

## Cinema



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**Date:** 2002

**DOI:** 10.17421/2037-2329-2002-CS-1

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The movies are one medium where important phenomena in society, culture and fashion come together. Therefore they are not extraneous to either science, whose world-view the movies convey through their subjects and plots, or religion, of which they represent and put on the screen the great moral contents. However, the contents of science as well as those of religion, are often transformed and modified by the principles of cinematographic language. Like literature, cinema is an art form where the great [myths](#) [2] and narratives survive, where eternal conflicts are played out, and their hermeneutics more or less unconsciously provided. In films, religious and existential themes are often delivered through scientific or science-fictional contexts and reach the public through the language of cinematography. There have been many studies on the relationship between cinema and religion or between cinema and scientific thought over the years. I would like here to highlight only some significant examples of how the big screen has offered an opportunity of encounter and debate between science and religion.

### **I. Transcendence and Science Fiction in 2001: A Space Odyssey**

In 1962, Thomas Kuhn published a book destined to influence as never before the epistemological debate over the philosophy of science and the study of the social sciences. Kuhn's successful essay was entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* and sought to determine, at the planetary level, the diffusion of a relativist vision of knowledge with tones that were in open contrast with the common logic of scientific rationality. The author of the work was exposing the famous thesis according to which the history of science would not advance continuously, but would proceed by jerks, called "scientific revolutions." In the course of these revolutions, a specific vision of the world called the "dominant paradigm" would cease to operate in order to leave space for another vision whose similarities with the previous one would be extremely scarce, if not non-existent. The author, who died in 1996, dedicated great energies, especially in the course of the last fifteen years of his intense intellectual activity, to refuting distorted

interpretations of his work. He maintained that his original point of view – even though some of his vaguely expressed formulations seemed to presuppose a relativist vision of science – was quite different, and that his intentions were certainly contrary to any form of relativism.

In Stanley Kubrick’s masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), however, the opposite occurred with respect to Kuhn’s famous text. The “rationalist” nature of this complex, ambiguous and fascinating movie, was especially exalted as it was optimistically “progressive” and benevolently favorable in terms of the liberating power of science. The film was even interpreted by some Catholics as a work dedicated to the mystery of God. Obviously, Kubrick’s vision of the world expressed in this film was very different; the ingenious and controversial director, always working ahead of the times, did not want to make a “rationalist” film, less at a time characterized by the “Sessantotto” protest (the student protest of 1968). In reality, he wanted to do the contrary, to make a film in opposition to the dominant “rationality.” In one of his precise analyses, Ruggero Eugeni, scholar of cinema and semiology, emphasizes that *2001: A Space Odyssey* «is to be considered a great epic poem of “Reason,” the reconstruction of the history of Western Rationality in a mythological and imaginary way, as a really human instrument of progress, civilization, order, peace, an instrument for the promotion of knowledge and the dominion of the world. The project would seem a typical project of the Enlightenment, strained to sing the myth of Reason. But Kubrick turns his attention on this *epos* with profound and demystifying skepticism and irony. And in this way, point by point, he dismantles the themes of positive optimism, specifying behind the myth of Reason, the dialectically active presence of its opposites.» (Eugeni, 1995, pp. 70–71).

In Australian John Baxter’s biography on Kubrick, the chapter dedicated to *2001: A Space Odyssey* clears up any doubt about the plot. This biography includes the text of a telegram sent to the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke (who would later work with the director on drafting the film’s screenplay) by Roger Caras, a director from Columbia Pictures (producer of the film *Doctor Strangelove*), after having had lunch with the English director. As is noted, the writer would soon be the author of a romance with the same title that would come out almost contemporaneously with the film (1968). In the text, dated 1964, we read: «Stanley Kubrick – Doctor Strangelove – Horizons of Glory etc. – Interested in doing film on extra-terrestrials – Stop – Interested in you» (cf. Baxter 1997). Therefore, Kubrick wanted to do a film about [extraterrestrial life](#) [3]. Later, Baxter reports Clarke’s opinion in 1964 about what the director was trying to do in his film, which had the following themes: a) the reason to believe in the existence of other intelligent forms of extra-terrestrial life; b) the impact (and perhaps even the lack of an impact in certain areas) that a similar discovery could have on the earth in the near future (cf. *ibidem*). This information is reported also in another biography of Kubrick by American Vincent Lo Brutto. In the dense chapter on *2001: A Space Odyssey* titled *The Definitive Journey*, Lo Brutto (1999) also confirms that Kubrick wanted to make a film on the existence of extra-terrestrials.

Now, the manner in which extra-terrestrials can be reconciled with scientific rationality (and perhaps also with the problem of [God](#) [4]) is difficult to hypothesize. Kubrick’s intentions are reflected perfectly in his masterpiece, a work from which all the great films of the recent and commercially successful genre of “Hollywood science fiction” have been born. With *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Kubrick anticipated a relativist, anti-rationalistic and anti-scientific culture, which would spread in the next thirty years, and which would use science fiction and the cultural industry, especially that of the movies and television, (even if the discussion were extended to the sector of cartoons and popular literature) in order to convey to the masses, as Kuhn would have said, the new emerging “paradigm.” With his film, Kubrick found the way to the heart of a new generation that was coming into the limelight as the Sixties were ending, a generation that wanted to hear new forms of spirituality, skeptical of science, progress, rationality and unbridled consumerism. On the other hand, Lo Brutto himself observes that the sequence of the Door to the Stars, which ends the film, caused the children of the Age of Aquarius to give “2001” the prize of the

film par excellence of the Sixties. And shortly thereafter, returning to the topic, he writes that for McLuhan's children, "2001" had a spiritual and religious power, and the audience was glued to the screen; he also adds that during the sequence of the Door to the Stars a teenager dove into the screen screaming "I see God!" (cf. Lo Brutto, 1999). But what kind of God was watching that young person, taken by the persuasive force of the Kubrickian imagery? One of the many "flower children", perhaps under the influence of some stupefying drug, was transported by that stream of white light that was projecting something divine on the screen which resembled God. However it was not the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but rather the God already dear to the followers of the Californian Jesus Revolution, who from that point would soon start to liken Jesus Christ to Buddha. In this way, they mixed mysticism and extra-terrestrials, the angels with the old therapeutic power of crystals, rock and pop music with science fiction cinema.

While some cosmologists were becoming the new theologians of our time --let us recall Stephen Hawking's popularity and the discussion of the role of God that arose from his theories-- , directors of science-fiction films were becoming the greatest popular heralds of ideas and suggestions that arose from the results of a new cosmology. The fateful date for this genre of cinematography is 1977. That year two young American directors, not yet famous, were creating a new way of understanding God, Creation and our view of the universe in two key films: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by Stephen Spielberg and the first episode of *Stars Wars* by George Lucas.

Returning to Stanley Kubrick's film, in order to fully understand its meaning, I must emphasize that we find ourselves before a work at the same time prophetic for the cultural and spiritual themes confronted, and intimately connected to its own time, a time in which human beings were getting incredibly closer to the conquest of space through technological progress. In fact, on July 20, 1969, man first walked on the moon, transported in the space ship Apollo 11. An old dream finally materialized, thanks to developments in aeronautic technology in the course of the second half of the 20th century. The mass media amplified this news in a formidable way, elevating it to its maximum influence and making it become a true icon of audio-visual mythology. Space adventures, capable of gathering millions of spectators contemporaneously around the whole world before the small screen, had already entered with familiarity into the collective imagination. Even Pope Paul VI from the Vatican Observatory, attended the event in real time, bestowing his blessing on that new conquered frontier. But in Kubrick's film, science fiction conveyed a genre half way between aesthetics and science through images and achieved international success one year before Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Thus, it marked a true turning point, opening to the Hollywood industry a road toward success, which at the same time was promoting among the masses a number of new ideas about the relationship between man and God.

## **II. *Star Trek's* Message**

If in terms of cinematography *2001: A Space Odyssey* indicates the birth of a new way of representing the fantastic, it must be remembered that a few years before, a television event, destined to endure great success during the next thirty years, had positively prepared the public to become familiar with stories that took place in times and galaxies far in the future. The event took place on the small screen and was broadcast for the first time on NBC in September of 1966. I am referring to the first episode of the long-lasting series *Star Trek*, which managed to delight viewers of every age, class and culture, transporting them magically on board the space ship *Enterprise* for an adventure in the cosmos, almost forty years long, over the course of many journeys. From the Sixties until now the *Enterprise* was adapted in shape and technology in order to satisfy the expectations and knowledge of at least three generations of viewers. From that prototype of 1966 four other television series (each one including numerous episodes)

were created and ten films were made which enjoyed notable success. The ten films that were born from them are: *Star Trek – The Motion Pictures*, 1979, by Robert Wise; *The Wrath of Khan*, 1982, by Nicholas Meyer; *The Search for Spock*, 1984, by Leonard Nimoy; *The Voyage Home*, 1986, by Leonard Nimoy; *The Final Frontier*, 1989, by William Shatner; *The Undiscovered Country*, 1991, by Nicholas Meyer; *Generations*, 1994, by David Carson; *First Contact*, 1996, by Jonathan Frakes and *Insurrection*, 1998, by Jonathan Frakes, to which we should add the newly released *Nemesis*, 2002, by Stuart Baird. Comments on Star Trek’s various cultural and philosophical “readings,” together with an ample bibliography, can be found in the works of Franco La Polla (1997 and 1999).

The genre of contemporary science fiction, starting with *2001: A Space Odyssey* has produced two different ways of reflecting on basic themes concerning science and religion. The first way regards the series *Star Trek*; the second is related to the *Star Wars* series, probably even more successful than the first in terms of collective imagination. Let’s start with *Star Trek*. «There is nothing more complex and, unfortunately, less studied,» Angelina M. Campani observes in her essay, «than the relationship between theology and science in *Star Trek*» (cf. Campani, 1998, p. 35). The creator of the series, Gene Roddenberry, is a Baptist who converted to a merely ethical humanism. For this reason, someone once pointed out the pronounced presence in *Star Trek* of a pantheistic theological substratum where God is nothing but a impersonal entity. But this is a simplified way of looking at the relationship between science and religion present in *Star Trek*. Angelina M. Campani holds the opposite opinion as she maintains that at the end of *Star Trek*, we find not a pantheistic idea of God but the fact that God is the ultimate destination of the human journey, a journey in a future dominated ever more by technology and science (and the Enterprise is its sophisticated laboratory). It is a future in which human spiritual thirst is not quenched, in favor of an unholy and purely rationalistic existence. The essay closes with the following words: «This theological vision recalls the scientific-theological speculations of the French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin for whom the story of man marks the lasting journey in which the inevitable encounter between man and God takes place. For Teilhard de Chardin, as perhaps for Roddenberry involuntarily, this encounter is the intimate meaning, the deep revelation of the finality of science and human history.»

As the physicist and astronomer Lawrence M. Krauss demonstrated in his study, the idealized world of *Star Trek*, although in this way the result of a fantastic construction, has a highly scientific base (cf. Krauss, 1997). The series conceived by Texan Roddenberry does not use a great deal of special effects, as is usual in contemporary science fiction. In *Star Trek* everything happens almost always inside the Enterprise. In his essay titled *The Philosophy of Star Trek*, Mario Palmaro observes that the series is «anything but banal, rich with non-conventional elements, new for the genre; it could be said that action and adventure are important elements, but not distinctive to *Star Trek*. Roddenberry has bigger ambitions: to formulate an ethical and anthropological debate about the future of man, and the relationships that humanity attempts to have with the world that is out there, beyond the solar system» (Palmaro, 1998, p. 568). In this work, Palmaro discusses at length the question of God and Tradition in the series. «There exists a truth about man,» he writes, «which will not change with the passing of the centuries: and this is the absolutely “anti-modern” message that *Star Trek* wants to throw at the viewer. Relativism has not yet corroded the metal sheets of the Enterprise like mortal rust. [...]. In episodes of *Star Trek*, the volcanic Spock embodies the superiority of logic, science, rationality: and, yet, in every episode the “reasons of the heart” dear to Pascal are revealed to be critical, stronger and more important in order to resolve any ethical dilemma.» (p. 569).

Through a quick sketch of the main characters’ traits, Palmaro thus summarizes the philosophy that underscores various adventures and characterize their choice of objectives and situations: «The bridge of command of the Enterprise has been compared to a home, frequented by a family model, in which the

value of freedom, thus shown by the movies of these years, is never separated from the value of responsibility. Responsibility for your fellow companions on the journey, but above all for yourself, are the duties that correspond to a noble idea of man. In this way, Captain Kirk embodies the role of the wise king, the demanding sovereign who commands his ship and equipment. He reminds us of Ulysses as he is anxious to explore new horizons and yet he has an overwhelming desire to return to Ithaca. For Kirk, home is the space ship, a place to return to, where someone waits for you because, deep down, the thousands of daily worries --including a mission into outer space!-- are only the sign of exile which must be resolved in a liberating return home. With respect to Ulysses, however, there are some interesting novel elements. In the Greek world, Odysseus' adventure is essentially a return, a fascinating succession of events that are endured nevertheless by the main character. It is only in Jewish tradition, however, that adventure is connected to the idea of a "goal", capable of assigning human meaning to journey. As there is no possible goal for those who have no desire to take a journey, an authentic journey is impossible for those who do not set a goal for themselves. The *homo viator* is he who puts himself on the path to "discover." But discovering does not simply mean perceiving new facts and data, but rather giving them "significance". Erik the Red landed on the coast of America much before Columbus, and even this event did not mean "discovery." Only he who is moved by the urgency to find meaning discovers. Captain Kirk embodies humankind's anxiety to possess a triple-fold faith in reality: faith that is *recognizable*, one that *deserves* to be recognized, and one that is recognizable due to *inventive* knowledge. Perhaps we will not be able to travel on a space ship like the Enterprise but from this small blue planet we have been able to explore the night sky and to discover its great wonders. If physics cannot give us what we need to navigate the Galaxy, it gives us what we need to bring the galaxy to us. Yes, in *Star Trek*, there is Blaise Pascal, even if Americans don't know it> (*ibidem*, pp. 571-571).

### III. Extra-terrestrials and the New Age Atmosphere

I have said that Star Trek is culturally very different from the saga of Star Wars or from so many other productions, noble or less noble, in modern science fiction. It is fitting to emphasize that through science fiction many different ideas – anti-rationalistic, anti-scientific, magical, Gnostic, neo-spiritual – have been conveyed in the last twenty years. I am talking about that nebulous that goes under the all comprehensive category of [New Age](#) [5]. The Enlightenment condemned astrology in favor of astronomy. It was the same Colbert, founder of the Academy of France, to expel astrology from the university. Reason and scientific progress would have replaced this form of irrational knowledge. At least this was the belief of the followers of the Age of Enlightenment. At the dawn of the 21st century, it can be said that astrology --under the sign of Aquarius-- got its revenge and that for many viewers science was replaced by a form of science strangely extrapolated which is in the end science fiction.

A specific example which enjoyed great success is Robert Zemeckis' *Contact* (1997). The main character in this film is an eccentric scientist (played by Jodie Foster), struggling against the traditional scientific community. Her persistent research attempts to demonstrate that other forms of life exist in the universe. She sends all sorts of signs into space through sophisticated antennas in the hopes that someone will respond. The film departs from a scientific foundation. A big American research project is underway called SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) which consists of probing the outer cosmic space with powerful radiotelescopes in order to look for signals and intelligent messages coming from beyond the solar system. Although no messages have been received till now, the movie breaks every barrier, building up a story where entities of superior intelligence respond and get in "contact" with the protagonist in order to resolve an unsuppressible question. Where will we find our loved ones who have left us? The girl will find her beloved father whom she lost at a very young age. There was a time in which it was theology which provided these answers; today the mass media do so through great science

fiction films, which provides these answers to millions of individuals all over the world with a persuasive tone.

This same theme was introduced in 1977 in Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The director confronts aliens, breaking an old tradition of representing them negatively. Rather he places them alongside human beings, a solution that will have even more success a few years later with *E.T.*. In the film Spielberg constructs a story in which there are three kinds of encounters between humans and UFOs. The first is limited to their watching, the second consists in gathering unequivocal proof of their existence, while the third kind of encounter entails direct contact. The encounter of the third kind with the aliens happens in a protected place that the scientists prepare for the big moment. In a serene environment full of lights, a peaceful spaceship delivers different human beings who mysteriously disappeared in the past. They are sent back just like they were taken, without a minute of their life having passed, and the scientists board the same spaceship. Together humans and aliens will build a better world.

«Already in the 1940's,» observes Cecilia Gatto Trocchi, «a lot of people had contact with aliens. A new sensitivity developed from this trend that made messages from extraterrestrials the focal point of spiritual and mystical groups, often few but usually very active» (Gatto Trocchi, 1998, p. 217). Before I spoke of a sort of anti-rationality which takes off in the movies from the scientific context itself, almost a science conceived to look at non-rational forms. In Spielberg's movie, one of the main followers of UFOs is a scientist who believes in the existence of "parallel worlds", inhabited by aliens with whom we can maintain a dialogue. Rational and irrational, here it is, served on a silver platter, under the semblance of a celluloid fable, good for children and adults. This is the profound meaning of this movie which indicated the affirmation of New Age cinematography.

#### **IV. From *Star Wars* to *The Matrix*: The Survival of Myth**

Stories on film of heroes cast into fantastic worlds and incredible adventures, busy conquering starry skies, galaxies and infinite spaces, made a rational breakthrough and increased the process of demythologization which began in the West in the Fifties and Sixties. As a consequence, there was a trend toward a radically relativist and fully post-modern divination of man. *Star Trek* is obviously not part of this cultural process but there is another science fiction series that is even more popular which increased the subsequent development of this genre of entertainment: *Star Wars*. This typical product of mass cultural consumerism of the Eighties is due to the ingenuity of American George Lucas who in 1977 constructed the prototype of the series, *Star Wars* which was followed by two hugely successful sequels, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, directed by Irvin Kershner) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983, directed by Richard Marquand). To complement these three films which have been re-released in theatres all over the world (and in a new version on re-digitized videocassette), Lucas decided to make a prologue of the story which consists of three other movies. The first in the series, *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace*, was released in 1999.

George Lucas, creator, director and producer of *Star Wars*, has given numerous interviews over the course of time to affirm that his cinematographic creation was determined above all to make one reflect on the problem of God. Speaking about the central theme of the movies --the "Force"-- Lucas has declared: «The Force evolved through various character and plot developments. I wanted a concept of religion based on the premise that God exists and that good and evil exist. I began to distill the existence of all religions in what I thought was a common idea, also common to primitive thought. I wanted to develop something that did not belong to one confession but could appear to be a true religion. I believe in God and in the existence of good and evil. I also believe that there are certain basic dogmas which in

time became specific, such as “Thou shalt not kill”. I don’t want to offend anyone. The philosophy that permeates my work is “Do not do unto others....”. I used the Force in the hopes of reawakening in young people a spirituality more connected to the idea of a God than to some specific religion. You could say “I believe” or “I think about it”. The important thing is to ask yourself.»

In a recent statement made on the occasion of the release of *Episode: I: The Phantom Menace*, the director of the movie set forth: «I put a strain in the film that arouses a certain type of spirituality in the very young. It is however more a belief in God than in a particular religious system. I did it on purpose to force children to ask for explanations of this great mystery. Seeing people around me who do not have the curiosity to ask themselves if God exists is to me the worst thing that could happen» (*Star Wars brings children closer to God*, “Il Giornale” [Italian newspaper], 21.4.1999). Lucas is truly convinced that this new series of *Star Wars* is the best instrument to bring the young generations to the divine mystery through the genre of science fiction. In fact, he goes on to say in the same statement: «What I want is to hear people say to me: I am looking around myself, I am very curious to know and I won’t have peace of mind until I discover the answer. If I am unable to find it, I will die trying to discover the mystery of the creation of the world. *Star Wars* tries to filter the questions that religion poses and re-transforms into a single concept which is a great mystery. I remember when I was ten years old and I used to ask my mom why there were so many religions if there was only one God. Up until now, I have not yet found an answer and my conclusion is that all religions are true. I am convinced that God exists, there are no doubts about that. I am not sure, however, who this God is and what we know about him» (*ibidem*). But to which God is Lucas referring? To the God of Judaeo-Christian Revelation or to another divine Being that governs the destiny of the earth? His idea seems clear enough in one regard: no religion in particular interests the director, but he believes that the context of the universe and its worlds, whose far-away horizons science-fiction is now capable to manipulate and make accessible, can present the problem of God and re-propose, in a form more mythological than ethical, the eternal fight between good and evil.

The vast success of Lucas’ saga is impressive: *Star Wars* ranks number two in terms of highest profits of all movies ever made in the United States with a total of \$ 461 million, second only to *Titanic*; *The Return of the Jedi* ranks number seven with profits totalling \$ 309 million, *The Empire Strikes Back* ninth with \$ 290 million. Worldwide, *Star Wars* is still number two with \$797 million, behind *Gone with the Wind*. *The Empire Strikes Back* is thirteenth with \$ 431 million and *Return of the Jedi* fourteenth with \$ 413 million. The overwhelming majority of all those who have tried to decipher *Star Wars*’s success have done so by using keys of reading especially connected to the narrative structure of the movies, to the abundant use of special effects, to the fascination aroused by its mythological roots.

But there is a subtle element which is rarely reflected upon. In *Star Wars*, Lucas skillfully succeeds in proposing again a story that is apparently yet another variation on the “canon Bible” in which there exists a clear distinction with Good and Evil and in which the human beings move within an environment marked by the presence of God. Yet, on the contrary, he mixes it up and twists it by introducing Eastern religious elements, revealed for example by the fact that man seems to weaken the divine strength to the advantage of human strength. In this sense, *Star Wars* can be discussed as a type of “mysticism and fiction”, with the extraterrestrial representing the image of God. In *Star Wars*, the Force is referred to constantly. It seems to possess an omnipotent divine power in the course of adventures. But the Force, according to Lucas, does not have an absolute negative or positive value. The Force, therefore neutral, can help either side --Good or Evil-- win. Everything depends on how the mind --therefore subjectivity, understood as human super-power-- uses the Force itself. In one scene in the film this is clearly explained: Yoda, a little elf, teaches Luke Skywalker to use the power of the mind (there is full concordance with Zen Buddhism, and Yoda is a clear visualization of a “teacher”) to confront and turn to his advantage the difficulties encountered. Thus he compares himself with the Force in a subjective way

and ends up finding it within himself. Incidentally, we can observe that in Sacred Scripture a similar context would not be possible. In the episode of Samson for example (cf. Judges, cc. 13-16), the Israelite hero possessed extraordinary strength but firstly uses it improperly, allowing his passion for Delilah to overwhelm him. Only later, when he has a humble and close relationship with God, will he use it in order to achieve a right goal.

After the great success of *Star Wars*, Andy and Larry Wachowski succeeded in bringing to the extreme what George Lucas had already started, in their cult film *The Matrix* (released in 1999; two sequels are due to come out). We see again in this film how Eastern spirituality develops as it is combined with strong biblical elements and offered to viewers in the form of virtual religion. This religion is spread on the Internet where fans of the Matrix can indulge themselves. In particular, the main protagonist of the Matrix, Neo has a strong resemblance to [Jesus Christ](#) [6] and it would seem he wants to impersonate the figure of the Messianic Savior. We see only some surprising parallels:

Christ is announced by various prophets – Neo is announced through a liberating prophesy of the Oracle; Christ is revealed by John the Baptist – Neo by Morfeo; Christ must save humanity – Neo’s mission is to save the universe. Jesus Christ, like Neo, gathers disciples. Christ is betrayed by Judas for money – Neo is betrayed by Chyper in exchange for a better life; Christ is put to death at the hands of the authority of the Temple – Neo by the agents of *The Matrix*; Christ rises for the love of the Father and with the strength of the Holy Spirit – Neo rises for the love of a woman with an original name, Trinity, always by his side during his earthly ups and downs. Christ has miraculous powers during his earthly life and divine powers after his Resurrection – Neo has special powers in life and becomes omnipotent after resurrection. In the end, just as Christ ascends into Heaven, so does Neo in the final flight of the film. I could continue to list many other similarities in this, the best cinematographic representation of Christ, according to the New Age philosophy through the character of Neo. A similar case could be made for the little Anakin Skywalker in the *Phantom Menace*, part of the *Star Wars* series.

If modern cinema (historically defined as the end of the Fifties through the Sixties) placed the problem of the eclipse of the sacred at the center of its own interests, the next phase, which we could call “post-modern cinema,” has close connections with the theme of reawakening and the return of the sacred. There are two tendencies that characterize this new period of film, still in ephemeral surroundings, already well-defined in basic features. On one hand, we are witnessing a renewed interest in eschatological and existential themes that are rooted in the cultural tradition of the Judaeo-Christian Western world; on the other hand, there is an attraction toward alternative forms of new spirituality, syncretic and agnostic in nature, mixed with abundant doses of irrationality and full of interest in Eastern religions which is typical of the *New Age*. By now modern screens are filled with angels in addition to extraterrestrials; but if the angels of the *Sky Over Berlin (Der Himmel uber Berlin, 1989)* by Wim Wenders are still rooted in the biblical tradition, the angels that fill *City of Angels (1998)* by Brad Silberling, protagonists of the vulgarization in the New Age style of the previous film, are certainly not any more. And for the same reasons, the screens are filled with space ships. But the world of *Star Trek*, scientifically developed beyond every measure, has not yet decided to do without God, while *Star Wars* has already made this step.

**Read also:** [Extraterrestrial life](#) [3]

[Myth](#) [2]

[New Age](#) [7]

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