

“Between the Pit of Man’s Fears and the Summit of His Knowledge”:
Cold War America and *The Twilight Zone*

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables	iv
Introduction	1
Rod Serling & <i>The Twilight Zone</i>	5
Long 1950s: Cold War Fears	14
Economic Changes	16
Social Changes: The Home and Family	20
Social Changes: Wider Society	23
Political Changes	28
Long 1950s: Television	35
Broadcasting & Limitations of Expression	36
Science Fiction & Social Commentary	43
Method	46
Defining the Themes	46
Defining the Variables	49
Coding Procedure	52
Results	57
Theme Analysis by Variable	61
Analysis by Broadcast Season	71
Analysis by Themes	76
Co-Occurrence of Themes	81
Discussion of Key Episodes	82
Conclusions	92
Sources	95
Appendices	100

List of Tables

Table 1: Theme Percentages

Table 2: Alienation Variables

Table 3: Fear of the Other Variables

Table 4: Fear of War and Mass Destruction Variables

Table 5: Erosion of Traditional Values Variables

Table 6: Totalitarian Regimes Variables

Table 7: Number of Total Themes Overall, By Season

Table 8: Theme Occurrences by Season

Table 9: “Alienation” Theme, By Season

Table 10: “Fear of the Other” Theme, By Season

Table 11: “Fear of War and Mass Destruction” Theme, By Season

Table 12: “Erosion of Traditional Values” Theme, By Season

Table 13: “Totalitarian Regimes” Theme, By Season

I. INTRODUCTION

In our current television landscape, viewers are much accustomed to shows promising “ripped from the headlines” storylines for familiar characters to tackle. Many primetime dramas, such as NBC’s hugely successful *Law & Order* franchise, have garnered millions of viewers with just this approach. Episodes feature major scandals of the day – political indiscretions, celebrity excesses, abuse of power – very thinly veiled with name changes; but viewers are quite aware of whose story is actually being told. There is a certain amount of instant gratification involved in watching well-known examples of malfeasance and misconduct exposed and righted by a favorite reluctant hero.

But this kind of frankness in television scripted drama was not always the case. For many years in the so-called “Golden Age” of television, networks and producers were besieged by restrictions of all kinds on the content of their series. As a result, many television critics have argued that television, particularly in the 1950s, was hardly an accurate representation of the state of national and world affairs at the time; at best, 1950s television portrayed an idealized facsimile of America. The nascent medium, they argue, found its footing by eschewing controversy, and in many cases, realism. There were a few exceptions to this starched image, one of which was the classic anthology series, *The Twilight Zone*.

The literature on the subject of *The Twilight Zone*, and its creator, Rod Serling, tends to emphasize Serling’s personal, left-leaning politics and characterize the series as a natural extension of these beliefs. Moreover, *The Twilight Zone* is often hailed by

television historians as being one of the early examples of serious political drama on television, in an age dominated by *Leave It to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*. The popularity of these latter two series, and others like them, has contributed greatly to the white-washed image many Americans have in their minds of the 1950s. However, the period between the end of World War II and the assassination of President Kennedy was actually much darker and more fraught with tension and confusion than is depicted through the rose-colored glasses of nostalgia.

As demonstrated in the following pages, deeper investigation into this time period, which M. Keith Booker (2001) called “the long 1950s” reveals an age in American history in which Americans were intensely conflicted about the country, its future and their place within it. In the wake of World War II, a new economic model grasped ever-so-tightly around the throats of American industry – and ultimately, around those of American homes as well. There were serious demographic and sociological shifts occurring, with mass migration not seen since the first pioneers headed west, the implications of which are still being felt today. The Iron Curtain had descended upon Europe, obscuring the light of democracy for millions, as Americans wondered if they might be next. But it was not only ideological clashes with the Soviet Union that weighed heavily on the minds of Americans: by 1955, the Soviet Union had equaled the United States in its mastery of both atomic and hydrogen bombs.

Threats (real or perceived) to Americans came from within just as surely as they came from without. Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and the House Un-American Activities Committee rose to national prominence peddling a parlor-trick version of

domestic security, but their lasting legacies among Americans who came of age in that era was to demonstrate the ease with which fear-mongering and hysteria can take hold of ordinary people. A quiet paranoia extended from the federal government to nearly all levels of society, and affected the lives and careers of many Americans – both prominent and ordinary. Even for those whose livelihoods were not directly threatened by the wave of red-baiting, distrust and fear were certainly part of life. Such was the culture into which Rod Serling introduced *The Twilight Zone*.

When scholars write of *The Twilight Zone* and of Serling, they tend to portray the series as a political drama – one that was focused on the darker side of American life in the 1950s: dictators, nuclear war, civil unrest. In so doing, many scholars reference several iconic episodes and qualitatively assess the presence of these tensions and fears in them, characterizing the series as a whole as Cold War allegory. In fact, qualitative work tends to *assume* this period was inherently marked by overwhelming societal fear and paranoia, but often fails to cite specific examples or demonstrate how these elements affected the broader culture. Perhaps this is simply because the authors of the works lived through this period themselves, so they may recall quite well the zeitgeist of the era. Literature concerning *The Twilight Zone* both lauds the series for its serious treatment of legitimate political issues, and contemplates the philosophical musings put forth by a number of episodes. The general consensus seems to be that, protected behind science fiction, magical realism and, sometimes, the fantastical, *The Twilight Zone* was Rod Serling's most political work on television. But these assessments have never been quantified; thus, it is difficult to determine whether then-contemporary political issues pervaded the entire series, or merely a handful of episodes. The literature may well be

spot-on; however, it is possible that *The Twilight Zone* was, in reality, only marginally more politically aware than *Father Knows Best*.

Although many primary source materials exist from the period, sources in which Serling himself discusses his desire to use *The Twilight Zone* as a vehicle for his own political expression, there has never been a quantitative investigation into whether the Cold War themes of fear, anxiety and suspicion actually *are* present throughout the series. That is the purpose of the present study. Did *The Twilight Zone* actually depict the fears and anxieties of the post-World War II era with regularity, or is the series motif iterated by television historians simply the result of a handful of strategically placed episodes? If so, which social and political currents occurred most frequently in the series? Does the regularity of political and/or social themes correspond with historical assessments of the time period? Does it correspond with what scholars have said about *The Twilight Zone*? What were the ways in which (stylistically, thematically, etc.) these themes *presented*? Were the political critiques or social concerns more likely to take center stage in the drama? Of the series' five seasons, did some emphasize political and/or social issues more frequently or vigorously than others?

In order to address these questions, this paper first establishes the field of inquiry by presenting the literature on *The Twilight Zone* and Rod Serling, scholarly analysis of the political, social and philosophical themes in the series, biographical information about Rod Serling and his professional work prior to *The Twilight Zone*, as well as information about his political and social ideologies, and his aspirations for the series, in his own words. Second, this paper identifies, describes and cites measurable examples of the

aforementioned fears prevalent in America during the height of the Cold War. Third, it positions *The Twilight Zone* in its proper historical television programming contexts, in terms of other successful shows of the same time period. This is followed by a discussion of science fiction as a medium for social critique during roughly the same time period in which *The Twilight Zone* originally aired. Finally, the study will turn to the method and results of a content analysis that incorporates all *Twilight Zone* episodes over its five seasons of airing.

II. ROD SERLING AND *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*

In comparison to other science fiction works of the 1950s and 1960s, and certainly when compared with the literature on *Star Wars*, relatively little has been written about *The Twilight Zone* or its creator, Rod Serling. Serling is certainly mentioned in many historical accounts of early television broadcasting, and his teleplays, including the famous “Patterns” and “Requiem for a Heavyweight” (both of which were later made into feature films), were among the first serious dramas written and produced specifically for television; Serling himself was part the group of television dramatists including Paddy Chayevsky and Gore Vidal (though both had left the medium by 1960) that popularized the television anthology drama. And in many volumes that purport to list the greatest television programs ever, such as 2004’s *Fifty Key Television Programmes*, *The Twilight Zone* is highlighted. But for the most part, these are passing references to *The Twilight Zone* and Serling; there has yet to be a study of considerable depth about the series.

The central component of the literature rests with two biographies of Serling; one written by Joel Engel (1989) and one by Gordon F. Sander (1992). Though these works for the most part refrain from offering thematic analyses of *The Twilight Zone*, they do yield insight into the experiences that shaped the series creator, and shed light on how these experiences and values were evident in a number of *Twilight Zone* episodes.

In his book, Engel details Serling's halcyon childhood in Binghamton, New York, the World War II combat experiences that left him with nightmares and insomnia for the rest of his life, and a professional life spent trying to recapture the peace and simplicity of his childhood. Engel characterizes Serling as driven by a strong sense of right and wrong, a "black and white" kind of morality that often won him critical praise when it informed his writing, but also earned him a reputation as an "angry young man" writer and "a Don Quixote tilting at windmills, a man unwilling to compromise his values" (143). However, after signing the deal with CBS that made him a millionaire and gave television *The Twilight Zone*, the man who had rallied against station censorship, spoken publicly against the sponsors of *his own programming* (when he felt they had "demeaned" his creative process) and espoused that "each of his scripts would 'say something'" (143) Serling was criticized by some for "selling out" and abandoning the political roots of his earlier work.

For his part, Serling would make somewhat contradictory statements over the years as to the nature of his writing on *The Twilight Zone*; in some instances, he defended his writing as still "saying something" albeit in a more subtle fashion. However, in others, usually to network or sponsor audiences, Serling had a habit of touting *The*

Twilight Zone as little more than a vehicle for hocking products. As part of a videotaped package pitching *The Twilight Zone* to sponsors, Serling taped an introduction to the series and his production company, Cayuga Productions. In it, according to Engel, Serling said to the potential sponsors, “This is a series for the storyteller because it’s our thinking that a mass audience will always sit and listen and watch a well-told story. We fully expect they’ll go to the store on the following day and buy your products. We think it’s that kind of a show” (179). Allegedly, Serling promised sponsors a “show without controversy” in exchange for a hands-off policy on their end (179).

This was a far cry from the Rod Serling of just three years earlier, who, on the heels of the success of his drama “Patterns” blasted the meddling of corporate sponsors in television programming thusly:

At the very worst, their interference is an often stultifying, often destructive and inexcusable by-product of our mass media system. I think it is a basic truth that no dramatic art form should be dictated and controlled by men whose training, interest and instincts are cut of entirely different cloth. The fact remains that these gentlemen sell consumer goods, not an art form. (143)

But Serling complained to Mike Wallace in 1959 that he was tired of fighting with networks and corporate sponsors, and that his goal now was simply to produce interesting and stimulating drama. He was not, in his own words, “going to try to delve into social problems dramatically” (183).

Almost as soon as the series began, Serling described himself as “desperately tired”; in fact, Serling was always “desperate” on some level. Engel notes, “Serling’s care-free, buoyant, easy-going exterior hid a very real sense of desperation. Throughout his life, in scripts, stories, interviews and correspondence, all forms of the word

desperation [sic] appear with frequency and regularity” (21). He desperately wanted *The Twilight Zone* to succeed, but midway through season 2, he became convinced it would not last beyond a third season (198). In reality, it was Serling’s decision, not the network’s to truncate the fourth season of the series. Serling had become frustrated with the writing schedule, was chaffing at sponsorship demands and felt he could no longer keep up the quality of the show. He spent the fall of 1962 as the writer-in-residence at Antioch College, his alma mater, rather than working on the set of *The Twilight Zone*.

In Sander’s 1992 eponymous Serling biography, he details the schism that occurred between Serling and CBS midway through *The Twilight Zone*’s third season (177). During this time, James Aubrey became president of CBS, and he had an immediate dislike for *The Twilight Zone* and for Serling (Sander, 155). Aubrey, recently from ABC, managed the network like an accountant, constantly balancing profits and losses; he was not shy with his feelings that *The Twilight Zone*, with its average ratings share, did not merit its expense (either in money or creative control) to the network (160). The arrival of James Aubrey as president of CBS would ultimately prove to drive a wedge so deeply between Serling and the network, the series (and, in fact, Serling) was never the same (160). In his later years, Serling would privately admit that Aubrey’s presence at the network, and his constant inspection of the series, was largely what drove him to take the fall of 1962 off (177-178). Sander asserts that as the palpable hostility between himself and CBS increased, and Serling felt more acutely the demands on his time as his fame grew, his *Twilight Zone* scripts became increasingly nostalgic, with episodes such as “A Stop at Willoughby” (185-191).

Despite Serling's problems with Aubrey, Sander characterizes the series creator positively. He makes repeated use of the phrase the "video Aesop" to describe both the parable didacticism of Serling's writing and his singular contribution to television. Of Serling's writing for many episodes of the series, Sander writes, "using the show as a personal bully pulpit to comment metaphorically on the aspects of human behavior and the human condition that made him [Serling] angry" (169); again invoking the same phrase, Sander writes that Serling used television "as a prism through which to view America's tormented soul" (143).

Aside from the biographies by Engel and Sander, a handful of writers have attempted to analyze *The Twilight Zone* from a variety of perspectives. Peter Wolfe (1997) comments on the series more from an artistic and philosophical standpoint, finding parallels between Serling's writing and those of playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco and Pirandello. Using the staples of surrealism – time travel, space travel and conversations between the living and the dead – Serling, Wolfe claims, comments on the "perversion of tradition, especially those values centering on the family" (8) in episodes such as "A World of His Own" and "The Bewitchin' Pool." As both Engel and Sander observed, Wolfe notes that Serling's best scripts "focus on closely observed, small domestic dramas that spin out of control" (29). If there is any cohesive theme to this five-season-long, anthology drama, Wolfe asserts, it is the emphasis on the individual, and all the ways that he goes awry. "The social criticism developed in *The Twilight Zone* matters less than the insights the show gives into individual behavior" (42).

Authors Don Presnell and Marty McGee (1998) also offer bits of thematic analysis of *The Twilight Zone*, while borrowing heavily from the Sander biography of Serling. Focusing less on the political statements made by the series, Presnell and McGee characterize the central contribution and unifying theme of *The Twilight Zone* as “lessons on what it means to be human” (7). This includes emphasis on ordinary people to whom extraordinary things happen; some of whom are taught a lesson with the opportunity to rectify ills, some of whom must live (or die) with the consequences of their ignorance. Presnell and McGee cite episodes such as “Where Is Everybody?”, “Two and “The Shelter” as examples of the series’ ruminations on the human condition, the good, bad and ugly of it all.

Marc Scott Zicree (1992), in his *Twilight Zone Companion*, appears to agree with Presnell and McGee’s assessment that *The Twilight Zone*, at its core, was really about the human experience. In fact, Zicree goes one step further, and is the only author writing about the series who specifically highlights the significance of alienation to the series as a whole. He writes, “*The Twilight Zone* was the first, and possibly only, TV series to deal on a regular basis with the theme of alienation – particularly urban alienation” (1). Furthermore, Zicree believes that the theme of alienation is repeatedly and intentionally presented in the context of fear, and that surrendering oneself to one would inherently mean suffering the consequences of the other (1). Comfort and security are to be found in cooperation and co-existence with others, not by positioning oneself at odds with one’s neighbors, as is overwhelmingly evident in episodes such as “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” and “The Shelter.”

In the few other works devoted exclusively to *The Twilight Zone* and Rod Serling, the series creator is characterized as “one of the loudest and most outspoken critics of American society and the television industry,” (Venuti, 354) and “a writer of socially-conscious, didactic television plays” (Boddy, 98). David Hogan (2006) writes of Serling and his contribution to science fiction, “Serling was a social progressive who was upset with the rich catalogue of human mischief and its concomitant misery. [...] Serling viewed science fiction as a vehicle for social comment, and he hoped, enlightenment” (4). Whatever it was he said to television executives and corporate sponsors, Serling’s legacy, specifically with regard to *The Twilight Zone* appears to be one of high-minded social critic.

Writing about science fiction and gerontocracy, F. M. Hodges (2003) cites *The Twilight Zone* as an example of writers and producers who used the science fiction genre to “explore popular feelings and anxieties about social and political change, and to analyze the limits of the ability of man to control the world and destiny of mankind” (176). This seems a far cry from “that kind of a show” – the kind that would serve as a vehicle for selling products – Serling promised to sponsors. Citing the *Twilight Zone* episode “Uncle Simon,” Hodges contends that the series frequently conveyed the message that “science and technology will always carry the malevolent imprint of its geriatric male creators and can never serve the needs of the young” (177). M. Keith Booker, in his *Science Fiction Television* (2005) also comments on *The Twilight Zone*’s treatment of science and technology, saying, “several episodes of *The Twilight Zone* explore the notion that, as our machines become more and more sophisticated, the boundary between us and them becomes more and more difficult to discern” (15).

Clearly the “science” aspect of *The Twilight Zone*’s science fiction theme was not always a positive one.

Booker echoes the sentiments of other television historians in his appraisal of the series and Serling’s contribution to the legacy of television. He calls *The Twilight Zone* “the most important science fiction television program of the 1950s, and the first to gain a widespread reputation for genuine artistic merit” (8). Like much of the literature on the series, Booker also comments on the social and political commentary embedded in the series, and references the same episodes (“Four O’Clock,” “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street,” “Time Enough at Last,” “Eye of the Beholder”) that are repeatedly cited as evidence of the supposed pervasive commentary of the series. The distinction Booker makes, that only Zicree also does, is the centrality of alienation and isolation to the series (11). That “the typical *Twilight Zone* protagonist is very much alone in the face of the strange circumstances that confront him or her” (11) is not lost on Booker, nor is its relation to America at the time. This overwhelming sense of alienation and of being solely responsible for addressing adversity is evidence, Booker believes, of the ways in which “the ideas [the series] explores so intelligently directly address numerous central concerns of American society in the late 1950s and early 1960s and generally comments first and foremost on the here and now, using imaginative settings and scenarios as a means of gaining new perspective on contemporary problems” (9).

Rick Worland (1996) also assesses *The Twilight Zone* positively, and praises the series and Serling for ahead-of-its-time political and social relevance saying, “the twist ending of a *Twilight Zone* political parable was often a lesson in New Frontier-era

liberalism” (105). Again, citing the 1962 episode “Four O’Clock,” Worland characterizes it as an anti-Blacklist, anti-McCarthyism vehicle, the airing of which “suggests not only an easing of restrictions on television content in the early ‘60s, but a confluence of ideological interests between the domestic political agenda of the New Frontier and the social fables of *The Twilight Zone*” (105). Through the “reformist liberalism the show tacitly espoused” (106), Serling created stories in which he could “frequently link politics to the larger dangers of the Cold War” (106). Despite Serling’s liberal personal politics and, as Engel mentioned, a stringent definition of right versus wrong, Worland also writes that episodes were not always tied together neatly at the end; they sometimes concluded with the “lesser of two evils” scenario, leaving as many questions as answers (109).

Despite their thoughtful appraisals of the series, neither Booker nor Worland examine the series episode by episode, or test to see whether or not their assertions about the series as a whole are true. Further, neither of the authors’ writings define the “central concerns of American society” (Booker, 9) or the “dominant political ideals and broad social anxieties” (Worland, 104) of the time, though they both reference them repeatedly. The writing of these two authors represent really the only serious treatment of *The Twilight Zone* vis-à-vis its connection to its time and place in history, and yet, they still fall short of concretely defining the series and how it reflected its era. Booker and Worland are just two among numerous authors who describe Serling as a risk-taker and *The Twilight Zone* as keen social commentary – despite the fact that by the time Serling had begun work on *The Twilight Zone*, he claimed to have hung up his critic’s hat.

Knowing all of this, one cannot help but wonder: which version of Serling was it that authored most of the *Twilight Zone* episodes? Was it the business man, eager to please sponsors and keep rating high? Or was it the angry young man, intent on using his art for “saying something”? In his later years, Serling said he avoided controversy and “delving into society’s problems”, but did he really? One aim of this study is to determine whether television historians, with all of their examples of the political and social topicality of the series, or Serling’s 1959 *Twilight Zone* promo are correct about the content of *The Twilight Zone*. But before this can be determined, first the issues of the 1950s must be examined and defined.

III. THE LONG 1950S: COLD WAR FEARS

For the purposes of this investigation, *The Twilight Zone* is analyzed in the context of M. Keith Booker’s “long 1950s,” (as opposed to the strict definition of the 1950s as a 10-year period) as it more accurately portrays the time period, without hemming and hawing over the arbitrary borders of a decade. Rather than the standard 10-year span of a decade, the long 1950s includes the period from 1946 to the beginning of 1964, shortly after President Kennedy was assassinated. As Booker explains of defining the period in this way, “My definition of the long 1950s allows me to encompass the great period of American Cold War hysteria, beginning soon after World War II and ending sometime around 1964, when nuclear and anti-Soviet paranoia in the United States began noticeably to decline” (3). Hereafter, the term “1950s” should be understood to mean this extended period of time between 1946 and 1964.

The 1950s have been firmly embedded into the American mythos as a time period emblematic of traditional America – of the values and identity that comprise our collective, national psyche. While it may be true that much of our current cultural identity has its roots in the formative 1950s, the time period was by no means “traditional” for its day. The 1950s were an era of profound change and tumult, in which the identity of America was inexorably transformed at all levels of society. These changes ran the gamut of sociological markers, including economic, political and social. Some of these changes represented phenomenal advances for America, steps towards a kind of Edenic future in which humanity would finally harness its full intellectual and emotional potential. Others, however, exemplified the capacity for destruction, and self-destruction, that have been seared into history books as modern-day cautionary tales. Indeed, 1950s America was a time of sometimes contradictory dualities: there was greater than ever economic prosperity and security, and yet it was also a time of great fear and anxiety; scientific and technological developments made lives for many Americans much easier, but they also caused many to fear for the future.

Whether good, bad or indifferent, the 1950s were not stagnant and undeniably broke with the America of previous generations. These alterations to the way Americans organized and identified themselves, according to scholars, were both forged in and led to a number of corresponding fears that beset the collective psyche. The time period came to be dominated, according to David Cate, by what he so succinctly termed “The Great Fear.”

Economic Changes

The cogs in the wheels of the American economy actually began their steady acceleration at the turn of the twentieth century, but were temporarily diverted during the Second World War (Leach 1993). It was in the postwar period that the steady acceleration achieved breakneck speed. Alterations to the economy affected all other aspects of society, and, one hundred years after they began, still shape the character of American commerce today. Technological achievements, geographic dispersions and demographic reformation all coalesced in the same time period, and, when coupled with the existing base of the U.S. economy that by then had over one hundred years of maturation, gave rise to a form of consumer capitalism the world had not yet seen. (Leach 1993). Consumer capitalism relied on the individual for its survival, and so anointed it the central unit of society, and de-emphasized the role of larger groups (families, communities, religious faiths) whose needs might conflict with the desires of the individual. As William Leach wrote, “it was a secular business and market-oriented culture, with the exchange and circulation of money and goods at the foundation of its aesthetic life and of its moral sensibility” (3).

A far cry from its agrarian past, or even the industrialization of the 1900s, the 1950s saw the advent of a culture marked by “acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire” (3).

Temporarily set back by the Depression, or perhaps *because* of the deprivation of that period, Americans of the first half of the twentieth century built a foundation of entitlement that became the basis for the postwar economy. The new consumer economy

of the postwar period exalted the individual and emphasized the importance of self, of obedience to no one and ultimate focus on acquisition.

The snowball that had begun down the side of the mountain fifty years earlier would not be halted by another war; instead, the foundation of changes to the American economy were strengthened by the postwar boom that followed World War II. According to Randall Bennett Woods, the war and its aftermath affected the economy in that: 1. Wartime rationing and savings fostered the perfect environment for heavy and widespread consumption at war's end; 2. The war itself and the tremendous need for supplies forced American industry to rapidly modernize production methods and materials, which were easily transitioned to civilian purposes once the war concluded; 3. The simultaneous growth of the plastics and electronics industries brought improvement and refinement of existing consumer products, as well as entirely new ones that would become quickly in-demand; 4. American workers, in all sectors of the economy were apparently reinvigorated by winning the war, as productivity increased significantly; 5. The widespread availability of government contracts to support a wide array of new government programs produced a boom in the private sector in many corresponding industries (Woods 2005).

By the end of World War II (whether it was actually true for the majority of Americans or not), "it was assumed that food, shelter and clothing were being attended to and that the task ahead was to stimulate and expand consumption in a never-ending drive to increase production and raise profits" (Woods, 123). Part of this consumption was financed by the wartime savings, but two other factors contributed even more

significantly: 1. Per capita incomes rose from \$2,150 in 1947 to \$2,699 in 1960, with inflation holding steady during that period (122); 2. Americans began living on credit. “Installment indebtedness” (125), by the mid-1950s had become a way of life for many American families, in order to accommodate everything from homes to new cars to refrigerators. But the indebtedness did not end with finance payments to Sears or Ford; the 1950s were also the birthplace of one of the most treasured American institutions: the credit card. First introduced in New York City by Diner’s Club in 1950, by the end of 1958, Sears Roebuck alone had acquired more than 10 million credit card accounts (125).

Americans now had more money than ever before, and even if they did not have sufficient funds to purchase something they desired, they could simply purchase it on credit. The 1950s saw more than the consolidation of the consumer economy – it was also the instant gratification economy. All of the new electric toys with which Americans were so enamored had built-in, planned obsolescence (127). While many of these devices afforded a new era of convenience and speed, they also ushered in an era of consumer waste; the planned obsolescence of cars, televisions and washing machines meant that consumers would keep buying – and discarding – the items as soon as newer, better models were produced (127). This new cycle of rapid acquisition and casting aside represented a major break with nearly every generation previous, not only in an economic sense, but in a moral sense as well. To waste something – that is, the failure to keep it until it is completely used up and will function no more – “had been considered uncivil and even immoral” (127). As recently as the Great Depression, to stop using something simply for aesthetic purposes or to “keep up with the Joneses” would have been unfathomable. But the 1950s were an altogether different time and place.

The shift from an industrial to a consumer economy also affected the kinds of jobs available to (mainly) men and the general organization of the workplace. The decline of traditional industries, such as coal and textiles, was simultaneous to ascent of finance (to manage all that credit being handed out), high technology and national corporations (many of which not did actually manufacture goods, but merely sold them), which all required a much different employee than previous generations had experienced. This was reinforced by the number of WWII veterans graduating college, thanks to the GI Bill. For the first time, millions of Americans who likely would not have had the opportunity to attend college or receive any kind of postsecondary training did so, and changed dramatically the character of the workforce (Edgerton, 156). It was the “emergence of a powerful new managerial class [...] specialists in management, marketing and finance were linked to the vast corporations and conglomerates for which they worked not only by rising salaries and benefits, but also by a culture that emphasized loyalty and conformity” (Woods, 134). The 1950s were the origin of “middle management” and the “company man.” These terms, so derided now, were then an important part of the postindustrial economy, even a source of pride for many middle-class Americans.

No longer toiling in the fields or mines, returning GIs could put their military training and “other-directed”(Reisman 1973) mindset to good use. The emphasis in this new work environment was not on individual achievement, but on fitting into the corporate bureaucracy and furthering the company goals. 1950s corporate America facilitated the “passing of the old Protestant work ethic and entrepreneurial risk-taking and their replacement by a social ethic that placed a premium on cooperation, security and the well-being of the group” (Woods, 135). This shift in the workplace organization

and culture corresponded with, and in fact may have contributed to, the myriad social changes that occurred during the 1950s.

Social Changes: The Home and Family

Social organization in the 1950s, from the household level and up, experienced such a dramatic overhaul from its previous incarnations, it is difficult to describe sufficiently. In general terms, 1950s American culture was contradictory in its nature, characterized by both an extreme pulling apart and a hasty coming together. As with previous generations, the seat of all the activity was the home, but it was a very different home indeed.

At the end of World War II prosperity returned to America, but many GIs did not want to return to the city, nor to the farm; their desires were met by a plethora of federal programs. Most notably, the 1944 GI Bill (née, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act) expanded the Federal Housing Authority to provide home loan insurance to (white) veterans (May, 151). In just six years after the conclusion of the war, new construction of detached, single-family homes climbed from 114,000 to almost 1.7 million (May, 151). The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 earmarked \$100 billion for the construction of 41,000 miles of highways outside of major urban areas (151). Both of these Acts affected the very nature of the residential construction industry. The construction of homes, historically a de-centralized, locally-driven operation, carried out by a large number of small and independent contractors was increasingly consolidated in the immediate postwar years (Jackson, 55-56). The most famous of all the construction companies to emerge from the postwar period was Levitt and Sons, which was

responsible for the “Island Trees” subdivision 25 miles east of Manhattan on Long Island. Levitt and Sons approached home construction the way Henry Ford approached automobile production: assembly line, vertical integration and uniformity of product. The Levitts recognized early on that it was much easier to produce many homes at once if they were all on uniform plots (60 feet by 100 feet) with uniform floor plans. They also used crews that would specialize in only one aspect of the home construction, and then perform it repeatedly on every home being constructed in a development. This method enabled the Levitts to transform 4,000 acres of potato farms into 1800 single-family homes in just over a year (Jackson, 56). By the end of the 1950s, there would be 17,400 particle board, concrete slab, cellar-less “Levitt houses” in Levittown, New York (Jackson, 57). Ultimately, the Levitts’ formula of mass home construction would be imitated in suburban developments all over America for the remainder of the century (Jackson, 56).

By 1950, the suburban explosion was well underway in America. But what is the significance of this migration to the suburbs? What kind of cultural and psychological impact did this movement have on Americans who lived it? According to Elaine Tyler May, suburban sprawl had a profound effect on white, middle-class America. Prior to the suburban flight, it was very common for American families to live with members of their extended families, often in tenement-style apartments in cities and in farmhouses in rural areas. In immigrant communities, such as New York’s Chinatown and Little Italy, neighbors were quite literally on top of one another and banded together with their shared native language, cuisine and traditions (May 1988). In cities, most necessities could be found within immediate walking distance from one’s home; on farms, many families

were able to cull what they needed from the land. What people lacked in physical space, they often had in convenience.

The suburbs, however, would be quite a different place. After the war, young families kissed their mothers-in-law and siblings goodbye and headed for their own 60 by 100 lot. In so doing, many of them bid farewell to their support network, families and ethnic communities who knew them best, and could be counted upon when needed (May, 18). Though these suburban pioneers were surrounded by the new, in many cases, they were surrounded by little else. Unlike in cities, the nascent suburbs did not offer the butcher, baker and candlestick maker steps from the front stoop. Grocery shopping, clothes shopping and playground visiting all often required a drive, not a stroll. Neighbors were cloistered behind picket fences, no longer the other side of the wall. Houses now dotted tracts of land formerly unoccupied, but for many years, lucrative jobs did not. The “company men” and middle managers of corporate America discussed above were still tethered to the cities for employment, which gave rise to another American institution: the commute. Those 41,000 miles of highway were quickly put to use by husbands making the long drive from their Levitt houses to their desks and back every day.

In many ways, though the 1950s suburb was an idealized goal, a singular representation of the American Dream fully realized, it still was not a destination in itself. There was much traveling to be done to and it from it, as well as within it, but the infrastructure was, in many cases, lagging behind home construction. In nearly all postwar suburbs, public transportation was non-existent (Jackson, 61). Now separated

from family, friends, work and daily necessities by distances only surmountable by car, 1950s suburbanites were marooned on their perfectly manicured island.

Several scholars, such as Elaine Tyler May (1988) and Mary Caputi (2005), assert that the flight to the suburbs created a feeling of “neither here nor there” for the inhabitants, a physical and emotional estrangement from the people and things that were familiar to them. This was especially true for many wives of the era. When nuclear families began fleeing to the suburbs and splitting off from their extended families (which meant no help with raising children and housework), it increased significantly the pressures on the suburban housewife. Of all the participants in the suburban thrust outward, the housewife was probably the most psychologically affected. Husbands now made the long drive to the office in the morning and back in the evening, but wives were by themselves in a way they never had been before. No longer were there balconies to shout down from, mothers in the sitting room, familiar faces at the corner store. If the children were of school age, housewives frequently found themselves spending more time alone with their washing machines, contending with the strains placed on a marriage by the work-life separation. This physical separation and isolation served to enforce more strictly the rigid gender roles that had been temporarily slackened by the visible contributions many women made to the public sphere during World War II (May, 18).

Social Changes: Wider Society

The collective psyche, as previously mentioned, was marked by a kind of contradiction. As M. Keith Booker (2001) asserts, “despite the impressive economic expansion of the decade, many who remembered the Great Depression remained terrified

that another economic collapse might be on the horizon. Meanwhile, those who had profited most from the 1950s boom grew increasingly anxious that they might not personally be able to hold on to their gains” (5). This sense of fear and uncertainty was deeply rooted in the American suburbs as well. The relative newness of the surroundings extended to the people, many of whom owned their own homes for the first time, and felt acutely that their newfound peace and prosperity could depart as quickly as it had arrived. As May wrote, “there were tenuous alliances among uprooted people. With so much mobility and with success associated with moving on to something better, middle-class nuclear families could not depend upon the stability of their communities” (20).

To compensate for these feelings of precarious success, rootlessness and vulnerability, some scholars argue, homogenization of culture and identity took hold. “In the midst of this plenty, a new type of society emerged characterized by a drive for conformity in dress, architecture and gender roles” (Wood, 126). This social homogenization was aided by the development of the consumer economy; there were now national chain stores, such as Sears Roebuck, from which Americans could purchase the exact same goods, whether they were in New York or Albuquerque. That there were now fewer companies producing more goods than ever before (Woods, 126) meant that as households were quickly buying dishwashers and refrigerators, millions of Americans were purchasing the *same* dishwashers and refrigerators, homogenizing the interiors of countless homes.

However, the interior of the home was not the only aspect to become homogenized. Jackson argues that, exacerbated by assembly line construction like Levitt

and Sons but not invented by them, home architecture in the postwar period lost its regional identity. Jackson notes that, traditionally, different areas of the country had developed their own particular style of home architecture in keeping with their own history and climates. “The colonial-style homes of New England, the row houses of Atlantic coastal cities, the famous Charleston town houses with their ends to the street, the raised plantation homes of the damp bayou country of Louisiana, and the encircled patios and massive walls of the Southwest” (61) all reflected unique regional identities. This diversity in the style of home was largely abandoned in the tidal wave of home construction at war’s end. These kinds of homes were much more expensive to construct and took much more time. The pseudo-Cape Cod-style homes that Levitt and Sons were able to put up at breakneck speed were much more cost-efficient. For the first time in American history, one could visit suburban areas outside of major cities all over the country and find houses that all looked strikingly similar. Quoting historian and social critic Lewis Mumford, Jackson writes, “The ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our own time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible” (63-64).

But the home was not the only facet of postwar America that became homogenized: American personal taste was also affected by the expanse of the consumer culture, partly in an organic process, but also partly out of the aforementioned fear of social estrangement. “Everyone rushed to purchase the newest novelty – for the working class, televisions, hoola-hoops [*sic*], disposable lipsticks and electric carving knives; for the wealthy, Corvettes, Christian Dior gowns and larger houses” (127). Shopping itself became a kind of national pastime as it had never been before; prior to the 1950s,

shopping was relegated to a chore one performed out of necessity. But with the advent of the suburban shopping mall, bored suburbanites could listlessly walk amongst dozens (sometimes over one hundred) stores and eat and chat, centrally cooled in the summer and warmed in the winter. In much the same way the absence of front stoops in Levitt houses reduced people's visibility on the street, so too did the indoor shopping mall, and its proliferation during the decade continued the suburban push indoors. Inside and away from prying eyes, Americans could shop for the dresses and hula hoops, mass produced somewhere far away by a nameless, faceless person the consumer would never know, that would draw neither ridicule nor fascination from their neighbors.

Television, Woods argues, contributed tremendously to the effectiveness of national stores and brands in reaching a very coveted demographic: everyone. By 1960, fully 90% of Americans had televisions in their homes and spent more time watching television than working or going to school (Woods, 128). All of these hours logged in front of the television included frequent and repeated exposure to a variety of sponsor products: hosts of shows (much like Rod Serling would at the conclusion of many *Twilight Zone* episodes) would tout the smooth flavor of Lucky Strike or extol the virtues of hitting the open road in a Chevrolet. Product-placement, disparaged now as the lowest form of commercialism in television shows and movies, was commonplace in 1950s television (Edgerton, 122, 180). Americans glued to "the tube" were not only homogenized by the limited network choices (four, and then only three, after DuMont folded) but also by the constant barrage of advertising. This new medium for experiencing entertainment shaped tremendously the collective personality of America in the 1950s. "The 'electronic hearth' changed the way Americans thought, dressed and

acted. The new medium made its adherents at once more cosmopolitan and more provincial, more active and more passive [...] Sitcoms, westerns and variety shows became placebos that insulated the common man from the hurts and anxieties of human existence” (Woods, 129). With all of the tumult of the era, it is no coincidence that television viewership and ownership rose so meteorically – there was much from which people desired insulation.

All of these social trends, particularly toward conformity of culture, give a somewhat different perspective of 1950s America than the image of idyllic prosperity many have today. While, of course, happiness and excitement existed during the period, there was also a kind of emotional claustrophobia that pervaded it as well. “Thus behind the look, the veneer of contentment within white, mainstream 1950s America, there resides a jarring dissonance between social conventions and human desires” (Caputi, 10). The 1950s were not black and white and cut and dry, but rather, the reality “that was, with its racism, homophobia, and general prejudice, quite confused and unhappy” (11).

It is worth noting, however, that despite the evidence to the contrary, some historians such as Alan Levine (2008) do not believe the 1950s were any more conformist than previous periods in American history. Far from repressed, Levine claims, the 1950s were the era of Kinsey, *Playboy*, Tennessee Williams, and *Lolita* (16). Though Levine is apparently in the minority with respect to his position that the 1950s were far from conformist, it is worth mentioning that there were aspects of culture, such as Kinsey and Kerouac, that deviated from the uniformity that pervaded popular (especially white, middle class) culture.

Political Changes

It might be more accurate to term this section “events that involved the federal government” because to call them strictly “political” changes undermines their depth and breadth. The government expanded its reach greatly during the war, as Woods notes the “enduring legacy of World War II was the growth of the federal government [...] the government intervened into every walk of life, setting prices, allocating manpower, rationing tires and gasoline, and taxing on a massive scale” (2). After the war ended, the government never really retreated away from this encroachment. As such, the wide intersection of federal government activities, policies and programs (both domestic and foreign), and the average American is the focus of this section.

Historian Tom Engelhardt (1995) sums up the relationship between the government and citizens with what he termed “Triumphalist despair” – “a nightmarish search for enemy-ness became the defining, even obsessive domestic act of the Cold War years (7).” The concept of war itself was entirely altered in a way that made it difficult for people to understand, because with the advent of nuclear weapons, there came the realization that there was no possibility for “total victory,” and therefore changed the “war story” that Americans had clung to during WWI and WWII. There was a loss of cohesive narrative that could simplify the situation and provide a neat and predetermined ending. There were at once so many options – at least as far as consumerism was concerned – and yet no real direction.

Booker (2002) also shares this view of the time period. He classifies the dramatic increase in consumption not, as many have assumed, as an indicator of the optimism of

the age, but rather a clear indicator of anxiety about the future. The struggle against Communism meant that Americans had to reassert the superiority of capitalism by reinforcing the capitalist system. “America’s new place as a global power helped to create a siege mentality in which Americans felt threatened not merely by the communist ghouls of the Soviet bloc but by the savage hordes of the Third World. For another, the new prosperity of the 1950s occurred within the context of a consumerist ethic that derived its energies from the creation of a never-ending and unquenchable desire that, by its very nature, made true satisfaction impossible” (2). It was during the long 1950s that America experienced a loss of its Utopian ideal – and its wartime ideology of hope and fighting the good fight against the forces of tyranny and oppression had given way to an era in which neither the battlefields, nor combatants, were clearly defined (3).

In this search to define enemies and draw clear lines in the sand as to who constituted “us” and who was left as “them,” there were many casualties. When confronted with the list of private and public enterprises undertaken in the name of “security,” it is difficult to argue against the fact that the 1950s were an extremely anxious time in American history. The security that people sought was from various boogeymen – nuclear war, Communism, dictators, another Great Depression – and it led them to a variety of sources that promised safety for a price.

Americans were concerned, quite understandably so, about nuclear technology. Once the Soviet Union harnessed the same capabilities, and America lost its monopoly on nuclear weaponry, Daniel Wojcik (1997) argues, there came a palpable feeling of vulnerability and exposure that was pervasive in many segments of society. In the

immediate postwar period, this vulnerability, coupled with constant news coverage of the growing Cold War, led to anxiety, fear, paranoia and distrust. This is evidenced by the popularity of backyard bomb shelters and “duck-and-cover drills,” both of which were designed to make people feel some semblance of control over their fates, which had been lost. In the later years of the 1960s, these tightly held fears gave way somewhat to a frustration and a resignation to the inevitability of nuclear apocalypse. The atomic bomb became not simply a weapon of war, or even a psychological weapon, but a ubiquitous social touchstone, so much so that the term “atomic” began appearing in a variety of popular contexts, including the names of products and stores. “This lighthearted adoption of the signifier ‘atomic’ seems to have been a reaction to deeper anxieties about the bomb, serving as a means of subduing the fear of the atomic threat; by associating the atomic bomb with commodities and commonplace events, its destructive capability was domesticated and incorporated into everyday life” (102). The ease and convenience of push-button appliances were an ironic juxtaposition with the “Doomsday Button,” which many people believed existed in the White House and could destroy civilization in seconds. “The belief that the world could be ended by pressing both reflected and reinforced feelings of helplessness and apocalyptic inevitability [...] Apocalypse was no longer a cosmic event executed by supernatural deities; it was now reduced to a mundane, technological absurdity” (103).

In an attempt to compensate for this feeling of helplessness, the American government created the Federal Civil Defense Administration, which was responsible for the civil defense “duck and cover” drills school children of the era knew so well. According to historian Guy Oakes (1994), “the civil defense programs of the 1950s

represented an attempt to [persuade] Americans that they could be trained to protect themselves from a nuclear attack” (6). This was, of course, untrue. There would be no “defense” against a nuclear attack; members of the public might be trained, in the absence of a functioning governmental structure, to manage their own *survival*, but no amount of ducking and covering would save anyone from a nuclear blast. As such, part of the civil defense program focused on “emotion management, designed to suppress an ‘irrational’ terror of nuclear war” (33). This is to imply that experiencing terror at the awesome destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, the likes of which the world had never known, was irrational. This is also to imply that public preoccupation with nuclear warfare, by the mid-1950s, had surpassed “anxiety,” “uneasiness,” and “fear” and catapulted to “terror.”

Americans in the 1950s may have been terrified of nuclear annihilation, but they also worried about social implications for nuclear technology. Paul Boyer (1985) writes that many Americans, though they did not understand the complexities of nuclear technology, intrinsically understood its capacity for change, just by its sheer existence; there was a sense that society would never again be the same. Paraphrasing the writing of Yale professor William Liscum Borden, Boyer asserts “the most salient social change of the atomic era would be the devaluation of the individual, an explicit undermining of the egalitarian premises of American political ideology, and a reversal of the democratic thrust of the vaunted ‘century of the common man’” (148). The stakes had been thrust skyward by nuclear weaponry, and as such, many felt the only way to keep from losing was to remain on constant alert. In keeping with the civil defense ethos, it was all fine and well for individual families to be on high alert, but what did it mean if the

government was involved in a 24 hour a day militant vigil? Some felt that this would spell the end of democracy. Political columnists and brothers Joseph and Stewart Alsop wrote as early as 1946 in the *Saturday Evening Post*:

No true democracy can enforce military discipline among all its people or suspend the right of search and seizure, or condemn by dictate all its great cities and bodily transplant their inhabitants to new homes... By painful stages, we shall sink into the mood which begets Fascism. (149)

It was not only annihilation that Americans of the 1950s feared, but living long enough to see the annihilation of the American way of life, democracy discarded in the name of security.

Americans feared the end of democratic order, both because of the social upheaval the bomb might cause without ever having been detonated, and through the spread of Soviet Communism. Benjamin Alpers (2003) writes extensively about totalitarianism and its place in American history. He asserts it has long occupied a place in the American collective consciousness, but its universal derision and contentiousness are rooted firmly in World War II. A war fought (ostensibly) against the dictatorships of Europe gave way to a Cold War, waged against a dictatorship of another kind. In the immediate postwar years, the term “totalitarianism” had become engrained in American popular culture, albeit with a somewhat ambiguous meaning. What was clear, however, particularly within the context of George Orwell’s *1984*, that totalitarianism and America’s reaction to it, represented “fears about modernity, about the growth of the state, about newly emerging forms of mass politics, about the long-run ability of capitalism to avoid economic catastrophe, about the international intentions of dictatorial regimes [...] and about the ability of democracy to respond to these challenges” (253).

Totalitarianism became associated with the “nightmarish pessimism” underlying much of the fears of the postwar years, and as a result, was a much larger part of the American consciousness in the postwar years.

Domestically, America was consumed, according to David Caute (1978), by “the politics of hysteria” – government by inquisition, with the singular focus on ridding America of domestic Communists. This began, says Caute, when President Truman signed Executive Order 9835, “which launched a purge of the federal civil service and inspired imitative purges at every level of American working life” (27). Further evidence of the federal government’s preoccupation with (supposed) Communists in the midst: the year after EO 9835, the 81st Congress debated no less than 38 (supposed) anti-Communist bills (38). The climax of the “Great Fear” came in the summer of 1954, shortly before the Senate voted to condemn Joseph McCarthy and his activities on the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (better known as the McCarran Committee). Caute describes the period between 1948 and 1955 as “a desperate time, a time in which the words ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ resembled gaudy advertising slogans suspended above an intersection where panic prejudice, suspicion, cowardice and demagogic ambition constantly collided in a bedlam of recriminations. The wealthiest, most secure nation in the world was sweat-drenched in fear” (11). Aided by television, the McCarran Committee hearings eclipsed their House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) counterparts, if not in the fear they inspired, at least in attention demanded. Holding court from his bully pulpit was Senator McCarthy, pointing fingers (literally and figuratively) at American citizens – both prominent and plebian – making quite clear the

point that no one was above suspicion for any indiscretion, large or small, real or imagined.

Science was more present than ever in the national consciousness, which was hardly a surprise after a scientific breakthrough (or, more accurately, *the* scientific breakthrough) won the war in the Pacific. Science now cut across all levels of society, and with increasing dependence upon electronic consumer goods, more people than ever had a stake in the future of scientific development. However, increased visibility also meant more people interested in scientific debate. As historian Martin Sherwin (1970) explained, scientists found their work subject to political scrutiny – it was not being judged (and funded) by whether or not it could benefit humanity, but by whether or not it could advance American military goals (158). While this was frustrating for many scientists, who came to feel like they were little more than cogs in the military-industrial machine, it had a profound effect on the American public and their understanding of science. Scientific achievement was now almost always couched in terms of foreign relations – there was no more investigation for investigation’s sake. “As a result, the boundary between science and politics blurred, and the public’s attitude toward science was defined by political rather than scientific criteria” (602). The politics, newness and speed with which science and technology were developing during the 1950s meant that many people were distrustful of their capabilities; many were concerned what increased reliance on technology might mean for the culture. Science as a whole came to be viewed with at least suspicion, and at most, outright hostility.

America at the end of World War II experienced enormous changes to nearly every area of organization. Politically, socially and economically, the America of the 1950s, and indeed, the rest of the twentieth century, looked very little like the America of years just recently passed.

IV. THE LONG 1950S: TELEVISION

Having established the wider historical context into and from which *The Twilight Zone* was created, it is logical to do the same from a broadcasting standpoint. Television of the 1950s is both sanctified and vilified, depending upon the author. However, neither perspective is particularly relevant to the present study. It is necessary to give a brief overview of the state of television broadcasting at the time *The Twilight Zone* originally aired in order to put the series in its proper context; however, this is not a study expressly regarding *The Twilight Zone*'s relationship to other programs of the day, but more so to the general times in which it aired. The relative merits or artistic achievements of the concurrent series are best left to another paper.

The period in which *The Twilight Zone* was originally broadcast was what historians Christopher Sterling and John M. Kittross (2002) describe as the "Age of Television" – and for good reason. Coinciding (though perhaps not coincidentally) with the Eisenhower Administration, television in this span of time went from a glowing novelty to a national obsession to, finally, a household necessity. The nature of television broadcasting of this era was, as Sterling and Kittross assert, largely centered on

entertainment (370), though there were certainly important political broadcasts during the 1950s (most notably the Army-McCarthy Hearings in 1954) (379). Some might argue that the entertainment, rather than instructive, value of television has remained since then its distinguishing feature. However, the reasons for this focus on entertainment are varied.

Broadcasting & Limitations of Expression

Television historian Thomas Doherty (2003) characterizes the 1950s television climate thusly: “The Cold War and the cool medium [television] worked out an elastic arrangement, sometimes constricting but ultimately expanding the boundaries of free expression and relaxing the credentials for inclusion” (3). However, Doherty allows that Hollywood, and especially the nascent television medium, was often choked by the hand of government intervention in the form of the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (McCarran Committee), House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, along with various FCC hearings. All of these government intercessions in Hollywood and television’s method of doing business led ultimately to the adoption of the Television Code (modeled after the Production Code Hollywood imposed upon itself in the 1930s). By 1952, television executives agreed to police their medium in accordance with the standards of those in government, “to placate moral guardians, to lend respectability to a disreputable medium and to avoid the threat of federal censorship” (68). Avoiding federal censorship, in many cases, meant avoiding issues that might even remotely be considered politically or socially taboo.

Official censorship extended beyond mundane issues such as nudity or profanity on television. The 1950s were the era of the Blacklist, and nearly everyone in Hollywood was afraid of somehow being connected to Communism. But it was not even Communism, specifically, that mattered: the appearance of anything un-American could keep someone from working. Blacklisting in Hollywood, as described by Sterling and Kittross was the period in which:

the industry, through fear and cowardice, let others control it [and] was a grim era in broadcasting and film and the arts generally [...] It was done by a small group of self-appointed investigators who made surreptitious reports to advertisers, agencies, stations and networks indicating that someone either should not be hired because of his or her political beliefs or was “cleared” for employment. Potential employers who did not pay attention to these messages could expect to have their own patriotism impugned. (334-335)

Not wanting to risk sponsor dollars, or their own careers, many network executives, station owners, producers and others simply refused to tackle any political or controversial material during this era.

Another reason for skirting controversial subjects had nothing to do with censorship, but everything to do with money. Erik Barnouw wrote in his revered tome *History of Broadcasting in the United States* (1970) that the 1950s were full of programming that centered on the characters’ actions – big, bombastic and exaggerated – because it was easier to sell these kinds of shows overseas (109-110). The nature of these images was universal and conveyed familiar plotlines, be they the good guys vs. bad guys of *Bonanza* or the zany, madcap misadventures of *I Love Lucy*. Programming that was verbose, limited in settings or dependent upon narration was far less likely to produce overseas revenue for production companies and networks (112). Especially as

advertising and sponsorship schemes were changing in the late 1950s (it was becoming increasingly rare for a company to sponsor an entire program, à la the *Alcoa Hour*), television producers were eager to shore up profits from steady sources. Foreign countries, with audiences impatient for programming but with broadcasting licensures lagging behind the U.S., were logical revenue streams.

James Baughman (2007) argues that the television industry, by the mid-1950s, had been overrun by producers, writers and, most significantly, advertisers, who wished for television to be an “imitative medium [...] to re-create for the small screen entertainment that consumers had enjoyed on the radio and at their neighborhood movie theaters” (3). The nature of the programming pushed (and ultimately produced) by this group was less than innovative, and certainly risk-averse. This style of programming, contemporaries of *The Twilight Zone*, was dictated by the common phrase of the era – that television was a “guest in the home” and therefore must behave the way a guest should. This meant nothing offensive or upsetting to the hosts; for just as an unruly guest will be asked to leave, viewers might do the same with their television sets (4-5). If viewers were to throw the television guest out, they would also throw out advertisers with him. General Electric, Kraft, Texaco, Philip Morris, Ford and Kodak all understood this logic, and so intervened swiftly and severely in the production of programs they sponsored (193-197). Some companies went so far as to have their advertising agencies send scripts to the network in order to ensure both: 1. There was nothing offensive about the content or storylines; 2. There were sufficient mentions of their products (198).

Historian George Lipsitz (1994) asserts that the influence of sponsors (corporations) and the producers who acquiesced to their demands severely and irrevocably degraded the instructive and artistic capacities of the television medium. Of the changes in programming from the late 1940s to the late 1950s (as described above), Lipsitz wrote that television had become, “an advertising instrument under the control of powerful monopolists [and] established itself as the central discursive medium in American culture [...] its incessant propaganda for commodity purchases helped erode the social base for challenges to authority” (61). This sharp criticism of the medium and those who worked in it stemmed from the example of the television program *The Goldbergs* and the subsequent changes the show experienced while on air. Lipsitz holds *The Goldbergs* up as an example of early television at its best: incorporating on-going social issues into the lives of the characters. In their original television incarnation (which was its second overall: *The Goldbergs* life began on radio during the 1940s), the Goldberg family lived in a tenement-style apartment building in the Bronx, inhabited largely by working-class Jewish families like their own. Of the original show, Lipsitz writes, “During every episode, neighbors and relatives passed through the Goldberg apartment. They carried on conversations through windows and yelling into dumbwaiter shafts. The Goldbergs met their friends on the streets, they shared night-school classrooms and Lewisohn Stadium concerts with the extended kinship of their neighborhood” (37). The connecting thread throughout *The Goldbergs* was this one family’s place within its larger community; the experiences of the Goldbergs were those of the immigrant/ethnic communities in urban areas all over America.

However, for the 1956 season, *The Goldbergs* became *Molly* (the name of the Goldbergs' matriarch) and moved from the Bronx to a fictional town on Long Island. There ceased the constant parade of neighbors and friends through the Goldberg home, the shouting in Yiddish and cramped quarters of the Bronx. Instead, Lipsitz says, the Goldberg family of *Molly* was isolated and alienated, even in their own home. "Consumer purchases and fears of installment credit took center stage. Adjustments to the expectations of strangers through dieting or home decorating provided major sources of comic tension and [...] the new standard of living and opportunity for upward mobility secured by the Goldbergs for their children only served to push the children into a different world, one that mocked the foreign accents and archaic customs of the family" (37). What happened to *The Goldbergs* was not, according to Lipsitz, a deliberate commentary on the part of producers; the awkward tensions and wincing the re-vamped version of the series produced were an unintentional by-product of changing the show to reflect the supposed (or aspired) upward mobility of viewers (38). The content and tone of *The Goldbergs* were changed dramatically when it became *Molly* in order to meet the demands of sponsors who wished to appeal to a broader audience, and its social relevance, particularly to ethnic and immigrant communities, ceased to be.

Another constraint placed upon the creativity of the medium was largely unavoidable: time. Though in the late 1940s and early 1950s two-hour-long, live productions of plays were common, by the mid to late-1950s, these productions had all but ceased to be broadcast (Baughman, 176). "Part of the 'golden halo' [of the "Golden Age" of television] derives from the astonishing artistic legacy left behind by all the young talent who cut their teeth on these live dramas and continued making their marks

afterward on stage, in theatrical films, on series TV and other creative venues” (Edgerton, 194). Their descendants were the hour-long “teleplays” and anthologies, thought to be a more respectable programming choice than the situation comedies or westerns. The anthologies (of which *The Twilight Zone* would become one of the most famous), such as *Kraft Television Theatre*, *Playhouse 90* and *Studio One* just to name a few, retained much of the Broadway-style staging and feeling of intimacy. Many of the anthology writers and producers had professional backgrounds in theatre, and approached their television works from this perspective, placing the greatest emphasis on the quality of the story (Baughman, 176-177). The ability of the new medium, and the writing style of these anthology dramas, allowed for a kind of emotional intensity and intimacy with the audience not permitted by either the size of cinema screens or the remoteness of radio sets (Edgerton, 195). “The dramatic potential of television that was first realized in these live weekly dramas crossed over and eventually influenced the development of telefilm aesthetics” (Edgerton, 195). Despite these important contributions to the medium, many writers of television anthology series, Serling included, found it difficult to fully develop a story and characters within a span of one hour (178). Though the content of the anthologies and teleplays were surely more heady fare than *Leave It To Beaver*, the writers still often complained that they were artistically compromised by the hour time constraint.

Another staple of 1950s television programming was the now-notorious quiz shows. Though quiz shows lacked the instant exportability of situation comedies and shoot-‘em-up dramas, in the mid-1950s they were a central component of New York’s then-shrinking contribution to television broadcasting; and for a time, quiz shows were

completely unobjectionable in their content. Of course, this would later prove to be untrue, as the controversy surrounding popular game show, *Twenty One*, actually resulted in a Congressional subcommittee hearing into alleged malfeasance (122-123). When contestant Charles Van Doren admitted to the legislative oversight committee that he had colluded with *Twenty One* producer, Albert Freedman, to cheat by learning the questions ahead of time (thereby winning the contest and deceiving viewers) it dramatically altered public sentiment with regard to the quiz show concept (Sterling & Kittross, 377).

Shortly after the cheating information came to light, quiz shows in general fell out of public favor. Interestingly, the void left by quiz shows in their hasty exit, may have actually made it easier for programs such as *The Twilight Zone* to gain audience share; quiz shows offered suspense (at least, the *appearance* of suspense) and intellectual stimulation, which would be the hallmarks of *The Twilight Zone* (Baughman, 128).

By and large, the long 1950s were dominated by situation comedies, variety shows and westerns on television (Sterling & Kittross, 370). There were some deviations on this style of programming (television journalism and anthology series worth noting), but for the most part, *The Twilight Zone* was born into a medium crowded with the likes of *Father Knows Best*, *Sid Caesar* and *Leave It to Beaver*. It was programming that, as a 1957 *Television Age* article circumscribed, adhered to television's "primary function which is not to instruct or dictate or elevate its audience's taste in entertainment but to appeal to it on its widest existing level" (Boddy, 237).

Science Fiction and Social Commentary

While the television landscape may have been somewhat lacking in social or political commentary, there were numerous films of the era that at least attempted to address these themes. However, because of the kinds of censorship enumerated above, critique was able to thrive in the science fiction genre. Science fiction provided writers a veil behind which they could disguise (however thinly, at times) their political and social insinuations: the locations and characters of science fiction were often sufficiently removed from contemporary society, the plotlines sometimes fantastic. “Because science fiction is taken seriously by so few people, it’s an ideal vehicle for social comment that, in other contexts, might be unacceptable to audiences” (Hogan, 3).

M. Keith Booker writes extensively on the topic of science fiction as a vehicle for social commentary throughout the twentieth century. In his 2001 *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War*, he summarizes 1950s science fiction as frequently using allegory to make very specific points, “many of these points were political and [...] some of the best science fiction of the 1950s was produced by left-leaning writers who found Aesopian potential in setting their political commentary in other times or other galaxies, thus allowing them more freedom than they could possibly have to comment on political conditions in contemporary America” (3). Again, despite the image many hold of 1950s America as a politically conservative, socially staid period of time in which popular sentiments simply mirrored elite discourse, the science fiction genre (and in particular, science fiction film) provided a conduit for relevant political and social commentary.

One film repeatedly cited for its social critique is the 1951 classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. It is unquestionable that the film calls for nuclear disarmament, that is the main character, Klaatu's, sole purpose for coming to Earth. According to writer Aeon Skoble (2008), "the film both addresses the impact of new human technology on society and forces us to consider the ethical ramifications of the alien technology" and deals specifically with issues such as "preemption and containment in war, paternalism and self-defense" (91). So early in the nuclear arms race, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is an example of science fiction that is topical and didactic.

However, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is considered by many as to be a classic film, one that has recently been re-made. But some scholars argue that even the lesser cinematic productions of the day had something to say about world affairs. William Tsutsui (2007) asserts that so-called "Bug Films" of the 1950s, such as *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955) and *Beginning of the End* (1957) were both literally and metaphorically expressive of fears regarding science and technology. That "1950s science fiction demonized science while simultaneously exalting it" (242) seems to imply that the creators of the genre felt the same mix of anxiety and anticipation about science as the general public. In many of the bug films, science causes the problem – giant, man-eating bugs – but is also ultimately the only way to defeat it. Through these b-movies, audiences can acknowledge and confront their fears about the destructive capacity of science, and also have them neatly resolved in the end.

Another classic film of the era was *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Though it did not receive the critical praise of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Invasion of the Body*

Snatchers has been re-made several times over; this is perhaps because the interpretation of the film has varied greatly over the years. Film historians and social critics alike have seen different messages in the Rorschach test of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, with some claiming it as an indictment of pervasive social conformity, others a warning of the slick, insidious means through which Communism can infiltrate communities (Hogan, 4-5). Still other, far lesser-known science fiction films, such as *Atomic City* (1952) were unambiguous in their reflection of nuclear war as, not only a *likely* outcome of the Cold War, but a horrific outcome in which millions of innocent people would die (Hogan, 63). *Atomic City* was also one of the first films to at least insinuate that the federal government could not necessarily be counted upon to prevent a nuclear holocaust.

Science fiction films during the height of the Cold War also frequently featured the “aliens from outer space attacking Earth” motif. Films such as *The Man from Planet X* (1951), *Invaders from Mars* (1953) and *Invasion of the Flying Saucers* (1956) all employ some version of “alien subversion of human will” to convey the point that the human race is in extreme danger (DiFate, 80). Despite the surface inanity of these kinds of b-films, the fact that so *many* alien invasion films were produced and released during the long 1950s is indicative of the climate of fear: people were terrified of nuclear holocaust, the threat of totalitarian takeover of America, and of having the finger pointed at them for supposed “subversive” activities. UFOs and little green men were Hollywood’s personifications of these fears (DiFate, 70).

V. METHOD

The present study is a quantitative content analysis of *The Twilight Zone*. As noted above, the qualitative research on *The Twilight Zone* has tended to take certain aspects of the series and the time period for granted, thus leaving a gap in the research on the topic. The present content analysis begins to close that gap.

The study covered all 5 seasons of the series, which aired from 1959 to 1964, and encompassed 156 episodes, broken down as follows: season 1 – October 1959-July 1960, 36 episodes; season 2 – September 1960-June 1961, 29 episodes; season 3 – September 1961-May 1962, 37 episodes; season 4 – January 1963-May 1963, 18 episodes; season 5 – September 1963-June 1964, 36 episodes.

Using the literature reviewed earlier, the context was established for the “fears and anxieties” so often referenced when discussing the series. Using the social, political and economic trends of the long 1950s, as well as initial pre-testing of the series, five sources of stress were identified that were repeatedly acknowledged in the literature as shaping the collective psyche of America at the time: alienation, fear of “the other,” fear of war and mass destruction, erosion of traditional values and totalitarian regimes. These sources of stress became the five thematic currents that would be coded for in each episode.

Defining the Themes

“Alienation,” for the purposes of this study, was defined as discomfort, confusion, upset or anxiety caused by physical or emotional estrangement from one’s social

network. This can include moving, changing careers, or general lack of fulfillment in one's life. The focus on coding for the "alienation" theme was that the character or characters express that they feel disconnected from the world around them, are unsure of their place in this world, and/or are unsure of who they are. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, four variables were selected to best capture the sense of simultaneous longing and disconnect.

"Fear of the other" was defined much more broadly. The literature reviewed suggest that there were two distinct kinds of "the other" to be feared in the 1950s: those who may pose harm from an external source (Soviet Communists) and those who may pose a threat from an internal source (friends and neighbors). For the purposes of this study, "fear of the other" was defined as a suspicion, confirmed or otherwise, as to the motives of a character who is unknown to the main characters of the episode; a belief, which may have no basis in reality, that a character who is unknown to the main characters has destructive intentions; inherent distrust of new people; reluctance to accept new people; unwillingness to accept new or unfamiliar terrain. The four variables, discussed below, account for the dialogue and behavior through which characters may commonly express this fear.

"Fear of war and mass destruction" was a very straightforward theme: any production element that incorporated references to war (in particular references to World War II), expectation of nuclear attack, or expressions of fear of war and the possibility of nuclear annihilation were coded by four variables to be defined in later sections. This included instances in which characters responded to these threats ambivalently (such as

expressing indifference towards a fate they regard as inevitable) or negatively (such as obvious displays of emotional upheaval – crying, screaming – or engaging in anti-social behavior – physical altercations, looting, general lawlessness – for example). This would also include any instances in which characters expressed concern at danger of loss or life, irrespective of which government or organization was responsible for initiating the attack.

“Erosion of traditional values” was created vis-à-vis the literature detailing the cultural revolution of the 1950s. Despite its later characterization as a part of “traditional” America, as previously noted, America was undergoing a rapid change in its organization and, to some extent, its shared values. With the advent of the atomic age, there was increased reliance upon science to not only explain the physical world, but to frame political debate as well. Material wealth was also of increasing importance to many in the 1950s, as evidenced by the proliferation of single-family homes filled with electronic appliances, Swanson television dinners and mass-produced automobiles. While many in American society were pleased with these technological advancements and the convenience they afforded, there were also many who feared these products were altering the way Americans organized themselves – for the worse. Would families no longer gather around the dinner table to discuss the events of the day over the food that mother had prepared for them? This time-honored, daily tradition was increasingly being forsaken for gathering around the television, to silently gaze at the glowing box whilst absently consuming the bland contents of a frozen dinner. The “erosion of traditional values” theme was designed to capture instances in which characters conform to modern standards and reliance upon technology at the expense of historically shared ethics. The

values themselves need not be defined, for they will vary from episode to episode; but the purpose was to code for instances in which characters express dismay at the ways in which their loved ones and/or society has changed.

“Totalitarian regimes” was defined as any instance in which a regime is portrayed negatively. A “regime” in this study can mean a political regime or government in the formal, traditional sense; however, it can also refer to informal organizations of people in which one person wields tremendous power over the others, and does so in a way that does not benefit the majority of people within the association. The focus on the theme was that democracy was not upheld and the rights of the individual were ignored (this excludes situations in which the concept of voting on procedure does not normally occur, such as with the military. A depiction of a navy ship with a captain and crew would not fall under the “totalitarian regime” definition, unless the abuse of power by the commander became so severe that the rest of the crew acted out against him.). The central focus of the theme was authoritarian power. The theme also included instances in which an individual is subject to persecution because of devotion to democracy or democratic principles.

Defining the Variables

Each theme was measured using four different variables. These variables account for the production elements used in television and the visual nature of the medium. Unlike its singularly aural predecessor, television could now connect with the 1950s

audience without using words, and allow camera angles, lighting and characters' postures tell the story. Variables selected to measure the presence or absence of a theme account for the variety of conduits through which television writers communicate storyline to audience (not solely through dialogue), and subsequently, how the audience understands the story.

Additionally, as previously discussed, because of the nature of the time period, and the conservative climate that pervaded television broadcasting during the 1950s, many of the political themes of *The Twilight Zone* were inserted allegorically and subtly. So when identifying the ways in which the themes of the series unfolded, it was very important to pay as much attention to non-verbal storytelling methods as to verbal.

After initially screening the series to develop a coding protocol (following trends in storytelling devices frequently employed by the *Twilight Zone* writers), it was determined that comprehensive variables must take into account the following: dialogue between characters, blocking (the physical movements of characters on stage and their interaction with each other and scenery), character behavior (actions, separate from dialogue) and story context (events that may actually occur during the episode, or do not occur during the episode but are revealed, through character dialogue, to be relevant to the storyline).

Using these guiding principles, variables were constructed to capture the essence of each theme. Alienation was represented by the following variables: 1. Main character on stage by his or herself; 2. Character portrayed as recently having left home or moved to a city; 3. Character complains of loneliness, confusion, isolation or feeling

misunderstood; 4. Character is rallied against by, or is the target of hostility from, the other characters.

The theme “fear of the other” was measured using the variables: 1. Characters respond to unfamiliar¹ terrain or characters in an overtly negative way; 2. Unfamiliar characters dressed in a bizarre fashion; 3. Negative motives assigned to unfamiliar characters; 4. Main characters verbalize dangers posed to them by unfamiliar terrain.

The variables that comprised the “fear of war and mass destruction” theme were: 1. Bomb is detonated during episode; 2. Characters express concern that a bomb or missile will affect their area; 3. Characters respond to threat of foreign attack in a negative way; 4. Visual or contextual references to WWII.

“Erosion of traditional values” was defined by: 1. Science leads characters to behave in an anti-social manner; 2. Money or attainment of personal power is the motivation for a character’s behavior; 3. Character devotes himself to modern culture at the expense of family and traditional values; 4. Characters who have contact with modern technology are physically distant from others.

Finally, the “totalitarian regimes” theme was measured using: 1. Negative regime portrayal; 2. Members or advocates of regime are portrayed in shadow; 3. “Good” characters portrayed as objects of punishment or scrutiny by regime; 4. Repression of non-state-sanction ideas is discussed (or carried out).

¹ “Unfamiliar” in this instance refers to the character’s lack of knowledge of, or experience with, a new character or terrain; it need not necessarily be unfamiliar to the audience viewing the episode.

Coding Procedure

To ensure objectivity and ensure intercoder reliability all 156 episodes were watched, separately, by two different individuals. Each individual coded for all of the variables within each of the five themes, a total of 20 variables in all. The frequencies for each variable within an episode were coded; coders kept a tally of how many times each variable appeared in a given episode. If a variable did not appear at all, it was simply marked as zero (“0”). See Appendix 1 for code sheet.

Intercoder reliability for each variable was calculated using Scott’s Pi, a chance corrected measure of intercoder reliability. Scott’s Pi is traditionally a very conservative measure of intercoder reliability. In the case at hand, it treats as equivalent a frequency differential of 1 between Coder A and Coder B (for any given variable on any given episode) and a frequency differential of 6 between Coder A and Coder B.

For example: If for episode #34, Coder A coded the alienation 1 variable as present 4 times, and Coder B coded the alienation 1 variable as present 5 times, Scott’s Pi treats this disagreement in the same way it would a disagreement in which Coder A coded the alienation 1 variable as present 4 times, and Coder B coded the alienation 1 variable as present 12 times. In this respect, the intercoder reliability results here may exaggerate the differences in coder responses. The intercoder reliability for the 20 variables ranged from .31 to .90. See Appendix 2 for details. While this is a conservative measure, and the intercoder reliability not as high in some instances as one might like, the data used in the analyses that follow came from a third set. Because each episode was coded by both coders, all cases of disagreement were reexamined and

reconciled between coders. All analyses presented in this paper are based on data after coders reviewed and agreed upon the proper coding for each episode.

Although individual episodes were coded at the variable level, the clusters of four indicator variables were ultimately aggregated together to reach a value for each of the five themes. The analysis that follows was done at the theme level (alienation, fear of “the other,” fear of war and mass destruction, erosion of traditional values and totalitarian regimes). One challenge was to operationalize how these separate variables should be aggregated into the respective five themes. In each case, parameters were established based upon the nature of the variables that comprise each theme.

For the theme of “alienation” there were four variables: 1. Main character on stage by his or herself; 2. Character portrayed as recently having left home or moved to a city; 3. Character complained of loneliness, confusion, isolation or feeling misunderstood; 4. Character is rallied against by, or is the target of hostility from, the other characters. In order to confidently say that the overarching theme of “alienation” was present in an episode, there needed to be more than one instance because of the nature of the variables. A main character on stage by his or herself is not an entirely uncommon practice in television blocking, and it need not always represent the character’s alienation from his/her surroundings or other characters. Likewise, a character complaining of confusion once during an episode does not necessarily mean that character is experiencing an identity struggle; he/she could simply be less than bright. For these reasons, it was determined that the threshold for whether or not a theme

could confidently be said to be present was 3 or more instances of any of the four variables within a given episode.

The same metric was used for the theme of “fear of the other,” again, because of the nature of the variables used: 1. Characters respond to unfamiliar terrain or characters in an overtly negative way; 2. Unfamiliar characters dressed in a bizarre fashion; 3. Negative motives assigned to unfamiliar characters; 4. Main characters verbalize dangers posed to them by unfamiliar terrain. For the case of “fear of the other” the threshold for the theme being present was also set at 3 instances in order to establish that the “other” was actually the focus of the episode. Often in television, main characters are placed in an unfamiliar setting, or new villains are brought in, simply for the purpose of keeping the series fresh and interesting. By setting the threshold at 3 instances per episode, the aim is to weed out the episodes in which the animosity towards someone or something unfamiliar was just a passing plot device, and focus on the episodes which appear to be specifically about the “other” and characters’ reactions to it. Based upon having watched all 156 episodes, 3 instances seemed to be the general dividing line between coincidence and intentional theming.

The “fear of war and mass destruction” theme was much easier to compute because of the nature of the variables: 1. Bomb is detonated during episode; 2. Characters express concern that a bomb or missile will affect their area; 3. Characters respond to threat of foreign attack in a negative way; 4. Visual or contextual references to WWII. These are not merely passing references that could crop up in the context of any show – bombs do not *incidentally* detonate during an episode. There was plenty of precedent for

scripted television programs in the long 1950s to exclude these elements altogether (as has been previously demonstrated). For this reason, it was determined that any instance of these four variables would meet threshold requirements for the theme of “fear of war and mass destruction” to be present in any given episode.

Similarly, “erosion of traditional values” was somewhat easier to pinpoint.

Applications of science or the acquisition of wealth are not necessarily standard plotlines, and their inclusion into an episode is usually telling in and of itself. The variables chosen were somewhat overt: 1. Science leads characters to behave in an anti-social manner; 2. Money or attainment of personal power is the motivation for a character’s behavior; 3. Character devotes himself to modern culture at the expense of family and traditional values; 4. Characters who have contact with modern technology are physically distant from others. While not quite as blatant as detonating a bomb, many of these variables were easy to spot, and their presence signified a definite intention on the part of the writers. As such, the threshold for the “erosion of traditional values” theme was set at two instances among the variables.

“Totalitarian regimes” was, much like “fear of war and mass destruction” a much more obvious theme to identify. Totalitarian regimes are hardly an everyday plot point, and so their inclusion into an episode can hardly be thought of as coincidental or perfunctory. The variables that comprise the “totalitarian regimes” theme were: 1. Negative regime portrayal; 2. Members or advocates of regime are portrayed in shadow; 3. “Good” characters portrayed as objects of punishment or scrutiny by regime; 4. Repression of non-state-sanction ideas is discussed (or carried out). Each of these

variables clearly represents a major plot point, and so the threshold for the “totalitarian regimes” theme was, as “fear of war and mass destruction” set at one instance per episode.

Using the parameters outlined, each theme was coded as present or absent from any given episode. However, even after applying the threshold guidelines to account for variation across variable measures, there were outlying instances in which the variables appeared many times. In these instances, the theme was marked as being “strongly present.” The standard for “strongly present” was that the variable frequency was in at least in the top 10% of occurrences. In all, a theme was marked as “0” if it was absent (did not meet the threshold standards established), “1” if it was present (met the threshold standards) or “2” if it was strongly present.

For example, the “alienation” theme appeared in the series a range of 0-14 times in any given episode; the fewest times it ever appeared in an episode was 0 (none of the variables were present), and the greatest number times it ever appeared in an episode was 14 (some permutation of the 4 variables appeared 14 times). As mentioned above, the standard for determining whether the “alienation” theme was present in an episode was set at three occurrences of any of the four variables that comprise the theme. However, to establish a range of 3-14 occurrences was too wide to code all the same as simply “present.” So in the case of alienation, the standard for “strongly present” was set at 9 occurrences: if any of the alienation variables occurred 9 or more times in a given episode, the alienation theme was said to be strongly present, and the episode was coded a “2.”

For the “fear of the other” theme, there was not as wide a range of occurrences of the theme within an episode as there was with “alienation.” The upper 10% of frequencies fell at 6 occurrences, so if there were 6-10 variable appearances in an episode, it was coded as “strongly present.” For “fear of war and mass destruction,” the standard for “strongly present” was set at 4-10 instances, which still only accounted for just under 9% of the appearances of the theme. For “erosion of traditional values” the range for “strongly present” was set at 5-12 instances, which accounted for 9% of all appearances of the theme. Finally, the “strongly present” standard for “totalitarian regimes” ranged from 3-13 instances, which only accounted for 5.1% of all appearances of the theme.

Using these standards to determine whether or not a theme was present, the data were analyzed to determine how often each individual variable was present when the larger theme was present.

VI. RESULTS

When speaking generally about the series, the data demonstrate that nearly every episode of *The Twilight Zone* met the threshold standards for *at least* one of the five themes; out of 156 episodes, only 3 did not feature any of the five themes (1.9%). This means that 98.1% of all 156 *Twilight Zone* episodes dealt with themes representing the fears and anxieties of the day in some capacity. When discussing the prevalence of themes, either in the series overall or in a specific episode, the term “saturation” will be

used simply as a means of conveying that a theme, or themes, is present. When talking about a particular season of *The Twilight Zone*, for example, it may be said that it is “heavily saturated” because all five themes appear multiples times. “Saturation” in this instance simply refers to the prevalence of any of the five themes.

The most prevalent theme in the series was “alienation,” which was present in 75.7% episodes over the five seasons. The first runner-up was “erosion of traditional values,” which was present half the time during the series. Next followed “fear of the other,” which was present 35% of the time, “fear of war and mass destruction” 21% of the series, and finally, “totalitarian regimes,” which was only featured just under 8% of the time – a scant 12 episodes.

Table 1: Theme Percentages

Theme	Percentage Present in Series Overall
Alienation	75.7%
Fear of the Other	35.2%
Fear of War and Mass Destruction	21.1%
Erosion of traditional values	49.4%
Totalitarian Regimes	7.7%

Based upon the previously reviewed literature, it was anticipated that the theme of “fear of war and mass destruction” would be the most prevalent among the episodes. Even when accounting for the differences in the variables that comprise the two themes, and consequently setting the threshold for “fear of war and mass destruction” at just one

instance and the threshold for “alienation” at three instances, “alienation” was still overwhelmingly more prevalent in the series than “fear of war and mass destruction.” “Alienation” was present in 75.7% of the 156 episodes, while “fear of war and mass destruction” was present a paltry 21.1% of the time. Given the amount of literature devoted to nuclear fears and civil defense, as well as Rod Serling’s own military service during World War II, it was anticipated that the “fear of war and mass destruction” saturation to be much greater than it was.

Potential reasons for this gap between expected and actual findings are many. Perhaps the literature focuses more on the nuclear anxieties of the age because it is much easier to define and discuss than concepts more abstract like “loneliness” or “isolation.” Mention nuclear war, and people can call up very specific, almost universal, images in their minds, such as the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima.

Following the same theme, it is also possible that nuclear fears are more widely written about because they were tied to actual government programs. The Civil Defense program (and in fact, the entire Federal Civil Defense Administration) was a means of preparing an anxious public for the possibilities of nuclear war. There was no corresponding federal program to deal with the psychological displacement that followed suburban flight. For this reason, there are specific government actions to write about and study, which thus makes researching war and nuclear anxieties more straightforward.

Another potential reason for this unexpected outcome lies not with the literature, but with the present study. Perhaps the issue is that the variables did not account for the correct occurrences of the “fear of war and mass destruction” theme. Instead of coding

for “Characters respond to threat of foreign attack in a negative way,” perhaps any passing mention of the military could be included in future research.

Also worth noting: Of all 4 variables that comprised the “fear of war and mass destruction theme,” the only one to be present more than 10% of the time through the entire *series* was “Visual or contextual references to World War II.” One could argue that the presence of this variable more than the others does *not* actually indicate a fear of war and mass destruction; rather, it is a theme emblematic of a series creator and principle writer (Serling) and a generation of Americans who had been unquestionably shaped by that war. To *not* have in the series references about the war might have been seen as more odd because of its close chronological proximity and the tremendous number of American personally affected by WWII. But acknowledging the war’s place in history and culture does not necessarily translate to highlighting the Cold War anxieties experienced by the families that constructed bomb shelters in their backyards in Levittown.

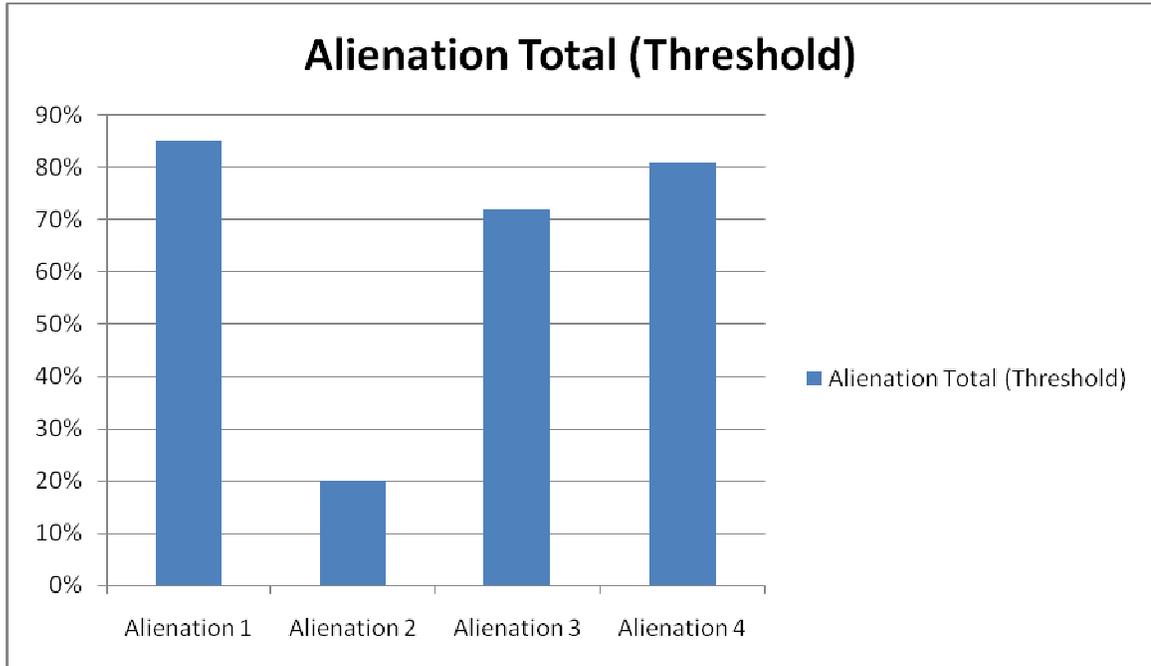
That “alienation” and “erosion of traditional values” were the most frequently occurring themes in the series seems to indicate that the show’s writers were more focused on the sociological and psychological shifts occurring in America during the long 1950s. This does not necessarily mean that these issues were more important to Americans during this time period, however. In fact, it does not even necessarily mean that these issues were more important to the writers. This may simply be an example of the censorship CBS imposed upon *The Twilight Zone*. Perhaps it was considered more controversial at the time to address issues such as nuclear fears, than it was to depict the

contemporary currents of loneliness and isolation. Sponsors might not have allowed their products to be associated with a television program that routinely depicted nuclear holocausts week in and week out. However, a man wandering alone in a deserted town, crying “Where is everybody?” might not have caused as much concern for the executives at Lucky Strike.

Theme Analysis by Variable

While the series was mainly analyzed at the theme level, the four variables that comprised each theme were also significant; they were tracked to see if any patterns emerged in how often each variable was present. If one particular variable was present in nearly all of the episodes in each instance that theme was recorded as being “present,” and the other three were hardly ever occurring, this may have indicated a flaw in the study design.

Table 2: Alienation Variables



As previously mentioned, the four variables that comprised the “alienation” theme were: 1. Main character on stage by his or herself; 2. Character portrayed as recently having left home or moved to a city; 3. Character complained of loneliness, confusion, isolation or feeling misunderstood; 4. Character is rallied against by, or is the target of hostility from, the other characters, each of which were referred to in the chart above as “alienation 1,” “alienation 2,” “alienation 3” and “alienation 4,” respectively.

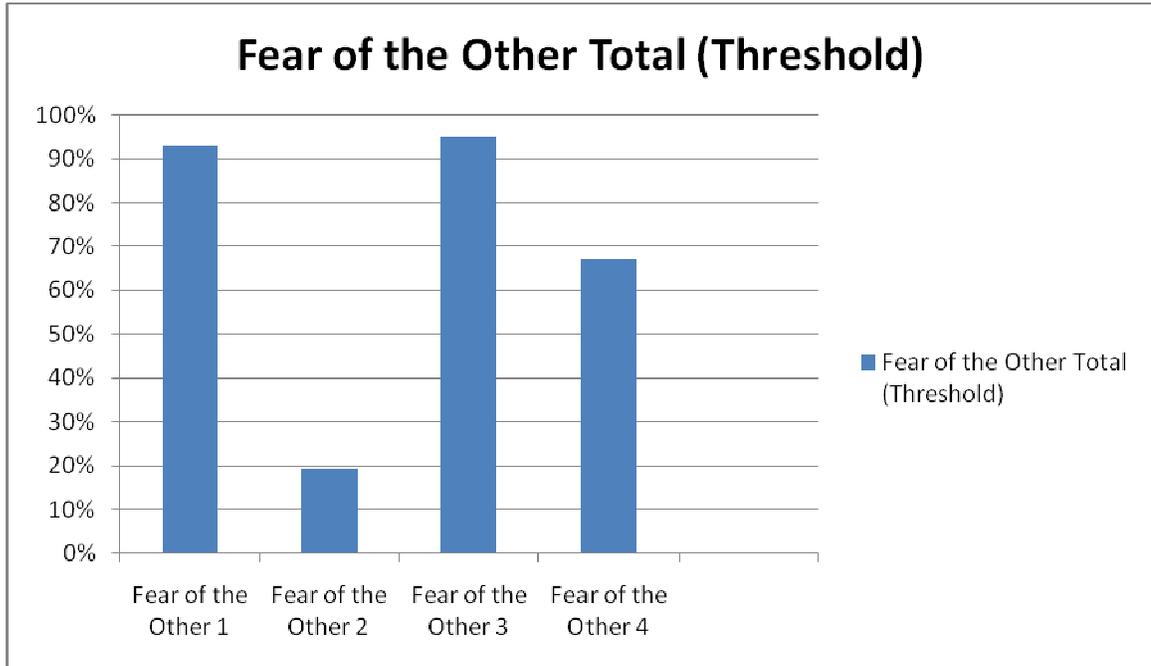
While “alienation” variable 2, “character portrayed as recently having left home or moved to a city” was present in far fewer instances, the other three “alienation” variables are all roughly equal in their distribution among episodes. The concern with the “alienation” theme was, potentially, that variable 1, “main character on stage by his or herself” would dominate all other variables, and thus give a skewed depiction of the

theme. However, though it is present more times than any of the other three variables, clearly both “character complained of loneliness, confusion, isolation or feeling misunderstood” and “character is rallied against by, or is the target of hostility from, the other characters” were present almost as frequently. This demonstrates that the high overall prevalence of the “alienation” theme cannot be attributed solely to a variable that may have resulted simply from a coincidence in character blocking.

The relatively infrequent occurrence of “alienation” variable 2 also indicates that characters leaving home or entering new surroundings was not the most common storytelling device through which the writers depicted alienation. In the context of *The Twilight Zone*, alienation was apparently more likely to come from circumstances already familiar to the characters. Without conducting interviews with the series’ principle writers and producers, it is impossible to know whether this depiction of alienation, as the result of personal estrangement rather than circumstantial estrangement, was intentional commentary. The literature on the subject of alienation, as cited earlier, explains the phenomenon of 1950s America as a result of both the initial suburban flight and detachment from urban social networks, and the subsequent social pressures to conform, as well as inter-personal distance that awaited the newly minted class of suburbanites.

A similar pattern emerged when the data were run on the “fear of the other” theme. Of the four variables that comprised “fear of the other,” one variable was present far less often than the other three. Again, variable 2, “unfamiliar characters dressed in a bizarre fashion” was present in just under 20% of all instances in which the “fear of the other” theme was coded as present.

Table 3: Fear of the Other Variables

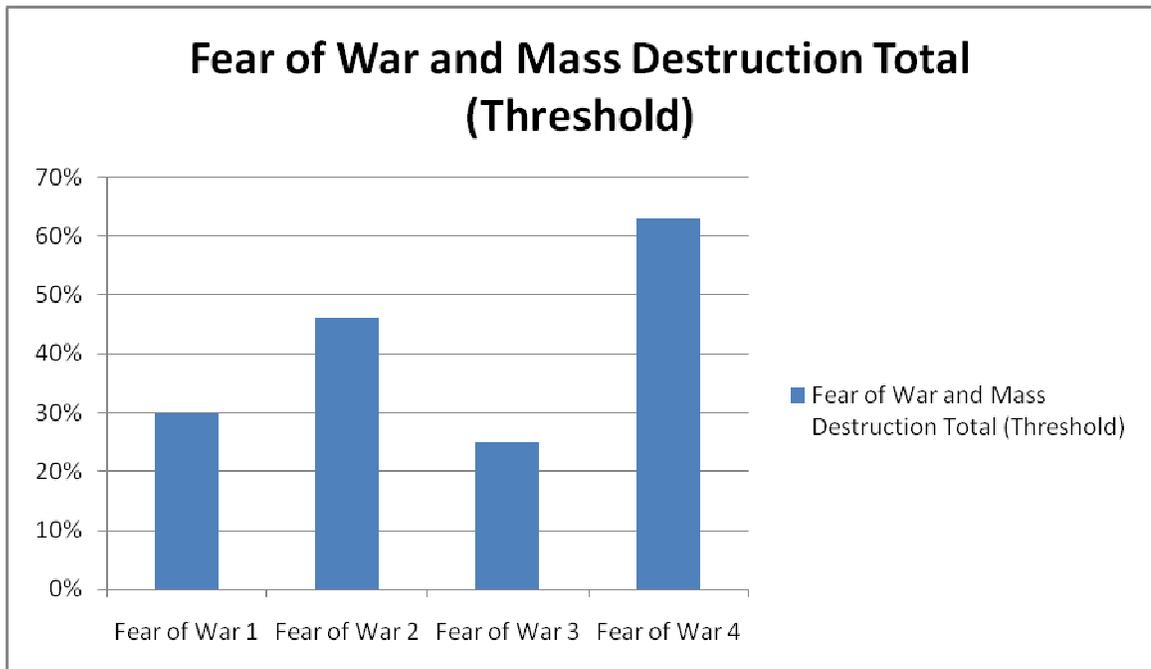


Variables 1 and 3 occur with roughly equal frequency, both present in over 90% of the instances in which “fear of the other” was coded as present. These two variables, “characters respond to unfamiliar terrain or characters in an overtly negative way” and “negative motives assigned to unfamiliar characters” are both largely non-verbal and have more to do with action and story context than they do with character dialogue. The fourth variable, “main characters verbalize dangers posed to them by unfamiliar terrain,” was present about 65% of the time when the “fear of the other” theme was coded as present.

Unlike both “alienation” and “fear of the other,” the “fear of war and mass destruction” theme did not have any one of its comprising variables present nearly all of the time. In fact, the most commonly occurring variable was variable 4, “visual or

contextual references to WWII,” was present in just over 60% of the episodes in which “fear of war as mass destruction” was coded as present. However, similar to “alienation” and “fear of the other,” there was no one single variable that dominated all occurrences of “fear of war and mass destruction.”

Table 4: Fear of War and Mass Destruction Variables



It is unsurprising that variable 4 was the most common of all the “fear of war and mass destruction” variables. As previously noted, World War II had an almost incalculable impact on an entire generation of Americans, its specter languishing in nearly every aspect of popular culture for decades. “Visual or contextual references to WWII” was hardly an uncommon occurrence for the time and place of *The Twilight Zone*, again, especially given its creator’s tour of duty during the War.

In only 30% of all episodes coded for “fear of war and mass destruction” was a bomb actually detonated during the episode (variable 1). Somewhat interestingly, it was far more common for characters to “express concern that a bomb or missile will affect their area” than it was for a bomb to actually impact characters’ lives. There are a variety of possible explanations for this: 1. paranoia, 2. censorship, 3. difficulty/cost of depicting a nuclear explosion.

Perhaps it was the intention of the writers to depict the pervasive *fear* of nuclear war, rather than war itself. This may have been Serling’s commentary on the times, his own version of “we have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Indeed, there were several episodes that dealt quite overtly with the dangers of allowing nuclear anxieties to take control of one’s actions. In these instances, characters that were consumed by fear generally behaved irrationally, and groups of neighbors turned into mobs. This was the case in the oft-cited episode “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street.” In this 1960 episode, a power outage on Maple Street (Anytown, USA) inspires first confusion, then suspicion, and finally, madness amongst the neighbors on the normally quiet street. All that actually transpired during the episode was that all of the power failed on the street, but intermittently came on and off in various locations. Failing an explanation for the outage, neighbors hypothesize everything from a meteor to nuclear testing to aliens. As day turns into night, neighbors accuse one another of being aliens, and all “unusual” behavior is called into question. In the climax of the episode, one of the neighbors shoots and kills another, refusing to wait for him to walk close enough out of the darkness to determine he posed no threat. However, while “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street” certainly demonstrates the dangers of becoming a mob, it does not entirely debunk the

presence of empty paranoia: at the end of the episode, the audience learns that, in fact, alien scouts were responsible for the power outage. Though the neighbors on Maple Street were worried about the *wrong thing*, the answer was *not* that they had nothing to worry about at all.

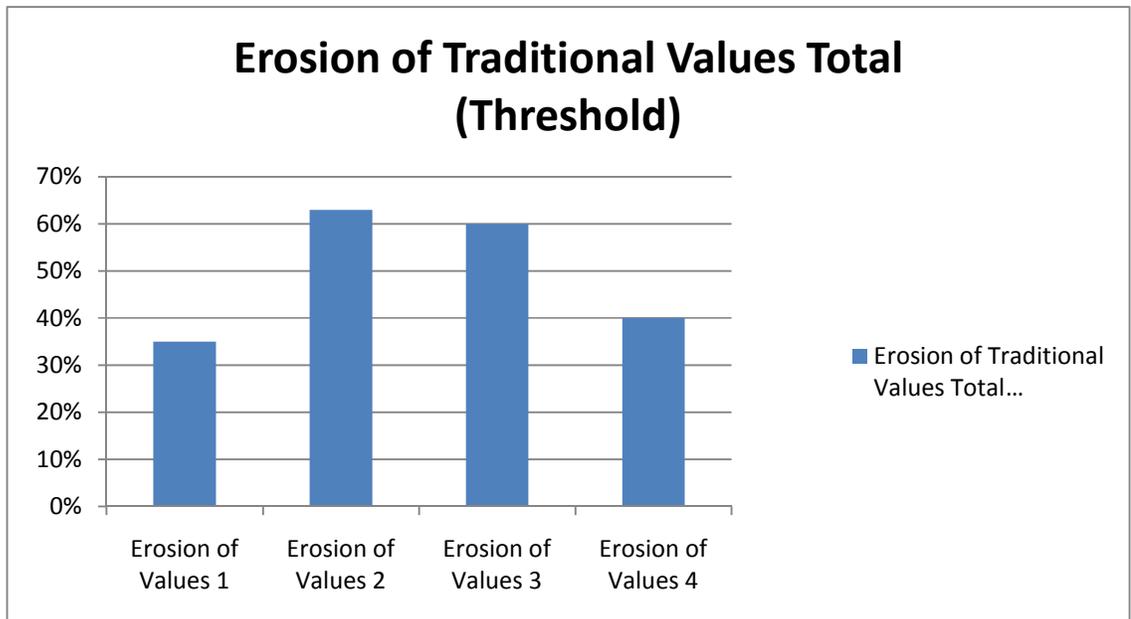
Another reason why the writers may have omitted actual bomb sequences was as a result of pressure from CBS to keep the series from *explicitly* addressing the arms race and the Cold War, which had heated up significantly during the run of the show. As mentioned in the literature review, Serling and CBS sometimes clashed over series content, with Serling feeling the network was stifling his creative and political ideas. However, as also previously cited, Serling did promise sponsors that he would not be courting controversy with this program. The fact that a bomb was detonated in only 30% of the episodes in which “fear of war and mass destruction” is perhaps evidence of this intermittent struggle over the frankness of content.

While it may have been creative or ideological reasons that kept explosions from happening on screen, there may also have been a much more “Hollywood” explanation: cost. Production technology in the 1950s was nowhere near what it is today, and the costs of simulating an explosion on screen were likely quite high. Even forsaking the detonation itself, with the concomitant blazes, flying debris and smoke, relaying to the audience that a bomb *had* exploded would require a great deal of work: a new, charred-looking set would have to be constructed (or demolish the old one), “survivors” would require special make-up, entirely new costumes would be needed, etc. All of these

elements are far more expensive than simply relying on character dialogue to convey the threat of war and a similar sense of dread and uncertainty.

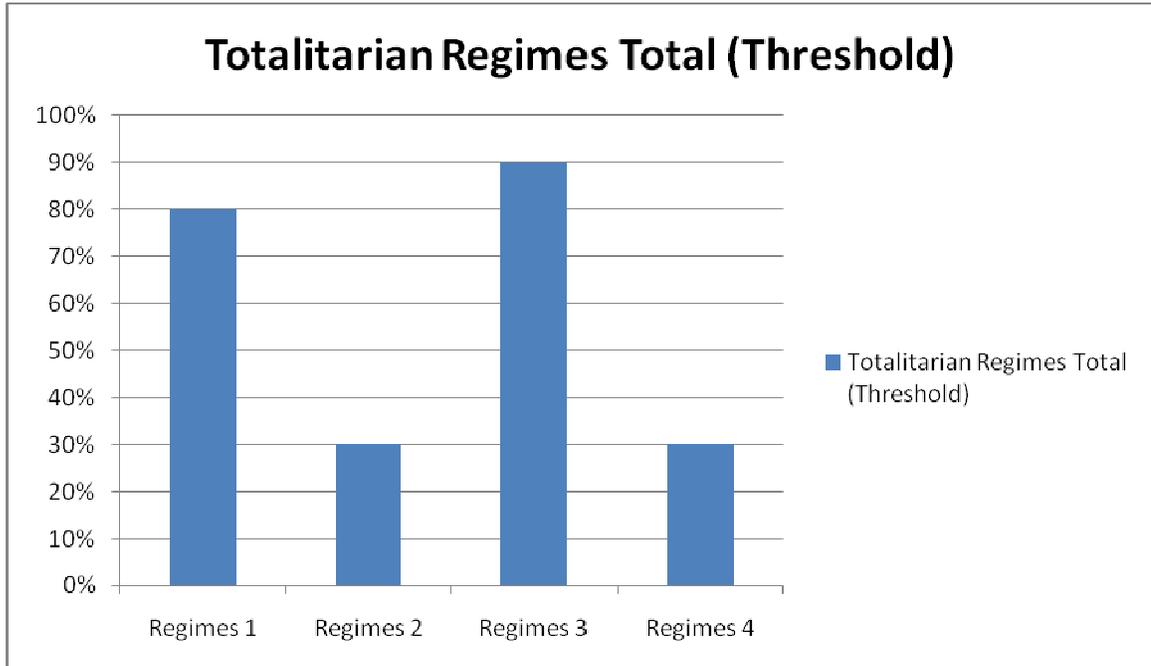
Much like “fear of war and mass destruction,” the “erosion of traditional values” theme did not have one single variable reach near 100% frequency. The most common “erosion of traditional values” variable was variable 2, “money or attainment of personal power is the motivation for a character’s behavior,” which was present in just over 60% of the episodes in which “erosion of traditional values” was coded as present. Only slightly less frequent was variable 3, “character devotes himself to modern culture at the expense of family and traditional values,” which was present in 60% of the “erosion of traditional values” episodes.

Table 5: Erosion of Traditional Values Variables



The remaining two variables, “science leads characters to behave in an anti-social manner,” (variable 1) and “characters who have contact with modern technology are physically distant from others” occurred with similar frequency, in 35% and 40% of the “erosion of traditional values” episodes, respectively. This breakdown of “erosion of traditional values” variables seems to indicate that *The Twilight Zone* did not take an overwhelmingly negative view of science or its place in the modern world, despite what Booker and Hodges wrote. The two variables that more often revealed an erosion of traditional values and traditional values were both centered on money and the devaluation of the family. These indicators have direct links to the shift to a consumer economy, and have little to no direct relation to the increased role of science and technology in modern society. This would seem to indicate that Serling, himself made a millionaire by creating *The Twilight Zone*, adhered to the adage that “money is the root of all evil” – at least in his writing if not in his business practices.

Table 6: Totalitarian Regimes Variables



For the theme that was least prevalent overall in the series (just 7.7% of the 156 episodes), its make-up, infrequent thought it was, lay primarily with variables 1 and 3, “negative regime portrayal” and “‘good’ characters portrayed as objects of punishment or scrutiny by regime.” Despite the fact that variable 1 was (intentionally) very broad, theoretically covering a large percentage of instances, the most common “totalitarian regimes” variable was variable 3. This is interesting because the focus of this variable is not primarily the regime itself, but the objects of its scrutiny. This demonstrates that the most common means of depicting a totalitarian regime is more indirectly, by emphasizing the effects the regime has on characters with whom the audience is meant to sympathize.

The remaining two variables, “members or advocates of regime are portrayed in shadow” and “repression of non-state-sanction ideas is discussed (or carried out)” are both

represented in 30% of the episodes in which “totalitarian regimes” was coded at the threshold level.

Analysis by Broadcast Season

When looking at how prevalence of themes corresponds to seasons of the series, a clear pattern emerges: Season 4 is generally the most saturated. In season 4, 38.9% of all episodes featured 3 *or more* themes at a time, which was significantly higher than the overall average for the series, which was 23% of episodes. Season 5 was also above the series’ average, and was coded as having three or more themes present in 27.8% of its episodes. The remaining three seasons, seasons 1 2 and 3 were coded as having three or more themes present in 19.5%, 13.7% and 21.6% of their episodes, respectively.

Table 7: Number of Total Themes Overall, By Season

Number of Themes Present	Season				
	1	2	3	4	5
0	2.8%	0%	2.7%	0%	2.8%
1	38.9%	48.3%	43.2%	27.8%	16.7%
2	38.9%	37.9%	32.4%	33.3%	52.8%
3	16.7%	10.3%	21.6%	22.2%	25%
4	2.8%	3.4%	0%	11.1%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	5.6%	2.8%

The natural question is: What was it about the *Twilight Zone*’s fourth season that lent it to such thematic saturation? There are several possible explanations for this trend. The first, which may have had a significant influence on the season’s content, was its programming changes. For all of the other seasons (1-3 and 5), *The Twilight Zone*’s

format was half-hour episodes, beginning in either September or October and ending in June or July of the following year. For season 4 only, the series aired for half a year (beginning in January 1963 and ending in May 1963). However, the episodes were twice as long, with CBS experimenting with an hour-long format for its truncated season. The logical progression is to cite the longer episodes for the greater saturation of themes, as the hour-long format allowed for more time to introduce themes into the story arc. Also of note: the episodes in season 4 were twice as long as in other seasons, but there were half as many of them. Essentially, the total air time for season 4 was equivalent to all of the other seasons. Given this, while each individual episode of season 4 was more than those of other seasons to be heavily thematically saturated, because of the brevity of season 4 it does not necessarily mean that should be *overall* more thematically saturated than the other seasons.

There were also issues related to the creative process behind the series. It was documented in the Engel biography of Rod Serling that as the series run wore on, Serling found himself more at odds with CBS, despite the show's success. The increased prevalence of social commentary as the seasons progressed may have been a manifestation of Serling's chaffing at CBS's heavy-handedness and defiance of network pressure. It may also have been an indication that Serling saw the writing on the wall: He known for quite some time the series was heading for cancellation, and he wanted to go out on his own terms, not the network's (Engel, 198).

The years themselves may have also played a part in the increasingly political tones of the series. By 1963, much of the gestalt of the Blacklist had abated, Joseph

McCarthy had been dead for several years, HUAC had declined significantly in its scope and prestige and the overall social climate had become more permissive (Caute 1978). In this sense, perhaps the increased political and social commentary of *The Twilight Zone* was a natural extension of the country's apparent weariness of Cold War paranoia. If this was the case, however, it would seem to diminish somewhat the topicality of the series and the courageousness of its writers.

Generally speaking, season 4 did have the highest percentage of *total numbers* of themes in that 38.9% of all episodes featured 3 *or more* themes at a time. With respect to each of the individual five themes, the seasons varied somewhat in their degrees of thematic saturation. Season 1 (1959-1960) was coded as follows: "alienation" was present in 72.3% of the episodes, "fear of the other" was present in 34.4% of the episodes, "fear of war and mass destruction" was present in 19.5% of the episodes, "erosion of traditional values" was present in 47.2% of the episodes, and "totalitarian regimes" was not present at all during the season. Season 1 hews fairly closely to the average percentages for the series as a whole.

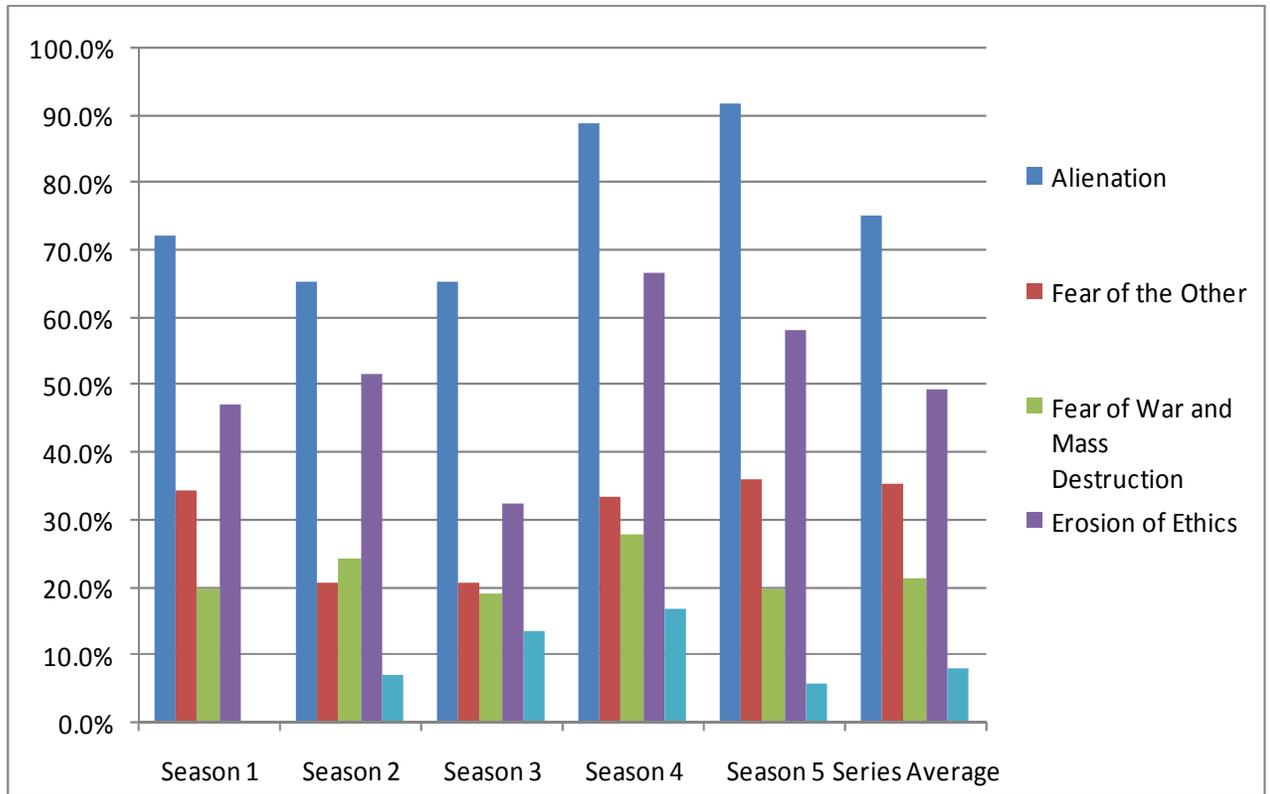


Table 8: Theme Occurrences by Season

Season 2 was coded: “alienation” was present 65.5% of the time, “fear of the other” was somewhat low with 20.7% (compared with 35.2% for a series average), “fear of war and mass destruction” was a bit higher than the series average (21.1%) with 24.1%, “erosion of traditional values” was present 51.7% of the season, and “totalitarian regimes” was present 6.9% of the time.

Season 3 was the least saturated of all 5 seasons, and perhaps not coincidentally, it was the season *Serling* deemed to be of the lowest artistic quality (Engel, 190). Curiously, however, television historians writing about the series in later years would praise this season as the series’ finest (Presnell and McGee, 20). Serling biographer Gordon Sander would also comment that the third season scripts “most closely reflected

current events” (Zicree, 127). The data presented here, however, would tend to disprove that assessment. The averages for season 3 were: “alienation” present 65.5% of the episodes, “fear of the other” present in 20.7%, “fear of war and mass destruction” was present 18.9%, “erosion of traditional values” was coded 32.4% of the season. Somewhat out of place in this below-average season was “totalitarian regimes,” which was present in 13.5% of the episodes, significantly higher than the 7.7% series average.

Season 4 was previously discussed as being generally the most saturated season. It is interesting to note that, while the data demonstrate that season 4 was the most politically and socially relevant (so to speak), it is regarded by a number of television historians as the weakest season in terms of artistic achievement (Presnell and McGee, 8). Season 5, which also had more above-average appearances of the five themes than not, is also regarded as a weak season artistically. This may be simply be a coincidence that the topicality of these seasons seems to be inversely related to critical praise; however, it makes for an interesting juxtaposition of perspectives. “Alienation” was present more in season 5 than in any other season, with almost 92% of the episodes featuring the theme. “Fear of the other” was also above average with 36.1%. “Fear of war and mass destruction” was present in 19.5% of the season, “erosion of traditional values” 58.3% of the season, and “totalitarian regimes” 5.6% of the season.

Analysis by Themes

Table 9: “Alienation” Theme, By Season

SEASON	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT	STRONGLY PRESENT
1	27.8%	66.7%	5.6%
2	34.5%	65.5%	0%
3	35.1%	64.9%	0%
4	11.1%	66.7%	22.2%
5	8.3%	69.4%	22.2%

The overall presence of alienation is fairly standard throughout the five seasons, meeting threshold standards for “present” in roughly 64-66% of episodes. The primary difference among seasons is the frequency with which “alienation” was coded as “strongly present” as opposed to simply “present.” “Alienation” was most strongly present in seasons 4 and 5, in which it appeared at the threshold level for “strongly present” (the number of occurrences was in the top 10% overall) 22.2% of the time in each season. While the longer episodes of season 4 was discussed earlier, and may explain why “alienation” appears so frequently during that season, it does not explain why the level of saturation was the same season 5, in which the episodes returned to their normal half-hour format. In fact, season 5 had the fewest instances in which “alienation” was coded as “not present” – just 8.3% of all episodes in season 5 did not feature “alienation.”

Seasons 2 and 3 had no instances in which “alienation” was coded at the “strongly present” threshold level, and both also had the highest percentages of episodes in which

no instances of “alienation” were coded – 34.5% and 35.1% respectively. In this sense, it can be said that seasons 2 and 3 were the more conservative of the five seasons in their depictions of the “alienation” theme. However, this cannot be said of these seasons for *all* of the five themes. In the case of “fear of the other,” season 3 actually had the second-highest saturation of the theme, in which “fear of the other” was coded as “strongly present” 13.5% of the time. The only season to have a higher percentage of “fear of the other” coded at the “strongly present” level was season 5, in which “fear of the other” was coded as “strongly present” in 13.9% of the episodes.

Table 10: “Fear of the Other” Theme, By Season

SEASON	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT	STRONGLY PRESENT
1	61.1%	36.1%	2.8%
2	79.3%	13.8%	6.9%
3	56.8%	29.7%	13.5%
4	66.7%	22.2%	11.1%
5	63.9%	22.2%	13.9%

In season 2, “fear of the other” was coded as “not present” nearly 80% of the time, almost 20% more episodes as in season 1. It would appear that for the series’ second season, the writers were less concerned with depicting people’s fears of one another. This is particularly interesting because the aforementioned “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street” episode, one that quite overtly tackles this theme and one of the most famous of all *Twilight Zone* episodes, aired during season 2. It is also one of only

two episodes that contributed to the 6.9% of season 2 episodes that were coded as featuring “fear of the other” strongly.

Despite the fact that season 1 featured “fear of the other” much more frequently than did season 2, only 2.8% of season 1 episodes were coded as having “fear of the other” coded at the “strongly present” threshold level. Overall, with regard to the “fear of the other” theme, neither season 4 nor season 5 are the seasons in which the theme was most prevalent; it would appear that season 3 is the most saturated, as the theme is coded as either “present” or “strongly present” in 43.2% of the episodes. Season 1 was the next-most saturated season, in which “fear of the other” was present in 38.9% of the episodes.

Table 11: “Fear of War and Mass Destruction” Theme, By Season

SEASON	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT	STRONGLY PRESENT
1	80.6%	13.9%	5.6%
2	75.9%	20.7%	3.4%
3	81.1%	8.1%	10.8%
4	72.2%	5.6%	22.2%
5	80.6%	13.9%	5.6%

Though, as described above, season 2 was the least likely to feature “fear of the other,” it was the second-most likely to feature “fear of war and mass destruction,” though in truth, its saturation is close to constant throughout the series. “Fear of war and mass destruction” was present, on average, in 21.1% of all episodes of the series, and the only season in which it appeared significantly above the average was season 4, in which

it was either “present” or “strongly present” in 27.8% of episodes. In general, the distribution of “fear of war and mass destruction” appears to be fairly even across the five seasons of the series. This points, again, to the fact that the theme was not as common in the series as one might have anticipated, given that the period of time in which it aired included the height of the nuclear arms race.

Table 12: “Erosion of Traditional Values” Theme, By Season

SEASON	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT	STRONGLY PRESENT
1	52.8%	47.2%	0%
2	48.3%	34.5%	17.2%
3	67.6%	29.7%	2.7%
4	33.3%	50%	16.7%
5	41.7%	44.4%	13.9%

The “erosion of traditional values” theme was present in just about 50% of *The Twilight Zone* episodes, on average, but was present most frequently during season 4. Overall, “erosion of traditional values” was featured in 66.7% of all season 4 episodes; however, “erosion of traditional values” was “strongly present” most often during season 2, in which 17.2% of all episodes were coded as such. This season featured several episodes with plots that revolved around criminals trying to hit it big by pulling off heists, and one, “The Prime Mover,” about a compulsive gambler and the morally bankrupt depths to which he will sink in order to maintain his addiction. These episodes all likely contributed significantly to the 17.2% of heavily saturated “erosion of traditional values” episodes. With respect to the “erosion of traditional values” theme, season 3 was the

least saturated overall, and featured only one episode that was coded as featuring the theme at the “strongly present” level.

Table 13: “Totalitarian Regimes” Theme, By Season

SEASON	NOT PRESENT	PRESENT	STRONGLY PRESENT
1	100%	0%	0%
2	93.1%	0%	6.9%
3	86.5%	8.1%	5.4%
4	83.3%	0%	16.7%
5	94.4%	2.8%	2.8%

As previously discussed, “totalitarian regimes” was the least commonly occurring theme throughout *The Twilight Zone*. The most famous episode to deal with this theme, “The Obsolete Man” in which a librarian is sentenced to death by an authoritarian state because he is deemed to have no function in society, aired at the end of the second season, and no doubt contributes to the 6.9% of episodes during that season that were coded as having the “totalitarian regimes” theme “strongly present.” However, the season with the highest percentage of episodes featuring the theme was season 4, during which another famous episode was broadcast. In “He’s Alive” a small-time Neo-Nazi operation (led by a young Dennis Hopper) is guided by a mysterious figure in the shadows. Embodying authoritarian regimes both literally and metaphorically, the point is blatantly driven home at the end of the episode when it is revealed that Hopper’s benefactor is none other than the very personification of totalitarian regimes – Hitler.

Co-Occurrence of Themes

Though 98.1% of all episodes featured *at least* one of the five themes, 35.5% of all episodes featured *only* one of the five themes. Another 39.7% of the 156 episodes featured *only* two of the five themes. In total, 77% of the series featured two or fewer themes in any given episode. In terms of strength of theme saturation, only 23% of all 156 episodes featured three or more of the five themes.

Similar to the pattern that emerged previously when discussing the individual themes represented in various seasons, again the fourth and fifth seasons appear to have the greatest percentage of multi-themed episodes. Though *The Twilight Zone* as whole only averages 2.6% of episodes with four themes present, season 4 had 11.1% of its episodes feature four themes. Season 4 and season 5 also each had one episode air in which all five themes were present.

The themes that occurred together most often, across the entire series, were “alienation” and “erosion of traditional values;” these two themes appeared together in 36.5% of all episodes. From a thematic standpoint, this is logical because both themes are concerned with psychological and cultural shifts occurring at the micro-level, down to individual households. These themes often had less to do with events that played out in the halls of Congress, and far more to do with the events in American Legion and Knights of Columbus halls. This co-occurrence of “alienation” and “erosion of traditional values” supports the claims of several authors cited earlier who assert that post-war America was far more entrenched in a struggle for self-definition than it was in the arms race.

The next-most common co-occurrence of themes was between “alienation” and “fear of the other” at 26.9% of the time, which again underscores the individual experience of the day. The data seem to suggest that *The Twilight Zone* scripts were more focused on the self, on individuals and how they related to, and defined themselves in relation to, one another. This also fits with Zicree’s aforementioned analysis of the series, which featured heavily on the interconnectedness of alienation and fear. The themes that appeared alongside one another the least were “fear of the other” and “totalitarian regimes,” which co-occurred just 1.9% of the time. See Appendix 3 for the full chart.

VII. DISCUSSION OF KEY EPISODES

As previously noted, 36 of the 156 episodes featured 3 or more of the 5 themes, with the highest percentages occurring in seasons 4 and 5, which had 22.2% and 25% respectively. The first episode to have 3 or more themes present was *The Twilight Zone*’s first episode, “Where Is Everybody?,” which aired October 5, 1959. This episode features “alienation,” “fear of the other,” “fear of war and mass destruction,” and “erosion of traditional values” all at the threshold level. It is often cited in *Twilight Zone* literature as one of the most representative episodes of the series, and it is no wonder why: there is little ambiguity in the episode’s stark imagery and message.

“Where Is Everybody?” introduces a man walking alone on a dirt road. Through the course of the episode, the audience learns that he does not know anything about

himself: his name, where he comes from, what he does for a living, not even where is currently and where he is headed. The man complains, out loud to himself, increasingly of loneliness, confusion and a vague sense of being hunted. He has no sense of self, no concrete ways to define himself or his relationship to the world around him. His is detached, alone and alienated to the most extreme degree.

What is also significant about this episode is the setting for the main character's plight; though he is alone for almost the entire episode (save for the very last moments), he is not in a deserted area. Or, at the very least, not in a setting the audience would typically associate with being deserted. The protagonist does not wander anguished and confused through an empty field or forest, but rather, through what looks very much like Anytown, USA. There is a drugstore with a lunch counter, a Bijou with flashing lights advertising a new movie, a town square complete with gazebo, shiny new Oldsmobiles, Fords and Chevrolets parked in driveways next to perfectly manicured lawns, and streetlights that commerce work once dusk settles. This town, this lovely suburban Shangri-La, is the picture of modern life in all ways. Except, of course, in that it is lacking a single inhabitant.

In the final scene of "Where Is Everybody?", as the protagonist's confusion and paranoia have risen to a fever pitch, the audience finally learns why this man has apparently been forsaken by humanity: He is not really in the middle of a town at all. The man is hallucinating this scene because his reality is more than he can bear. The "twist," the surprise, ironic ending for which the series was to become famous, was that the protagonist was actually an astronaut in training, confined to a 5-foot by 5-foot box

for nearly two weeks in order to simulate a trip to the moon or orbiting Earth. He is confined to this space, though willingly, at the behest of the government, which apparently has little regard for his safety or sanity. It's only after slicing his hand on the glass face of a gauge (he believes to be a crosswalk signal), and entreating repeatedly "Help me, help me! Somebody, please, help me!" that the General observing the would-be astronaut (who, we finally discover, is named Ferris) finally pulls the plug on the operation.

This pilot episode quite literally set the tone for the kinds of episodes viewers could expect from Rod Serling and his two most frequent collaborators, Charles Beaumont and Richard Matheson. Beaumont wrote another one of 36 episodes in which three or more themes were present, episode #20, "Elegy." This episode featured "alienation," "fear of the other," and "erosion of traditional values" at the threshold level. The plot of "Elegy" also focuses on astronauts, and on surroundings that bear striking resemblance to the suburban developments now dotting the landscape. Unlike Ferris in "Where Is Everybody?", however, these astronauts really have left Earth. Despite the oddly familiar surroundings, the astronauts learn the substantial difference between Earth and its seemingly-long lost cousin: Earth is not full of taxidermied people. What Meyers, Webber and Kirby have stumbled upon is a galactic graveyard of sorts, in which the only living resident is the caretaker who ensures the deceased remain undisturbed.

Again, the symbolism in this instance is not difficult to discern. Much like "Where Is Everybody?" these space travelers find a place that looks like home, but does

not *feel* like home. Though there are technically people there, they are all dead, embalmed and stuffed to merely *appear* alive. Ultimately, the only “person” the three astronauts encounter, the caretaker Wickwire, is revealed to be a robot, incapable of genuine human emotion. In the interest of performing his duty and keeping the peace of the graveyard, Wickwire poisons the astronauts. In the final scene of the episode, we see Wickwire positioning the taxidermied Meyers, Webber and Kirby on their ship in various poses. All they wanted was to go home; instead, they got a taunting, empty pantomime of it.

Another seminal *Twilight Zone* episode, “The Obsolete Man,” featured fan-favorite Burgess Meredith as kind librarian Romney Wordsworth. This is another oft-cited *Twilight Zone* episode, partly because of its star and partly because of its script. “The Obsolete Man” features “alienation,” “fear of war,” “erosion of traditional values,” and “totalitarian regimes” all at the threshold level. Though the series was not overall highly saturated with the “totalitarian regimes” theme, “The Obsolete Man” was likely the most prominent example of the series’ treatment of the theme. The sympathetic Wordsworth is the target of ire from “The State,” personified in this episode by a nameless official, who conducts a perfunctory “trial” perched atop a podium far above Wordsworth. Among the crimes with which Wordsworth has been charged are his occupation as a librarian and his belief in God. These are the offenses from which the episode derives its name, as Wordsworth is found to be obsolete – of no use to The State because the The State has proven there is no God and there is no longer any use for books.

The chasm between Wordsworth and the Chancellor is apparent in all aspects of the episode. Despite The State's ideological positioning as rational, logical, efficient and iron-handed, the Chancellor speaks in rants, passionately assailing Wordsworth with tirades about his obsolescence. From his spot at the podium The State's official manages to unequivocally evoke both Joseph McCarthy and Adolph Hitler. The more mild and calm Wordsworth is, the more enflamed the Chancellor becomes. Through the character of the Chancellor, the totalitarian state is portrayed at once as both grasping and frightened and crushing and soulless.

Wordsworth is sentenced to death for his crimes, and ultimately, die he does. However, in typical *Twilight Zone* fashion, the episode does not end without one unexpected twist. Wordsworth was clever enough to ask two things of his execution: that only he and his executioner know the method by which he will die, and that his execution be televised. The Chancellor is particularly glad to oblige the second request because The State "finds it has an educative effect on the public" to watch convicted criminals die. The following night, Wordsworth calls the state official to his home, to visit him one last time before he is to die. Upon his arrival, Wordsworth locks the door and informs the Chancellor, in front of the television camera set up in his room to broadcast the execution, that he is to die by an explosion. Now trapped inside Wordsworth's home, the Chancellor has two choices: he can beg Wordsworth for mercy, or he can remain stoic and accept his fate. Of course in the end, the Chancellor abandons the stoicism and courage of The State and, prostrate before Wordsworth, pleads "in the name of God" to be let out of the room. Wordsworth complies, just a moment before the bomb explodes. The Chancellor flees to safety, but it is only temporary. He walks back into the room in

which he normally stands at his podium above the accused, only to find that his former deputy now occupies his position. The robotic voice tells him that he has embarrassed The State, shown weakness and therefore has no function. As Wordsworth was consumed by a bomb, the Chancellor is consumed by a State mob and meets the same fate.

“The Obsolete Man” concludes with one of Serling’s trademark voice-overs, a quick summation of the morality play just witnessed:

*The chancellor, the **late** chancellor, was only partly correct. He was obsolete, but so is the State, the entity he worshipped. Any state, any entity, any ideology that fails to recognize the worth, the dignity, the rights of man, that state is obsolete.*

While this conclusion seems to be aimed primarily at the Soviet Union, Serling falls short of confining his indictment to the totalitarian regimes of Europe. Instead, he makes specific reference to “any entity [...] that fails to recognize the rights of man,” which could just as easily been an allusion to the recent activities of the junior Senator from Wisconsin as to the pogroms of Stalin.

One of the only episodes to have three or more themes present but *not* “alienation” was the season 2 “The Man in the Bottle,” which features “fear of the other,” “fear of war and mass destruction” and “erosion of traditional values” all coded at the threshold level. “The Man in the Bottle” is a teleplay based upon the old adage “Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it.” This proves to be the case for the getting-on-in-years, curio shop owners, Mr. and Mrs. Castle. The couple has run their business without the slightest business sense, and often loses money in the process of

helping their “customers” – down-on-their-luck neighbors looking for much more than their glorified junk is worth. In sum, these are decent, hard-working people who have spent many more years worrying about others than about themselves. Their reward for a lifetime of altruism is mounting debt and sleepless nights. In the rapidly “modernizing” world of the 1950s, Mr. and Mrs. Castle are anomalies, focused on extending a hand rather than profits. But recently, a fragment of regret has lodged itself in their collective psyche, and the Castles have begun to resent the lives their business has leftover for them.

The Castles are presented with an opportunity to reverse their fortune when a piece bound for the scrap heap is revealed to be the home of a wish-granting genie. Seeing an exit from their self-created debtors’ prison, the Castles quickly wish for one million dollars (surely a much larger sum in 1960). However, their habit of helping their wayward neighbors is only exacerbated by their new-found wealth, and within minutes, what they have not given away, the IRS promptly takes for taxes; the Castles are left with five dollars. Seeing their folly in asking for money, Mr. Castle wishes for power – specifically, to be the unchallenged head of a country, someone who would rule his entire lifetime. Cut to Mr. Castle, with his now-dark hair slicked back, with a severe part on one side, a tiny, Charlie Chaplin mustache, in a uniform with an arm band, sitting in what appears to be a bunker. Of course, he got his wish: He is Hitler.

Before Mr. Castle lives out Hitler’s end, he wishes that they never found the lamp in the first place, and all is undone. Back from the bunker, with his wife in their curio shop, the two quickly decide that, despite their lack of means and nights spent lying

awake, they are better off without intervention. Though they want for much financially, their love for each other and for their customers will keep them warm in the end. In the 1950s climate of consumerism, Levitt houses and the “company man,” the Castles’ story was an increasingly rare one. America had begun its shifting away from Mom & Pop and towards Sears Roebuck, and wealth, or at least its pursuit, was no longer the exclusive domain of the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts. Perhaps it was precisely because of these cultural trends, and not in spite of them, that Serling wrote “The Man in the Bottle.”

Of the heavily saturated fourth season of the series, the first episode of the truncated season, which aired January 1963, is one the darkest and most disturbing of all *Twilight Zone* episodes. “In His Image” was adapted by Charles Beaumont from one of his short stories, and features “alienation,” “fear of the other” and “erosion of traditional values” all at the threshold level. More than forty years after it was first broadcast, “In His Image” still inspires a desperate, choking sense of fear and confusion in the viewer. It is the story of a man, Alan Talbot, who, away from home in a big city, inexplicably kills an old woman on a subway platform, and runs off into the night in the first sequence of the episode.

Though this violent outburst is not explained for some time, the episode depicts Talbot as recently in love and full of the excitement and foolishness the experience brings. He brings his new intended to visit the home he shares with his aunt. Upon arrival, Talbot seems lost; though he has only been away for a week, nothing about the town is how he remembered it, and no one he asks has any idea what he is talking about. At his house, he finds not his aunt but another family, and where his parents’ graves are

supposed to be, the headstones of another married couple. He arrives in the town absolutely sure about his past and present, but within a few hours, the changed landscape and residents who claim not to know him have Talbot, and his fiancée, questioning his sanity. As the day wears on, it is revealed that Talbot has begun to periodically hear shrieking, discordant cacophonies that obscure his connection to reality. During one such episode, just as with the woman on the subway platform, he tries to kill his fiancée.

After the violence has left him (and his fiancée flees to safety), Talbot tries to piece together bits of information the town's residents have told him with things he is certain he remembers about his life. In the middle of the night, unsure of how he arrived there, Talbot finds himself inside a large, shadowy home on the outskirts of town. He does not know why, but he is compelled to search the house, believing that someone or something will be there to explain why his memories do not match up with reality. The twist of "In His Image" is most disturbing because it shakes the most basic of human principles: what makes someone human, who is responsible for creation, how can one truly be sure of one's own existence?

In the house, Talbot comes face to face with himself, both actually and metaphorically. He learns he not a human being at all, but a robot, a creation of Walter Ryder made in his image to be all the things Walter could not: charming, charismatic and fun. But, as the horrendous sounds Talbot hears attest, Walter's robot has begun to malfunction horribly; the week-long "vacation" he was on in the city was actually when Talbot escaped from Walter's basement in a violent outburst. Now, it is only a matter of time before he shuts down completely. Despondent and desperate, Talbot tells Walter all

about his fiancée, with the hopes that he can be fixed. Unfortunately for Talbot, it is too late, and he consumed once again by violent malfunction. Walter is forced to destroy his creation in order to save himself.

This episode is laden with existential and moral questions, both philosophical and practical. “In His Image” explores the possibility of humanoid robots, as so many of the *Twilight Zone* episodes do. But unlike episodes such as “I Sing the Body Electric,” in which a kindly, grandmother stand-in robot helps a lonely widower raise his three children, Talbot does not know he is a robot, and believes all of his emotions and memories to be real. This challenges Voltaire’s venerated declaration of existence, “I think, therefore I am.” If one can think, but still not *be*, then how can we know what is real? What happens when we believe certain things to be true, that are then proven to be false? Do we define our identities by externalities? Is it possible to do otherwise? Perhaps Charles Beaumont was alluding to the idea that we are more than the sum of our parts, but ultimately, Talbot was far less than his.

“In His Image” also shines a spotlight on science and technology, and asks how moral are some of the uses to which they are put. If a robot could think and feel, what right do we have to create such a thing and then use it to our own ends? What are the rights of the creator over the created? Has the significantly increased prominence of and societal dependence upon science and technology since the end of World War II led to an increased feeling of estrangement and isolation? Are we, the consumers of General Electric and Boeing and Ford, the Alan Talbots of the world? “In His Image” seems to

imply yes, at least in part, to many of these questions; it also seems to imply that there are those pulling the strings to control a truth of which many may not be aware.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

In a May 2004 editorial in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, Gary Hoppenstand writes about *The Twilight Zone* and how, in every positive way, that series was the antithesis of current television programming. Hoppenstand laments that television now, especially “reality” television, appeals to the lowest common denominator, not only of the medium but of humanity. He seeks refuge in DVD boxed sets of series long-gone, and, reflecting upon *The Twilight Zone* he writes:

This early pioneer of TV narrative fully understood the potential of the television medium. Unlike the drivel of today’s reality TV, Serling knew how to transform television into metaphor [...] This was television that entertained and instructed that enlightened us about ourselves and allowed us to escape the toils and routines of daily life. Rod Serling’s series transformed television into poetic metaphor, and though certainly not perfect, *The Twilight Zone* did much to dispel Newton Minow’s assessment in 1961 that television was a “vast wasteland.” (562-563)

The purpose of this study was not to canonize Rod Serling or claim *The Twilight Zone* as high art. Television historians have written of *The Twilight Zone* for years in much the way Hoppenstand did, but the context had not been defined and outlined. This study sought to establish that context for the series: context for American society during the height of the Cold War, of the fears and anxieties present in society, and the context with regard to television broadcasting. Beyond that, this study also sought to determine whether scholars who have written on the subject were correct in their assertions about

the program itself: whether it truly was five seasons of Cold War allegory, or if its topicality and critique were limited to a few select episodes. Were the relevant social, political and economic themes, and corresponding fears, actually present throughout the series? Did *The Twilight Zone* instruct and “enlighten us about ourselves?” Or was it mere entertainment, with just a handful of episodes dedicated to the themes that were en vogue at the time?

The data are concrete: *The Twilight Zone* featured social and political currents of the day in 98% of its episodes. It would seem that, despite Rod Serling’s protestations to the contrary, he *was*, in fact, still interested in “saying something” and delving into the social questions of the day. He was, however, truthful to the sponsors when he said he would not court controversy; he left his public calls for nuclear disarmament for several years after *The Twilight Zone* had gone off the air (Engel, 244), and very few episodes actually featured the destruction wrought by modern weaponry. As noted by Wolfe, Serling was concerned less with the world and more with the individual’s place within it (Wolfe, 26) and so many *Twilight Zone* episodes did the same. Perhaps to focus more on nuclear fears or the immorality of McCarthyism would have been to court controversy; so, instead, Serling focused his *Twilight Zone* on the private struggles of everyday men and women afraid of being different and risking being ostracized, but afraid of becoming like everyone else and losing their identities.

As the data demonstrate, “alienation” was the most common theme in *The Twilight Zone*. Its manifestations ranged from characters dissatisfied with their life choices to characters literally, completely alone and estranged from all human contact to

people who find out they are not people at all. Whether or not the feeling of alienation, whether from one's family, community or way of life, was indeed the widest reaching and most socially significant current of the long 1950s, it may be impossible to say with finality. It was, however, unquestionably the most prominent theme of *The Twilight Zone*, highlighted again and again over the show's five seasons. This finding does fit with Presnell and McGee's assertion that the central tenet of *The Twilight Zone* was "lessons on what it means to be human" (7). Alienation is certainly unique to the human experience, and a feature of contemporary life still. With the Cold War now long over and the "modern" way of life firmly entrenched in American culture, alienation may be the lasting legacy of the series, for it continues to bear relevance to our lives.

Popular culture, "low culture" to some, can tell us much about ourselves. For many years since the series went off the air, television historians have repeatedly cited *The Twilight Zone* as an example of one instance in which popular culture held a mirror up to the public and reflected the image of what people privately knew to be true, but did not publicly address. Though the threat of Soviet world domination has long since abated, and Senator McCarthy is merely a specter of history books, America is in many ways still searching for its identity and struggling to find its way in the 21st century. While some references may be dated, *The Twilight Zone*'s central themes – questions of identity, of belonging and human connection – remain as culturally significant today as ever.

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Appendix 1

Episode number/title: _____ Original airing date: _____

ALIENATION:

- 1. Main character on stage by his or herself
- 2. Character portrayed as recently having left home or moved to a city
- 3. Character complains of loneliness, isolation or feeling misunderstood
- 4. Character is rallied against by, or is the target of hostility from, the other characters

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCCURANCES

FEAR OF THE OTHER:

- 1. Characters respond to unfamiliar terrain or characters in an overtly negative way
- 2. Unfamiliar characters dressed in a bizarre fashion
- 3. Negative motives are assigned to unfamiliar characters
- 4. Main characters verbalize dangers posed to them by unfamiliar characters or terrain

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCCURANCES

FEAR OF WAR & MASS DESTRUCTION

- 1. Bomb is detonated during episode
- 2. Characters express concern that a bomb or missile will affect their area
- 3. Characters respond to threat of foreign attack in a negative way
- 4. Visual or contextual references to WWII

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCCURANCES

EROSION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

- 1. Science leads a characters to behave in an anti-social manner
- 2. Money or attainment of personal power is the motivation for a character's behavior
- 3. Character devotes himself to modern culture at expense of family & traditional values
- 4. Characters who have contact with modern technology are physically distant from others

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCCURANCES

TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

- 1. Negative regime portrayal
- 2. Members or advocates of regime are portrayed in shadow
- 3. "Good" characters portrayed as objects of punishment or scrutiny by regime
- 4. Repression of non-state-sanctioned ideas occurs or is discussed

TOTAL NUMBER OF OCCURANCES

Appendix 2: Scott's Pi Values by Variable

Alienation 1	0.52
Alienation 2	0.45
Alienation 3	0.47
Alienation 4	0.33
Fear of the Other 1	0.44
Fear of the Other 2	0.42
Fear of the Other 3	0.47
Fear of the Other 4	0.5
Fear of War 1	0.54
Fear of War 2	0.57
Fear of War 3	0.31
Fear of War 4	0.54
Erosion of traditional values 1	0.5
Erosion of traditional values 2	0.51
Erosion of traditional values 3	0.5
Erosion of traditional values 4	0.55
Totalitarian Regimes 1	0.31
Totalitarian Regimes 2	0.5
Totalitarian Regimes 3	0.35
Totalitarian Regimes 4	0.9

Appendix 3: Theme Co-Variance

Alienation	Fear of the Other	26.9%
Alienation	Fear of War	15.4%
Alienation	Erosion of traditional values	36.5%
Alienation	Totalitarian Regimes	6.4%
Fear of the Other	Fear of War	7.7%
Fear of the Other	Erosion of traditional values	12.8%
Fear of the Other	Totalitarian Regimes	1.9%
Fear of War	Erosion of traditional values	8.3%
Fear of War	Totalitarian Regimes	4.5%
Erosion of traditional values	Totalitarian Regimes	5.1%