormann, interfaced with a notion of *vampirism*, an unobstructed cyclorama of the Island is made available, indeed, providentially for the inhabitants in the film as well as the real world American society.

You Don't Want to Go to the Island:" A Rhetorical Panorama of "The Island"

*Introduction*

Lincoln-Six-Echo peers every day out of the glass towers that are his home, which he believes is *the* refuge for all of humanity from a global pathogenic contamination.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the towers are a transitioning, waiting zone as the last pathogen-free area is progressively being re-inhabited. Lincoln and his companions wait enthusiastically to be selected in the weekly lottery to relocate to "the island," hence the title of the film, *The Island*. Lincoln is, however, distinct from the other hundreds of human beings. Indeed, he is outfitted in the identical white Puma jumpsuits and reads the same scrolling descriptions over his stainless-steel lavatory as his bodily nutrients and functions are meticulously monitored. Each of the inhabitants remembers glimpses of their *childhood* before the contamination. (There is a wide array of ages among the inhabitants, and yet they can only recall their childhoods.) Significantly, Lincoln is distinct from the others because he inquires, "why?" Why can he not eat bacon, and why does he have to wear white? It is impractical and uninteresting. Even these feelings of Lincoln are monitored, and Dr. Merrick, the omnipotent, omniscient, and fostering director of the facility, summons him in to discuss these feelings of curiosity. This meeting is a crucial moment within the film where Lincoln's experiences congeal and the film becomes a revelatory exposition of postmodern society. *The Island* is abounding in rhetorical value beyond what a limited popular review can ferret out and disclose. It is an artifact worthy of criticizing rhetorically because it fictionally reflects significant current issues such as the dilemma of cloning, abortion, and the quality of life and the persistent notion of hope.

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<sup>1</sup> All commentaries and references made to the film, *The Island*, are derived from: *The Island*. Dream Work Home Entertainment and Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc. Michael Bay, Director. Ewan McGregor, Scarlett Johansson. 2005.

The primary theme of the film, *The Island*, is, indeed, that of human genetic cloning, and this film is like an omen. It portrays the demise of postmodern ethics. Unknown to the inhabitants of the facility who are the main characters of the film, they are essentially and entirely genetic replicas of human beings outside of the facility. When a man outside of the facility has an ailment caused by his sexual philandering and needs a liver transplant, as in the case of Lincoln Six Echo's host, he can cash in his five million dollar investment to have him executed and cut up for parts. When a lady wishes to have a child but does not wish to bear the burden of pregnancy with stretch-marks and hormonal inconsistencies, she can cash in her five million dollar investment with in vitro fertilization. When the child is born, the biological mother is eradicated. (The clone cannot survive to bear other children for the host, because once a woman goes into labor, she is told she and her new child are going to the Island.) Literal instances of the inhumane actions portrayed in the film have not occurred within the American society, yet millions with the same principle in mind have occurred. For instance, abortion, which is also exhibited in the film, euthanasia, genocide, and illegal human part trafficking may indeed be precursors to the abomination depicted in this film. It is imperative that our society gets off of the slippery ethical slope for the sake of our own lives if ethical standards do not persuade; thus, a rhetorical critique of this aspect of the film is crucial for our society, as is the critique of any other public discourse with like themes.

The inhabitants, who are in reality clones, genuinely value life, and so hold on to hope; to hope of the Island; to hope of freedom. Hope, whether just a symbolic notion, a chemical, or biological response, a feeling, or whatever it is actually classified as, is

another theme within the film. It is a lesser theme in that it is not overtly discussed by the characters, yet it is a theme that is unmistakable in the protagonists, the clone characters, as well as the antagonists (the hosts of the clones and those who manage the cloning facility). It should be intriguing to investigate hope, its properties and limitations. A question to ask about hope within the context of the film, *The Island*, is: how does hope pertain to the value of life within the context of postmodernism? Lincoln Six Echo, like the other clones, hoped for the Island; yet he hoped for something more. He hoped for bacon when he wanted it. He hoped for a colored stripe on his Puma jumpsuit. He hoped for meaning beyond waiting for the lottery.

The search for the meaning of life has well been philosophically exhausted. Nevertheless, meaning of life occupies a key theme and may be beneficial for discovering the rhetorical value within the two themes, cloning and hope, introduced above. The meaning of life is the overarching question of life, and Lincoln Six Echo, who is essentially a three year old human wanting to know the meaning of his life. This question is nagging, and though it has been discussed in depth by philosophers throughout centuries, it will be interesting to see how the rhetorical value of the question exhibits itself in the film.

### *Literature Review*

#### Science Fiction Film

The array of literature pertaining to the genre of the film, *The Island*, as well as the proposed methodology for this particular analysis yields a broad and diverse scope of criticism. There are hundreds of pieces of literature that dissect the genre of science fiction to reveal distinct elements with which *The Island* corresponds precisely. There

are also hundreds of critical analyses that utilize Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA); yet, there is an evident absence of literature applying this methodology to the science fiction genre. The excerpts and synopses of the literature below constitute the evidence necessary to justify the application of FTA to science fiction.

Vivian Sobchack, a distinguished film critic and phenomenologist, defines science fiction film as “a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present, transcendentalism of magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown.”<sup>1</sup> The critique of popular culture, particularly the science fiction film, may have commenced with skeptical reactions from critics, but currently, the criticism is well-established. J. P. Telotte, science fiction critic, surveys the history of the genre, exhibiting, through three pivotal films, *Robocop*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *THX 1138* how the genre is a social commentary.<sup>2</sup> An online resource argues:

This film genre has long served as a vehicle for thinly-disguised and often thoughtful social commentary. Presentation of issues that are difficult or disturbing for an audience can be made more acceptable when they are explored in a future setting or on a different, earth-like world. The altered context can allow for deeper examination and reflection of the ideas presented, with the perspective of a viewer watching remote events.<sup>3</sup>

The plot of *The Island* is set in a futuristic setting, but, not too distant for the issues in the film to be irrelevant. The issues of human genetic cloning, abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and illegal human part trafficking are all controversial issues in

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998, 63.

<sup>2</sup> Telotte, J.P. *Science Fiction Film*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>“Science Fiction Film.” 2 November 2006. *Wikipedia, The Online Encyclopedia*. 4 November 2006 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science\\_fiction\\_film#Film\\_versus\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fiction_film#Film_versus_literature)>.

current American society. Another prominent author in the field of science fiction criticism is Roz Kaveney whose most recent book, From Alien to The Matrix: Reading Science Fiction Film, again, advances beyond mere thematic analysis to an application develop to current society.<sup>1</sup>

### Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA)

The principle elements of FTA imply its relevant application to nearly, if not all, forms of rhetoric, depending on the context. Sonja Foss recognizes some of the diverse types of rhetoric that FTA has been applied to, including popular songs, presidential inaugural speeches, and graffiti art.<sup>2</sup> There are other intriguing rhetorical selections in which FTA has been utilized.<sup>3</sup> Margaret Duffy critiques riverboat gambling; R. C. Hubbard, romance novels; Anne Marie Daniels, a declaration of independence; and Dorothy Baker Mettee, the lives of prison inmates.<sup>4</sup> From these journal articles and dissertations, the enormous scope where FTA is applicable becomes evident. Nevertheless, even with the duration and growing sophistication of science fiction film criticism, FTA has not markedly been applied. Therefore, employing FTA in the

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<sup>1</sup> Kaveney, Roz. From Alien to The Matrix: Reading Science Fiction Film. London: I. B. Tauris and Company, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Foss, Sonya K. Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004. 109-149.

<sup>3</sup> "Fantasy Theme Analysis and Symbolic Convergence Theory." The Journal for the Study of Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament. James D Hestor, ed. 4 November 2006  
<[http://rhetjournal.net/SCT\\_FTABiblio.html](http://rhetjournal.net/SCT_FTABiblio.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> Duffy, Margaret. "High Stakes: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Selling of Riverboat Gambling in Iowa," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 51(1985), 117-132.

Hubbard, R. C. "Relationship Styles in Popular Romance Novels, 1950 to 1983," Communication Quarterly, 33, 113-125.

Daniels, AnneMarie A. "The Palestinian People: Constitutive Fantasy in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence" Master's thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1991.

Mettee, Dorothy Baker. "Fantasy-Theme Analysis of the Rhetoric of Prison Inmates," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1984.

approach to the criticism of *The Island* is not only justified, but novel and potentially insightful.

### *Methodology*

There are hundreds of paths a rhetorical critique could follow regarding the film, *The Island*. My primary means for rhetorically approaching this film is through the method of Fantasy Theme Analysis.<sup>1</sup> A broad, elementary definition for fantasy theme analysis, derived from the contemporary theories of Ernest G. Bormann says:<sup>2</sup>

A critic can take the social reality contained in a rhetorical vision which he has constructed from the concrete dramas developed in a body of discourse and examine the social relationships, the motives, the qualitative impact of that symbolic world as though it were the substance of social reality for those people who participated in the vision. If the critic can illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the *dramatis personae* within the manifest content of their rhetoric, his insights will make a useful contribution to understanding the movement and its adherents.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Bales of Harvard University framed the rhetorical function of fantasies as

he observed people interacting within small groups and reacting to specific shared episodes within the small group.<sup>4</sup> Using Bales' fantasy theory as an underpinning theory, Ernest Bormann developed the Symbolic Convergence Theory of language; that is that humans engage in communication as *social actors*, contributing relevant concepts to a shared experience of creating a fantasy theme (Baldwin, Perry, Moffitt, 95). This theory

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<sup>1</sup> Literature review on Fantasy Theme Analysis derived from: Foss, Sonya K. *Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004. 109-148.

<sup>2</sup> Bormann, Ernest. "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: the Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 401.

<sup>3</sup> Kidd, Virginia. "Fantasy Theme Analysis." Department of Communication Studies California State University, Sacramento. 7 May 2006  
<[http://www.csus.edu/indiv/k/kiddv/FTA\\_reading.html](http://www.csus.edu/indiv/k/kiddv/FTA_reading.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin, John R., Stephen D. Perry, and Mary Anne Moffitt. *Communication Theories for Everyday Life*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004. 95.

is contingent on two prevailing concepts, one being that communication creates reality and the other that “symbols not only create reality for individuals but that individuals’ meanings for symbols can converge to create a shared reality or community consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

The word *convergence* implies that two or more separate symbolic entities, or humans, can be drawn to one another based on common symbols. Bormann illuminates this idea, saying, “If several or many people develop portions of their private symbolic worlds that overlap as a result of symbolic convergence, they share a common consciousness and have the basis for communicating with one another to create community, to discuss their common experiences, and to achieve mutual understanding.”<sup>2</sup> In *The Island* characters are depicted not merely as connecting on meaning; they “have [also] jointly experienced the same emotions; they have developed the same attitudes and emotional responses to the personae of the drama; and they have interpreted some aspect of their experience in the same way.”<sup>3</sup> These connections Bormann describes as fantasy themes or “creative and imaginative interpretation[s] of events that [fulfill] a psychological or rhetorical need.”<sup>4</sup> One can recognize a fantasy theme through prevalent cryptic allusions as Sonya Foss says. These allusions “may be a code word, phrase, slogan, or nonverbal sign or gesture...serv[ing] as allusions to a previously shared fantasy and arouse the emotions associated with that fantasy.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foss, Sonya K. *Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice*. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Bormann, Ernest, G. “Symbolic Convergence: Organizational Communication and Culture.” *Communication and Organizations : An Interpretive Approach*. Ed. Linda L. Putnam and Michael E. Paconowsky. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Bormann, Ernest G. “Symbolic Convergence Theory.” 104.

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin, Perry, and Moffitt. *Communication Theories for Everyday Life*. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Foss, Sonya K. *Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice*. 110.

The elements of a fantasy theme function to present the fantasy as reliable, credible, and necessary; thus, themes are constructed with substantial arguments that appeal to logos and pathos. Due to the necessity of arguments to sustain a fantasy, “Bormann provides an example of the connection between fantasy themes and arguments”<sup>1</sup>:

For instance, the puritan vision gave highest place to evidence not of the senses but to revelations, from God. The assumptive system undergirding the Puritan arguments was a grand fantasy type in which a god persona revealed the ultimate truth by inspiring humans to write a sacred text. Supplementing this core drama was the fantasy type in which the god persona inspired ministers to speak the truth when preaching and teaching. These fantasy types provided the ultimate legitimization for the Bible as a source of revealed knowledge and for the ministers as the proper teachers of biblical truths.<sup>2</sup>

Within *The Island*, implanted memories are what legitimize Dr. Merrick’s fantasy theme, thus allowing it to chain out. The chaining out of a fantasy theme occurs when all of the elements of an imaginative interpretation converge and congeal into one intense solid mass. Initially, the elements are coming together, but since they are entirely connected, the direction must go out. Thus, the allusions, the artifacts, and the ardor of the fantasy theme progress outward to engulf more people, thus creating a rhetorical vision, or a new paradigm.

Using FTA is appropriate, and according to the standards that comprise a solid theory, those being utility, scope, parsimony, heurism, and falsifiability, fantasy theme analysis is pragmatic in the case of *The Island*.<sup>3</sup> The fantasy theme within the film is supported by other authoritative communication theories such as the theory of relational dialectics evident in the example of Lincoln experiencing the dialectical pull between

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<sup>1</sup> Foss, Sonya K. *Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice*. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Bormann, Ernest G. *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985. 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Baldwin, John R., Stephen D. Perry, and Mary Anne Moffitt. *Communication Theories for Everyday Life*.

accepting his environment as genuine of whether it is false. Thus, fantasy theme analysis fosters broader and deeper observation. Moreover, the “heuristic provocativeness...generates questions for further research on groups and the way disclosing information about life outside the group connects the group and increases the overall group climate.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Methodology*

In the analysis of *The Island* the film will be coded to delineate setting, themes, character themes, and action themes<sup>2</sup> to derive the rhetorical vision and how it parallels with a current fantasy theme in American society. Upon successfully analyzing the film and the parallel rhetorical vision, I will integrate Barry Brummett’s notion of *vampirism*, a frame work that is also applicable to the film because it provides an analogy which represents current American society. The metaphor of *vampirism* will focus the rhetorical study even further than the application of Fantasy Theme Analysis allows. Brummett examined historical science fiction vampire films and developed the notion that in vampire films there is some force or being that connivingly overhauls human beings and becomes their replacement.<sup>3</sup> This theme is recurrent in recent literary history and is strikingly represented in American popular culture in films, broadcasts, books, magazines, and now the internet. *Vampirism* is a devil term, to use Kenneth Burke’s provocative name, a thoroughly negative fictive description of the exploitation of human beings. A form of *vampirism* occurs within this film; yet, ironically, the idea of “replacement” is not

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<sup>2</sup> Fantasy Theme Analysis ( Symbolic Convergence Theory). February 14 2001.  
<<http://www.uky.edu/~drlane/capstone/group/fantasy.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> Foss, Sonya K. Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice. 124.

<sup>3</sup>Brummett , Barry. “Vampires in Disguise.”

yet repugnant to the depicted real human society. Unknown to the society outside of the laboratory, are the negative outcomes of this practice of *vampirism*.

### *Film Narrative Overview*

An aerial shot spans a large room with hundreds of clear plastic sacs, functioning as wombs plugged into nutritional lines imaging the clones in every stage of development. One sac contains simply the embryonic fluid and human form, but shaped of primarily the circulatory system, a mass of veins and arteries. Another is a fully developed human being, fetal, sucking his thumb in the manner of an infant. Still another sac contains only an agnate. After the “birth” of the clones and their brainwashing or briefing, if you will, they are incorporated into the population of “survivors.” It is at this point that the fantasy theme truly manifests within the new clone. Bormann says, “A given individual may share several rhetorical visions providing social realities for such things as hobbies, politics, intimate relationships, and religion. . . . The visions may last only for short periods of time. On the other hand, some rhetorical visions are so all-encompassing and impelling that they permeate an individual's social reality in all aspects of living. I call such all-encompassing symbolic systems life-style rhetorical visions.”<sup>1</sup>

The common circumstances that develop the fantasy theme are as follows: The year is at least prior to 2015, for there is a Eugenics Law of 2015 mentioned by Dr. Merrick, referring to the agnates remaining in a persistent vegetative state, never achieving consciousness. In the vision, there has been a global contamination in which the extreme majority of the world’s population has been terminally infected by this pathogen. The facility is a refuge for survivors in which they are rehabilitated, and then

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<sup>1</sup> Kidd, Virginia. “Fantasy Theme Analysis.”

through the mechanism of a lottery are selected to travel to “The Island,” the last remaining pathogen free area on the planet. This lottery is the channel through which the inhabitants focus the entirety of their hope except for our protagonist, Lincoln Six Echo (His skewed hope is the fulcrum of the entire plot of the film). The Lottery, however, is already one of a few discrepancies in the fantasy vision that triggers Lincoln Six Echo’s questioning. The refugees are reminded frequently that they are “special,” the fortunate few to have the opportunity and privilege to repopulate their very own “Garden of Eden.”

The image of the Island is encrypted on the minds of every clone within the “refugee” facility through a subconscious visual brainwashing that occurs just after the “birth” of the clones. Through the towers of glass that are seemingly erected directly in the surf adjacent to the Island, the refugees have a constant icon of hope in front of their eyes. If every deliberation, every mannerism, every hair, and every recollection is implanted in the “refugees,” then how can doubts even develop about anything, especially a global contamination and the recovery facility that every being around embraces as an amalgamator to their present lifestyle. John Stewart, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the University of Dubuque, and interpersonal communication scholar says, “We, as persons, can be treated as if we were interchangeable parts, but each of us can also be thought of as unique in a couple of ways, genetically and experientially...even when persons have the same biological raw material, each experiences the world differently.”<sup>1</sup> Lincoln is the genetic replica of Tom Lincoln, as mentioned above, a philandering man, but also a speed enthusiast and vehicle engineer. Through the means of a synaptic brain-scan, Dr. Merrick discloses that along with the implanted memories, Lincoln’s brain seems to have developed a portion that maintains

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, John. Bridges Not Walls. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2006. 34.

Tom's memories, such as the Latin word, *Ringavato*, which is an intriguing narrative trajectory to be analyzed later. Lincoln has the clones' common memories, Tom's memories, and his personal memories or experiences in the facility.

A minimal but significant number of Lincoln's personal experiences in the facility are as follows: "feeding" the nutrient lines as his job; traveling to "Sector 6" to fraternize with Mac, a computer engineer who shares scandalous photos and a flask of booze with Lincoln while they discuss God, Dr. Merrick, and general elements of the fantasy theme; being physically attracted to Jordan 2 Delta; and following a flying bug into the sector of the facility to witness the murdering of other clones. Lincoln, frustrated, demands to know the source of the crimson nutrient tubes, and their destination, and why, why, why do they have to inject them. His co-worker and friend, Jonesy, says that the refugees need nutrients from food, and the food needs nutrients, thus they are feeding nutrients to the food (in actuality, the nutrient lines are for the developing clones). Sector 6 is supposed to be contaminated, yet Lincoln notices that no other person in the steamy, dingy, factory type room is dressed in a contamination kit. Also, he questions why Mac is not permitted to win the Lottery. He further questions how a flying bug got past the pathogen detectors to get into Sector 6. When he follows its flight upward, Lincoln finds himself crawling through a floor tile in a hospital type area in which he witnesses the recent Lottery winners being harvested for their parts and then executed. Lincoln is friends with Jordan 2 Delta, a female clone, yet they seem to have a sexual drawing to each other, a drive that is supposed to be obsolete to avoid "obvious complications." When Jordan 2 Delta wins the Lottery, Lincoln realizes that his friend will not travel to the Island, but will die. All of these experiences congeal to a heavy lump of doubt. The

fantasy theme that Dr. Merrick developed and chained out within the clone population now begins to crumble. This detail parallels with reality apart from the film which is disclosed in the findings.

As Lincoln is enlightened to his circumstances, that his entire existence has been fabricated for the prosperity of another human being at the expense of his own life, he does not retreat into a rapt dialectical struggle. He immediately furiously sprints down the colorless, sterile corridor of the harvesting center, down through the floor tile he entered, and into the restricted female residential sector of the facility. Frantically, he pounds on the opaque glass doors until Jordan Two Delta answers, snatching her arm, they set in motion the extended, flurry of intense science-fiction style dashing. These scenes encompass most of the content a popular critic would harp on. The special effects are at minimum admirable with high-speed chasing, profound collisions that stretch the narrative fidelity. During all of the action, Lincoln and Jordan adapt to surreal circumstances and concepts. As an example, they are perplexed as to what a directory service or a court of law is.

Intriguingly, their cognitive capacity is increasing and can clearly be perceived. Though, they had shared memories of time preceding the global contamination, these memory implants omitted the majority of common knowledge. Nevertheless, the two fugitive “products” track Lincoln’s sponsor, Tom Lincoln, and in a cunning adaptive reaction, manipulate their way back into the facility finding themselves faced with a virtual attempt at genocide by Dr. Merrick. According to the synaptic brain scan performed on Lincoln personally by Dr. Merrick, Lincoln Six Echo as well as the other products of Echo generation, present evidence of rapid substantial cognitive growth. This

impending high aptitude by this clone generation is a threat to sustaining Dr. Merrick's rhetorical vision within the facility and more significantly outside the facility. Thus, he opts to incinerate the products of Echo generation to insure that no instability within the fantasy causes the entire vision to crumble. This represents the cycle of the fantasy as Borman describes as the "emergence, growth, maturity and decline."<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately for Dr. Merrick, and fortunately for the "products," Lincoln and Jordan's efforts result in life and the truth. Fortunately for current day America, Merrick's rhetorical vision does fail, for it represents hope from a seemingly impending demise.

### *Findings*

The first task of fantasy theme analysis, according to Sonya Foss's description of the methodology, is to code the artifact for themes.<sup>2</sup> This is a process that involves arduously combing through every scene of the film to decipher what about the setting, the action, or the characters is a theme, or an imaginative interpretation of something else. Upon completing this task, which often requires rewinding the film, skipping scenes, and even slowing down the film to recognize themes, the two hour film become a five hour task. I located hundreds of themes, and then organized them into character themes, setting themes, and action themes. For this particular analysis, only a few themes were found to be significant in terms of this essay's focus.

A rhetorical vision is dependent upon all three types of themes; however, it is apparent that the coded results of *character* themes to be the overarching themes and are independent of the others. The action and setting themes are insignificant without a

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<sup>1</sup> Borman, Earnest. The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Foss, Sonya K. Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice. 124.

character envisioning a fantasy and making connections with the setting, and thus promoting action on the part of the heroes. So, though a fantasy may be dependent on the components of a setting, as in the Island *mise-en-scene*, there has to be an initial character to recognize the significance of the setting, as in Dr. Merrick. Dr. Merrick is the decisive personality who imaginatively interprets an event. Ironically, he himself does not adhere to the fantasy theme in the same naïve manner as the inhabitants, for in fact he has created the fantasy of the island. The island is a setting theme in that the clones aspire to inhabit the island, though it in fact is not an actual sandy paradise situated in warm tropical waters. Thus, the island also satisfies the dimensions of a character theme in that it personifies heroic a essence; the clones contemplate how the island will be their new beginning, a place of redemption from the demise of the “global contamination.”

The false “global contamination,” another essential theme, functions as a character theme. This character serves as the primary argument to legitimize the rhetorical vision by mean of the clones’ memory implants. All of the clones are constantly reminded of this shared memory, especially by the scrolling LED signs throughout the facility that disclose detections of pathogens. All activities are designed to concur with optimum health potential, the aim of the “survivors” to regain strength after the contamination, as the fantasy theme suggests. In actuality, the optimum health level is for the purpose of obtaining optimum “products.” After all, the sponsor *requires* clearer skin, a cirrhosis-free liver, or offspring without the labor of pregnancy. Indeed, as noted above, two focal character themes are the island or the fantasy of the island concept, and the global contamination; but, these are merely concepts within the rhetorical vision. The action themes of the human characters, Dr. Merrick and Lincoln Six Echo, are

crucial for the chaining-out process of the fantasy theme of the island. Resolutely, particular action themes lead to the demise of the fantasy theme.

Mentioned briefly above, Dr. Merrick is the decisive personality who imaginatively interprets an event resulting in the fantasy theme of the island. The island is the implanted and reinforced rhetorical vision for the clones of the facility, that vision being that they can renew their life on the island. Ironically, this same rhetorical vision is the product of different chaining-out of fantasy theme that Dr. Merrick provides for America, not for the clones. His commercial tells viewers: "Living forever...it's the new American dream." This fantasy theme is not explicitly dramatized within the film, yet is the conceptual underpinning of the island fantasy theme. For the logic of the analysis and the linkage between sections, the interpretation of the Lincoln Six Echo character theme will follow the arguments for the second part of the essay.

In sum, the fantasy theme of the Island is not the exclusive theme within the film; it is merely a mechanism to sustain a superior fantasy that chains out in the real world, outside of the cloning facility, in the United States of America. The entirety of the rhetorical vision of the "Island" is developed to protect the fantasy of living forever for postmodern America. The public relations director of Merrick Enterprises, the cloning facility, pitches his spiel to potential customers: "I want to tell you how you are going to live sixty to seventy years longer..." This fantasy theme delineates out as simply and relentlessly as the "Island" fantasy does.

The chief function of a fantasy is to create symbolic convergence, in which humans' understanding of concepts and messages converge to harmoniously create a reality. The reality that Dr. Merrick creates for America in the film is that for a price,

humans, as the “most complex of all living organisms,” can accomplish anything, even to defy a general wearing out of the human body until inevitable death. Our protagonist’s sponsor, Tom Lincoln, is able to spend years on end in promiscuous, drunken activity, leaving his liver ravaged, and ailing from Cerotic Hepatitis. This is no agonizing to the Scotsman, for when the time is most advantageous, meaning when his liver fails, he is able to redeem his “insurance policy,” that being Lincoln six Echo. This fantasy is not only for the less noble, for even the leader of the free-world, the President of the United States, has contributed his DNA for his own personal replica. Though this fantasy theme is secondary in occurrence in the film’s plot, it is primary in significance to the film. For the film, as I mentioned in the preview of the essay, is an augury of the manifestation of postmodern ethics within current-day America. From a most appropriate spokesman, Al Gore, postmodernism is defined as “the combination of narcissism and nihilism.”<sup>1</sup> This description is also arguably applicable to Brummett’s notion of *vampirism*, at least its development. From this point, I will integrate the archetype of *vampirism*—here meaning a societal overhaul—with Ernest Bormann’s fantasy theme analysis.

The opening shots of the film are surreal, spanning scenes from within Lincoln Six Echo’s head, a dream where he is cruising in a sleek yacht with a captivating lady in white. Though his dream goes awry, the concept of a dream as a prologue to the film is an ideal route to travel with the archetype of *vampirism* and fantasy theme. The American Dream is the air castle our society gazes upon; it is ironically the fetters in that castle’s dungeon that hem us from living a life of *satisfying* meaning. The substance of

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<sup>1</sup> “Postmodernism.” 9 September 2006. Wikipedia, The Online Encyclopedia. 9 September 2006 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>>.

the American Dream is material gain.<sup>1</sup> Such a superfluous end seems to lead to a Machiavellian philosophy, and as an omen, the film, *The Island* presents the notion of living “sixty to seventy years longer” in order to obtain even more of the American Dream, to become another of “America’s billionaire cabbies.”<sup>2</sup> The means to that end, portrayed in the film is through genetic engineering of entirely functioning human beings—mentally, physically, and emotionally—who are then butchered for their spotless organs. Ron Epstein, research professor at the Institute for World Religions in Berkeley, California discusses the slippery slope of genetic engineering:

In 1971 the United States government issued the first patent on a living organism, a genetically engineered bacterium for cleaning up oil spills. That slippery slope has led not only to the patenting of genetically engineered plants and animals, but also to the patenting of human genes, often without either the consent of the people from whom they are taken or any benefit to them. A proprietary attitude toward living organisms is based on philosophies of instrumental values, in which intrinsic value is disregarded. In other words all life is evaluated only in terms of its specific use for the individual. Absent is any sense of respect for life and the right of other living beings to work out their own destiny. Given the historical role of the United States in championing the notions of equality and individual rights, the legalization of instrumental values with regard to human genes is somewhat surprising. If “a man's home is his castle,” how much the more so our bodies and genetic makeup. One would think that people would have legal control over their own genes; however, that does not seem to be the case.<sup>3</sup>

The value of life is not in the person, the personality, intellect, passion, humor, etc.

but in the functional appliance of the machine called the human being. It is evident that the archetype of *vampirism* is an ideal tool to unpack the argument of the slippery slope.

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<sup>1</sup> “American Dream.” 14 September 2006. Wikipedia, The Online Encyclopedia. 14 September 2006  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_dream#The\\_American\\_Dream\\_today](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_dream#The_American_Dream_today)>.

<sup>2</sup> A rags to riches story of Tamir Sapir, and immigrant from the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. “American Dream.”

<sup>3</sup> Epstein, Ron. “Genetic Engineering and Its Dangers.”  
<<http://online.sfsu.edu/%7Erone/GEessays/gedanger.htm>>.

Epstein, Ron. “Redesigning the World: Ethical Questions about Genetic Engineering.” Ethical Issues in Biotechnology. Richard Sherlock and John D. Morrey, eds. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, 47-70.

The fantasy theme of the Island translates into our modern society in the form of the American Dream. In the film, the clones' aspiration is to win the Lottery (though some Americans indeed invest all of their meager earnings into a lottery, that is not the evidence for the argument). The broader fantasy theme is that through advanced technology of genetic cloning, we can reach our "island" of material gain, by one day being able to live longer lives with our "spare parts" in storage. An interesting aspect of the deep structure of visual rhetoric in the film is drawn from an analysis of the actual photographic image of the island, an island in the Leeward group of the Society Islands of French Polynesia called Bora Bora, meaning "First Born."<sup>1</sup> This aspect of the film's deep linguistic structure applies to the argument because the notion of genetic engineering ultimately leading to human reproductive cloning is analogical to the vision of American society being the first born among a future filled with demise. In his article, Epstein continues to say:

For all the advantages claimed for genetic engineering, in the overwhelming number of cases the price seems too high to pay. In order to insure megaprofits for multinational corporations well into the next century, we will have to mortgage the biosphere, seriously compromise life on the planet, and even risk losing what it means to be a human being. We have seen that genetic engineering poses serious risks to human health and to the environment. It raises serious ethical questions about the right of human beings to alter life on the planet, both sentient and non-sentient, for the benefit of a few.<sup>2</sup>

In Brummett's article about *vampirism*, he provides analogies from older films.

One in particular is the 1956 science fiction film, *Pod People*, based on the novel, *The Body Snatchers*, in which pods mysteriously appear in major cities throughout the United States. People are perplexed by these pods and are not deterred from them, but are

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<sup>1</sup> "Bora Bora." 14 September 2006. [Wikipedia, The Online Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bora_bora). 13 September 2006 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bora\\_bora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bora_bora)>.

<sup>2</sup> Epstein, Ron. "Genetic Engineering and Its Dangers."

instead drawn to them, and to their ignorance, pods contain aliens that are subversively replacing the citizens of any given city with their exact representations in appearance. The application is that the population accepts a new concept, even deifies it while it surreptitiously insurrects against the idolizers. In the fantasy theme of the island translated to the American Dream, the current momentum toward material gain is looming near what the film refers to as the *new American Dream*, of living longer. This aspiration connivingly overhauls the essentialness of humanity.

The desire to remain alive is a natural sensation; moreover a healthy one in reference to personal obstruction or suicide. To adjust and focus the above assertion, the desire to live long does not oppose what it means to be human, yet the obsession to avoid death regardless of price is the overhauling determinant. Humanity or humaneness is characterized by sympathy, and a natural tendency to alleviate suffering. The National Bioethics Advisory Commission states the argument like this:

[The] exercise of technological power would come at the cost of an artificial, diminished humanity. It would also disrupt the fundamental relational ties of likeness, identity, and equality. A child created through cloning is designed and manufactured as a product, rather than welcomed as a gift (Meilaender, 1997). Moreover, the process is itself inauthentic, or “fabricated,” with respect to what it means to be human. (Ramsey, 1970)<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, the five million dollar price tag for an extra sixty to seventy years depicted in this film, narcissistic and excessive, is nominal in juxtaposition to the price of human life. Though current American society has yet to produce an entire, living, cognitively, physiologically, emotionally, socially functioning human being, the preliminary research steps are well underway and rapidly developing.<sup>2</sup> According to the United States Government funded Human Genome Project Information webpage, “If the

<sup>1</sup> “Cloning Human Beings.” Report and Recommendations of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission. PDF: 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Humber, James, M. and Robert F. Almeder. Human Cloning. Totowa: Human Press, 1998.

low success rates can be improved ... reproductive cloning can be used to develop efficient ways to reliably reproduce animals with special qualities. For example, drug-producing animals or animals that have been genetically altered to serve as models for studying human disease could be mass-produced.”<sup>1</sup> The relative nature of America’s postmodern attitude allows for a Petri dish effect for inhumane philosophies to develop and manifest into real acts, such as depicted in the film. The “new American Dream” is a rhetorical vision that has a potential *vampiring* effect on current American society. Thus, *The Island* is, indeed, a fictional piece of rhetoric with relevant, dire implications, and serves as nothing less than an omen for the American viewers.

### *Conclusion*

Fantasy Theme Analysis has been broadly utilized in the rhetorical field because of its pragmatic “dramatic interpretation” of phenomena. The theory emerged from observance from small group interaction, and is it not, indeed, in a small group that people admit their dreams creating convergence. A spiral of silence<sup>2</sup> seems in process in the real world American society, for those who do recognize the *vampiring* effect of the American Dream are not intensely vouching for the alternative. Therefore, the decline of morals and general humane innateness can conceivably increase posthaste. Though, *The Island*, again, was not deliberated and produced to counter the spiral of silence, it is a modern rhetorical composition that can notably facilitate a social change in direction. This may be the first Fantasy Theme Analysis conducted on this film, and with this

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<sup>1</sup> “Cloning Fact sheet.” Human Genome Project Information. 2006. U.S. Department of Energy Office of Science, Office of Biological and Environmental Research, Human Genome Program. 9 April 2006. <[http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human\\_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml)>.

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, John R., Stephen D. Perry, and Mary Anne Moffitt. Communication Theories for Everyday Life.

analytical infrastructure to the film, other communication theories can be readily applied, as in the case of *vampirism*.

This film was created for primarily monetary and entertaining intents, and has proven, through the application of Fantasy Theme Analysis and *vampirism*, to be a gift of forewarning to the American society. In the film, the clones or “survivors” of a global contamination are constantly bombarded with halcyon surround-sound audio messages saying, “You want to go the Island.” In real life America, we are bombarded with the same message, to reach “our” island, regardless on the ramifications to other people. Through this analysis, it is evident that “You do not want to go to the island.”

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