Norma Perez

ENG 651: Rhetoric and Composition Theory

Professor Wexler

28 March 2014

E.T. the Extra-terrestrial and the Quest for Ultimate Existence

*The news that an extra-terrestrial landed on planet Earth reached the minds of the masses. Attempting to understand these possibilities was in the conversations of all those whose only vision of life was grounded on what the earth could provide but whose visions in the future called to technologies that earthenins could have only dreamt of.*

*Area 51:Behind a looking glass* (TV)*.*

E.T.: “E.T. phone home. E.T. phone home.”

Elliot: Yes, E.T. will go home soon.

E.T.: “E.T. phone home. E.T. phone home.”

Elliot: You’ll see. It’s just a matter of seconds before they come for you and you will be back home like you were before.

E.T.: Home, E.T.

Elliot: I promise.

*Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Longinus, and Elbow, all who compose the The Philosophical and Political Secret Society observe and take careful notes on observations and although they know that what they have just watched was a film, they could not dismiss the implications the movie places on society at large. Such connections led to the interview that was to take place where Steven Spielberg was an integral part of Earth and what lies out of it.*

PLATO: Upon us is a revelation that quite literary transcends beyond this world, one which will continue to be challenged despite any evidence that is put in front of us.

ARISTOTLE: Well, you cannot make the assertion that the existence of this being is not plausible or that it cannot be deemed as false or an illusion directed by fragmentation, as what you had beyond you was more than a pixilation of perhaps constructed ideologies of what you and I both looked at.

PLATO: Your argument is plausible in that we did have before us an image. I can only make claim for what I saw but cannot and will not ever be able to observe whether these observations align with yours.

ARISTOTLE: Hence, based on your claim, it was not a three foot species that has never been seen on earth not a clue to your doubt?

PLATO: You and I are species too. Are we not?

ARISTOTLE: Depends again how you define what a species is.

PLATO: Well, let us say that what we call species in this circumstance is one which does not have human like characteristics like you and I.

ARISTOTLE: Integrating reason into the equation, one can then, based on your answer, formulate that you and I then are speciess as well because we each have characteristics that define us as individuals.

PLATO: This observation is however led mostly by what you see. Sight governs your vision and so what you see might be different than what I see. Even in attempting to decipher each of our visions independently, we run into the problem of justifying these observations for ourselves and for others who attempt to align visions of a particular.

ARISTOTLE: Well, let us look at the physicality of parts of his physical state.

PLATO: In doing so we would already be relying too much on the sense, which in the first place is not concrete and more often than not, it is inaccurate and unreliable.

*Longinus walks in and listens before engaging in the conversation.*

LONGINUS: It is important to also be mindful about where our knowledge is coming from and who we are to believe.

PLATO: Even then, is your judgment one that was guided by nature or was it construed by whom you think was at the authority to provide such information?

LONGINUS: The drunken scoundrel on the side of the street can say that planet was constructed in one day and that the ultimate being that gave rise to humanity was the pigeon and the kangaroo. But how much of this can we take for truth?

ARISTOTLE: Of course. Who do we associate wisdom with? Is it not with those who have studied at institutions of Philosophy.

PLATO: To join in a quarrel about the possibilities of life form outside Earth is one which entails conflicting ideologies of existence.

ARISTOLTE: What is the reasoning behind your claim, especially concerning the natural world we live in, independent from sources that science had expounded from us?

PLATO: Precisely. It is this natural world that is distanced from all other elements on earth.

*Locke, Longinus, and Elbow also join in the conversation.*

LOCKE: Let us investigate the term extra-terrestrial.

LONGINUS: And when you’re speaking of extra-terrestrial, you are also making allusions to subjectivity.

LOCKE: Not just the term itself but language as a whole. “The imperfection of words is the doubtfulness or ambiguity of their signification, which is caused by the sort of ideas they stand for” (Locke 817). In this case, it stands for more than just

LONGINUS: The subjectivity of language. Yes. And, what is this subjectivity doing? Well, but even if this is the stance language is taking, can we not still pay close attention to what it is doing and how meaning is created and transformed?

LOCKE: You are correct. But though I’m suggesting that language is imperfect, I am not devaluing what subjectivity does for language and the delivery of it. Keep in mind the difference in particulars and abstracts and what these do to the way we perceive ideas, actions, and even objects.

LONGINUS: You mentioned the word extra-terrestrial. How then does the particular/abstract dialect come into play in defining how we even begin to grasp such heavy concept?

LOCKE: I should begin this explanation by defining each. Well, as far as the particular is concerned, we look at a word as the sign that within an instance of time and space cannot be used in others. To explain further, and before delving into the subject at hand, let me provide an example.

LONGINUS: The “figures of thought and figures of speech” (Longinus 350) you speak of might allude to the way we convey many things in life. But, please proceed.

ELBOW: It is interesting that you make such distinction but I am curious how you will provide such explanation without also keeping in mind human’s automatic instinct to classify something as either correct or incorrect, as the term extra-terrestrial carries so many social, racial, and political connotations. But before I proceed to interrogate these, I shall wait for your linguistic approach.

LOCKE: If we say, for example, that my fellow comrade Longinus’s hound is named Sublimy. I can’t assume that my comrade Elbow’s hound is also named Sublimy just because they are both hounds. This is what we call the particular. On a different note and taking on a different example, despite his great contributions to the world, many categorized Sir Issac Newton a nut who was hard to get along with based on his psychotic behavior and frequent mood swings. In a culinary context however, a nut is also a fruit. In this case, the word, or sign, “nut” is an abstract idea because it represents more than one meaning.

ELBOW: Transformative philosophy. Your theory plays off even when we speak of socially constructed terminology. Insults, for example, are developed from ideas that were once created to indicate an item by which to some extent share characteristics.

LOCKE: Precisely. Now the term in hand, extra-terrestrial. Particular or abstract? Or should we even force it into a category?

ELBOW: Well, again we come to the notion of subjectivity and how words are influenced by society, culture, religion, and other institutions taking major roles on how we make meaning of our surroundings. What is socially accepted? What is not?

LONGINUS: Let me attempt to begin interrogating such questions by looking at the sign, extra-terrestrial, which I can define as one that transcends, quite literally from planet earth. Is it a place? A thing? Can it be explained? Elbow mentioned that institutions are influential to meaning-making. Nature, and what we know and do not know about it, in this case, is influential to explaining the meaning of the extra-terrestrial.

ELBOW: Nature as an institution?

LONGINUS: Yes. “Though nature is on the whole a law unto herself in matters of emotion and elevation, she is not a random force and does not work altogether without method.” (Longinus 347). Thus, it is often the case that nature and its derivatives are also reduced down in terms of importance. However, it is because nature cannot be measured, quantified, or evaluated that makes it an even more potent force that is often hard to explain. In the same matter, when we think about nature, we often associate it to Earth. But how many connections can we make between nature, Earth, and interchangeably, nature beyond the Earth?

LOCKE: Since you bring up nature, Longinus, let’s acknowledge our understanding of things and how we make judgments. We often know things based on two qualities: primary and secondary.

ELBOW: How does this play out in the world of dialects an in how problematic it is to particularize the way we think into two qualities, given its subjectivity.

LOCKE: First, it is important to clarify that my intention was not to particularize nature, and even less, to suggest that there is only one way of interpreting life outside of earth. My attempt was to highlight the abstractness of such notions. Now that that is clarified on my part, I would also life to expand on both qualities I mentioned earlier.

ELBOW: Please continue.

ARISTOTLE: How much of this can we rely on reason manifested in men’s knowledge-making, the art of deliverance, and in building credentials to his name. Even to suggest that there are only limited ways of knowledge closes off possibilities.

LOCKE: Well, I suggest that the secondary qualities by which we know everything is color and smell and the primary is shape.

ELBOW: But can it also be assumed that how we see things extends beyond the possibility?

ARISTOTLE: That’s a valid question, especially as the human speciess was cultivated upon knowledge and reason, and such required a deep understanding of how nature and the world as a whole operate. Thus, a philosopher and one who engages in the sciences will uncover the truths about concrete evidence, such as both the Copernicus’s heliocentric and Newtonian models of the solar system.

LOCKE: Yes, which is also why I believe it is important to look at the word “extra-terrestrial,” from a linguistic perspective.

*Locke adds emphasis on the word by pronouncing it separately extra- -terrestrial.*

LOCKE: Let us take the part we can identify as closest to nature, the idea we have been speaking of. Terrestrial is that which relates to land and the planet Earth. Taking a step forward, a terrestrial planet is one created of rock and heavy metals. There are four like these in the Solar system: Mercury, Venue, Earth, and Mars. These planets share many characteristics: they are surrounded by a mantle of silicate rock, they are smaller than gas planets, and they have a varied terrain that includes volcanoes, canyons, craters, and mountains (Cessna).

ARISTOLE: Evidently, you are one with the credentials to make note of such information in articulating your claim.

LOCKE: In reading Greek Philosophy, it is difficult to escape using such observations to make a point. Perhaps I may not have the credentials to carry on a full conversation to carry out a conversation about the Solar System, but I do know some.

ARISTOTLE: By credentials, I mean that orator who is able to provide a reasoned discourse on the subject matter. Sure he can relate his experience in order to try to appeal to the audience, but serves no function he cannot provide the means for an articulated example. In this case as Longinus suggested one cannot fully fall under the guise of a student who is doing research on a particular field compared to a scientist who has mastered his art of science.

LOCKE: Yes, and given what has been put forth on the table and what the suffix, “extra,” which linguistically refers to what is beyond, necessary, and expected, and understood. What does it then suggest about how we classify that which is beyond the Earth? The connection between the two suggests not only a complex array of implications, but it also creates more questions than it does answers.

ARISTOTLE: Well, let us take for instance the philosophical models of the universe.

*Aristotle reaches into his bag and brings out his book, A Philosophical Attempt into the Unknown, a book on the congruence between philosophy and the universe.*

ARISTOTLE: We are attempting to comprehend the possibility of a life outside of earth, but let us take a step back and focus on the earth and its composition. This should offer a glimpse into existence.

PLATO: Yes, and how do we begin to measure where an extra-terrestrial being fit within the nature of existence?

ARISTOTLE: Well, given what we do know about the planet Earth and what there is still to be discovered opens up yet another question, how much do we know about what lies beyond planet Earth?

LONGINUS: These pieces of information continue to be complex and ambiguous.

ARISTOTLE: Well, let me expand further. Philosophical models put together provide assumed appearances of the earth. Such assumptions are thus deceiving. We must therefore seek to understand the reality that lies in the universe based only on what is provided by those who have dedicated their studies to earth and the universe.

*Ellie, who had been kept in a room with E.T. now has the opportunity to come into the room and listen to what the committee was speaking of.*

LOCKE: Your claims are reason why I decided to break the term, into two because as Elbow provided, it carries with it many connotations and subjectivity is not an aspect that can be escaped. We can emphasize on how critical it is to even focus on the formulations of our very home.

ARISTOTLE: Of course this is critical. Take for instance matter. Matter can be thought to exist in different forms and at different states. More specifically, water, or what we know of it, transgresses in different forms. Water changes to ice, then back to water, and lastly, to steam.

ELBOW: Another commonality that is difficult to dismiss is categorization. We see it as we attempt to understand the probability of life outside of Earth. What specifically, however, do you mean by form?

ARISTOTLE: What I mean to say is that the composition of different materials of the world may be formed out of a single primal material.

ARISTOTLE: I am saying that the actual infinite cannot exist.

ELBOW: We have been speaking all along of subjectivity. In keeping such idea in mind, how may we then define the actual infinite with respect to the Earth and the Universe?

ARISTOTLE: What I mean by actual infinite is the idea that shapes, forms, and existence can form an actual and complete totality. This further goes to the idea we mentioned before about the unreliability of what we hear.

*He continues to look around the room and especially on Ellie who sits quietly, ready to be invited into the conversation.*

ARISTOTLE: It continues to be part of that given circle.

LOCKE: This circle that you speak of becomes very charged with the sciences and so rather than providing specific explanations to what the topic at hand is, making sense of E.T.

PLATO: Did it fall from the atmosphere without any connection at all to human development? How can we bring into question the origin of the world? Of humanity? Of plants? Of the living, in general?

ARISTOTLE: Where then would someone like E.T. fit when we speak upon the creators? Let’s historicize this claim. Based on your claim, there has to be a supreme power above it all. But what gives this supreme being the knowledge to understand the function of everything on earth?

PLATO: We must first begin to examine what we mean by creation and the creator? About the hierarchy of life? Who was created first? What speciess helped formulate the earth for what it was before and what it is now?

ARISTOTLE: To illustrate, why is woman’s body created birth a child? The male gamete, also known as sperm, and the female gamete, or the egg or ovum, both merge in the female's reproductive system. When the sperm fertilizes, the fertilized egg is called the zygote. Why was it that each sex was given such role? Is woman’s body a perfectly designed machine of production?

PLATO: There is from where your fallacy begins dear comrade. The creator is not one that should be put at the same level as humanity as he is one that transcends it all. The creator created earth and interchangeably, earth made the creator to embody both good and reason.

ARISTOTLE: What I’m trying to say is that God is more than just a mere creator of the universe. This God too is a grand mover who thinks about his own thinking , the ultimate philosopher who can logically think about his thinking , and demonstrate such act to be the most valuable thing about human life. This is not to say that God takes the same characteristics of man; on the contrary, God thinks in ways that not many people can think in.

PLATO: We were in the end born into mortality. Man’s immortal soul suggests a cyclical move of life, as far as life is concerned. Birth, life, death, and what exists in the aftermath. Given such stages, however, can perhaps even speak to the beginnings and ends to life outside of earth, given of course the assumption that there in fact exists life that surpasses the Earth’s crust.

LOCKE: Provided the information above, we can all at least to some extent, say that there are no fixed boundaries on nature. And because of these unfixed rules, the world is classified depending not on a holistic vision but rather on a vision that is largely dependent on individual purposes.

ARISTOTLE: We can continue to speak of this God endlessly. Because given the claim you just provided, Locke, even the belief or lack thereof of such entity will depend largely on the person’s life and everything that entails.

LOCKE: Precisely, Aristotle. Often we want to enforce specific beliefs and ideologies onto people thinking that there is only one single Truth, with a capital T. When believing such, we are falling into a fallacy that erases all other possible truths.

ELBOW: So, there is no standard Truth?

LOCKE: There is no single classification of things, regardless of what you are speaking of. It might be an individual truth, but this does not automatically make it applicable to all other individuals. Thus, there is no single Truth but rather many truths created and adopted by a popular consensus, society at large.

*They all look at each other as if the conversation is ending for the interview with Steven Spielberg.*

LONGINUS: Shall we proceed to the room?

*They all enter to find Steven Spielberg sitting.*

SPIELBERG: Greetings earthlings.

*They all reply to his salutation.*

LONGINUS: We were all in dialogue in preparation for this dialogue. But to begin, tell us a little about the film you, which if I may add, transforms the viewers in ways that are uncontrollable even to them.

SPIELBERG: “E.T. was a gift that came from the heavens for me” (“Steven”). No pun intended.

*They all laugh*.

SPIELBERG: I was picking up fossils in Tunisia the day after watching the end of *Close Encounters*. I then thought to myself, “What if the alien stayed behind on earth?” This was essentially the idea behind leaving and E.T. and behind his desire to go back home.

ARISTOTLE: You chose the term, alien, and we discussed the term, extra-terrestrial quite closely. Are there any particular reasons for the choice in terminology?

SPIELBERG: Not only did the term, extra-terrestrial but also the reasoning behind the film as a whole was influential to the ideologies of society.

ELBOW. Right. I noticed all those implications too.

SPIELBERG: Sure, it was a story of my life and the lives of children whose parents divorce. In looking at how I could structure the film, I placed particular attention to how such part of my life impacted me growing up.

LOCKE: We also spoke about subjectivity and how there is no universal truth. In constructing the vision of the alien, or the extra-terrestrial to keep consistent, did you base any characteristics of him, E.T. on anything in particular?

SPIELBERG: “I don’t think aliens should be taller than people. I like the idea that they are like children. [In fact] little girls in costumes were chosen to play the role of E.T.. This also makes it easier to relate to.”

ELBOW: You pay particular attention to the role children play in society, are there other metaphors and implications that you attempted to reveal in your film?

SPIELBERG: Well, as you were able to observe, Elliot does not have a father. His father fled to Mexico with another woman and so Elliot is a lost kid who wants a companion and somebody to fill in that gap.

LONGINUS: We followed that. Your language, though simplistic with the purpose of connecting with the younger audience, captures the viewer despite the age in such an interesting manner. The content is dignified to capture the experiences of your audience.

SPIELBERG: Since you speak about language, there is a metaphor to the story, perhaps not a hidden one, but a metaphor nonetheless. This absence and the quest to find this absence alludes to the desire to be rescued whether it is from life, any emotional state of mind, or just a physical rescue.

ELBOW: In this case, the quest is led by Elliot, correct?

SPIELBERG: Yes. Not only led by Elliot, but by E.T. as well. Elliot was a child rescued by E.T. in that he filled the absence in his life. In the same way, E.T. was rescued by Elliot when he helped him find home again (“Spielberg”).

ELBOW: Any other connections you can make to society?

SPIELBERG: Yes, plenty. But I would also like to hear all of your takes on the matter. There is only so much I can praise my film about. *He chuckles*. I did however connect with both Elliot and E.T.

ELBOW: It would be foolish of me not to make connections not only with the movie but also with the terminology that is used by society and how this terminology also transforms.

SPIELBERG: Of course. What specifically would you like to concentrate on?

ELBOW: I wanted to discuss the term “alien” and “extra-terrestrial” and the connotations attached to this. I think it would be interesting to hear your take. This conversation may move from the film alone but I would like to focus on a particular aspect we can discuss.

LOCKE: In terms of anything we talked about before.

ELBOW: Similar to that discussion. Over the years there have been negative connections with the term “alien” and how it is used freely to categorize people immigrating to the country. Such category is politically incorrect in nature. “Illegal” is used to categorize a violation of the law and alien suggests something outside of this earth. To use this term incorrectly. Although in a different instance, I would say that “cleaning up the language” is derogatory in that it implies one single and correct way of speaking, there is language and categorizations that should be examined carefully.

SPIELBERG: I agree with you completely and understand how and why what we put out, especially through the media can influence the masses.

LONGINUS: Yes. And when the masses are unable to make distinctions about what they see from how society operates also in relation to their lives, this becomes dangerous.

ELBOW: Yes. But your attempt to bridge humanity to life outside of earth I’m sure influenced the viewer.

SPIELBERG: I hope so. *He smiles.* One thing is for sure though. This quest for ultimate existence and to find life outside earth is one that will continue.

*They all thank Spielberg.*

Works Cited

American Film Institute.“Steven Spielberg on E.T. The Extra-terrestrial.” *YouTube*. YouTube, 20 Dec. 2011. Web. 20 March 2014.

Aristotle. “From Rhetoric.” *The Theoretical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bodford/ St. Martin’s, 2001. 179-240. Print.

Cessna, Aby. “Terrestrial Planets.” Universe Today. 11 Jan. 2010. Web. 20 March 2014.

Elbow, Peter. “Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond ‘Mistakes’, ‘Bad English’, and ‘Wrong English.’” *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Victor Villanueva and Kristin L. Arola. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 2011. 641-669. Print.

*E.T. the Extra-terrestrial*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Dee Wallace, Henry Thomas, Drew Barrymore, and Peter Coyote. Universal Pictures, 1982. Film.

Locke, John. “From An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.” *The Theoretical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bodford/ St. Martin’s, 2001. 817-827. Print.

Longinus. “From On the Sublime.” *The Theoretical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bodford/ St. Martin’s, 2001. 346-358. Print.

Plato. “Gorgias.” *The Theoretical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bodford/ St. Martin’s, 2001. 87-137. Print.