

The British Reception of 1950s Science Fiction Cinema

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Abstract

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Scholarship on 1950s American science fiction cinema has tended to explore the relationship between these films and their domestic contexts of production and reception. They are often characterised as reflections of US anxieties about communism and nuclear technology. However, many such films were exported to Britain where these concerns were articulated and understood differently. The ways in which this different national context of reception shaped British interpretations of American science fiction cinema of this era has not yet been accounted for. Similarly, although some research has addressed 1950s British science fiction, this scholarship has been comparatively concise and has left gaps in our knowledge about the domestic reception of these films. Unable to draw on a British reception history of domestic and US 1950s science fiction cinema, debates about the genre have sometimes been underpinned by the presumption that western audiences responded to these films in a uniform manner. This thesis seeks to complicate our understanding of the genre by suggesting the specificity of the British reception history of science fiction cinema during the 1950s.

The paucity of documentary evidence of British responses to 1950s science fiction films makes an audience study impossible. Within the intellectual framework of the New Film History, this thesis instead employs a contextually-activated approach to reception. Making extensive use of archival sources, newsreels, newspapers, magazines and other such documentary evidence, it explores some of the different contexts in which 1950s science fiction cinema was received in Britain and suggests how these factors might have shaped the interpretation of the genre.

The thesis examines the interplay between American and British 1950s science fiction cinema and the British public understanding of communism, immigration, nuclear technology and scientific advancement. It contributes to our knowledge of these films by demonstrating that Britons did not necessarily understand 1950s science fiction cinema in the same way as Americans because they were party to a differently inflected series of public debates. It exposes the flexibility of the metaphors utilised by the genre during this period and their susceptibility to reinterpretation in different national contexts. This research makes visible, in a more extensive manner than has yet been accomplished, the specificity of the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema, and thereby provides a means to resist assumptions about the similarity of western audiences during this decade. Its conclusions call for further research into other national reception histories of these films, so that they too are not overshadowed by the better known American history of the genre, and into the possibility that the British reception history of other genres might similarly have been obscured.

Declaration

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Introduction

A nuclear test takes place in the Arctic Circle. The explosion melts the ice that has kept a gigantic, reptilian beast in a deep sleep since prehistoric times. Once awoken, the creature carves a path of destruction along North America's Atlantic coast, ending in a deadly rampage through New York City. This sequence of events, which forms the plot of the American 1950s science fiction film *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), has tended to be interpreted in both the academic and popular writing on 1950s science fiction cinema as a metaphorical representation of US Cold War anxieties about nuclear weaponry, with the monster serving as an embodiment of the dangerous potential of the explosion that released it.¹ Drawing on the seminal work of Susan Sontag, a number of the era's American radioactive monster movies have similarly been connected by scholars and critics to US fears of nuclear technology and particularly Soviet nuclear weaponry.²

However, these anxieties were not consistent across every nation to which these films were exported. Across the Atlantic Ocean, Britain was engaged in a period of what Keith Chapman has described as 'considerable optimism' about nuclear technology, culminating in the opening of 'the first nuclear plant in the world to supply power on a commercial rather than an experimental basis' in 1956.³ As S. M. Macgill has noted, the promise of cheap electricity allowed the British nuclear industry to promote itself as 'a tremendous opportunity for growth and prosperity in postwar economic development'.⁴ The financial promise of nuclear technology was framed by Britain's significant debt to America as a result of the Anglo-American Loan Agreement of 1946 and the struggle to recover the nation's former economic strength after the Second World War.⁵ While 1950s science fiction films have often been made sense of

as representations of American Cold War nuclear anxieties, in Britain, where *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* was released in 1953, a different relationship to nuclear technology was emerging.⁶

As Paul Swann argues:

American films did not “mean” the same thing to British audiences as they did to audiences in the United States. The two audiences drew upon very different cultural references when they decoded these films. Consequently, the images of America and Great Britain presented in American films could often be interpreted on different levels - one for the American audience, one for the British. Often films gain something, as well as losing something, in the transition/translation from America to Britain.⁷

Swann’s overview of the reception of Hollywood cinema in post-war Britain raises the possibility that Britons found meanings in 1950s science fiction’s nuclear creatures that were not necessarily available to audiences in the United States, suggesting that perhaps traditional wisdom about the interpretation of the genre during this era cannot go all the way towards explaining its British reception.⁸ This thesis aims to explore these tensions by investigating the relationship between British audiences and science fiction cinema during this decade, suggesting some of the unique meanings that these genre films acquired when watched in the specific cultural and socio-political contexts of 1950s Britain.

Beast is not an isolated example of a 1950s science fiction film whose interpretation as a product of American anxieties has a problematic relationship with British public sentiment. Authors such as Susan Sontag, David J. Skal and Cyndy Hendershot have drawn attention to the connections between a wide range of mid-century American science fiction films and US public anxieties about radiation and the Soviet possession of nuclear weaponry.⁹ Much of this work echoes Hendershot’s claim that American science fiction ‘films of the 1950s attempted to represent the nuclear threat by utilising metaphors that helped American audiences to concretise and tame the unthinkable threat of

nuclear war'.¹⁰ Similarly, scholars have also suggested that the motif of depersonalisation that ran throughout much of the genre during this era spoke to US fears that communist ideologies were taking root in American suburbia. This work has elaborated on Peter Biskind's argument that 'possession by [alien] pods – mind stealing, brain eating and body snatching – had the added advantage of being an overt metaphor for Communist brainwashing'.¹¹ Arguments that connect 1950s science fiction cinema and contemporary US fears have become so prominent that Mark Jancovich has argued that they, alongside claims about the presumed patriarchy of the genre, 'have virtually achieved the status of an orthodoxy'.¹²

This level of attention to the relationship between American anxieties and 1950s science fiction cinema can perhaps be explained by the dominance of the genre by American films. Andrew Tudor, for example, has suggested that 56.9% of the horror films released in Britain between 1931 and 1984 came from America, but much of what Tudor deems to be horror could also be categorised as science fiction.¹³ The 1950s was certainly subject to this trend and most science fiction produced during this period came from Hollywood. M. Keith Booker considers the 1950s a period of 'American standardization and homogenization, as Fordist-Taylorist mass production techniques reached new heights of sophistication and new levels of penetration into every aspect of American life'.¹⁴ Cinema was not exempt from these forces. In this context, genre cinema offered Hollywood a stream of 'dependable products' that could be produced cheaply by reusing sets, costumes and props because they relied on the 'repetition and variation of commercially successful formulas'.¹⁵ The economic appeal of genre film production, coupled with rising public interest in both science and space as a result of Cold War technological advances, such

as artificial satellites and nuclear weapons, led to the 1950s becoming an American 'Golden Age of science fiction film'.¹⁶ While science fiction cinema already had a long history by this point, stretching back at least as far as Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), the 1950s saw a greater number of these films being produced in the United States than ever before or, perhaps, since.¹⁷ These were films such as *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) and *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958). Other countries, too, made notable science fiction films during the 1950s, such as Britain's *Fiend Without a Face* (1958) or the Japanese and American collaboration *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956), a reworked version of Japan's *Gojira* (1954), but without the developed industrial infrastructure and financial reserves of Hollywood these nations could not compete with the scale of American production. 1956, for example, saw the release of twenty-five American science fiction films, with a further thirty-four following in 1957.¹⁸ This was also the period in which science fiction's reputation for making exhaustive use of new special effects technologies was solidified. Techniques such as 3D cinematography, composite shots and stop motion animation gave these films a distinct visual style that has since been developed using more sophisticated tools, such as computer generated special effects. The sheer innovativeness and volume of science fiction films being produced in Hollywood during the 1950s makes this a key decade in the development of the genre on screen and an important era to focus on when assessing the genre's history in the west. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the vast majority of scholarly writing on the science fiction cinema of the 1950 has focused on the relationship between US films and US society.

However, these films were also watched by audiences elsewhere in the world. Britain was a very significant market for western film distributors during the 1950s as a result of the cinema's great popularity in that country. As Paul Swann notes, in 1955 'annual average admissions in Great Britain were 22.7 million, down from 26.3 million in 1951'.¹⁹ It is difficult to be precise about the share of this market taken by science fiction films since British box office figures for much of the genre, particularly its low budget films, remain elusive. However, some suggestion of the genre's popularity can be gleaned from its prominence in British cinema magazines of the era, particularly in two of the most popular of these publications, *Picturegoer* and *Picture Show*. Alongside the great range of previews, reviews and articles about 1950s science fiction films printed in these magazines, and drawn on throughout this thesis, *Picturegoer* occasionally published short stories that retold the plots of films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954).²⁰ It was also not uncommon for both magazines to present these narratives in a comic strip format, using still images from the films.²¹ *Picturegoer* even awarded *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* its Seal of Merit, a very rare honour bestowed only on films the magazine thought particularly worthy.²² Contrary to Wheeler Winston Dixon's assertion that '1950s British audiences wanted horror, not science fiction', the genre was deemed popular enough to justify significant coverage in the nation's film magazines, a fact that would in turn have served to further publicise these productions.²³

The popularity of American science fiction cinema in Britain is suggested by the number and range of films exported across the Atlantic. American classics of the genre, such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *It Came from Outer Space* and *Them!* (1954), were screened in Britain alongside less well known productions, such as *The*

Amazing Colossal Man (1957), *The Alligator People* (1959) and *The Giant Gila Monster* (1959). This was part of a larger trend in 1950s British cinema-going since, as Swann has observed, 'in the decade after the Second World War, the British were actually more loyal than the American cinema-goer to American films'.²⁴ US science fiction films thus made up a very significant portion of a popular genre in 1950s Britain.

Although it imported a great variety of science fiction films from America, Britain was itself an industrious and independent producer of genre cinema during the 1950s. Beginning in 1953 with the release of *Spaceways*, British studios produced a number of varyingly successful science fiction films. Notably in 1955, Hammer, the British studio behind *Spaceways* which is now most widely famed for its distinctive brand of 1960s horror cinema, adapted *The Quatermass Experiment*, a popular BBC television serial drama from 1953, into the film *The Quatermass Xperiment*, a hybrid of science fiction and horror that proved very successful both at home and in the United States.²⁵ A sequel, *Quatermass II*, followed in 1957 and received similar, if slightly more muted, praise. Before the end of the decade a wide range of science fiction films had been produced in Britain, ranging from the preposterous and often ignored *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958) to genuine classics of the genre such as *Fiend Without a Face*. These homegrown genre films were screened in Britain alongside the influx of American science fiction content during the 1950s.

Although science fiction films from other nations were also occasionally distributed in Britain, the genre as it manifested in that country was overwhelmingly American and, to a lesser extent, British. It would therefore be a mistake for a project such as this to limit its investigation of 1950s British science fiction reception to an exploration either domestic or American films. To

ignore either country's productions would be to consider a false image of the genre in 1950s Britain. There were, however, obvious differences between British and American films, not least in terms of the actors' accents and the types of locations depicted on the screen. As a result of these factors, British audiences might well have related to films differently because of their national origins. As such, this thesis examines a range of different science fiction films that were released in Britain during this decade, both British and American, but notes where signifiers of nationality within these films might have inflected their reception. This is most obvious during the discussion of the concept of 'American invasion' that underpins a significant portion of Chapter Five, but will also be raised elsewhere where relevant.

As suggested above, while the films of these two countries might have enjoyed a two-way flow across the Atlantic during the 1950s, the contexts within which they were received in the United States and Britain were divergent. This is true in terms of both film cultures and broader national circumstances. In terms of cinema production and distribution, Britain was undergoing a period of transition. As Sue Harper and Vincent Porter note, after Britain signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948 it became impossible to continue the quota system that had previously been imposed on distributors in order to ensure the screening of British films and the sustainability of the British film industry.²⁶ In this way, GATT endangered the financial wellbeing of British studios and effectively forced them to seek American investment. This, alongside other factors outlined by Harper and Porter, resulted in a flood of nominally British films that were shot in Britain but were financed and produced by American studios using key American personnel.²⁷ To some extent, this process served to 'Americanize the content of British films'.²⁸ While this shift in

tone was of benefit to American exhibitors in their efforts to sell these products in the United States, in Britain it had a different effect, altering the nature of the country's national cinema.

There were also differences between British and American models of film distribution during the 1950s. In America, the Paramount Decree of 1948 forced film studios to relinquish possession of their cinemas. As Thomas Doherty notes, 'the vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition - the sweet monopoly that had oiled the studio machine and crushed independent competition - was now a busted trust. By breaking the choke hold of studio control over exhibition, the Department of Justice gave theatre owners more autonomy over booking and programming', leading to a greater variety of films being available to American consumers.²⁹ In Britain, however, the range of products offered in cinemas remained relatively tightly controlled for much of the decade. As Harper and Porter have observed:

The principal distributors, some of whom owned their own exhibition outlets, carefully structured the supply of films, in order to maximize their revenues. It was only in London and the large metropolitan cities that audiences were able to exercise an extensive choice between programmes mounted by competing cinemas. In many provincial cities, competition was restricted to two or three circuit cinemas which could show only their national release, while cinema-goers in small towns often had access to only a single cinema.³⁰

This restricted choice of films stood in contrast to the increase in the range of products Americans could choose from during the 1950s. Similarly, American audiences also had a greater choice about where they would go to watch films. The 1950s was the key decade in the expansion of drive-in cinemas in the United States, a mode of exhibition that is commonly associated with the types of genre films that concern this thesis. By 1949, for example, there were a thousand drive-ins in America, but this number increased to over four thousand by the middle of the 1950s.³¹ In Britain, where both the cost of land and the climate are prohibitive to outdoor film screenings, the only non-temporary drive-

in ever to have been constructed opened in Maidstone, Kent in the early 1980s. It closed shortly thereafter.³² Before, during and after the 1950s, British cinemas were almost exclusively indoor venues. As this suggests, Britons and Americans watched 1950s science fiction cinema within very different film cultures, both in terms of the choice of films available and the places in which they could be consumed.

However, the differences between Britain and America during the 1950s ran much deeper than film culture. Despite their superficial similarities, such as their shared belief in democracy and their hostility to the spread of communism, highlighted through Britain's role as a 'junior partner to the USA' during the Cold War, these countries found themselves in contrastive social, political and economic situations in the 1950s.³³ In terms of economics, the Second World War had seen the US emerge from the Great Depression and the 1950s had brought a great boom in the production of consumer products.³⁴ GDP increased by 43.4 per cent over the decade.³⁵ Between 1950 and 1960 the percentage of Americans earning \$10,000 or more increased from nine to thirty.³⁶ This increase in wealth allowed the country to better look after its citizens' needs. State and local government spending on education, for example, increased by seven per cent in 1950 alone and that year saw seventy-eight per cent of children between the ages of five and nineteen enrolled in school.³⁷ Meanwhile, Britain faced significant economic challenges. Although the country's per capita GDP increased by just over two fifths between 1950 and 1960, Barry Supple has noted that 'during the post-war decades the British economy certainly did decline in relative terms: the rates of growth of its total and per capita GDP were persistently lower than those of its rivals'.³⁸ Indeed, at the dawn of the decade per capita GDP in America was 'nearly one half higher again than Britain'.³⁹ As

Andrew Rosen indicates, Britain's 'share of world trade in manufactured products' fell from thirty per cent shortly after the Second World War to twenty five per cent in 1950 and fourteen per cent by 1964.⁴⁰ Unemployment also presented a gradually worsening picture throughout the decade and beyond, rising from an average of 1.67 per cent during the 1950s to 2.03 per cent in the 1960s.⁴¹ These economic problems manifested in British homes. In 1956, for example, only eight per cent of British households owned a refrigerator.⁴² In terms of the availability of foodstuffs in Britain, Rosen notes that 'the groundbreaking innovations of the 1950s did not bring about widespread results until the prosperity and innovative spirit of the 1960s'.⁴³ While America's economy expanded dramatically during the 1950s, allowing its citizens a better quality of life, things remained tough for many Britons as the nation's financial recovery from the Second World War was comparatively slow.

Alongside its expanding economy, the United States itself expanded during the 1950s with two former America territories, Hawaii and Alaska, receiving statehood in 1959. The US began the decade as a country of 151.5 million people.⁴⁴ During the 1950s this population grew by 18.5 per cent.⁴⁵ By way of contrast, the British Empire shrank dramatically during the same decade. The 1940s saw the pace of decolonisation increase and during the 1950s independence was won by Sudan, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and the Federation of Malaya (now part of Malaysia), with Nigeria also taking significant steps towards freedom. As such, notions of Britain and Britishness were rapidly evolving as the nation was faced with questions about what it would become without the Empire that it had ruled and expanded for several centuries. Britain faced the dissolution of the cornerstone upon which so much of its former power had depended while America expanded both its population and its own borders.

Moreover, America largely remained a racially homogenous country during the 1950s, a period when ninety per cent of Americans were white and only about seven per cent had been born overseas.⁴⁶ While the first significant waves of mass immigration into the US did not begin until the mid-1960s, Britain underwent dramatic demographic shifts during this period.⁴⁷ When post-war labour shortages began to bite, Britain turned to its remaining and former colonial territories to source workers. The number of Indians and Pakistanis living in Britain, for example, rose from 17,300 to 55,000 between 1957 and 1958.⁴⁸ These early waves of mass immigration caused increasing racial tensions in Britain, culminating in the 1958 race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill. Consequently, while America in the 1950s could be characterised as predominantly white, prosperous and expanding, Britain saw increased immigration and ensuing racial tensions, the erosion of its financial competitiveness and the continued disintegration of its Empire.

This divergence of national circumstances suggests that British and American responses to 1950s science fiction cinema might well have differed since key issues in these films, such as Otherness, invasion and the future, were likely to have been understood differently in these two countries. Peter Hutchings has suggested something of the potential for British audiences to respond to these films in different ways to their American counterparts in his discussion of 1950s science fiction's invasion narratives. For Hutchings, these films were well suited to articulating the concerns of 'a social and cultural context which has become relativised and less sure of itself' and so found particular resonance during this era as the result of 'a number of shifts and new trends in the west, most notably a growing affluence and materialism coupled with a widespread sense that traditional values were increasingly being brought

into question'.⁴⁹ However, as Hutchings notes, 'these various changes did not manifest themselves uniformly across the western world. Consumerism, for example, meant something different in America from what it did in Britain (where it was often associated with anxieties about the alleged undue influence of American culture on the British way of life)'.⁵⁰ While Hutchings uses these national differences to explore 'the socially and historically specific pressures exerted upon the fantasies by the context within which they were produced', this project builds on his observation by noting that the same pressures were present in the contexts in which these films were received.⁵¹ As suggested above, British society was party to a different, and differently articulated, set of concerns than its American counterpart during the 1950s. In light of these differences, cultural products, such as science fiction films, might have been understood in different ways.

However, while Hutchings has taken these divergent national circumstances into account, the academic discussion of 1950s science fiction films has largely focused on their relationship to American society, as noted earlier.⁵² Perhaps as a result, popular British accounts of the genre, for example in film magazines, have tended to discuss the meanings that scholars have suggested American audiences found in these films as if they were unambiguous and universal. In May 1978, John Brosnan wrote in *Starburst*, a British genre film periodical, that science fiction cinema from the 1950s was essentially about 'the fear of communist subversion', 'atomic radiation' and 'the Bomb'.⁵³ While these were significant issues in 1950s Britain, Chapters Two and Four of this thesis show that the national response to them was more complicated than mere fear. Brosnan's argument implicitly applies the claims of scholars who only sought to explore American responses to these films to

audiences in *Starburst's* native Britain without consideration of their different contexts of reception. Similarly, in 2007 *Total Film* magazine claimed that 'the prevailing winds of the '50s were measured with a Geiger counter' and that the science fiction cinema of the era mirrored these nuclear anxieties.⁵⁴ While this may have been true in America, the opening of this Introduction suggested that many Britons saw the 1950s as an era of nuclear promise rather than nuclear panic, indicating that other readings of these films might have been possible. Given that *Total Film* is a British publication, one might have expected it to reflect something of the specificity of this nation's response to the genre. However, at the time of this article's publication little research into the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema had been performed and so assumptions about the similarity of western audiences allowed claims intended to explain the American response to these films to be applied to British audiences.

These American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema have also emerged in British online commentary, again with no mention of their original intention to explore only the relationship between US audiences and the genre cinema of the era. Martin Barber, for example, recently claimed on the BBC's Norfolk website that 'much has been written about the connection between the sci-fi cinema of the 1950s and 1960s and the Cold War, where fear of invasion, communism and nuclear war was played out in films that projected the anxieties of the present onto the future'.⁵⁵ Similar arguments have also appeared on more populist websites, suggesting their penetration of the British public consciousness. Ryan Lambie, writing for Britain's popular *Den of Geek* genre entertainment website, has claimed that *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* reflected 'the 50s "reds under the bed" era of communist paranoia', while

Invaders from Mars (1954) 'captured the 50s fear of communism'.⁵⁶ These films were certainly produced during a time when their native America was gripped with anti-communist sentiment, but Chapter Two of this thesis suggests that these anxieties might not have been quite as widespread or uniform in Britain. For British websites such as these to note only the American contextual framework within which 1950s science fiction cinema was understood obscures the range of other readings made possible by the specificities of its relationship to British public debates.

British online discussion forums also provide an insight into the extent to which Americo-centric presumptions about 1950s science fiction films have been adopted by the public. In 2007, for example, a post was made on the *Science Fiction Fantasy Chronicles* forum claiming that 'the Atomic Age...was a time where science was developing at quite a rate what with Nuclear power and so forth, and gave birth to an abundance of sci fi movies etc'.⁵⁷ Also in 2007, a poster on *The Student Room*, a British discussion forum for university students, claimed to be 'doing preliminary reading for my dissertation, in which I am going to write about science-fiction films from the 1950s and their contemporary remakes, looking at aspects of communism, postmodernism and the historical, social and political contexts of these films'.⁵⁸ While these comments do not tie 1950s science fiction films to American anxieties in an overt manner, they also do not allude to the British public debates that might have framed their interpretation, such as immigration, race or imperial decline. As such, they implicitly situate 1950s science fiction cinema within an interpretive framework dictated by US concerns. Although it is not possible to know the nationality of these posters for certain, the websites mentioned above are targeted at a British audience and they commonly feature a British slant. There is, of course,

no reason why British publications and websites should only discuss British film reception, but the fact that no consideration of this perspective emerges from these accounts, or from the vast majority of similar commentary, suggests that there is generally little public awareness of the differences between British and American audiences of 1950s science fiction films. To some extent, the meanings that scholars have suggested were attributed to the genre in the United States are now considered to apply more broadly despite the different national contexts within which these films were watched.

This situation bears similarities to Bill Niven's concept of the globalisation of memory, a phrase that refers to the ways in which the memories of the people of one nation are adopted and shared by the people of another.⁵⁹ Niven explores this concept in reference to 'Holocaust memory', arguing that 'we live in an age in which...Holocaust memory is being shared by more and more countries', thereby allowing this European atrocity to become a discursive site through which nations around the world can give voice to 'their own suffering...inflicted not by the Germans but, say, by the Soviets, the Turks, or former colonial powers'.⁶⁰ According to Niven, this process has had dramatic consequences for Germany. He argues that 'the global sharing of Holocaust memory and its use to stimulate concern at other genocides does represent a release of pressure on Germany. This, in turn, opens up a space in which the rediscovery of German suffering can thrive'.⁶¹ Niven uses this German national depressurisation, resulting from the globalisation of Holocaust memory, as a means of explaining recent interest in the suffering of ordinary Germans during the Second World War when previously they had been popularly considered victimisers, not victims. Consequently, in Niven's example at least, the

globalisation of memory serves a positive purpose in that it allows the burden of memorialisation to be shared and new historical narratives to be explored.

The beneficial potential of this process is predicated on the international adoption of European Holocaust memory serving to galvanise the remembrance of local traumas in countries around the world, but in other, less extreme examples of the globalisation of memory local perspectives have been subsumed rather than stimulated. In the much more mundane context of the debates about readings of 1950s science fiction films, there has only been limited consideration of the meanings attributed to both foreign and domestic science fiction films by audiences in Britain, as I outline further in the following chapter. As such, there exists the danger that the well documented and widely recognised American memories of 1950s science fiction cinema will obscure rather than inspire interest in the genre's British reception history, as suggested by the examples of British commentary on these films provided above. In such circumstances, the globalisation of memory that does not stimulate parallel local debates manifests as a type of slippage, wherein what was once claimed of American audiences and American films comes to be understood in more general terms than was initially intended.⁶²

To limit this type of slippage the current project seeks to demonstrate the existence of a unique British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema that cannot be explained through the readings that critics have suggested American audiences found in these films. By highlighting the specificity of the relationship between the genre and British society, this thesis stresses the need to recognise the geographical limitations of existing readings of mid-century science fiction films to avoid obscuring histories of their international reception. This does not represent a dismissive challenge to dominant, Americo-centric

interpretations of 1950s science fiction cinema, but rather a call for greater recognition of the often forgotten limits of their applicability in the context of the international distribution of these films.

Redressing this slippage matters for a number of reasons. Today Britain remains a key territory for the exportation of American films, with Hollywood taking eighty-four per cent of the British market in 2004.⁶³ Indeed, Britain has retained its close ties with America in a number of ways since the 1950s.

Drawing on the notion of an 'Anglo-American shared identity' that is 'rooted in a common history, common philosophy and cultural foundations', James Sperling has pointed out that America and Britain have enjoyed a close relationship 'on issues of war, peace, and global order'.⁶⁴ However, in recent years Britons have become increasingly paranoid about their status 'as the interlocutors between America and Europe', with the result that 'attentive British foreign policy elites experience a crisis of confidence and fear' whenever this position is perceived to be threatened.⁶⁵ These tensions and anxieties about the so-called 'special relationship', alongside ongoing unease about Britain's seeming subservience to American post-9/11 foreign policy, particularly in Iraq, have produced 'a gradual reassessment of priorities and stakes on both sides', leading to the apparent transformation of the Anglo-American partnership 'into a more pragmatic relationship without the traditional emotional baggage'.⁶⁶ At this particular historical moment, when the differences and similarities between these two nations are being renegotiated with potentially significant consequences for both countries, the current thesis' desire to explore the nature of Britain and America's supposedly shared cultural history, drawing attention to one particular site at which popular perception has disguised points of divergence, takes on particular significance.

There is also a broader intellectual context which signals the importance of a project such as this. The globalisation of American memories of 1950s science fiction cinema can be understood as a symptom of what Erich Fromm has termed humanity's 'fear of freedom'.⁶⁷ Writing during the Second World War, Fromm reflects on the rise of fascist dictatorships in Europe and 'the dangers which they imply for the greatest achievements of modern culture - individuality and uniqueness of personality'.⁶⁸ For Fromm, 'modern European and American history is centred around the effort to gain freedom from the political, economic, and spiritual shackles that have bound men'.⁶⁹ In these terms, the First World War 'was regarded by many as the final struggle and its conclusion the ultimate victory for freedom'.⁷⁰ However, Fromm expresses concern that 'only a few years elapsed before new systems emerged which denied everything that men believed they had won in centuries of struggle'.⁷¹ The submission of millions of ordinary people to the rule of fascist dictators in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s represented a wilful retreat from the freedom that humanity had so long struggled for. Consequently, Fromm argues that 'if we want to fight Fascism we must understand it' and sets out to explore the psychology that underpins humanity's apparent desire to relinquish its freedom.⁷²

Finding that freedom can lead an individual to suffer feelings of existential 'aloneness and powerlessness', Fromm suggests that 'we are ready to get rid of our individual self either by submission to new forms of authority or by a compulsive conforming to accepted patterns'.⁷³ He discusses three means by which we seek to minimise our exposure to these negative aspects of freedom, one of which is the human tendency towards the 'suppression of critical thinking'.⁷⁴ To demonstrate how this is enacted in our daily lives, Fromm

gives the example of the different responses that people might give when asked for their opinion about what kind of weather should be expected later in the day.⁷⁵ While some might use their knowledge of the current weather conditions to make an educated guess about what might happen, others might admit their lack of expertise but explain that they had heard a forecast that predicted certain conditions. Others still would feel compelled to have their own opinion and so would repeat the forecast that they had heard while simultaneously forgetting that they were 'simply repeating somebody else's authoritative opinion'.⁷⁶ The person in the final category 'has the illusion of having arrived at an opinion of his own, but in reality he has merely adopted an authority's opinion without being aware of this process'.⁷⁷ For Fromm, this is the same mechanism through which newspapers are able to influence their readers. He argues that if one were to 'ask an average newspaper reader what he thinks about a certain political question' then 'he will give you as "his" opinion a more or less exact account of what he has read, and yet...he believes that what he is saying is the result of his own thinking'.⁷⁸ Through these examples, Fromm outlines what he sees as a fundamental human drive to submit to an external authority and suggests that suppressing our capacity for original or critical thought by subconsciously adopting the opinions of that authority as our own is one means by which this is achieved.

In this sense, Fromm was concerned with the dangers of the human desire to accept and internalise received wisdom without question, a process that can be readily observed in the globalisation of American memories of 1950s science fiction cinema. As demonstrated above, claims about the reception of these films in America have to some extent been implicitly applied to British audiences despite their inability to speak to the responses of cinema-

goers in that country. In this sense, one could argue that these interpretations have been accepted unquestioningly as a form of received wisdom. This suggests that the globalisation of American readings of 1950s science fiction films has necessitated the suppression of our capacity for critical thinking, in keeping with Fromm's argument. By failing to challenge the limitations of this example of the globalisation of memory, the popular understanding of these films has succumbed to what Fromm terms 'pseudo thinking', the uncritical adoption of opinions from an external authority.⁷⁹ In this case, the authority in question is those scholars and figures in public debate who have either applied US readings of 1950s science fiction cinema more broadly than is tenable or who have left room for ambiguity about the geographic limitations of their claims.

Of course, some scholars, such as Cyndy Hendershot and M. Keith Booker, have taken care to stress that their interest in the genre is centred on its relationship to US society, making the globalisation of their conclusions less likely. Hendershot states explicitly on the first page of her book that she is concerned with 'what constituted cultural paranoia for postwar America', while the title of Booker's monograph, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism*, suggests his focus on the United States.⁸⁰ However, there has also been a comparative lack of precision in the work of other authors, such as Benjamin Shapiro who discusses the place of these films in 'our culture', ostensibly referring to America but leaving room for ambiguity about whether his claims can be applied to the entirety of North American culture, western culture or even, in an extreme misreading of his intentions, human culture in general.⁸¹ Particularly notable in

this regard have been attempts to characterise the 1950s without reference to the differences between nations. For example, Melvin E. Matthews tells us:

The science fiction boom of the '50s owed its existence to several reasons: World War II and the advent of the atomic bomb; a change in the public's attitude towards scientists, which elevated such figures as Wernher von Braun and Albert Einstein to celebrity status; the Cold War between East and West, and Soviet and American competition in rocket technology; anxiety over nuclear war and paranoia over communist subversion; and the "flying saucer" scare. Consequently, '50s science fiction films were characterized by several themes: the atomic bomb and its consequences; the effects of atomic radiation; alien invasion and alien possession; and world destruction.⁸²

Matthews provides a broad characterisation of both the decade itself and its science fiction cinema without noting the Americo-centricity of his claims. As suggested above and in the following chapters, his argument does not adequately describe the British experience of the era. Matthews references Biskind's work as the source of these claims and there is certainly room for confusion in Biskind's suggestion that the films that he discusses 'reflect the particular constraints of the fifties cultural and political climate'.⁸³ This argument is only later grounded in his focus on US society. In these examples, Biskind, Matthews and Shapiro provide room for unnecessary confusion about the extent to which claims about the American reception of 1950s science fiction films can be applied to the audiences of other nations, leaving scope for the globalisation of their conclusions and the consequent emergence of pseudo thought.

This thesis seeks to redress this type of pseudo thought by meeting a number of aims. Its immediate goals are to examine the types of readings that were available to British audiences of 1950s US science fiction films, demonstrating that these were not the same readings performed by their American counterparts, and to show that British science fiction films were able to hold particular meanings for their domestic audiences that were unlikely to occur to American viewers upon their international distribution. Through

performing these tasks, the thesis highlights the specificity of British interpretations of the genre, offering an alternative to the popular perception that during this era these films functioned predominantly as reflections of American concerns about nuclear technology and communism. In turn, this undermines the globalisation of American readings of these films by robustly demonstrating the existence of a unique British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema, thereby exposing the fallacy of the type of pseudo thought that has become established in the popular understanding of the genre.

The problems with which this thesis grapples, then, necessarily emerge from the ways in which the observations made in critical debates about 1950s science fiction films have been, or at least stand the potential to be, overextended. Therefore, in order to provide an adequate sense of the contexts in which my arguments will be made, it is necessary to perform a thorough survey of the scholarly literature that has addressed 1950s science fiction cinema. The characterisation of these debates presented in this Introduction has been necessarily broad and descriptive, seeking to provide an overview of the topic rather than a deep and expansive exploration of the scholarship that this thesis sits in dialogue with. The first half of Chapter One expands on this by offering a literature review that surveys the output of the key writers in the study of 1950s science fiction cinema and demonstrates how this project is situated in relation to their work. The review divides its material into three categories. The first constitutes what Lincoln Geraghty, developing a claim made originally by Mark Jancovich, has termed the 'critical orthodoxy' that surrounds these film.⁸⁴ This term refers to the dominant focus of the body of literature that has discussed 1950s US science fiction films on their relationship to American anxieties about communist infiltration, but, as this section shows, it could also

be extended to encompass the equally prominent interpretations that relate the genre to US fears of nuclear technology. Debates about these issues began with observations about global audiences, but academics have largely been most interested in developing our understanding of their implications for American science fiction production and reception. This has inadvertently left a gap in our knowledge about the reception of these films in countries such as Britain, which has in turn permitted the globalisation of American readings to fill the hole.

The second section of this chapter demonstrates that alternatives to Geraghty's orthodoxy exist by surveying a number of studies that have found different ways of reading 1950s US science fiction cinema. A broad range of work has shown that it is possible to consider these films through a variety of intellectual frameworks, opening the door for the current project to further diversify the readings of the genre that have been produced by considering an aspect of its history that has largely been overlooked, namely its British reception. However, such attempts to broaden the debate about 1950s US science fiction cinema have largely remained embryonic and have not been developed to the same extent as arguments about the relationship between these films and communism and nuclear technology. As such, the dominant focus on these issues still exists, despite the alternatives available, and continues to inform much of the discussion of the genre, both academic and popular.

The third section of the chapter turns its attention to a parallel body of literature that has considered British science fiction cinema of the 1950s. A number of authors have already begun the task of outlining the specificity of the history of these films, but to date their work has focused on production rather

than reception contexts. There remains a need for a project such as this not only to explore the reception history of these films, but also to bring together debates about the reception of British and American productions.

Chapter One continues to elaborate on the contexts within which this thesis operates by examining how the methodological approach that it employs has emerged out of intellectual developments in fields such as cinema semiotics, the New Film History and transnational cultural transmission. These areas of study have shaped my understanding of the relationship between films and historically, culturally and geographically specific audiences. The second half of this chapter thus explains what I mean when I discuss the ‘audience’ and how I will perform my investigation into the ways in which it interpreted 1950s science fiction cinema. These sections explain that, given the limited available evidence of the responses of 1950s British cinema-goers to science fiction, this thesis must instead explore how what Barbara Klinger terms a film’s ‘discursive surround’ shapes its interpretation.⁸⁵ This phrase describes the discursive contexts within which a film is received. In this sense, the methodology employed here draws on recent work within the intellectual context of the New Film History, an approach to the study of film production and reception that has been heavily informed by Janet Staiger’s historical materialist-influenced ‘context-activated theories’ of interpretation.⁸⁶ As the second half of Chapter One explains, what is presented in this thesis is not a study of actual audiences, since such a project would be critically hampered by the lack of surviving evidence of such cinema-goers, but rather an exploration of their likely or potential interpretations of 1950s science fiction cinema given the contexts within which it was received. These sections thus cover topics such as the types of evidence that will be used during this investigation, the types of claims that

the available sources will enable it to make, the limitations of its approach and the ways in which these limitations can be managed. Consequently, Chapter One concludes with a description of the methods of analysis employed during the remaining chapters and an explanation of how these methods allow the thesis to meet the goals described above.

The remainder of the thesis presents its main arguments and findings. This material has been divided into two sections. Since this project is interested in differentiating the British response to 1950s science fiction films from the American response discussed in the majority of the critical literature outlined during the first part of Chapter One, this thesis addresses the two key themes that have emerged from those debates, namely nuclear technology and fears of communist infiltration, and reframes them through a 1950s British perspective. As such, Section A, which comprises Chapter Two and Chapter Three, explores how the meanings available to British audiences of 1950s science fiction cinema were inflected by the ways in which the threat of communist infiltration and other types of perceived invasion were seen in Britain. Section B, which constitutes Chapter Four and Chapter Five, examines how Britons understood the presentation of science in 1950s science fiction films through public debates about nuclear technology and other significant topics with which the genre intersected. Sections A and B each directly engage with one of the key themes in the scholarly analysis of 1950s science fiction cinema, demonstrating that both communism and nuclear technology were framed in Britain by public debates that were specific to that country. Consequently, I show that the ways in which these issues inflected interpretations of science fiction films were not the same on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

The chapters that constitute Section A and Section B seek to present their material in such a way as to provide a balanced assessment of the issues that they tackle. As I argue in Chapter One, my analysis must avoid totalising the British national audience and so has been organised in such a way as to allow for an examination of the different perspectives that were represented within 1950s Britain.⁸⁷ Consequently, each chapter is divided in two with each half providing evidence of a contrasting outlook on the topic in question. This material is used to produce two different interpretations of the case study films analysed in each chapter, thereby accounting for something of the range of perspectives present in mid-century Britain. Furthermore, as well as reflecting the diversity of 1950s British film society, I also account for the diversity of the science fiction films that it consumed. As noted above, the majority of the films of this genre screened in Britain were either British or American. Consequently, each chapter will use the range of British perspectives that it addresses to explore two case study films, one British and one American. In this way, some of the various attitudes represented within the 1950s British national audience together with a suggestion of the array of science fiction films that this audience watched are accounted for in this thesis.

Chapter Two begins my exploration of the meanings that Britons found in 1950s science fiction cinema by discussing how British attitudes to the potential threat of communist infiltration shaped the ways in which Britons negotiated the various alien invasions that the genre depicted during this era. Drawing on Peter Biskind's suggestion that the possession or replication of human bodies by extraterrestrials in the era's depersonalisation narratives functioned as a metaphor for communist brainwashing in the American public imagination, this chapter takes as its case studies two films in which alien invaders infiltrate a

society by hijacking the identities and mimicking or possessing the bodies of their victims.⁸⁸ *It Came from Outer Space*, an American film from 1957, sees the residents of Sand Rock, Arizona, gradually falling under the control of an alien who has crash-landed out in the desert, while *Quatermass II*, a British film from the same year that was adapted from a television serial drama produced by the BBC in 1955, finds high level public figures becoming possessed by a covert alien invasion force. Both films contain good examples of the tropes that Biskind identifies as paranoid fantasies of communist infiltration. However, the historical evidence presented in this chapter suggests that Britons understood communism as a threat to Establishment figures, such as politicians and civil servants, rather than a threat to the community, as was the case in America. While Britons might also have understood 1950s depersonalisation narratives as metaphors for communist infiltration, as a result of these divergent national debates the reading strategies that they employed to uncover these meanings were not the same as those used by their American counterparts. Chapter Two thus demonstrates that, even when similar readings of 1950s science fiction films were produced in Britain and America, the differences between these countries ensured that they were not produced in the same manner. In addition, this chapter also complicates these issues by exploring the meanings that these films might have held for Britons who were sympathetic towards or supportive of communism, thereby accounting for a different British perspective on the genre's depersonalisation narratives.

Chapter Three steps away from communism altogether and recasts notions of invasion and the Other in terms of a uniquely British 1950s public debate. With the days of Empire coming to a close and Britain experiencing its first waves of mass immigration by citizens of its remaining colonies and the

Commonwealth of Nations, the 1950s was an era when race came to the forefront of the British national consciousness and what Robert Miles has termed the process of 'racialisation', or of recognising and apportioning significance to differences in skin colour, gained a foothold.⁸⁹ As this chapter shows, many of the most widely read newspapers of the time framed the arrival of significant numbers of Commonwealth and colonial citizens in Britain as an 'invasion' of sorts, despite the fact that these economic migrants were actively recruited by British authorities to fill labour shortages. This was a perception predicated on the popular but misconceived notion that Britain was a country of white people subjected to an infiltration of black newcomers. Of course, as Peter Fryer has indicated, black people had lived in Britain 'for close on 500 years' and had 'been born in Britain since about the year 1505', but in the 1950s this history was obscured behind national panic about a perceived 'invasion' from Britain's former and remaining colonies.⁹⁰ As a result, for many Britons race was partially understood through the categories of the national Self and the invading Other.

Chapter Three uses this as a background against which to discuss the meanings that Britons might have found in the juxtaposition of the human Self and the alien Other in the era's science fiction films. This chapter consequently suggests two specifically British readings of two films that were released in the particularly pressurised weeks that followed the 1958 Notting Hill race riots in London, *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* and *The Trollenberg Terror*. The first of these readings sees the alien as a threatening invader that gave voice to 1950s British concerns about race and immigration while the other finds in these films a call for recognition of the fact that, underneath their superficial differences, the Self and the Other, whether they are categories predicated on

race or on planetary origins, are essentially the same. These are readings that result directly from the form taken by much of the racialised debate evident in Britain during and after the national trauma of the events in Notting Hill, and so constitute specifically British responses to these films that could not have taken quite the same shape in other countries, particularly in the United States where, as discussed above, the early waves of mass immigration did not begin until the 1960s.

Section A thus reconsiders the role of the Other, most often linked to US fears of communist infiltration in America by the critical orthodoxy that surrounds these films, in producing meaning in the era's science fiction cinema through the lens of British public debate. Section B performs a similar analysis of the other key concern of American readings of these films, namely nuclear technology. Beginning this task, Chapter Four demonstrates that Britons had a complex and multifaceted relationship with the atomic age. Many Britons were as disturbed as their American counterparts by what Cyndy Hendershot has described as 'the atomic bomb and its psychological and physiological effects', but I suggest in this chapter that these fears were often articulated through and amalgamated with memories of the nation's experience of bombardment during the Blitz.⁹¹ As such, Chapter Four begins by suggesting that, while many Britons would have had concerns similar to those of many Americans about the atomic age, these fears emerged out of differently inflected anxieties and so produced differently inflected readings of the era's genre films. This is demonstrated through an analysis of this chapter's two case study films, *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) and *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959), released in America as *The Giant Behemoth*.

Conversely, the second half of Chapter Four considers those Britons for whom the dawning atomic age was not a threat but a promise. Many believed that Britain's post-war economic problems could be solved by embracing nuclear science and applying it, for example, in the fields of medicine, industry and energy production. For audiences who saw nuclear technology in this light, films such as *Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth* were able to offer a variety of positive messages about the application of all things atomic, thereby reinforcing official messages about the benefits that this type of research could bring to the country. Once again, the image that emerges from this chapter is of a diverse national audience whose members held a range of different viewpoints. The consequent readings of 1950s science fiction that Chapter Four suggests are necessarily contradictory, but each nonetheless emerges from a particular stance on the issue of nuclear technology that was taken by Britons during the 1950s, and as such they all represent specifically British responses to these films.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Five, performs a similar task to Chapter Three in that it moves the section's focus away from how Britons related to important American issues, to the types of issues that were of particular significance to Britons themselves. In this sense, while Chapter Four discusses the role of nuclear science in shaping the meaning of 1950s science fiction films in Britain, Chapter Five examines the readings of these films influenced by the ways in which science in science fiction cinema was understood in mid-century Britain in more general terms. This requires a slightly different approach to that taken in previous chapters. Instead of examining the case study films through two different perspectives on a single issue, two different issues that were prominent in 1950s Britain are used to frame the

presentation of science in these films. The benefit of this minor alteration to the format of Chapter Five is that it allows for a demonstration of the flexibility of science as a metaphor in these films, showing how it enabled them to be understood through a range of other debates. The aim of discussing different perspectives in the earlier chapters is to account for the diversity of viewpoints in 1950s Britain, a goal that is also fulfilled here by accounting for the variety of different debates through which science in science fiction cinema was understood. The first half of Chapter Five examines science fiction films as one site through which public concerns about British post-imperial decline and American post-war ascendancy could be negotiated. As fears for Britain's international significance were underlined by the humiliation that was suffered as a result of the Suez Crisis in 1956, so the perception began to take root that America was benefitting from British dependency. British newspapers talked of an American cultural invasion of Europe and economic tensions emerged between the transatlantic allies. This chapter argues that films such as *Fiend Without a Face* and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* allowed Britons to explore these concerns because they used science as one means of comparing the relative success of different nations. For example, while *Flying Saucers* sees America and Britain facing an alien invasion force, it is America alone that possesses the scientific knowledge necessary to repel the creatures. As such, the first half of Chapter Five argues that science was not only significant in 1950s science fiction films in its own right, but also served as a mouthpiece for other concerns, especially Britain's anxieties about its global standing.

The second half of this chapter draws attention to the role of science during the cinematic experience itself. Science fiction was a genre that took particular advantage of new developments in the production and projection of

films, becoming part of the post-war fantasy of a new world created by science. New cinematographic techniques, such as 3D and CinemaScope, changed the ways in which audiences related to the cinematic image, while masters of the science fiction genre, such as Ray Harryhausen and George Pal, used special effects in inventive ways to create the illusion that the genre itself was on the cutting edge of science, even if the techniques through which this impression was imparted had been in use for decades. As such, attending the cinema became a science fictional experience, appearing as an encounter with the limits of human ingenuity and capability. At the same time, Britons were being told through various sources that new scientific breakthroughs were about to make their lives better in a number of different ways. Newsreels of the era, discussed at some length in the chapter itself, depicted Britain as a place where scientific research was about to provide real, tangible benefits to ordinary people. As such, the notion emerges that science fiction films, which were, of course, often narratively concerned with science, were also a site at which this coming scientific utopia could be experienced. They allowed British cinemas to appear to be in the very vanguard of Britain's promised new age.

Chapter Five thus suggests that science in science fiction cinema became a multifaceted site of public debate in 1950s Britain, capable of giving voice to both hopes and fears for the nation's future. As a result, science fiction films such as *Fiend Without a Face* and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* were open to a number of different interpretations in Britain, for example as icons of a coming scientific age or as worrying visions of a world where British scientific expertise was in relative decline. Crucially, however, each of these perspectives on the meaning of science in 1950s science fiction cinema emerges out of an

understanding of the ways in which the British public related to the issues at stake, and as such represents a uniquely British approach to these films.

The common link between the arguments made in these chapters is that they each use the presentation of particular issues in public debate in 1950s Britain as the contextual framework through which to investigate the ways that science fiction cinema came to be understood. Sometimes the differences between the British readings of these films presented in this thesis and the American interpretations offered by the majority of scholarly writing to date are significant and sometimes they are minor. Importantly, however, differences between the British and American reception of these films do emerge. What is demonstrated by these differences, both in the readings themselves and in the ways in which they were derived, is that there did exist a distinct British response to 1950s science fiction cinema. This thesis consequently offers an alternative to the application of conclusions derived from US audiences to broader geographical contexts than they were initially intended to explain. By suggesting some of the ways in which Britons made sense of 1950s science fiction films, this research reduces the need to use Americo-centric readings of the genre to address the experiences of British audiences. This thesis consequently not only renders visible an often overlooked aspect of the cultural history of mid-century science fiction cinema, but also expands our understanding of these films in the hope of resisting the globalisation of their US interpretations and reducing the reliance on pseudo thought that this practice has necessitated.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Henrikson, Margot A. 1997. *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. pp.56-57 and Hendershot, Cyndy. 1999. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.77.

² Sontag, Susan. 2004. 'The Imagination of Disaster', in Redmond (2004: 40-47). (Originally published in 1965). See, for example, Wojcik, Daniel. 1997. *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America*. New York: New York University Press. p.110; and Booker, M. Keith. 2005. 'Science Fiction and the Cold War', in Seed (2005: 171-184). p. 176.

³ Chapman, Keith. 2000. 'Energy', in Gardiner and Matthews (2000: 32-60). p.43. (Originally published in 1982).

⁴ Macgill, S. M. 1987. *Sellafield's Cancer-link Controversy: The Politics of Anxiety*. London: Pion Limited. p.12.

⁵ The term 'America' is used in this thesis to denote the United States of America, not the continent of North America as is sometimes the case.

⁶ American films were often exported to Britain some time after their domestic release. Since this thesis is interested in the responses of British audiences, all release dates provided represent the year in which they entered circulation in Britain. However, films were distributed across a range of different types of British cinemas in different regions at different times, rather than the simultaneous nationwide release model that is now the norm for significant British and Hollywood productions. As such, it can be difficult to identify a firm British release date for some of these films. Where no such date is available, the year in which the film was passed by the British Board of Film Censors, a process that often immediately preceded its release, is provided.

⁷ Swann, Paul. 1987. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. p.5.

⁸ Any discussion of British national reception will encounter issues of totalisation and terminology. While I address the problems with discussing a cohesive national audience in Chapter One of this thesis, it is worth briefly explaining my use of the term 'British'. This word is often considered to be ideologically weighted because it implies a common identity for the people of Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. However, this thesis largely discusses issues that were relevant across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, rather than being specific to particular constituent nations. Consequently, the term 'British' is the most appropriate for my purposes.

⁹ Sontag. 'The Imagination of Disaster'. p.44; Skal, David J. 1993. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. London: Plexus. p.247; Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.1.

¹⁰ Sontag. 'The Imagination of Disaster'. p.44; Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.127.

¹¹ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.140.

¹² Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.17.

¹³ Tudor, Andrew. 1989. *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. p.18.

¹⁴ Booker, M. Keith. 2001. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. p.10.

¹⁵ Grant, Barry Keith. 2007. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*. London: Wallflower. p.7.

¹⁶ Booker. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War*. p.107.

¹⁷ This raises questions about what the term 'science fiction' is taken to mean and how this thesis defines the genre it studies. There is a long history of scholarly writing about the boundaries of science fiction, both on screen and in literature. See, for example, Landon, Brooks. 2002. *Science Fiction After 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars*. London: Routledge p.31 and Suvin, Darko. 1979. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Although there are many different ways in which the genre could be defined, in light of this project's focus on historical British audiences it makes more sense to include or exclude films based on the ways in which their generic status was understood in 1950s Britain. Each film discussed in this thesis was framed as science fiction by the promotional material that accompanied its British release or by reviews, previews and other types of contemporary commentary. This is, of course, a necessarily broad and nebulous grouping of films that is open to criticism and debate, but in the context of the aims of this work a more concrete definition of what is meant by 'science fiction' is largely unnecessary.

¹⁸ Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.105.

¹⁹ Swann. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*. p.6.

²⁰ See, for example, Anon. 6 October 1956. 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', *Picturegoer*. p.12, 13 and 21; and Anon. 26 June 1954. 'Devil Girl from Mars', *Picture Show*. p.5, 6 and 12.

²¹ See, for example, Anon. 22 June 1957. 'Quatermass II', *Picture Show*. p.9.

²² Anon. 6 October 1956. 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', *Picturegoer*. p.12.

²³ Dixon, Wheeler Winston. 2010. *A History of Horror*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press. p.88.

²⁴ Swann. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*. p.6.

²⁵ There is some debate about the title of this film, with certain sources listing it as *The Quatermass Experiment* despite it being styled on its British release as *The Quatermass Xperiment*, perhaps to advertise the fact that it was deemed so horrific that it was awarded an 'X' certificate by the British censors. In order to help distinguish it from the 1953 BBC television serial on which it was based, this thesis will refer to the Hammer film as *The Quatermass Xperiment* and the BBC serial as *The Quatermass Experiment*.

²⁶ Harper, Sue and Vincent Porter. 2003. *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.114.

²⁷ Ibid. pp.114-115.

²⁸ Ibid. p.115.

²⁹ Doherty, Thomas. 2007. *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.228.

³⁰ Harper and Porter. *British Cinema of the 1950s*. p.243.

³¹ Bell, Shannon. 2003. 'From Ticket Booth to Screen Tower: An Architectural Study of Drive-In Theatres in the Baltimore - Washington, D.C. - Richmond Corridor', in Hoagland and Breisch (2003: 215-227). p.126.

³² Segeave, Kerry. 1992. *Drive-In Theatres: A History from Their Inception in 1933*. Jerrerson, NC: McFarland. p.109.

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- ³⁵ McDonald, John. F. 2008. *Urban America: Growth, Crisis, and Rebirth*. New York: M.E. Sharpe. p.65.
- ³⁶ Willis. *America in the 1950s*. p.27.
- ³⁷ Brown, Clair. 1994. *American Standards of Living*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers. p. 277.
- ³⁸ Supple, Barry. 1994. 'British Decline Since 1945' in Flound and McCloskey (1994: 318-346). pp.322-323.
- ³⁹ Temple, Paul. 1998. 'Overview: Growth, Competitiveness and Trade Performance', in Buxton, Chapman and Temple (1998: 69-98). p.75.
- ⁴⁰ Rosen, Andrew. 2003. *The Transformation of British Life 1950-2000: A Social History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.11.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. p.12.
- ⁴² Ibid. p.14.
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- ⁴⁴ Willis. *America in the 1950s*. pp.5-6.
- ⁴⁵ McDonald. *Urban America*. p.65.
- ⁴⁶ Willis. *America in the 1950s*. pp.5-6.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. p.6.
- ⁴⁸ Desai, Rashmi. 1963. *Indian Immigrants in Britain*. London: Oxford University Press. p.6.
- ⁴⁹ Hutchings, Peter. 1999. "'We're the Martians Now': British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s", in Hunter (1999b: 33-47). p.35.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. pp.35-36.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. p.36.
- ⁵² The Americo-centricity of much of the academic literature that addresses 1950s science fiction films is discussed further in Chapter One.
- ⁵³ Brosnan, John. May 1978. 'A History of Science Fiction Films', *Starburst*. Vol.1, No.3. pp. 32-40.
- ⁵⁴ Lowe, Andy, Jayne Nelson, James White and Jamie Graham, October 2007. 'The Seven Ages of Sci-Fi', *Total Film*. No.133. pp.80-91.
- ⁵⁵ Barber, Martin. 12 October 2007. 'Exhibition: Alien Nation', *BBC Norfolk*. http://www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/content/articles/2007/10/02/arts_alien_nation_scva_oct07_feature.shtml. Retrieved 16 June 2011.
- ⁵⁶ Lambie, Ryan. 20 October 2010. 'The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies of the 1950s', *Den of Geek*. http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/640057/the_greatest_scifi_movies_of_the_1950s.html Retrieved 16 June 2011.
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- ⁵⁸ strawberry_wise. 23 August 2007. 'Re: To the Proud "Mickey Mousers"', *The Student Room*. <http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=442621&page=2>. Retrieved 10 July 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Niven, Bill. 2004. 'The Globalisation of Memory and the Rediscovery of German Suffering', in Taberner (2004: 229-246).
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. p.233.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. p.237.
- ⁶² Of course, this is not the traditional use of the term 'globalisation' since this thesis is only interested in British, rather than worldwide, audiences. However, because this concept is drawn from Niven's work I retain his terminology, even if it does not fit my own usage as neatly as it fits his.
- ⁶³ Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2007a. 'Mapping Global Media Flow and Contra-Flow', in Thussu (2007b: 10-29). p.17.
- ⁶⁴ Sperling, James. 2010. 'Permanent Allies or Friends with Benefits? The Anglo-American Security Relationship', in Brown (2010: 15-37). p.18.
- ⁶⁵ Sperling. 'Permanent Allies or Friends with Benefits?'. p.18.
- ⁶⁶ Balis, Christina V. 2004. 'Contrasting Images, Complementary Visions', in Balis and Serfaty (2004:203-224). p.205.
- ⁶⁷ Fromm, Erich. 2009. *The Fear of Freedom*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009. (Originally published in 1942).
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. p.iix.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. p.1.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid. p.2.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid. p.3.
- ⁷³ Ibid. p.116.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid. p.165.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. pp.163-164.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid. p.164.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid. p.165.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid. p.166.
- ⁸⁰ Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.1; Booker. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War*.
- ⁸¹ Shapiro, Benjamin. 1990. 'Universal Truths: Cultural Myths and Generic Adaptation in 1950s Science Fiction Films', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. Vol.18, No.3. Autumn. p.111.
- ⁸² Matthews, Melvin E. 2007. *Hostile Aliens, Hollywood and Today's Headlines*. New York, NY: Algora. p.8.
- ⁸³ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.4.

- ⁸⁴ Geraghty. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. p.20; Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.17.
- ⁸⁵ Klinger, Barbara. 1997. 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies', *Screen*. Vol.38, No.2. Summer. pp.107-28.
- ⁸⁶ Staiger, Janet. 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p.45.
- ⁸⁷ I am, of course, aware that the notion of a 'national audience' is contentious and I explain my approach to this issue in Chapter One.
- ⁸⁸ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.140.
- ⁸⁹ Miles, Robert. 1997. 'Beyond the "Race" Concept: The Reproduction of Racism in England', in Gates (1997: 249-274). p.255.
- ⁹⁰ Fryer, Peter. 1984. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press. p.xi.
- ⁹¹ Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.75.

Chapter One: Contexts and Approaches

Introduction

The principal issue that this thesis grapples with is not suggested by 1950s science fiction films themselves, but rather by the ways in which they have been framed in popular debate. As I demonstrated in the Introduction, there has been a problematic tendency in this type of discussion to either apply conclusions about the American reception of these films to audiences in other countries or to leave the issue of different national reception contexts unacknowledged. This situation has resulted in part from the contexts within which academic debates about these films have been held. The abundance of American science fiction cinema produced during the so-called golden age of the 1950s has provided film scholars with both a compelling reason to turn their focus to the US and also a wealth of American material to analyse. However, this has come at the detriment of other possible areas of enquiry. The reading strategies employed by British audiences of American genre films, for example, have not yet been fully explored, while British science fiction cinema itself has been the subject of a comparatively concise range of debates that have largely focused on production rather than reception. These gaps in our knowledge about the relationship between British audiences and 1950s science fiction cinema have made it difficult to argue that there existed a unique British reception history of the genre during this period, thereby allowing US readings of these films to be globalised under the false presumption that western audiences responded to films in a largely uniform manner.

This line of argument was suggested in the Introduction during a brief characterisation of the academic literature that has addressed 1950s science fiction cinema. However, because that overview could only provide a succinct

account of the intellectual contexts of this study, it did not offer detailed evidence about the nature and scope of existing scholarship on these films to support this premise. Consequently, a more comprehensive review of this literature is required to demonstrate the limitations of our current understanding of 1950s science fiction cinema that have produced the slippage that necessitates the project undertaken in this thesis. This is the task performed by the first half of the current chapter.¹ Since this thesis is concerned with 1950s British and American films, the literature that has addressed the science fiction cinema of these countries during this era is surveyed. What emerges is a picture of a field that has not yet fully accounted for either the specificity of the relationship between American films and British audiences or the full range of concerns that inflected the British reception of domestic 1950s science fiction cinema. As such, these sections demonstrate gaps in our understanding of these films that might have contributed to the globalisation of their American readings and which, in order to limit such a process, this thesis seeks to fill.

The second half of the chapter turns its attention to the literature that has influenced my approach to performing that task. If this thesis seeks to highlight the potential of these films to be reinterpreted by British audiences in line with public debates that were being held in that country, then it must make explicit its understanding of the relationship between texts, audiences and reception contexts, its approach to the study of historical reception and the precise methods by which it hopes to achieve its goals. Drawing on intellectual developments in areas such as semiotics, transcultural transmission, the New Film History and the conceptualisation of the audience and the nation, the second half of the chapter begins by outlining the theoretical frameworks that inform my approach to this study. With these underlying principles in place, the

final section discusses how the analysis presented in the chapters that follow will operate, what sources it will draw on and how these sources will be used to address the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema.

American 1950s Science Fiction Cinema: Communism and Nuclear Anxiety

The notion that audiences used 1950s science fiction cinema as a means of exploring anxieties about nuclear technology has long been a prominent feature of the scholarly criticism of these films. Such claims can trace their lineage back to Susan Sontag's seminal essay, 'The Imagination of Disaster'.² First appearing in 1965, this early critique of mid-century science fiction has also been one of the most influential. In her article, Sontag suggested a connection between the repeated narrative use of radiation across science fiction films from the 1950s and early 1960s and contemporary international anxieties about the potentially holocaustic consequences of the development of nuclear weaponry.³ In making this observation, Sontag not only highlights the particular significance of nuclear anxieties in Japan, given that it is the only nation to have suffered the blast of a nuclear bomb, but also discusses American science fiction films, including *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), and British offerings such as *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961).⁴ For Sontag, the development of nuclear weapons provided 'a historically specifiable twist' to the relationship between 1950s audiences across the globe and cinematic images of mass destruction and monstrosity.⁵ In this way, Sontag implicitly suggests that audiences in different countries around the world were engaged in a politicisation of nuclear science in their reading of 1950s science fiction cinema. For Sontag, this was an international phenomenon.

However, the observation that nuclear anxieties informed science fiction films during the 1950s occupies only a brief section of 'The Imagination of Disaster' and is largely out of kilter with portions of Sontag's broader argument. Elsewhere in this essay she suggests:

There is no social criticism, of even the most implicit kind, in science fiction films...Also, the notion of science as a social activity, interlocking with social and political interests, is unacknowledged. Science is simply either adventure (for good or evil) or a technical response to danger. And, typically, when the fear of science is paramount - when science is conceived of as black magic rather than white - the evil has no attribution beyond that of the perverse will of an individual scientist.⁶

As these claims demonstrate, despite the influence that Sontag's observations about the function of nuclear science in science fiction cinema would later exert over a broad range of critical literature, her argument simultaneously sought to deny that these films understood science as a social or political activity. As such, there is tension in Sontag's approach to the role of nuclear science in 1950s science fiction cinema. She sees these films as products of anxieties about nuclear science, but ultimately rejects the notion that their depiction of science had any broader social or political significance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sontag's denial of the social and political function of science in these films has drawn criticism. Scholars such as Errol Vieth have argued that 'Sontag's claims that the nature of science is a decontextualised ephemera without social and cultural underpinnings cannot be supported'.⁷ Indeed, as Vivian Sobchack has claimed, 'although the SF [science fiction] film existed in isolated instances before World War II, it only emerged as a *critically* recognised genre *after* Hiroshima' (Sobchack's emphasis), suggesting that there is at least some connection between 1950s science fiction cinema and real world nuclear politics.⁸ Similarly, J. P. Telotte has argued that 'the various mutant and monster films of the 1950s and 1960s amply attest to [America's] troubled attitudes towards science and technology'.⁹ Both Sobchack and Telotte

suggest that these films emerged out of real social and political concerns about the use and abuse of science, thereby challenging Sontag's belief that they were, in Vieth's terms, 'decontextualised'.¹⁰ Sontag's observations about radiation in 1950s science fiction cinema have subsequently been developed by writers such as Sobchack and Telotte who find in these films the type of social and political commentary that she denied was present. Scholars such as Reynold Humphries and Jonathan Lake Crane have largely gone about this task by producing work that also distances itself from Sontag's broad characterisation of international cinema in favour of more tightly focused, in-depth examinations of the relationship between the particular Cold War nuclear anxieties of a specific society and their manifestation in the science fiction cinema which that culture produced.¹¹ Perhaps because America was by far the largest producer of genre films during this era and therefore provided the greatest wealth of material for such projects, the majority of this work has focused on US films and their contexts of production and reception.

One of the most significant studies of this type is Cyndy Hendershot's *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*, which employs a psychoanalytic framework to examine how paranoid fears of nuclear technology informed the production and reception of science fiction films in mid-century America.¹² Situating her work within the context of a late 1990s critical movement towards 're-evaluating the cultural paranoia that shaped Cold War American life', Hendershot provides a 're-examination of how popular entertainment both reflected and shaped this paranoia'.¹³ This project extends the scope of her earlier research, which investigated the ways in which 1950s American science fiction films played on US fears of nuclear science through a series of 'evolution/devolution fantasies'.¹⁴ Hendershot's aim in addressing US

nuclear paranoia in her work is to describe a specifically American cultural phenomenon, identifying the characteristics of the atomic panic that permeated the nation and their influence on the popular culture which the country produced. Although Hendershot herself only briefly acknowledges Sontag's work, dismissing it as a result of the fact that it 'does not develop' the connection between 1950s science fiction films and nuclear weaponry 'at any length', it is clear that Hendershot's study draws more significantly from Sontag's observations about radiation and its impact on national psyches than she acknowledges.¹⁵ In the same way that Sontag saw 'the accidental awakening of the super-destructive monster who has slept in the earth since prehistory' in Japanese films as 'an obvious metaphor for the Bomb', Hendershot has similarly argued that American science fiction 'films of the 1950s attempted to represent the nuclear threat by utilising metaphors that helped American audiences to concretise and tame the unthinkable threat of nuclear war'.¹⁶ Hendershot's work is thus a good example of the range of scholarship that followed Sontag by refining her internationally focused observations to explore the place of nuclear anxiety within the specific production and reception contexts of 1950s America.

A range of other authors from a variety of different critical perspectives have similarly noted the importance of 1950s US nuclear paranoia to contemporary American science fiction cinema. David J. Skal, for example, has found a place for these films within a chronology of American anxieties on screen, identifying their atomic panic as an evolution of the gothic horror of Universal's monster movies of the 1930s and 1940s. He writes that 'an enveloping cloak was no longer an image of dread. But a mushroom cloud was'.¹⁷ Similarly, Kendall R. Phillips reads *The Thing from Another World* (1951)

as a film in which, 'given...the sense of impending atomic doom, the parallel between the real horror and the fictional horror could be too close'.¹⁸ The 'sense of impending atomic doom' that he discusses is, of course, the same American nuclear paranoia that Hendershot investigates.¹⁹ Parallel claims have been made by a range of critics, including M. Keith Booker, Lincoln Geraghty, Peter Lev and Thomas D. Clareson.²⁰ The implicit argument suggested by these scholars is perhaps made the most plain by Jonathan Lake Crane when he claims that, during the 1950s, 'amongst the most common places, in number and status, to attempt an understanding of the enormous destruction suffered by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to face the possibility of an even more dire future atomic apocalypse, were theatres and drive-ins across America'.²¹ As a result of their interest in the American films that dominated the genre in the 1950s, these scholars have focused their work on the multiple ways in which US fears of nuclear technology informed the nation's science fiction cinema during this decade.

American fears of communist subversion and invasion have been just as central to the literature that has addressed 1950s US science fiction cinema as anxieties about nuclear technology. The broadly suspected communist infiltration of American society during the 1950s has become another popular lens through which scholars have viewed US science fiction films of the era. As Kim Newman writes of *The Thing from Another World*, 'the Cold War certainly forms a potent subtext for the s-f [science fiction] thrills of man against monster'.²² However, while the connection between US nuclear anxieties and these American films is relatively straightforward, since many made narrative use of radiation, the ways in which they relate to American fears of communism are a little more complicated, as I discuss below.

Although he is careful to identify weaknesses in and alternatives to these readings, Peter Biskind has perhaps presented the most persuasive arguments about how some 1950s American science fiction films operated as projections of US anxieties about communist infiltration. Biskind's book, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us To Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*, is a study that, as Paul Swann describes it, allows 'one to see widely disparate genre films [of 1950s America] subscribing essentially to the same position', namely that 'the essential contradictions between the American traditions of individualism and conformity' could be partially resolved by 'creating and controlling consensus, whether by the left, the centre or the right'.²³ Biskind demonstrates the political intentions of the films he analyses by devoting sections of his book to some of the most popular film genres from this era and uncovering within them a constellation of different outlooks, organising them into categories including, but not limited to, 'corporate-liberal', 'conservative', 'pluralists' and 'extremists'.²⁴ However, when discussing 1950s American science fiction cinema, Biskind argues that films that belong to each of these different political persuasions attempted to identify their ideological opponents with the threat of communism, thereby discrediting them.²⁵ As Biskind describes it, the result of these attempts to undermine different political positions by associating them with communism was that science fiction films from across the political spectrum became united in their increasing anti-communist sentiment.

He argues:

The Soviet threat was as much a function of the squabble between Democrats and Republicans as it was a reality...Indeed, the red nightmare was so handy that had it not existed, American politicians would have had to invent it. Movies did invent it, and it served somewhat the same purpose in Hollywood as it did in Washington. More often than not, the Communist connection was a red herring, allowing the centre to attack extremists, extremists to attack the centre, and both centrists and extremists to quarrel among themselves...all in the guise of respectable anticommunism.²⁶

As this argument suggests, Biskind sees 1950s US science fiction cinema as one point at which the various political positions which interest him ostensibly collapse into one another in their haste to associate each other with communism, leaving instead a united attempt to denigrate this political ideology in American genre cinema of this era.

Biskind sees this attack on communism being operated through metaphor and the figure of the Other. In terms of the invasion narratives of the era, he argues that 'the little green men from Mars stood in the popular imagination for the clever red men from Moscow', while films that tackled dehumanisation, often through alien replication or possession of human bodies, raised fears of communist ideology and propaganda.²⁷ Films about giant insects, such as the overgrown ants in *Them!* (1954), are read by Biskind in similar terms, since these creatures 'behaved like a mass, loved war and made slaves' and so could also be seen to represent popular American stereotypes of communists.²⁸ What unites the schemes of representation through which Biskind sees 1950s science fiction films attacking communism is that they all make use of the essential Otherness of science fiction's worlds and creatures as a metaphor for the presumed Otherness of communist ideology to American audiences. In this sense, demonising and dehumanising the Other provided a means by which these films could go about 'transforming them into Them while at the same time guaranteeing that the ideas, people, and values [that the political centre] did like were cosily considered to be Us'.²⁹ In other terms, fears of the communist bugaboo voiced by 1950s science fiction films supported the construction of a political consensus behind supposedly traditional American values. Biskind's argument is much broader than this narrow focus on the communist infiltration of America, taking in issues such as the binary opposition

of civilisation and nature, gender and, of course, the threat of nuclear weapons, but it is his observations about the relationship between US fears of communism, American science fiction's Others and conformity that have proven most influential with later scholars.

Biskind's claims have been developed by a wealth of writing that connects anti-communist sentiment and 1950s US depersonalisation films, in which alien Others possess or replicate human bodies, particularly the classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). As M. Keith Booker, for example, has argued:

What *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* lacks in the way of eye-catching visuals is more than made up for by its mind-catching theme. The notion of stealthy invaders who essentially take over the minds of normal Americans, converting them to an alien ideology, resonates in an obvious way with the Cold War fear of communist subversion. Indeed, the film has come to be widely regarded as an iconic cultural representation of its contemporary climate of anti-communist paranoia. It is certainly the case that the replacements [that the aliens use to disguise the absence of their victims], who look the same as everyone else, but feel no emotion and have no individuality, directly echo the era's most prevalent stereotypes about communists.³⁰

Booker's claim has clearly been strongly influenced by Biskind's work on the relationship between the communist and alien Others in depersonalisation films. Since Biskind's book was published, similar arguments about a range of US depersonalisation narratives have appeared across a wide variety of studies, including, for example, those of Barry Keith Grant, Mark Rawlinson, William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, and Jay McRoy.³¹ Each of these scholars has connected depersonalisation in 1950s American science fiction cinema with the threat of communist infiltration in the United States. Indeed, so prevalent has this type of argument become that Lincoln Geraghty has gone so far as to term it a 'critical orthodoxy', a claim that draws on earlier work by Mark Jancovich.³² As suggested by the literature reviewed above, this orthodoxy could also be extended to include the suggestion that 1950s American science fiction cinema

played on US fears of nuclear technology. These two arguments have appeared in a significant number of studies of these films and have come, as Geraghty and Jancovich suggest, to dominate the field. It is of little surprise, then, that it is these claims that have started to be globalised and which inform the examples of popular British debates about 1950s science fiction films discussed in the Introduction.

American 1950s Science Fiction: Alternative Readings

There have also been studies, albeit fewer in number, that have demonstrated the possibility of other approaches to the relationship between 1950s American society and its science fiction cinema. Some have placed America's covert invasion films, such as *Body Snatchers*, in dialogue with different aspects of 1950s US debates about communism. Booker himself, for example, offers a secondary interpretation of *Body Snatchers* that subverts much of the consensus about anti-communist sentiment in 1950s US science fiction cinema by arguing that 'the film suggests that the communist conspiracy...is incredibly far-fetched, the stuff of B-grade science fiction'.³³ Similarly, Phillip L. Gianos advances another re-reading of this film's relationship to communism, claiming 'one can easily see *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as an allegory on...the drive toward a dehumanising conformity in behaviour and orthodoxy of thought in the service of opposition to communism'.³⁴ Gianos thus sees this film not as an attack on communism, but on the anti-communist fervour, encapsulated by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, that gripped America during much of the 1950s. Furthermore, Barry Keith Grant has suggested that the depersonalised alien pod creatures of *Body Snatchers* might

also have been understood as representations of 'our detached and alienated neighbours'.³⁵ Jack Finney, who wrote the novel that *Body Snatchers* was based on, has denied that he ever intended his pod people to be read as metaphors for communists, while Don Siegel, the film's director, is said to have been proud of his film's political message, but remained silent about what he thought that message was.³⁶ Perhaps these differences of opinion about *Body Snatchers* result from what Grant describes as its utilisation of a 'central metaphor for the monstrous that...is sufficiently flexible to accommodate multiple interpretations'.³⁷ In this sense, each of these commentators has demonstrated the polysemic nature of 1950s US science fiction's depersonalisation narratives, such as *Body Snatchers*, by showing them to be capable of suggesting a variety of attitudes towards communism.

The flexibility of the era's American science fiction cinema is suggested in a more general sense by the fact that scholars have read these films as critiques of entirely different aspects of US culture. Most prominent amongst this body of work is Mark Jancovich's *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*.³⁸ First published in 1996, this study offers a fresh perspective distinct from Biskind's suggestion that many 1950s US science fiction films supported conformity and traditional American ideals.³⁹ Jancovich argues that 'if these films do emphasise the need to "pull together", they do not endorse the kinds of conformist consensus which Biskind...suggest[s]. They are actually deeply critical of conformity'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, he draws attention to the fact that 'the alien's association with the Soviet Union did not necessarily imply an affirmation of American society' and its values.⁴¹ Building on these claims, Jancovich turns assumptions about communism's association with the Other upside down when he suggests that 'the concerns with the Soviet Union were often merely a

displacement or a code which different sections of American society used in order to criticise those aspects of American life which they feared or opposed'.⁴² Although Jancovich does accept that Biskind made similar claims about different sections of American society associating each other with communism as a means of discrediting them, his argument diverges from that of Biskind when he claims that the Other was also used to critique the creeping uniformity of American society brought about by what he terms 'scientific-technical rationality'.⁴³ In this sense, he reads the rejection of the Other in 1950s science fiction films as an 'admirable attempt to defend the human against the inhuman; to privilege certain communal values in opposition to the "dehumanising" domination of scientific-technical rationality'.⁴⁴ Jancovich's argument, in its radical re-reading of the signs and symbols that have led many scholars to conclude that 1950s US science fiction cinema was often anti-communist, suggests that the flexible metaphors of these films might also have been understood as an attack on emergent trends in contemporary America itself.

Bonnie Noonan is another example of a scholar who has similarly deviated from the dominant critical focus on communism and nuclear technology. Her work examines the representation of female scientists in mid-century American science fiction films, subverting the popular assumption that women were predominantly marginalised by the genre.⁴⁵ Noonan demonstrates that 'one characteristic of American B science fiction films from 1950 to 1963 or so is the depiction of professional women characters, particularly as assistants to scientists, students of science, and even as scientists in their own right'.⁴⁶ Noonan places these American female scientists within the context of a society that witnessed 'the emergence of women into the public and professional sphere during World War II'.⁴⁷ Although observations about the role of women in

1950s science fiction films have appeared in many other critical analyses, notably in Biskind's own arguments, Noonan's book is the most sustained example of this type of study to date.⁴⁸ Noonan's work can be placed in dialogue with Jancovich's arguments about scientific-technical rationality to suggest that interpretations produced by domestic audiences of US science fiction films were inflected by a range of issues that extended beyond fears of nuclear technology and communism. The variety of topics that might have been used in making sense of these films is further suggested by the scholarship of a number of other authors, such as Kevin Heffernan and Steven M. Sanders, who have read these films through the history of 3D technology and film noir respectively.⁴⁹ Similarly, William M. Tsutsui has argued that, rather than being interpreted as representations of communism or nuclear technology, the overgrown insects that appeared in many science fiction films of this period, such as *Them!*, 'should be taken more literally, less as metaphors than as insects, and that the big bug genre should be analyzed in the context of actual fears of insect invasion and growing misgivings about the safety and effectiveness of modern insecticides in 1950s and early 1960s America'.⁵⁰ Clearly there were a number of different American concerns through which these films could have been read.

Other academics have provided alternatives to the 'critical orthodoxy' that Geraghty describes by approaching these films in ways that do not connect them to their historical contexts of production or reception at all.⁵¹ Patrick Lucanio's *Them or Us* is a good example of this type of work.⁵² Lucanio applies psychoanalytic principles to 1950s science fiction films, arguing that 'C. G. Jung's analytical psychology is the proper methodology for the interpretation of meaning and value in the science fiction genre'.⁵³ Consequently, Lucanio's

conclusions are often of a radically different nature to the contextually influenced readings produced by authors such as Hendershot or Biskind. For example, Lucanio argues:

The flying saucer is the iconographic image for the symbol (mandala) of wholeness and totality. Wholeness and totality, furthermore, are representative of individuation. The flying saucer is, then, the vehicle by which the ego assembles the archetypes for full harmony within consciousness.⁵⁴

Lucanio's reading of the imagery and narrative patterns of 1950s science fiction cinema employs a psychoanalytical approach and consequently explores these films in an ahistorical manner. Like that of Noonan and Jancovich, Lucanio's work thus represents a deviation from the more traditional intellectual frameworks within which these films have been studied.

Although both Geraghty and Jancovich have argued that there exists a scholarly 'orthodoxy' that posits American 1950s science fiction cinema as a manifestation of US fears of communism and nuclear technology, the studies discussed above suggest that a broader range of readings of these films is possible.⁵⁵ From the anti-McCarthyist reading of the depersonalisation narratives suggested by Booker's alternative approach to *Body Snatchers* to Lucanio's ahistorical psychoanalysis, the range of interpretations of these American films offered by scholarship has been broader than is often acknowledged.⁵⁶ While most, but not all, of these writers have in some way situated these films within their American contexts of production and reception, the variety of readings that they have produced strongly suggests the polysemic nature of much of the genre during the 1950s. This in turn indicates that these films might have been particularly susceptible to reinterpretation by audiences in other countries to which they were exported, who were party to a differently inflected set of public debates. The United States may have dominated science fiction film production during this decade, but the academic literature that has

addressed these films in their domestic contexts conversely highlights their suitability to the type of cross-cultural re-reading that this thesis is interested in by underlining the mutability of the metaphors that they employed. This interpretative flexibility is important to my work because these US films were received in very different socio-political contexts when screened in Britain as a result of the significant differences between that country and America during the 1950s, as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis. These American science fiction films might consequently have found their meanings shaped in new ways by Britons who saw in them an opportunity to express and negotiate their own hopes and fears, many of which were nationally specific. Prior to the current thesis, however, this aspect of the reception of 1950s American science fiction cinema had not been rigorously explored. In providing such an investigation, this project outlines for the first time some of the ways in which these American productions were framed by British public debate, rendering visible the specificity of the British history of their reception and consequently providing a means of resisting the globalisation of their US interpretations.

British 1950s Science Fiction Cinema

As noted above, the broad range of work that has addressed American 1950s science fiction cinema is perhaps a result of the fact that films from the United States dominated the genre during the decade. However, Britain was also a prominent producer of 1950s science fiction cinema, although it could not match Hollywood's proliferation. This has provided British genre historians with a decent, but less extensive, range of material with which to work. Consequently, although a number of scholars have considered British science fiction films of the 1950s, such work has been comparatively limited in quantity.

Furthermore, as I demonstrate below, it has also focused predominantly on contexts of production rather than reception. As a result, there remains scope for a project such as this to broaden our knowledge about these films by exploring their relationship to different British public debates.

Peter Hutchings' work on British science fiction cinema is particularly useful to the current project because it both draws attention to the specificity of the British history of the genre during the 1950s and stresses the importance of understanding the domestic contexts that informed these films. In his essay, "We're the Martians Now": British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s', Hutchings describes the 'distinctive character' of the British films of this sub-genre, rejecting the presumption that they were 'lesser versions of or adjuncts to the better known US science fiction invasion films of the 1950s'.⁵⁷ Hutchings explains the unique qualities of British science fiction films through reference to the 'socially and historically specific pressures exerted upon the fantasies by the context within which they were produced'.⁵⁸ Hutchings' interest in production contexts is, of course, different from my own interest in reception contexts, but his discussion still places these British films within the framework of 1950s British public debates. For example, he argues that 'consumerism...meant something different in America from what it did in Britain (where it was often associated with anxieties about the alleged undue influence of American culture on the British way of life)'.⁵⁹ In the context of this and other British concerns, Hutchings examines the series of Hammer films that featured the character of Professor Bernard Quatermass, produced between 1955 and 1967, the BBC television serials on which they were based, which aired between 1953 and 1959, and a number of other British invasion narratives that were released into the 1960s and which consequently fall outside the timeframe

of my project. Placing these productions in dialogue with British television and film cultures, and debates about domesticity and national identity, Hutchings examines the relationship between British science fiction cinema and British public anxieties.

This is a project that he also pursues in an earlier piece of work on some of the films that concern this thesis. Hutchings devotes half a chapter of his study of the British horror film to *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955).⁶⁰ Here he explores the industrial contexts within which this film was produced, drawing attention to the ways in which issues such as finance and censorship helped to shape the environment from which the feature emerged. He also provides an analysis of the ways in which *The Quatermass Xperiment*, its sequel from 1957 and *X - The Unknown* (1956) explored pressing issues in British society, such as the problematic nature of post-war masculinity, the Welfare State and the dislocation of the working class. This work shares with “‘We’re the Martians Now’: British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s” a concern for the relationship between 1950s British science fiction films and the contexts within which they were made. In this sense, the current thesis builds on Hutchings’ research by extending his interest in the socio-political contexts of 1950s British science fiction film production into the realm of reception.

Hutchings’ focus on the intersection of public debate, production contexts and 1950s British science fiction cinema is shared by Ian Conrich, who has discussed what he terms the ‘trashing London’ science fiction films.⁶¹ These productions, made in Britain during the 1950s and early 1960s, saw gigantic monsters attacking the British capital. Conrich argues that these films ‘may be read as allegories of atomic age fears, but they also appear to be articulating tensions created by a crisis in hegemony’ during the twilight of the British

Empire and represent 'a return to wartime images'.⁶² In this regard, his observation that 'British colossal creature films can be read as metaphorical representations of a fear of modern warfare and the atomic threat...[but they also] look back to the wartime terror of the Blitz' draws connections between texts and contexts in a manner that mirrors Hutchings' approach.⁶³ Similarly, Sarah Street has briefly considered the ways in which British science fiction films from the 1950s articulated British concerns, drawing connections between *The Quatermass Xperiment*, *Quatermass II*, 'Britain's decline as an imperial power' and 'anti-nuclear protests in the mid-to-late 1950s'.⁶⁴ Steve Chibnall has also performed comparable work in terms of the presentation of gender in the genre, drawing on films such as *Four Sided Triangle* (1953) and *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954).⁶⁵ He returns to this topic in a section of his book, *The British 'B' Film*, co-authored by Brian McFarlane.⁶⁶ Hutchings, Conrich, Street, Chibnall and McFarlane thus provide readings of mid-century British science fiction films that position the genre within its socio-political contexts of production, much as writers such as Biskind, Jancovich and numerous others have done for American science fiction films of the era. These authors effectively demonstrate the specificity of British science fiction cinema of the 1950s, relating its style and content to a range of British concerns. Despite being relatively concise, especially when compared to the host of book-length studies that constitutes the equivalent debate about the US science fiction cinema of the period, this body of work shows that British science fiction often intersected with key public debates of the 1950s, paving the way for my research to supplement its analysis of the contexts within which these films were produced through an exploration of the contexts within which they were watched.

The particular British anxieties and debates that the scholars discussed above focus on sometimes overlap with the areas of investigation selected by the following chapters, but in each case this study approaches the issue in question from a different angle. Hutchings' discussion of film and television cultures, for example, shares some similar concerns with the arguments made in Chapter Five about the experience of 1950s British science fiction cinema-going. However, whereas Hutchings is interested in the ways in which the Quatermass films and television programmes both address their own status as media texts and also use this status to engage with wider issues, my focus in Chapter Five is the technologically mediated appeal of the cinema itself in 1950s Britain.⁶⁷ Similarly, although Conrich's discussion of 'wartime images' and nuclear disaster provides the genesis for my argument in Chapter Four, I develop on Conrich's position by demonstrating that Blitz imagery and the prospect of a nuclear attack were often amalgamated in the British imagination, thereby enabling new readings of these films to emerge.⁶⁸ Chapter Three shares common interests with Street's brief discussion of the significance of the collapse of the Empire to British science fiction cinema, a topic that Hutchings also addresses, but my work on this issue largely focuses on connected anxieties about the perceived eclipse of the nation by America.⁶⁹ As these comparisons demonstrate, although there has been some work that situates British 1950s science fiction cinema within its historical national context, there is still scope for a project such as my own to further expand our knowledge in this area.

Conversely, Andrew Tudor's book, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, is an example of work that has addressed these films in a manner that does not privilege their connection to British public debates.⁷⁰ Tudor examines the range

of horror films 'which were released in Britain between 1931 (the beginning of the 'sound' horror movie) and 1984'.⁷¹ While Tudor's interest in genre films that were screened in Britain during the 1950s, including many that could be classed as science fiction, superficially aligns his study with the concerns of the current project, his primary focus is the formalist generic qualities of these films and not their reception or production contexts. Tudor classifies the threat contained in the films he discusses in relation to a series of binaries as a means of codifying their narrative content. In this regard, Tudor's work provides useful information on the nature of British horror, and to a lesser extent science fiction, cinema and his observations underpin some of the claims that I make in the chapters that follow. However, Tudor's work is not concerned with the meanings attributed to these films by British audiences.

There has been some critical debate about 1950s British science fiction cinema, the majority of which shares with both my own work and that of a large portion of the scholars who have written on American genre cinema of this era, a concern for the contextual factors that informed these films. Much of this writing has been focused on production rather than reception contexts, but each of these studies has developed our understanding of the broad range of public debates that British 1950s science fiction films both articulated and negotiated. However, because these films have been addressed by a more concise field of scholarship than their American counterparts, there is room for a project such as this to further contribute to our knowledge in this area. In doing so, this thesis develops its argument that 1950s science fiction cinema, both domestic and foreign, was open to reinterpretation in Britain in unique ways as a result of the country's specific cultural and socio-political circumstances.

National Cinema and National Audiences

Although this is not a thesis that is principally concerned with investigating the concept of national cinema, Andrew Higson argues that ‘to write about British cinema is to operate, however implicitly, with some understanding of what that cinema is, what its limits are, what distinguishes it from other cinemas’.⁷² Since my work discusses British and American 1950s science fiction films, it is worth briefly situating myself within debates about, and problematising the concept of, national cinema. Higson, for example, takes issue with attempts to identify ‘indigenous’ traits within national cinemas.⁷³ The notion of indigenesness is certainly problematic in 1950s science fiction since directors, such as Eugène Lourié, sub-genres, such as the creature feature, and even, in the case of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) and *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959), entire plots found their way into both British and US films. Given that this was a time of both increased US investment in the British film industry and also American utilisation of British production facilities, as noted in the Introduction, the notion that there was something indigenous about either British or American 1950s science fiction cinema is contentious. Indeed, the trappings of a transnational cinematic identity were actively embraced by some British productions during this era since, as I argue in Chapter Five, it helped them to gain a US audience. This further confuses notions of the ‘national’ because films such as *Fiend Without a Face* (1958) attempted to hide their predominantly British national origins behind an ostensibly North American facade. Consequently, what this thesis means when it discusses British or American science fiction cinema requires some attention.

Higson has been, alongside John Hill, a prominent figure in debates about how to conceptualise national cinema. Higson has tended to emphasise

consumption, exploring the uses to which films are put by audiences in the construction of a sense of nationhood, while Hill has been largely critical of this approach, preferring to draw a distinction between the films screened in a nation and the films of that nation.⁷⁴ While recognising that these debates suggest that attempts to define national cinemas are often complex and controversial, there is little need for this thesis to engage in them beyond explaining its use of terms such as British and American science fiction cinema. In this regard, Sarah Street provides a practical solution. Street argues that, 'there is a British film industry with relatively clearly defined economic boundaries and methods of classification, producing films which may or may not necessarily involve British themes or preoccupations, often including financial and labour participation from other countries'.⁷⁵ Following this lead, when subsequent chapters discuss British science fiction cinema, they refer to films predominantly produced in Britain by British studios and production companies, regardless of their subject matter, tone or the involvement of foreign personnel and finance. The same definition applies when discussing American films. This is, of course, a narrow conceptualisation of national cinema which does not account for debates about the content of films or the uses to which they were put. However, since this project is itself an exploration of how films are made sense of by audiences, these concerns are present in various forms throughout the thesis. Consequently, where issues of national identity, transatlantic co-production and the involvement of international personnel become particularly relevant they are, of course, accounted for by my arguments.

In terms of national film histories, this thesis can be situated in relation to other recent projects that have re-examined 1950s British cinema. As Ian MacKillop and Neil Sinyard note, the decade's British films have often been

derided as 'conservative and dull'.⁷⁶ MacKillop and Sinyard reject this notion and have edited a collection of essays that seeks to reappraise British films of the period 'not simply as social documents...but also as aesthetic artefacts'.⁷⁷ Their aim to reassess British cinema of the 1950s has similarly been taken up by Sue Harper and Vincent Porter in their book *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*.⁷⁸ It also informs Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane's research on British 'B' films and, perhaps less explicitly, Peter Hutchings' study of British director Terence Fisher, which places his most famous work from the late 1950s, such as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and *Dracula* (1958), within the context of his wider career.⁷⁹ The exploration of British science fiction from this decade presented in the following chapters thus also belongs within a body of work which has sought to portray 1950s British cinema as something more than an era of stagnation between 'the golden period of the immediate post-war years' and 'the mould-breaking New Wave of the early 1960s'.⁸⁰ Although claims that these genre films were sometimes aesthetically accomplished are largely limited to the discussion of special effects in Chapter Five, this project does demonstrate that 1950s British science fiction cinema was more than the disposable pulp that it is often popularly perceived to be.

While discussing issues of the 'national', it is also worth problematising the contextually-focused approach that has dominated much of the work on 1950s science fiction discussed above in relation to its conceptualisation of national audiences. In many cases, such means of investigating films have led to the totalisation of a country's cinema-going public. This is suggested, for example, by Biskind's assertion that the gigantic ants of *Them!* resembled communists to 1950s Americans.⁸¹ Such a claim only makes sense in light of

his belief that the American public by and large understood Soviets as a warlike collective, a generalisation that Biskind does not support with adequate reference to historical evidence. As I note below, Biskind finds a way to mitigate this concern, but the same cannot be said for all of the authors who have taken a similar approach to 1950s science fiction cinema. Bryan E. Vizzini, for example, discusses the genre as a reflection of 'the fears and desires of Cold War America', erasing the possibility that different Americans might have feared or desired different things.⁸² Similarly, Jancovich uses a discussion of 'Fordism and the critique of conformity' in 1950s America to facilitate his interpretation of these films, but such an approach cannot account for the reading strategies of Americans who might have embraced or desired conformity.⁸³ In much the same way, Hendershot's focus on societal paranoia in the United States assumes that Americans largely shared similar anxieties about nuclear technology. In readings such as these, the conflicting meanings that 1950s science fiction films could generate as a result of their interpretation by a diverse population are not fully addressed.

In this sense, the concept of a national audience is inherently problematic. Denis McQuail has noted that, in terms of television, 'the national audience is heterogeneous' since no nation is composed of entirely likeminded individuals.⁸⁴ John Hill makes a similar argument in reference to 1940s cinema-going, claiming that 'the "national" audience for British film, even during the "golden age" of British cinema, was neither as homogeneous nor as socially representative of the nation as is sometimes assumed'.⁸⁵ Although Hill suggests that the fracturing of the British audience is largely a feature of post-1960s cinema-going, his belief that 'the national audience is in fact a series of audiences which are often addressed in different ways' is supported by the

range of different interpretations that it was possible for audiences of 1950s science fiction cinema to make, as demonstrated above and throughout this thesis.⁸⁶ To presume that the 1950s British cinema audience was homogeneous and shared a common understanding of public debates would be to obscure the diversity of its members' viewpoints and opinions.

Biskind is notable in this regard since, as discussed above, he identifies a range of political standpoints within 1950s America and explains their relationship to the country's science fiction cinema. Although he addresses the presence of these positions within films rather than audiences, his analysis is able, at least, to gesture towards the diversity of the United States in the 1950s. His is a rare example of a study that mitigates the difficulties associated with discussing a national audience and his work consequently provides the foundations of the model that I use to address this issue. The means by which I do so are explored in detail later in the chapter.

Transnational Cultural Transmission

Although issues of the 'national' certainly have a bearing on this thesis, my interest in the exportation of American films to Britain suggests that some attention must also be paid to the process of transnational cultural transmission. Little work on this topic has considered science fiction cinema itself, but the intellectual frameworks within which scholars have theorised the relationship between films and international audiences are applicable to my research. This section outlines some of the significant developments in that regard and explores how the current study makes use of them in its examination of the British reception of both American and domestic 1950s science fiction films.

Of particular interest here is the critical attention that has been paid to the cinema as a site of cultural exchange between Britain and America. Prominent amongst studies in this field is Sarah Street's *Transatlantic Crossings*, an examination of the history of the distribution of British films in America between the 1920s and 2000.⁸⁷ Although I am interested in the opposite process, namely the exportation of US films to Britain, the ways in which Street addresses her topic are, to an extent, transferable. Street frames her work as an investigation into specific American historical contexts of the reception of British cinema. This focus on texts and contexts mirrors the mode of approach used by many of the studies of 1950s science fiction cinema discussed above, albeit with a transatlantic slant. Street addresses the reception contexts that she is concerned with through extensive use of archival material. She takes advantage of a broad range of historical sources, such as 'critical reviews from a variety of trade papers, newspapers and journals, together with film publicity, press books and posters'.⁸⁸ Street uses this material to reconstruct a sense of the American reception contexts within which she situates British films. Although Street is primarily interested in industrial contexts of distribution and exhibition, she is also concerned with the socio-political environment within which Americans watched British films. She writes that 'it is illuminating to consider [British films such as] *The Private Life of Henry VIII* [1933] in the context of the New Deal and...*Drums/The Drum* (1938) and *The Four Feathers* (1939), in relation to American conceptions of individualism'.⁸⁹ In this sense, Street reveals how British films 'demonstrated qualities that were appreciated for their difference but at the same time were comprehensible [to US audiences]. They were also incorporated into contemporary American concerns'.⁹⁰ As Street notes, 'what emerges is a model of exportation that

depends as much on the film itself as on the way it was presented for consumption'.⁹¹ As these comments show, Street's work demonstrates that, once exported, films are subject to reinterpretation by international audiences through the codes and debates that constitute their new contexts of reception.

This is an observation that has been made across a range of studies of cinematic transnational cultural transmission. Paul Swann, for example, has explored this process in the late 1940s and early 1950s in *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*.⁹² Taking a similar methodological approach to Street, Swann examines the industrial, cultural and socio-political contexts that shaped the reception of American films in Britain during the post-war decade by drawing on a broad range of historical sources. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Swann argues that the exportation of films from America to Britain brought them into contact with 'very different cultural references', resulting in a process that he terms 'transition/translation' whereby they were reinterpreted through their new discursive surround.⁹³ In this sense, Swann's approach to international distribution very closely mirrors that of Street.

A similar line is taken in the introduction to Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby's collection on the topic of cinematic transnational cultural transmission, *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*. Maltby situates a comparable model of international cinematic reinterpretation to that outlined by Street and Swann within a broader, anthropological context. He argues:

One of the paradoxes of transnational cultural history lies in the way in which a cultural artefact of demonstrable semantic complexity at its point of production and initial domestic consumption is liable, when exported, first to be simplified and then rendered semantically complex in different ways by the conventions through which the artefacts of its originating culture are perceived in the second, host culture. Hollywood movies are no less liable to this process than West African masks or Kwakiutl totem poles.⁹⁴

Maltby's work thus serves to underline the suggestion made by Swann and Street that international audiences are able to find in films readings that are not

available to domestic audiences because their understanding of the imported cinema is framed by a different set of cultural codes and debates.

Maltby, Swann and Street suggest that in order to ascertain the meaning of a film to a foreign audience one must attempt to understand the specificities of the relationship between the film itself and the contexts within which it is watched. As noted during my review of the literature that has addressed both British and American 1950s science fiction cinema, this type of analysis has also been exploited in the examination of domestic film reception. The fact that this focus on the intersection of films and reception contexts has usefully addressed the relationship between audiences and both domestic and foreign films suggests its particular relevance to the current project. Drawing on this model, this thesis can express its principal aim as an exploration of the unique relationship between mid-century science fiction films, produced both in Britain and America, and the historically and culturally specific reception contexts of 1950s Britain. This provides a general framework for my investigation in the chapters that follow, but it is first necessary to be precise about the ways in which I conceptualise and analyse both the audience and the films that I explore. There are, after all, a number of different methods through which such an analysis could approach its material. This task begins below with an explanation of the ways in which semiotic theory underpins my examination of the films themselves.

Cinema Semiotics

If this thesis is to explore how 1950s science fiction films suggested different readings in Britain than they did in America, it is necessary to be explicit about the processes through which it sees cinema acquiring meaning. In

this respect, my approach has been influenced by the semiotic tradition that was established by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes.⁹⁵ There is no need to rehearse these familiar debates in full here, but it is important to note the key concepts arising from this school of thought and how the analysis presented in the following chapters employs them. In this sense, it is only the underlying model of meaning production suggested by semiotic theory and its use in film studies that it is necessary to posit here.

Drawing on the work of Saussure, Barthes refers to units of communication such as words, sounds or images as 'signifiers', the phenomena they allude to as the 'signified' and the 'associative total of the first two terms' as the 'sign'.⁹⁶ As Saussure observed in terms of linguistics, signifiers themselves are hollow of meaning, distinct from the phenomena that they signify, but able to refer to them through a mutual understanding of the meaning attributed to the signifier.⁹⁷ In this sense, various types of communication can be understood as sets of symbols with no direct referents, only able to signify as the result of shared knowledge about how they should be interpreted. As such, semiotics suggests that the meaning of different forms of communication relies not only on the signifier itself, but also on the context within which it is understood.

In terms of cinema, Graeme Turner has described how 'at the level of the signifier, film has developed a rich set of codes and conventions'.⁹⁸ Images, sounds, camera angles, cutting patterns and numerous other aspects of films can all be seen as types of signifiers. They bear no immediate or innate meaning but have become imbued with significance because their audiences have learned to interpret them in different ways. Turner provides the example of how 'at the end of love scenes we might see a slow fade, or a slow loss of focus, or a modest pan upwards from the lovers' bodies - all coy imitations of

the audiences averting their eyes but all signifying the continuation and completion of the act'.⁹⁹ This sign is only able to operate because its audience has the cultural knowledge necessary to make sense of this set of images. Consequently, Turner is keen to stress the importance of understanding the cultural contexts within which signification occurs when attempting to assess the meanings with which signifiers are filled. He argues that 'audiences must, in a sense, bring the set of rules with them into the cinema, in the form of...cultural knowledge...The role of the audience in determining meaning cannot be overestimated'.¹⁰⁰ As Turner's argument suggests, in order to assess how particular audiences make sense of a film, it is necessary to understand what types of meanings they might attribute to its signifiers by investigating the cultural contexts of reception.

Turner's semiotic approach to cinema suggests that the meaning of a film is not to be found solely in the film text or in the cultural contexts of its reception, but rather in the intersection of the two. As such, it places the role of the audience and its cultural knowledge at the forefront of questions about the meanings that films adopt. In order to provide an account of the British reception of 1950s science fiction, then, the current thesis will investigate how the context of 1950s Britain shaped the ways in which the signifiers contained within these films, such as possessed human bodies and gigantic mutated reptiles, could be interpreted.

This approach raises the issue of how one perceives the relationship between textual signifiers, reception contexts and the audience. If the work of this thesis is to investigate the intersection of an audience's cultural knowledge and the sounds and images of 1950s science fiction films, what would such an analysis look like? What sources would it use and with what aims? In answering

these questions, this chapter turns to the work of scholars who have been involved since the mid-1980s in reconceptualising the practice of film history and whose work has been termed the New Film History. The following section provides an overview of this area of enquiry, drawing attention to the ways in which its scholars have theorised the relationship between texts, contexts and audiences so that later sections of this chapter can demonstrate how these approaches inform the methodology of the current study.

The New Film History

The New Film History is a means of approaching the study of cinema history that seeks to explore a film's form and meanings by understanding its relationship to its contexts of production and reception. Initially emerging in the mid-1980s in the work of David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, and Thomas Elsaesser, the New Film History is often presented as a departure from a more traditional paradigm of historical research in film studies that 'tends to focus solely on the text - film history as the history of films - at the expense of the institutional and cultural contexts of production'.¹⁰¹ As this claim suggests, in its early years the New Film History was seen as a means of exploring the style and content of a film in relation to its circumstances of production, with little consideration paid to reception. In the earliest works of the discipline, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson provided an account of the relationship between the industrial contexts of Hollywood up to 1960 and the form and style of its output, Allen and Gomery turned their attention to the historiographical and methodological concerns of film history, while Elsaesser highlighted a tendency of contemporary film historians to examine not only the histories of individual films

and figures but also the ways in which historical socio-political environments had influenced cinema production.¹⁰² Common to each of these approaches is an interest in the relationship between film texts and contexts of production. The New Film History was not immediately concerned with reception contexts, audiences or their role in shaping cinematic meaning.

In recent years, however, the New Film History has been heavily influenced by the rise of reception studies within arts and humanities research and has borrowed concepts and methods from this fellow discipline. Indeed, more recent scholars of the New Film History have argued that it has 'extended the historical analysis of films from the moment of their production to the moment(s) of their reception'.¹⁰³ In this regard, James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper position the New Film History in direct opposition to 'theoretical models of spectatorship, which assumed that cinema audiences responded monolithically to films', a tendency that is also evident in the totalisation of national audiences by much of the literature that addresses 1950s science fiction cinema discussed above.¹⁰⁴ As such, Chapman, Harper and Glancy's important collection of essays from 2007, *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, offers a very different model of the New Film History than Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, Allen, Gomery and Elsaesser did two and a half decades before. For Chapman, Harper and Glancy, reception studies 'seeks out evidence of actual audience responses and locates these within the context of the audience's time, place and identity', and thus informs the New Film History's desire to place 'the film text at the nexus of a complex and dynamic set of relationships between producers and consumers'.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, the New Film History now shares much in common with what Janet Staiger's early, influential work on historical materialist approaches to historical

audiences termed 'context-activated theories' of reception, or theories in which 'historical circumstances become central to the account' of reception.¹⁰⁶ In other terms, the New Film History not only has retained its interest in understanding films as products of particular economic, industrial, cultural and socio-political contexts, but also has developed a greater awareness of the role played by audiences in the process by which films come to bear meaning, an awareness that it shares with both Turner's semiotics and the current thesis.

However, as the New Film History has developed in this direction it has run into certain problems. Sarah Street acknowledges in her chapter in *The New Film History* that issues of practicality often intrude on research into the historical contexts of cinema production and reception. Street notes that 'for the historian researching British cinema, there can often appear to be a paucity of archival source material', referring to documents produced by studios, censors and other official bodies.¹⁰⁷ The same problems are often also encountered by reception historians. Studies of contemporary audiences and reception have thrived because of the availability of consumers with whom media texts can be discussed and about whom data can be acquired. The same cannot be said of the audiences that interest the film historian. Perhaps because cinema-going was, and to a certain extent still is, popularly perceived as a leisure activity without broader significance, very few audience members keep detailed accounts of their responses to individual films. Occasionally a diary entry or similar documentation of personal reflections on a film will be preserved, but this type of evidence is by its very nature sporadic and only able to account for a small fraction of a film's audience. Even existent accounts of cinema reception, such as reviews or letters printed in film magazines, have their limitations in this regard. Reviews, while certainly useful in giving a sense of how a film might

have been received, reflect only a very narrow and privileged range of opinions that have often been at odds with popular tastes. Similarly, letters sent to and published by the editors of magazines also present limitations as evidence of a film's reception. As Jackie Stacey argues, they are often 'written in response to articles and features...suggesting that the agenda for legitimate topics is largely framed by the producers of the magazine', skewing the image of a film's reception that they present.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, 'the opinions of more marginal groups may not be expressed within the established pages of such mainstream publications', while 'there has been understandable scepticism about using letters pages as evidence of audience/reader opinion, since those printed may well be concocted by office staff at the magazine'.¹⁰⁹ While sources such as these certainly have their place within the current study, since they can provide information about the debates that surrounded 1950s science fiction films on their British release, their value as evidence of the responses of real audiences is limited.

The lack of evidence of the responses of real British audiences of 1950s science fiction cinema brings this project into contact with the same issues that Andrew Tudor encountered when he pointed out that 'even if today's audience is accessible to research, yesterday's is not. How, then, can we gain indirect access to the realm of past practical consciousness?'.¹¹⁰ Tudor's question is resonant of those asked by Annette Kuhn in her study of 1930s cinema-going in Britain. Kuhn wonders 'how do films and their consumers interact? And what, if anything, can we know about this interaction if it has taken place in the past?'.¹¹¹ Tudor sidesteps these issues by reframing his investigation in terms of the formal qualities of the films he investigates, as discussed above. For Kuhn the answer is not to search for evidence of historical reception recorded at the

time, but rather to question surviving audiences about their cinema-going histories. However, this approach also brings complications and Kuhn acknowledges 'that particular questions arise concerning the evidential status of accounts which rely on remembering - and thus also on forgetting, selective memory and hindsight'.¹¹² This does not present a problem for Kuhn, who embraces these issues by situating her analysis within the context of memory studies. In her work, Kuhn considers memory 'as neither providing access to, nor as representing, the past 'as it was'; the past, rather is taken to be mediated, indeed produced, in the activity of remembering'.¹¹³ As such, memory becomes the very topic of Kuhn's investigation. However, for a project that does not examine how films are remembered but how they were received, the type of evidence provided by memory is insubstantial and the usefulness of surviving audiences as sources of information about historical reception is limited.

Of course, the paucity of evidence of the responses of historical cinema audiences is an issue that has been encountered and addressed by many scholars of the New Film History. As noted above, academics such as Street have wrestled with these concerns and in response have suggested alternative theorisations of the relationship between texts, contexts and audiences that take these practical issues into account. In this regard, the New Film History has embraced the study of historical artefacts that are able to speak to the economic, socio-political and cultural contexts of cinema reception, using these sources to reconstruct a film's 'discursive surround'.¹¹⁴ This phrase, as noted in the Introduction, is used by Barbara Klinger to refer to the types of cultural knowledge that frame a film on its release and through which Turner argued that a film's signifiers adopt meaning for an audience. As such, the New Film History has dramatically 'expanded the range of primary sources available for

the researcher'.¹¹⁵ These include 'memoirs, personal papers, production files, scripts, censors' reports, publicity materials, reviews, fan magazines and Internet discussion groups', to name but a few, each of which can be employed in the search for evidence of the contexts within which a film was made and watched.¹¹⁶

Historical Reception Studies

Klinger's work, alongside that of Janet Staiger, suggests that some attention must be paid to the ways in which these different sources are treated by the reception historian. Staiger, for example, advocates that these sources ought not to be used to construct a contextual framework through which a film can be interpreted, but should instead be seen as a means of understanding the historical 'event' of interpretation.¹¹⁷ Staiger describes a type of reception studies that 'would be historical, would recognize the dialectics of evidence and theory, and would take up a critical distance on the *relations* between spectators and texts. It would not interpret texts but would attempt a historical *explanation* of the event of interpreting a text'.¹¹⁸ Staiger's emphasis on the historical event of interpretation suggests that those materials that are most closely connected to the films themselves, such as reviews or publicity materials, should take prominence within this type of work because they are more obviously associated with the films, and hence with the interpretive event, than broader socio-political contexts.

Of course, this type of analysis is only possible where such materials are available to the researcher. As noted above, this is not the case for the current study. While promotional materials associated with 1950s science fiction cinema have often been preserved and do inform some of the arguments of this thesis,

reviews of these films in British 1950s periodicals and newspapers, although also available for consultation, are less instructive. They are frequently very brief and often simply describe the premise of the films and single out one or two elements, such as the special effects or individual performances, for praise or scorn. Such reviews offer little information that could be used to assess the interpretive event, and so cannot provide the evidence necessary to support the type of reception history that Staiger calls for.

However, Klinger offers an alternative approach to historical reception that utilises other types of material which are, in relation to this project, more useful. In contrast to Staiger's belief that cinema historians ought not to attempt to interpret films through their historical contexts of reception, Klinger argues that 'without question, historical reception studies has a strong interpretive dimension'.¹¹⁹ This discrepancy results from the fact that, while Staiger seeks to explain the interpretive event, thereby implicitly placing the audience and their interpretations at the centre of her model of analysis, Klinger suggests that:

The viewer in this semantic geography is everywhere and nowhere, neither the product nor the subject of one particular discourse. The viewer does not exist in one stable location in relation to the flux of historical meanings around a film, and therefore cannot be placed conveniently at the centre, the periphery or some other 'niche' within this interaction. Thus, a total history does not tell us...how specific individuals responded to films: it cannot generally 'pin' the viewer down as subject to a series of discursive manoeuvres. Instead, it provides a sense of what the historical prospects were for viewing at a given time by illuminating the meanings made available within that moment. A totalized perspective thus depicts how social forces invite viewers to assume positions, giving us a range of possible influences on spectatorship, without securing an embodied viewer.¹²⁰

As a result of this move away from the discussion of actual audiences, Klinger reframes historical reception studies as an investigation of the various meanings that a film was able to hold at a particular historical moment, regardless of whether cinema-goers actually produced these interpretations or not. The readings provided by Klinger's model of reception history are not those

produced by audiences, but are the scholar's own contextually informed interpretations.

In practical terms, Klinger argues that the contexts within which a film can be situated can be 'organized in a progressively outward-bound direction, beginning with those areas most closely associated with the production of a film ("cinematic practices"), moving to those technically outside the industry, but closely affiliated with a film's appearance ("intertextual zones"), and ending with social and historical contexts circulating through and around its borders'.¹²¹ However, the current project is not concerned with cinematic practices and, as described above, can only make limited use of intertextual zones, such as film reviews. As a result, the final area of enquiry, namely social and historical contexts, is the most useful for this analysis.

For Klinger, this is not to be seen as a problem. She suggests that 'not all of these regions may be equally important to each film analysed. The researcher attempts to discover which regions seem particularly applicable to reconstructing the vital relations which comprise the contexts in which particular films are produced and received'.¹²² While in this instance the decision about which types of historical contextual material to examine has largely been made as a result of availability rather than applicability, this simply means that the relations between texts and contexts considered here might not be as 'vital' as they could have been if other types of contexts were available for examination. As such, the analysis performed by this project reflects the author's own contextually informed readings of 1950s science fiction cinema rather than those produced by contemporary audiences, and it does this only in relation to specific, available materials. While it is important to note these limitations, this

thesis can still provide a valid assessment of the relationship between British socio-historical contexts and 1950s science fiction films.

Of course, histories of reception that follow this model are open to biases produced by decisions that the scholar makes about which contextual evidence to include, which to exclude and how to present this material. Such accounts can be further skewed by the availability of historical evidence, raising questions about what material is currently inaccessible, what survives in archives, what does not, how decisions about preservation are made, which individuals and organisations make them and with what intent. This is an inherent issue in the approach taken by this thesis and as much as it is a study of historical reception it is also an account that reflects my own understanding of the period, my perception of 1950s science fiction cinema and the range of material that has been available to me. While a broad range of historical sources has been consulted in an attempt to provide a nuanced account of this decade of British history, thereby mitigating these limitations as much as is possible, the very nature of this work demands that it will inevitably reproduce to some extent my own prejudices and biases and the assumptions that I have made as a result of the various materials that have either perished or been preserved. As such, while I do expand our understanding of the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema, other accounts could also be presented that would be no less accurate. The contexts within which this thesis has been produced necessarily shape its analysis and should be kept in mind by the reader when considering its arguments.

Addressing the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema through evidence of historical contexts provides a means of investigating the concerns of this thesis through materials that are available to the modern researcher.

However, this theorisation only provides half of the picture and, in order to return information about the relationship between cinema and reception contexts, it must be placed in dialogue with the semiotic tradition of formal analysis that informs my approach to the films themselves. Consequently, the following section describes how these different approaches relate to one another and how they will be employed in the chapters that follow.

Methods

Drawing on the semiotic model of communication established by Saussure and Barthes and applied to film analysis by academics such as Graeme Turner, and the approach to audiences and reception contexts taken by scholars of the New Film History and studies of transcultural transmission, this thesis sees meaning in cinema generated when a specific film's signifiers are interpreted through a perspective informed by its particular national, cultural and socio-political circumstances of reception. This frames my investigation of the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema as an exploration of the types of issues, debates and knowledge that contemporary British audiences might have used as an interpretive framework when making sense of specific images, sequences and moments within these films. In line with developments made within the New Film History, it is the job of this thesis to uncover historical evidence of the types of public debates that informed interpretations of science fiction cinema's signifiers in Britain and to suggest the types of meanings that were consequently available.

However, adopting such an approach to audiences means that this study cannot make claims about how real historical audiences watched 1950s science fiction films. The evidence necessary to justify making firm and extensive claims

about real audiences simply does not exist. What can be done, however, is to suggest potential viewing strategies that British audiences were likely to have adopted given their circumstances of reception. While this might be what Andrew Tudor has termed 'a second-best' approach to addressing the research questions asked by the present thesis, it is the most appropriate approach given the available evidence.¹²³ As such, this study cannot aim to prove that British audiences found different meanings in 1950s science fiction films to their American counterparts, but rather to suggest that, given the historical contexts in which they watched these films, different readings were available to them.

Comparable approaches are not unfamiliar in the study of 1950s science fiction and similar conjecture is present in the work of those critics who have advanced the Americo-centric readings of the genre that this thesis expands upon. As noted in the literature review presented above, these scholars have also often used the contexts of a film's production and reception to address its audiences. Only very limited evidence of the responses of real American audiences was available to authors such as Biskind and Jancovich and so they too had to make assumptions based on the contexts within which 1950s science fiction films were watched. However, this thesis draws on a greater wealth of documentary evidence of the discursive surround of these films than the majority of other equivalent studies and the readings that it suggests are consequently based on a more thorough assessment of their reception contexts than has been the norm. Crucially, this type of approach still allows the thesis to undermine the popular assumption that American readings of the genre can be applied to British audiences by highlighting their inability to account for British contexts of reception.

Since I am interested in the ways in which particular issues were discussed and understood by 1950s Britons, the historical sources that are drawn on in assessing these debates were largely publicly available and broadly consumed at the time. Newspapers are a particularly useful resource since they were both readily obtainable and widely read. They were a daily presence in the lives of many Britons and so were able to shape public debate in a powerful way. Letters ostensibly written by members of the public printed in newspapers also offer a glimpse of public sentiment. The concerns about the bias and reliability of such correspondence noted earlier in the chapter remain relevant, but they do not diminish the fact that, genuine or not, letters pages were widely read in 1950s Britain and so helped to shape the public discussion of the topics that are examined in the following chapters. A range of newspaper archives have been consulted in researching this thesis, with a variety of political affiliations being represented. *The Daily Mirror*, *The Times*, *The Observer* and *The Manchester Guardian* are particularly prominent because their archives have been digitised, making the examination of a large quantity of relevant material more accomplishable. This has allowed a more representative sample of articles and letters to be selected for discussion here, making my characterisation of the debate about particular issues more evenhanded than would otherwise have been possible.

Other sources, too, are used to provide evidence of the nature of public debates, notably the newsreels that were routinely shown before films in British cinemas during the 1950s. These are particularly useful to the current project since they would have been fresh in the minds of British audiences as they watched their chosen science fiction feature, thereby increasing the possibility that they inflected the readings that audiences performed. The vast majority of

newsreels shown in British cinemas in previous decades are now listed in the British Universities Newsreel Database, compiled by the British Universities Film and Video Council, and many have been digitised and made available on the internet by NewsFilm Online. The newsreels discussed in the remaining chapters have largely been accessed via this resource, but some were also viewed at the North West Film Archive in Manchester. The particular location of each of the sources cited is provided in the relevant reference.

This thesis also makes use of sources that were produced to accompany the release of 1950s science fiction films, such as posters and advertisements. These materials framed the films on their initial release and helped to shape the ways in which the genre came to be understood. They can now either be found in the press books that were distributed in support of the films, many of which are now kept in the British Film Institute National Library in London, or in the pages of popular British film journals and periodicals from the 1950s, such as *Picturegoer* and *Picture Show*. These publications also contain reviews, previews and articles about 1950s science fiction films that formed part of their discursive surround and as such are of particular use to this project. A large run of issues of both titles from the 1950s is housed at the Insight Collections and Research Centre at the National Media Museum in Bradford and has been consulted during the preparation of this thesis.

Elsewhere, sources that were not publicly available are used in the chapters that follow where it becomes necessary, for example, to ascertain the private attitudes of public figures or to assess the inner workings of government bodies. These sources cannot speak directly to my discussion of the public perception of particular topics in 1950s Britain, but they can sometimes inform that analysis in particular ways. The remaining chapters draw on the wealth of

material available at the National Archives at Kew, including letters to and from senior politicians and records of their private meetings. Despite not being able to speak to the shape of 1950s British public debate, each of these sources has its own relevance to the current project's investigation and will be introduced within the text of the chapters that follow where required.

In practical terms, the main discussion chapters of this thesis follow a clear structure. Each will explore a prominent public debate in 1950s Britain, including communism, immigration, nuclear technology, science and imperial decline, examining the forms in which it circulated and the types of meanings that it accrued. After characterising the relevant public debate through reference to the historical evidence described above, the chapters turn their attention to the ways in which it inflected the meaning of signifiers contained within specific films. These sections thus employ an historically inflected form of textual analysis that identifies specific features of a shot or sequence and relates them to the historical material presented earlier. This allows an examination of how particular signifiers were filled with meaning by the public debates that shaped their audiences' perspectives.

However, this method of analysis must avoid treating the British audience as a monolithic entity that related to public debates in a uniform fashion. As noted above, such issues have arisen in previous studies that have addressed audiences through national contexts of reception. Biskind's work offers a model for accounting for audience diversity that can be utilised here. I have already described how Biskind identifies a range of political positions adopted by various 1950s American science fiction films and is therefore able to avoid totalising the genre's stance on particular issues.¹²⁴ Similarly, this study seeks to highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the British national audience

by discussing the range of perspectives that were present within it. As such, the structure of this thesis has been devised to make visible the oppositional attitudes to particular issues or topics that were present in 1950s Britain. Each chapter has been divided into two sections, both of which present contrasting views of the public debate under discussion and its inflection of 1950s science fiction cinema. The following chapter, for example, begins by discussing British hostility to communism and the ways in which it might have shaped the reception of two 1950s science fiction films, *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Quatermass II*. The second half of the chapter then turns its attention to more positive, or at least tolerant, messages about communism that were presented to the British public during the 1950s. These are then used as a means of re-evaluating the films discussed in the first half of the chapter, suggesting oppositional readings that British audiences might also have made. As such, each chapter presents two different approaches to the issue that it addresses, and consequently explores two different readings of the two films under discussion. This thesis thus accounts for a variety of different attitudes that were present in 1950s Britain and suggests that an equally broad range of readings of the science fiction films of the era were produced. As a result, the totalisation of the British national audience is reduced.

The two films examined in each chapter have been selected for three reasons. Firstly, they are often representative of how a variety of other films within the genre operate, allowing my conclusions to have as broad a relevance as possible across significant numbers of 1950s science fiction films. In this regard, it is appropriate that my case study films feature many of the classic narrative devices that the genre employed during the decade, including alien invasions, gigantic monsters, nuclear testing gone awry, possessed human

bodies, unethical scientists and angry mobs of conformists. Films that could have been subject to similar readings are, therefore, noted within the text of each chapter. Secondly, the case study films represent a number of different types of 1950s science fiction films that were released in Britain during this decade. Big budget genre classics, such as *It Came from Outer Space*, contrasted with much cheaper productions, such as *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958), while space adventures, such as *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), were screened alongside gigantic monster movies, such as *Behemoth the Sea Monster*. Each of these films is analysed in the chapters that follow, alongside a number of other, often radically different, features, allowing the thesis to account for the variety of the genre during the 1950s. Thirdly, as noted in the Introduction, the films that are discussed represent the cinema of the two nations that produced the vast majority of science fiction that was screened in British cinemas during the 1950s, namely Britain and America. Of course, genre films from other countries were also released in Britain, but never with the frequency of their British and American counterparts. To reflect this, one of the films analysed in each of the following chapters is British and the other is American.

Despite these attempts to focus on films that offer a balanced representation of the science fiction that was screened in Britain during the 1950s, there will always be films that do not fit within the norms and which cannot be accounted for by this type of generalisation. Examples of such films will occasionally be noted in the text of the thesis, with their own idiosyncrasies indicated, but there will always be exceptions and the conclusions that I reach are not intended to apply unproblematically to every example of 1950s science fiction cinema.

Notes

- ¹ The body of literature that addresses 1950s science fiction cinema is extremely expansive and, as a result, this review is not intended to be exhaustive. Those authors whose work most clearly demonstrates the intellectual contexts within which this thesis operates are discussed here. Other authors will be cited in the remaining chapters where their arguments become relevant.
- ² Sontag, Susan. 2004. 'The Imagination of Disaster', in Redmond (2004: 40-47). (Originally published in 1965). p.44
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid. p.47.
- ⁶ Ibid. p.46.
- ⁷ Vieth, Errol. 2001. *Screening Science: Contexts, Texts, and Science in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. p.181.
- ⁸ Sobchack, Vivian. 2001. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 2nd edn. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press. (Originally published in 1987). p.21.
- ⁹ Telotte, J. P. 2001. *Science Fiction Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.98-99.
- ¹⁰ Vieth, Errol. 2001. *Screening Science: Contexts, Texts, and Science in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. p.181.
- ¹¹ Humphries, Reynold. 2002. *The American Horror Film: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.57; Crane, Jonathan Lake. 1994. *Terror and Everyday Life*. London: Sage. p.107.
- ¹² Hendershot, Cyndy. 1999. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.1.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Hendershot, Cyndy. 1998. 'Darwin and the Atom: Evolution/Devolution Fantasies in *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, *Them!*, and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*', *Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 25, No. 2. July. pp.319-225.
- ¹⁵ Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.134.
- ¹⁶ Sontag. 'The Imagination of Disaster'. p.44; Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. p.127.
- ¹⁷ Skal, David J. 1993. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. London: Plexus. p.247.
- ¹⁸ Phillips, Kendall R. 2005. *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p.50.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Booker, M. Keith. 2001. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. p.105-106; Geraghty, Lincoln. 2009. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. Oxford: Berg. pp.24-35; Lev, Peter. 2003. *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. p.171; Claerson, Thomas D. 1990. *Understanding Contemporary American Science Fiction: The Formative Period, 1926-1970*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press. p.40.

- ²¹ Crane. *Terror and Everyday Life*. p.102.
- ²² Newman, Kim. 2011. 'Mutants and Monsters', in Jones, McCarthy and Murphy (2011:55-71). p.56.
- ²³ Biskind, Peter. 2001. *Seeing is Believing*. London: Bloomsbury. (Originally published in 1983); Swann, Paul. 1987. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. p.56.
- ²⁴ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.103, 104, 106 and 111.
- ²⁵ Ibid. p.111.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid. p.111 and 140.
- ²⁸ Ibid. p.132.
- ²⁹ Ibid. p.112.
- ³⁰ Booker, M. Keith. 2006. *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p.65.
- ³¹ Grant, Barry Keith. 2010. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. London: BFI. pp.63-69; Rawlinson, Mark. 2009. *American Visual Culture*. Oxford: Berg. p.48; Young, William H. and Nancy K. Young. 2004. *American Popular Culture Through History: The 1950s*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. p.197; McRoy, Jay. 2007. "'Our Reaction Was Only Human': Monstrous Becomings in Abel Ferrara's *Body Snatchers*", in Hand and McRoy (2007: 95-108). pp.96-97.
- ³² Geraghty. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. p.20; Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.17.
- ³³ Booker. *Alternate Americas*. p.66
- ³⁴ Gianos, Phillip L. 1998. *Politics and Politicians in American Film*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p. 140.
- ³⁵ Grant. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. p.68.
- ³⁶ Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. p.64.
- ³⁷ Grant. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. pp.8-9.
- ³⁸ Jancovich. *Rational Fears*.
- ³⁹ Although Jancovich's work addresses the horror genre, he spends a considerable portion of his book discussing the types of films that are addressed by the current thesis.
- ⁴⁰ Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. p.29.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. p.17.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid. p.29.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Noonan, Bonnie. 2005. *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.4.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. p.48.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. pp.133-35 and 138.

⁴⁹ Heffernan, Kevin. 2004. *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1968*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp.16-42; Sanders, Steven M. 2008a. 'Picturing Paranoia: Interpreting *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*', in Sanders (2008b: 55-72).

⁵⁰ Tsutsui, William M. 2007. 'Looking Straight at Them!: Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s', *Environmental History*. Vol.12, No.2. April. pp.237-253 at p.237.

⁵¹ Geraghty. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. p.20

⁵² Lucanio, Patrick. 1987. *Them or Us*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁵³ Ibid. p.viii.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.64.

⁵⁵ Geraghty. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. p.20; Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. p. 17.

⁵⁶ Booker. *Alternate Americas*. p.65; Lucanio. *Them or Us*.

⁵⁷ Hutchings, Peter. 1999. "'We're the Martians Now': British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s", in Hunter (1999b: 33-47) p.33.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.36.

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp.35-36.

⁶⁰ Hutchings, Peter. 1993. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp.37-50.

⁶¹ Conrich, Ian. 1999. 'Trashing London: The British Colossal Creature Film and Fantasies of Mass Destruction', in Hunter (1999b: 88-98).

⁶² Ibid. p.88.

⁶³ Ibid. p.96.

⁶⁴ Street, Sarah. 2009. *British National Cinema*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge. p.88.

⁶⁵ Chibnall, Steve. 1999. 'Alien Women: The Politics of Sexual Difference in British SF Pulp Cinema', in Hunter (1999b: 88-98).

⁶⁶ Chibnall, Steve and Brian McFarlane. 2009. *The British 'B' Film*. London: BFI. pp.282-284.

⁶⁷ Hutchings. "'We're the Martians Now'". pp.36-38.

⁶⁸ Conrich. 'Trashing London'. p.88.

⁶⁹ Street. *British National Cinema*. p.88; Hutchings. "'We're the Martians Now'". p.43.

⁷⁰ Tudor, Andrew. 1989. *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.6.

⁷² Higson, Andrew. 2000. 'The Instability of the National', in Ashby and Higson (2000: 35-47). p. 35.

⁷³ Ibid. p.36.

- ⁷⁴ Higson, Andrew. 1995. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon; Hill, John. 1992. 'The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production', in Petrie (1992: 10-21); Hill, John. 1997. 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation', in Turner (2002: 165-173).
- ⁷⁵ Street. *British National Cinema*. p.1.
- ⁷⁶ MacKillop, Ian and Neil Sinyard. 2003. *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.2.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Harper, Sue and Vincent Porter. 2003. *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ⁷⁹ Chibnall and McFarlane. *The British 'B' Film*; Hutchings, Peter. 2001. *Terence Fisher*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- ⁸⁰ MacKillop and Sinyard. *British Cinema of the 1950s*. p.2.
- ⁸¹ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.132.
- ⁸² Vizzini, Bryan E. 2009. 'Cold War Fears, Cold War Passions: Conservatives and Liberals Square Off in 1950s Science Fiction', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. Vol.26, No.1. January. p.38.
- ⁸³ Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. pp.18-25.
- ⁸⁴ McQuail, Denis. 1997. *Audience Analysis*. London: Sage Publications. p.55.
- ⁸⁵ Hill, John. 'British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation', in Turner (2002: 165-173). p.168.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid. p.170.
- ⁸⁷ Street, Sarah. 2002. *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States*. London: Continuum International.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid. p.4.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid. p.8.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid. p.2.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Swann. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*. p.5.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Maltby, Richard. 2004. 'Introduction: "The Americanisation of the World"', in Stokes and Maltby (2004: 1-20). p.2.
- ⁹⁵ Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics*. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, (eds). Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill. (Originally published in 1916); Barthes, Roland. 2000. *Mythologies*. London: Vintage. (Originally published in 1957).
- ⁹⁶ Barthes. *Mythologies*. p.113.
- ⁹⁷ Storey, John. 2006. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. p.87.
- ⁹⁸ Turner, Graeme. 1999. *Film as Social Practice*. 3rd edn. London: Routledge. p.56.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.57.

¹⁰¹ Chapman, James, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper. 2007a. 'Introduction', in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007b: 1-10). p.3.

¹⁰² Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. 1985. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge; Allen, Robert C. and Douglas Gomery. 1985. *Film History: Theory and Practice*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf; Elsaesser, Thomas. 1986. 'The New Film History', *Sight and Sound*. Vol.55, No.4. Autumn. pp. 246-51. For a good overview of each of these contributions, see Chapman, Glancy and Harper. 'Introduction'. pp.5-6.

¹⁰³ Chapman, Glancy and Harper. 'Introduction'. p.6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. pp.6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Staiger, Janet. 1992. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p.45.

¹⁰⁷ Street, Sarah. 2007. 'British Cinema, American Reception: *Black Narcissus* (1947) and the Legion of Decency', in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007b: 201-214). p.201.

¹⁰⁸ Stacey, Jackie. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. p.55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Tudor, Andrew. 1989. *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. p.5.

¹¹¹ Kuhn, Annette. 2002. *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London: I.B. Tauris. p.3.

¹¹² Ibid. p.9.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Klinger, Barbara. 1997. 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies', *Screen*. Vol.38, No.2. Summer. pp.107-28.

¹¹⁵ Chapman, Glancy and Harper. 'Introduction'. p.7.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Staiger. *Interpreting Films*. p.81.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Klinger. 'Film History Terminable and Interminable'. p.112.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.114.

¹²¹ Ibid. p.113.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Tudor. *Monsters and Mad Scientists*. p.5.

¹²⁴ Biskind. *Seeing is Believing*. p.103, 104, 106 and 111.

Section A:

The Invading Other

Chapter Two: The Communist and the Other in 1950s Science

Fiction Cinema's Depersonalisation Narratives

Introduction

In 1955, the British Council floated the idea of organising two film festivals, one in Britain screening films from the Soviet Union and the other behind the Iron Curtain, showcasing British cinema to the Soviets. The Council itself might have anticipated a cultural exchange, but the involvement of George Jellicoe, a Foreign Office official who handled Soviet relations, suggests that the possibility of spreading pro-western propaganda in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev had not been overlooked. Jellicoe himself certainly intended to seize this opportunity, describing the event to the Council as 'a rare opportunity for giving wide masses of Soviets an inkling of life in the West and of Western art and culture'.¹ However, despite the rarity of this opportunity, in December 1956 the Chairman of the British Council informed A. A. Roschin at the USSR Embassy that British 'public opinion' would make the reciprocal film festivals impossible.² Perhaps there was such a depth of anti-communist sentiment in Britain that the display of Soviet art in London was intolerable, or perhaps citing 'public opinion' was a diplomatic way for the Foreign Office to deny the Soviets their own propaganda opportunity. In either case, the cancellation of such a strategically valuable event suggests that sections of 1950s Britain saw Soviet cinema as potentially very dangerous.

This was not the only moment in which cinema became a battleground in the Cold War ideological struggle. The 1950s science fiction boom has often also been understood in this light. As noted earlier, critics have frequently interpreted those US films that feature a depersonalisation narrative, in which

aliens possess or duplicate human bodies, as expressions of American anxieties about communist infiltration and influence. Peter Biskind's argument is worth citing again in this context: 'possession by [alien] pods – mind stealing, brain eating and body snatching – had the added advantage of being an overt metaphor for Communist brainwashing'.³ As indicated in the previous chapter, Biskind is far from alone in making this claim. M. Keith Booker, for example, has argued that 'the notion of stealthy invaders who essentially take over the minds of normal Americans, converting them to an alien ideology, resonates in an obvious way with the Cold War fear of communist subversion'.⁴ For these scholars, depersonalisation films, including classics of the genre such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), connect the alien with communism, at least as it was imagined by many Americans, since both alter a person's internality in a way that is not betrayed by external, visible signifiers.

However, because this interpretation of the depersonalisation narratives is predicated on an American perception of communism, it cannot explain the responses of audiences outside of the United States. In countries where brainwashing and infiltration manifested in public debate in different forms or where the Soviets were not deemed to be a threat, these films might have been understood quite differently. As the first half of this chapter demonstrates, Britain was one country where the communist threat was articulated differently than it was in America in the 1950s. This raises the possibility that the figure of the alien Other was also understood in different terms on opposite sides of the Atlantic, as suggested by 1950s British film magazine *Picturegoer's* claim that the depersonalisation film *Red Planet* (released in 1952 as *Red Planet Mars*) was 'about Mars, not Communism'.⁵ Sarah Street has explored the differences

between British and American science fiction's Others in terms of the formal qualities of the films themselves, claiming that 'whereas American horror and science-fiction films of the period tend to configure the monster, the 'Other', as relating directly to the 'Red menace', i.e. Communism, the British generic variation is slightly different'.⁶ While later chapters share Street's interest in the other public concerns that shaped British readings of 1950s science fiction cinema, this chapter argues that communism was as likely to have inflected interpretations of these films in Britain as it was in America, but that the specific nature of British public debates about the issue would have framed the figure of the alien Other in unique ways.

This chapter's analysis of 1950s British public debates about communism accounts for two different perspectives on the topic. It begins by addressing the ways in which anti-communist sentiment was expressed and the impact that it might have had on the interpretation of the alien Other in science fiction cinema. The first section below demonstrates that some aspects of the debate displayed a concern with Soviet brainwashing that was similar to that which has been observed in America. However, in Britain subversion and indoctrination were articulated not as local threats to the neighbourhood, as Amy Maria Kenyon has indicated was the case during the US 'reds under the beds' scare, but as threats to what one might call the British Establishment.⁷ This is a term that I use to mean those individuals or groups perceived to represent the British state during the 1950s, amongst whom the key groups discussed in the analysis that follows are the military and the diplomatic services. Each was, in its own way, an emblem of Britain and, as my argument shows, each was perceived at various times during the 1950s to be under threat from communist infiltration. The first section of this chapter consequently

demonstrates that debates about communist subversion in Britain differed from those in America during the 1950s.

The next section explores the ways in which this aspect of 1950s British anti-communist public debate might have inflected the interpretation of two depersonalisation films. Both *It Came from Outer Space* and *Quatermass II* (1957) feature the alien inhabitation, replication or appropriation of human bodies, situating their extraterrestrials alongside those that Biskind has claimed Americans understood as analogues for communists.⁸ However, as this section shows, anxieties about the infiltration of the Establishment made it possible for Britons to draw unique connections between the aliens of these films and communism that would not have been suggested by the discursive environment on the other side of the Atlantic.

The chapter then goes on to examine a different aspect of the 1950s British public understanding of communism. Though there was little pro-communist sentiment evident in public debate at that time, there is evidence to suggest that Britain was in some ways more even-handed than America in its treatment of communists themselves. Building on Reg Whitaker's observation that the McCarthyist witch hunts of the US were never repeated on British shores, a number of examples of British tolerance towards communists during the 1950s are explored.⁹ In examining the softer stance taken by some in Britain, this section complicates our understanding of how the so-called Soviet menace was perceived during the 1950s by demonstrating that not all Britons were party to the staunchly anti-communist sentiment outlined during the first half of the chapter. This new discursive context is then used by the final section to renegotiate the meaning of both *It Came from Outer Space* and *Quatermass II*, demonstrating how they might have been made sense of by a Britons who

were either tolerant of or sympathetic towards communism. Drawing attention to the ways in which these films encourage identification with or greater understanding of the alien Other, it is argued that this often overlooked aspect of some 1950s depersonalisation narratives might have encouraged Britons to reject the demonisation of the communist Other.

By examining readings of 1950s science fiction cinema suggested by its relationship to Britain's multifaceted attitude towards communism, this chapter demonstrates that many divergent and often oppositional interpretations of the genre could have been produced in Britain. Though the previous chapter noted that scholars have also described a range of readings of these films that were available to their American audiences, the British interpretations outlined here differ from their US counterparts because they have been produced in relation to a different set of public debates. This chapter thus contributes to the overarching aims of the thesis by differentiating between British and American understandings of the relationship between communism and the alien, demonstrating that US readings of 1950s science fiction films that discuss this connection cannot necessarily speak to the experiences of British audiences.

Characterising Public Debate: Anti-Communist Sentiment in 1950s

Britain

There were a number of causes for the inflammation of anti-communist sentiment in Britain during the 1950s, but most significant for this chapter was the emergence of a series of defectors within the British Establishment. Perhaps most famous were Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess, who were converted to communism at Cambridge University during the 1930s and who had spied for the Soviets while working in the Foreign Office and the diplomatic

services before their flight to Moscow in 1951. Their defections contributed to what Sheila Kerr frames as a 1950s loss of confidence in the British Establishment.¹⁰ This section demonstrates that defections such as these focused British anxieties about communist influence and infiltration on the Establishment itself rather than on the community, as had been the case in the United States.

An early example of the threat posed to the British Establishment by infiltration and defection came in 1953 during Operation Big Switch when prisoners from both sides of the recent Korean War were exchanged. The war itself, fought between June 1950 and July 1953, pitted the capitalist Republic of Korea, with backing from the UN, including Britain and the United States, against the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea, supported by the USSR and the People's Republic of China. One of the main stumbling blocks during the peace negotiations that concluded the war was the communist nations' insistence that all captured personnel be returned to their home countries, whether they wanted to go or not. America in particular objected, wishing to allow Korean troops to defect. Eventually the communist countries relented, but only on the understanding that western personnel too would not be forced to return home. During the conflict, one thousand and sixty British servicemen and women went missing or were taken prisoner.¹¹ Though few opted to remain in China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a handful of Americans and one Scot chose to stay behind when their fellow prisoners of war were repatriated. Royal Marine Andrew Condron refused to return to Britain, choosing instead to remain behind in communist China where he remained 'lively and cheerful' and began teaching English at the Peking Language Institute.¹²

While Callum MacDonald is correct that ‘the bitter debate about collaboration’ that occurred in America after the revelation that not all of the country’s soldiers would be returning home ‘never occurred in Britain’, this should not be confused with the British public being either unaware of or uninterested in Condrón’s defection.¹³ Though he never worked for the Soviets and did eventually return to Britain in the early 1960s, contemporary media reports reveal that during the 1950s Condrón was framed by British public debate as a traitor. *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, reported that Condrón and the American defectors ‘rode off into North Korea...and carried banners bearing the Picasso peace dove, portraits of Mao Tse-tung, and North Korean flags’.¹⁴ As Patrick Brantlinger argues, the British military had a long history of being glorified by the public during the colonial era and had only recently returned victorious from the Second World War, so the suggestion that one of their troops had been surrounded by pacifist and communist imagery while waving the flag of the enemy would have likely generated a certain degree of public concern.¹⁵

Condrón’s defection was not the only incident to have raised suspicion about communist infiltration in the British Armed Forces during this period. In October 1953, three months after the end of the Korean War, *The Times* reported that fusilier Patrick E. Lyndon, a prisoner of war who had been released by the communist allies, had been arrested on his return to Britain and made to appear before a court martial on charges of ‘cowardice in the face of the enemy’.¹⁶ Lyndon now seems to have had no intention of defecting and was simply frightened by the violence that surrounded him in Korea, but *The Times* reported that ‘Lyndon muttered *towshon*, which was Chinese for “I surrender”’ while cowering on the floor of a trench.¹⁷ Given this event’s proximity to

Condrón's defection, the suggestion that Lyndon had learned some Chinese, and indeed that he had learned that particular phrase, was enough to create at least a hint of treachery. To make matters worse, Lyndon was 'with the first group of returning prisoners of war from Korea', souring what would otherwise have been a joyous period of celebration at the return of Britain's war heroes.¹⁸

These were not merely isolated incidents. There was a series of similar revelations of apparent communist influence in the British military and the militaries of other comparable western nations. In 1956, *The Manchester Guardian* reported that the War Office had accused 'Driver Douglas Thomson, of Old Aberdeen, who had been recalled as a reservist to 120 Company, R.A.S.C.' of being 'an active communist'.¹⁹ In 1951, *The Observer* suggested that there was significant communist influence in the French 'civil service, army and police'.²⁰ In 1952, *The Times* recorded an organised attempt by Greek communists to infiltrate that nation's army.²¹ The US military was the subject of a series of investigations led by various Senators, notably the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy, into alleged communist sympathies, each reported in British newspapers.²² Throughout the early 1950s, the British were confronted with the notion that western militaries around the world were susceptible to communist influence. The cases of Condrón, Lyndon and Thomson underlined the severity of this threat at home, demonstrating that the British armed forces were far from immune to communist subversion.

Via media reporting, cracks had begun to appear, however fine, in the edifice of the British army's image and reputation. Her Majesty's Armed Forces, a well respected emblem of the British Establishment both at home and abroad, had been tainted by the suggestion that communist-influenced traitors lurked in its ranks. In 1955, Condrón cemented this idea by writing a piece for the

communist propaganda pamphlet, *Thinking Soldiers: By Men Who Fought in Korea*.²³ Decades earlier, the World War One poets, such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, had begun to disillusion the British public about the nature of war by recording its true horror. In a similar manner, albeit to a lesser extent, media reports about Condron, Lyndon and Thomson contributed to the disillusionment of the British public about their Establishment, a process that would continue throughout the 1950s and 1960s via events such as the Suez Crisis, discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, and the Profumo Affair.

An even more sensational example of communist infiltration in the British Establishment was provided by the disappearance and eventual reappearance of Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess, the two spies mentioned briefly above. Maclean, a Foreign Office official, and Burgess, an intelligence officer based at the British embassy in Washington, caused great public intrigue when both vanished from Maclean's family home on the evening of his thirty-eighth birthday, 25th May 1951. Despite the offer of a £1000 reward, no concrete information on their whereabouts was forthcoming. As the years passed, public interest in the case refused to die down and suspicion of Soviet involvement began to mount. Government figures in Britain attempted to avoid press questions on the affair, but Anthony Adamthwaite has argued that this was ultimately counterproductive since 'the clumsy attempts at damage limitation only served to keep the hue and cry in full swing'.²⁴ There were frequent reports of sightings of the missing officials from across Europe, sometimes in Paris, sometimes in Kiev, but always just out of reach of reporters and officials so none could be qualified. So strong was public interest in the case that even three years after the disappearances *The Times* was still using Burgess and Maclean to sell largely unconnected stories. For example, in a report on the

defection of Vladimir Petrov, 'the former third secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Canberra', *The Times* reported that 'a spokesman said yesterday that from information so far received in London it is clear that Petrov has no first-hand knowledge of the [Burgess and Maclean] affair and no detailed knowledge whatsoever'.²⁵ Petrov's defection was significant in its own right, but *The Times* ran this story under the headline 'No News of Burgess and Maclean', presumably unafraid of advertising the lack of content in the story because the draw of these names alone would attract a readership.

In 1956, half a decade after their initial disappearance, both diplomats finally reappeared at a Moscow press conference, speaking to confirm their defection to the USSR. In Britain, despite years of public suspicion, there was widespread shock at the notion that Foreign Office officials could have been working for the Soviets. As Sheila Kerr indicates, 'in British newspapers stories about Burgess and Maclean became more aggressive after their appearance in Moscow'.²⁶ In reporting the text of Burgess and Maclean's statement from Moscow, for example, *The Times* used the subheading 'Grounds for Fear'.²⁷ In the statement itself this phrase refers to Maclean and Burgess' grounds for fearing that the British and American authorities were not actively seeking peace with the USSR, but abstracted from this context as a subheading it reads more like a description of the statement's contents to the British reader. If figures so prominent in the British political and diplomatic Establishment had been secretly working for the Soviets then truly there were grounds for fear. The ensuing sense of public outrage at this case was of such significance that the Royal National Lifeboat Institution declined a donation from Burgess that he made in lieu of payment for an article that he wrote for the *Sunday Express*. The R.N.L.I. announced:

The institution is a charity which serves the people of all nations in peace and in war. It has no concern with politics and it is continuously in need of funds, which it welcomes from all quarters. However, in the peculiar circumstances in which this sum of money has been offered, the institution feels compelled to decline the offer.²⁸

The fact that 'a charity which serves the people of all nations in peace and in war' and 'is continuously in need of funds' was unwilling to accept a donation from Burgess suggests the depth of feeling about his defection in 1950s Britain.

The press did little to quell these concerns in the weeks that followed the Moscow press conference, habitually referring to Burgess and Maclean through linguistic constructions that simultaneously stressed both their positions in the British Establishment and their defection. Phrases such as 'the British diplomatists who went over to Russia' or 'the British diplomat who disappeared from Britain', typical of the ways in which the British press identified Burgess and Maclean during 1956, contained a microcosm of their defection.²⁹ By first establishing their status as British diplomats before reminding the reader that they abandoned their homeland, this type of phraseology ensured that, for months after the truth about the disappearances was revealed, the British public were still being reminded that communists had successfully infiltrated the diplomatic services and that the British Establishment was vulnerable to such threats.

However, the army and the diplomatic services were not the only sectors of the British Establishment that were seen to be under pressure from the Soviets. As James Rusbridger has pointed out, the 'defections of Burgess and Maclean...naturally came as a great shock to the British establishment and were embarrassing because of the inept way MI5 handled the matter', suggesting that Britain's secret services were failing to protect the nation from the communist threat.³⁰ Furthermore, in their initial statement from Moscow

Burgess and Maclean repeatedly stressed their involvement with specific prestigious institutions in Britain. They wrote, for instance, that 'at [the University of] Cambridge we had both been Communists' and that they had joined the diplomatic services 'because we thought, wrongly it is now clear to us, that in the public service we could do more to put these issues into practical effect than elsewhere'.³¹ This statement, run in a respected national newspaper, made it quite clear that the Foreign Office and the University of Cambridge, both institutions at the heart of the British Establishment, had contained communist agents. Indeed, Burgess and Maclean indicated that the Foreign Office itself was a significant draw for communist sympathisers intent on revolution. As such, the secret services, the university system and the Foreign Office joined the broader diplomatic community and the army as sectors of the British Establishment that were perceived to be vulnerable to Soviet infiltration during the 1950s.

Despite raising concerns about the British Establishment, each of the defections discussed in this section was closely associated with foreign locations. Lyndon and Condrón were both supposedly corrupted far away from home in Korea. Although Burgess and Maclean became interested in communism while studying at Cambridge, they only fell under press scrutiny after they fled Britain and were only confirmed as communists in the public eye after they emerged in Moscow. Indeed, Maclean worked within the Foreign Office and so was professionally involved with other nations, while Burgess had been based abroad, albeit in Washington, prior to his disappearance. In this sense, the threat to the Establishment was not characterised by its association with the local as, for example, in Americans' fears of communists operating in their own communities, but was largely imagined to originate outside of Britain's

borders, only to be brought into the country by those officials that it corrupted. As this shows, although America and Britain were seemingly united in their opposition to communism during the 1950s, this opposition did not manifest uniformly in the two countries and the fear of Soviet infiltration was often felt differently on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

Reading 1950s Depersonalisation Narratives: Anti-Communist Attitudes and the Alien Other

In late 1953, as Jack Arnold's science fiction classic, *It Came from Outer Space*, made its way through the cinemas of Britain's town and cities, its listings shared space in Britain's newspapers with reports of Andrew Condrón's refusal to return home after the Korean War and Patrick E. Lyndon's supposed intention to defect. In this climate Arnold's film might have been particularly relevant since it presents a world of mistrust and suspicion in which familiar figures leave the safety of their known surroundings only to return possessed by an alien invader. According to Peter Biskind, depersonalisation narratives such as this were read in America as warnings about the communist brainwashing which 'had just turned GIs into Reds in Korea', a reading predicated on the similarity between US perceptions of communist collectivism and the victims of alien dehumanisation.³² However, it is not the dehumanisation itself that makes *It Came* particularly relevant to British concerns about the subversion of the Establishment, but the fact that Arnold's film presents unfamiliar locations as corruptive. Given that Britain had seen figures such as Condrón and Lyndon influenced by an unfamiliar ideology while away from home in Korea, *It Came* might have allowed Britons to explore their own anxieties about the communist infiltration of the British Establishment abroad. Similarly, Britain's own

Quatermass II, a film that portrayed public figures under the influence of alien invaders, was released in the aftermath of the Burgess and Maclean defections, raising the possibility that its own vision of an infiltrated British Establishment might have been relevant to the contemporary concerns of British viewers. By connecting the alien Other and its depersonalised victims with the figure of the defector in the British Establishment, this section suggests that the atmosphere of mistrust into which both of these films were released might have allowed their various signifiers to give voice to contemporary concerns about Soviet influence in Britain.

It Came from Outer Space tells the story of John Putnam who, alongside his girlfriend Ellen Fields, witnesses the crash landing of an alien spacecraft in the desert near the Arizonian town of Sand Rock. Mistaken for a meteor by the locals, the ship is hidden in its crater by falling rocks and Putnam's protestations about what he saw out in the desert are ignored. When some of the locals, including Fields, begin to act strangely, Putnam tracks the creatures that escaped from the spacecraft to a nearby mine. Here, one of the aliens explains that they have been replicating the bodies of particular humans in order to infiltrate society and acquire materials to fix their spaceship. Before Putnam can help, the locals begin to suspect that they are under threat and form an angry mob outside the mineshaft. Putnam holds them back long enough for the craft to be repaired and the aliens depart, releasing their prisoners before they leave.

Scholars have tended to be cautious when positioning this film in relation to the threat of communist brainwashing as it was perceived in America during the 1950s. Mark Jancovich, for example, has argued that 'if the film resembles the depersonalisation narratives in which the townspeople are replaced by apparently cold, robotic aliens, the situation is not used to suggest the "rational

conformity” of the aliens, but rather it is used to play with the audience’s perceptions and expectation’.³³ For Jancovich, *It Came* is subversive in its use of the depersonalisation narrative and does not connect the alien with the type of brainwashed conformity that commentators such as Biskind saw in American stereotypes of communists.³⁴ Similarly, in a DVD special feature that accompanied the 2002 release of *It Came*, Paul M. Jensen points out the fallacy of positioning the aliens as invaders or infiltrators since they ‘don’t want to be here. They didn’t come to meet us. They didn’t come to tell us anything...Their car broke down’.³⁵ Scholars have instead tended to see *It Came* as an attack on the anti-communist hysteria that took root in America in the 1950s. Peter Biskind has argued that the film ‘begins as a radical-right film, but is gradually transformed into a left-wing film as it becomes clear that the aliens mean us no harm’.³⁶ This is a perspective shared by the film’s director, Jack Arnold. He tells us:

It Came from Outer Space certainly *did* talk about hysteria, paranoia, all these things - that was the whole point...The moral of *It Came from Outer Space* is: Don’t destroy things just because you don’t understand them.³⁷

Although I agree that there is nothing in the film itself to suggest that it was intended as a discussion of the communist threat, the ways in which its paranoia is constructed held particular resonance with 1950s British fears that Soviets were converting Establishment figures when they went abroad. Within the context of a British audience newly aware of Andrew Condron’s defection deep inside enemy territory and Patrick Lyndon’s suspected treachery on the battlefields of Korea, it is significant that *It Came from Outer Space* posits the threat of possession as something that occurs elsewhere, outside of known society. To construct this sense of a dangerous ‘elsewhere’ the film poses the familiarity and security of the town against the dangers of the desert that

surrounds it. In this regard, I disagree with scholars such as Mark Jancovich who have framed the desert as a welcome, if slightly eerie, respite from the repressive 'conformity and intolerance' of the town.³⁸ For Jancovich, the desert is 'used to illustrate the insignificance of the town and its experiences in comparison to the vastness of nature'.³⁹ Although I agree that the town represents stifling conformity, Jancovich's characterisation of the desert as a positive space ignores the lengths to which the film goes to stress its inhospitableness. At one point Putnam takes Fields out into the desert and, staring resolutely out at the vast expanse, announces that 'it's alive...Oh no, it's alive and waiting for you, ready to kill you if you go too far. The sun will get you, the cold at night. A thousand ways the desert can kill'. The desert is certainly 'a place of beauty and mystery', as Jancovich asserts, but its beauty, though alluring, has a nightmarish quality.⁴⁰ It is presented as both drastically dangerous and radically Other, marking it as a place in which human society does not, and perhaps cannot, exist. Although ultimately the aliens in the wilderness are more enlightened than the people of the town, who eventually become an angry mob, the desert is characterised as a place outside of civilisation.

This contrast between the radically unknowable desert and the familiar, if repressive, town allows the film to represent unfamiliar places as transformative spaces into which people stray and are never the same again. George and Frank, two telephone line technicians who become the first humans to have their identities stolen by the aliens, live in the town but work in the desert. It is while out on a job that they are attacked and replicated. Only when they leave the familiarity of civilisation do they become contaminated by the alien presence. Similarly, the second group of people to be attacked also go missing

while out in the wilderness and Fields herself is duplicated after being abducted from a desert highway. Indeed, every time the aliens kidnap a victim and steal his or her identity, the attack is staged in the desert. The desert is thus characterised as a dangerous hinterland into which people disappear and return altered. In *It Came from Outer Space*, the impression is given that leaving the confines of the familiar exposes one to the risk of possession and dehumanisation.

This is not an idea that is unique to *It Came from Outer Space*. The contaminative 'elsewhere' is a trope that appeared in a number of science fiction's depersonalisation narratives throughout the 1950s. The British film *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955), whose sequel will be discussed later in this section, tells the story of Victor Caroon, an astronaut who returns to the familiarity of Earth from the wilderness of space infected by an alien life form. *Invaders from Mars* (1954) sees a boy's father go to investigate the mysterious landing site of a flying saucer only to return cold, distant and dehumanised. The titular beasts of *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) take on the voices and personalities of humans who leave the relative security of their base camp for the local jungles. In each of these examples, as in *It Came from Outer Space*, unfamiliar spaces are posited as dangerous places in which people become possessed by alien forces.

This sense that unfamiliar locations could be contaminative and depersonalising was mirrored in the era's reports of British defectors. By 1953, when *It Came from Outer Space* was released, Burgess and Maclean had already fled Britain for a then-unknown location. As speculation about their communist leanings gathered, their flight tied together notions of the Soviet infiltration of the Establishment and the dangers that lurked outside of Britain's

familiar borders. Similarly, the defection of Andrew Condon in Korea framed him as a representative of the Establishment who had ventured into unfamiliar terrain and had become possessed by communist ideology. Indeed, *The Manchester Guardian* stressed that he and his fellow defectors had ‘succumbed to Communist “brainwashing” while fighting abroad.’⁴¹ Just like Condon, Patrick Lyndon was also posited as a man who had left the security of the familiar, ventured into the Korean unknown and had there fallen victim to a dangerous outside influence. In these terms, their journeys mirrored those made by Ellen Fields, George and Frank in *It Came from Outer Space*, Victor Caroon in *The Quatermass Xperiment*, the boy’s father in *Invaders from Mars* and the many others who fell victim to possession in the wildernesses of 1950s science fiction films. That Fields as a schoolteacher and Caroon as an astronaut represented the educational and military Establishments respectively could only have served to underline such connections since the Establishment was one of the principal sites on which British fears of communist infiltration were focused. These depersonalisation narratives were thus of relevance to the British public debate about communist indoctrination and infiltration.

Not all 1950s science fiction films require this level of decoding in order to find within them a commentary on communist infiltration. *Quatermass II*, adapted by the famed British film studio Hammer from a 1955 BBC TV serial and released in cinemas in 1957, contains much more obvious allusions to the subversion of the Establishment than *It Came*. In this film, Professor Bernard Quatermass has been having trouble securing funding to establish a human base on the moon. Distracted from these frustrations by a shower of unusual meteorites over Wyncroft Flats, he goes to investigate only to discover a version of his lunar site constructed out in the British countryside. After being

removed from the area by a group of armed men with strange markings on their skin, Quatermass meets with Vincent Broadhead, a Member of Parliament, and arranges an ill-fated tour of the facility. Their visit to the site leaves Broadhead dead and Quatermass is chased from the complex. Believing the structure to be housing the vanguard of an extraterrestrial invasion force which has possessed the guards and various senior officials, Quatermass joins up with a group of disgruntled locals who have been involved in construction work at the plant and storms the site. Once inside, he exposes the aliens to oxygen, reasoning that Earth's atmosphere could be toxic to them. However, the creatures emerge from the domes that have been housing them and, towering above the facility, begin to destroy their surroundings. Identifying an orbiting asteroid as the staging post for the invading army, Quatermass orders his assistant to launch a rocket to destroy it. This plan succeeds and the monsters are instantly defeated. The strange marks vanish from the bodies of those who had fallen under their influence and life returns to normal.

Quatermass II had its premiere on 24th May 1957 and began circulation on 17th June. These dates are significant because they indicate that the film was watched in Britain during a period of heightened anxiety about communist infiltration of the Establishment. It had only been four months since Burgess and Maclean spoke to the press in Moscow to confirm their defection, an event that reignited fears of communist subversion and refocused suspicion on the Establishment, specifically the Foreign Office. As *Quatermass II* was ushered into British cinemas, this story was still filling the pages of Britain's newspapers. *The Manchester Guardian*, for example, reported on an American investigation of the spies on 24th May, just ten days before the film received its premiere.⁴² On 14th July, a little under a month after the film was released in Britain and

while it was still being screened in some of the nation's cinemas, the same paper announced a trip made by Burgess' mother to Moscow to visit her son.⁴³ Hammer's *Quatermass II* entered the British public consciousness at a time when communist influence within the Establishment was still a very prominent issue.

Given this context of reception, it is telling that Peter Hutchings has identified 'a kind of iconoclasm' present in the transformation of 'the Shell Haven Refinery in Essex', where the external shots of the secret facility were filmed, 'into an alien base'.⁴⁴ For Hutchings, 'one consequence of this mixing of the familiar and the strange, with the strange often concealed within the familiar and close to home, is that audiences are invited to look at their own world in a different light, seeing it to a certain extent as itself an alien world'.⁴⁵ This alienation of the familiar mirrors the British perception of the Establishment during this period, with trusted individuals, institutions and organisations suddenly subverted and rendered ambiguous.

Quatermass II's narrative, replete with secretive invaders and their traitorous, possessed and frequently influential agents, was ripe for interpretation as an expression of anxieties about Soviet brainwashing and the British Establishment. Bill Warren has argued that *Quatermass II* goes one step further than even *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the quintessential American depersonalisation film, in its paranoia because 'the aliens are *already* in control of the government (or at least part of it) when the story opens' (Warren's emphasis).⁴⁶ Government signs warn visitors away from the plant, while 'an official government announcement' attempts to cover up Broadhead's disappearance. Senior police figures are also shown to have the strange markings, the signs of alien possession, on their skin. The aliens' control over

the government and the police is particularly significant since both of these institutions represent the British Establishment. The political commentary that *Quatermass II* might have offered to its domestic audiences is barely obscured, with the film's possessed Establishment figures representing the brainwashed Establishment figures of the British public imagination. In this sense, the alien Other served as an obvious allusion to the communist Other since both were framed as the bearers of a dangerous and subversive influence over the British Establishment. This reading was even suggested by the promotional materials that surrounded the film, for example in the stress that *Picture Show* magazine placed on the involvement of the Establishment in the invasion when it explicitly described the alien base as 'a Government secret'.⁴⁷ The film's paranoid vision of powerful British public figures acting against their own people while under the influence of an alien invasion force played out a national fantasy of communist infiltration of the Establishment that had been inflamed when Andrew Condon refused to return home from Korea four years earlier and which had been reinvigorated just four months before by the confirmation from Moscow of Burgess and Maclean's defection.

While *It Came from Outer Space* allowed Britons to negotiate their anxieties about communist infiltration by mirroring their concerns about the contaminative and dangerous nature of unknown and unfamiliar places, *Quatermass II* invoked these same fears in a different manner by explicitly depicting the subversion of the British Establishment. Crucially for this project, these readings resulted from the particular nature of British fears of Soviet subversion, demonstrating that the nation's uniquely inflected anxieties produced specifically British readings of 1950s science fiction's depersonalisation narratives. Although these British readings were sometimes

superficially similar to their American counterparts, in that both connected the perceived infiltration of a society by communists with the possession of human bodies by alien creatures, they were not identical and were not arrived at in the same way.

Characterising Public Debate: Tolerance Towards Communists in 1950s

Britain

Despite the fears expressed by some Britons about the subversion of the Establishment, it would be unfair to characterise the nation itself as essentially anti-communist during the 1950s, particularly in the early years of the decade. The anxieties about Soviet infiltration outlined above presented only one aspect of the public understanding of communism. Although in the later years of the decade, and certainly in the decades to follow, Britain's stance towards the USSR and the spread of communism would harden, there is some evidence to suggest that, at the outset of the 1950s at least, British public opinion on the matter was much more varied than it would become. Curtis Keeble, for example, draws attention to the popular ambivalence towards communism during the early 1950s when he argues that 'there was in fact little concern with the Soviet Union in the British general elections of 1950 and 1951'.⁴⁸ Moreover, David Childs has suggested that support for the Communist Party of Great Britain was significant in workers' unions as diverse as the National Union of Mine Workers, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Clerical and Administrative Workers and the Scientific Workers during this era.⁴⁹ He writes that 'even in the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), Bert Papworth, the Communist busmen's leader, had been elected in 1944 as one of its two representatives on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) General

Council'.⁵⁰ Although the swell of support in many workers' unions was not repeated throughout the British population at large, it does indicate that there was at least one small pocket of Britons who were positively disposed towards communism. This section builds on that suggestion, showing that the British were much more diverse in their attitude towards communism than the first half of the chapter allowed for.

The way in which the defection of Andrew Condron was reported in some British newspapers suggests an underlying tolerance towards communism and communists in sections of 1950s British society. *The Manchester Guardian*, itself a left-leaning newspaper, reported in 1953 that Condron's father had sent his son a letter begging him to return to Scotland. He told the paper in late September that 'I didn't reproach him but told him how we had been looking forward to going to Southampton to meet him. Even if he has become a Communist why doesn't he come home? He can be a Communist here if he wants to'.⁵¹ The public suggestion that it would be acceptable for Condron to live openly as a communist in Britain draws a marked contrast to the anti-communist hysteria of the United States at this time. As Ellen Schrecker describes in her history of McCarthyism, so fearful were the American authorities of the threat of communism that the right to free speech, so fundamental in the US, was placed at risk.⁵² Condron's father's public expression of his belief that communists could live freely in Britain stands in sharp relief to that type of repressive anxiety. While this is certainly not evidence of widespread or official tolerance of communism in Britain, and is perhaps best viewed in the context of a father's grief at his separation from his son, the following days and weeks saw no letters published in *The Manchester Guardian* to refute Condron's father's assessment of the situation or to chastise his desire

to welcome a communist into Britain. While it is certainly possible that such letters were received but not printed by the newspaper, Condron's father's suggestion that Britain was, to some extent, tolerant of communism entered the public consciousness unchallenged and untempered.

Other debates held elsewhere in the public sphere similarly suggest that the public attitude towards communism in Britain during the 1950s was less extreme than that which was being adopted in America. One such debate focused on the role of the BBC in the British general elections of 1950, 1951 and 1955. As Andrew Defty points out in his study of British and American collaboration on anti-communist propaganda, although the BBC cooperated with government efforts in this area, there was a significant divide between the bombastic tone of the US propaganda broadcasts, which were branded as the Voice of America (VOA), and the BBC's own, more measured output. Defty indicates that 'the most vigorous anti-communists preferred' the VOA to the BBC because, as he quotes Christopher Warner, Assistant Secretary at the Foreign Office responsible for the Information Research Department, there was a sharp contrast between 'the vigorous American and the balanced British' material.⁵³ Other historians, too, have argued that the BBC had a problematic relationship with the nation's official anti-communist stance. Although, as John Jenks writes in his assessment of the British news media during the Cold War, 'when the government shifted to open anti-communism in early 1948 the BBC followed', he characterises the BBC as being slow moving in this regard and suggests that it consequently became a cause for concern amongst the British authorities.⁵⁴ In March of that same year the BBC dismissed three personnel as a result of their suspected communist sympathies, but even this did little to ease official concerns and shortly afterwards one MP informed the House of

Commons that he believed there still to be significant communist influence within the broadcaster.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that, as Defty notes, the BBC would carry anti-communist propaganda in later years, in the early 1950s its political outlook was not as clear-cut.⁵⁶

One example of the BBC's antagonistic relationship with the anti-communist efforts of the government came as early as 1950, when *The Times* reported that the broadcaster had been attacked in the House of Lords for allowing 'the continuation of a harmful series called "Soviet Views"'.⁵⁷ This radio programme, more widely known as *The Soviet View*, was broadcast on a monthly basis beginning in 1948 and continuing until 1958. The broadcasts comprised a digest of news and comment taken from Soviet domestic media. Given his well documented anti-communist stance, it is hardly surprising that Lord Vansittart, who delivered this attack on the BBC in the House of Lords, would be angered that Soviet opinions were being distributed to the British people by the national broadcaster itself, but he was not alone in his outrage. *The Times* shared Vansittart's dim view of this programme. 'Could anything be more mistaken', the newspaper asked, 'than to give the Communists broadcasting time during the election?'⁵⁸ The article even quotes Vansittart himself who argues that 'what is fundamentally wrong is that the BBC share the delusion that Communism is just another philosophy. Either they must change that notion or we must change management'.⁵⁹ Both Vansittart and *The Times* were clearly deeply angered by the BBC's decision, providing further evidence that, as Jenks suggests, the shift in BBC policy against communism was slow enough to be perceived by some as providing tacit support to the extreme political left during this transition period.⁶⁰

The fact that a programme such as *The Soviet View* was aired by Britain's public service broadcaster during the 1950s adds weight to the argument that communism was treated differently by some in Britain from the way it was treated in the US. Given that Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunts were at their height during this period, with the media coming under particularly intense scrutiny, it would have been all but impossible for a similar programme to have been broadcast in America. Perhaps the closest that the US media came to this was Edward Murrow's celebrated 1954 editions of *See It Now*, a national news and documentary television series, in which he challenged McCarthy's staunchly conservative and reactionary outlook. Although Robert L. Ivie has claimed that the public response to these broadcasts meant that 'McCarthy's iron grip on public opinion had been broken', attested to by the fact that his political career went into decline shortly after Murrow's broadcasts, it would be a mistake to presume that this was the end of strident anti-communist sentiment in the United States.⁶¹ Susan L. Brinson, for example, has traced the Red Scare not through McCarthyism but through the work of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and found that it continued in some form until at least 1960.⁶² Into the mid-1970s the US was engaged in the Vietnam War in an attempt to combat the spread of communism abroad. Murrow clearly did not end America's anti-communist hysteria, but even if he did rein in its worst domestic excesses his contribution never went to the extreme of giving communist commentary a platform in the national media, unlike *The Soviet View* did in Britain. Up until the end of the 1950s the US media was scrutinised to varying degrees for pro-communist sentiment, but in Britain the BBC was actively engaged in giving voice to Soviet perspectives. Both nations held impassioned debates about communist sympathies in the

media, but, because of the different degrees to which this altered the regulatory atmospheres in the two countries, the BBC was able to go much further than any US television or radio station could by providing communists with airtime.

Vansittart's anger had little effect on BBC policy in 1950 and the following year similar complaints were made by Lord Craigavon, the president of the Listener's Association, in relation to the broadcasting of the opinions of the Communist Party of Great Britain. According to *The Manchester Guardian*, Craigavon complained that the BBC had allowed 'what may often appear unreasonable minorities...to continue to express their views. This is dangerous and appears to give a loop-hole for the broadcasting of Communist propaganda'.⁶³ Despite the gathering force of Establishment opinion against it, the BBC maintained that it was obliged to treat all significant political parties in an equal manner and that it was not a decision but a duty to give airtime to the Communist Party. As Andrew Crisell argues, the BBC 'was, and is, obliged...to provide a political balance' in its reporting.⁶⁴ Although this should not be misconstrued as the BBC offering support to the Communist Party, by featuring them in its programming it did afford them an air of legitimacy that their American counterparts could only have dreamed of. Although it was later reported that the BBC refused to allow the Communist Party to broadcast its views before the 1955 election, this decision was reportedly taken on the grounds that at that point it did not have enough support to qualify for airtime according to the BBC's regulations.⁶⁵ Despite the actions of Joseph McCarthy and the FCC in America, in Britain the Communist Party was treated, by the BBC at least, like any other political party in the early and mid-1950s.

In this context, perhaps Condrón's father's suggestion that his son could have lived in Britain as a communist seems more realistic. There were other

communists living openly in Britain, a national Communist Party that had a voice on the BBC and a regular slot on the radio given over to commentary from within the Soviet Union. Although this is insufficient evidence on which to base a claim that Britain was not overwhelmingly anti-communist in the 1950s, it does seem that some institutions and some individuals projected into the public sphere the idea that Britain, while not being overtly welcoming to communists, was at least tolerant of them, and certainly more so than America. Indeed, as early as 1948 at least one British official had voiced the opinion that 'Britain could use its influence to encourage the Americans to be more subtle in their [anti-communist] propaganda'.⁶⁶ While there was an ever increasing suspicion, fuelled in part by the media, that the Establishment was vulnerable to communist infiltration, these anxieties were tempered by another, perhaps more marginal, strand of public debate that sought to afford communists the same rights and privileges as everyone else. While America was attempting to purge the spectre of Soviet influence from both public and private life, Britain, while certainly not pro-communist, was more nuanced in its approach to the issue. The communist might have been a political Other for most Britons, but it was not always a source of anxiety.

Reading 1950s Depersonalisation Narratives: Tolerance of the Communist and the Alien Other

The readings of 1950s depersonalisation narratives outlined in the first half of the chapter were unlikely to have occurred to Britons who did not recognise communism as a source of anxiety. These individuals understood Soviet Otherness in different ways to those who held firm anti-communist beliefs. As this section argues, such perspectives allow a different range of

meanings to emerge from *It Came from Outer Space* and *Quatermass II*. I suggest below that the depersonalisation narratives were able to offer validation of the belief that the Other was not something to provoke anxiety but to be better understood. By breaking down the familiar binary of good human/bad alien, the readings outlined below suggest the outlook of those within British society who, while they might still have equated the communist and the alien Other, did not necessarily recognise this Otherness as a source of fear. In the words of Jack Arnold, director of *It Came*, these films told their audiences not to 'try to read evil into what is not understandable. And don't be afraid of the unknown'.⁶⁷

It Came suggests such readings through its use of point of view shots. This first becomes apparent during an early encounter with an alien creature as it follows Fields and Putnam along a desert highway. As these characters drive home, one of the aliens suddenly appears and looms before them in the road. The camera is positioned in the back seat of the car, looking over the human characters' shoulders and through the windscreen at the creature. The audience's viewpoint consequently approximates that of Putnam and Fields. This type of shot has frequently been understood by scholars such as Jackie Stacey as one means by which a film can foster identification between its characters and the audience, suggesting that *It Came* here encourages its viewers to share Putnam and Fields' horror at the alien.⁶⁸

However, the same technique is also used elsewhere in the film to subvert this pattern of identification. The film contains several sequences in which the camera's perspective matches that of one of the creatures. After the first alien emerges from the crashed ship and begins exploring the surrounding landscape, for example, a point of view shot is used to suggest that the

audience is seeing the scene through the eyes of the creature. This is emphasised by the superimposition of a series of strange, undulating circles in the centre of the image, presumably a feature of the alien's physiology of sight. This sequence, which invites the audience to share the alien's point of view, reverses the perspectives at work in the desert highway scene, encouraging identification not with the humans, but with the creature. As such, *It Came* refuses to allow its audience to demonise the alien Other, asking them instead to consider events for both human and alien viewpoints.

There is some evidence that a number of British viewers both understood and enjoyed this manipulation of perspectives. In *Picturegoer* magazine, Donovan Pedelty stressed how effective he believed 'Arnold's directorial trick of putting us behind the enormous eye of the visitor from outer space' to be.⁶⁹ Henry Lane, from the same publication, picked up on the fact that the aliens of this film were not 'villainously moronic monsters: they behave in a reasonably credible human fashion - or better-than-human fashion'.⁷⁰ Although such reviews do not overtly connect the point of view shots with the film's refusal to demonise the alien, both of these features were commented on in the British press, suggesting that they did have resonance for British audiences.

Perhaps this aspect of *It Came* might have been particularly appealing to Britons who had been exposed to the viewpoints of communists through the BBC, both during the 1950 and 1951 elections and via *The Soviet View*, and had found them to be different but not threatening. While Lord Vansittart and Lord Craigavon framed communists as radical and dangerous Others, the BBC had shown that this was not necessarily the case, treating both the Communist Party of Great Britain and Soviet commentators fairly and allowing communist perspectives to inform national debates. For many in Britain, not least Andrew

Condron's father, the communist was not necessarily seen as the enemy during the 1950s. That messages of tolerance towards the Other could also be found in *It Came from Outer Space's* treatment of its aliens suggests that this was a film that was capable of speaking to the concerns of those sections of British society that did not share the paranoid anti-communist attitudes evident elsewhere in the country and in the United States.

The relationship that *Quatermass II* bore to the communist Other in 1950s Britain can be similarly complicated. Peter Hutchings, for example, has interpreted the section of the film in which the locals, led by Quatermass, break into the facility, occupy the pressure control room and attempt to kill the invasion force as a 'representation of industrial workers rising up to fight their alien bosses'.⁷¹ Hutchings is primarily interested in the commentary that this sequence makes on social issues, arguing that it should be seen within the context of a film that 'provides a more political and class-orientated account of 1950s Britain than does its predecessor' and which 'records the weakening of old class ties as workers are shifted to new housing estates'.⁷² There is also, however, another reading of the revolt that could be made, since images of workers overthrowing their masters might well have been seen in 1950s Britain as an implicit suggestion of communist activity. Communism was predominantly understood at that time as a political philosophy that was of particular relevance to workers, a notion suggested most prominently through the title of the newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain, *The Daily Worker*. Indeed, before the 1950 general election Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party, complained publicly that his party's political broadcast was scheduled 'at a time when many workers will not be home from work', thereby underlining the importance of the workforce to the communist agenda.⁷³ As

such, the worker's revolt in *Quatermass II* could be read as a bold, communist-influenced call to action. From that perspective, the insidious alien masters do not stand in for communism, as was suggested during the first half of the chapter, but for capitalism and its exploitation of the workers. The simplicity of this reading, in which workers represent workers and the alien management at the factory represents the management at ordinary factories, suggests that it would have been all the more likely to occur to 1950s British cinema-goers.

This reading can also be extended to address the 1950s so-called creature features that will be the focus of Chapter Four. These films, such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), *Beginning of the End* (1958) and *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959), often saw gigantic beasts devastating major western cities, most often New York and London. Although the revolt sequence towards the end of *Quatermass II* is certainly more easily interpreted as a display of the power of the workers against their exploitative masters, many of the creature features also present a world in which a new, radical force awakes to challenge the established order. For British communist sympathisers, there might have been particular pleasure in seeing capitalist metropolises and their iconic landmarks crumble beneath the might of a rampaging Other.

Of course, this reading of *Quatermass II* does not merely suggest that communism is nothing to fear, but actually endorses resistance to capitalism. While *It Came* was able to suggest that aliens, and hence communists, were not dangerous monsters, *Quatermass II* could go further still and suggest that communism was not an Other at all and could provide a useful means of resisting exploitation. Perhaps this would have endowed *Quatermass II* with greater appeal to those Britons in the workers' unions that David Childs suggests had communist sympathies, such as the National Union of Mine

Workers, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Clerical and Administrative Workers and the Scientific Workers.⁷⁴ *It Came* and *Quatermass II* were both capable of addressing audiences who did not find communism a cause for fear or alarm, but *Quatermass II* was a more subversive film in this regard and was more likely to be relevant to those who were already positively predisposed to communist ideology.

Conclusion

This chapter has described a variety of meanings that 1950s science fiction's depersonalisation narratives adopted in the context of different British attitudes towards communism, but, as noted in the previous chapter, it was not only Britons who found these films open to a range of such readings. Scholars have similarly suggested that American anxieties about communism also inflected mid-century science fiction cinema in a number of different ways. For some US audiences these films underscored fears of Soviet infiltration in the community, while for others they reflected concerns about the anti-communist witch hunts led by Senator Joseph McCarthy.⁷⁵ Crucially, however, the readings that this chapter has suggested were made by Britons were not the same, or were not arrived at in the same way, as those that other authors have argued were made by Americans. There has been no suggestion, for example, that Americans ever found in the genre a call to empathise with, or even tolerate, the communist Other, while readings predicated on fears of an invaded Establishment emerged out of uniquely British socio-political circumstances. British and American readings of the depersonalisation narratives differ because they resulted from dissimilar national contexts of reception in which the Soviet threat was articulated in different ways. This chapter has drawn attention to a

number of these points of divergence. Britons, for example, often imagined communist brainwashing to occur beyond their borders, while Americans were more likely to be concerned about their own neighbours.⁷⁶ The BBC aired commentary from the USSR, which would have been largely unthinkable in the more restrictive US media environment. As a consequence of such disparities, communism came to mean something different on opposite sides of the Atlantic and Britons and Americans connected the depersonalisation narratives' alien Others with the communist Other in different ways.

This is significant in terms of the thesis' broader aims because it demonstrates that, even though Britain and America were politically united in their official rejection of Soviet ideology, it is still possible to differentiate between the ways in which attitudes towards communism shaped the range of readings of 1950s depersonalisation narratives available in these two countries. The analysis presented above thus indicates that the British reception of the genre cannot be explained through readings that draw on American perspectives on the communist threat, thereby demonstrating the existence of pseudo thought in accounts of these films that globalise their US interpretations. Moreover, this chapter has also suggested some of the ways in which Britons were able to negotiate their own national science fiction cinema's stories about people losing their identities, further delineating the specificity of the British history of the genre's reception.

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- ⁵⁷ Anon. 30 March 1950. 'Lord Vansittart Indicts Communists', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.4.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Jenks. *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War*. p.47.

⁶¹ Ivie, Robert L. 1997. 'Diffusing Cold War Demagoguery: Morrow Versus McCarthy on "See It Now"', in Medhurst, Ivie, Wander and Scott (1997: 81-102). p.81.

⁶² Brinson, Susan L. 2004. *The Red Scare, Politics, and the Federal Communications Commission, 1941-1960*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

⁶³ Anon. 19 January 1951. 'Report on BBC Criticised', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.4.

⁶⁴ Crisell, Andrew. 1997. *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*. London: Routledge. p. 28.

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⁶⁶ Defty. *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*. p.104.

⁶⁷ Weaver. *Monsters, Mutants and Heavenly Creatures*. p.25.

⁶⁸ Stacey, Jackie. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. p.130.

⁶⁹ Pedelty, Donovan. 18 July 1953. 'He Came from Outer Space', *Picturegoer*. p.18.

⁷⁰ Lane, Henry. 10 October 1953. 'Out of Space into Depth', *Picturegoer*. p.18.

⁷¹ Hutchings, Peter. 1993. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press pp.49-50.

⁷² Ibid. p.49-50.

⁷³ Pollitt, Harry. 27 January 1950. 'A Community Broadcast', *The Times*. p.5.

⁷⁴ Childs. *Britain Since 1945*. p.16.

⁷⁵ See Booker. *Alternate Americas*. p.65; Gianos, Phillip L. 1998. *Politics and Politicians in American Film*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p.140.

⁷⁶ Kenyon. *Dreaming Suburbia*. p.82.

Chapter Three: Immigration and the Other in 1950s Science Fiction

Cinema's Alien Encounter Narratives

Introduction

Historians such as Stephen J. Lee have noted that the 1950s saw the first wave of large scale immigration into Britain in response to the labour shortages that followed World War II.¹ In describing this immigration, the British press often relied on language mined from the contemporary science fiction cinema boom. *The Manchester Guardian* published articles about the towns and cities that had 'borne the brunt of the invasion' and 'the social effects of their invasion'.² Cyril Osborne, MP for Louth, similarly warned against a 'West Indian and West African invasion'.³ *The Times* wrote of calls for legislation to deport Commonwealth immigrants 'similar to that used for dealing with aliens' and printed letters about the 'treatment of aliens'.⁴ *The Daily Mirror* drew on the genre's pulp tradition when describing 'the coloured evil men', perhaps recalling the previous year's *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (1957) or the earlier feature *Superman and the Mole Men*, the alternative title for *Superman and the Strange People* (1952).⁵ Science fiction metaphors became one way in which concerns about immigration were expressed in 1950s Britain, projecting the alien Others of the cinema screen onto the immigrant Others who began to settle in the nation's towns and cities.

The use of the language of science fiction in such contexts relied on the perception that immigrants were essentially different from the British population whose territory they were seen to 'invade'. This outlook was made possible in 1950s Britain by what Robert Miles, drawing on the work of Franz Fanon and Michael Banton, has termed the 'racialisation' of immigrant communities.⁶ Miles'

term refers to the 'historical process of reifying the idea of "race", of conceiving it as a real object'.⁷ It describes the apportioning of 'social significance' to skin colour, thereby allowing the concept of race to emerge in the public consciousness.⁸ Racialisation has gained significant currency amongst historians and sociologists of 1950s Britain and has been used by scholars such as Farzana Shain and Huw Thomas to make sense of various aspects of the decade.⁹ Of course, it was not a process that began in or was unique to the 1950s and Richard Dyer has identified similar phenomena dating back to the eighteenth century.¹⁰ However, the 1950s was a key decade for the development of the racialisation process because it saw the widespread settlement of people from across the world within Britain's borders for the first time. This was the decade in which race emerged as a pressing matter in British domestic politics.

One of the effects of the racialisation process was to reconstruct 1950s immigration in public debate as a black invasion which threatened to pollute what one senior political figure described in correspondence with Prime Minister Anthony Eden as 'the racial character of the English people'.¹¹ Because the racialisation process made it possible to categorise people according to their race, it enabled Britons to imagine immigrants as a group of racial Others, distinct from the supposedly uniformly white host population. This perception underpins the use of terms such as 'invasion' or 'alien' in the 1950s newspaper reports quoted above, suggesting that the narratives and ideas associated with 1950s science fiction films were of particular relevance to a British audience swept up in the racialisation process and seeing the first waves of mass immigration into the country. Indeed, when Cyril Osborne MP called for 'courageous action' to repel this perceived invasion, it came in the form of

violence, as in so many of the decade's science fiction films, during the Nottingham and Notting Hill race riots of 1958.¹² From the perceived threat of a black invasion by the so-called aliens arriving on Britain's shores to the violent action that was taken in response, it is possible to see the history of race relations in 1950s Britain underpinned by the language and logic of the era's science fiction cinema.

As the language of science fiction was one means by which Britons negotiated issues of race and immigration, the same debates helped to shape the British reception of the era's genre cinema. In this regard, films in which people encounter aliens provide a fruitful area of enquiry since they dramatise the encounter between the Self and the Other. A number of such films were discussed in the previous chapter, since the depersonalisation narratives often see aliens arriving on Earth and coming into contact with the locals, even if this is done by proxy through possessed human bodies. However, whereas those films were useful in my exploration of the relationship between the communist and the alien because of their depersonalisation theme, here a broader range of films that feature a number of different types of alien encounter can be considered. *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958), this chapter's first case study film, frames its contact between humans and aliens as an invasion, depicting creatures from outer space coming to Earth to attack humanity. The second film that I discuss, *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), is slightly different in that its alien is not part of a planetary invasion, but a monstrous stowaway on a spaceship populated by human astronauts. Despite these differences, both films stage an encounter with an alien Other and so were capable of being understood through 1950s British debates about race and immigration.

This chapter argues that the key concepts of the 1950s alien encounter narratives, such as Otherness, physical difference and invasion, took on particular meanings in relation to the specific nature of British debates about race and immigration. However, the public understanding of those issues was not consistent during the 1950s. Its shape and focus shifted as the years passed, immigration increased and the racialisation process evolved. In order to avoid totalising these debates by attempting to account for the era as a whole, this chapter focuses on one particular moment in the history of 1950s British race relations, namely the 1958 race riots. The riots have been chosen since they represent a time when race became a prominent topic on Britain's public agenda and hence when it might have been at the forefront of the British cinema-goer's mind. This chapter thus describes some of the contradictory attitudes towards race that were expressed in the aftermath of the rioting and traces their consequences for contemporary readings of the two alien encounter narratives in question, *The Trollenberg Terror* and *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, both of which were released in the weeks that followed the violence.

The first section of the chapter presents evidence that some British people saw in the riots confirmation that different races could not peacefully coexist and that the racial Self and Other were incompatible. This attitude is traced primarily through media reports of relevant events and letters from the public, published in Britain's newspapers, both of which suggest that certain corners of British society remained hostile to immigration and immigrants even after the violence of 1958. The second section then uses this evidence to suggest that the threatening alien Others of science fiction's alien encounter films were able to mirror the threatening racial Others that Britain's immigrant

population was perceived to be, presenting readings of both *It!* and *Trollenberg* to support its argument.

The second half of the chapter suggests a different way of approaching these films by discussing the anti-racist backlash against the violence perpetrated by white Britons during the 1958 riots. This strand of public debate, again traced through letters and articles in Britain's newspapers, attempted to use the riots to discourage racist attitudes. The place occupied by both *It!* and *Trollenberg* in post-riot Britain is reassessed in light of this facet of public debate. Both films contain sequences in which the Otherness of the alien is contested as it begins to display a likeness to the human Self. This section traces parallels between the questioning of the status of the alien Other and the anti-racist response to the 1958 riots, suggesting the potential of *It!* and *Trollenberg* to challenge as well as to reaffirm the perception of racialised immigrants as Others.

This chapter advances the aims of the thesis by suggesting that the British reception of 1950s science fiction's alien encounter narratives was inflected by the specific nature of debates about race and immigration that emerged in Britain after the riots, a significant national event, and so was unique to Britain. It is not possible to demonstrate this through a direct comparison between the British readings presented here and equivalent American interpretations because race and immigration have not yet been a significant focus of debates about the meaning of these films in the United States.¹³ Film historians have not yet extensively explored the role played by race and immigration in structuring the responses of American audiences to 1950s science fiction films, but this chapter shows that, should such an analysis be produced, it could not take the same shape as that presented here since the

readings that I describe below are derived from specifically British concerns about race and immigration. Consequently, this chapter shows that the alien Other of 1950s science fiction films was not simply reinterpreted in Britain in light of a domestic understanding of issues that were significant in America, such as communist infiltration, but was rather reframed through debates that were important in Britain itself. As a result, the globalisation of American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema is again shown to be incapable of explaining the British reception of the genre.

Characterising Public Debate: Immigration Anxieties in 1950s Britain

In November 1955, Secretary of the Cabinet Norman Brook informed Prime Minister Anthony Eden that 'colonial immigration is not yet a matter of general public concern'.¹⁴ Written less than three years before the notorious Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots, Brook's letter now appears at odds with recent histories of the period that have rendered visible the underlying racism of 1950s Britain. Charles More, for example, has noted the nation's contradictory attitude towards race during this era, arguing that although 'many people deplored the strict segregation which the US military enforced among its troops in Britain during the war...many were also concerned at interracial sexual liaisons'.¹⁵ Laura Penketh has taken a less cautious approach, arguing that 'in the 1940s and 1950s Britain was a hostile, unwelcoming environment steeped in the ideology of racial superiority'.¹⁶ Though they disagree on the explicitness of the racial prejudice on display during the 1950s, these scholars are typical of a number of historians of this period who have formed a loose consensus behind the idea that British society was inherently racist.

Annie Phizacklea and Robert Miles have built on this consensus by examining the ways in which ‘black migrant workers’ increasingly found ‘social significance’ apportioned ‘to their physical appearance, a significance which [led] to their being categorised as a “race”’.¹⁷ As noted above, Miles has termed this phenomena ‘racialisation’.¹⁸ Miles and Rudy Torres have argued that the origins of this process can be traced to the early years of the 1950s when ‘the “race problem” was spatially located beyond Britain’s borders in its Empire, particularly in certain colonies, notably South Africa’.¹⁹ As Benjamin Bowling indicates, this was a period when people who were not white largely only entered the British public consciousness as a presence ‘in the colonies, rather than in Britain itself’.²⁰ Perhaps because of the great distances between these colonies and the metropole, Bowling claims that ‘during the early 1950s British people did not identify black people as a threat’.²¹ Race was predominantly seen as a thing of the Empire, not a domestic and immediate concern to people residing in Britain itself. However, as post-war labour shortages in Britain brought increasing numbers of colonial and Commonwealth subjects to its shores, the presumption that Britain was what Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has called a ‘homogeneous white country’ evaporated and debates about race began to shift their focus from the colonies to the parent state.²²

The initial 492 Jamaican passengers who arrived in Tilbury aboard the *Empire Windrush* in June 1948, the first significantly sized cohort of West Indian economic migrants to arrive in Britain in the post-war years, were followed in September by a further 108.²³ As the years passed, the figures for annual arrivals increased. According to Frank Field and Patricia Haikin, ‘by 1951 it was estimated that about 1,750 [immigrants from the West Indies] arrived in one year; in 1952 and 1953 over 3,000; and in 1954 between 10,000 and 11,000’.²⁴

A similar picture was emerging from other Commonwealth and colonial territories. Rashmi Desai has shown that, in 1955 alone, 10,700 Indians and Pakistanis lived in Britain, rising to 17,300 in 1957 and 55,000 in 1958.²⁵ In 1955 the net intake of non-white immigrants from the Commonwealth was 42,700, rising to a peak of 46,850 in 1956.²⁶ Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was informed in July 1957 that 'the total number of West Indians in this country continues to increase' and although 'the flow of immigration [from the West Indies] has displayed a continuous and striking fall since last summer...immigration from India and Pakistan...shows no signs of abating'.²⁷ In 1958 a letter from an advisor informed him that 'West Indian immigration remains higher than last year' with 'a monthly influx into this country of some 3,000 coloured immigrants'.²⁸ As these figures demonstrate, the 1950s saw the demographic makeup of Britain undergo a radical change as the number of non-white immigrants increased markedly in a very short space of time.

Issues of race often distorted debates about immigration in Britain's newspapers during this period.²⁹ In 1953, for example, Colin Jordan of Leamington Spa wrote to *The Observer*:

I venture to suggest that the most satisfactory and humane way to tackle the colour problem is to prevent further coloured immigration into Britain and to promote the repatriation of coloured folk over here. I submit that whatever human discomfort and inconvenience this might involve, it would be small in comparison with the eventual total of suffering, discord and disorder which will result from continued immigration and settlement. It is difficult indeed to see any rhyme or reason for allowing this coloured influx into this essentially white man's country.³⁰

Jordan refers to a 'colour problem', 'coloured folk' and a 'coloured influx', juxtaposing these ideas against the notion of Britain as a 'white man's country'.³¹ For Jordan, the issue was evidently not immigration per se, but rather the arrival of non-white people in Britain.³² Similarly, when Kenneth Little of the Department of Social Anthropology at Edinburgh University wrote to *The*

Manchester Guardian in 1954 about 'a fairly extensive series of studies of Colonial immigration into Britain', he rapidly moved from discussing 'West Indian immigration' and 'Colonial students in London' to 'Negro and Moslem groups', 'the Coloured population' and 'the Coloured "middle classes"', shifting his focus from national origins to race.³³ For many, Norman Brook's assessment of colonial immigration as a 'long-term threat to the racial character of the English people' might have seemed accurate.³⁴ In each of these examples the debate about colonial immigration became a means of expressing concerns about the increasing presence of non-white people in Britain. The perception that race was only an issue in the colonies and not in Britain itself was clearly subsiding. As Benjamin Bowling put it, 'colonial racism was transformed into indigenous racism' and, in Miles' terms, race became 'a real object' in Britain.³⁵ As a result it was now possible for the newspaper accounts quoted in the introduction to this chapter to frame immigration in terms of a national white Self and an invading racial Other.

As this process of racialisation took hold, the belief that the perceived black invasion was dangerous to an imagined white national Self strengthened. Concerns about overpopulation and the supposed dislocation of white, working class communities by immigrants of different cultural and racial heritages are now familiar features of 21st century British debates about immigration, but similar anxieties were also present in the late 1950s, albeit on a more localised scale. Fears about population pressure resulting from immigration were not present nationwide, but they were certainly felt in places where immigrant communities developed quickly and densely, as in 'London, the industrial Midlands, parts of the north west and parts of Yorkshire'.³⁶ This was seen to put pressure on the local job market in these locations. In October 1954, for

example, *The Daily Mirror* reported that '17,000 dockers were on strike' in London as a result of 'allegations...that the Dock Labour Scheme had been infringed by coloured labour being brought in'.³⁷ The newspaper reported accusations that 'the coloured men - Indians and Goanese - had handled baggage and mail from the liners'.³⁸ Similar concerns were expressed in terms of housing. As one headline in *The Manchester Guardian* announced, locals had dubbed an area of London 'brown town', a reference to the skin colour of the new immigrant community, a pun on the nearby White City region and a comment on the perceived drop in the quality of life in the district.³⁹ According to *The Manchester Guardian's* summary of a conversation with a local resident of this area, the public 'ought to expect overcrowding and resentment' as a result of attempts to 'pack another three or four thousand people...most of them men and all of them coloured' into an already deprived region.⁴⁰ It is clear from this emphasis on skin colour that it was not solely the presence of these people, but also their race and its supposed impact on the region that caused concern. *The Daily Mirror* legitimised such claims in 1955 by arguing that, while racial prejudice had a hand in fanning tensions, there was 'a real grievance to sustain it'.⁴¹ Even Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was made aware of the growing perception that immigrants from Africa and the West Indies were dominating local services to the detriment of white residents. An advisor wrote to him in July 1957 to warn that even the 'reduced rate of immigration' that Britain was seeing at the time was 'capable of giving rise to problems, particularly where it produces "black" pockets of population who monopolise housing accommodation'.⁴² These commentators each saw the presence of communities of people who were not white as a negative force in an area,

changing the nature of the place and making it less habitable for white residents.

In late August and early September 1958, the racial tensions that had underpinned the decade finally came to the fore through riots on the streets of two British cities. On 23rd August, Nottingham saw running battles between groups of black and white men involving upwards of a thousand people. A number were taken into hospital as a result of injuries from weapons such as knives and bottles. The rioting in Nottingham only lasted for one night, with intermittent low level violence in the two weeks that followed, but it was soon repeated elsewhere. In Notting Hill, London, on the evening of 30th August, a mob of between three and four hundred white people attacked the houses of West Indian immigrants. Similar disturbances recurred daily for a week, during which time local immigrants began to carry weapons for protection. Police intervention eventually brought the violence under control, but seventy-two white people and thirty-six black people were charged with crimes ranging from grievous bodily harm to possessing offensive weapons. It was the worst race rioting that Britain had ever seen and is still the most serious to date.

A significant portion of the coverage of these events in Britain's newspapers served to re-inscribe the notion that colonial immigration and racial diversity were threats to Britain's supposedly homogenous white society and to suggest that different races could not peacefully coexist. On 3rd September, during the Notting Hill riots, *The Daily Mirror* used the inflammatory headline 'Black v White' to introduce a story, mentioned above, about 'the coloured evil men' and the need for 'courageous action' by white people to resist their presence in Britain, positioning black and white people as irreconcilable adversaries.⁴³ Similarly, on 28th August, *The Times* reported that a group of

Conservative MPs saw 'in the Nottingham fight between coloured and white people on Saturday night a red light of further troubles to come'.⁴⁴ *The Times* suggested that these politicians 'intend to renew demand for controls to be placed on immigration from the Commonwealth and colonies'.⁴⁵ That a number of MPs saw controlling immigration rather than addressing prejudice as the way to prevent further trouble suggests that they either blamed colonial immigrants for the violence or saw racial diversity itself as problematic. Cyril Osborne MP was even quoted in *The Times* arguing that by permitting colonial immigration 'we are sowing the seeds of another "Little Rock"', referring to an incident in the United States in which National Guard troops had to be called in to force racial integration on a resistant school in Arkansas.⁴⁶ Each of these examples is typical of a strand of public debate that emerged in the aftermath of the racist violence of 1958 which claimed the riots as conclusive evidence that people of different races could not peacefully coexist.

Indeed, the race riots did little to dispel the belief held by many in 1950s Britain that a black presence made a community a more difficult place for white people to live. Claims that black immigrants lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, often fuelled by suspicions that such arrangements would not be tolerated by the police if the tenants were white, appear to have been as common after the riots as before. As a Home Office report of a meeting held by the Home Secretary in September 1958 to discuss what it terms the 'racial disturbances' in Notting Hill noted:

Local white residents felt that the coloured immigrants reduced the amenities of the neighbourhood and, in particular, that they lived in conditions which the local and public authorities would not tolerate for white people. The houses in which coloured people lived were notoriously overcrowded and there was resentment at the way in which coloured landlords attempted to get rid of white tenants...Much hostility was caused by coloured men...known to be living on the immoral earnings of white prostitutes.⁴⁷

These complaints, familiar in the national press before the 1958 race riots, did not die down in the weeks and months that followed the disturbances. They were voiced, for example, by Noel B. W. Thompson in 1959 in a letter to *The Manchester Guardian*, stressing his belief that immigrants would buy property and use 'coercive methods to remove existing tenants and subsequently grossly overcrowd the houses with tenants of their own colour'.⁴⁸ Douglas Shearn, a police sergeant in Notting Hill, claimed after the riots that the cause for the trouble had been 'the housing situation there, plus white women associating with coloured men in the area'.⁴⁹ As Gerry Holloway has noted, similar anxieties about the pressures exerted on Britain by immigration were also expressed through white 'resentment of immigrant workers who were seen to be taking jobs from indigenous communities'.⁵⁰ In some corners of public debate, white people were still being framed as the victims of black immigrant communities and their supposed impact on the quality of life in an area even after the riots. For some white people, the perceived black invasion of their communities had squeezed local resources and caused their quality of life to drop.

As the 1950s progressed, discussions of race transferred their focus from Britain's colonies to Britain itself. This created the discursive conditions through which the racialisation process could produce two distinct categories, the white national Self and the immigrant racial Other. Once this was done, immigration could be framed as the invasion of an imaginary white Britain by non-white foreigners. In the period that followed the 1958 riots, this system of thought nurtured a strand of public debate, fostered in the pre-riot years, that saw black integration as a danger which threatened the prosperity of local, white communities. In the section that follows, this view of race and immigration in 1950s Britain will be used to discuss two science fiction films that were

released in the aftermath of the riots, reframing their alien encounters through the perception of immigration as a form of racialised invasion.

Reading 1950s Alien Encounter Narratives: The Racialised Immigrant and the Alien Other

It! The Terror from Beyond Space is an American film that, according to the London Pavilion listings in *The Manchester Guardian*, was screened in Britain from at least 4th October 1958, a few short weeks after the riots.⁵¹ It tells the story of a crew of astronauts, seven men and two women, who visit Mars to rescue Colonel Edward Carruthers, the sole survivor of a previous mission, only to face the prospect of a four month return journey to Earth trapped in their ship with a bloodsucking alien stowaway. This is certainly not a plot that deliberately engages with debates about race and immigration and indeed authors such as Cyndy Hendershot, John L. Flynn and J. Gordon Melton have found in it more obvious allusions to vampire mythology.⁵² However, vampires have often been understood as a means of addressing concerns about race.⁵³ *It!*'s presentation of an alien encounter certainly stood the potential of being interpreted in this way given the film's release into the particularly charged environment of early October 1958 in Britain. In that context, where terms such as 'invasion' and 'alien' had become associated with immigration and race, there are certain aspects of the film that might have found their interpretation inflected by these debates.

It! is a film that repeatedly underscores the diametric opposition between its human and alien characters. Dana Polan has argued that the Martian beast represents 'complete and irrevocable difference from everything that the film upholds as the decent everyday world'.⁵⁴ Neil Badmington has similarly argued

that the 'binary opposition between the human and the inhuman' allows 'the sudden presence of the alien [to create] a coherent sense of the human...If there is an "It", there must be something that is not an "It", and this, of course, is "Us"'.⁵⁵ This contrast can be observed not only in the film's characters, but also in its presentation of different locations. For example, *It!* opens with a wide angle shot of the expansive, barren Martian horizon, in the centre of which lies the metallic wreckage of Carruthers' first spacecraft. A man-made piece of technology in the middle of the natural, rocky landscape, the spaceship is clearly out of place. When we see inside the rescue mission's craft, its enclosed, artificial, metallic sets also contrast with the opening shot of the vast wilderness of the Martian surface. Just as Mark Jancovich notes that *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) contrasts its desert and town locations, as discussed in the previous chapter, *It!*'s mise-en-scène draws clear distinctions between human and alien spaces, juxtaposing the populated, manufactured craft with the deserted, natural landscape.⁵⁶

The opposition between human and non-human allows *It!* to stage its alien encounter story as a type of atypical invasion narrative. As the film progresses, the creature gradually gains control of the spaceship's decks, forcing the humans out of their own territory and into an increasingly confined space. The beast's assault can thus be read as an invasion of a small outpost of humanity amongst the stars by an alien Other, removing the crew from their familiar spaces and rendering them inhospitable. Just as some Britons were becoming increasingly concerned about the displacement of white communities by black immigrants and the resultant pressure on resources, *It!* arrived in cinemas, warning of the dire consequences of the arrival of an alien Other who squeezed the human crew out of their known surroundings and took possession

of one of their most limited resources, space. Towards the end of the film the astronauts even worry that the beast has breathed too much of their oxygen. As these similarities suggest, the film's story mirrors the narrative of deprivation and dislocation that some white communities constructed for themselves during this period when faced with the arrival of black immigrants.

The perceived similarity between the alien creature and Britain's colonial immigrants is further heightened by the fact that, in a parallel of the racialisation process that took place in 1950s Britain, the Martian comes to be identified by its black skin, often in opposition to the human crew's whiteness. This is demonstrated during a sequence where the creature emerges from ventilation pipes into the lower decks of the spaceship. The alien is surprised to discover that the room has been rigged with explosives by the humans, who listen in from the floor above. As the beast is caught up in these blasts its body is obscured by thick smoke. Poorly lit within this haze, the alien's features become blurred and indistinguishable. Only its vaguely human shape and the blackness of its skin, accentuated by the dark latex of its costume and the monochrome cinematography, are identifiable. Echoing earlier scenes in which the alien only appears as an inky silhouette projected against the ship's walls, the lighting, costume, special effects and film stock used to capture this sequence, which is typical of the presentation of the beast throughout much of the film, all culminate to ensure that its predominant feature is the blackness of its skin.

Moreover, the film invites its audience to compare the beast's black skin with the white skin of its human characters, further suggesting that Britons might have understood the creature as a racialised subject parallel to the country's newly arrived immigrants. Two shots of the beast amidst the explosive traps in the lower decks, by now a hazy whirl of smoke, shadow and black latex,

bookend a long, slow panning shot of the well-lit, crisply photographed and uniformly white faces of the crew. The lighting even glistens on several of their sweaty faces, drawing further attention to their pale skin. The camera spends a full ten seconds lingering on this pan, giving the audience ample time in which to contrast the whiteness of humanity as it exists on the ship with the black beast that they have just witnessed rampaging below. The film then cuts back to the lower deck, replacing the white faces of the crew with the black head of the beast, accentuated by deep shadows. This sudden cut, in which the white human face is juxtaposed with the black alien mask, construes the beast's blackness as a racial counterweight to the crew's whiteness. This intersection of images thus mirrors the racialisation process of 1950s Britain, ensuring that the creature is not merely seen to have black skin, but to be black in contrast to the white characters. In this sense, the black latex of the creature's outfit becomes a racial signifier through its juxtaposition with white flesh.

In constructing a dualism between white humans and black beasts, this reading of *It!* draws on a tradition of fantastical films that have racialised their monsters. Mark Jancovich has noted that *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), for example, could be understood as a commentary on 'the tyranny of WASP culture over other ethnic and racial groups, particularly through the film's concern with colonisation'.⁵⁷ Although less obvious in their allusions to issues of cultural imperialism, the film's sequel, *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), and *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) could also have been read in this way. As I discuss later in the chapter, the precedent for this use of monsters as signifiers of race was set at least as far back as the 1930s when, for James A. Snead, *King Kong* (1933) emerged as 'a noteworthy...instance of "the coded black"' in which 'the carrier of blackness is not a human being, but an ape'.⁵⁸ In this

sense, *It!*'s racialised monster was another manifestation of a convention that had been a part of fantasy and science fiction cinema for some time and which was also present in other contemporary genre films.

However, by the 1950s, when science fiction films such as *It!* and *Black Lagoon* presented monstrous Others as racialised figures, the British contexts in which these films were received might have made such readings even more relevant, especially given the post-riot suggestion, underscored by the *Daily Mirror* headline 'Black v White', that black immigrants were engaged in an invasion of Britain.⁵⁹ Indeed, contemporary British film magazines sometimes used the language of race to discuss the creatures of 1950s science fiction's alien encounter films. In November 1958, for example, two months after the riots and one month after the release of *It!*, *Picturegoer* talked about the genre's 'monsters as a race' and the characteristics that could be apportioned to them.⁶⁰ In this context, the titular creature of *It!* may well have appeared as the racialised invader of a white crew's spacecraft, analogous with the racialised colonial immigrants that many believed were staging an invasion of a 'white man's country'.⁶¹

It! was not the only science fiction film released in Britain in late 1958 that could have found its interpretation shaped by events on the streets of London and Nottingham. *The Trollenberg Terror*, a British film adapted from an Associated Television serial of the same name that was broadcast between 1956 and 1957, began screening in Britain on 7th October 1958, just one month after the riots. *Trollenberg* tells the story of two British sisters on a train bound for Geneva when the younger sibling, Anne Pilgrim, feels a sudden, inexplicable urge to alight in Trollenberg, a peaceful town at the foot of a Swiss mountain. Anne and her sister, a clairvoyant double act from London, are taken to a hotel

by Alan Brooks, an American scientist who shared their train carriage and who is in Trollenberg to visit an old friend, Professor Crevett, in his observatory on the slopes of the mountain. While the English women rest and recuperate, Brooks tours Crevett's facility and is warned about mysterious, radioactive clouds that hover over the mountain. It soon transpires that the clouds have been hiding alien invaders who descend to Earth. These gigantic eyeballs with long, thin tentacles attack a small girl and force the population of the town, including Brooks and the two Pilgrim sisters, to retreat up the mountain to Crevett's observatory. A siege begins with the beasts buffeting the building while the humans throw petrol bombs at them. The aliens soon break open the wall of the room where Anne is resting and attempt to reach her with their tentacles. This attack is cut short by the efforts of the humans inside the facility and the firebombing of the observatory by a military jet. The creatures burn alive on the slopes of the mountain and the humans emerge from their shelter unscathed.

The poster used to advertise this film in Britain featured a tentacled eye encircling a young, smartly dressed woman, probably intended to be Anne, in its appendages. Anne does become a focal point of the aliens' mission, with several attempts to kidnap her being launched, but the film never explores what motivates these attacks. One explanation of the alien's desire for Anne can be suggested by locating this poster in the broader context of 1950s science fiction cinema advertising. Similar images of helpless women in the grip of dangerous beasts accompanied many alien encounter films during this period. They were used to promote *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Phantom from Space* (1953), *Invaders from Mars* (1954), *Robot Monster* (1954), *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Tobor the Great* (1954), *The Day the World Ended* (1956), *The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues* (1956), *Revenge of the Creature*, *Fire Maidens*

from *Outer Space* (1956), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *It Conquered the World* (1956), *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957), *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *Invasion of the Saucer Men*, *The Monster that Challenged the World* (1957), *The Colossus of New York* (1958), *The Woman Eater* (1958), *Satan's Satellites* (1959), *Return of the Fly* (1959) and numerous others besides. These images became so strongly associated with the genre that articles on alien encounter films in Britain's cinema magazines sometimes made reference to them. For example, an article in *Picturegoer*, knowingly entitled 'The Case of the Frightened Ladies', described how actress 'Mala Powers seems just a shade apprehensive in the grasp of' the robotic man from *The Colossus of New York*, drawing attention to the type of imagery that posters had taught audiences to anticipate in the era's science fiction films.⁶² As this demonstrates, the repeated depiction of a helpless woman in a monster's hand across so many different posters, regardless of whether the scene that it depicted actually appeared in the film in question or not, ensured that such imagery became part of the iconography associated with the genre during the 1950s.

The imagery itself draws on a tradition of depicting white women at the mercy of terrifying beasts in science fiction and fantasy cinema that has been decried for its racist overtones. Alongside the racialised monsters discussed earlier in this chapter, these posters can also trace a lineage back to *King Kong*, a film which, as Joshua David Bellin notes, used its creature to articulate the perceived 'threat of black male sexual predation', particularly through the ape's curiosity about Ann Darrow, the white woman who visits his island.⁶³ Similarly, Cynthia Erb has situated *Kong* within 'the overall fetishization of hands, touching, and body contact repeatedly featured in jungle films' which underlines 'the genre's overall investment in images of contact, usually between

representatives of “civilization” and “nature,” or Western and non-Western’.⁶⁴ For these scholars, Kong can be understood as an embodiment of 1930s fears of black male sexuality. In this sense, Kong is comparable to what Donald Bogle has called the ‘pure black buck’.⁶⁵ Bogle describes this black stereotype in Hollywood cinema as ‘over-sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh’, suggesting that it ‘articulated the great white fear that every black man longs for a white woman’.⁶⁶ The black buck’s sexual fixation on white skin underpins both Bellin’s reading of Kong’s pursuit of a white woman and Erb’s use of him as an example of the sexualised touch between western and non-western subjects.⁶⁷ A number of the posters used to advertise this film were also informed by this sexualised stereotype, featuring Kong, a literal black beast, atop the Empire State Building with a distressed, provocatively posed and white-skinned Darrow in his hand. The sheer popularity of *Kong* and its privileged position in the genre’s canon suggest that it is to this image that many 1950s science fiction cinema posters made reference when depicting a white woman in the grasp of a monstrous creature, perhaps hoping to recapture some of the earlier film’s financial success. However, in recreating this image these posters also recreated its race politics, invoking the figure of the black buck and his sexual fetishisation of white skin by reviving the practice of depicting monstrous beasts in pursuit of white women.

The British poster used to advertise *The Trollenberg Terror*, described above, certainly makes use of this type of racially inflected imagery, but that is not the only way in which the film’s aliens can be understood in relation to the black buck stereotype’s desire for white flesh. The creatures also suggest their sexual predation through their appearance. They are gigantic eyes with long, phallic tentacles, suggesting both voyeurism and sexual aggression. From

certain angles their eyeball bodies resemble gigantic testicles, their tentacles looking more phallic still in this context. Furthermore, as the creatures climb the mountain in pursuit of Anne they make a rhythmic, gasping, grunting noise that carries obvious sexual connotations. As such, when the creatures eventually break through the wall of the mountain observatory room where Anne is sleeping and watch her through the hole in the wall, slowly extending their phallic appendages towards her, there is a strong implication that their desire for her is sexually motivated.⁶⁸

The aliens of *Trollenberg* are monstrous Others who, in the absence of any clear motivation for their attacks, appear to have a sexual desire for Anne, a white woman. This indicates that they, too, might have been recognised by British viewers, who were already immersed in debates about race when this film was released, as part of *Kong's* legacy of using monsters to suggest the black buck stereotype. There is certainly some evidence to suggest that the links between many 1950s science fiction films and *Kong* were understood by British film magazines. In reviewing *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), for example, *Picturegoer* deemed it the 'latest runner from the *King Kong* monster stable'.⁶⁹ A few weeks earlier this publication had printed a mock interview with the titular beast of *20,000 Fathoms*. When asked why his film was not in 3D, a technology that was in vogue at the time, the creature responded:

[Monsters] have always been successful, even in flat films. Look at *King Kong*. He did well enough in 1933, didn't he? And when R-K-O-Radio dug him up again just recently he earned another 2,500,000 dollars. *Mighty Joe Young* [1949] was successful, too. So was *The Thing From Another World* [1951].⁷⁰

This interview frames both *20,000 Fathoms* and *The Thing* as successors to *Kong*, a claim first made in *Picturegoer* the previous year when it was claimed that '*The Thing* sounds remarkably like *King Kong*'.⁷¹ Comments such as these encourage an expectation that other 1950s science fiction films, such as

Trollenberg, will resemble *Kong* and consequently suggest that the same reading strategies, and the same racial stereotypes, can be used in making sense of them.

Like *It!*'s creature, *Trollenberg*'s aliens also caused their human prey to abandon their homes and huddle in overcrowded and unfamiliar territory, even if in the latter film the shelter was a mountaintop observatory rather than a spaceship's upper decks. This similarity suggests that the eyeball monsters' invasion was also available for interpretation as a metaphor for the so-called black invasion that immigration had been framed as in public debate. In this way, both of these films could be understood as fantasies of white resistance to invasions that were coded as black. These black invasions appear to parallel colonial immigration, with resistance being framed as heroic and necessary, much like the 'courageous action' that Cyril Osborne had suggested was required to stop the arrival of more economic migrants in Britain.⁷²

Characterising Public Debate: Post-Riot Optimism

As discussed above, much of the media response to the 1958 race riots presented mass immigration as the root cause of the violence because it brought supposedly incompatible racial groups together in one country. However, this was not the only way in which these events were understood in late 1958. Wendy Webster has recently argued that the similarity between the riots and racial violence and prejudice in the United States and South Africa 'threatened Britain's self-representation as a liberal and tolerant nation'.⁷³ Perhaps in part a response to this threat to Britain's self-image, a significant strand of public debate emerged in the post-riot weeks that expressed outrage at the violence and suggested that it was alien to British society. A British Pathé

newsreel, for example, reported the Notting Hill violence as ‘something new and ugly [that] raises its head in Britain’.⁷⁴ The report goes on to claim that ‘opinions differ about Britain’s racial problems, but the mentality which tries to solve them with coshes and broken railings has no place in the British way of life. This violence is evil and the law and public opinion must stamp it out’.⁷⁵ Similarly, *The Times* reported that Eric Irons, himself from the West Indies and a member of the Nottingham Council of Social Service Consultative Committee for the Welfare of Coloured People, claimed that ‘during the time we have been in this city (since 1949) we have experienced complete harmony between the races in spite of any personal misunderstanding’.⁷⁶ This report also quotes David Muirhead of the Caribbean Welfare Services in London claiming that ‘there has never been a clash of such proportions in this country before. It is most alarming’.⁷⁷ Even the Home Secretary, Richard Austen Butler, known as Rab Butler, was quick to stress that ‘we are rightly proud in this country of the fact that racial discrimination never has been part of our life or our law. We have prided ourselves on our hospitality to our fellow human beings from Commonwealth and colonial territories who enjoy the right of unrestricted entry to the mother country’.⁷⁸ In this strand of public debate, racism, and in particular racist violence, was seen as something incompatible with the values of British society.

Attempts to use public outrage at the violence to promote tolerance emerged from many sectors of society in the post-riot weeks. Much of this commentary came from Church figures, such as Trevor Huddleston of London’s Priory of St. Paul, who wrote in *The Times*:

If [the race rioting] should lead to the restrictive legislation which some desire, then it will be evident that this country positively desires a colour-bar and is prepared to enforce one. But if it should lead, as it still may, to a radical searching of the conscience on the part of ordinary citizens and to a determination that the evil of

colour-discrimination be totally eradicated from our national life, then much good will have come out of evil.⁷⁹

Similarly, the Bishop of Chester described the riots as 'a blessing in disguise' since they might inspire Britons to become less complacent and to ask 'what was amiss with our society and especially with our educational system that it could produce people anxious to incite others to acts of racial discrimination'.⁸⁰ As these comments show, the Church was at the forefront of Britain's calls for racial harmony after the rioting.

However, the Church was not alone in making these types of arguments and a number of events took place that were aimed at tackling racist attitudes, such as a one day conference of sixth form students from London's grammar schools held to discuss how Britain could resist racial prejudice.⁸¹ The press, too, sometimes sought to encourage racial harmony. *The Daily Mirror* began a series of articles under the headline 'Introducing to You...', in which a different section of the immigrant population was discussed each day.⁸² The first of these was called 'the boys from Jamaica' and made several claims that Britons owed Jamaicans the right to live in Britain. The article observes, for instance, that 'about 70,000 of [Britain's non-white immigrant population] are from Surrey, Middlesex and Cornwall - the three counties of Jamaica, British for 300 years', positioning these Jamaicans as colonial subjects who have a shared heritage with Britain.⁸³ Furthermore, the article notes that 'during the war 10,000 Jamaicans came voluntarily to this country to fight for Britain', implicitly suggesting that Britain could not turn its back on a nation that had done so much to support it during the Second World War.⁸⁴ The article also addressed some of the key concerns expressed by Britons who opposed immigration, such as 'are they wasters?', 'are they heathens?' and 'are they stealing our women?', by stressing some of the common values that it believed united Britain and

Jamaica, such as hard work and religious faith, through claims that 'in three years, Jamaicans have sent home £10,000,000 in postal orders to their dependants' and 'three out of every five Jamaicans are members of a Christian church or group'.⁸⁵ Highlighting the shared values and histories that united the British and the Jamaicans, *The Daily Mirror* became another voice in British public debate calling for tolerance and understanding of the nation's new immigrant communities.

However, public anger at the violence in Nottingham and Notting Hill had little effect on official policy. Although politicians such as Rab Butler were keen to talk about Britain's enduring antipathy to racism, successive governments took action to curb Commonwealth and colonial immigration. As Peter Fryer has claimed, 'between 1958 and 1968 black settlers in Britain watched the racist tail wag the parliamentary dog'.⁸⁶ The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 relieved citizens of Commonwealth nations of their right of abode in Britain without specific permission. These controls were tightened further by the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968 and again by the Immigration Act 1971. 1968 saw Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech warning the British public of what he saw as the great dangers of immigration and anti-discrimination legislation. The post-riot resurgence of anti-racist debate was soon subsumed by familiar prejudices, but for a moment in late 1958 a protest was raised and a number of individuals and institutions made very public their belief that, as *The Daily Mirror* put it, 'people are human beings even though they come in different colours'.⁸⁷

Reading 1950s Alien Encounter Narratives: Identifying with the Alien

The reading of *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* outlined in the first half of this chapter stressed the ways in which aliens and humans were presented as diametric opposites, allowing them to be understood through British debates about the perceived opposition between different racial groups. However, it is clear that this was not the only way in which race was being discussed in late 1958 when *It!* and *Trollenberg* were released. That particular historical moment also produced an anti-racist backlash which called for tolerance and compassion. As such, it is possible to identify moments of incongruity in *It!* and *The Trollenberg Terror* where the alien Other reveals similarities to the human Self and in which one can find support for the suggestion that the boundaries between the racial Other and the presumed white national Self were artificial.

In *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, the connection between the human and the alien is most apparent during a sequence where the crew of the spacecraft attempt to slay the creature by exposing it to dangerous nuclear fuel. With the beast sealed inside the ship's reactor room and the protective shutter separating it from the radioactive material beginning to rise, the camera lingers on the creature, allowing the audience to see its final moments before its supposed annihilation. The creature puts its hands up to its face, presumably in a futile attempt to shield itself from the radiation, and stumbles around the room in both pain and panic. The suffering of the creature is thus rendered comprehensible through its performance of recognisably human actions. The alien Other and the human Self are shown to share some similarities.

This suggestion is reinforced by a cut to a close-up of the beast's face. As Jackie Stacey has noted, 'the close-up shot has conventionally been used within cinematic practice to signify intimacy between characters within the film narratives: the close-up is typically on the face and by convention encourages

heightened emotional connections'.⁸⁸ In terms of the close-up in *It!*'s reactor room, however, it is not two different characters within the film who are the subjects of the intimacy, but rather the alien and the audience. The close-up removes from the frame everything except the creature's face as it prepares for its own death. The shot suggests a face to face meeting between audience and beast and forces the viewer to witness its humanised suffering in uncomfortable detail. This could serve to heighten any sympathy fostered for the creature during the earlier moments of the sequence, especially in light of the 'heightened emotional connections' that Stacey suggests such shots encourage.⁸⁹ As the use of the close-up demonstrates, it is not simply the actions of the creature, but also the ways in which they are framed that invite recognition of the humanity of the alien.

The mask worn by the actor playing the Martian also serves to underscore the humanisation of the creature during this close-up. Up to this point the mask has appeared decidedly alien, with pronounced, bony ridges running upwards from a porcine snout under scaly skin. There was, however, some confusion during the film's production about how best to render the alien's eyes. Randy Palmer records how Paul Blaisdell, who made the monster costume for *It!*, was asked by Robert E. Kent, the film's producer, to make a costume with 'really big eyes' built into it, even though they would not be able to move realistically, because he didn't 'want to use [actor] Ray Corrigan's eyes'.⁹⁰ Blaisdell reportedly produced a high quality set of eyes for the creature, but when he went to deliver the costume Kent was not there and Edward Small, who worked as an uncredited executive producer on the film, was unimpressed. On Small's orders, and apparently much to Kent's later displeasure, Blaisdell removed the creature's eyes from the suit, meaning that Corrigan's real eyes

would be visible. John Johnson gives a different account of the suit's production, claiming that the eyes were scrapped not because of disagreements amongst the crew, but 'so Corrigan could see better'.⁹¹ Whatever the real reason for the removal of the artificial eyes, the end result is that, when seen in close-up, the creature's face, despite its impressively alien features, has a disconcertingly human pair of eyes staring out of it. Johnson has claimed that 'using an actor's real eyes tends to add more emotion to a monster mask...especially in closeup shots'.⁹² This is certainly true of the close-up during the reactor room sequence in *It!*, with the human eyes serving to heighten the mounting sense of horror on the Martian's face as it realises that it is about to die. Furthermore, this is the first close-up of the beast's face in the film, meaning that the humanity of the creature, suggested physically by its eyes, might have come as a shock to the viewer. Although Corrigan's performance as the creature humanises its suffering through its very human responses to pain, and the close-up shot itself encourages sympathy for the beast, the eyes at the centre of this image suggest both a literal and metaphorical human being lurking within the alien skin.

Cyndy Hendershot has suggested that 'the creature in *It!* is repulsive...a humanoid reptilian creature with pig-like nostrils'.⁹³ Hendershot's observation is typical of those made by a number of writers who have similarly characterised the beast as a demonic grotesque. Randy Palmer, for example, termed the creature a 'nightmarish vision of a Martian vampire'.⁹⁴ Even Corrigan's then-wife, Elaine DuPont, herself a genre cinema actress, described her husband's character as a 'horrible monster'.⁹⁵ These commentators are correct that during the majority of the film the alien creature is presented as a terrifying brute, but in the remarkable sequence in the reactor room the humanity beneath the surface

of the alien Other is put on display. For a few moments the film suggests that the human and the alien are one and the same, quite literally so if the creature's human eyes encourage the viewer to withdraw from the diegesis and note Corrigan's presence in the alien suit. If, as Neil Badmington has argued, 'the sudden presence of the alien [creates] a coherent sense of the human' in this film, then during this sequence it is the collapse of that binary through the sudden presence of the human within the alien which troubles the distinction between the Self and the Other.⁹⁶ In this way, *It!* encourages an exploration of the artificiality of the distinction between the Self and the Other.

The Trollenberg Terror also questions this distinction, again during a sequence in which the aliens are put through physical pain. Towards the end of the film the humans defend the besieged observatory by throwing molotov cocktails at the aliens and summoning a fire bomb strike from an overhead plane. As the bombs begin to fall the creatures are engulfed by flames. Their screams are initially inhuman wails, but as the conflagration takes hold the creatures begin to sound increasingly like children, even babies at times, yelping in agony. Just as in *It!*, the creatures are shown to respond to pain in a recognisably human manner. While *It!* achieved this through the physical reaction of the creature, *Trollenberg* uses sound to create a similar effect.

In *It!* the humanisation of the creature as it suffered was stressed through the use of a close-up shot. *Trollenberg* also highlights the humanised alien's suffering, but this is achieved through the duration and intensity of the images. One and a half minutes of screen time are devoted to the bombing of the observatory and its aftermath. This lengthy sequence is dominated by images of burning bodies, making extensive use of lingering shots of blackened and smoking extraterrestrial limbs. The intensity of the bonfire as it chars the alien

flesh is underscored by the sound of crackling flames. The sequence does not end when the fire goes out and the audience is then presented with a series of burned alien corpses. The duration of the sequence gives the audience time to consider the brutality of these images and the humanisation of the creatures suggested by the uncomfortably human screaming that they produced. Both *It!* and *Trollenberg* place emphasis on the pain experienced by aliens and their recognisable responses to suffering as a means of humanising the creatures. In these moments the binary opposition of alien and human collapses, suggesting the artificiality of the distinction between the Self and the Other.

This positioning of the alien as a sympathetic creature and the resultant questioning of the boundary between Self and Other was not limited to these two films and became a feature of some prominent examples of 1950s science fiction cinema, a fact that did not escape British film magazines of the era. For example, *Picturegoer's* reviewer concluded that 'horrible, rather than horror, is the word for the scenes of realistic holocaust when the eight- or nine-foot ants in *Them!* [1954] are roasted alive', demonstrating an emotional bond with the film's monsters.⁹⁷ One year later, in the pages of the same publication the famed British Director Val Guest requested that the British press did not refer to his film, *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955), as 'horror' but rather as a 'chiller' since 'the monster or "thing" who destroys life against its will, is something to feel sorry for'.⁹⁸ Through such articles it was suggested to the British public that science fiction's creatures were not necessarily monsters and could be thought of as sympathetic figures in much the same way as this chapter has shown was possible in *Trollenberg* and *It!*.

It is significant that *It!* and *Trollenberg* contain moments of uncertainty about the difference between the Self and the Other given that these films were

released at a time when questions were being asked in Britain about the extent to which the Othering of racialised subjects could be tolerated in the wake of the 1958 race riots. If the readings presented in the first half of the chapter saw the battle between humans and aliens as a parallel to the antagonistic relationship between some white Britons and some black immigrants, then the more sympathetic moments in the treatment of the Other in *It!* and *Trollenberg* had the potential to demonstrate the artificiality of these distinctions. It is possible that these films drew attention to the fact that looks could be deceiving and suggested that the colonial immigrants who arrived during the 1950s deserved the same respect as native Britons regardless of the colour of their skin.

Conclusion

Race has not proven a popular lens through which to make sense of 1950s alien encounter films. The alien Other in 1950s science fiction has become so strongly associated with the communist infiltrators who haunted the American public imagination at this time that there has been little examination of the different societal Others that it might have evoked when these films were screened elsewhere. In Britain, for example, public debate framed newly arrived black immigrants from Commonwealth and colonial territories as racial Others distinct from the presumed white national Self. The possibility that science fiction's creatures were understood as racialised figures analogous to these economic migrants was raised by the genre's reliance on familiar racial stereotypes and comparisons between darkly coloured alien costumes and white-skinned human actors. The consequent suggestion that, just like the alien creatures of these films, Britain's newly arrived immigrants drained resources

and put pressure on native communities mirrored much of the public commentary that followed the 1958 race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill.

However, there was also a significant backlash against British racism in the period after the riots that could similarly have helped to shape the meanings that 1950s alien encounter films adopted. For many Britons, the violence of late 1958 underscored the need to tackle racist attitudes and to demonstrate that differences between the races were artificial, social constructs. The fact that *It!* and *Trollenberg* contained moments which humanised their alien creatures indicates that these films were capable of underlining the insignificance of external appearances. The revelation that the alien was more human than had been initially anticipated allowed both films to support the suggestion made in public debate during 1958 that Britain's white and black residents were no different from each other.

This chapter has shown that, at least during late 1958, the figure of the alien Other was able to take on unique meanings in Britain as a result of national debates about race and immigration. Because these readings rely on the forms that public discussion about such issues took in Britain at that time, they represent a specifically British perspective on 1950s science fiction films. They could not, for example, have been duplicated exactly by US audiences since Americans were party to a differently inflected understanding of race and immigration produced by their own national circumstances. As the Introduction to the thesis noted, these issues meant very different things in Britain and America at that time since mass immigration did not begin in the US until the 1960s and the country's population remained overwhelmingly white throughout the 1950s.⁹⁹ Consequently, the readings outlined above represent an understanding of the 1950s alien encounter films that reflects a British

perspective on an issue that mattered in Britain in a way that it did not in America. The arguments presented here have consequently further expanded our knowledge of the specificity of the British reception history of the alien encounter narratives, demonstrating that debates which have not been seen as important to the American reception of these films were certainly able to shape their meaning in Britain. Consequently, this chapter has shown that the globalisation of American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema limits our understanding of the rich range of British debates that framed the interpretation of these films.

Notes

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³ Osborne, Cyril. 20 January 1955. 'Immigration into Britain', *The Times*. p.9.

⁴ Anon. 13 October 1958. 'New Deportation Power Likely to Be Sought', *The Times*. p.6; MacWilliams, Kenneth. 19 September 1958. 'Treatment of Aliens', *The Times*. p.16.

⁵ Anon. 3 September 1958a. 'Black v White', *The Daily Mirror*. p.20.

⁶ Miles, Robert. 1997. 'Beyond the "Race" Concept: The Reproduction of Racism in England', in Gates (1997: 249-274). p.255.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Phizacklea, Annie and Robert Miles. 1980. *Labour and Racism*. London: Routledge. p.21.

⁹ Shain, Farzana. 2003. *The Schooling and Identity of Asian Girls*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books. p.48.

¹⁰ Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. London: Routledge. p.19.

¹¹ Brook, Norman. 10 November 1955. Letter addressed to Prime Minister Anthony Eden. National Archives file PREM 11/2920.

¹² Anon. 'Black v White'. p.20.

- ¹³ Issues of race and immigration have been raised in relation to 1950s science fiction films in an American context in a passing comment in Cantor, Paul A. 2008. 'Un-American Gothic: The Fear of Globalization in Popular Culture', in Bertho, Crawford and Fogarty (2008: 109-127). p. 118. These concerns also underpin Katrina Mann's discussion of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) as a representation of the perceived assault on white, patriarchal, heterosexual society in 1950s America. See Mann, Katrina. 2004. "'You're Next!': Postwar Hegemony Besieged in *'Invasion of the Body Snatchers'*", *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 44, No. 1. Autumn. pp.49-68. However, neither of these discussions takes race or immigration as its primary focus and there has not yet been a sustained debate about the relationship between these issues and 1950s science fiction cinema.
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- ¹⁶ Penketh, Laura. 2000. *Tackling Institutional Racism*. Bristol: The Policy Press. p.52.
- ¹⁷ Phizacklea and Miles. *Labour and Racism*. p.21.
- ¹⁸ Miles. 'Beyond the "Race" Concept'. p.255.
- ¹⁹ Miles, Robert and Rudy Torres. 2007. 'Does "Race" Matter? Transatlantic Perspectives on Racism after "Race Relation"', in Gupta, James, Maaka, Galabuzi and Chris (2007: 65-73). p. 66.
- ²⁰ Bowling, Benjamin. 1998. *Violent Racism: Victimization, Policing and Social Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.28.
- ²¹ Bowling. *Violent Racism*. p.28.
- ²² Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. 2000. *Who Do We Think We Are?: Imagining a New Britain*. London: Allen Lane. p.29.
- ²³ Field, Frank and Patricia Haikin. 1971. *Black Britons*. London: Oxford University Press. p.4.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Desai, Rashmi. 1963. *Indian Immigrants in Britain*. London: Oxford University Press. p.6.
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- ²⁷ Bishop, F. A. 3 July 1957. Letter addressed to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan . National Archives file PREM 11/2920.
- ²⁸ Author Illegible. 27 June 1958. Letter addressed to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. National Archives file PREM 11/2920.
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- ³³ Little, Kenneth. 7 May 1954. 'Colonial Immigration', *The Manchester Guardian* . p.8.
- ³⁴ Brook, Norman. 10 November 1955. Letter addressed to Prime Minister Anthony Eden. National Archives file PREM 11/2920.
- ³⁵ Bowling. *Violent Racism*. p.29; Miles. 'Beyond the "Race" Concept'. p.255.

- ³⁶ Geddes, Andrew. 2003. *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*. London, SAGE Publications. p.33.
- ³⁷ Anon. 8 October 1954. 'London Docks Are Almost Stopped', *The Daily Mirror*. p.16.
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- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Anon. 22 March 1955. 'The Racketeer Landlords', *The Daily Mirror*. p.7.
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- ⁴³ Anon. 'Black v White'. p.20.
- ⁴⁴ Anon. 28 August 1958. 'Renewed Call for Changes in Immigration Law', *The Times*. p.4.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁰ Holloway, Gerry. 2005. *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*. Abingdon: Routledge. p.206.
- ⁵¹ Anon. 4 October 1958. 'London Cinemas', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.3.
- ⁵² Hendershot, Cyndy. 2001. *I Was a Cold War Monster: Horror Films, Eroticism and the Cold War Imagination*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.53; Flynn, John L. 1992. *Cinematic Vampires*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.116; Melton, J. Gordon. 1994. *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopaedia of the Undead*. Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press. p. 524.
- ⁵³ See, for example, Hudson, Dale. 2008. 'Vampires of Colour and the Performance of Multicultural Whiteness', in Bernardi (2008: 127-156).
- ⁵⁴ Polan, Dana. 1997. 'Eros and Syphilization: The Contemporary Horror Film', in Gibian(1997: 119-128). p.119.
- ⁵⁵ Badmington, Neil. 2004. *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp.20-21.
- ⁵⁶ Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp.174-176.
- ⁵⁷ Although this suggests that Jancovich is interested in the relationship between race and 1950s science fiction cinema, his observation is not developed further. See Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. p.184.
- ⁵⁸ Snead, James A. 1994. *White Screen, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*. London: Routledge. p.8.
- ⁵⁹ Anon. 'Black v White'. p.20.

- ⁶⁰ Forrest, Elizabeth. 1 November 1958. 'The Case of the Frightened Ladies', *Picturegoer*. pp. 8-9.
- ⁶¹ Jordan. 'Coloured Immigrants'. p.2.
- ⁶² Forrest. 'The Case of the Frightened Ladies'. pp.8-9.
- ⁶³ Bellin, Joshua David. 2005. *Framing Monsters: Fantasy Film and Social Alienation*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. p.22.
- ⁶⁴ Erb, Cynthia. 1998. *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. p.69.
- ⁶⁵ Bogle, Donald. 2001. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group. (Originally published in 1973). p.13. Although Bogle's work on the pure black buck focuses on American cinema, the anxiety about black male sexuality that this stereotype embodies was a feature of British culture too. Lola Young has observed that 'the themes and preoccupations of [1950s and 1960s British films], made by white film-makers, articulate tensions regarding interracial relationships', suggesting the stigmatisation of romance between people of different races in Britain during this period. See Young, Lola. 1996. *Fear of the Dark: 'Race', Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*. Abingdon: Routledge. p.86.
- ⁶⁶ Bogle. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*. pp.13-14.
- ⁶⁷ Bellin. *Framing Monsters*. pp.21-23.
- ⁶⁸ The monster's sexual fixation on a white woman was a common trope in 1950s science fiction films, notably in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, mentioned above, and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), which sees an alien posing as a human male in order to marry and impregnate a white woman with the aim of repopulating his planet.
- ⁶⁹ Anon. 26 September 1953. 'The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms', *Picturegoer*. p.15.
- ⁷⁰ Anon. 19 September 1953. 'How About THIS In Your Lap?', *Picturegoer*. p.25.
- ⁷¹ Anon. 28 June 1952a. 'Is This Really The Thing?', *Picturegoer*. p.7.
- ⁷² Anon. 'Black v White'. p.20.
- ⁷³ Webster, Wendy. 2005. *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.165.
- ⁷⁴ *Shameful Incident*. 4 September 1958. Pathé News. Camera: Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 58/71. UK.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Anon. 26 August 1958. 'Race Clash in Nottingham "Alarming"', *The Times*. p.4.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Anon. 6 September 1958. 'Mr. Butler on Race Clashes', *The Times*. p.6.
- ⁷⁹ Huddleston, Trevor. 30 August 1958. 'Race-Riots in Nottingham', *The Times*. p.7.
- ⁸⁰ Anon. 24 September 1958. 'Race Trouble "Blessing in Disguise"', *The Times*. p.4.
- ⁸¹ Anon. 10 October 1958. 'A Sixth Form View of Race Prejudice', *The Times*. p.4.
- ⁸² Anon. 8 September 1958. 'Introducing to You...The Boys from Jamaica', *The Daily Mirror*. p. 13.
- ⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Fryer, Peter. 1984. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press. p.381.

⁸⁷ Anon. 'Introducing to You...The Boys from Jamaica'. p.13.

⁸⁸ Stacey, Jackie. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. p.210.

⁸⁹ Stacey, Jackie. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. p.210.

⁹⁰ Palmer, Randy. 1997. *Paul Blaisdell: Monster Maker*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.201.

⁹¹ Johnson, John. 1996. *Cheap Tricks and Class Acts: Special Effects, Makeup and Stunts from the Films of the Fantastic Fifties*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company. p.121.

⁹² Ibid. The use of humanised physiognomy to increase a creature's emotional impact is a familiar trope for fans of science fiction. It has been used to great effect throughout the genre's history, notably in the alien hybrid in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).

⁹³ Hendershot. *I Was a Cold War Monster*. p.53.

⁹⁴ Palmer. *Paul Blaisdell*. p.206.

⁹⁵ Weaver, Tom. 2002. *Science Fiction Confidential*. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland. p.100.

⁹⁶ Badmington. *Alien Chic*. pp.20-21.

⁹⁷ Anon. 4 September 1954. 'Them!', *Picturegoer*. p.22.

⁹⁸ Stoddart, Sarah. 26 November 1955. 'Britain Gets a Monster', *Picturegoer*. p.11.

⁹⁹ Willis, Charles A. 2005. *America in the 1950s*. New York: Facts on File. pp.5-6.

Section B:

Science and Technology

Chapter Four: Nuclear Technology and 1950s Science Fiction

Cinema's Creature Features

Introduction

The 1950s is often characterised as a period of atomic panic in which the world's most powerful militaries produced vast stockpiles of atomic bombs, providing the means by which the Cold War could potentially heat up, while civil engineers erected nuclear power plants, giving the public cause for concern about the possibility of a meltdown. The atomic age certainly provided British society with a plethora of new threats about which it could be justifiably terrified, but, as is so often the case, cinema went even further. 1950s science fiction films presented a world in which nuclear technology gave birth to a wave of mutated insects, radioactive lizard monsters and prehistoric beasts woken from their slumber by an atomic blast. This was a decade in which science fiction imagined the world, as Ian Conrich puts it, 'besieged by colossal creatures', the vast majority of which were in some way the result of nuclear experimentation.¹ Against a backdrop of the real-world horror of potential nuclear annihilation, these so-called 'creature features', such as *Beginning of the End* (1958), *Them!* (1954) and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), set about imagining monstrous, radioactive beasts whose fear factor was fuelled by an increased public awareness of the debates surrounding nuclear technology.

Conventional wisdom tells us that the simultaneous rise of these celluloid nuclear monsters and the emergence of the nuclear arms race as a key battleground of the Cold War was no accident. The study of the ways in which 1950s science fiction films negotiated and interpreted American Cold War atomic panic has provoked much debate in recent decades. Cyndy Hendershot,

for example, explicitly situates these films within the context of 1950s American nuclear paranoia, arguing that the era's creature features 'examine the potential eclipsing of the human species brought about by the atomic bomb and its psychological and physiological effects'.² Similarly, Melvin E. Matthews has claimed that 'Hollywood churned out atomic mutation films that came to symbolize the nuclear-age anxieties' of 1950s America.³ Adilifu Nama, too, has observed that 'science fiction cinema of the 1950s became the primary vehicle for American film audiences to attempt to confront feelings of dread and despair' which resulted in part from 'the nuclear threat attached to the political gamesmanship of the cold war'.⁴ As indicated in Chapter One, these arguments typify much of the critical debate about nuclear technology in 1950s science fiction cinema in that they describe genre films of the era as projections of American nuclear anxieties.

The creature features of this period certainly display a narrative preoccupation with radiation, but this chapter explores the range of meanings that these films might have held given Britain's unique relationship to nuclear technology during the 1950s. Although many western nations, Britain included, feared Soviet nuclear aggression during this period, there were discrepancies between the ways in which they understood and related to the nuclear threat. As Tracy C. Davis' comparative study of civil defence in Britain, America and Canada has indicated, Americans and Canadians could rely on their basements for some refuge from a nuclear attack, while British homes largely did not offer this type of protection.⁵ American cities were dispersed across a vast continent while Britain was a small, relatively densely populated island that could more easily be choked by radioactive fallout. The French and British desired nuclear weapons in part to bolster their significance in an age of decolonisation while

America's vast stockpile of warheads became a symbol of the nation's position as the only remaining western superpower. Subtle differences in the ways in which these technologies were understood in different territories meant that 1950s nuclear anxieties manifested in different forms across the west. Consequently, readings of 1950s creature features that have been derived from American nuclear paranoia cannot necessarily be transposed onto British audiences. Even within Britain, however, nuclear anxieties were not uniform, since the danger posed by Soviet weaponry might have been much more acute to a Londoner than, for example, to a resident of the rural Scottish Highlands. Although Conrich has begun the task of analysing the ways in which British nuclear anxieties shaped domestic 1950s science fiction films, his work on this topic is relatively concise and the diversity of attitudes on display in the country is not accounted for.⁶ This chapter aims to expand on this existing work by exploring how 1950s Britons understood and related to nuclear technology and how the range of opinions and outlooks present in Britain allowed different interpretations of the era's atomic creature features to emerge.

In order to account for at least some of this diversity, the analysis that follows again presents two different perspectives on the issue. The first of these examines aspects of 1950s British public debate which encouraged Britons to recognise the unique horror of nuclear warfare, but to contextualise it within their relatively recent memories of the British home front during World War II. The first half of this chapter argues that some Britons suffered a similar nuclear paranoia to their American counterparts, but that this was expressed through an understanding of the nuclear bomb derived from their experiences of Nazi bombing in the 1940s. This facet of the British understanding of nuclear war is then used as a lens through which to examine a particular narrative moment

that is repeated across the majority of the 1950s creature features, namely the monster's attack on a major city. This moment has been chosen as it often contains images that mirror both the British civilian experience of the Second World War and the nation's planning for a nuclear attack. This is certainly true of the two case study films addressed by this chapter. Both *Behemoth the Sea Monster*, a British creature feature from 1959 which sees London faced with a colossal reptilian creature, and *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, an American film from 1955 in which a gigantic octopus attacks San Francisco, contain images that might have been understood as allusions to both the Blitz and to British planning for nuclear war, making them suitable candidates for exploration through British anxieties about nuclear technology that were often rooted in experiences of the Second World War.

The second half of this chapter reexamines these films through a different assessment of Britain's understanding of nuclear technology. For some in Britain, anxieties about the atomic age jostled with the notion that nuclear technology represented the nation's best hope for recovery after the Second World War had battered its economy and international influence. For these Britons, the nation's nuclear expertise, signalled in part by the opening of Calder Hall, the world's first nuclear reactor capable of producing commercial quantities of electricity, led to optimism that nuclear technology represented a way for the British economy to cast off its former reliance on Anglo-American loan money and emerge into a new, high-tech future. Although Britons were certainly aware of the potentially devastating military use of nuclear material, they were also encouraged to consider its peaceful use in civilian life and its potential to inspire international co-operation in the post-war years. This positioning of nuclear technology as both necessary and desirable is used to

reassess *Behemoth the Sea Monster* and *It Came from Beneath the Sea*.

Reading both films through the more positive aspects of Britain's outlook on the atomic age, this section uncovers the ways in which they signalled the beneficial potential of the country's nuclear project, helped to legitimise Britain's use of nuclear power despite its inherent risks and bolstered the nation's drive towards developing its nuclear expertise.

Just as earlier chapters have found contrasting messages available to British audiences in 1950s science fiction cinema, this chapter will also suggest that nuclear technology was a contested site in British public debate and hence that its presence in the era's creature features rendered them open to reinterpretation by different sections of the British public. Crucially, the different reading strategies described below are each derived from the British understanding of nuclear technology during the 1950s and hence represent a uniquely British perspective on these films. The interpretations offered here address the specificity of the British response to the presentation of the atomic age in 1950s creature features and consequently offer a means by which the globalisation of American readings of these films, derived exclusively from US nuclear paranoia, can be resisted.

Characterising Public Debate: Nuclear Anxieties in 1950s Britain

In her work on 1950s American attitudes towards the nuclear bomb, Cyndy Hendershot observed that it was often seen as 'merely another conventional weapon that would be used in the next world war'.⁷ Hendershot suggests that American 'discussions of the atomic bomb analogized it with conventional bombs' through a comparison of its destructive power with that of TNT.⁸ During the latter half of the 1950s, British public debate often followed

suit. In early 1955, for example, *The Manchester Guardian* described nuclear explosions performed by America's Atomic Energy Commission as 'ranging from one kiloton to fifty kilotons', clarifying that 'one kiloton is the power equivalent of 1,000 tons of TNT'.⁹ *The Times* similarly discussed plans to excavate a second Panama Canal by using nuclear devices 'with a total explosive yield corresponding to 16.2, 18.6 and 15.35 million tons of TNT'.¹⁰ Even when trying to address the novelty of these weapons, *The Daily Mirror* resorted to comparisons between one nuclear bomb and 'several million tons of TNT', seemingly unable to express to the reader the true force of the explosion without equating it to conventional weaponry.¹¹ This trope was still active as late as 1959, when *The Manchester Guardian* questioned 'whether the seismographic record of a nuclear explosion can be distinguished from that of a conventional one'.¹² Be it as a result of the inadequacy of written descriptions of nuclear explosions, the sheer unfamiliarity of nuclear weapons or a desire to rationalise away the horrific capability of these bombs, the British press often fell back on the same tactics as their American counterparts, conventionalising nuclear bombs through comparisons to their non-nuclear predecessors.

Perhaps as a result of the fact that British public debate often considered nuclear weaponry as an updated form of the bombs dropped on the nation by the Nazis, atomic age civil defence planning in Britain was largely based on models used during the Blitz. Second World War tactics for protecting the population from aerial bombardment, such as the use of public bomb shelters and the evacuation of children from population centres, formed the backbone of Britain's atomic age civil defence. As Tracy C. David notes, 'the British maintained and updated the plans they had executed in 1938-45 for the removal of selected groups from vulnerable cities to the countryside and to

Ireland'.¹³ Emanuel J. de Kadt has similarly indicated that before 1960 official planning for a nuclear attack on Britain entailed evacuating twelve million people from urban areas.¹⁴ For de Kadt, 'the whole idea of evacuating, on a voluntary basis, before the outbreak of war, women, children, the aged and others in priority groups, from predetermined evacuation areas to predetermined reception areas', very much a feature of the nation's plans in the event of a nuclear war, 'is a leftover from World War II'.¹⁵ The notion that nuclear bombs were a mere evolution of conventional weaponry was further signalled in 1950s Britain through the recycling of Second World War era civil defence strategies.

Similarly, British civil defence exercises, often vast citywide pieces of theatre which rehearsed the aftermath of a nuclear strike, helped to ground the nation's perception of such an event in wartime experiences of conventional bombing. During one such exercise in 1959, the population of Preston was asked to perform a dry run of the procedures that had been devised for the eventuality of a nearby nuclear attack. A recording of this exercise, made under the title *County Borough of Preston Civil Defence Exercise "Prestonian"*, shows that sequences of the drill took place amongst crumbling buildings reminiscent of the bombed out ruins of Blitz era British cities.¹⁶ Although Preston itself never faced sustained bombardment during the war, there is evidence that some bombs did fall on the city. As one survivor, Fred Latham, has noted:

You could hear the planes coming over towards Barrow, which was full of the shipping and construction industries...The returning planes were the more dangerous because they would release any bombs they hadn't had chance to drop over Barrow.¹⁷

It is possible, therefore, that the partially destroyed buildings that were used during the Preston civil defence exercise to stand in for the structures devastated by a nuclear blast had, in reality, been hit by Nazi bombs. Similar

civil defence exercises took place in various cities across the country, a significant proportion of which had been subjected to wartime bombing. Barrow, Bath, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Canterbury, Cardiff, Coventry, Clydebank, Exeter, Greenock, Hull, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Plymouth and York each fell under heavy bombardment and any civil defence exercises held in these cities were very likely to have been performed against the backdrop of buildings that had crumbled under the Nazi bombing, but which now stood in for the radioactive ruins of an atomic attack. This potential equation in the minds of participants and observers of the destruction caused by German bombing runs with the destruction caused by a nuclear strike meant that civil defence exercises like that in Preston risked further masking the differences between nuclear and conventional warfare.

There is evidence that this type of public confusion was prevalent in Britain in the late 1950s. *The Times* reported in 1957 that a Miss Pauline Webb had claimed during a meeting of Church bodies that ‘young people of her generation who had grown up since the war looked back in anger to childhood memories of the “blitz” and forward in fear to the threat of the hydrogen bomb’.¹⁸ This suggests that, for some Britons, conventional and nuclear war were seen as merely different facets of the same violent undercurrent that characterised the era. One year later, *The Times* reported that, while it would still be impossible to shoot down a German V2 rocket, progress had been made in defence since it was now possible to detect an intercontinental ballistic missile (I.C.B.M.) via radar.¹⁹ The atomic era I.C.B.M. is here framed as an advanced form of the V2 from the Second World War. In 1959, *The Times* discussed how Britain’s Women’s Volunteer Services, founded during the Second World War ‘to bring home to all women...what air raids might mean, and what they could do

for their families and themselves', was still involved in 'preparing the household woman for air raids. Only this time it will be the nuclear kind'.²⁰ The press thus also contributed to the perpetuation of the belief that nuclear warfare and conventional warfare were not dissimilar.

This suggestion became a common motif of late 1950s public debate. When nuclear war became a real possibility so soon after the end of the Second World War, Britain returned to the tried and tested survival strategies that had prevented the already high casualty figures of the Blitz becoming even more extreme. Although these plans were updated and amended as appropriate for the atomic age, images and ideas associated with the Blitz, such as mass evacuations, bomb shelters, conventional explosives and ruined cityscapes, came to underpin the public understanding of the new threat of nuclear war. Both conventional and nuclear warfare came to share this common iconography in Britain, suggesting the extent to which they had become intertwined in public perception.

However, British public debate was not so caught up in the notion that nuclear warfare was analogous to conventional warfare that it ignored the new dangers posed by the bomb. Despite what Tony Shaw describes as government efforts aimed at 'downplaying the effects of radioactive fall-out', information on the unique and terrifying nature of these weapons was available to Britons during the late 1950s.²¹ Indeed, there was a trend during this period for the proliferation of specific facts and figures about the consequences of a nuclear attack on a British city. In 1955, for example, *The Daily Mirror* reported:

The casualties would certainly have to be reckoned in the MILLIONS. Gigantic fires would be instantly ignited by heat and flash. The hearts of towns would be completely torn out and the radius of destruction by gamma rays may be...anything within 400 miles...Over 80 per cent of British industry and over a quarter of her population are contained in the first ten major towns of the British Isles...There is no comparable target in the world.²²

Similarly, Dr Antoinette Pirie of Oxford University told *The Times* in 1959 of ‘an island 100 miles from Bikini [which] had had to be evacuated for three years after a nuclear test there in 1954’, suggesting that ‘any survivor of an attack on Britain would have to be similarly evacuated’ even though there existed ‘no provision for [such an exodus] because it could not be done’.²³ Alongside newspaper articles such as these, the television, still very novel in Britain but increasingly popular throughout the decade, also capitalised on the British public’s interest in the morbid details of life after a nuclear strike by bringing dramas about the horrifying consequences of a nuclear explosion into British homes. J. B. Priestley’s ‘Doomsday for Dyson’ was one such programme broadcast in early 1958. *The Daily Mail* heralded this teleplay as ‘the most controversial ever seen on TV’ and explained that it told ‘the story of an H-bomb attack on Britain and its effect on one family, the Dysons’.²⁴ This newspaper’s reviewer emphasised the distressing nature of this broadcast by noting that ‘some of the scenes are considered horrific’ and ‘because of this, there will be a warning before the play starts that it is NOT suitable’ for younger viewers.²⁵ Britons were thus made aware of the horrors of nuclear war through a variety of channels during the late 1950s.

Although a nuclear war might have been understood by Blitz survivors as the return of familiar wartime practices, the British public were also informed of its unique, nightmarish character. British anxieties about nuclear bombardment were thus intertwined with wartime memories of conventional bombardment. This connection, forged between an iconic moment in Britain’s wartime past and the possibility of the country’s future destruction, provided a unique national inflection to the era’s atomic panic.

Reading 1950s Creature Features: Nuclear Blitz

If Britons partly imagined the prospect of nuclear war through their experiences of the Blitz, 1950s creature features provided another forum in which these two different types of conflict became confused. As I argue below, these films included the type of Blitz iconography that had also come to symbolise atomic era civil defence in Britain, causing the attack of the monster to appear as an eerie hybrid of past and future conflicts in much the same way as many Britons imagined a nuclear attack would be. This section examines the ways in which this collision of nuclear and conventional warfare manifests in the 1950s creature features through a discussion of two case study films, *Behemoth the Sea Monster* and *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. These films, and many others of their ilk such as *Tarantula* (1955) and *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (1956), presented their creatures as artefacts of the nuclear age, but the ways in which they framed their attacks on major cities associate them with the Blitz. In highlighting this system of dual referencing this section suggests that 1950s creature features had the potential to allow Britons to see their fears of a nuclear Blitz played out on screen.

Behemoth the Sea Monster is a British film that was co-written and directed by Eugène Lourié, a Russian-born Frenchman who worked as a production designer on a number of Jean Renoir's films in the late 1930s. When Renoir fled the Nazi invasion of France, moving to America in the early 1940s, Lourié followed him and began working in Hollywood, notably as the art director of Charlie Chaplin's final film, *Limelight* (1952). During the 1950s and early 1960s he developed a reputation as a leading figure in the production of science fiction's creature features, directing classics of the genre such as *The*

Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, *Behemoth the Sea Monster* and *Gorgo* (1961), the latter two of which were both set and produced in London.

Behemoth begins with a series of mysterious events. A fisherman is attacked on a beach and is left dying from serious burns, muttering about a 'behemoth'. Vast numbers of dead fish, later found to be radioactive, wash ashore on the Cornish coast. Reports are made of a strange creature glimpsed beneath the water. Troubled by the potential connection between these events, American scientist Steve Karnes takes charge of a team who are working to solve the mystery before it is too late. Upon further investigation and consultation with an excitable palaeontologist, Karnes deduces that the creature is a prehistoric reptile called the Paeleosaurus. The beast seems to be both electrified and radioactive, making it particularly deadly to human beings. As Karnes sets out to tackle the Paeleosaurus, it makes its way up the Thames estuary and begins to demolish London. The human counterstrike is delayed once it is discovered that the use of conventional weapons would spill the creature's radioactive blood across the city. It is reasoned that a radioactive isotope could be used to bury a torpedo fired from a nearby submarine within the creature, destroying it from the inside without risking contamination. This plan succeeds and the monster is slain. However, reports are received of dead fish washing ashore in America.

Kim Newman has mentioned how British science fiction invasion narratives of the 1950s made frequent visual references to the Second World War.²⁶ As noted above, Ian Conrich has shown that this is also true of the era's British creature features. Conrich has identified their 'warning signs, shelters, sandbags, public announcements, the civil defence and the emergency services' as iconographic images lifted from the British home front of the

Second World War.²⁷ Each of these elements is present in *Behemoth*, particularly during the lengthy sequence towards the end of the film in which the citizens of London prepare for the beast's approach. Men in uniform arrive in military vehicles to build makeshift defences and to warn the public about the oncoming attack. Defensive weaponry is deployed and people prepare to shelter from the violence. This type of scene, typical of the monster attacks in many 1950s creature features and common in British offerings such as *Behemoth*, would have been familiar to British audiences from their experiences during the Blitz. In this way, the iconography of *Behemoth's* monster attack serves to equate the creature with the conventional weaponry used by the Nazis in their bombing of Britain.

It was not only British creature features that made use of this type of imagery. Many American films of this type, such as *It Came from Beneath the Sea*, also presented their monster attacks through iconography commonly associated with the Blitz. This film begins with a nuclear submarine suffering a strange encounter with a mysterious creature off America's Pacific coast. The military draft in two scientists, Lesley Joyce and John Carter, to examine flesh that the beast lost in the machinery of the submarine. They hypothesise that a colossal octopus has been forced from its lair in an underwater trench due to contamination by nuclear material. The creature can no longer feed since its prey are sensitive to radiation and can now feel it coming. The hungry beast has gone in search of other food and found it in the form of humanity. After the existence of the octopus is confirmed by the crew of another vessel that is attacked at sea, the military begins taking the threat seriously. With the beast seemingly heading towards San Francisco, a trap is laid by unfurling an electrical net beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. However, the net proves no

match for the octopus, which destroys a section of the bridge before making its way into San Francisco Bay. Sending its long tentacles into the city itself, the creature makes short work of several buildings and only the military's flamethrowers are able to force its retreat back into the water. The ending of the film mirrors that of *Behemoth* since a submarine is launched with an atomic torpedo onboard and, after a scuffle, the warhead is detonated killing the octopus.

Just as in *Behemoth*, the moment when *Beneath the Sea*'s monster attacks the city is littered with the iconography that Conrich has claimed associated British creature features with the Blitz. 'Warning signs, shelters, sandbags, public announcements, the civil defence and the emergency services' are all once again present in this film.²⁸ *Beneath the Sea* features several appearances of the emergency services, for example, including one shot in which four police motorcycles and three police cars leave a police station in formation with their sirens blaring. *Behemoth* depicts public warnings about the oncoming attack through radio announcements claiming that there are 'thirty-six dead and more than fifty missing' and newspaper headlines such as 'Monster Attacks London'. In *Beneath the Sea*, news about the beast's advance is similarly disseminated through the media with newspaper headlines such as 'Golden Gate Closed Tight' and 'Coast Awaits Sea-Beast'. Both films draw attention to the plight of the civilians caught up in the destruction through scenes of fleeing crowds. Both prominently feature the military response to the attack through a focus on hardware such as weapons and vehicles. During these sequences, *Beneath the Sea* draws on the same thread of imagery as *Behemoth*, suggesting that its creature's assault was also available for interpretation as an analogy of the Blitz.

Another prominent strand of imagery in these films that recalls the British experience of World War II is their focus on devastated urban landscapes. Conrich has argued that 'spectacular shows of urban decimation' in British creature features represent 'a return to wartime images'.²⁹ Cyndy Hendershot has similarly claimed that, even for American viewers who did not suffer through the hardships of the Blitz, 'images of cities in ruins recall the bombed-out cities of wartime newsreels'.³⁰ This is particularly noticeable in the British creature feature *Gorgo* from 1961, which sees another gigantic reptile attack London. During this film a reporter comments of the urban destruction that 'there's been nothing like it, not even the worst of the Blitz'. The poster for this film, depicting the colossal monster standing amid the ruins of a London street, even used a popular nickname that the British had given to the Second World War, 'the big one', to describe the beast. However, while *Gorgo* was particularly ostentatious in its use of destroyed urban settings to evoke wartime London, both *Behemoth* and *Beneath the Sea* feature similar imagery. Once *Behemoth's* titular beast arrives in London, for example, it smashes buildings, leaving piles of rubble in its wake, brings down power lines and spreads fires throughout the city. The film lingers on these images during the attack of the creature, a series of extended sequences towards the end of the film, the longest of which lasts almost four minutes. Crucially, this gives the audience adequate time to note the ways in which these images of a crumbling London mimic the iconography of the Blitz. The attack of this creature is even directly compared to the Second World War bombing of London by some of the film's characters when they dismiss the idea of completely evacuating the city because 'we didn't even do that at the height of the Blitz'. In this sense, *Behemoth* prefigures *Gorgo's* reenactment of the Blitz through images of urban destruction.

It Came from Beneath the Sea makes similar use of shots of a crumbling urban landscape to *Behemoth*. As *Beneath the Sea*'s gigantic octopus enters San Francisco Bay it damages the city's famous Golden Gate Bridge before reaching its enormous tentacles down the city's streets, toppling a clock tower, smashing windows and walls alike, causing the ground to shake beneath the feet of fleeing pedestrians and showering civilians with rubble. If British audiences saw *Behemoth*'s focus on urban destruction as 'a return to wartime images', then a similar focus, available for similar readings, is also evident in *Beneath the Sea*.³¹ Perhaps the suggestion of the Blitz is weaker here than in *Behemoth* since the latter film is set in London, which, unlike San Francisco, actually suffered Nazi bombing. However, if, as Conrich indicates, it is simply scenes of urban destruction that suggest this reading then perhaps the devastation of San Francisco in *Beneath the Sea* might also have been suggestive of the Blitz.

Although the use of Blitz iconography in these monster attack sequences may have been noted by US audiences, it was likely to have taken on particular meaning in Britain where, as the previous section suggested, this type of imagery was also associated with nuclear warfare. In referencing the British home front, these films also simultaneously referenced British civil defence planning for a nuclear strike. In these terms, Conrich suggests that the Blitz images that he identifies also resembled 'contingency measures...for a possible nuclear attack'.³² Indeed, each of these icons of the Blitz, including the emergency services, sandbags and warning signs, was also on the streets of Preston during the civil defence exercise depicted in *County Borough of Preston Civil Defence Exercise "Prestonian"*. They formed part of the common iconography that the home front of the Second World War shared with British

atomic era civil defence. Having experienced civil defence exercises such as that in Preston, the British public might well have been primed to read the imagery that surrounded the attacks made on cities by the monsters of the era's creature features as evocations of both the Blitz and, consequently, nuclear warfare. However, whereas Conrich discusses these as two distinct points of reference to which the imagery of the 1950s creature features alluded, the historical evidence presented earlier in this chapter suggests that the Blitz and the possibility of a nuclear strike had largely become amalgamated in the public imagination, indicating that the monster attack sequences in *Behemoth* and *Beneath the Sea* could appear to be the type of nuclear Blitz that many Britons feared.

This is also evident in terms of the ruined urban landscapes depicted in these films. Conrich reads their ruined cityscapes as 'a return to wartime images', but they also recalled the ways in which the British envisioned a nuclear war.³³ Britons had been warned by *The Manchester Guardian* as early as 1953 to expect 'between 50,000 and 100,000 homeless persons...from the dropping of a single atomic bomb on a British city', thereby stressing the level of damage a city could anticipate in the event of a nuclear attack.³⁴ Indeed, the Preston civil defence exercise took place amongst the crumbling ruins of bombed out houses that stood in for this type of nuclear urban devastation. Just like the other icons of the home front featured in the monster attack sequences of 1950s science fiction films, scenes of inner-city destruction thus became suggestive not only of Blitz imagery, but also of a nuclear war. As such, the shells of ruined buildings became another site at which past and potential conflicts merged in both the British imagination and in the era's creature features.

Both *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth the Sea Monster* are products of a post-war era in which the world had already seen cities such as London come under sustained aerial bombardment. Consequently it is perhaps unsurprising that the ways in which they imagined urban conflict, albeit with a monstrous creature replacing a foreign aggressor, drew heavily on the experiences of the British people who had suffered through a protracted period of Nazi bombing. In Britain, however, these wartime experiences were the base on which civil defence programmes built their plans for a nuclear attack. For many Britons, the iconography of the Blitz had been re-imagined as the imagery of atomic age warfare. Consequently, when films such as *Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth* depicted their beasts engaged in acts of destruction that mirrored the wartime bombing of London, they simultaneously suggested a city under nuclear attack. Although Conrich has indicated that these films resembled both the Blitz and a nuclear strike, they actually entangled these two conflicts, appearing as a hybrid of fears from the past and for the future. The intertwining of conventional and nuclear warfare, evident both in the 1950s creature features and in contemporary British public debate, provided a nationally specific inflection to interpretations of the terrifying beasts of the decade's science fiction cinema, allowing them to engage with British atomic era anxieties through their staging of a nuclear Blitz.

Characterising Public Debate: 1950s Britain's Nuclear Tomorrow

In 1956, Queen Elizabeth II opened Calder Hall, the world's first nuclear reactor to generate sufficient quantities of energy for civilian use, near to Seascale, a village situated on the coast of the Irish Sea in what is now Cumbria but was then Cumberland. The United Kingdom Atomic Energy

Authority (UKAEA) codenamed the design of the reactor PIPPA (pressured pile for producing power and plutonium), owing to its capability of producing both electricity for the national grid and plutonium for military purposes.³⁵ Britain's initial engagement with nuclear power thus acknowledged the potential of this technology for terrible devastation, but simultaneously promised the utopian dream of limitless, cheap, sustainable energy. Although many Britons harboured anxieties about nuclear technology, as discussed above, Calder Hall served as a reminder of the potential benefits of the atomic age. This more positive outlook on nuclear science was bolstered during the 1950s by numerous attempts to promote nuclear power as a safe means of both augmenting Britain's post-war economic recovery and rejuvenating its failing international significance in the post-colonial era. This section examines a number of the ways in which nuclear technology was framed in a positive light in Britain during the latter half of this decade, countering the previous section's focus on the destructive potential of the bomb. It describes how nuclear technology was tied to notions of national prosperity by a scientific and political community seeking to rally public sentiment in the face of strong nuclear anxieties. By discussing some of the ways in which the British imagined nuclear technology as a gateway to a better future, this section prepares the way for the final section of this chapter to discuss how this more positive outlook might have enabled Britons to produce alternative readings of the 1950s creature features to those outlined above.

After the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by American atomic bombs in 1945 and, later on, in the wake of a fire at a reactor at the Seascale plant in 1957 that spread radioactive material across the surrounding area, the 1950s saw the emergence of a glut of public messages in Britain about how

safe, reliable and efficient nuclear power was. Unsurprisingly, many of these came from the burgeoning nuclear industry itself. In 1958, for example, the UKAEA produced a short training film called *Full Power* (1958), aimed at demonstrating the proper running of the Calder Hall facility to potential and current staff.³⁶ Despite its small, select intended audience, this film offers clues about how the nuclear industry wished to be perceived during the late 1950s. *Full Power* repeatedly stresses both the safety and the conscientious management of the Calder Hall facility. Viewers are told that ‘nothing is left to chance’ and that ‘the highest degree of safety’ was assured. A series of shots depict well-groomed men gently tinkering with wheels, cranks, dials and graphs, all the while taking careful notes. A voiceover announces that the authorities at the site have ‘two years of experience’, presumably a reassuring fact in these very early years of nuclear energy. In this way, *Full Power* works to mask the dangers of nuclear power behind the image of Calder Hall as a well-managed and secure facility.

The UKAEA was not alone in spreading this type of message. During the 1950s, the safety of nuclear technologies was also promoted by other British industries that similarly sought to pacify the public about their use of radiation. An early example of this came from Unilever, which produced a magazine reel containing three short films about different aspects of its operations. Named simply *Unilever Magazine No. 1* (c.1950), this reel begins with a sequence that examines the role of nuclear technology in bringing a variety of Unilever’s products to market.³⁷ The film encourages its audience to recognise the supposed silliness of atomic anxieties by presenting radiation in non-threatening terms. It refers to the company’s scientists by the friendly moniker ‘back room boys’ and shows the role of irradiation in menial tasks such as

distributing nutrients through chicken feed. It suggests that if one were afraid of such processes then one 'might as well worry about the radioactivity in the dial of your luminous watch', domesticating the threat and contextualising it into the viewer's everyday life. This tactic is used again when the narration announces that the public encounter background radiation 'every time we buy ourselves a pint or press another gin on that blonde'. Radiation is shown to be as ordinary as a visit to the pub and as harmless as much of 1950s society saw this type of flirtation to be. *Unilever Magazine No. 1* presents a world in which atomic panic is laughably small-minded and radiation is merely a tool for making everyday life easier. This emphasis on the beneficial qualities of nuclear technology became a common theme in similar short advertisement films produced by various British companies during the 1950s, such as *Another Name for Power* (1959), produced for Associated Electrical Industries Ltd to describe the good that radiation can do in the field of medicine.³⁸

These messages about the benefits of radiation in highly specialised industries were supported by a series of news reports that framed Britain's expanding use of nuclear technology as being of national and international benefit. Newsreels were one medium through which this occurred. On 4th December 1958, a British Pathé newsreel entitled *Atomic Power from Britain - Italy* was released in cinemas documenting the building of 'the first atomic power station in the world to be erected by one country for another'.³⁹ According to this film, Britain was at the cutting edge of technological innovation and, as a result, had been asked to build a nuclear reactor in Italy. That Britain, an Allied Power in the Second World War, was providing nuclear expertise to Italy, one of the former belligerent Axis Powers, only thirteen years after being on opposite sides of the most bloody conflict in human history underlined the potential for

nuclear co-operation to help forge closer international relations. This was again highlighted by the formation of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), an international body aimed at orchestrating nuclear power sharing in Europe, in 1957. Though Britain was not a member of Euratom, Italy was, and so Britain did participate to some extent in the use of atomic age technology as a means of uniting the European continent after the Second World War.

The British hope that nuclear power could be used to inspire international unity was also on display in the print media of the late 1950s. *The Daily Mirror* described Calder Hall, even in the midst of a staff walk-out over safety concerns, as ‘the world’s first atom-power-for-peace plant’.⁴⁰ This type of phrasing gained currency in Britain around that time, most probably as a result of the ‘the International Atoms-for-Peace conference’ in Geneva in 1958, which, *The Daily Mirror* reported, saw the signing of the contracts for the Italian reactor.⁴¹ Under the headline ‘Atoms for Peace’, *The Manchester Guardian* reported that ‘proceedings have formally been blessed with international friendliness and bonhomie’, with only the occasional flaring up of political rivalries.⁴² In 1957, *The Times* even reported that Prime Minister Harold Macmillan himself had justified Britain’s possession of nuclear weapons by claiming ‘that the whole purpose of the defence plans of Great Britain and her allies can be stated in a single phrase: to prevent war’.⁴³ In 1950s Britain, nuclear technology was certainly associated with the bomb, but it also stood for peace, international co-operation and prosperity, three key British interests in the post-war years.

Nuclear power was also presented as being useful in Britain’s own national self-interest. Britain’s economy had been devastated by the Second

World War. The Anglo-American Loan Agreement of 1946 saw Britain borrowing \$3.75 billion from the US to stave off the imminent threat of bankruptcy. The sheer size of this loan, which took the form of a line of credit that Britain could draw on, indicates the severity of the country's financial crisis in the immediate post-war years. By the 1950s, although the situation had improved and the period referred to as 'austerity Britain' had drawn to a close, the British economy was still in a fragile state. Nuclear technology's promise of limitless energy and its potential for financial exploitation thus made it a popular source of hope for Britain's economic future. *Today Tomorrow* (release date unspecified but certainly between 1955 and 1959), a film produced to advertise the work of Crossley Brothers Ltd, a manufacturer of internal combustion engines for UKAEA nuclear power plants, demonstrates this drive towards economic growth through nuclear power.⁴⁴ Shots of technical equipment and delivery trucks moving to and fro suggest a busy and purposeful industry, while the audience is told that 'the United Kingdom, by her achievements' has taken the global lead in developing a high-tech and successful nuclear sector. *Today Tomorrow* taps into national optimism about nuclear technology's role in Britain's post-war development by promoting Crossley Brothers Ltd, and hence nuclear engineering, as an important factor in the restoration of national pride and economic growth at a time when the country faced decolonisation and financial uncertainty.

With nuclear technology being perceived as a significant factor in the broader success of the nation, the government itself became keen to reverse any negative public opinion that surrounded either nuclear power or nuclear weaponry. In March 1958, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan even went so far as to write to an unfortunately illegible recipient that 'I will do my best in the

speeches I make to steady public opinion' about nuclear technology.⁴⁵ In the weeks that followed there seems to have been an increased focus on redressing public sentiment in this way. As Macmillan wrote to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster nine days later:

It is most important that we should find some way of organising and directing an effective campaign to counter the current agitation against this country's possession of nuclear weapons...Letters to *The Times* are all very well, but do not reach the middle range of people...Can we persuade some influential publicists to write articles? Are there any reliable scientists? Or Church of England Bishops?⁴⁶

This manipulation of public opinion in favour of nuclear weapons continued with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster identifying sympathetic 'intellectuals, Churchmen, scientists and others' with the aim that 'the BBC and the programme companies will be confidentially informed [of the need to promote nuclear weapons] and the suggestion made that these people should be invited to give expression to their views on sound and television'.⁴⁷ Twenty days after sending this letter, the Chancellor wrote again to the Prime Minister to confirm that 'the objective [of this campaign] is a steady stream of spoken, printed and broadcast contributions' from public figures in support of Britain's nuclear programme.⁴⁸ The Chancellor quickly became the organisational force behind this campaign, as revealed by Philip de Zulueta, Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, when he wrote to Macmillan to inform him that Lord Hailsham wanted to discuss radioactivity in the House of Lords, but 'I think, however, that it would be as well for him to work closely with the Chancellor of the Duchy in organising it'.⁴⁹ Just as the Prime Minister had hoped, the Chancellor's efforts to control the ways in which nuclear technology was discussed went some way to reversing negative public sentiment. In May 1958, just two months after Macmillan had voiced his concerns, the Chancellor reported to him that 'I suspect that the press, and maybe the country, is a little weary of the whole business of polls,

processions and pontifical pronouncements on the hydrogen bomb'.⁵⁰ With public apathy towards the issue of nuclear weapons on the rise, the government campaign was succeeding.

This was not an approach that was readily abandoned by government officials. As late as 1965, the British authorities were involved in suppressing material that cast a negative light on nuclear technology. Peter Watkins' BBC film, *The War Game*, which received a very limited cinema release in 1966 despite being originally intended for broadcast during the previous year, depicted the likely, and deeply disturbing, consequences of a Soviet nuclear attack on Britain. The film's broadcast was delayed while governmental approval was sought by the BBC. Watkins' film was ultimately pulled from the schedules. Though the BBC has stood by its claim that, as an independent operation, the decision not to broadcast the film was its own, political influence is widely blamed for the effectual ban that the film received.⁵¹ Indeed, Patrick Murphy provides compelling new documentary evidence that government officials were directly responsible for suppressing the film in his short feature, *The War Game - The Controversy* (2003).⁵² The desire to limit the availability of material that depicted nuclear technology in an unfavourable light, evident in the Prime Minister's papers from the late 1950s, persisted through to the mid-1960s.

The 1950s was an era of great contrast in Britain's outlook on nuclear technology. While many feared an oncoming nuclear war, messages about the benefits of the atomic age were also prominent in public debate. Those with a vested interest in the success of Britain's nuclear programme, both in industry and government, made the case that nuclear technology represented Britain's best hope for economic prosperity and peace. The public were told that nuclear

power was safe and reliable, that nuclear co-operation could unite old enemies and prevent future conflicts and that radiation could usher in a new age of more efficient medical and industrial practices. There is little question that Britons suffered from anxieties about the potential use of nuclear weapons during the 1950s, but these fears were at least partially counterbalanced by an array of positive messages about nuclear technology itself.

Reading 1950s Creature Features: Nuclear Optimism

Just as many 1950s Britons simultaneously feared nuclear weapons and found hope in nuclear power, so too did the creature features that they watched present the duality of the atomic age. Critics have long noted a bipolar outlook on nuclear technology in 1950s science fiction cinema. This dates back to Susan Sontag's seminal essay, 'The Imagination of Disaster', in which she observed that 'the standard message [of these films] is the one about the proper, or humane, uses of science, versus the mad, obsessional use of science'.⁵³ M. Keith Booker similarly observes that many 1950s science fiction films made an 'attempt...to allay fears of nuclear and associated issues (particularly radiation)', even though he ultimately believes that this attempt failed.⁵⁴ Peter Biskind is perhaps most outspoken in this regard when he writes that 'centrist films [such as *It Came from Beneath the Sea*]...are not primarily worried about the Bomb; they loved the Bomb, or at least the technology that made it possible'.⁵⁵ For Biskind, in these films, 'where science caused the problem, science often solved it too'.⁵⁶ 1950s science fiction films, and the creature features in particular, might have encouraged British fears of a nuclear Blitz, but, as Sontag, Booker and Biskind suggest, they were also able to present a more positive image of nuclear technology. This section will

demonstrate how such readings of *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth the Sea Monster* might have been especially relevant in Britain, a country whose self-image and economic fortunes were being tied in public debate to its fledgling nuclear industry.

Nuclear technology is seemingly a double-edged sword in *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. As Biskind notes, 'the giant octopus in question is spawned by nuclear testing, but it is also destroyed in the end by an atomic torpedo'.⁵⁷ He becomes more optimistic about the presentation of nuclear technology in 1950s science fiction cinema later in his argument when he claims that, in America, 'the prestige of science was so high by the beginning of the fifties that the mad scientists of thirties and forties films...were no longer mad, but, on the contrary, rather pleased with the way things had turned out'.⁵⁸ However, what Biskind optimistically sees as the redemption of science and scientists in 1950s science fiction, particularly in *Beneath the Sea*, does not sit comfortably with readings of this film produced by other scholars who have tended to focus more heavily on the monster's relationship to nuclear testing. Ernest Giglio has described the creature in *Beneath the Sea* as 'a radioactive octopus that is transformed into a carnivorous giant'.⁵⁹ Daniel Wojcik uses *Beneath the Sea* as an example of a film in which 'nuclear bombs and radioactivity inevitably result in the creation of monsters, mutants, and threats to society and individual existence'.⁶⁰ While Biskind focuses principally on the redemption of nuclear science implied by the film's ending, these authors ignore that aspect of the film and attempt to associate nuclear technology with the monstrosity of the beast. However, neither Wojcik nor Giglio provide a close reading of the film to support their arguments and their belief that the octopus monster represents the

dangers of the atomic age can be destabilised through an examination of the ways in which *Beneath the Sea* characterises its creature.

Beneath the Sea's gigantic octopus is much less strongly associated with the monstrosity of nuclear weaponry than, for example, the lizard beast of *Behemoth*. The behemoth is saturated with nuclear radiation and its principal form of attack resembles a nuclear explosion. During certain sequences a strange, electronic, pulsing noise is heard, faint concentric white circles are superimposed over the image of the monster's victim, the screen rapidly fades to a bright white and the film either cuts away, implying the death of the victim, an explosion occurs or the white screen is replaced with an horrific image of the victim with serious burns. In one particularly disturbing sequence a group of soldiers is framed by the concentric circles, the screen fades to white and, when the image of the soldiers returns, it has been replaced by a hand-drawn picture of them with their faces charred beyond recognition, their bones exposed and their guns melted. The depiction of a white flash that causes horrendous burns to human victims recalls the effects of a nuclear explosion, in which both the initial heat blast, which is accompanied by a blinding flash of light, and the lingering radiation can, amongst many other awful effects, burn human skin. The behemoth is not merely released upon the world as a result of atomic testing, but is an embodiment of nuclear weapons themselves. Even its blood is so radioactive that it poses a hazard to human life. By way of contrast, *Beneath the Sea*'s octopus does not draw power or abilities from its radioactivity and was both monstrous and colossal before it was contaminated with nuclear material. As such, this sea creature displays a very different relationship to nuclear science than the behemoth and cannot be said to embody the threat of radiation to the same extent.

These differing relationships to nuclear technology are also evident in the ways in which these creatures emerge into the human world. The behemoth was forced from its former habitat by nearby nuclear explosions from which it absorbed radiation, clearly framing the destruction that it causes as a direct consequence of these nuclear tests. However, the emergence of the octopus in *Beneath the Sea* has only an indirect relationship with nuclear material. The creature, as Dr. Lesley Joyce explains in the film, lived in a deep underwater trench many miles away from nuclear test sites. Winds brought the radiation to the waters around its lair, but the creature remained unaffected until it ate fish which had become radioactive. Even then the radiation had no particular biological consequence for the octopus, which was already of monstrous proportions. The local fish, however, could sense radioactivity and so were now able to avoid the colossal predator much more effectively. Without a food supply, the octopus was forced from its lair and began preying on humans. Although radiation certainly plays a role in precipitating the octopus' attack on San Francisco, the connection between the beast and the nuclear material is tangential, especially in comparison to *Behemoth*. It is, therefore, problematic for Giglio to characterise the creature in *Beneath the Sea* as 'a radioactive octopus that is transformed into a carnivorous giant'.⁶¹ Indeed, no transformation takes place, be it initiated through radioactivity or otherwise. Although the octopus's rampage in *Beneath the Sea* certainly bears an iconographic similarity to the way in which many Britons imagined a nuclear attack, as outlined in the first half of this chapter, the beast itself remains more distant from the monstrosity of radioactivity than commentators such as Giglio have claimed.⁶²

Furthermore, *Beneath the Sea* is imbued with an optimism about the nuclear age that mirrors the optimism expressed in British public debate during the 1950s. For example, this film contains a number of sequences which valorise the innovative spirit of the nuclear industry. The film opens with a short montage sequence depicting the launch of a nuclear submarine. The vessel itself is shown draped in flags and surrounded by cheering crowds. It is described by a voiceover as 'man's greatest weapon of the seas...Her engines were to be a miracle of speed and power, her sides strong enough to withstand any blow, her armament and firepower of greater force than the worst enemy she might encounter'. Later, inside the nuclear submarine, the captain mentions that, far from the restricted diet one might imagine being available on such a craft in the 1950s, his breakfast consisted of 'orange juice, bacon, eggs, coffee'. He suggests that the nuclear submarine is as easy to control as 'an automatic elevator' and that all his crew have to do 'is eat and sleep, press a button when there is some work to be done'. The craft is described as 'roomy' and the conning tower is even compared to a ballroom. The audience is also told that the submarine had 'three world records in the bag on our first shakedown cruise'. Soft, Hawaiian music plays throughout the craft while the crew idly play cards. As one man puts it, 'all we need is some champagne and dancing girls'. In *Beneath the Sea*, the nuclear submarine is a submergible atomic era paradise, housing whatever its crew might desire in spacious and comfortable surroundings. Nuclear technology is thus presented as a great benefit to humankind, capable of transforming even the harshest of environments into a carefree haven.

Even after the octopus attacks the nuclear submarine and exposure to radiation becomes likely, this is not presented as a great danger. One crew

member informs the captain that he just got married and was 'counting on a family', but he had heard that radiation, such as that leaking into the submarine around them, 'makes it so you can't have children'. The captain's response is a not overly concerned promise to have them out of the compartment as soon as is practical. There is no great rush to evacuate in the face of the radiation and the clicking of the onboard Geiger counter goes unnoticed for some time before this exchange. Similarly, when it becomes clear that part of the hull of the submarine has become radioactive, the divers sent to examine it are not instantly recalled from the water, but are rather advised to 'stay clear' of that particular section during their investigation. Radiation is dangerous, the film admits, but not pressingly so. If one is sensible and is only exposed to it in reasonable quantities, there is no need to be anxious. *Beneath the Sea* thus mirrors the claims of British promotional films by companies such as Unilever, which tamed the threat of radiation by stressing its presence in the daily lives of ordinary Britons.

Beneath the Sea was thus available for interpretation by those Britons who were well versed in the optimism of the atomic age, as so many were during the 1950s, as a reaffirmation of the faith that they had placed in Britain's nuclear future. It dismissed fears of radiation while depicting the utopian ideal of a nuclear tomorrow, much as the British government sought to do. Its creature, terrifying though it might have been, was not an unequivocal embodiment of nuclear technology and could easily have been perceived as simply one of nature's monsters of the deep. The film's presentation of humankind battling against a dangerous adversary and only achieving victory by utilising the wonders of the atomic age, such as a nuclear torpedo, validated the country's embracement of nuclear technology.

As noted above, *Behemoth* is generally a much less optimistic film than *Beneath the Sea* in its presentation of nuclear technology. In this regard, it is particularly difficult to look past the beast's use of radiation as a weapon. However, that is not to say that Britons found nothing in this film to help them to justify their nation's hopes for the atomic age. For all its focus on the harm that the nuclear behemoth does, the film's ending ultimately mirrors that of *Beneath the Sea*, and indeed several other 1950s creature features such as *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, of which *Behemoth* was an unofficial remake, by showing nuclear technology to be the only force capable of saving humankind. As the behemoth makes its way through the streets of London, the authorities charge scientists with the production of a radioactive isotope that will bury a torpedo within the creature, thereby containing the danger that would result from spilling its blood. Biskind's claim that 'where science caused the problem, science often solved it too' is certainly true of *Behemoth*.⁶³ Although it would be difficult to class this as one of Biskind's 'centrist films', which he claims 'are not primarily worried about the Bomb; they loved the Bomb', it certainly shares with them their love of 'the technology that made [the bomb] possible'.⁶⁴ It is, after all, not a nuclear bomb but a torpedo containing a nuclear isotope that kills the beast. Perhaps *Behemoth* is best understood as a film that is cautious about nuclear weaponry, but which is willing to embrace the use of other nuclear technologies for defensive or peaceful ends. One could even find in it the suggestion that, once the evil of nuclear weapons had been created, embodied by the behemoth itself, society had a responsibility to use the science of the atomic age in order to avoid the type of carnage that the film depicts. Ultimately, *Behemoth's* sudden embracement of nuclear technology at its climax is extremely rushed and comes too late in the film to offer any sustained commentary, but if Britons

were willing to look for it then the suggestion that radiation might be a boon to humankind could certainly be found in this film's ending.

The notion presented in the first half of this chapter, that some of the horror of the atomic age was present in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth the Sea Monster*, was predicated on the suggestion that the sequences that depicted the attack of the monster resembled a form of nuclear strike. Elsewhere, however, these films were able to display a positive attitude towards nuclear technology, albeit to different degrees, that would have struck a chord with many 1950s Britons. Indeed, in his preview of *When Worlds Collide* (1951), published in the British weekly film magazine *Picturegoer*, David Marlowe went as far as to claim that he was 'getting sort of tired of doom - whether we're to have it from atom bombs or planets'.⁶⁵ Marlowe, like many of his British readers, might consequently have found much to praise in *Behemoth* and *Beneath the Sea*. Atomic anxieties can certainly be read into in both films, but this is not the only attitude towards nuclear technology that Britons would have recognised in these creature features.

Conclusion

The late 1950s was a time of instability and confusion in Britain's outlook on nuclear technology. Looking back to the recent past, many Britons feared that a nuclear war would return the horrors of the Blitz to their lives alongside the terrifying new dangers of radiation. Looking to the future, however, other Britons imagined a world of peace and prosperity ushered in by Britain's engagement with nuclear technology. Calder Hall became a suitable metaphor for the duality of the British approach to this subject, producing both abundant electricity for civilian consumption and radioactive materials capable of being

used in a nuclear weapon. Both pro- and anti-nuclear camps had strong supporters and detractors and the national debate became a conflicted arena in which the battle for public opinion was waged. Nuclear anxieties were rife, but that did not necessarily mean that Britons were incapable of seeing the benefits that embracing the atomic age could bring.

Into this confusion emerged *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth the Sea Monster*, just as conflicted in their attitudes towards nuclear technology as were the British audiences who watched them. Both films tapped into the British public imagination, perhaps unwittingly, by presenting attacks on urban areas that recalled and intertwined the home front of the Second World War and atomic era British civil defence. This meant that the monsters of these films were available for interpretation in Britain as a type of nuclear Blitz. *Behemoth* was particularly significant in this regard since it imbued its beast with devastating nuclear powers and showed it demolishing London as the Nazi bombers had in the previous decade. Simultaneously, however, both films also signalled the positive aspects of Britain's nuclear project. *Beneath the Sea* was more adept at this since it not only refused to allow its creature to be an unproblematic embodiment of radiation, but it also went to some lengths to depict nuclear technology as an improvement in the lives of ordinary human beings, such as those aboard its nuclear submarine. Both films have endings in which nuclear science saves humankind. This allowed them to appear to justify Britain's continued investment in nuclear research and technology despite the dangers of the nuclear bomb. Each film can, when seen as part of 1950s British public debate, reveal a variety of possible interpretations that were available to British viewers. These were films that were capable of both supporting and

challenging either side of Britain's nuclear debate. As such, they provided a forum for Britons to reflect on their country's ever advancing nuclear agenda.

The relationship between 1950s science fiction's creature features and the British outlook on nuclear technology is both complex and vital to our understanding of how these films came to hold meaning in that country. They were available for interpretation in unique ways in Britain, both because of the specific set of debates about nuclear technology that surrounded them and because of the recent memories of the British home front of the Second World War that they evoked. As noted above, Americans might also have seen similarities between the 1950s creature features, the Blitz and the prospect of a nuclear attack, but their understanding of these relationships was not informed by a history of living under Nazi bombardment, a sense of national optimism at the opening of Calder Hall, fears about Britain's unstable economic future or any of the other issues mentioned above. This chapter has consequently demonstrated that, even when understood in terms of topics that were of deep concern across the west, such as nuclear technology, the British reception of 1950s creature features was unique since it was informed by debates and memories that were specific to that country.

Notes

¹ Conrich, Ian. 1999. 'Trashing London: The British Colossal Creature Film and Fantasies of Mass Destruction', in Hunter (1999b: 88-98). p.88.

² Hendershot, Cyndy. 1999. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.75.

³ Matthews, Melvin E. 2007. *Hostile Aliens, Hollywood and Today's Headlines*. New York, NY: Algora. p.81.

⁴ Nama, Adilifu. 2009. *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. p.14.

⁵ Davis, Tracy C. 2007. *States of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. p.15.

⁶ Conrich. 'Trashing London'. pp.96-97.

- ⁷ Hendershot, Cyndy. 1999. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.113.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Anon. 23 February 1955. 'Atomic Test in Nevada', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.7.
- ¹⁰ Anon. 22 May 1959. 'Canal Digging by Nuclear Explosions', *The Times*. p.10.
- ¹¹ Cassandra. 3 June 1957. 'Like an Oil Painting from Hell', *The Daily Mirror*. p.3.
- ¹² Anon. 19 December 1959. 'Test Explosion in Old Lead Mine', *The Manchester Guardian*. p. 10.
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Chapter Five: Imperial Decline, American Invasion and Technology in 1950s Science Fiction Cinema

Introduction

As the previous chapter noted, nuclear power and weaponry certainly played a role in shaping the public perception of science and technology in 1950s Britain, but this was also the decade in which a vaccine against polio was discovered and ownership of television sets boomed. Britain's nuclear hopes and fears were only one aspect of a much broader public debate about the nature, status and use of science that took a number of different forms. Queen Elizabeth II, for example, drew public attention to the variety of inventions and advances that were made during this period in her annual Christmas Day broadcasts. She made eight of these speeches during the 1950s, five of which mentioned science or technology. Her comments were often very general, as in 1954 when she claimed to be 'amazed by the spectacular discoveries in scientific knowledge, which should bring comfort and leisure to millions'.¹ She did occasionally make what might be interpreted as veiled warnings about the dangers of nuclear technology, notably in 1955 when she argued that 'year by year, new secrets of nature are being revealed to us by science - secrets of immense power, for good or evil, according to their use. These discoveries resolve some of our problems, but they make others deeper and more immediate'. However, she also singled out other areas of technological achievement, for example in her praise of innovations in telecommunications and the media in 1958, when she noted that her voice was 'carried between us upon the invisible wings of twentieth-century science'. Of course, the Queen's comments alone cannot be used to characterise the nature of British public

debate about science during the 1950s, but they do suggest that these discussions were about more than just nuclear technology.

The arguments presented below similarly extend my exploration of British interpretations of science in 1950s science fiction cinema beyond the previous chapter's interest in atomic power and the nuclear bomb. In this regard, my approach is informed by the work of Mark Jancovich and Bonnie Noonan, who have both suggested that the presentation of science in 1950s US science fiction cinema allowed these films to intersect with other, largely unconnected, public debates. For Noonan, 'the emergence of the modern American science fiction film in 1950 combined with the situation of post-World War II women in science to create a genre explicitly amenable to exploring the tension between a woman's place in the home and her place in the work force, particularly in the fields of science'.² Although Noonan focuses on female scientists, this claim suggests that science in science fiction cinema might also have been able to give voice to seemingly unassociated issues surrounding the domestic and working lives of women in many other sectors. Jancovich also exposes this flexibility of science as a means of addressing other debates in his examination of the genre's monsters as 'products of science'.³ For Jancovich, the science that creates these monsters is used to discuss 'an anxiety about humanity's role within the cosmos' and 'the end of American isolationism and the nation's growing awareness of its place within a complex and often hostile world order'.⁴ Jancovich's work shares Noonan's belief that the ways in which science is treated by these films might have provided commentary on issues to which science itself was only loosely connected.

Following this lead, this chapter explores how a range of prominent British public debates intersected with the presentation of science in 1950s

science fiction films, thereby shaping their interpretation. The first half of this chapter focuses on the perceived political consequences of the 1956 Suez crisis. This international incident, which saw Britain forced to withdraw from a military conflict in Egypt at the behest of the international community, led by America, called Britain's status as a global power into question. The role of the United States in Britain's humiliation served to reinforce British anxieties about American influence at home and in Europe. At the same time, science fiction films, such as the case study films examined in this chapter, *Fiend Without a Face* (1958) and *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956), were presenting stories in which science became one means of comparing the strength and success of different nations. This depiction of science allowed Britons to explore their weakened international position after Suez by comparing Britain's scientific capabilities, as presented on the screen, with those of America.

The second half of the chapter addresses a topic that is more obviously related to science itself, namely the increased presence of technology in British society during the 1950s. As such, the focus turns to the relationship between science as it appeared on screen and science as it manifested in the day to day lives and imaginations of British cinema-goers. This section identifies in British public debate a tendency to see new technologies of recording and broadcasting as harbingers of an anticipated scientific revolution that would transform the nation. As a result, I argue that by deploying new cinematic technologies such as 3D and CinemaScope, science fiction films were able to present themselves as scientifically mediated experiences for 1950s Britons and so were perceived to provide a glimpse of the exciting advances that new technologies would bring.⁵

This format is of course a little different from that adopted by previous chapters, since the two halves of this chapter do not explore opposing viewpoints on a single topic, but rather show how two distinct topics framed science in 1950s science fiction cinema. The aim of accounting for different outlooks in previous chapters was to represent the breadth of readings that Britons might have made of these films. This same goal is achieved here by highlighting the variety of public debates that science was able to intersect with through its depiction in the genre and the range of readings of these films that might consequently have been produced. As such, although the format of this chapter differs slightly from those that have preceded it, it still achieves the same goals. It also fulfils the ambition of this thesis to demonstrate the existence of a distinct British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema by showing that, in many of these films, science was able to take on particular significance in relation to a range of other British concerns. The ways in which these issues related to science fiction cinema, outlined below, would not have been repeated in quite the same form in other national contexts of reception because they rely on the specific nature of 1950s British public debate. Consequently, the readings discussed in this chapter represent a distinctive British response to these films that could have been obscured by the globalisation of their American interpretations.

Characterising Public Debate: Britain and America After Suez

Historian Saki Dockrill has claimed that in the late nineteenth century 'Britain was...endowed with the power to command the world' through its global Empire.⁶ Covering almost a quarter of the globe, encompassing a quarter of its population and spanning every continent, at its height the British Empire was a

prominent and often dominant force in international relations. By the end of the 1950s, however, this influence was in drastic decline and Britain was often seen as powerful not because of its own resources and capabilities but because of its relationship with America. In Dockrill's terms, 'Britain's relations with the United States became an important barometer for the measurement of Britain's global standing'.⁷ The balance of power in the world had shifted and, as Britain's colonies were gradually granted their freedom and the nation's global influence ebbed away, America and the USSR took increasingly dominant roles in international affairs. As Dockrill's argument suggests, by the 1950s Britain was no longer seen as a superpower in its own right but as a key ally of the United States.

1956 is often cited as a significant year in Britain's post-war decline. This was the year that Britain and France, in collusion with Israel, conducted a brief and ultimately disastrous military operation to regain control of Egypt's recently nationalised Suez Canal. The Israelis agreed to attack Egyptian territory in late October, allowing the European partners to enter the country under the pretence of separating the two sides. Once in Egypt, the French and British claimed custody of the canal, a vital shipping route that served as an artery between Britain and its remaining colonies. The military action was initially a success, but the political fallout had serious consequences for Britain's international standing.

On 2nd November, the United Nations adopted General Assembly Resolution 997, drafted by the United States, demanding the withdrawal of all troops, the reopening of the canal and an immediate ceasefire.⁸ The Americans, unwilling to support their European allies, also blocked British attempts to access the International Monetary Fund to support the nation through the

conflict.⁹ This was a particularly acute problem since the closure of the canal during the hostilities had restricted Britain's supply of oil. This situation was further hampered by a Saudi Arabian oil embargo against Britain and France and by American threats to sell a portion of its Sterling Bond holdings, potentially forcing the devaluation of the pound and endangering Britain's ability to import food and energy. Sanctions were never enacted against Britain by the UN or the US, but, as Keith Kyle has observed, 'the mere talk of them in the former and the refusal of the latter to respond instantly to Britain's urgent currency requirements were enough' to force Britain's hand.¹⁰ Britain bowed to the international community's demands and announced a ceasefire and the withdrawal of its forces. Britain, once 'endowed with the power to command the world', had instead been censured and humiliated.¹¹ A. J. Stockwell argues that 'Britain's leadership of the Commonwealth was gravely damaged, and it became "Enemy Number One" at the United Nations'.¹² With this failed attempt to enact its will abroad, Britain's diminishing significance on the global stage became clear, especially in comparison to the show of diplomatic power that the United States had used to restrain its ally.

Alongside this international condemnation, Britain's military action also received significant domestic criticism. David L. Rousseau has observed that the British were 'split on the use of force', referring to an opinion poll that found '48 percent supporting [the military action], 32 percent opposing, and 20 percent undecided'.¹³ Stockwell has described this as a time when 'the curtain dropped on the age of deference' and indeed much public anger was expressed against the nation's leaders in the letters pages of Britain's newspapers.¹⁴ On 6th November, for example, *The Manchester Guardian* published a selection of letters about the crisis, which claimed:

More than five hundred further letters from our readers dealing with the Government's action in the Middle East have been received during the week-end. The total is now approaching a thousand. The proportion against the Government (and in support of the views expressed in our leading articles on the crisis) had remained fairly consistent in each postal delivery at about eight to one.¹⁵

Although some bias is inherent in this summary, since *Guardian* readers were likely to have selected a newspaper that shared their politics, this does suggest something of the domestic tensions and uncertainties that surrounded Britain's role in Suez.

Public anger was often matched by criticism in the press and, as *The Manchester Guardian* suggests, some British newspapers took a strong stance against military intervention in Suez. Tony Shaw notes that, 'despite the enormous moral and political pressure for it to toe the government line whilst the country was at war, the press had...faithfully reflected public opinion...[T]he press...articulated the public's fundamental misgivings' about the use of force in Egypt.¹⁶ One such article, appearing in *The Times* less than a week after Prime Minister Anthony Eden announced the withdrawal of British troops, reported that Aneurin Bevan, the MP for Ebbw Vale, believed that Britons were 'dishonoured all over the world' as a result of Suez and that 'it had looked as though some of the nations in the Commonwealth would leave it' as a consequence.¹⁷ As a member of the Labour Party, Bevan was sitting on the opposition benches when Britain entered Egypt, so perhaps his criticism was to be expected, but by giving his strident rhetoric a public platform, and indeed by adopting a similarly critical tone to that of *The Manchester Guardian* in its general reporting of the Suez conflict, *The Times* helped to make visible the domestic crisis of faith in Britain's world role after Suez.

Not only did Suez undermine Britain's global standing and self-confidence, it also revealed what A. J. Stockwell has described as 'Britain's

incapacity to act without American approval'.¹⁸ This reinvigorated British anxieties about US influence in Europe that had existed since the Second World War. Historian George Henry Bennett's description of Operation Bolero, the planned buildup of 1,345,000 American military personnel in Britain in 1944, as 'the American occupation of Britain' reflects sentiments expressed by many Britons during the 1940s.¹⁹ As Wendy Webster notes, anxieties about the American presence in Britain during the Second World War were often given voice as concerns about resultant sexual relationships 'between British women and American men'.²⁰ The comedy inherent in the most famous British description of American GIs, that they were 'overpaid, oversexed and over here', masked real concern about the presence of large numbers of American men in British towns and cities, especially while British men were away fighting in Europe.

During the period between the end of the war and the Suez Crisis there remained a perceptible unease about the extent of American influence in Britain. The nation's newspapers, for example, often referred to American entertainment or sports personnel in Europe with tongue-in-cheek insincerity as an 'American invasion'. *The Daily Mirror* in particular made use of this phrase throughout the early 1950s. In terms of cinema, it observed that 'another American invasion is on the way. Several leading Hollywood stars are coming to Britain during [the Festival of Britain]...to play in big-scale Anglo-American film productions'.²¹ In 1950, this paper examined an historical precedent for this type of cultural intrusion, arguing that 'the American invasion of Paris' had once taken the form of 'visits by [jazz musicians] Sidney Bechet in 1925, and later by Mezz Mezzrow and Dave Tough'.²² The 1950s and early 1960s saw a similar musical invasion of the French capital with Gene Kelly starring in the 1951 US

song and dance film *An American in Paris*, the popular *Paris Blues* (1961) depicting American jazz musicians living in the city and renowned American jazz musician Miles Davis recording the score for Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (1958, but released in Britain as *Lift to the Scaffold* in 1960 and in America as *Elevator to the Gallows* in 1961). In sport, under the headline 'American Invasion', the *Mirror* reported that 'seven United States golfers...have left by air to compete in the British Amateur Golf Tournament at St Andrews, Scotland'.²³ This newspaper even became concerned about the traditional British variety show, reporting that 'the great 1951 American invasion of British variety begins in March with the arrival of one of the zaniest characters in the music business - Red Ingle, the man who introduced his band as "the most obnoxious in America"'.²⁴ The *Mirror's* repeated use of the term 'American invasion' was perhaps the most obvious manifestation of concerns about US influence in Europe, but *The Observer* was equally anxious when it reported that the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an arts organisation later shown to have been funded by America's Central Intelligence Agency as an anti-communist tool, had put on a festival in Paris. Despite its French location, *The Observer* claimed:

The show is very much an American one, financed by American money, run largely by American organisers, attended, it would seem, largely by American audiences, and in the context of the cold war it all looks to the hypersensitive and politically minded French like another American "invasion." There have been gibes about "Nato culture," "dollar imperialism" in a cultural disguise, and so on.²⁵

As these articles demonstrate, American influence in Europe was seen as problematic by certain quarters of the British press in the pre-Suez 1950s.

After Suez these pre-existing anxieties intensified. They continued to be framed as cultural criticism, as in *The Manchester Guardian's* unease about 'the number of films produced in this country which are not only financed by

American controlled companies but are also made by American producers and directors with American actors playing the leading parts', but they also began to manifest as economic and political concerns.²⁶ Similarly, articles in British newspapers presented the US as a land of plenty benefiting from and working to maintain Britain's relative deprivation. This became particularly apparent in January 1957, when the Texas Railroad Commission refused to increase crude oil production, consequently raising prices in Britain and profits in America. *The Manchester Guardian* reported this under the sub-heading 'No sinister motive in refusing to step up oil output?', with the question mark insinuating that perhaps Britons were being exploited.²⁷ This suggestion became more explicit when the article warned that events in Texas 'could come to be interpreted in Britain as a plot to squeeze dollars out of suffering Europeans'.²⁸ America's oil wealth became a frequent bone of contention, such as in January 1957 when it was reported that the United States was enjoying a good financial return on its fuel sales, while in Britain 'to maintain the petrol ration and our fuel-oil supplies at their present level' until May of that year would cost \$350 million.²⁹ This perception that America's financial success was to Britain's detriment was further underlined in 1958, when *The Times* highlighted the 'losses to Britain of valuable research workers' who were tempted to America by large salaries that 'were most attractive, and were made to people that Britain could not afford to lose'.³⁰ Across different sections of the economy, British suffering was presented as the cost of American success. Even something as innocuous as soup was seen as a potential site of besiegement by invading American companies. In 1959, *The Observer* reported:

It began with the invasion of Britain by Campbell's Soups, which belongs to an immense American company of the same name, with sales of \$500 million a year. A year ago they stormed into Aberdeen with the provocative slogan "Campbell's

are coming.” From there they launched out over the rest of Scotland. And this autumn...they have started the conquest of the rest of the country.³¹

Phrases such as ‘stormed into Aberdeen’ and ‘the conquest of the rest of the country’ framed this product launch as an act of US aggression while information about Campbell’s extraordinary profits highlighted America’s relative wealth. Articles such as these operated in tandem with America’s prominent role in Britain’s humiliation at Suez to underline the nation’s weakened global standing and its replacement as the dominant western power by the United States.

Reading 1950s Science Fiction Films: Science and International Relations

Letters written to *Picturegoer* magazine during the 1950s reveal that British audiences considered science fiction cinema as another site of Anglo-American competition. They often expressed concern at the perceived dominance of US genre films in Britain. In 1952, John de Vere Webb complained that ‘although the science-fiction film has increased in popularity in the past two years, little notice of this has been taken by our studios. Have we to rely on America for all our futuristic films?’³² In 1953, C.E. Barrett asked if the country had ‘the producers to make a science-fiction film and prove to Hollywood that others can handle such subjects’.³³ In 1957, a reader named only as D.C. similarly noted that ‘Britain is lagging behind in the screen’s space race’.³⁴ *Picturegoer* itself encouraged such transatlantic comparisons, framing *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) as an attempt to ‘make Hollywood scared’ by the threat that Britain posed to its dominance of science fiction cinema.³⁵ In 1958, when one reader suggested that a British studio should adapt John Wyndham’s novel, *The Day of the Triffids*, the editor’s response was simply to

note that 'America has beaten us to it. Columbia has bought the screen rights'.³⁶ As these comments demonstrate, during the 1950s science fiction cinema was perceived by some Britons as a further site of tension in the Anglo-American relationship.

This is perhaps unsurprising given that British cinemas experienced an American invasion of their own during the 1950s, with a rush of US features filling the nation's screens. As Alistair Davies notes, 'in Britain, American films have since the 1920s made up the bulk of annual programming, with the proportion of American films increasing dramatically from the 1950s onwards'.³⁷ A significant portion of this US content was provided by the decade's science fiction boom. Many of these American genre films presented a picture of the world dominated by the United States, perhaps adding to British frustration that the nation's studios were not countering this image with significant numbers of films of their own during the early and mid-1950s. One might anticipate a certain degree of patriotism in American films such as *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* or *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957) given that they were made during a time when the US saw itself locked in a global struggle with the USSR. More of a puzzle are films such as *Fiend Without a Face*, a British film that, as the first half of this section will demonstrate, had the potential to reinforce anxieties about US dominance and British decline.

Fiend without a Face, based on a short story by American author Amelia Reynolds Long, takes place in and around a US airbase in Winthrop, Canada. When townspeople are found dead the local Manitobans suspect that the nearby American nuclear reactor might have played a role in their demise. Jeff Cummings of the US Air Force hears about a British scientist who has retired to the area and visits Professor Walgate at his home. It transpires that Walgate

has been drawing energy from the nuclear reactor on the nearby airbase to enhance his research into telekinesis. Walgate admits that his experiment resulted in one of his thoughts escaping from his mind and taking on physical form. To make matters worse, the thought is murderous, invisible and multiplying. As the creatures draw power from the nuclear plant they gradually take form, appearing as disembodied brains that are capable of pushing themselves around by virtue of their attached spinal cords. These grotesque monsters attack Walgate, Cummings and a handful of others in a local house. After realising that the brain creatures can be killed by a gunshot wound, the humans begin to fight back while Cummings escapes to destroy the power plant. Upon its destruction the creatures lose their powers and are finally defeated.

Despite its British origins, *Fiend* offered its audience an ostentatiously North American experience. The film had a British director and was distributed by a British company called Eros Films. However, it was based on the work of an American writer, featured American actors speaking in their native accents, dubbed some of its British cast with American voices and was set on a United States airbase in Canada. In this sense, *Fiend* is a good example of a trend, observed by I. Q. Hunter, for British films that ‘masqueraded as American productions’ to strengthen their ability to draw a US audience.³⁸ In many of these films ‘American stars were drafted to attract international attention’, and hence box office revenue, to otherwise potentially ignored British science fiction films.³⁹ As N. Peter Rathvon, the American producer behind the British film *1984* (1956), told *Picturegoer*, this was important because it allowed films ‘more drawing power in America, where the bulk of his receipts would have to be found’ if the British censors gave a restrictive certificate.⁴⁰ *Fiend*’s producers

made use of this tactic to bolster its economic potential by casting Marshall Thompson, an American actor who would go on to star in a handful of genre films in the mid to late 1950s, including *Cult of the Cobra* (1955) and *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958), in its lead role. Through its setting, accents and actors, *Fiend* makes a strong appeal to the North American market and largely succeeds in its self-conscious attempt to hide its Britishness behind an American facade.

This awareness of transatlantic differences also plays out in the film's narrative through the contrasting characters of Walgate and Cummings. The film's only British character, Walgate fares poorly in comparison with Cummings, the film's American protagonist. Cummings is an honest, forthright and youthful American, while the British academic is confused, bumbling, irresponsible and elderly. If Britons were worried that their time as world leaders was drawing to a close after Suez, seeing their nation represented on cinema screens around the world by an old man on the verge of senility, who is capable of causing problems but is unable to resolve them without the help of his American friend, would have been troubling indeed. Walgate even stresses his own incapacity. He claims that 'these days I welcome any excuse to stop work', while simply 'having a quiet talk' with Cummings is enough to ensure that he 'got dizzy' and confused. As Cummings comes closer to uncovering Walgate's secret research, the professor again pleads that he is 'tired and sick'. Although Walgate uses his health and age as a smokescreen to disguise his culpability for the recent deaths, the repeated emphasis placed on his senility resonates with 1950s British anxieties about the nation's own perceived post-Suez irrelevance as a colonial power in an increasingly post-colonial era.

The contrast between Britain and America suggested by the film's characters is also apparent in its presentation of science. In *Fiend* there are two opposing schools of scientific practice, one associated with the research into nuclear powered radar conducted on the American airbase, the other with the British Professor's arcane experiments in his secret underground laboratory. The former of these is perhaps the easier to characterise. The US airbase is a clean, brightly lit space that contains computer equipment, men in crisp, smart uniforms and a clearly defined command structure. Shots of spinning radar dishes are paired with descriptions of highly sophisticated nuclear technology. The ordered world of the military base serves to eulogise the American scientific-military establishment.⁴¹

In contrast to this American science, the British Professor Walgate performs dangerously irresponsible work that leads to civilian deaths. In this respect, I disagree with Andrew Tudor who uses *Fiend* as an example of a trend in 1950s science fiction cinema to 'loosen the direct link between science, scientists and the threat that they produce'.⁴² Tudor sees Walgate as 'a scientist...[who] inadvertently creates a monster', absolving him of blame because the creation of the thought beast was an accident.⁴³ Although Walgate certainly did not intend to create these creatures, during the flashback sequence of his experiments into telekinesis he begins to resemble the archetypal mad scientist. Cyndy Hendershot's description of the mad scientist as a 'messiah figure bordering on apocalyptic destroyer' aptly addresses the duality of Walgate who is at once a genial, elderly gentleman and a potential destroyer of worlds.⁴⁴ Unlike Dr. Charles Decker in the later British science fiction film *Konga* (1961), a scientist who sends a monstrously enlarged chimpanzee to kill his enemies, Walgate harbours no murderous intent.

However, he is part of a collective of well-intentioned but negligent British scientists in 1950s science fiction films that included Dr. Laird from *The Strange World of Planet X* (1957) and Bill Leggat from *Four Sided Triangle* (1953). Laird's principal crime is that he is so fixated on research into magnetic fields that he does not sense the danger that his work poses, while Leggat is simply too infatuated with a woman who loves somebody else to notice the immorality of making a clone of her for himself. Walgate, Laird and Leggat, unlike Decker, do not intend any harm, but their research produces inconceivable damage nonetheless. As such, they all fit Hendershot's description of the mad scientist, working with the best of intentions towards monstrous goals.

This archetype also exists in American films of the era and Walgate bears more than a passing resemblance to Dr. Edward Morbius from *Forbidden Planet* (1956). Morbius becomes obsessed with his studies of the scientific relics of an extinct civilisation until, just like Walgate, his thoughts take on a murderous life of their own. Entrenched in a Freudian understanding of the mind, *Forbidden Planet* sees Morbius' id taking physical form and committing violence unbidden by its owner. Although Morbius is a good example of the American equivalent of the British mad scientists, the repetition of this character type in Walgate, Leggat and Laird suggests that it held particular significance in British science fiction cinema of the era.

As *Fiend* demonstrates, American science was often presented as much more controlled and consequently less dangerous than the work of these British mad scientists. Indeed, the 1950s saw a trend for American actors playing responsible US scientists in British science fiction films. A number of these productions have already been encountered in this thesis. Professor Bernard Quatermass, an English scientist in the original BBC television series, *The*

Quatermass Experiment, broadcast in 1953, was re-cast in the British Hammer Film Productions cinema adaptation, *The Quatermass Xperiment*. There he was played by American actor Brian Donlevy who used his native accent for the role. Donlevy's American Quatermass returned with his US accent intact for one sequel, *Quatermass II* (1957), which was a focus of Chapter Two of the current study. Forrest Tucker, a US actor who hailed from Plainfield, Indiana, took the lead in the British film *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958), discussed in Chapter Three, playing American scientist Alan Brooks. Brooks himself is juxtaposed with a more eccentric and less heroic European scientist from the Trollenberg Observatory. One of the case study films from Chapter Four, *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959), starred Gene Evans who was born in Holbrook, Arizona and raised in Colton, California. Evans played the role of Steve Karnes, a scientist who saves Britain from a gigantic lizard monster. These US actors in British science fiction films, who could potentially have been seen as an American invasion themselves, each played US scientists whose rational approach to the world reflects the characterisation of American science found in *Fiend*.

Just like Britain attempting to wield its military power in Egypt, only for the United States to step in and take control of the resulting crisis, Walgate finds that his brand of irresponsible and arcane scientific experimentation is prone to creating disasters that only Cummings can resolve. *Fiend Without a Face* thus held the potential to underline British anxieties about the country's actions at Suez and the ensuing erosion of its former international significance by the rising power of the United States, with science and the figure of the scientist being the sites through which this reading is mediated. Of course, it was not only through science that this transatlantic tension was articulated and Jackie Stacey has suggested that debates about the relative appeal of British and

American female film stars was another such point of contention. However, perhaps as a result of its new importance in the age of satellites and atomic bombs, science was one prominent lens through which these issues were explored by the British public.⁴⁵

The ways in which science was presented in American science fiction films that were screened in Britain during this period meant that they also had the potential to be understood through British debates about US influence and British decline. A number of these films depicted Britain as a nation helpless against a hostile enemy without the scientific expertise and technological ingenuity of the United States for protection. One such film is *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, released in August 1956. Due to the system of film distribution in Britain at that time, which staggered the release of features in different types of cinemas in various locations during the weeks and months after their premieres, *Flying Saucers* circulated in Britain before, during and after the Suez crisis. For some British viewers, this film would have been a recent memory when the United States effectively forced British withdrawal from Egypt in November 1956, but others would have been watching it as these events unfolded.

Earth vs. the Flying Saucers tells the story of Russell Marvin, a recently married American scientist who works on Project Skyhook, a US programme that launches satellites into orbit. During one particular launch, however, a flying saucer appears. The aliens are met with gunfire and retaliate by destroying the Skyhook facility. Marvin and his wife survive this initial attack and he contacts the aliens to arrange a meeting. The visitors demand humanity's surrender and threaten its destruction. Saucers hover over major world cities, but Marvin gets to work using his privileged knowledge of the aliens, gleaned from his contact

with them, to devise a weapon that will stop their campaign against humanity. He produces a potent sonic device that is capable of disrupting the flying saucers. Using it on the alien craft that have begun to wage war on Washington, Marvin and the US military send them crashing into a number of famous D.C. landmarks. The war is won and Marvin and his wife take some well deserved rest.

Science is clearly an important issue in *Flying Saucers*, with both humanity and the alien menace relying on their own scientific prowess to support their military campaigns. Marvin uses his scientific expertise to produce the sonic weapon while the creatures use their technologically advanced spacecraft to threaten humankind. More subtly, it is suggested that the aliens rely on technology to make up for their physiological shortcomings by enhancing their sensory receptivity. At one point a human character tries on an alien helmet, finding that it enables him to hear sounds over much greater distances. Bill Warren connects this to a similar moment in *The War of the Worlds* (1953), in which the analysis of an extraterrestrial's electronic eye exposes some of the differences between human and alien biology. As Warren argues, 'in that film, the very alienness of the Martians is part of the story, and the sequence works because it adds to our knowledge of just how strange the Martians are. But in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, the only real enemy are the flying saucers themselves', thereby rendering the exploration of alien physiology in the later film thematically disjointed.⁴⁶ The sequence in *Flying Saucers* is devoid of the earlier film's interest in extraterrestrial bodies and serves only to fetishise technology, a trait that is also apparent in the film's spectacular shots of the alien craft and its narrative focus on advanced weaponry. As this

demonstrates, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* is a film that goes to some lengths to stress the importance of science and technology.

The significance that this film attaches to science takes on new meaning when seen alongside its glorification of American technological knowledge and its marginalisation of Britain. Most probably drawing inspiration from the famous ending of *The War of the Worlds*, in which the global reach of the defeated alien invasion is shown through images of destruction at the Eiffel Tower, Christ the Redeemer and the Taj Mahal, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* contains a short sequence that depicts saucers in the skies above Paris and London. Britain is shown to be under threat, but this six second shot is the country's only appearance in the film, aside from a very brief glimpse of Londoners listening to a warning from the visitors, and no clear suggestion of its fate is offered.

American author Bill Warren expresses discomfort with this moment, observing that 'the aliens are said to be at war with the entire world, and we see brief glimpses of...saucers over various European cities, but the attack is confined to Washington, D.C.'. ⁴⁷ Warren is not strictly correct since there is no conclusive evidence that the saucers leave London and Paris without attacking, but the film is so concerned with America that it certainly only depicts the Washington assault. The British are terrorised by flying saucers, but British audiences were to be left guessing at how their fictional compatriots fared since the film's narrative is not interested in their fate. ⁴⁸

Flying Saucers' marginalisation of Britain can be understood in relation to its interest in science. The film suggests that both Britain and America are in desperate need of scientifically advanced weaponry capable of repelling the invasion, but it only places this crucial technology in American hands. Indeed, materials have to be shipped to the United States from across the world so that

Marvin and his fellow American scientists can construct the weapon. Britain is shown to suffer a parallel threat to the US, but it is American technological superiority that repels the invaders while Europe is obliterated from the narrative, casting doubt over Britain's capacity for self-preservation, let alone international leadership. In a film where science is held in as high regard as it is in *Flying Saucers*, America's greater mastery over technology served to underline its growing real world dominance.

This reading would almost certainly not have occurred to the vast majority of US audiences of this film since it relies on particular attention being paid to the positioning of Britain within the narrative, something that most American viewers might not have been overly concerned with. However, in Britain, a nation already primed to speculate about its country's place in the rapidly changing world of 1956, this interpretation had the potential to be particularly relevant. Given the ways in which *Flying Saucers* uses science and technology to draw comparisons between Britain and the United States, this film was particularly suited to act as a site of confluence for the various public debates that produced, negotiated and intensified anxieties about Suez, the rise of America and Britain's new place in the global order. Just like *Fiend Without a Face*, *Flying Saucers* depicted science and technology in a way that allowed Britons to reflect on their ongoing retreat from international dominance.

Characterising Public Debate: Science Fiction Britain

As well as being a means by which science fiction films could comment on other national debates, science itself became a topic of public interest in its own right in 1950s Britain. Perhaps as a consequence of the fascination with science that resulted from the development of nuclear weaponry and artificial

satellites, the mid to late 1950s was a time in which scientific research and new technologies became headline news in Britain's media. This was true of the nation's newspapers which, for example, made much of Britain's Sir Alexander Todd being awarded the Nobel prize for chemistry in late October 1957, but it was perhaps the newsreels shown in British cinemas that were most adept at presenting scientific research in an exciting manner.⁴⁹ In doing so, they frequently stressed the Britishness of new scientific developments, framing Britain as a country at the forefront of technological progress.

In June 1958, for example, British Movietone News released a newsreel featuring a story entitled *Ship of the Future*.⁵⁰ This reported on the development of an early hovercraft, stressing that, although it was demonstrated by a Swiss designer, it was a British invention and could soon be in use in Britain. Similarly, *This Car is History* (1958), a British Pathé newsreel, reported on the arrival of Jet 1, a gas turbine car, at the Science Museum in Kensington, London.⁵¹ Jet 1 is positioned both as the car of the future, through the claim that in years to come 'the petrol pump will give way to the paraffin pump', and also as a uniquely British achievement from the iconic British company Rover. *This Car is History* thus stresses the scientific expertise of the nation, claiming that Jet 1 'gives Britain a flying start'. The British public is invited to look forward to reaping the rewards of this national success through the claim that 'it may be some years before gas turbine cars are on sale to the public, but the Rover Jet 1 has already solved many of the problems which will bring nearer the day' when ordinary Britons could own this impressive piece of futuristic technology for themselves. Elsewhere, *The Vital Vaccine* (1957) reported on the new 'British vaccine' against polio, the first of its kind, claiming that it had already been of benefit to a significant and expanding number of British children.⁵²

999's New Home (1957) claimed that new technologies used in emergency services control centres had halved the time it took to dispatch personnel.⁵³ In each of these films Britain is presented as a nation on the verge of a technological transformation, about to enjoy the fruits of its scientific expertise.

Many of these technologies were either only on trial in limited areas of the country or were still being tested and so did not feature in the lives of the majority of ordinary Britons. However, these newsreels constructed an image of a second, technologically superior Britain that was in the process of revamping the world that the viewer inhabited. This science fictional convergence of 1950s Britain and its futuristic counterpart is perhaps most evident in *House of Ideas* (1957), a newsreel article that depicted what domestic life might be like in the coming years, but which set these optimistic fantasies within recognisably contemporary contexts.⁵⁴ This was done explicitly through the narration's description of how 'eighteenth and twentieth centuries meet in a new house in Blackheath', in which 'the Georgian concept of a terraced house is adapted to meet the requirements and tempo of today'. This phraseology collided the old and the new, constructing a futuristic reality within the context of the recognisable world. This traditional Georgian house contained advanced features such as 'thermostatically controlled central heating', 'a sheltered garden right in the house' and moveable glass walls. All of this futuristic technology could be found in a real house in Blackheath, a district of London, indicating that it might soon be available to aspirational home owners throughout the country. By colliding the present and the future, *House of Ideas* further suggested the technological transformation of Britain.

Just as this newsreel reconstructed Blackheath as a small corner of the future nestling within 1950s London, so too did *Listening to the Stars* (1957)

transform the Cheshire countryside into a science fictional landscape beneath the futuristic structure of the Lovell Telescope at the Jodrell Bank Observatory.⁵⁵ Accompanied by a soundtrack of otherworldly, ethereal strings, this newsreel shows the enormous radio telescope from unusual angles, including overhead shots of the complex network of supports that make up the body of the structure and panning shots of the vast concave hollow of the dish taken from within. These unfamiliar sounds and images present Jodrell Bank as a futuristic construction, but long shots locate it in a familiar rural landscape. This film thus sets the mundane and the contemporary against the unusual and the technologically advanced, mirroring the clash of present and future found in numerous other 1950s newsreel stories, notably *House of Ideas*. These were films in which Britain was seen as an increasingly science fictional country engaged in the transformation of its recognisable landscapes and urban spaces through its technological expertise.

Newsreels of this period frequently framed recording and broadcasting technologies as the vanguard of the technological revolution, particularly in terms of the expanding use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) in Britain. In November 1959, for example, British Movietone News produced a film entitled *Bank on the Telly* that looked at the innovative use of cameras in banking.⁵⁶ A customer watches a television screen in a bank manager's office while, elsewhere in the building, her records are accessed and shown to a camera. This image appears on the customer's monitor, providing her with the information she requires and removing the need for people to move around the bank. Similarly, *A Telly Copper* (1958) reported that police in Durham were able to monitor traffic flow in the city centre via a CCTV feed.⁵⁷ *An Eye on Your Wheels* (1959) showed cameras being used to relay images of the testing of car

parts to a nearby laboratory.⁵⁸ In each of these films the CCTV camera is used to frame recording and broadcasting technologies as examples of how science was already helping to improve British life. This entanglement of visual technologies and scientific advancement was a recurring trope in newsreels during the second half of the 1950s, with cameras and screens functioning as a form of shorthand for technological progress.

CCTV was not the only visual technology handled in this way by British newsreels. Television, too, was framed as a futuristic medium, especially after 1952, when domestic TV ownership doubled in a year, largely as a result of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, bringing more Britons than ever before into contact with the technology.⁵⁹ In 1957, British Movietone News released a newsreel film that overtly connected the technologies of television broadcasting and space exploration, helping to propagate the perception that television was part of Britain's move into the future. *Rockets for BBC* discussed stability tests performed on the television broadcasting tower at Crystal Palace.⁶⁰ Erected the previous year and nicknamed London's Eiffel Tower, this seven hundred feet tall latticed metalwork construction, the largest structure in the British capital until One Canada Square was built at Canary Wharf in the early 1990s, must have looked decidedly futuristic amidst London's mid-century skyline. This impression was developed further when British Movietone News described the use of 'rockets' during the stress tests on the tower, using this term in the context of a world that had only the previous month seen the rocket-propelled launch of Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, by the USSR. *Rockets for BBC* drew on the language of the dawning space age to associate Britain's television infrastructure with scientific and technological advancement.

Another newsreel article to position visual technology as a site at which Britain's promised scientific age was already emerging was *TV Camera Helps Building* (1959).⁶¹ This film describes how a camera allowed engineers to examine the foundations of a building being constructed on London's South Bank. The newsreel stresses that this was a significant development for the construction industry, but the camera is also framed as a futuristic device through the film's mimicry of science fiction tropes. As the camera descends into the pit the viewer watches the footage that it captures while the narration comments that 'it would certainly set the cat amongst the pigeons if a strange face suddenly appeared from the bowels of the Earth'. This draws on a motif that had been used to great effect only a few months earlier when the BBC's science fiction television serial *Quatermass and the Pit*, which ran from December 1958 to January 1959, featured an alien skull being unearthed during building work in Knightsbridge, London. If the narration in *TV Camera Helps Building* was not intended as a deliberate reference to the *Quatermass* serial, the sheer popularity of the BBC programme suggests that the newsreel's audience would have been likely to make this connection regardless. *TV Camera Helps Building* continues by claiming that 'you can laugh, but at the rate our scientists are forging ahead you'll never know what we'll find next', implicitly suggesting that science was venturing into the unknown where unlikely events, such as those depicted in the science fiction programme referenced by this newsreel, were possible. In late 1950s Britain, where the motifs of genre films were relatively familiar, this clash of reality, fiction and science had the potential to suggest that the country was a place where the dawning technological age could turn the imagined futures of science fiction cinema and television into a reality.

Bank on the Telly, A Telly Copper, An Eye on Your Wheels, Rockets for BBC and *TV Camera Helps Building* are all examples of newsreel films that tied visual technologies to Britain's promised technological age. The camera and the screen, technologies that had existed in cinema for decades, were again being looked on as objects of excitement. The new interest in broadcasting and recording technologies, ushered in by the increase in TV ownership, invested cinema and the cinematic apparatus with a revitalised sense of importance. Technologically mediated reception was once again being presented as a thrilling glimpse of modern science in action. In this regard, it is significant that newsreels were instrumental in popularising the notion that both Britain and cinema technology were on the cutting edge of science. Not only was this a message about cinema, but also a message delivered in cinemas. Audiences were presented with the idea that the very entertainment experience that they were partaking of was something exciting and futuristic, perhaps never more so than if their chosen film was about futuristic technology itself, as was the case with much of the 1950s science fiction boom. The following section will demonstrate how this context of reception made possible particular readings of 1950s science fiction films that made use of new technological advances in film production and distribution.

Reading 1950s Science Fiction Films: The Technologies of Science Fiction Cinema

Just like these contemporary British newsreels, many 1950s science fiction films presented recording and broadcasting technologies as scientifically advanced. The shots of London and Paris under threat in *Flying Saucers* are shown to human characters on a large video screen aboard a technologically

sophisticated alien craft, while *This Island Earth* (1955) featured what we might today term a videophone. However, this preoccupation with cameras, images and screens was only one of the ways in which science fiction films of the 1950s embedded visual technologies into the futures they presented. Many such films incorporated new cinematic technology into their very fabric via their extensive use of special effects and new modes of projection. These films relied heavily on stop motion animation, intricate model shots, composite shots, complex pyrotechnics, 3D cinematography, CinemaScope, new colour processes such as SuperCineColor and the combination of traditional animation and live action footage in the same frame. More than any other genre, science fiction films were laden with images produced and projected using new technologies. Errol Vieth notes that 'special effects in science fiction film are different from special effects in other genres, in that their ability to transmogrify the unreal into the real is central to the film's ability to induce the willing suspension of disbelief in an audience'.⁶² This is certainly true of 1950s science fiction films, many of which were not merely about advanced technology, but were necessarily and ostentatiously products of advanced technology. British cinemas became locations where new technologically mediated audiovisual thrills could be experienced. As such, this section argues that watching science fiction films in 1950s Britain might have felt like a futuristic, technological experience that anticipated the coming scientific age promised by contemporary newsreels.

The attention paid to the technical details of science fiction cinema's special effects by British film magazines of the 1950s, notably *Picturegoer*, suggests that the genre intersected with British excitement about scientific progress. Articles often explained how particular shots or effects were achieved

in some detail. Visiting the set of *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars* (1953), *Picturegoer* noted with some interest that a layer of smoke on a pool of water 'is made by blowing "dry ice" (solid carbon dioxide) through a thick hose'.⁶³ Similarly, *Picturegoer* quoted the craftsperson responsible for creating the creature in *The Quatermass Xperiment*, a man named Les Bowie but referred to in this interview as Jim Bowie, claiming:

We went to the slaughterhouse, got some tripe and cut it up...We made a rubber frame with lots of joints. After photographing it in miniature, we married it up with paintings on foreground glass - and eventually made it look like the monster was inside Westminster Abby.⁶⁴

When *Picturegoer* witnessed the production of Britain's first major 1950s science fiction film, *Spaceways* (1953), David Marlowe reported back that 'processes such as matte shots, optical printing, back projection and cutting into the flights of real rockets are being used to give the picture the same touch of authenticity - or impossibility, whichever you prefer - as those other high-flown wonders made in Hollywood'.⁶⁵ The magazine was also impressed by 'the technical brilliance of Disney's under-water sequences, and by shots of the submarine's destruction' in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1955).⁶⁶

Picturegoer even once went so far as to claim that the 'technical stuff' in *Flight to Mars* (1951) was 'far more interesting than the reactions of the characters'.⁶⁷ As these responses suggest, in 1950s Britain special effects sequences in science fiction films aroused curiosity about the science and technology that underpinned their production.

This curiosity about the production of these films suggests that *Picturegoer* was displaying what Michele Pierson, drawing on the work of Philip Fisher, terms 'wonder'.⁶⁸ For Pierson, 'only visual effects have the power to elicit the aesthetic experiences of amazement, admiration, and delight associated with wonder and the intellectual curiosity that it excites'.⁶⁹ Crucial to this

understanding of wonder is the notion that a visual experience can provoke an intellectual response. Pierson stresses this connection, arguing that 'one of the attractions of this way of thinking about wonder is that it makes thought a component of aesthetic experience, returning to it an incitement to curiosity and contemplation'.⁷⁰ This can be seen in *Picturegoer's* fascination with the technical details behind the visual effects of 1950s science fiction films. The attention paid to the production of these shots served to satisfy the intellectual curiosity that the images themselves provoked. *Picturegoer* found much to wonder at in 1950s science fiction films and invited its readers to wonder at them too.

No matter how impressive the special effects of these films appeared, the reality of the situation was that they often did not make use of the type of cutting edge technology that British audiences were fascinated by during the 1950s. In terms of *Flying Saucers*, Ray Harryhausen, the famed special effects artist who worked on the production, used rather cumbersome techniques to deliver the most striking images of the film. Rather than employing expensive high speed photography to capture images of falling rubble, for example, the film's limited budget dictated that laborious stop motion animation be used instead. Each tumbling block was suspended by a wire and was lowered a fraction of an inch every time a new frame of footage was taken. Similarly, Harryhausen has described using very simple techniques when shooting the flying saucers themselves, such as hanging 'the miniatures in front of the rear-projected live-action plates' using 'overhead wires'.⁷¹ *Flying Saucers'* restrictive budget enforced strict limitations on the nature of the special effects work that Harryhausen could do, prohibiting him from making use of expensive new technologies.

However, the response that *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* received in Britain suggests that these limitations did not impinge on the film's ability to inspire wonder. *Picturegoer*, for example, commented in 1957 that the film contained 'brilliant model work'.⁷² Recent commentators have tended to agree. John D. Daugherty has described *Flying Saucers* as 'the special effects extravaganza of its day', while Patrick Lucanio has drawn attention to the 'outstanding model work and stop-motion photography by Ray Harryhausen'.⁷³ Despite their humbles origins, Harryhausen's accomplished special effects sequences have clearly been able to inspire a strong sense of wonder, suggesting that they had the potential to appear as products of advanced visual effects technology. This impression is heightened when this film is placed in the context of the low quality effects of many contemporary science fiction films and television programmes that British audiences watched, such as those of the BBC's *Quatermass* serials (1953, 1955 and 1958-9). In this regard, it is significant that *Flying Saucers* is, alongside *The War of the Worlds*, one of very few 1950s science fiction films to feature sustained sequences of alien craft in flight. More typical of the era are films such as *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, discussed in Chapter Three, which makes very sparing use of its disappointing spacecraft effects. Although *It!* is set almost entirely aboard a spaceship, it uses only occasional and brief exterior shots of the vessel in flight. The principal exception is an uninspiring sequence where footage of a man in a spacesuit walking against a black background is tilted to give the impression that he is walking vertically down the outside of the craft. This type of cheap and visually unimpressive effects sequence, common in much of the genre during this period, contrasts sharply with the extensive and elaborate shots of alien spaceships and falling debris in *Flying Saucers*. This suggests that this film and

others that achieved similarly outstanding special effects, such as *Forbidden Planet*, could have had a significant impact on viewers used to substandard offerings. In comparison to many of its peers *Flying Saucers* looked as if it was created using an advanced and technologically sophisticated production process.⁷⁴

The special effects in *Fiend Without a Face* received attention in the British press for different reasons. While Harryhausen created a dramatic spectacle in *Flying Saucers*, particularly during the destruction of various Washington landmarks, Baron Florenz von Nordhoff and Klaus-Ludwig Ruppel, the Munich-based team behind *Fiend's* stop motion animation, produced effects that were less grand, but perhaps more shocking. Indeed, the model work in *Fiend* has been described as 'the goriest effects from the fifties'.⁷⁵ During the climax of this film, the human characters discover that the thought monsters are susceptible to gunfire. What follows is a disturbing and bloody sequence in which the beasts, who resemble human brains with attached spinal cords, are repeatedly shot, bleed profusely, gasp in agony and slowly die. James Kendrick has described how 'when the fiends are shot, they ooze large glops of viscous matter and expire with a grotesque wheezing that, as one critic noted, sounds like a leaking bicycle tire. *Fiend* is quite gruesome even today'.⁷⁶ Revealingly, *Fiend's* executive producer told interviewer Tom Weaver that 'we had to make a cut version for England because the British censor didn't want to pass it' in as gruesome a form as was initially intended.⁷⁷ However, some of the bloodier shots must have been present in the version that was released in Britain since no other sequence would have given *Picturegoer* cause to describe *Fiend's* creatures as 'really messy monsters'.⁷⁸ Even before their deaths, the effects work on the creatures is detailed and impressive. Antennae and spinal cords

wave and wiggle independently, lending the creatures personality and a certain level of individuality. *Fiend* is, as John Johnson claims, 'one of the most innovative stop motion pictures ever made'.⁷⁹ Just as Harryhausen's work was technically accomplished enough to suggest a technologically sophisticated production process, the same could be argued of Nordhoff and Ruppel's special effects.

Despite the unimpressive effects work in films such as *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, there were a number of other 1950s science fiction films that, alongside *Fiend*, *Flying Saucers* and *Forbidden Planet*, were able to appear technologically sophisticated. As indicated above, *The War of the Worlds* was one such production. Despite being dismissive of much of the film, *Picturegoer's* reviewer, for example, was pleased with George Pal's animation and model work. Margaret Hinxman claimed:

It's just one magnificent film stunt from start to finish. Its dialogue makes you wince. Its incidental love story gives you a drearily hollow feeling in the pit of your stomach. All that, yet *The War of the Worlds*...is a film that will make picturegoers sit up. For it's a film that stars special effects...And can a film get by on trick effects? Obviously, this one suggests it can.⁸⁰

Hinxman describes how 'Pal's special effects pulverise you into a state of breathlessness'.⁸¹ She recalls witnessing 'eye-popping incident upon eye-popping incident with barely breathing space in between'.⁸² Similarly, *The Manchester Guardian* praised the special effects used to create this film's creatures, deeming them 'certainly the most frightening and possibly the ugliest Martians yet discovered by cinema'.⁸³ Aside from model work and stop motion animation, other types of technologically driven cinematography were also enjoyed by British reviewers. *Picture Show* magazine thought that *Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954) 'has some first-rate underwater scenes'.⁸⁴ This sense of wonder was apparent in British science fiction film reviews into the

early 1960s, when, despite being disappointed by the inexpressive model used for the mother of the reptile beast in *Gorgo* (1961), *Monthly Film Bulletin* certainly found the composite shots impressive and suggested that they gave the film 'a touch of grandeur, notably in the shots of Ma Gorgo towering angrily over Piccadilly Circus'.⁸⁵ British reviewers found great pleasure in wondering at the array of special effects technologies utilised by science fiction cinema when they were employed effectively. For British audiences excited about the prospect of scientific advancements, these films were able to provide an experience that incited curiosity about cutting edge technologies, even though the reality of their production often did not match the illusion.

Other technological developments also underpinned and facilitated the 1950s science fiction boom. 3D films, for example, had existed in various forms since *The Power of Love* was screened at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles in 1922, but by the time of *Bwana Devil* (1953), the first American colour film to be shot in 3D, it had become economically and technologically viable for this type of production to be given a broad commercial release.⁸⁶ Such films are shot on two cameras simultaneously and both images are projected on top of one another. By wearing special glasses, audiences are provided with the illusion that the film has depth, or that it occupies three dimensional space rather than the traditional flat screen. In 1953, Universal brought science fiction cinema into the 3D age with *It Came from Outer Space*, discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. This film's 3D cinematography was stressed by its promotional material, some of which drew on a precedent established earlier in 1953, with the release of *House of Wax*, for suggesting that 3D emphasised the appeal of the female body to male audiences. When *Photoplay* magazine published a brief interview with Phyllis Kirkland, the female

star of *House of Wax*, the interviewer noted that ‘I mentioned...the tag the publicity people had given her of “The Girl with the 3-D shape.” (For the record, her measurements are: bust 32, waist 22, hips 33½, height 5ft. 5ins.)’.⁸⁷ Similarly, *The Daily Mirror* printed a short article about *It Came from Outer Space*, claiming that ‘a solemn little meeting has just taken place at...the American censor’s H.Q....For what may be acceptable in two dimensions can be highly revealing when seen in “depth”’.⁸⁸ The article goes on to draw attention to the 3D presence of actress Kathleen Hughes in *It Came*, presumably anticipating that male audiences might wish to see her in this ‘highly revealing’ state. Taking advantage, perhaps unwittingly, of the sense of excitement that was being generated in Britain around the notion of scientific progress, 3D science fiction films were partly marketed as a means of technologically enhancing the traditional draws of the cinema, such as the sexual appeal of a film’s stars. Films of this type, such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), *Cat-Women of the Moon* (1954) and *Gog* (1954), afforded British audiences the chance to see films about science and technology in a manner that highlighted the new technological apparatus of the cinema.

The same is true of the various science fiction films that were shot and screened in CinemaScope during this decade. CinemaScope was a widescreen format that allowed for an image almost twice as broad as had previously been the norm. It ‘squeezed onto the film a wide field of view to be unsqueezed in projection’, thereby making it necessary for cinemas to install much larger screens.⁸⁹ Reflecting this alteration to the cinema auditorium, Richard Maltby has called CinemaScope ‘the most drastic shift in what the screen *looked* like in the history of cinema’ (Maltby’s emphasis).⁹⁰ Maltby describes how ‘technical

explanations of CinemaScope suggested that it activated the viewer's peripheral vision and required lateral eye movement. Together these ocular effects replaced the feeling of watching a framed picture with the sensation of viewing an actual space'.⁹¹ Martin Halliwell notes that this sensation 'encouraged viewers to lose themselves in the epic scale, emphasising dramatic and symbolic elements often muted in' the traditional aspect ratio.⁹² This technique 'helped to revolutionise how films were constructed and dramatically changed the experience of cinema-going'.⁹³ These effects made CinemaScope a powerful attraction for audiences, so much so that *Picturegoer* began to signal its use by printing the CinemaScope logo next to reviews of films that were projected in this way from 1955 onwards.⁹⁴ Consequently, science fiction films such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Forbidden Planet*, *World Without End* (1956), *Queen of Outer Space* (1959) and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1959) became strongly associated with this new technology of film distribution, both in their promotion and their consumption. As with 3D, CinemaScope was able to appeal to audiences as a technological experience.

Through both on-screen and in-auditorium effects, science fiction offered an extensive range of technologically mediated and crafted pleasures during the 1950s. As the reviews printed in British publications show, the appeal of these films was derived in no small part from their engagement with and embodiment of technology. The new effects technologies did not merely enable the 1950s science fiction boom, they were an inalienable part of its attraction, especially in Britain where science and technology were already sites of great public interest. Errol Vieth's observation that 'in this genre...special effects assume star status in the same way that humans assume star status in other genres' was never more true than in 1950s Britain.⁹⁵ Vieth continues that

‘science fiction is as much a product of film technology as any other influence’, but in the 1950s, science fiction was not merely a product of that technology, but an expression of it too.⁹⁶ In this sense, watching science fiction in Britain’s cinemas during the 1950s became one way in which ordinary people could experience something of the new technological age promised by the newsreels that they watched before the films began. This symbiotic relationship between newsreels that promised technological advancements and the films that followed them onto the screen, which were themselves embedded with technology, allowed science fiction cinema to both make use of and support the perception that Britain was entering into a period of scientific and technological discovery.

Conclusion

The 1950s was a decade in which discussions about science and technology took prominence in British public debate. This was signalled quite early in the decade when the 1951 Festival of Britain, a series of exhibitions aimed at reinvigorating national morale in the face of slow post-war reconstruction, put science at its very heart. The architecture of the exhibition suggested a futuristic utopia of new technologies. This was particularly true of the Skylon, a seemingly unsupported needle that jutted ninety meters into the air above London’s South Bank. Next to the Skylon stood the largest dome in the world, the aptly named Dome of Discovery. Pre-dating the Millennium Dome by half a century, this ninety-three meter tall structure invited visitors to see exhibitions that demonstrated new discoveries of both the natural and human worlds. In South Kensington an exhibition focused exclusively on science, while Glasgow’s Kelvin Hall displayed items and technologies related to the theme of

industrial power. As well as standing displays in many British cities, other exhibitions toured the nation, taking the wonders of modern science, technology and discovery to Britons across the country. As a celebration of what Britain stood for at the dawn of the second half of the Twentieth Century, the Festival of Britain was unambiguous in its suggestion of the centrality of science to the nation and its future.

Science duly became a key issue in 1950s Britain, particularly in cinemas where newsreels, special effects, new projection technologies and the plots of science fiction films placed it under the spotlight. As Bonnie Noonan and Mark Jancovich have demonstrated, however, the presentation of science in these films was flexible enough to enable it to address other, sometimes seemingly unconnected debates.⁹⁷ This suggests that topics that were both directly and indirectly related to science itself influenced its interpretation in 1950s science fiction films. This chapter has traced this process in Britain in terms of two different public debates. It might be of little surprise that Britain's hopes for a technologically advanced future played a role in shaping the British reception of science in 1950s science fiction cinema, since these were films that often made prominent narrative use of laboratories, scientists and futuristic gadgetry, but so too did less obviously connected topics, such as the anxieties that followed Britain's withdrawal from Suez in 1956. In British cinemas, science in 1950s science fiction films was available for interpretation in relation to aspirations for the supposed technological age that the nation presumed was due, but concerns about declining British influence and American invasion could equally have played a role in shaping its reception.

This is significant to the current thesis because it demonstrates that, like the alien Other discussed in Section A, science in 1950s science fiction cinema

was polysemic and was open for use by British audiences as a means of making sense of a number of different issues. The meanings that were available to British viewers in these films were, therefore, heavily influenced by the socio-political contexts of reception, since it was, at least in part, the agenda of national debate that dictated the issues through which they were read. As a result, science in the era's science fiction films was able to take on divergent meanings in Britain and America, where, as demonstrated in the Introduction, the landscape of 1950s public debate was often quite different. The discussion presented above has outlined some of the ways in which this process of interpreting science in genre cinema was able to take place with regards to a number of national debates in Britain, thereby suggesting something of the specificity of the British reception of these films. In demonstrating this specificity, this chapter has further exposed the inadequacy of the application of American readings of 1950s science fiction to British audiences.

Notes

¹ The full text of each of the Queen's Christmas Broadcasts can be found at The Official Website of the British Monarchy. No date provided. 'The Queen's Christmas Broadcasts', *The Official Website of the British Monarchy*. <http://www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/TheQueensChristmasBroadcasts/Overview.aspx>. Retrieved 28 January 2011. All quotations from these broadcasts used in this chapter have been taken from this website.

² Noonan, Bonnie. 2005. *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.6.

³ Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.27.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 3D is a technology that allows the wearer of special glasses to see a film in three dimensions, with the image gaining the illusion of depth. CinemaScope uses a broader cinema screen to provide a more immersive experience. More details of these technologies and their use in 1950s science fiction films are provided later in this chapter.

⁶ Dockrill, Saki. 2002. *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice Between Europe and the World?*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. p.1.

⁷ Ibid.

- ⁸ Dombroski, Kenneth R. 2007. *Peacekeeping in the Middle East as an International Regime*. Abingdon: Routledge. p.43.
- ⁹ Kirshner, Jonathan. 1995. *Currency and Coercion: The Political Economy of International Monetary Power*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p.69.
- ¹⁰ Kyle, Keith. 2003. *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Tauris. p. 581.
- ¹¹ Dockrill. *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez*. p.1.
- ¹² Stockwell, A. J. 2008. 'Suez 1956 and the Moral Disarmament of the British Empire', in Smith (2008: 227-238). p.232.
- ¹³ Rousseau, David L. 2005. *Democracy and War: Institutions, Norms and the Evolution of International Conflict*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. p.65.
- ¹⁴ Stockwell. 'Suez 1956 and the Moral Disarmament of the British Empire'. p.232.
- ¹⁵ Anon. 6 November 1956. 'The Act of War: More Readers' Views on Suez', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.6.
- ¹⁶ Shaw, Tony. 1996. *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion During the Suez Crisis*. London: I.B. Tauris. p.92.
- ¹⁷ Anon. 12 November 1956. "Dishonoured All Over World", *The Times*. p.4.
- ¹⁸ Stockwell. 'Suez 1956 and the Moral Disarmament of the British Empire'. p.232.
- ¹⁹ Bennett, George Henry. 2007. *Destination Normandy: Three American Regiments on D-Day*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International. p.2.
- ²⁰ Webster, Wendy. 2009. 'Shorn Women, Rubble Women and Military Heroes: Gender, National Identity and the Second World War in Britain, France and Germany, 1944-1948', in Rorato and Saunders (2009: 51-70). p.57.
- ²¹ Anon. 16 February 1951. 'Blow the Bagpipes - Bogart's Coming!', *The Daily Mirror*. p.4.
- ²² Asman, James. 5 April 1950. 'A Jazzman's Who's-Where', *The Daily Mirror*. p.8.
- ²³ Anon. 16 May 1950. 'American Invasion', *The Daily Mirror*. p.10.
- ²⁴ Brown, Kennedy. 17 January 1951. 'Obnoxious - That's What He Calls His Music!', *The Daily Mirror*. p.8.
- ²⁵ Kilmartin, Terence. 25 May 1952. 'Festival in Paris', *The Observer*. p.8.
- ²⁶ Anon. 13 August 1957. 'British - American Films', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.4.
- ²⁷ Cooke, Alistair. 7 January 1957. 'Just an Honest Mistake by the Texans', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.1.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Anon. 2 January 1957. '\$350M. for Petrol by May', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.2.
- ³⁰ Anon. 16 May 1958. 'Warning of Britain's Losses in Medical Research Men', *The Times*. p.5.
- ³¹ Mammon. 6 December 1959. 'Campbell's Are Coming', *The Observer*. p.3.
- ³² Webb, John de Vere. 26 April 1952. Published letter, *Picturegoer*. p.3.
- ³³ Barrett, C.E. 18 July 1953. Published letter, *Picturegoer*. p.3.
- ³⁴ D.C. 9 November 1957. Published letter, *Picturegoer*. p.3.

- ³⁵ Stoddart, Sarah. 26 November 1955. 'Britain Gets a Monster', *Picturegoer*. p.11.
- ³⁶ Gladwell, Brian. 7 September 1958. Published letter, *Picturegoer*. p.3. Despite this claim, when the film version of *Triffids* was released in 1962 it came from a British studio.
- ³⁷ Davies, Alistair. 2000. 'A Cinema in Between: Postwar British Cinema' in Davies and Sinfield (2000: 110-124). p.111.
- ³⁸ Hunter, I. Q. 1999a. 'Introduction: The Strange Worlds of the British Science Fiction Film', in Hunter (1999b: 1-15). p.8.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Player, Ernie. 2 July 1955. 'This British Film Must Shock America', *Picturegoer*. p.14.
- ⁴¹ Of course, the nuclear reactor on the American base serves as the power source for the film's monsters once they escape Walgate's mind, but crucially it is the British professor whose thoughts take on physical form and corrupt the science performed at the US facility.
- ⁴² Tudor, Andrew. 1989. *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of Horror*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd. p.42.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Hendershot, Cyndy. 1999. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. p.23.
- ⁴⁵ Stacey, Jackie. 1994. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. pp.57-58.
- ⁴⁶ Warren, Bill. 1982. *Keep Watching the Skies!*, Vol.1. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.257.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. p.158.
- ⁴⁸ A few 1950s science fiction films from America display a much more developed concern for internationalism, the most prominent example of which is *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). However, significant Americo-centricity is still evident in more recent US science fiction cinema, notably in *Independence Day* (1996).
- ⁴⁹ See, for example, Anon. 1 November 1957. 'Nobel Prize for British Chemist', *The Manchester Guardian*. p.3.
- ⁵⁰ *Ship of the Future*. 12 June 1958. British Movietone News. Commentator: Geoffrey Sumner. Issue no. 1514A. UK.
- ⁵¹ *This Car is History*. 5 May 1958. Pathé News. Camera: Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 58/36. UK.
- ⁵² *The Vital Vaccine*. 3 June 1957. Pathé News. Camera: Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 57/45. UK.
- ⁵³ *999's New Home*. 3 January 1957. Pathé News. Camera: Cedric Baynes and Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 57/2. UK.
- ⁵⁴ *House of Ideas*. 3 June 1957. Pathé News. Camera: Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 57/45. UK.
- ⁵⁵ *Listening to the Stars*. 27 June 1957. Pathé News. Camera: Pat Whitaker. Issue no. 57/52. UK.
- ⁵⁶ *Bank on the Telly*. 9 November 1959. British Movietone News. Camera: Godfrey Kenneth Hanshaw. Commentator: Geoffrey Sumner. Issue no. 1588. UK.
- ⁵⁷ *A Telly Copper*. 6 January 1958. British Movietone News. Camera: David W. Samuelson. Commentator: Geoffrey Sumner. Issue no. 1492. UK.

- ⁵⁸ *An Eye on Your Wheels*. 12 January 1959. British Movietone News. Camera: Samuelson. Commentator: Geoffrey Sumner. Issue no. 1545. UK.
- ⁵⁹ Roberts, Graham and Heather Wallis. 2007. 'Britain: Meet Mr Lucifer: British Cinema Under the Spell of TV', in Ostrowska and Roberts (2007: 6-24). p.7.
- ⁶⁰ *Rockets for BBC*. 25 November 1957. British Movietone News. Camera: Phil John Turner and Len Waldorf. Commentator: Geoffrey Sumner. Issue no. 1486. UK.
- ⁶¹ *TV Camera Helps Building*. 13 April 1959. British Pathé. Commentator: David De Keyser. Issue no. 224. UK.
- ⁶² Vieth, Errol. 2001. *Screening Science: Contexts, Texts, and Science in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. pp.38-39.
- ⁶³ Anon. 18 October 1952. 'Bud and Lou Meet the Ladies', *Picturegoer*. p.17.
- ⁶⁴ Player, Ernie. 11 February 1956. 'The Monster is a Load of Tripe...and Confidentially That's Just What it is', *Picturegoer*. p.11.
- ⁶⁵ Marlowe, David. 3 January 1953. 'Now We're Shooting Stars into Space', *Picturegoer*. p.17.
- ⁶⁶ Anon. 18 June 1955. '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea', *Picturegoer*. p.28.
- ⁶⁷ Anon. 28 June 1952b. 'Flight to Mars', *Picturegoer*. p.19.
- ⁶⁸ Pierson, Michele. 2002. *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. p.21.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Harryhausen, Ray and Tony Dalton. 2003. *Ray Harryhausen: An Animated Life*. London: Aurum Press. p.80.
- ⁷² Daugherty, John D. 2004. *Exploration: Themes of Science Fiction, A Brief Guide*. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford. p.16; Anon. 13 July 1957. 'Earth vs. the Flying Saucers', *Picturegoer*. p.16.
- ⁷³ Lucanio, Patrick. 1987. *Them or Us*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. pp.36-37.
- ⁷⁴ As David Butler has noted, Harryhausen's stop motion animation was still receiving significant attention in 1958. In that year, *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* placed it at the forefront of the film's advertising campaign, assigning it the exciting name 'DYNAMATION'. Of course, this film uses the same types of techniques that were seen in *Flying Saucers*, but by providing them with a new name Columbia Pictures attempted to recapture the excitement of Harryhausen's earlier work. For a discussion of the role of Harryhausen's effects work in *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, see Butler, David. 2010. *Fantasy Cinema: Impossible Worlds on Screen*. London: Wallflower Press. p.77.
- ⁷⁵ Johnson, John. 1996. *Cheap Tricks and Class Acts: Special Effects, Makeup and Stunts from the Films of the Fantastic Fifties*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.197.
- ⁷⁶ Kendrick, James. 2009. *Hollywood Bloodshed: Violence in 1980s American Cinema*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. p.42.
- ⁷⁷ Weaver, Tom. 2006. *Interviews with Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers: Writers, Producers, Directors, Actors, Moguls and Makeup*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. p.178.
- ⁷⁸ Anon. 22 November 1958. 'Fiend Without a Face', *Picturegoer*. p.15.
- ⁷⁹ Johnson. *Cheap Tricks and Class Acts*. p.71.
- ⁸⁰ Hinxman, Margaret. 9 May 1953. 'What a War and What a Fake!', *Picturegoer*. p.12.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid. p.13.

⁸³ Anon. 4 April 1953. 'New Films in London, *The Manchester Guardian*. p.3.

⁸⁴ Anon. 22 October 1955. 'Creature From the Black Lagoon', *Picture Show*. p.10.

⁸⁵ Anon. November 1961. 'Gorgo', *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Vol.28, No.339. BFI. p.155.

⁸⁶ *Bwana Devil* was released in 1952 in America and in 1953 in Britain. Because the main text of this thesis provides British release dates, it is necessary to note that 3D films began circulating in the US from 1952.

⁸⁷ P.E. November 1956. '3-D? Don't Mention that Word...', *Photoplay*. Vol.7, No.11. p.15.

⁸⁸ Zec, Donald. 24 March 1953. 'New Angles', *The Daily Mirror*. p.4.

⁸⁹ Bordwell, David. 1985. 'Widescreen Processes and Stereophonic Sound', in Bordwell, David, Staiger and Thompson (1985: 358-364). p.358.

⁹⁰ Maltby, Richard. 2003. *Hollywood Cinema*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p.251.

⁹¹ Maltby. *Hollywood Cinema*. p.235.

⁹² Halliwell, Martin. 2007. *American Culture in the 1950s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.150.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Anon. '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea'. p.28.

⁹⁵ Vieth. *Screening Science*. pp.38-39.

⁹⁶ Vieth. *Screening Science*. p.42.

⁹⁷ Noonan. *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. p.6; Jancovich. *Rational Fears*. p. 27.

Conclusion

In the Introduction this thesis explained its aim to explore the specificity of the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema. In order to do this, it has focused on the two key themes that have dominated criticism of the genre during this period, namely the Other and science, and has reframed them through the meanings that they adopted in Britain. It has now become clear that these core elements were essentially polysemic and so were able to be understood in relation to a series of national debates. Section A showed that the figure of the Other could give voice to a range of attitudes about two particular British concerns. Chapter Two showed that, while the Other in 1950s depersonalisation narratives has most frequently been interpreted as a representation of American fears of Soviet brainwashing, in Britain it was able to articulate comparable but differently inflected fears of communist infiltration and also sympathies towards and tolerance of communists. Chapter Three suggested that the figure of the alien Other was also available for interpretation in Britain in an entirely different manner, since it could both support and challenge various aspects of the British debate about race and immigration that took place in the aftermath of the 1958 Notting Hill riots. Section B showed that science was equally as flexible a signifier as the Other. Chapter Four demonstrated that numerous creature features found their meanings inflected by differing attitudes towards nuclear technology that were present in 1950s Britain, while Chapter Five showed that the depiction of science itself allowed science fiction films to be interpreted through a number of nationally specific debates. In this regard, it is clear that both of the significant themes in 1950s science fiction cinema explored by this thesis carried a variety of meanings in

Britain as a result of their intersection with a range of different attitudes to a number of significant public debates.

In light of this evidence it is perhaps worth restating Barry Keith Grant's claim that *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) employed a 'central metaphor for the monstrous that...is sufficiently flexible to accommodate multiple interpretations'.¹ As the analysis performed in the previous chapters shows, the malleability of *Body Snatchers*' metaphors is something that it shares in common with many science fiction films of this era. Both science and the alien Other, two of the most common motifs of British and American 1950s science fiction films, were equally flexible and open to multiple interpretations. They could be read in a number of different ways depending on the discursive surround within which they were situated, enabling them to acquire a variety of meanings both from audiences in different countries and from different sections of a single national audience. As such, the arguments presented here have shown that the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema was both unique, in that it relied on a series of debates that emerged out of Britain's national circumstances and which were not reproduced identically elsewhere, and also varied, because it encompassed the responses of a diverse body of people with a wealth of different points of view.

Moreover, certain common themes have emerged across the analyses performed in the chapters of this thesis that further develop our understanding of the specificity of the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema by making it possible to differentiate it from the American response to the genre. This can be done in two ways. The first of these emphasises the fact that, even when Britons and Americans were able to make sense of 1950s science fiction in relation to the same topics, such as nuclear science or communism, the

variations in these public debates between the two countries ensured that the possible resultant readings of the genre were not identical. This was demonstrated by the first halves of Chapters Two and Four, for example, where I argued that, even though British readings of these films were not always wildly dissimilar to those available in America, they were derived from differently articulated anxieties. Chapter Two suggested that Peter Biskind's claim that 'possession by [alien] pods – mind stealing, brain eating and body snatching – had the added advantage of being an overt metaphor for Communist brainwashing' in America was, to an extent, also true in Britain.² However, the fear of communist infiltration in Britain focused on the vulnerability of the Establishment rather than the community, giving this threat a unique inflection that has not been evident in readings of 1950s science fiction films produced in the United States. Consequently, the metaphor that Biskind argues allowed aliens to stand in for communists in the American imagination was also relevant in Britain but, because the danger of communism was perceived differently on both sides of the Atlantic, the range of potential readings of these films was not the same in the two countries. In this sense, similar interpretative processes were possible in both Britain and America, but subtle variations in the debates about communism held in these countries ensured that the interpretations of 1950s science fiction films that could arise were often very different indeed.

This is an idea that also emerges from the findings presented in the first half of Chapter Four. While both Americans and Britons feared their annihilation at the hands of the Soviet nuclear weapons programme, this threat too was articulated differently in the two countries, for example through claims that Britons were more vulnerable to a Soviet attack as a result of their country's geography and housing stock.³ Just as the British inflection of fears of Soviet

infiltration allowed for the production of particular British readings of the alien Other, so too did Britain's unique relationship to nuclear weaponry, alongside recent memories of the Blitz, allow its citizens access to readings of films about radioactive monsters that were not available in quite the same form to American audiences. Chapter Two and Chapter Four thus both provide evidence that, even when the same types of public anxieties were raised by 1950s science fiction cinema in Britain and America, the differences between the two countries' national relationships to these issues meant that the interpretations of these films that were available were never identical.

The second way in which this thesis has differentiated the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema from the American response to the genre is by indicating that these films were open to interpretation in Britain in light of debates that were significant in that country, but which were of little concern in the United States. This can be demonstrated by tracing the connections between Chapters Three and Five. Chapter Three argued that both pro- and anti-immigration debates, sparked by the arrival of workers from former and current British colonies in response to post-war labour shortages, could have inflected British interpretations of 1950s alien encounter films. This is important because significant post-war immigration did not begin in America until the 1960s, suggesting that these readings of the era's science fiction cinema would not necessarily have occurred to contemporary US audiences. Chapter Five suggested that the depiction of science in films from across the genre reflected British hopes and fears about the nation's imperial decline, its relationship to America's expanding influence in Europe and the deployment of new scientific innovations. Each of these debates arose out of particular British historical circumstances, be they humiliation at Suez or the increasing presence

of technology in British society. The issues discussed in Chapters Three and Five consequently mattered in Britain in a way that they did not necessarily matter abroad and so their inflection of 1950s science fiction cinema was unique to the country.

Chapters Two and Four have shown that British audiences had the potential to read these films in light of the same issues as their American counterparts and yet discover different meanings in them, while Chapters Three and Five have indicated that specifically British issues were also able to shape the interpretation of the genre. This thesis has consequently demonstrated a distinct British reception history of 1950s science fiction films and has provided some suggestion of its character. This casts new light on the 'critical orthodoxy' that Lincoln Geraghty has suggested dominates scholarship on 1950s US science fiction cinema.⁴ As discussed earlier in this thesis, both he and Mark Jancovich have indicated that authors have repeatedly stressed similar interpretations of these films.⁵ In Chapter One I outlined the nature of this orthodoxy, suggesting that it has taken the form of a loose consensus behind the idea that 1950s American science fiction films reflected US fears of communism and the nuclear bomb. I also drew attention to the alternatives that have been offered to these readings by authors such as M. Keith Booker, Philip L. Gianos, Barry Keith Grant, Mark Jancovich, Bonnie Noonan and Patrick Lucanio.⁶ These scholars have used a number of critical frameworks to broaden our understanding of the range of meanings that 1950s science fiction films can hold. This thesis has continued their work by suggesting another means of approaching the genre. By showing that science fiction cinema was open to different readings in 1950s Britain than it was in the United States, this project has further developed the range of ways in which we can understand these

films. This is not intended as a challenge to or a criticism of the studies that constitute Geraghty's orthodoxy, since my research cannot speak to the responses of the American audiences or the US production contexts that predominantly interest those authors. Instead, it represents an attempt to deepen our knowledge in this field by offering an alternative account of the genre's history during the 1950s through the demonstration of the specificity of its reception in Britain.

Rather than limiting its discussion to US science fiction films, this thesis has also addressed the British productions that were screened alongside them. In this regard, my work also sits in dialogue with existing scholarship on the British science fiction cinema of this era. Authors such as Peter Hutchings, Ian Conrich, Sarah Street, Steve Chibnall and Brian McFarlane have identified a number of ways in which British contexts of production shaped the content of the genre.⁷ This thesis has expanded on these studies by examining British science fiction films from a different angle, exploring their contexts of reception. As has become clear, the observations that I have made about the flexibility of the metaphors employed by the genre during this period are as true of these British productions as they are of their American counterparts. These were also films that were able to engage with a wide variety of public debates in Britain, both challenging and supporting the views of their audiences. Of course, there were differences in the ways in which domestic and American science fiction films were received in Britain, a topic that is discussed further below, but this thesis has also shown that, in many ways, the genre sustained its polysemic nature across films from both of the countries that dominated its production during the 1950s. Both British and American films have, in each of the chapters presented here, been shown to be capable of addressing a wealth of public

concerns in a range of different ways, suggesting that this was a prominent feature of the genre as a whole as it was screened in Britain at this time.

The potential interplay between existing work on the production contexts of British 1950s science fiction cinema and the evidence of the domestic reception history of these films provided by this thesis suggests that it might now be possible to produce a more holistic account of the genre in Britain during this period. Both areas of study are concerned with the ways in which British science fiction films intersected with 1950s public debates, albeit that they explore this interaction at different sites. Many of the topics examined in this thesis, such as nuclear science and Britain's imperial decline, are also discussed in this earlier work, as noted in Chapter One. By situating the current study alongside those of the scholars mentioned above, some indication of the relationship between the production and reception of these films in Britain might begin to emerge. Although this conclusion is not the place to begin such an analysis, it is certainly worth noting that this thesis opens up broader avenues of enquiry into the place that science fiction cinema occupied in 1950s Britain and suggests the possibility of new ways of considering the relationship between the country and its genre films.

Furthermore, this thesis also provides a means by which the globalisation of American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema can be resisted. As I suggested in the Introduction and Chapter One, the tendency in popular discussion not to distinguish between the British and American reception of these films might well have been caused by the overwhelming focus of scholarly debate about the genre during this period on American films and by the relatively concise nature of the research on their British cousins. While this thesis has examined an equal number of British and US productions,

and so cannot claim to have gone any way towards redressing this imbalance, it has exposed the inadequacy of using Americo-centric readings of 1950s science fiction films to address their British reception. Through demonstrating the potential for British audiences to understand both domestic and foreign science fiction films in ways that might not necessarily have occurred to cinema-goers in America, this project has shown that there exists a British reception history of the genre that is distinct from its US counterpart. In enabling such arguments to be made, this study encourages the disruption of the globalisation of US readings of the era's science fiction cinema and challenges its underpinning presumption that western countries received these films in a largely uniform manner during the 1950s.

In making this contribution, however, this thesis has also raised a number of further questions about 1950s science fiction cinema in an international context. For example, although I have provided some sense of the British reception of the films of the two countries that dominated the genre during this period, namely Britain and America, I have only been able to provide a few insights into the impact of the differences between these national science fiction cinemas. Chapter Five's discussion of American actors in British productions and British films that attempted to hide their national origins, such as *Fiend Without a Face* (1958), suggested some of the ways in which the interpretation of British and American films differed in Britain, but since this has not been the primary focus of this work it has only occasionally been of significant concern. Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston have identified several important ways in which the science fiction of these two countries, both on film and television, differed during this period, but the consequences of this for the British reception

history of the genre have only been touched on in this project.⁸ Consequently, there remains scope for further research in this area.

Questions could also be asked about the relationship between these films and other countries besides Britain and America. The arguments presented above have shown that the meanings generated by science fiction films of this period were largely dependent on reception contexts that varied, sometimes radically so, between different countries. This draws attention to the absent histories of the reception of 1950s science fiction cinema in a long list of countries within which these films were screened.⁹ As yet, there has been no indication of the ways in which these British and American films were understood in France, Belgium, Austria, Italy, West Germany, Portugal, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Turkey and Japan, to name but a few of the nations to which they were exported. Just as the reception history of these films in Britain has not previously been explored in depth, the same is also largely true of these aforementioned countries. While this thesis has gone some way towards guarding against the use of American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema to address its British reception, it cannot provide sufficient evidence that a similarly unique reception history also existed in other countries. This is certainly likely given the importance of national contexts to the reception of the genre, as highlighted in the preceding chapters, but further research is necessary before firm claims of this nature can be made.

As well as demonstrating the need for this type of broad, internationally focused research, the conclusions of this thesis also suggest that a deeper, nationally focused investigation of the ways in which the globalisation of memory has obscured other British film histories might be advantageous. If American readings of 1950s science fiction cinema have tended to disguise

British interpretations of these films, other genres in other eras might also have undergone a similar process. If the pleasures of the western genre are often understood in terms of their offering a national founding myth to American audiences, as Gary J. Hausladen argues, then questions could be asked about the draw that they held for British cinema-goers who lived in a country that had a lengthy national history, an established mythology and different relationships with space, the wilderness and the gun.¹⁰ One could similarly enquire about how 1970s and 1980s slasher films, which created threat in part by subverting the familiarity of American suburbia, thrilled audiences in the British countryside. In exposing the danger posed by the globalisation of cinema memory to the preservation of localised histories of film reception, this thesis acts as a call for further investigation of British historical audiences and their interpretation of other genres in order that the specificity of these cinematic encounters might not be lost or obscured.

Alongside its original contribution to the study of the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema, this thesis has also demonstrated the key role that the New Film History can play in attempts to resist the dangers that Fromm associated with pseudo thought. For Fromm, the uncritical acceptance of received wisdom, represented in this thesis by the globalisation of Americo-centric interpretations of 1950s science fiction films, constituted a submission to an external authority, here embodied by Geraghty's critical orthodoxy, and a surrender of our capacity for critical thinking through 'a compulsive conforming to accepted patterns' of thought.¹¹ This thesis has revealed that the New Film History's interest in the different relationships that films can have with their audiences in varied reception contexts provides a means of breaking out of these 'accepted patterns' of thought by considering the multiple, often diverse

meanings that a film can possess.¹² In so doing it encourages the dismissal of the types of pseudo thought that have established and defended authoritative or dominant interpretations of films and genres. Academics such as Sarah Street, Sue Harper and James Chapman have spearheaded recent developments in this process that have shown how the contexts of a film's reception can play a central role in determining its meaning for an audience.¹³ This thesis has built on their work by highlighting the potential of this approach to challenge critical orthodoxies within film history and, through this, to redress those areas in which the discipline continues to rely on pseudo thought and supposition. This project thus contributes to the current critical movement towards reconsidering the nature and purpose of film history that the New Film History represents.

¹ Grant, Barry Keith. 2010. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. London: BFI. pp.8-9.

² Biskind, Peter. 2001. *Seeing is Believing*. London: Bloomsbury. p.111 and 140.

³ Davis, Tracy C. 2007. *States of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. p.15.

⁴ Geraghty, Lincoln. 2009. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. Oxford: Berg. p.20.

⁵ Ibid.; Jancovich, Mark. 1996. *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p.17.

⁶ Booker, M. Keith. 2006. *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p.66; Gianos, Phillip L. 1998. *Politics and Politicians in American Film*. Westport, CT: Praeger. p.140; Grant. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. p.68; Jancovich. *Rational Fears*; Noonan, Bonnie. 2005. *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland; Lucanio, Patrick. 1987. *Them or Us*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁷ Hutchings, Peter. 1999. "'We're the Martians Now': British SF Invasion Fantasies of the 1950s and 1960s", in Hunter (1999b: 33-47); Hutchings, Peter. 1993. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp.37-50; Conrich, Ian. 1999. 'Trashing London: The British Colossal Creature Film and Fantasies of Mass Destruction', in Hunter (1999b: 88-98); Street, Sarah. 2009. *British National Cinema*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 88; Chibnall, Steve. 1999. 'Alien Women: The Politics of Sexual Difference in British SF Pulp Cinema', in Hunter (1999b: 88-98); Chibnall, Steve and Brian McFarlane. 2009. *The British 'B' Film*. London: BFI. pp.282-284.

⁸ Jancovich, Mark and Derek Johnston. 2009. 'Film and Television, the 1950s', in Bould, Butler, Roberts and Vint (2009: 71-79).

⁹ These histories are certainly absent from English language scholarship, but it is possible that they have been provided elsewhere.

¹⁰ Hausladen, Gary J. 2003b. 'Where the Cowboy Rides Away: Mythic Places for Western Film', in Hausladen (2003a: 296-318). p.310.

¹¹ Geraghty. *American Science Fiction Film and Television*. p.20; Fromm, Erich. 2009. *The Fear of Freedom*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009. (Originally published in 1942). p.116.

¹² Fromm. *The Fear of Freedom*. p.116.

¹³ Street, Sarah. 2002. *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States*. London: Continuum International; Harper, Sue. 2007. 'History and Representation: The Case of 1970s British Cinema', in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007b: 27-40); Chapman, James. 2007. "'This Ship is England': History, Politics and National Identity in *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003)", in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007b: 55-68).

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The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues. 1955. Dir. Dan Milner. Prod. Jack Milner and Dan Milner. Milner Brothers. USA. 1956.

The Power of Love. 1922. Dir. Nat G. Deverich and Harry K. Fairall. Prod. Harry K. Fairall. Haworth Pictures Corporation. USA.

The Private Life of Henry VIII. 1933. Dir. Alexander Korda. Prod. Alexander Korda. London Film Productions. UK.

The Quatermass Xperiment. 1955. Dir. Val Guest. Prod. Anthony Hinds. Hammer Film Productions. UK.

The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad. 1958. Dir. Nathan H. Juran. Prod. Charles H. Schneer and Ray Harryhausen. Columbia Pictures. USA.

The Strange World of Planet X. 1957. Dir. Gilbert Gunn. Prod. George Maynard. Artistes Alliance Ltd. UK.

The Thing from Another World. 1951. Dir. Christian Nyby. Prod. Howard Hawks. Winchester Pictures Corporation. USA.

The Trollenberg Terror. 1958. Dir. Quentin Lawrence. Prod. Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman. Eros Films. UK.

The War Game. 1965. Dir. Peter Watkins. Prod. Peter Watkins. BBC. UK.

The War of the Worlds. 1953. Dir. Byron Haskin. Prod. George Pal. Paramount Pictures. USA.

The Woman Eater. 1958. Dir. Charles Saunders. Prod. Guido Coen. Fortress Film Productions Ltd. UK.

This Island Earth. 1955. Dir. Joesph M. Newman. Prod. William Alland. Universal International Pictures. USA.

Tobor the Great. 1954. Dir. Lee Sholem. Prod. Carl Dudley and Philip MacDonald. Dudley Pictures Corporation. USA.

When Worlds Collide. 1951. Dir. Rudolph Maté. Prod. George Pal. Paramount Pictures. USA.

World Without End. 1956. Dir. Edward Bernds. Prod. Richard G. Heermance. Allied Artists. USA.

X - The Unknown. 1956. Dir. Leslie Norman. Prod. Anthony Hinds. Hammer Film Productions. UK