SCIENCE FICTION CINEMA AND 1950s BRITAIN

RECONTEXTUALISING CULTURAL ANXIETY

MATTHEW JONES

'This is the book on British 1950s sci-fi we've been waiting for! Authoritative, accessible, covering a wide range of films and directors, this is the one-stop volume on this key period in British cinema, carefully written and researched, making these films come alive for a whole new audience.'
Wheeler Winston Dixon, James Ryan Professor of Film Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, USA

'In this fascinating study of the British reception of 1950s American science fiction films, Matthew Jones shows that these films are more than just about the fear of communism and The Bomb. Boldly challenging critical orthodoxy, Jones's work has enormous implications for our wider understanding of genre and national cinema.'
Barry Keith Grant, Professor Emeritus, Brock University, Canada, and author of *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*

'With this book, Matthew Jones provides a fascinating revisionary account of 1950s science fiction cinema. Through focusing on the specifically British reception of both British and American SF films, Jones challenges the "commie-baiting" readings that have become firmly associated with this kind of cinema and finds instead new and sometimes surprising significance, nuance and ambivalence. Accessible, stimulating and provocative, Jones's study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of British film culture during the 1950s. It is also a welcome reminder that films are as much defined through the contexts of their reception as they are through the circumstances of their production.'
Peter Hutchings, Professor of Film Studies, Northumbria University, UK

'*Science Fiction Cinema and 1950s Britain* cleverly rethinks the reception of a range of genre films in the British context, challenging received wisdoms and revising established histories along the way. Matthew Jones skilfully rereads the likes of monster movies, alien invasion narratives and nuclear nightmares to show how British audiences of the time were unlikely to mirror the kinds of cinematic

understandings historically linked to US culture. Rather than "reds under the bed", this was an era of Establishment defectors in Britain, whilst Jones also analyses how "atomic anxieties" were distinctively filtered through memories and practices of the "Blitz". Offering timely new ways of approaching 1950s science fiction cinema, this book brilliantly complicates film history's dominant accounts.'

Matt Hills, Professor of Media and Film, University of Huddersfield, UK

'Received wisdom on the 1950s wave of English language science fiction films views them primarily as articulating distinctively American fears of communist infiltration and nuclear science, albeit in allegorical form. In this volume Matthew Jones offers a more nuanced reading, reconsidering the films in their context of reception in Britain where, he argues, rather different public anxieties play into their likely understanding by audiences. In a UK in the throes of losing its empire, the threat of communism was seen rather differently, attitudes to nuclear energy and science were arguably more complex, and race was becoming a significant factor in public perceptions. Re-examining the films in this cultural context gives rise to a fascinating study which obliges us both to rethink the traditional critical approach to 50s SF cinema and, more generally, to recognize that it is always necessary to pay full attention to the cultural landscapes within which films are received and understood.'

Andrew Tudor, Professor Emeritus, University of York, UK

Science Fiction Cinema and 1950s Britain

Recontextualizing Cultural Anxiety

Matthew Jones

For Betty – a cinema book for a lifelong cinemagoer

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Acknowledgements

Introduction: Teacups and Flying Saucers

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 academic and popular writing 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] 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 opportunities presented by nuclear technology were 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. 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.[5]

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 inter-preted on different levels – one for the American audience, one for the British. Often films gain something, as well as losing something, in the transition/trans-lation from America to Britain.[6]

Swann's overview of the reception of Hollywood cinema in post-war Britain raises the possibility that Britons found meaning in 1950s science fiction's nuclear creatures that was 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. It is this book's aim to explore these tensions by investigating the rela-tionship between science fiction cinema and its British contexts of reception during the decade, suggesting some of the unique readings of these genre films that became possible when they were 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 inter-pretation 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.[7] 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'.[8] Similarly, scholars have also suggested that the motif of depersonalization 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'.[9] Indeed, arguments that con-nect 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'.[10]

This level of attention to the relationship between American anxieties and 1950s science fiction cinema can perhaps be explained by the prominence of American films within the genre. Andrew Tudor, for example, has suggested

that 56.9 per cent 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 categorized as science fiction.[11] 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'.[12] 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'.[13] 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'.[14] 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.[15] 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. The year 1956, for example, saw the release of twenty-five American science fiction films, with a further thirty-four following in 1957.[16]

Indeed, Keith M. Johnson notes that, partly as a result of this swell in popularity, 'the term "science fiction", which 'was not seen in previous decades', entered 'regular usage in 1950s reviews'.[17] While previous reviewers had devised a range of creative and colourful terms to describe the nascent film genre, it was during the 1950s that the current descriptor became more settled. It was also during this period that many of the tropes now attached to the genre on screen began to emerge, often informed by issues of public interest. Johnson argues, for example, that 'the recurring image of a saucer-shaped object hanging in the

sky came from a series of 1947 reports' of such sightings in the United States, which rapidly caught the media's attention.[18] He describes this flow of ideas from public discourse onto cinema screens as 'part of a process of "genreification", where the recurring use of particular symbols both in films and culture suggests core elements of generic identity'.[19] As such, it was not only the case that more films that might now be understood as science fiction were being produced during the 1950s than at any earlier point, but also that the genre was taking on a recognizable shape, entering the public consciousness and acquiring its now-familiar name. Definitions of the genre have always been fluid and problematic, but during the 1950s audiences began to understand what they were watching as a coherent generic form. It is this admittedly loose and discursively produced notion of science fiction that is used to guide the interests of this book. While the boundaries of the genre were, as they always would be, in flux during the 1950s, the chapters that follow address a range of films that were described during the period as belonging to the emergent science fiction genre, or which fit within the range of tropes that were increasingly being ascribed to it.

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 1950s 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'.[20] 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 periodicals of the era, particularly in two of the most popular of these publications, *Picturegoer* and *Picture Show*. Alongside a host of

previews, reviews and articles about 1950s science fiction films printed in these periodicals, *Picturegoer* occasionally published short stories that retold the plots of films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954).[21] It was also not uncommon for both magazines to present these narratives in a comic strip format, using still images from the films.[22] *Picturegoer* even awarded *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* its Seal of Merit, a very rare honour bestowed only on films the publication thought particularly worthy.[23] 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 periodicals, a fact that would in turn have served to further publicize these productions.[24]

The popularity of American science fiction cinema in Britain is also 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'.[25] 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 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*, 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.[26] A sequel, *Quatermass II*, followed in 1957 and received similar, if slightly more muted, praise. Before the end of the decade a wide variety 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 home-grown 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 science fiction and its British contexts of reception to an exploration of 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, the chapters that follow examine a range of different science fiction films that were released in Britain during this decade, both British and American, but note 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 7, but will also be raised elsewhere where relevant.

As suggested, 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 film production, 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.[27] In this way, GATT endangered the financial well-being 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.[28] To some extent, this process served to 'Americanize the content of British films'.[29] While this shift in tone benefitted 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.[30] 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.[31]

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 science fiction. 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.[32] 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.[33] Before, during and after the 1950s, British cinemas were almost exclusively indoor venues. Thus, Britons and Americans watched 1950s science fiction cinema in 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.[34] In terms of economics, the Second World War had seen the United States emerge from the Great Depression, and the 1950s had brought a great boom in the production of consumer products.[35] GDP

increased by 43.4 per cent over the decade.[36] Between 1950 and 1960 the per-
centage of Americans earning $10,000 or more increased from 9 to 30.[37] 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
7 per cent in 1950 alone and that year saw 78 per cent of children between the
ages of five and nineteen enrolled in school.[38] Meanwhile, Britain faced signifi-
cant economic challenges. Although the country's per capita GDP increased by
just over two-fifths between 1950 and 1960, Barry Supple has noted that 'dur-
ing 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'.[39] Indeed, at the dawn of the decade, per capita GDP
in America was 'nearly one half higher again than Britain'.[40] 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.[41] 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.[42] These eco-
nomic problems manifested in British homes. In 1956, for example, only 8 per
cent of British households owned a refrigerator.[43] 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'.[44] 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 American territories, Hawaii and Alaska, receiving
statehood in 1959. The United States began the decade as a country of 151.5 mil-
lion people.[45] During the 1950s this population grew by 18.5 per cent.[46] In con-
trast, the British Empire shrank dramatically during the same period. The 1940s
saw the pace of decolonization 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 90 per cent of Americans were white and only about 7 per cent had been born overseas.[47] While the first significant waves of mass immigration into the United States did not begin until the mid-1960s, Britain underwent dramatic demographic shifts much earlier.[48] When post-war labour shortages began to bite, Britain turned to its remaining and former colonial territories to recruit workers. The number of Indians and Pakistanis living in Britain, for example, rose from 17,300 to 55,000 between 1957 and 1958.[49] 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 characterized 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 relativized 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'.[50] 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)'.[51] 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', the same pressures were present in the contexts in which these films were received.[52] As suggested earlier, British

society was party to a different, and differently articulated, set of concerns than America 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 only on their relationship to American society. This is, in effect, the orthodoxy of scholarly opinion about the genre at this time that both Mark Jancovich and Lincoln Geraghty have described and to which this book responds.[53] The development of this orthodoxy can be traced back to Susan Sontag's seminal essay, first published in 1965, 'The Imagination of Disaster'.[54] In her article, Sontag suggests 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.[55] For Sontag, the development of nuclear weapons provided 'a historically specifiable twist' to the relationship between 1950s audiences and cinematic images of mass destruction and monstrosity.[56] In this way, Sontag implicitly suggests that audiences were engaged in a politicization of nuclear science in their reading of 1950s science fiction cinema. 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.[57]

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. Analysing cinemas of different countries in a way that later scholars have often not attempted, 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'.[58] 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', suggesting that there is at least some connection between 1950s science fiction cinema and real world nuclear politics.[59] 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'.[60] 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'.[61] Though her focus on radiation persisted through the work of later writers, Sontag's other ideas were gradually dismissed.

Scholars such as Reynold Humphries and Jonathan Lake Crane have similarly produced work that distances itself from Sontag's broad characterization 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.[62] 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. While Sontag's observations remained influential, their international focus has been eroded in later work in much the same way as her insistence on the genre's apolitical nature.

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.[63] 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'.[64] 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'.[65] 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 that 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.[66] 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'.[67] 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.

As the orthodoxy developed, authors from a variety of different critical perspectives 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'.[68] Similarly, Kendall R. Phillips reads *The Thing from Another World* 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'.[69] The 'sense of impending atomic doom' that he discusses is, of course, the same American nuclear paranoia that Hendershot investigates.[70] Parallel claims have been made by many critics, including M. Keith Booker, Lincoln Geraghty, Peter Lev and Thomas D. Clareson.[71] The implicit argument suggested by these scholars is perhaps made 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'.[72] 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 developing consensus. 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'.[73] 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'.[74] 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, organizing them into categories including, but not limited to, 'corporate-liberal', 'conservative', 'pluralists' and 'extremists'.[75] 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.[76] 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.[77]

As this 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 dehumanization, often through alien replication or possession of human bodies, raised fears of Communist ideology and propaganda.[78] Films about giant insects, such as the overgrown ants in *Them!*, 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.[79] 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, demonizing and dehumanizing 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'.[80] 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 civilization 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. They have, in essence, become a bedrock for the developing orthodoxy.

Biskind's claims have been developed by a wealth of writing that connects anti-communist sentiment and 1950s US depersonalization films, in which alien Others possess or replicate human bodies, particularly the classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. As M. Keith Booker 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.[81]

Booker's claim has clearly been strongly influenced by Biskind's work on the relationship between the Communist and alien Others in depersonalization films. Since Biskind's book was published, similar arguments about US depersonalization 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.[82] Each of these scholars has connected depersonalization in 1950s American science fiction cinema with the threat of Communist infiltration in the United States.

As these arguments about depersonalization, Soviet infiltration, nuclear weaponry and the monstrous creatures of 1950s science fiction proliferated, they gradually became the primary, and frequently the sole, focus of scholarly literature on the genre during this period. It would, however, be disingenuous to argue that this domination of the field has been complete. 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'.[83] Similarly, Phillip L. Gianos advances another rereading 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'.[84] 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 depersonalized alien pod creatures of *Body Snatchers*

might also have been understood as representations of 'our detached and alienated neighbours'.[85] Jack Finney, who wrote the novel on which *Body Snatchers* was based, 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.[86] Perhaps these differences of opinion about *Body Snatchers* result from what Grant describes as its utilization of a 'central metaphor for the monstrous that . . . is sufficiently flexible to accommodate multiple interpretations'.[87] In this sense, each of these commentators has demonstrated the polysemic nature of 1950s US science fiction's depersonalization 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 these films have been read as critiques of entirely different aspects of US culture. Most prominent among this body of work is Mark Jancovich's *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*.[88] 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. 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'.[89] 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.[90] 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'.[91] 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'.[92] 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'.[93] Jancovich's argument, in its radical rereading 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 have also been understood as an attack on emergent trends in contemporary America itself. His is a rare dissenting voice.

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 marginalized by the genre.[94] 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'.[95] She 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'.[96] 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.[97] Her 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.[98] 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'.[99] Clearly there were a number of different American concerns through which these films could have been read.

Other academics too 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.[100] Patrick 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'.[101] 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.[102]

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.

Despite the consensus opinion that American 1950s science fiction cinema was a manifestation of US fears of Communism and nuclear technology, the studies discussed so far suggest that a broader range of readings of these films is possible.[103] From the anti-McCarthyist reading of the depersonalization narratives suggested by Booker's alternative approach to *Body Snatchers* to Lucanio's ahistorical psychoanalysis, the gamut of interpretations of these American films offered by scholarship has been broader than is often acknowledged.[104] 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 that there exists a shadow history of 1950s US science fiction cinema that moves beyond the current focus on nuclear radiation and Soviet indoctrination. However, these alternative accounts of the genre have been few and far between, their perspectives far outweighed by the volume of work that reinforces the dominant interpretations of these films. They highlight the instability of the critical orthodoxy, but have thus far been unable to substantially disrupt it.

In a similar vein, debates about British 1950s science fiction have not yet provided a robust argument against the implicit assumption, produced thorough the overwhelming scholarly and popular focus on US interpretations, that 1950s science fiction films were interpreted uniformly across the West. 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 body 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. In addition, while much of the writing on American genre films of the era has situated them within their domestic reception contexts to produce arguments about their relationship to that culture, work on British science fiction of the era has predominantly been concerned with contexts of production. This focus on production, coupled with the comparatively restricted number of publications on these films, has left room for the development of the assumption that US interpretations of the genre were mirrored in Britain. However, the work that does exist on 1950s science fiction cinema in a British context points tantalizingly to the possibility that such assumptions may be wildly inaccurate.

Peter Hutchings' work on British science fiction cinema is particularly useful in this regard 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 subgenre, rejecting the presumption that they were 'lesser versions of or adjuncts to the better known US science fiction invasion films of the 1950s'.[105] Hutchings' interest in production contexts is, of course, different from my own interest in reception contexts, but his discussion still locates these British films within the framework of 1950s British public debates. 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 in the 1960s, placing these productions in dialogue with British television and film cultures, and debates about domesticity and national identity. In an earlier piece of work, Hutchings similarly explores the industrial contexts within which *The Quatermass Xperiment* 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.[106] He also provides an analysis of the ways in which *The Quatermass Xperiment*, its sequel from 1957 and *X – The Unknown* (1956) negotiated pressing issues in British society, such as the problematic nature of post-war masculinity, the welfare state and the dislocation of the working class. In this sense, Hutchings provides a strong sense of how 1950s British science fiction emerged from and critiqued the sociopolitical status quo

of the country in which it was produced, thereby shining a light on subtleties that US interpretations of the genre could not address.

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.[107] 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'.[108] 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 allows their British specificity to emerge.[109] Similarly, Sarah Street has briefly considered the ways in which British science fiction films from the 1950s articulated national 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'.[110] 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).[111] He returns to this topic in *The British 'B' Film*.[112] Hutchings, Conrich, Street, Chibnall and McFarlane thus provide readings of mid-century British science fiction films that position the genre within its sociopolitical contexts of production, effectively demonstrating 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. It consequently offers a sense of how British reception contexts might have informed the ways in which the genre was understood in this country, but its focus on production limits the extent to which it can be used to discuss audience interpretations. Such a reception history has, prior to this volume, not been mapped out.

Perhaps as a result, popular British accounts of the genre produced since the 1950s, 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 periodical, that science fiction cinema of the 1950s was essentially about 'the fear of Communist subversion', 'atomic radiation' and 'the Bomb'.[113] While these were significant issues in 1950s Britain, Chapters 2 and 4 of this book 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, Britain's *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.[114] While this may have been true in America, 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, it seems that assumptions about the similarity of Western audiences have allowed claims intended to explain the American response to these films to be uncritically applied to Britain.

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, has 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', making explicit the connection between the scholarly consensus outlined earlier and the public understanding of the genre.[115] Similar arguments have also appeared on more populist websites, suggesting their penetration of the British public consciousness. Ryan Lambie, writing for Britain's well-liked *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'.[116] These films were certainly produced during a time when their native America was gripped with anti-communist sentiment, but these anxieties were not 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 other readings made possible by the specificities of its relationship to British public debates.

This situation bears similarities to familiar debates about US cultural imperialism, in which the incursion of ideas, products, myths and other such artefacts of American culture, rendered all but irresistible by the various forms of power wielded by that country, is perceived to erode the indigenous identity of another nation. However, while this provides a useful framework for addressing the lack of attention paid to British interpretations of 1950s science fiction cinema, it can be nuanced by the work of authors interested specifically in notions of transnational memory. Bill Niven's concept of the globalization of memory, for instance, seeks to explain the ways in which the memories of the people of one nation are adopted and shared by the people of another.[117] 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'.[118] 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'.[119] Niven uses this German national depressurization, resulting from the globalization 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 perpetrators of atrocities, not victims. Consequently, in Niven's example at least, the globalization of memory serves a positive purpose in that it allows the burden of memorialization 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 galvanize the remembrance of local traumas in countries around the world, but in other, less extreme examples of the globalization 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 such, there exists the danger that the well-documented and widely recognized 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 earlier. In such circumstances, the globalization of memory that does not stimulate parallel local debates manifests as a type of slippage, wherein what was once claimed of American audiences and films comes to be understood in more general terms than was initially intended. Here Niven's concept of globalized memory transforms into a type of cultural imperialism of memory, the consequence of which is the overemphasizing of US interpretations and the resultant obscuration of their international counterparts.

Apportioning overwhelming significance to US interpretations of 1950s science fiction cinema has, of course, been advantageous to scholars, critics and filmmakers interested in elevating the status of the genre. By finding political meaning within an often-derided body of films, these readings simultaneously signalled the need to take science fiction seriously. In David Bordwell's terms, they identified the genre's films as plausible texts, or texts that are sufficiently important, worthy or otherwise valuable to be deserving of critical analysis.[120] This in turn justified the attention paid to science fiction both within and beyond the research community. As such, the crowding out of international interpretations of the genre, and indeed their replacement in public discourse with an American mythology of 1950s science fiction, is likely to have been a simple consequence of the fact that US readings offered a particularly powerful means of legitimating science fiction cinema more broadly.

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 their conclusions less likely to contribute to the type of cultural imperialism described earlier. 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.[121] 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 human culture in general.[122] Particularly notable in this regard have been attempts to characterize 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.[123]

Matthews provides a broad characterization of both the decade itself and its science fiction cinema without noting the Americo-centricity of his claims. As suggested earlier 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'.[124] 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 countries, leaving scope for their conclusions to seep into national contexts to which they do not apply.

To limit this type of slippage, it is my intention 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 book stresses the need to recognize 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 84 per cent of the British market in 2004, though this has since fallen to 51 percent in 2015.[125] 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'.[126] 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.[127] This was most recently observed in the response to the Brexit referendum in Britain and Donald Trump's election in the United States, which threatened Britain's role as a transatlantic negotiator and America's best friend abroad respectively. 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, 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'.[128] At this particular historical moment, when the differences and similarities between these two nations are being renegotiated with potentially significant consequences for both countries, an exploration of 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.

However important the task of demonstrating the existence of a British reception history of 1950s science fiction that diverges from its American counterpart, discussing the historical reception of films has been notoriously difficult. 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 set of opinions that have often been at odds with popular tastes. Similarly, letters sent to and published by the editors

of newspapers and magazines should be viewed with some degree of suspicion. 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.[129] 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'.[130] While sources such as these certainly have their place in the chapters that follow, 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. As Andrew Tudor has noted, '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?'[131] 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?'[132]

This paucity of evidence of the responses of historical cinema audiences makes any attempt to capture their interpretation of particular films impossible as they are permanently beyond reach, separated from the researcher by a chasm of time. To address this, researchers have suggested a number of alternative theorizations of the relationship between texts, contexts and audiences that take these practical issues into account. One such approach is to pay particular attention to historical artefacts that are able to speak to the economic, sociopolitical and cultural contexts of cinema reception, using these sources to reconstruct a film's 'discursive surround'.[133] This phrase is used by Barbara Klinger to refer to the types of cultural knowledge that frame a film on its release and through which a film's content adopts meaning for an audience. Such lines of argument have dramatically 'expanded the range of primary sources available for the researcher'.[134] 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.[135] While the latter of these sources is not of relevance to work on the 1950s, using the others to reconstruct the discourses through which films were understood provides one means of countering the lack of evidence of historical audience responses.

This model has been most widely utilized in relation to the reception of foreign films in domestic contexts. As Sarah Street observes, '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'.[136] Similarly, 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.[137] Richard Maltby has also taken a similar line when writing that:

> 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.[138]

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. However, one could also argue that this same model can be used to address the reception of films in their own domestic contexts, since they are still understood in light of their interaction with the codes, discourses, anxieties and debates that constitute the reception context. This approach 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.[139] In work that adopts this approach, it is those materials most closely associated with the films that are of greatest value to the researcher. Of course, this is only possible where such materials are available. Sadly, as with more direct information about the reception of 1950s science fiction, this type of material remains elusive too. While promotional materials associated with 1950s science fiction cinema have often been preserved and do inform some of the arguments presented here, 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 utilizes other types of material which are, in relation to this project, more useful. She 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.[140]

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'.[141] However, the current project is not concerned with cinematic practices and, as described previously, 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 its purposes.

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'.[142] 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.

Drawing on this model, the principal aim of this book can be thought of as the exploration of the unique relationship between mid-century science fiction films, produced both in Britain and America, and the nationally and culturally specific reception contexts of 1950s Britain, as evidenced through historical documents that speak to the shape of public discourse at the time. As such, the analysis performed in the remaining chapters 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, the arguments that I advance can still provide an 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 organizations make them and with what intent. This is an inherent issue in the approach taken here, and as much as this 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 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 have been preserved. As such, while this book does shine new light on the British reception of 1950s science fiction cinema, other accounts that would be no less accurate could also be presented.

While this analytical framework does provide a means of addressing the host of readings available to British audiences of the films under discussion in the chapters that follow, it also opens up the risk of adopting a reflectionist approach. In such models a film 'is read in relation to the mood of the moment, a current political controversy, or a broader zeitgeist' in order to make it 'seem important and relevant', when in reality there is a distinct possibility that no such connection existed or, crucially for this book, was observed by audiences.[143] Reflectionist approaches to film have been strongly criticized on these grounds and remain highly problematic for historical reception studies. However, as James Chapman notes, such criticism has been responded to through the development in the 1970s and 1980s of 'contextual film history', in which the imprecision of reflectionism was countered by a tighter 'emphasis on finding the primary sources to document the processes and external contextual factors that shaped the content of films' or, in this instance, the interpretations made by audiences.[144] This book follows the general approach of contextual film history, in that it uses archival sources to inform its analysis, with the aim of avoiding producing broadly reflectionist readings. However, while the worst excesses of reflectionism are hopefully evaded through the archival research that underpins this book, the connections drawn between texts and contexts may inevitably make the films seem more 'important and relevant' than they might have appeared to some contemporary audience members.[145] In light of this, it is perhaps worth restating that the readings of 1950s science fiction films offered here are intended only as indications of the types of interpretations that were available to Britons and are not an account of documented responses of actual audiences. The aim is to map out a field of possible readings, some of which may well have related to pressing concerns of the time and which would consequently appear to be reflectionsist in character. Other, less politically minded readings would also have been available.

Since I am interested in situating science fiction films in relation to 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 and printed in newspapers also offer a glimpse of public sentiment. The concerns about the bias and reliability of such correspondence noted earlier 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. As such, a range of newspaper materials inform much of the discussion that follows, with a variety of publications of different political affiliations being represented. 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 relevant 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.[146]

I also make use of sources such as posters and advertisements that were produced to accompany the release of 1950s science fiction films. 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's Reuben 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.[147]

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 offer evidence of 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 remaining chapters follow a clear structure. Each will explore a prominent public debate in 1950s Britain, including Communism, immigration, nuclear technology, science, the Anglo-American relationship and imperial decline, examining the forms in which it circulated and the types of meanings that it accrued. After characterizing the relevant public debate through reference to historical evidence, the chapters turn their attention to the

ways in which this debate was able to inflect the meaning of particular shots and sequences contained within specific films. However, it is important to avoid treating the British audience as a monolithic entity that related to public debates in a uniform fashion; this book instead seeks to highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the British audience by discussing the range of perspectives that were present within it. As such, the structure of this book has been devised to make visible the oppositional attitudes to particular issues or topics that were present in 1950s Britain. The chapters have consequently been arranged into pairs that address the same issue, but which approach it through contrasting perspectives on the public debate under discussion. The following chapter, for example, discusses 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* and *Quatermass II*. However, the chapter that follows 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 previous chapter, suggesting oppositional readings that British audiences might also have made. The arguments that emerge thus account for a variety of different attitudes that were present in 1950s Britain and suggest that an equally broad range of readings of the science fiction films of the era were produced.

The two films examined in each chapter pairing have been selected for three reasons. First, 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. Second, 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*, while space adventures, such as *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*, 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, thereby accounting for the variety of the genre during the 1950s. Third, 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 generalization. Examples of such films will occasionally be noted in the text, 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.

It is also worth noting that the list of public debates explored within this book is not intended as an exhaustive list of concerns facing the British during the 1950s. Communism, nuclear science, immigration, American dominance of the world stage and British national decline were all significant issues, but so too, for example, were gender and youth. These and other such important debates offer the possibility of future work on the genre in its British contexts. As such, while the aim of this book is to demonstrate the existence of an alternative British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema, as with all histories it cannot claim its account to be complete or all-encompassing. There are, as always, other stories to tell.

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 the films presented here 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 consequently offers an alternative to the unthinking 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 were able to make 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. It is my hope that this will not only render visible an often overlooked aspect of the cultural history of mid-century science fiction cinema, but will also provide a means of resisting the cultural imperialism inherent in the globalization of US interpretations and reducing the reliance on received wisdom that this practice has necessitated.

Part A

Communist Infiltration and Indoctrination

1

Soviet Brainwashing, British Defectors and the Corruptive Elsewhere

In 1955, the British Council floated the idea of organizing 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 invited the Soviet culture minister, Nikolai Mikhailov, to London that summer and discussed the festivals with him directly. Mikhailov, a newcomer who had been in his role for less than a year at this stage and appeared to be more inclined towards good cultural relations with the West than his predecessor, used his time in London to raise a number of similar potential partnerships. Those behind these initiatives might have anticipated a series of cultural exchanges of the type that, though reasonably rare, did occur sporadically throughout the 1950s, but the involvement of George Jellicoe, a Foreign Office official who handled Soviet relations, in the planning for the film festivals suggests that the possibility of spreading pro-Western propaganda in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev had not been overlooked by the British. Jellicoe himself certainly intended to seize this opportunity, framing the events in his correspondence with Sir Paul Sinker, the new Director General of the British 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 their obvious propagandistic value, in December 1956 the chairman of the British Council informed A. A. Roschin at the USSR embassy that the reciprocal film festivals would be impossible due to British 'public opinion'.[2] Perhaps by this stage there had developed 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 significant event suggests that sections of 1950s British society 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. Critics have frequently interpreted those US films that feature a depersonalization narrative, in which aliens possess or duplicate human bodies, as expressions of American anxieties about Communist infiltration and influence. Peter Biskind has argued that such films were overt in their engagement with debates about Soviet brainwashing, but he is far from alone in making this claim.[3] 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 authors, depersonalization films, including classics of the genre such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), 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 depersonalization narratives is predicated on an American perception of Communism, it cannot explain the responses of audiences outside of the United States. For example, in 1952, the British film magazine *Picturegoer* claimed that the depersonalization film *Red Planet* (released in that year 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 American films and audiences may have been engaged in a dialogue driven by fears of the dangers that lurked behind the Iron Curtain, in other parts of the world these films were watched by people who approached Communism from different perspectives. In countries where brainwashing and infiltration manifested in public debate in alternative forms or where the Soviets were not deemed to be a threat, audiences might have renegotiated the meanings of the depersonalization films.

Britain was one such country where the Communist threat was articulated differently than it was in America during the 1950s. The nation certainly shared with the United States a concern about Soviet brainwashing, but 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 American 'reds under the beds' scare, but as threats to what one might call the British

Establishment.[7] This is a slippery term that has been defined in a number of different ways, but here it is used to mean those individuals or groups perceived to represent the British state during the 1950s, among whom two key groups were the military and the diplomatic services. Each was, in its own way, an emblem of Britain and each was perceived at various times during the 1950s to be under acute threat from Communist infiltration. As such, the danger of Communist indoctrination was largely imagined to occur in different areas of society in the United States and Britain, with the former looking anxiously at ordinary communities while the latter generally eyed its institutions and their leaders with greater suspicion. This distinction had significant consequences for the range of interpretations of 1950s depersonalization narratives that were available to these countries' respective audiences.

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 significant amongst them 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. Such defections contributed to a loss of confidence in the British Establishment and its emergence as the key focus of British anxieties about Communist influence and infiltration.

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, 1,060 British servicemen and women went missing or were taken prisoner. 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 in Communist China where he lived a 'lively and cheerful' life and began teaching English at the Peking Language Institute.[8]

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 Condron's defection.[9] 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 Condron was framed by British public debate as a traitor. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, reported that Condron 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'.[10] 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.

Condron'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'.[11] 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.[12] Given this event's proximity to Condron'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 whiff 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.[13]

These were not merely isolated incidents. During the 1950s there was a series of similar revelations of apparent Communist influence in the British military and the militaries of other 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'.[14] In 1951, *The Observer* suggested that there was significant Communist influence in the French 'civil service, army and police'.[15] In 1952, *The Times* recorded an organized attempt by Greek Communists to infiltrate that nation's army.[16] 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.[17] 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 Condron, 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, Condron cemented this idea by co-editing a book that collected stories from fellow defecting Western servicemen, *Thinking Soldiers: By Men Who Fought in Korea*.[18] Decades earlier, the First World War 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 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. 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, 25 May 1951. Despite the offer of a £1,000 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 quell the situation by avoiding 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'.[19] 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. 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'.[20] 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'.[21] In reporting the text of Burgess and Maclean's statement from Moscow, for example, *The Times* used the subheading 'Grounds for Fear'.[22] 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 appears 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 (RNLI) declined a donation from Burgess that he made in lieu of payment for an article that he wrote for the *Sunday Express*. The RNLI 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.[23]

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 demonstrates just how toxic he had become in Britain after his defection was confirmed.

The press did little to calm these concerns in the weeks that followed the Moscow press conference, habitually referring to Burgess and Maclean through phrasing that simultaneously stressed both their positions in the British Establishment and their defection. Descriptions 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.[24] 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.[25] 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'.[26] 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 not only contained Communist agents, but had inadvertently enabled them to attain greater influence. Indeed, Burgess and Maclean indicated that the Foreign Office itself was a significant draw for Communist sympathizers 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 these defections was closely associated with foreign locations. Lyndon and Condron 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 characterized by its association with the local, as 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. Before package holidays and affordable flights put international travel within reach of ordinary Britons, the world beyond the country's borders was still something many had not experienced. The entanglement of these influential figures, communism and foreign locations could only have made the unfamiliar countries Britons had heard about but never visited seem even more alien. British fears of Communist infiltration thus came to focus on figures who represented the nation returning from places beyond its shores. This was a far cry indeed from US anxieties about Communists living next door or working in local schools. 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.

Anti-communist attitudes and the alien Other

This raises the possibility that the figure of the alien Other in 1950s science fiction cinema's depersonalization narratives was also understood in different terms in these two countries. Even when citizens of both countries understood the alien menace as a metaphor for Soviet subversion, the readings of these films available to them would not have been the same because of the differing ways in which Communism's threat to the nation was understood. *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Quatermass II* (1957) are useful examples to explore in this

context. *It Came* was directed by Jack Arnold, who has become synonymous with American science fiction after helming many of its most famous 1950s films, such as *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). *It Came* was his first science fiction film and has gone on to become one of the most iconic and admired depersonalization stories. *Quatermass II* has also enjoyed widespread popularity, though it has suffered in comparison to its predecessor, *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955). Produced by Hammer, the British studio now most famous for its 1960s gothic horrors, and adapted from a BBC television serial, *Quatermass II* became closely associated in the public imagination with these two very different but equally prominent British cultural institutions. Both films circulated widely in Britain and, although *Quatermass II* was outperformed by its Hammer stablemate, *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), both it and *It Came* did well at the UK box office, meaning that they were seen by a significant portion of the British audience. Both also feature the alien inhabitation, replication or appropriation of human bodies, situating their extraterrestrials alongside those that Americans are often claimed to have understood as analogues for Communists. *It Came* has a more troubled relationship with this interpretation since its aliens uncharacteristically came in peace, but both films are depersonalization narratives and hence suggest issues of possession and indoctrination. However, 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 in the United States.

In late 1953, as Jack Arnold's *It Came from Outer Space* made its way through the cinemas of Britain's town and cities, its listings shared space in the country's newspapers with reports of Andrew Condron'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. *It Came* shows unfamiliar locations to be corruptive. Given that Britain had seen figures such as Condron and Lyndon influenced by a supposedly dangerous 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.

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, this 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 expectations'.[27] For Jancovich, *It Came* is subversive in its use of the depersonalization narrative and does not connect the alien with the type of brainwashed conformity that commentators such as Biskind saw in American stereotypes of Communists.[28] 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'.[29] Instead, commentary on this film has 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'.[30] In the United States, this looked like a film that was attempting to undermine the reactionary anti-communist fervour that had been brewing since the end of the Second World War.

This may not have been the case in Britain, where *It Came* sat more awkwardly within its sociopolitical contexts of reception. Although the film may have been critical of US anti-Soviet sentiment, such interpretations take as their starting point its subversion of the perceived connection between depersonalized bodies and Communists. However, there are other ways of connecting this film to Communism if one begins with the ways in which Soviet infiltration and subversion were understood in Britain. The means by which *It Came* constructs

its paranoia have 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. This has not been a popular interpretation and Mark Jancovich, for example, has instead framed the desert as a welcome, if slightly eerie, respite from the repressive 'conformity and intolerance' of the town.[31] For Jancovich, the desert is 'used to illustrate the insignificance of the town and its experiences in comparison to the vastness of nature'.[32] Although the town certainly represents stifling conformity, Jancovich's characterization 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 into the desert and, staring resolutely out at the vast expanse, spackled with the strange, jagged form of the Joshua tree, he 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.[33] 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 characterized as a place outside of civilization. This could only have been further emphasized by the fact that the vast majority of British audiences would only have seen deserts on the cinema screen or in photographs in books. While the United States contains four major deserts, such environments, with their sparse, spiked flora, red sands and towering mesas, look distinctly alien in contrast to Britain's temperate, oceanic climate. For audiences here the sheer inhospitable otherworldliness of this landscape would have been even more palpable.

This contrast between *It Came*'s radically unknowable desert and 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

Figure 1 The otherworldly desert landscape of *It Came from Outer Space.*

on a job that they are attacked and replicated. Only when they leave the familiarity of civilization 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 presented 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 dehumanization.

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 depersonalization narratives throughout the 1950s. The British film *The Quatermass Xperiment*, whose sequel will be discussed later in this chapter, 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 dehumanized. 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 depersonalizing 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 Condron 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* explicitly stressed that he and his fellow defectors had 'succumbed to Communist "brainwashing"' while fighting abroad.[34] Just like Condron, 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 depersonalization narratives were thus enfolded into the same concerns that informed 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. Britain's own *Quatermass II* was released in cinemas in 1957, in the aftermath of the Burgess and Maclean defections, raising the possibility that its vision of an infiltrated British Establishment might have been relevant to the contemporary concerns of its viewers. It also 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 Wynerton 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 had been their lair 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 the aliens' influence and life returns to normal.

Quatermass II had its premiere on 24 May 1957 and began circulation in Britain on 17 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 14 May, just ten days before the film received its premiere.[35] On 14 July, a little under a month after the film was released in Britain and while it was still being screened in the nation's cinemas, the same paper announced a trip made by Burgess' mother to Moscow to visit her son.[36] 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'.[37] 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'.[38] This alienation of the familiar mirrors the British perception of the Establishment during this period, with trusted individuals, institutions and organizations 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 depersonalization film, in its paranoia because 'the aliens are *already* in control of the government (or at least part of it) when the story opens'.[39] 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'.[40] This language was mirrored by the film's American press book, which talked of a 'secret government project'.[41] Similar language is used in its British equivalent. 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 Condron 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, these readings result from the particular nature of British fears of Soviet subversion and are predicated on fears of an invaded Establishment that emerged out of distinctive British sociopolitical circumstances. The nation's uniquely inflected anxieties made possible specifically British readings of 1950s science fiction's depersonalization narratives that differ from American readings of these films, even when they also articulate fears of Communism, because the Soviet threat was imagined in different ways in these two national contexts. Although the readings available to Britons 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. Communist invasion, infiltration and indoctrination came to mean something different in Britain and America, and had the potential to shape the meaning of the depersonalization narratives differently on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

'He Can Be a Communist Here if He Wants To': Living with the Monster

On 10 November 1953, during a month of activities organized by the British Soviet Friendship Society, the Scala Theatre near to London's Tottenham Court Road hosted a range of performers from the USSR including singers, dancers and a puppeteer.[1] Soviet tanks had violently quelled the East German uprising just five months before, which was met with horror and condemnation in Britain, but this seems to have done little to curb London theatregoers' enthusiasm for culture from beyond the Iron Curtain. Indeed, Londoners turned out in great numbers to see the show and the streets surrounding the Scala were 'almost impassable owing to the crowds clamouring for unwanted tickets'.[2] While many would simply have been keen to see the performances themselves, the event was not completely depoliticized. A large part of the commotion in the surrounding area was caused by people 'disposing of peace and political literature'.[3] Those who were lucky enough to get a ticket and who managed to get through the crowds outside the theatre's doors enjoyed traditional performances from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. The response in the auditorium seems to have been positive, but the contexts in which the show took place, with the summer's events in East Germany still fresh in the public's memory and political materials being distributed on the pavements outside the venue, suggest that the audience must, to some extent at least, have been aware of the tensions inherent in hosting Soviet performers in the heart of London. However, these political concerns appear not to have dissuaded people from attending and enjoying the show.

Despite acute political strain between the two states on the global stage, Anglo-Soviet cultural cooperation was not uncommon during the 1950s. The abandonment of the proposed British-Soviet film festivals of 1955 was a rarity

and events such as the variety performance at the Scala were generally received with enthusiasm. This was not only true when Soviets visited Britain, but also when British artists made the journey to Russia. *The Times* reported, for example, that a British production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1955 sold out its two-week run 'long before the company arrived'. Although many 'tickets were distributed to worthy workers in factories and offices by the appropriate Soviet authorities', the newspaper notes that 'the Soviet is giving expression to the Geneva spirit in the way of cultural exchanges between nations'.[4] By 1956 there was discussion of 'complementary visits of the Sadler's Wells Ballet company and the Bolshoi Theatre Ballet company, and between the Stratford Memorial Theatre and the Moscow Art Theatre', as well as exchanges of films, art exhibitions, journalists, 'engineers, musicians, educationists, surgeons, museum directors, representatives of Oxford and Moscow Universities' and a visit to the USSR by the London Philharmonic Orchestra.[5] Cambridge scientists visiting Moscow described the experience as 'exactly like a Tchekhov play', noting that they received 'the most lavish hospitality' and enjoyed Russian culture during a trip to the Kremlin museum, an art gallery, a 'most wonderful presentation of *Swan Lake*', an orchestral concert and an evening on the Moscow River.[6] Reports of these cultural interactions between Britain and the USSR in the national press emphasized that Russia was a country with a rich cultural history that had much to offer. Whether they took place in London, Moscow or elsewhere, these events, the enthusiasm that surrounded them and the ways in which they were reported underlined the public interest in and value of Anglo-Soviet ties.

As curiosity about Soviet culture clearly persisted in Britain during the early years of the Cold War, the Communist Party of Great Britain itself also earned new supporters. For example, in the 1950 general election, 91,765 people voted for the Party. This number declined to 21,177 the following year, but climbed again to 33,144 in 1955. The Party intended 'to have 100 candidates contesting the election' in 1950 and, according to the Young Communist League's national secretary, they believed 'that we have good prospects'.[7] The National Union of Teachers included a group of Communists who carefully and covertly negotiated the tensions between their political beliefs and their professional practice.[8] The Party also enjoyed considerable support amongst African students studying in Britain. By the early years of the 1950s a West African student branch of the Party had been successfully established, and by 1953 Britain's Nigerian Student Union was speaking freely about the 'common ground' that its members shared with 'the Communist world'.[9] While plans for the British Council's Soviet film

festival may have been undone by official anxieties, there were still many sectors of British society in which Communism was either tolerated or supported. The majority in Britain may have taken a dim view of such attitudes, but for others, Communism was not perceived as an elusive, toxic or invasive force. Instead a small but important minority imagined it as either a distant political system from a faraway land that produced fine art and culture, or as a welcome alternative to capitalist and colonialist exploitation.

The emergence of such tolerant attitudes was at least partly related to British horror at the McCarthyist witch-hunts in America. The years between 1950 and 1956, known as the Second Red Scare following a similar rise in anti-communist sentiment in America between 1917 and 1920, saw the United States engage in a period of paranoia and anxiety about the supposed infiltration of the country by Communist agents. Starting in 1950 with the conviction of Alger Hiss, a State Department official, for perjury in his espionage trial, and lasting until Senator Joseph McCarthy's political decline and eventual death in 1957, American officials, entertainers and public figures were subjected to 'loyalty review boards', blacklists and appearances before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, all with the express purpose of rooting out the Communist sympathizers who were imagined to be lurking within the nation. The result was suspicion, mistrust and significant pressure to conform.

As Reg Whitaker has noted, in Britain 'there was plain and simple revulsion against the excesses witnessed in America, sympathy for apparent victims of smear campaigns, and, among those from all parties, an incomprehension of an American political system that allowed freelance demagogues to challenge their own party leadership'.[10] Indeed, when asked in the House of Commons in 1954 whether Britain should join America and Australia in establishing agencies and commissions to uncover and counter Communist propaganda at home and abroad, Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared his support for those countries and their efforts, but held back from establishing similar bodies in Britain since they did not fit with 'our traditions and circumstances' which 'do not seem to have worked too badly so far'.[11] His implicit suggestion that there were fundamental distinctions between Britain and America that would not allow the former to succumb to the type of fervent anti-communist paranoia that held sway in the United States is reflected in the significant number of people who fled America during this time and were accepted into Britain. These displaced people included filmmakers and writers such as Carl Foreman, a one-time American Communist Party member whose script for *High Noon* (1952)

is often seen as an overt criticism of Hollywood's inability to stand up to the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Although offering such figures sanctuary and a chance to continue their careers falls short of formally expressing an objection to what was taking place in the United States, Whitaker notes that 'successive British governments and opinion leaders made it very clear that McCarthyism was not exportable to the UK'.[12] There is much evidence that points towards Britain being predominantly anti-communist during the 1950s, but the country certainly seems to have been more even-handed in this regard than America, with the debate remaining reasonably measured and never spilling over into the type of fervour that was evident in the United States.

This aspect of the national discourse around Communism during the 1950s opens up the possibility that there were sections of British society in which Communism was not necessarily seen as a dangerous, corruptive threat. The notion that not all Britons were party to the staunchly anti-communist sentiment voiced by some public figures complicates the picture of how the so-called Soviet menace was perceived. In turn, this raises issues around the interpretations of films such as *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Quatermass II* (1957) that were described in the previous chapter, which relied on the association of Communism with infiltration and brainwashing. However, this remains a reasonably contentious area and, before new readings of these films are presented, the nature and extent of British tolerance of Communism in the 1950s must be outlined.

Tolerance towards Communists in 1950s Britain

Despite the fears expressed by some Britons and many British institutions, it would be unfair to characterize the nation itself as essentially anti-communist during the 1950s, particularly in the early years of the decade. Anxieties about Soviet infiltration represent only one, albeit very prominent, 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'.[13] Moreover, David Childs has suggested that support for the Communist Party of Great Britain was very 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.[14] 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'.[15] As noted, this is a picture that was repeated in student unions too, particularly those established to support people from former and current colonial states. Although the swell of support for Communism in many workers' and students' unions was not repeated throughout the British population at large, it does indicate that there was at least one pocket of Britons who were positively disposed towards Communism.

The way in which the defection of Royal Marine Andrew Condron to China, discussed at length in the previous chapter, was reported in some British newspapers also 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'.[16] 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 United States, was placed at risk.[17] 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. Although no official body was formed in Britain to tackle anti-communist propaganda, Andrew Defty points out that there was collaboration with America on this issue and that the BBC cooperated with the government in this regard. However, despite the public broadcaster's role in these transatlantic anti-communist efforts, there was a significant divide between the bombastic tone of the US propaganda broadcasts, which were branded as the Voice of America, and the BBC's own, more measured output. Defty indicates that 'the most vigorous anti-communists preferred' the Voice of America 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.[18] 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', the BBC was seen as being slow-moving in this regard and consequently became a cause for concern among the British authorities.[19] 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 suspicions. Shortly afterwards one MP informed the House of Commons that he believed there still to be significant Communist influence within the broadcaster.[20] 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.[21]

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" '.[22] 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 comments 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?'[23] The article 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'.[24] Both Vansittart and *The Times* were clearly deeply angered by the BBC's decision, providing further evidence that 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.

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 United States. 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 terminal 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.[25] Susan L. Brinson, for example, has traced the Red Scare not through McCarthyism but through the work of the Federal Communications Commission and found that it continued in some form until at least 1960.[26] Into the mid-1970s the United States 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* in Britain. Up until the end of the 1950s the US media was scrutinized 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'.[27] 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.[28] 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 of which their American counterparts could only have dreamed. 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 by this point it did not have enough public support to qualify for airtime according to the BBC's regulations.[29] Despite the actions of Joseph McCarthy and the Federal Communications Commission 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, Condron'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, Communists in senior positions in numerous unions, 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 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'.[30]

Although 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, though 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 he was not always a source of anxiety.

Tolerant attitudes and the alien Other

The most familiar readings of 1950s depersonalization narratives, which are often inspired by the anti-communist sentiment prevalent in the United States during this period, were unlikely to have occurred to Britons who did not recognize Communism as a source of anxiety. These individuals understood Soviet Otherness in different ways to those who held firm anti-communist beliefs. Their perspectives allow a different range of meanings to emerge from films such as *It Came from Outer Space* and *Quatermass II*. In this context, it is possible to imagine that the depersonalization 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 in this section suggest the outlook of those within British society who, while they might still have equated the Communist and the alien Other, did not necessarily recognize this Otherness as a source of fear. In the words of Jack Arnold, director of *It Came*, these films told such audiences not to 'try to read evil into what is not understandable. And don't be afraid of the unknown'.[31]

It Came is particularly tantalizing as a film that might be open to such subversive readings given that, as Peter Biskind notes, it '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'.[32] While it is certainly possible to see in the film suggestions of the dangers of straying beyond civilization and being brainwashed by threatening outsiders, this reading could also be undermined through a focus on the lack of aggression displayed by the aliens. Indeed, the people of the town misunderstand the creatures they encounter, assuming that an invasion is taking place rather than a mission to repair the extraterrestrial craft so that it and its occupants can return home. The film's horror at this false assumption that

the outsider is hostile and dangerous renders it open to readings that question unsympathetic attitudes towards the Other, and hence which might seek to rehabilitate the monstrous image of the Communist that was held by many in 1950s Britain.

One way in which the film suggests such subversive interpretations is through its use of point of view shots. This first becomes apparent during an early encounter with an alien creature as it follows Ellen Fields and John 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. By putting the audience metaphorically in their shoes, this shot encourages identification with the human characters, suggesting that *It Came* here urges its viewers to share Putnam and Fields' horror at the alien. While this may not be unusual, in that many science fiction films of this period invited their audiences to fear the alien threat, the same technique is also used elsewhere in *It Came from Outer Space* to subvert such patterns of identification. The film contains several sequences in which the camera's perspective matches that of one of the creatures. For example, after the first alien emerges from the crashed ship and begins exploring the surrounding landscape, a point of view shot is used to suggest that the audience is seeing the scene through the eyes of the creature. This is emphasized 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. During this sequence the soundtrack includes a slow, laboured breathing, presumably emanating from the alien but with no corresponding source of the sound to be found on the screen. This extends the suggestion that the audience has been placed behind the creature's eyes. These features of the film, which invite the audience to share the alien's point of view, reverse 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 demonize the alien Other, asking them instead to consider events for both human and alien viewpoints. In light of the film's revelation that the creatures mean humanity no harm, while the townspeople gather weapons and advance on the aliens' lair, this questioning of perspectives further suggests a desire for understanding and tolerance rather than suspicion and violence.

There is some evidence that a number of British viewers both understood and enjoyed this manipulation of perspectives. In *Picturegoer* magazine, Donovan

Figure 2 Strange undulating circles indicate that the audience is seeing events from the alien creature's point of view in *It Came from Outer Space*.

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.[33] 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'.[34] Although such reviews do not overtly connect the point of view shots with the film's refusal to demonize the alien, both of these features were commented on in the British press, suggesting that they did have resonance in this country.

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. That the film's final act reveals the aliens to be enlightened creatures, seeking only escape from their spacecraft's crash site, could only have strengthened such connections, positioning the extraterrestrials as different but non-threatening, much as some in Britain imagined Communists.

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 where the aliens reside, 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'.[35] Hutchings is primarily interested in the commentary that this sequence can be seen to make on social issues, arguing that it should be understood 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'.[36] 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.[37] As such, the worker's revolt in *Quatermass II* could be read as a bold, Communist-influenced call to action. Dave Rolinson and Nick Cooper interpret this moment as a triumph of human will, but their description of how 'the elite's threat is dismantled by the mob' draws attention to the film's depiction of a victorious collective overthrowing their leaders.[38] From that perspective, the insidious alien masters might not stand in for Communism, as was suggested in the previous chapter, but for capitalism and its exploitation of workers. The simplicity of this reading, in which workers represent workers

and the alien management at the factory represents the management at ordinary factories across the nation, suggests that it would have been all the more likely to occur to 1950s British cinemagoers.

As might be expected, such a reading is not directly reflected in reviews of the film on its initial release, but there was an implicit suggestion in *The Times* that the film remained open to radical interpretations. Rather than seeing alien masters controlling their human servants as a comment on Communist brainwashing, the reviewer instead notes that 'as to the opposing force – the brain behind the conspiracy – even at the end we are left guessing what it is'.[39] The writer goes on to clarify that 'the secret of the plant [in which the aliens make their base] is revealed to us, but the origin and scope of the conspiracy are not', suggesting that the film's monstrous creatures remained polysemic and able to bear the weight of various audience interpretations. For those who had begun to question capitalism, as a small but important and often overlooked minority had in Britain, this opens up the possibility of projecting fears of exploitation onto the alien invaders.

Indeed, the review in *The Times* stresses that the creatures' 'headquarters are established in the north of England', a predominantly industrial region at the time that was often characterized in the public consciousness through images of factories and working-class life, and that the threat in the film resides 'in a research plant guarded by masked and armed men', perhaps reminiscent for some of the region's production plants and their management.[40] This sense of conflict between those who ran industrial sites and those who worked in them is mirrored in *Picturegoer*'s review of the film, which referred to 'a research station in the middle of nowhere [that is] patrolled by armed guards' where 'the personnel is mostly made up of victims who have been "infected"'.[41] Plants such as the one that the aliens make their base might well have been understood by some as analogous to the factories in which, as Malcolm McCorquodale, the Conservative MP for Epson, put it in 1950, 'the ordinary man and woman' were not able 'to feel that he or she was regarded as a human being and a partner in production' and hence could be tempted to turn towards Communism.[42] With bodies such as the Electrical Trades Union 'almost wholly under Communist dominion' and sections of the British Communist Party coming to be seen as 'the voices of the factory floor', the gaps that *The Times* identified within *Quatermass II*'s depiction of its conspiracy could certainly have been filled for some with fantasies of capitalist exploitation.[43] *Kine Weekly* was more suggestive in this regard when its reviewer wrote that 'the plant . . . resembles a giant oil

refinery' and contained 'innocent workers' who 'rebel' against their masters.[44] The absence of clear motivations for the attempted invasion, as highlighted by *The Times*, and the emphasis placed on the alien threat, making victims out of the workers at an industrial facility, leaves room for those Britons who would be so inclined to imagine a world populated by dangerous capitalists operating secretive facilities that exploited and dehumanized workers in the nation's industrial heartlands. While none of the film's contemporary reviews explicitly described the film as an allegory of the dangers of capitalism, they certainly indicated how *Quatermass II* opened up space for such readings to be inferred and, in some instances, began to trace connections between workers, industrial facilities, capitalism and the alien threat.

While such a political reading of what is essentially an entertainment product may seem unlikely, there is evidence that other stories about Professor Quatermass were overtly politicized by audiences during the 1950s. In 1958, for example, Dr W. C. Pilgrim, a leading figure in Britain's West Indian community, and Dr C. J. K. Piliso of the Afro Caribbean Association criticized the BBC for including a suggestion in the third *Quatermass* serial, *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958–1959), that Birmingham was suffering from race riots. Dr Pilgrim saw this as an unfortunate setback that 'might create an anti-West Indian attitude among English people at a time when the coloured leaders were encouraging sympathy between the races'.[45] While the BBC dismissed such claims by pointing to the fantastic nature of the world its protagonist inhabited, where in these pre-Apollo programme days 'a rocket landing on the moon' clearly signalled the serial's status as 'Jules Verne sort of stuff', for some audiences this serial held greater and more troubling social significance.[46] Given that only one year after the release of *Quatermass II* a related production was being understood by some sections of society as a serious and worrying political commentary, even if that commentary was focused on race rather than capitalism, it would perhaps not be unreasonable to suggest that Britons sympathetic or tolerant towards Communism might have found similarly political meanings in the earlier narrative.

This reading of *Quatermass II* can also be extended to address the so-called creature features of the 1950s, which will be returned to in more detail in the next chapter. 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 creatures 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 some of the more devoted British Communist sympathizers, there might have been particular pleasure in seeing capitalist metropolises and their iconic landmarks crumbling beneath the might of a rampaging Other.

Of course, the reading of *Quatermass II* described here does not merely suggest that Communism is nothing to fear, but actually endorses resistance to capitalism. While *It Came* was able to carry the implication that aliens, and hence Communists, were not dangerous monsters, interpretations of *Quatermass II* could go further still and suggest that Communism was not an Other at all and instead provided a useful means of resisting exploitation. Perhaps this would have endowed *Quatermass II* with greater appeal to those Britons in the workers' unions that had Communist sympathies, such as the National Union of Mine Workers, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Clerical and Administrative Workers and the Scientific Workers, and those in the Nigerian Student Union or the Communist Party's West African student branch. *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* could be understood as a more subversive film in this regard and was more likely to be relevant to those who were already positively predisposed to Communist ideology.

It is clear that, if audiences were receptive to them, a variety of meanings were available in 1950s science fiction's depersonalization narratives. They were certainly open to interpretation as projections of conservative anxieties about Communist brainwashing and infiltration, but in the context of the varied attitudes towards Communism on display in Britain, it is possible that they were also open to other readings. Of course, it was not only Britons who were able to find in these films a range of such readings. Scholars have similarly suggested that American anxieties about Communism also inflected the public understanding of 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. Crucially, however, the readings that this chapter has suggested were available to 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 empathize with, or even tolerate, the Communist Other. The readings of the depersonalization narratives available

to British and American audiences differ because they resulted from dissimilar national contexts of reception in which various aspects of Communism were articulated in different ways. A number of these historical points of divergence between the two societies have been traced in this chapter. For example, the BBC aired commentary from the USSR, which would have been largely unthinkable in the more restrictive US media environment. Similarly, the suggestion in the nation's newspapers that a Communist could live openly in Britain went unchallenged, a situation that would not have been imaginable in the United States. As a consequence of these and other disparities, there opened up a space for anticommunist sentiment to be publicly challenged and tempered in Britain in a way that did not occur in America outside of Murrow's broadcasts. Consequently, for Britons there existed the possibility of thinking of Communists not as monstrous aberrations, but as people who were different to the majority but not necessarily threatening. This represents a minority opinion, of course, but it is certainly one area in which there can be a differentiation between the ways in which some Britons and Americans connected the depersonalization narratives' alien Others with the Communist Other.

Even though Britain and America were politically united in their official rejection of Soviet ideology, it is still possible to distinguish between the ways in which attitudes towards Communism shaped the range of readings of 1950s depersonalization narratives available in these two countries. The British reception of this subgenre cannot be explained through readings that draw on American perspectives on the Communist threat since these do not provide scope for considering those Britons who were exposed to and found sympathy with Communist views. Britain was not only more tolerant of Communism during much of the 1950s, but this tolerance also had the potential to shape the ways in which some members of the public engaged with and understood science fiction cinema, be it domestic or American.

Part B

Nuclear Technology

The Beast in the Atom: Britain's Nuclear Nightmares

The 1950s is often characterized 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. Throughout the 1950s, but with greater frequency in the latter half of the decade, 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 brutes 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 monster films negotiated and interpreted American Cold War atomic panic has provoked much discussion. 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] 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.

However, just as Britain's understanding of Communism differed from America's during the 1950s, so too did its understanding of nuclear technology. Although many Western nations, Britain included, feared Soviet nuclear aggression, there were discrepancies in the way they 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 decolonization 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. Britons held a range of opinions and outlooks on nuclear weapons, which in turn allowed different interpretations of the era's atomic creature features to emerge. Locating these differences and exploring the specificity of the British response to the presentation of the atomic age in 1950s creature features offers another means by which the international adoption of American readings of these films, derived exclusively from US nuclear paranoia, can be resisted.

Nuclear anxieties in 1950s Britain

In her work on 1950s American attitudes towards the nuclear bomb, Cyndy Hendershot observes that it was often seen as 'merely another conventional weapon that would be used in the next world war'.[6] 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.[7] 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'.[8] *The Times* similarly discussed thankfully ill-fated plans to excavate a second Panama Canal using nuclear devices 'with a total explosive yield corresponding to 16.2, 18.6 and 15.35 million tons of TNT'.[9] Even when trying to articulate 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.[10] 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'.[11] Be it as a result of the inadequacy of written descriptions of nuclear explosions, the sheer unfamiliarity of nuclear weapons or a desire to rationalize away the horrific capability of these bombs, the British press often fell back on the same tactics as their American counterparts, conventionalizing 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 conventional bombs, which had become only too familiar in this country due to the recent bombardment of British cities by the Nazis during the Second World War, 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 attack, 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. Davis 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'.[12] 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.[13] 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'.[14] Despite the ineffectiveness of such plans in the face of radioactive fallout and the collapse of society that would inevitably result from a nuclear strike on the capital, Britain blithely maintained a steady course, deploying a framework for survival that was born in a very different era, when such catastrophes had not yet become possible. Through this recycling of Second World War era civil defence strategies, the notion that nuclear bombs were a mere evolution of conventional weaponry was cemented in 1950s Britain.

Similarly, British civil defence exercises, often vast citywide pieces of theatre that rehearsed the aftermath of a nuclear strike, helped to ground the nation's perception of such an event in wartime experiences of conventional bombing. These large performances of preparedness were not uncommon in the 1950s and, while unlikely to have been effective at reducing the number of casualties in any significant way should nuclear war have broken out, served the dual purpose of both reassuring the public while also sending the somewhat unconvincing message to the USSR that the nation would not be easily defeated by a nuclear strike. During one such exercise in 1959, the population of Preston, a large town in the northwest of England, 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 among crumbling buildings reminiscent of the bombed-out ruins of Blitz-era British cities.[15] People walk past the remains of fire-damaged houses and skirt around piles of smashed bricks. Although Preston itself never faced sustained bombardment during the war, there is evidence that some bombs did fall on the city. Nazi bombers returning from raids on other targets would frequently dispose of remaining bombs by dropping them on any settlements they happened to fly over. In this regard, Preston was unfortunately positioned under the flight path back to mainland Europe from the high-value target of Barrow-in-Furness, the site of major shipyards that contributed significantly to Britain's war effort through the construction of Royal Navy vessels, including submarines. As one survivor, Fred Latham, recalls:

> 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.[16]

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, London, Manchester, Norwich, Plymouth and York each fell under heavy bombardment, and any civil defence exercises held in these towns and 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 civil defence participants 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 confusing of old and new types of warfare was prevalent in Britain in the late 1950s, with newspaper reporting becoming another key site at which the two were merged. *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'.[17] This suggests that, for some Britons, conventional and nuclear war were seen as merely different points of the same violent continuum that had been a constant presence throughout their lives. 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 (ICBM) via radar.[18] The atomic era ICBM 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'.[19] Alongside civil defence preparations and exercises, the press 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 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.[20] Indeed, there was a grim 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.[21]

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'.[22] Alongside newspaper articles such as these, the television, still very novel in Britain but increasingly popular throughout the decade, also capitalized 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 Mirror* 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'.[23] This newspaper's reviewer emphasized 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.[24] Britons were thus made aware of the true 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.

The creature features and the 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. These films, whose enormous, radioactive monsters often lay siege to major cities, included the type of Blitz iconography that had also come to symbolize atomic-era civil defence in Britain. As a result, the attack of the monster could appear as an eerie hybrid of past and future conflicts in much the same way as many Britons imagined a nuclear attack would be. It is possible to see this collision of nuclear and conventional warfare in many 1950s creature features, but it is particularly evident in Britain's *Behemoth the Sea Monster* and, despite being produced in the United States, can also be found in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* when this film is refracted through its British contexts of reception. 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 urban centres associated them with the Blitz. This system of dual referencing, which may not have been intended by the films, particularly those from America, but which was certainly available for British audiences to

observe, suggests that 1950s creature features had the potential to allow Britons to see their fears of a nuclear Blitz played out on the big screen.

Behemoth the Sea Monster 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 Britain.

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 implanted into the beast's body using a torpedo fired from a nearby submarine, 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 indicated that British science fiction invasion narratives of the 1950s made frequent visual references to the Second World War.[25] As noted, 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.[26] 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 particularly 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 drafts in two scientists, Lesley Joyce and John Carter, to examine flesh that the beast lost in the machinery of the submarine. They hypothesize 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 approaching. The hungry beast has gone in search of other food and found it in the form of humanity. After the existence

Figure 3 London's defences against the creature resemble the British Home Front of the Second World War in *Behemoth the Sea Monster*.

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 into the water. The ending of the film mirrors that of *Behemoth* since a submarine is launched with an atomic torpedo on board 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 shown 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.[27] *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 the Second Word War 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'.[28] 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'.[29] 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 the 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 re-enactment of the Blitz through images of urban destruction.

Similar to *Behemoth*, *It Came from Beneath the Sea* uses shots of a crumbling urban landscape. 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*.[30] 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 despite its American setting.

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 this type of imagery had also become associated with nuclear warfare. In referencing the British Home Front, these films also simultaneously referenced British civil defence planning for a nuclear strike. Indeed, each of the icons of the Blitz utilized by these films, 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. Their ruined cityscapes may indeed represent 'a return to wartime images', but they also recalled the ways in which the British envisioned a nuclear war.[31] 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.[32] Indeed, the Preston civil defence exercise took place among 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. However, when such films depicted their beasts engaged in acts of destruction that mirrored the wartime bombing of London, they simultaneously suggested a city under nuclear attack. These two types of conflicts became entangled, 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.

That both of these films were capable of suggesting such readings in their British reception contexts is significant. *Behemoth* may have been set and produced in London, where Nazi bombs had indeed fallen, but *Beneath the Sea* offered its viewers remarkably similar imagery. Though it was not produced within the discursive contexts that give rise to the readings discussed here, it was watched within them and hence stood the potential of being understood in similar terms to *Behemoth*. In this sense, the national origins of 1950s science fiction creature features matter less than the ways in which they present and construct their cities under attack and the interpretative frameworks that were available for their audiences to deploy.

This matters because, while in these terms a film's national origins may not be a primary influence on its interpretation, the national contexts of its audiences are crucial. In contrast to Britons, Americans lacked the formative experience of living through the Blitz, or, for younger viewers, of hearing stories of the Blitz firsthand from family members and seeing the bombed-out ruins that still remained in Britain during the 1950s. Americans may have seen images of London during the first half of the 1940s and heard about the destruction on the radio, but they did not continue to live amid its consequences. Similarly, while they were also encouraged to see nuclear bombs as a type of advanced conventional bomb and had based their civil defence strategies on this understanding, their country had not lived through a period of sustained bombardment where ordinary citizens evacuated or rushed for cover in a bomb shelter. As such, for US audiences the prospect of nuclear war would not have been connected to the experience of the Second World War in anything like as powerful a manner. In addition, with basements to hide in and a large, sparsely populated country around them, Americans did not share with Britons the sense that a single nuclear strike would likely precipitate national collapse. For all these reasons, there existed a uniquely British fear of a nuclear Blitz, and the ways in which 1950s creature features played on it are very unlikely to have troubled Americans. The two countries shared both a horror of nuclear war and a sense that it may be unavoidable and impending but, as with fears of Soviet indoctrination, this was informed by specific facets of the national context and so took on different forms in Britain and America. As a consequence, the relationship between the specific national iterations of these fears and the era's creature features was also not the same.

Atomic Albion: Britain's Nuclear Dreams

In December 1956, Father Christmas came to Plaistow Hospital. British Movietone News footage shows a young, bearded gentleman arriving in full costume to distribute presents to boys and girls who would not be able to spend the festive period at home with their families. While earlier shots show children pressing their faces against department store windows in London, watching robotic dogs in winter hats spinning around an ice-covered pond and toy tigers settled on snowy steps, the hospital sequence is only marginally less lavish. The nurses' arms are full of presents, there are brief glimpses of an elaborately decorated tree and then Saint Nicholas himself, or at least someone doing a remarkably good impression, arrives. The narrator announces that he has 'come to bring joy to small patients', a theme emphasized by the newsreel's title, *Christmas Joys* (1956).[1] The scene is an idealized festive postcard of the wholesomeness of a 1950s British Christmas, but the narrator has a surprise in store. The presents that the children eagerly receive are not from their parents or a charitable foundation. They have been 'bought on subscription by servicemen on Christmas Island', the site of Operation Grapple and the subsequent Grapple X, Y and Z operations, Britain's early hydrogen bomb tests. The explosions had not yet occurred and were not scheduled to begin until the following year, but *Christmas Joys* does not see this as an opportunity to obfuscate the atomic connection in order to avoid disrupting its picture of yuletide happiness. On the contrary, it emphasizes the lurking presence of the bomb and enfolds it into the festive scene. The film announces, over shots of a baby holding a doll and two children playing around a cot, that the unexpected presents were bought by people who were 'engaged in preparing the [Christmas Island] base for next year's nuclear tests'. Under the looming shadow of nuclear war, these children enjoy a very merry Christmas indeed.

As horrific as the British might have imagined a nuclear strike to be, it clearly didn't occupy such a wholly negative space in the public consciousness that a

mention of the bomb would ruin the fun of an otherwise pleasant Christmas morning. Indeed, the casual manner with which *Christmas Joys* introduces its nuclear surprise suggests that British Movietone News anticipated its audience being delighted with the generosity of the servicemen on the base and not at all troubled by, or caused to reflect on, the nature of their work. Given the myriad ways in which the public had been informed of the catastrophically devastating effects of the bomb and the seemingly ever-present risk of the Cold War growing hot, it is striking to find the bomb being associated unproblematically with festive cheer and happy, though sickly, children. The nuclear nightmare that haunted much public discourse about the bomb was not, it seems, the only way in which atomic issues were imagined and presented. British nuclear discourse was more complicated and nuanced than that.

For some in Britain, for example, 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 cooperation in the post-war years. This positioning of nuclear technology as both necessary and desirable made possible new and radically different readings of *Behemoth the Sea Monster* (1959), *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955) and other 1950s creature features than those outlined in the previous chapter. Exploring these films through the more positive aspects of Britain's outlook on the atomic age makes it possible to see the ways in which they signalled the beneficial potential of the country's nuclear project, helped to legitimize Britain's use of nuclear power despite its inherent risks and bolstered the nation's drive towards developing its nuclear expertise.

Towards a 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. 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, 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 postcolonial era. Nuclear technology more broadly was also framed in a positive light in Britain during the latter half of this decade and 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. In short, atomic science was imagined as a gateway to a better future.

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 British Windscale 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*, aimed at demonstrating the proper running of the Calder Hall facility to potential and current staff.[2] 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, even if it now seems terrifyingly short. In this way, *Full Power* works to mask the dangers of the infant technology 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 promoted by other British industries too, which 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.[3] The film encourages its audience to recognize the supposed silliness of atomic anxieties by presenting radiation in non-threatening terms. It refers to the company's scientists by the friendly and familiar moniker 'backroom 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 contextualizing 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.[4]

British industry was seen as benefitting from the boom in nuclear technology not only as a result of its application in specialized processes, but through the knock-on effect that the development of nuclear facilities had in other sectors, such as construction. In 1958, for example, British Movietone News produced a newsreel entitled *Goliath*, which reported on the erection of an enormous crane used to 'speed up the construction of the Electricity Board's nuclear power station at Bradwell-on-Sea' in Essex.[5] The crane, which appears on screen as a futuristic and impressively complex lattice of girders with a claw suspended high above the workers' heads, is described as having been 'specially designed by a British firm', emphasizing the expertise and ambition engendered in the construction industry as a result of the unique challenges created by Britain's flourishing nuclear industries. In this way, nuclear science fed into the broader

economy by necessitating tangible building projects and the development of bold new infrastructure to make them possible.

These messages about the value of radiation to highly specialized industries and the good that the nuclear industry was doing for other sectors of the British economy 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 frequently occurred. On 4 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'.[6] 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 bloodiest 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) in 1957, an international body aimed at orchestrating nuclear power-sharing in Europe. 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 amid a staff walk-out over safety concerns, as 'the world's first atom-power-for-peace plant'.[7] 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.[8] 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.[9] 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'.[10] In 1950s Britain, nuclear technology was certainly associated with the bomb, but it also stood for peace, international cooperation and industrial development, three key British interests in the post-war years.

Beyond its industrial and international benefits, the development of nuclear power was also presented as being in Britain's economic 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 United States 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.[11] 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 decolonization 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.[12] In the weeks that followed, there was indeed an increased focus on redressing public sentiment in this way, which seemed to have amounted to a small-scale, government-orchestrated, pro-nuclear propaganda campaign. 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 pub-
licists to write articles? Are there any reliable scientists? Or Church of England
Bishops?[13]

This manipulation of public opinion in favour of nuclear weapons contin-
ued 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'.[14]
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.[15] The Chancellor quickly became the organi-
zational 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'.[16] Just as the Prime Minister had
hoped, the Chancellor's efforts to control the ways in which nuclear technol-
ogy was discussed went some way in 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 pon-
tifical pronouncements on the hydrogen bomb'.[17] Indeed, far from being a
source of fear, by this stage the bomb had even become the subject of humour
to some. Raphael Tuck and Sons, a printers and stationers that was appointed
'fine art publishers to their Majesties the King and Queen' but, having never
quite recovered from the bombing of its headquarters during the Blitz, was
now producing novelty postcards for sale in British resort towns, printed one
card that depicted a woman asking a cinema commissionaire about a film
entitled *Mighty Atom*.[18] His comic response is that she is not to worry since,
although the film is certainly about the bomb, the nuclear threat never gets
in the way of the protagonist's courtship. Drained of its apocalyptic potential,
here nuclear weaponry is simply cause for a cheap gag. With public apathy
towards the issue of the nuclear bomb 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 famously delayed while government 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. Indeed, Patrick Murphy provides compelling documentary evidence that government officials were directly responsible for suppressing the film in his short feature, *The War Game – The Controversy* (2003).[19] 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 cooperation could unite old enemies and prevent future conflicts, and that radiation could usher in a new golden age of dramatically more efficient medical and industrial practices. There is little doubt 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.

Nuclear utopias

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'.[20] 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.[21] 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'.[22] For Biskind, in these films, 'where science caused the problem, science often solved it too'.[23] Science fiction films of the 1950s 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 might have been of particular relevance in Britain, a country whose self-image and future 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'.[24] 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'.[25] 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'.[26] 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'.[27] 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 destabilized through an examination of the ways in which *Beneath the Sea* characterizes 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, among 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. Giglio's assertion that this creature was 'transformed into a carnivorous giant' by radiation is inaccurate; the octopus is certainly radioactive, but the film emphasizes that its size is a feature of its species, not its contamination.[28] 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 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*. The octopus' 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 previous chapter, but the beast itself remains more distant from the monstrosity of radioactivity than some commentators have claimed, and certainly than is the case in other 1950s creature features.

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 that valorize the innovative spirit of the nuclear industries. The film opens with a short montage sequence depicting the launch of a nuclear submarine. The vessel itself is shown draped in flags and is surrounded by cheering crowds. It is described by a voice-over 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 plays cards. As one seaman 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.
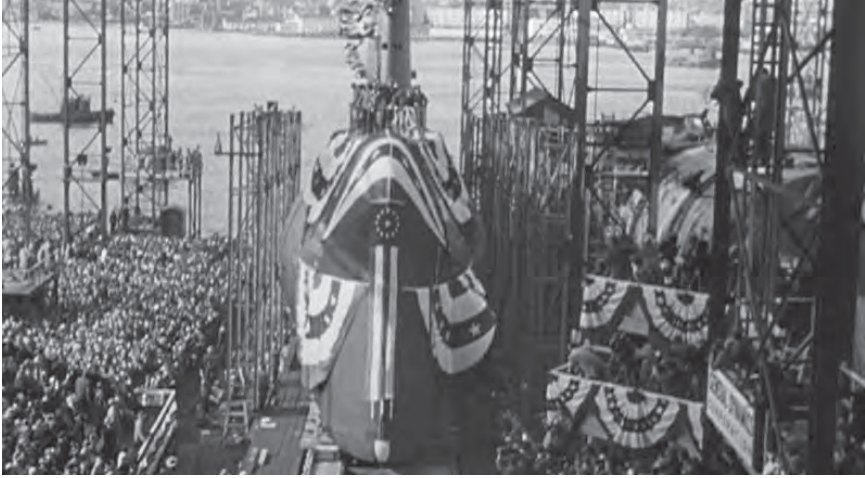
Figure 4 The launch of the nuclear submarine is cause for great celebration in *It Came from Beneath the Sea*.

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 on-board 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 were so many 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 utilizing the wonders of the atomic age, such as a nuclear torpedo, validated the country's embrace of nuclear technology.

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 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* (1953), 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 be buried within the creature by a torpedo, killing it from the inside and thereby containing the danger that would result from spilling its similarly radioactive blood. Biskind's claim that 'where science caused the problem, science often solved it too' is certainly true of *Behemoth*.[29] Although it would be difficult to class this as one of Biskind's 'centrist films', which lauded nuclear weaponry, it certainly shares with them their love of 'the technology that made [the bomb] possible'.[30] 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 embrace 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.

Some of the horror of the atomic age is certainly present in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Behemoth the Sea Monster*, notably in the sequences that use the attack of the monster as an analogy for a 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. In his preview of *When Worlds Collide* (1951), published in the British 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'.[31] 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 both films, but this is not the only attitude towards nuclear technology that Britons would have recognized in these creature features.

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 presented attacks on urban areas that recalled and intertwined the Home Front of the Second World War and atomic era British civil defence, but both 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. 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 because of the specific set of debates about nuclear technology that surrounded them. The national optimism engendered by the opening of Calder Hall and fears about the nation's unstable economic future both produced a distinctive discursive environment within Britain in which the creature features were watched. Even when understood in terms of topics that were of deep concern across the West, such as nuclear technology, the range of possible British interpretations of 1950s creature features was unique since it was informed by debates that were specific to that country.

Part C

Race and Immigration

It Came from the Colonies!: Mass Immigration and the Invasion Narratives

When the *New Australia*, a passenger ship carrying 1,570 British migrants to Sydney, arrived in port in late 1950, the announcer in British Movietone's news-reel described their reception as 'most cordial'.[1] His 'Australian counterpart' declares that 'we welcome them to the ranks of Australia's rising generation'. This is warmly received by the British narrator, who notes that 'it is certainly good to know that Australia appreciates the young people we are sending them'. In this film, *Australia Welcomes British Immigrants* (1950), and others like it, such as Pathé's *Millionth Migrant* (1955), British immigrants are presented as familiar and positive additions to Australian society.[2]

However, while British migrants were treated to a warm welcome in Australia, the reception that awaited migrants who landed on British shores was much frostier. The first wave of large-scale immigration into Britain took place during the 1950s in response to the labour shortages that followed the Second World War. In describing this phenomenon, the British press often relied on language mined from the contemporary science fiction cinema boom, which alienated rather than welcomed. 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'.[3] Cyril Osborne, MP for Louth, similarly warned against a 'West Indian and West African invasion'.[4] *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'.[5] 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 serial *Superman and the Mole Men*, the alternative title for *Superman and the Strange People* (1952).[6] Science fiction metaphors of alien invasion 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.

One of the effects of this psychological disassociation of colonial migrants was the reconstruction of 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'.[7] By categorizing people according to their ethnicity, British discourse on migration made it possible to imagine immigrants as a group of racial Others, distinct from the supposedly uniformly white host population. This perception facilitated the use of terms such as 'invasion' and 'alien' in 1950s newspaper reports, suggesting that the narratives and ideas associated with 1950s science fiction films were of particular relevance to a British audience 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.[8] 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 both 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 dramatize the encounter between the Self and the Other. The depersonalization 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, but a broader range of films that feature a number of different types of alien encounters can also be seen in this light. Britain's *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958), for example, frames its contact between humans and aliens as an invasion, depicting creatures from outer space coming to Earth to attack humanity. America's *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 invasive alien Other and so were capable of being understood through 1950s British debates about race and immigration.

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'.[9] 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'.[10] 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'.[11] Though they disagree on the explicitness of the racial prejudice on display during the 1950s, historians of this period 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"'.[12] This is what Miles has termed 'racialisation'.[13] 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'.[14] 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'.[15] 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'.[16] Race was predominantly seen as a thing of the Empire, not a domestic and immediate concern to people residing in Britain itself. However, as postwar labour shortages in Britain brought increasing numbers of colonial and Commonwealth subjects to its shores, the presumption that Britain was a homogeneous white country evaporated and debates about race began to shift their focus from the colonies to the parent state.

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.[17] 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'.[18] A similar picture was emerging from other Commonwealth and colonial territories. Rashmi Desai has shown that, in 1955, 10,700 Indians and Pakistanis lived in Britain, rising to 17,300 in 1957 and 55,000 in 1958.[19] In 1955 the net intake of people of colour from the Commonwealth was 42,700, rising to a peak of 46,850 in 1956.[20] 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'.[21] 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'.[22] As these figures demonstrate, the 1950s saw the demographic makeup of Britain undergo a radical change as the number of people of colour living in the country increased markedly in a very short space of time.

The British seem to have objected most strongly to the race of the new arrivals rather than their numbers. Issues of race often insinuated themselves within and distorted debates about immigration in Britain's newspapers during this period. 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.[23]

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'. For Jordan, the issue was evidently not immigration per se, but rather the arrival of people of colour in Britain. 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.[24] 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.[25] In each of these examples the debate about colonial immigration became a means of expressing concerns about the increasing presence of people of colour in Britain. The perception that race was only an issue in the colonies and not in Britain itself was clearly subsiding. As Benjamin Bowling puts it, 'colonial racism was transformed into indigenous racism' and, in Miles' terms, race became 'a real object' in Britain.[26] This created the discursive environment in which it became possible to frame immigration in terms of a national white Self and an invading racial Other.

As this process of racialization 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 twenty-first-century British debates about immigration, notable particularly for their emergence in the campaign that led to Britain's vote to leave the European Union in 2016, but similar anxieties were also present in the late 1950s, albeit on a more localized 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 and parts of the Midlands, the Northwest and Yorkshire. 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'.[27] The newspaper reported accusations that 'the coloured men – Indians and Goanese – had handled baggage and mail from the liners'.[28] 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.[29] 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.[30] 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* legitimized such claims in 1955 by arguing that, while racial prejudice had a hand in fanning tensions, there was 'a real grievance to sustain it'.[31] The issue was of sufficient concern to be raised in Westminster. 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'.[32] 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 23 August, Nottingham saw running battles between groups of black and white men involving upwards of a thousand people. Many were taken to hospitals as a result of injuries from weapons such as knives and bottles. The rioting in Nottingham lasted only 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 30 August, a mob of between three hundred 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 3 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.[33] Similarly, on 28 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'.[34] *The Times* suggested that these politicians 'intend to renew demand for controls to be placed on immigration from the Commonwealth and colonies'.[35] 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 US Army troops had to be called in to force racial integration on a resistant school in Arkansas.[36] 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.[37]

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'.[38] 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'.[39] 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'.[40] 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 own lives to become harder.

The immigrant and the alien

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 4 October 1958, just a few weeks after the riots.[41] 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.[42] However, vampires have often been understood as a means of addressing concerns about race, while the notion of an alien passenger on a craft headed back to the white astronauts' home is suggestive.[43] *It!*'s presentation of an alien encounter certainly stood the potential of being interpreted as a warning about colonial immigration 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 particular 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'.[44] 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" '.[45] 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. *It!*'s mise-en-scène draws clear distinctions between human and alien spaces, juxtaposing the populated, manufactured craft with the deserted, natural landscape, and hence underscoring the difference between 'it' and 'us'.

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 among 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 racialization 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 evident in 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 black and white 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 racialized subject parallel to the country's newly arrived immigrants. Two shots of the beast amid 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

Figure 5 Shot in silhouette amid the smoke, the creature's defining feature becomes the blackness of its skin in *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*.

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 racialization 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 racialized 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'.[46] 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. 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'.[47] In this sense, *It!*'s racialized 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 racialized 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.[48] 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.[49] In this context, the titular creature of *It!* may well have appeared as the racialized invader of a white crew's spacecraft, analogous with the racialized colonial immigrants that many believed were staging an invasion of a 'white man's country'.[50]

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, which was broadcast between 1956 and 1957, began screening in Britain on 7 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.

One 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 aliens' 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 science fiction 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), *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), *The Day the World Ended* (1956), *The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues* (1956), *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 science fiction 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.[51] 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 promised 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. These posters 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.[52] 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'.[53] 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'.[54] 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'.[55] 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 sexualized touch between Western and non-Western subjects.[56] A number of the posters used to advertise this film were also informed by this sexualized 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 genre cinema's canon suggest that it is to this image that many 1950s science fiction film 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 fetishization 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* 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 they have created, slowly extending their phallic appendages towards her, there is a strong implication that their desire for her is sexually motivated.[57]

Indeed, there is a sense that Anne is seduced up the mountain by the alien beasts. The very reason for her presence in Trollenberg is that Anne feels a sudden and irresistible urge to visit the mountain and the film further associates her with the peak by intercutting images of her face and its slopes. As Anne and her sister unpack in their hotel, for example, Anne wonders about the force that brought her there and looks out of the window as the film cuts to a special effects shot of the mountain. Though not necessarily threatening at this point in the film, the mountain is certainly mysterious and alluring, its cliffs dreadfully jagged and its slopes impossibly angular. The visual effects used to create this shot, which according to the film's special effects artist, Les Bowie, involved a cotton wool ball nailed to an image of a mountain, are curiously stylized.[58] The mountain becomes an object of mystery whose unknowability holds a power over Anne. Even the music used during this shot, slow sequences of ascending notes, underlines this dreamlike and bizarrely alluring atmosphere. That Anne is depicted as naive and innocent while the mountain is distinctly phallic and enchanting casts these sequences as a type of seduction in which Anne gradually succumbs to the power that the mountain holds over her. Of course, it is not the mountain itself that seduces Anne but the aliens who live above it, and

Figure 6 The staring eyeball creature extends a phallic tentacle towards the sleeping Anne in *The Trollenberg Terror*.

the eventual revelation of their sexualized nature and their desire for her only underline this further.

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. By itself this might be unusual, but would be unlikely to connect the film to racialized fantasies of colonial immigrants. However, amid the tense atmosphere of the autumn of 1958, when issues of race and the perceived threat posed by black men crackled in the national discourse, and in the context of a film and indeed a genre advertised through posters steeped in familiar allusions to black sexuality, these sexualized alien predators may well have taken on new meanings. They could have been recognized 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 1950s science fiction films, such as *Trollenberg*, 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'.[59] 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].[60]

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 argued that '*The Thing* sounds remarkably like *King Kong*'.[61] Comments such as these encouraged an expectation that other 1950s science fiction films, such as *Trollenberg*, would resemble *Kong* and consequently suggest that the same reading strategies, and the same racial stereotypes, could have been 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 to be interpreted in light of the so-called black invasion that immigration had been framed as in public debate. In this way, both 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.[62]

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. While mass immigration did not begin in the United States until the 1960s and the country's population remained overwhelmingly white throughout the 1950s, Britain's relationship with its former colonies and the migration of people of colour from them meant that the term 'invasion' now offered nationally specific allusions, which contributed

to the framing of newly arrived black immigrants as racial Others distinct from the presumed white national Self. When viewed in this context, 1950s science fiction films offered a parallel discourse of intergalactic Others and the human Self that rendered them available for interpretation as racial allegories, adding fuel to the fires that had burned out of control in Nottingham and Notting Hill.

Loving the Alien: After the Notting Hill Race Riots

The violence that spilled out onto the streets of London and Nottingham during the race riots of 1958 was both shocking and brutal. Britain, a nation that had sat at the head of a multi-ethnic, globe-spanning empire, had demonstrated its intolerance at home to those it had subjugated abroad. The myth of kinship between the various peoples of the fading British Empire and the fledgling Commonwealth, including Britons themselves, was exploded as white men armed themselves and, in a microcosm of the country's imperial history, sought out people from other nations over whom they could assert dominance through the use of force. Previously, Britons had looked across the Atlantic at the racism in American society 'with self-righteous condemnation', as the Gaumont British News film *Colour Bar Violence* (1958) put it, 'and thanked God that it couldn't happen here'.[1] The country's sense of moral piety was shattered by the riots as, this film goes on to note, 'in centres in many parts of Britain mass prejudice seems to have shown itself, for the first time, in all its ugliness. Riots, beatings, hooliganism'. The tone of disappointed self-flagellation is characteristic of much reporting at the time, which perceived Britain to have let itself down by engaging in the type of racist vigilantism that was previously seen as the reserve of the United States. However, this mournful tone is itself interesting in as far as it highlights that, while the rioting was motivated by racism, the public discourse that it inspired often recognized that this was something that Britain needed to condemn, challenge and distance itself from. *Colour Bar Violence* goes on to argue that racist violence is 'our problem now and we must solve it'. It is noted that '190,000 coloured people live in Britain – less than half of one percent of the population and in the main they live happily'. Though 'a little strange at first, they soon settle into living and working with their new neighbours'. Colonial immigrants are described as 'good workers, honest decent people' and the film

strongly implies that Britain has a responsibility to accept and welcome them, since it is 'the mother country of the Commonwealth. By right it is their second home'. After the riots, *Colour Bar Violence* suggests, Britain's aim should be 'to live together in peace'. As horrific as the violence in 1958 was, from it sprang the early signs of an anti-racist backlash, which offered hope that Britain might become a more tolerant, welcoming nation in the future.

For those receptive to such optimistic calls for tolerance, and indeed for many others who were more cautious but could feel the landscape of public debate about race and immigration starting, albeit slowly, to shift in a more positive direction, the demonization of the alien Other in much of 1950s science fiction cinema might well have been a cause of frustration or concern. Within scenes of hostility and suspicion towards strangers who did not look like them, they could have found a mirror for the hostile attitudes on display in Nottingham and Notting Hill in 1958. However, there are also occasional moments in these films, including those released during the period when anti-racist sentiment emerged in the immediate aftermath of the rioting, such as *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* and *The Trollenberg Terror* (both 1958), where this antagonistic and confrontational worldview is undermined. In these fleeting but often powerful moments, Them and Us do not seem so different after all. For many in post-riot Britain, this would have been a very reassuring development indeed.

Post-riot positivity

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 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'.[2] 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. In a similar vein to *Colour Bar Violence*, a British Pathé newsreel reported the Notting Hill riots as 'something new and ugly [that] raises its head in Britain'.[3] 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'.[4] 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'.[5] 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'.[6] 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'.[7] In this strand of public debate, racism, and in particular racist violence, was seen as something incompatible with the values of British society and an aberration in British history. While this was not necessarily the case, since British participation in the slave trade and its various colonial adventures all demonstrate that its history before 1958 was not one of racial harmony, in the post-riot period the violence was certainly framed in public debate as a monstrous deviation from historical norms to which the country had to return.

Attempts to use public outrage at the violence to promote tolerance emerged from many sectors of society in the weeks after the riots had faded away. 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 out national life, then much good will have come out of evil.[8]

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'.[9] As these comments show, leaders of the country's various Christian communities, which

still at this stage encompassed the majority of Britons, were keen not to focus on the riots themselves, but on their potential to act as a warning to Britons in the hope that the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment could be addressed, challenged and reversed. As a result, the church positioned itself 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 in October 1958 to discuss how Britain could resist racial prejudice.[10] Another such event, reported by British Movietone News, took the call for tolerance back to the scene of the riots by hosting a New Year party in December 1958 'for the white and coloured children of Notting Hill Gate'.[11] Coming just two months after the violence in the area, the central message of this event was 'let's get together. Let's start the new year as we intend to spend it', which the narrator of British Movietone's film describes as 'one of the best resolutions anyone could make'. The focus on children is revealing since it mirrors the nature of the school debate held elsewhere in the city a few weeks earlier, suggesting that perhaps efforts were being made to foster greater integration early in life to prevent confrontation as the next generation matured. This in turn allowed the event to be used to suggest to adults that if children could be tolerant of people of different races, they too should be capable of it. This is implicit in the film's suggestion that 'we are kids. We don't get all pompous about it. We get along fine anyhow and we all love a party'. This sense of unity in childhood is further emphasized through the suggestion that 'at party time almost every kiddie gets a bit giddy', presumably with the intended implication that children are equally excitable and boisterous regardless of their race.

Although this event and the sixth form conference for London grammar schools sought to tackle racial prejudice overtly, the changing nature of British society meant that people of colour were also becoming increasingly visible to white Britons in day-to-day life, in public engagements that had little to do with race and in reporting on those engagements. For example, British Movietone's newsreel about the British Rock 'n' Roll Championship, a lively dance competition held in London in January 1958, concludes with a shot of a smartly dressed black man wiping sweat from his face with a handkerchief.[12] Though it is possible he was employed by the event's organizers, perhaps as a musician, given his attire, the fact that he is sweating suggests to the viewer that he was a competitor. The voiceover narration underlines this impression by suggesting that he, as well

as the competition, was 'cool'. Alongside anti-racist events, films such as this helped to establish the notion that, contrary to the perception that people of colour were incompatible with the dominant culture, they were dancing, laughing, entering competitions and enjoying themselves as anyone else would. It is perhaps this increased visibility and normalization, more than any targeted event, that began to defuse, at least temporarily, the charged issue of immigration and quell concerns about race.

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.[13] 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 immigrant population] are from Surrey, Middlesex and Cornwall – the three counties of Jamaica, British for 300 years', positioning these Jamaicans as colonial subjects who had a shared heritage with Britain.[14] 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.[15] These bonds are invoked in an attempt to undermine the unfortunately common perception that immigrant communities and people of colour were inherently different from white Britons by drawing attention to aspects of their history that interlace with Britain's own. These people were not, such articles argue, as alien as many believed due to the fact that Britons had encountered and lived alongside them before, both for many years in their home countries and more recently on the battlefields of Europe, and that their presence in Britain itself during the 1950s was a mere evolution of that existing and beneficial relationship. The *Daily Mirror* 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, family 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'.[16] Highlighting the shared values and histories that united the British and the Jamaicans, the *Daily Mirror* and other similarly liberal newspapers 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'.[17] The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 relieved citizens of Commonwealth nations of their automatic right of abode in Britain and instead replaced it with a requirement that they seek specific permission from the British authorities prior to relocating. These controls were tightened further by the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1968 and again by the Immigration Act 1971. The year 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'.[18]

Identifying with the alien

It! The Terror from Beyond Space and *The Trollenberg Terror* were released in Britain at a unique historical moment. Never before had the nation experienced racial violence at home on such a large scale, so neither had it witnessed a public outcry and period of national soul-searching about the way it treated racial minorities. Such moments are sadly too familiar in the present day, but in 1958 this was something new. Following the shock of the violence, let alone the hostile public debate about issues of race and immigration that preceded and created the conditions for the riots, the open calls for tolerance and compassion must have felt like a significant departure from the country's current trajectory, even if they were framed by politicians and newspapers as an attempt to return to historical norms. The atmosphere into which *It!* and *Trollenberg* were released was consequently not only charged with the feeling that the country was teetering on the brink of the type of violent racism that had been witnessed in America, but at a deeper level was also suffused with questions about who the British were, what united them with or divided them from the new immigrant communities, and whether Them and Us could ever peacefully exist side by side. While the

primary message of both films is about the dangers of unfamiliar entities, for those who found in the anti-racist backlash after the riots cause for optimism, these films could also offer moments, however fleeting, of comfort. It is possible to identify points of incongruity in *It!* and *Trollenberg* where the alien Other reveals similarities to the human Self and in which one could 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, just as one might raise one's hands in a hopeless gesture to protect one's face from the heat of a fire. It stumbles blindly around the room in both pain and panic, bumping into obstructions in a most human manner. The suffering of the creature is thus rendered comprehensible through its performance of recognizably 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'.[19] In terms of the close-up in *It!*'s reactor room, however, it is not two different characters within the film whose intimacy is highlighted by the cinematography, indeed no other character is present, but rather it is the intimacy between the audience and the alien in its moment of suffering. 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 humanized 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.[20] As the use of the close-up demonstrates, it is not simply the actions of the creature, but also the ways in which it is framed by the camera that invite recognition of the humanity of the alien.

The mask worn by the actor playing the Martian also serves to underscore the humanization 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. The allusions it makes are to the animal kingdom, but not to humanity. There was, however, some confusion during the film's production about how best to render the alien's eyes. Paul Blaisdell, who fashioned the monster costume for *It!*, was asked by Robert E. Kent, the film's producer, to make a mask 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'.[21] Blaisdell reportedly produced a high-quality set of eyes for the creature mask, but when he went to deliver the costume, Kent was not present 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 among the crew, but 'so Corrigan could see better'.[22] 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'.[23] 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 realizes 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 humanizes its suffering through its very recognizable responses to pain, and the close-up shot itself evokes 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'.[24] Hendershot's observation is typical of those made by a number of writers who have similarly characterized the beast as a demonic grotesque. Randy Palmer, for example, termed the creature a 'nightmarish vision of a Martian vampire'.[25] Even Corrigan's then-wife, Elaine DuPont, herself a genre cinema actress, described her husband's character as a 'horrible monster'.[26] These commentators are correct that during the
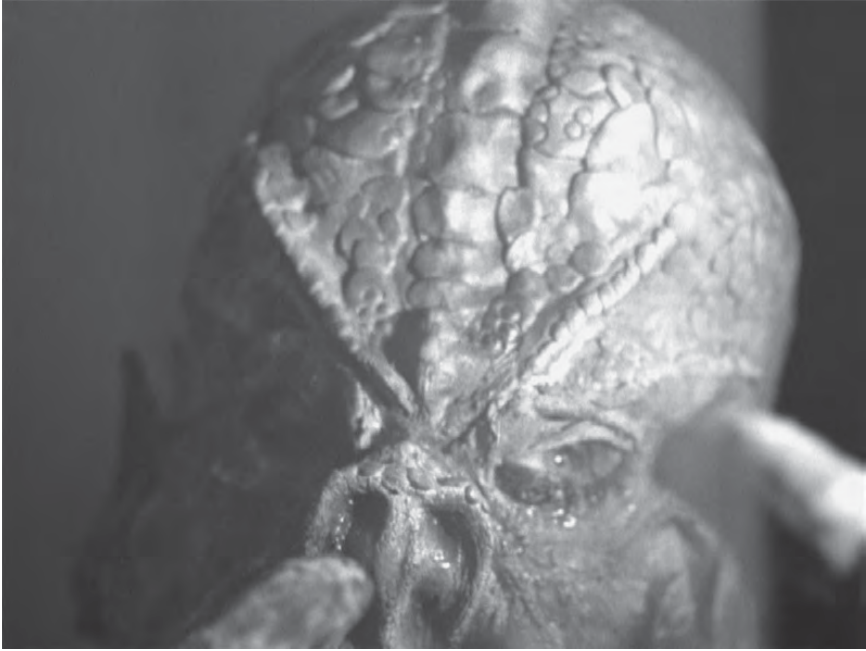
Figure 7 A human eye stares out of an alien face in *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*.

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.[27] In this way, *It!* encourages an exploration of the artificiality of the Us/Them binary.

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 recognizably human manner. While *It!* achieved this through the physical reactions of the creature, *Trollenberg* uses sound to create a similar effect.

In *It!* the humanization of the creature as it suffered was stressed through the use of a close-up shot. *Trollenberg* also highlights the humanized alien's suffering through cinematographic techniques, but here this is achieved through the duration and intensity of the shots. 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; 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 humanization of the creatures suggested by the uncomfortably human screaming that they produce.

This positioning of the alien as a sympathetic creature and the resultant questioning of the boundary between Self and Other were not limited to these two

Figure 8 The inferno engulfs an alien's body, its tentacles still twitching, as its screams fill the air in *The Trollenberg Terror*.

films. It 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.[28] 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'.[29] 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 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 racialized subjects could be tolerated in the wake of the 1958 race riots. If it was possible to see 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 spuriousness of these distinctions. It is possible that these films drew attention to the fact that looks could be deceiving and served to reinforce the rising awareness that the colonial immigrants who arrived during the 1950s deserved the same respect as native Britons regardless of the colour of their skin.

None of this is to say that 1950s science fiction films did not largely trade in the tension between humans and aliens, consequently setting up an opposition between people who looked like Hollywood's predominantly white stars and those who did not, a sector of society that might have been understood as analogous to the invading aliens of the silver screen. The notion that the hostile, adversarial dynamics that underpin the genre's aliens could be dismissed entirely would be preposterous. However, it is also problematic to ignore the local contexts within which these films were watched outside America or to leave unanswered questions about how they could have shaped the genre's meaning for its international audiences. In Britain, the significant backlash against violent racism in the period after the riots forms one such context and is significant for films that were released at the end of 1958. The violence audiences had witnessed or read about in newspapers raised in the public consciousness the urgent need

to expose the supposed distinctions between races as artificial, social constructs. This worldview, which would take hold much more powerfully during the cultural revolution of the 1960s, recognized that differences need not be threatening. The fact that *It!* and *Trollenberg* contained moments that humanized their alien creatures suggests that these films were also capable of underlining the insignificance of external appearances. Though they set their aliens up as monstrous invaders, they both also undermine this perspective in brief but memorable sequences. The revelation that the alien was more human than had been initially anticipated allowed both films to reinforce, at least in part, the suggestion made in public debate during 1958 that Britain's white and black residents were no different from each other.

The United States, of course, does not share this British history of race relations. While racial tensions were new to many in Britain, racism had been a more palpable force in US society for a long time. Mass immigration had yet to come to America by the 1950s, but the country was still under the repressive regime of the Jim Crow laws and their toxic mantra of 'separate but equal'. The Civil Rights Act would not come into force until 1964 and the Voting Rights Act until 1965. Legal segregation in schools ended in 1954, but persisted in other areas of society for a decade. Racist violence was not uncommon throughout much of this period. Moreover, racial tensions in the United States during the 1950s were not brought to light through the arrival of new communities, but through the continued unravelling of the consequences of the nation's history of slavery and the Civil War. While Britain also played a prominent role in the slave trade, racism in the 1950s was an issue that emerged in light of colonial and Commonwealth immigration, and which was seen as being opposed to rather than a consequence of the country's history. The logic here is muddy since immigration from the West Indies, India, Pakistan and elsewhere was directly related to Britain's fading empire, but the effect was that Britons understood race and immigration differently from Americans. As a result, the presence of human traits in an alien being may have taken on meanings in Britain that it did not in the United States, particularly during the worrisome, testing months of late 1958.

Part D

Britain at Home and Abroad

Still Overpaid, Still Oversexed and Still Over Here: The American Invasion of Europe

The story of British science in the 1950s is also the story of a small island at the heart of a vanishing empire, desperately trying to play a high-stakes game of global domination with two rising superpowers for whom it was no match. This explains many anomalies of the atomic age, from concrete slabs on the beaches of isolated Pacific islands, where Britain tethered its nuclear test devices in a vainglorious attempt to make the remains of its waning power manifest, to the debut of new British Centurion tanks on the battlefields of Korea, where the nation paradoxically attempted to demonstrate its continued might by playing a supporting role in a predominantly American conflict. In each instance, science and technology were tools used by Britain to signal its relevance in the post-war and increasingly postcolonial world. The sense that the country's dancing days would soon be over, but that it was unwilling to see the sun set on them just yet, is palpable in the way it deployed its scientific ingenuity throughout the decade.

Just as Britain was using science as a barometer for, and a means to maintain, its global standing, science fiction cinema too was deploying science as a way of addressing other, largely unconnected social and political concerns. For Bonnie 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'.[1] The figure of the female scientist, making her own way in the male-dominated world of research, allowed the depiction of science on film to intersect with and address only loosely connected issues around the domestic and working lives of women in other sectors. Mark Jancovich also exposes this flexibility of science as a means of engaging with other debates in his examination of the genre's monsters as 'products of science'.[2] 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'.[3] Science was an important issue in its own right in the 1950s, but in science fiction cinema it was also a means of opening up issues to which science itself was largely not connected.

One such issue, which became a major and historic catastrophe in British foreign policy, was the crisis that unfolded in 1956 around the Suez Canal. 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 *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 special relationship after Suez

In the late nineteenth century 'Britain was . . . endowed with the power to command the world' through its global empire.[4] Covering almost a quarter of the world's landmass, 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 colonies and capabilities but because of its relationship with America. In Saki Dockrill's terms, 'Britain's relations with the United States became an important barometer for the measurement of Britain's global standing'.[5] 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. By the 1950s, Britain was no longer seen as a superpower in its own right but as a key ally of the United States.

The year of the Suez crisis, 1956, was a significant marker of Britain's postwar decline. Britain and France, in collusion with Israel, conducted a brief and

ultimately disastrous military operation to regain control of Egypt's recently nationalized 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 2 November 1956, 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.[6] 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.[7] 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 United States, 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.[8] 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.[9] A. J. Stockwell argues that 'Britain's leadership of the Commonwealth was gravely damaged, and it became "Enemy Number One" at the United Nations'.[10] 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'.[11] 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 letter pages of Britain's newspapers.[12] On 6 November,

for example, the *Manchester Guardian* published a selection of letters about the crisis and 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 weekend. 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.[13]

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.[14] 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.[15] 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'.[16] 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 build-up 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.[17] Anxieties about the American presence in Britain during the Second World War were often given voice as concerns about resultant sexual relationships that American men were perceived to be seeking with British women. 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'.[18] 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'.[19] 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'.[20] 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" '.[21] 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, a US arts organization 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.[22]

As these articles demonstrate, American influence in Europe was seen as prob-
lematic 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.[23] Similarly, articles in British
newspapers presented the United States as a land of plenty, benefiting from
and working to maintain Britain's relative deprivation. This became particu-
larly apparent in January 1957, when the Texas Railroad Commission refused to
increase crude oil production, consequently raising prices in Britain and prof-
its 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.[24] 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'.[25]
America's oil wealth became a frequent bone of contention, 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.[26]
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'.[27] 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.[28]

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.

Science fiction 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?'[29] 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'.[30] In 1957, a reader named only as D. C. similarly noted that 'Britain is lagging behind in the screen's space race'.[31] *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.[32] 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'.[33] 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'.[34]

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 United States 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 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 realizing 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 US 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.[35] 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.[36] 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' should the British censors give a restrictive certificate.[37] *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 a North 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 postcolonial 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 characterize. 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 eulogize the American scientific-military establishment.[38]

In contrast to this American science, the British Professor Walgate performs dangerously irresponsible work that leads to civilian deaths. This is difficult to reconcile with Andrew Tudor's assessment that *Fiend* is an example of a trend in 1950s science fiction cinema to 'loosen the direct link between science, scientists and the threat that they produce'.[39] 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.[40] 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.[41] 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 includes 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 civilization 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 whom have already been encountered in earlier chapters. Professor Bernard Quatermass, an English scientist in the original BBC television series, *The Quatermass Experiment*, broadcast in 1953, was recast 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). Forrest Tucker, a US actor who hailed from Plainfield, Indiana, took the lead in the British film *The Trollenberg Terror* (1958), playing American scientist Alan Brooks. Brooks himself is juxtaposed with a more eccentric and less heroic European scientist from the Trollenberg Observatory. Britain's *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 characterization 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, with stars and locations playing a role too, but 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 during the 1950s.

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 inge-
nuity of the United States for protection. One such film is *Earth vs. the Flying
Saucers*, released in Britain in August 1956. Due to the system of film distribu-
tion 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 mar-
ried 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 con-
tacts 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 DC 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 technol-
ogy 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.[42] The sequence in *Flying Saucers* is devoid of the earlier film's interest in extraterrestrial bodies and serves only to fetishize technology, a trait that is also apparent in the film's spectacular shots of the alien craft and its narrative focus on advanced weaponry. *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 marginalization 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.'.[43] 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. *Flying Saucers* takes care to note that the British are terrorized 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.[44]

Flying Saucers' marginalization 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 United States, 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.

Figure 9 A brief glimpse of Britain, seen on a screen in an alien spacecraft, in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*.

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 by the crisis in Suez to speculate about its 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. They were not alone in this regard. Although science fiction is, by its very nature, a genre that relies heavily on depictions of technology, in the 1950s alien spacecraft, high-tech weaponry and out-of-control research became particularly central to its films. However, unlike in what is often called 'hard' science fiction, these technologies were not of significant fascination to the films themselves beyond the narrative interest they could generate and the obsession with all things nuclear. Instead, the presentation of science in these films was loose and flexible enough to enable it to serve as a surrogate

for important issues affecting the state of the nation or the world. Topics that were both directly and indirectly related to science itself were able to influence its interpretation in these genre films. In Britain in 1956, under the long, dark shadow of Suez, this meant that science fiction films were available to be understood as meditations on the perceived decline of British influence, the imagined American invasion and, perhaps, a host of other issues too.

Science Fiction Britain: The Nation of the Future

In 1951 the Festival of Britain unambiguously signalled that science and technology were to be the crucible in which the nation's future was forged. Imagined as a tonic to flagging morale caused by slow post-war reconstruction, the festival was brimming over with an excess of optimism and big ideas. The architecture of the main 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. Predating the Millennium Dome by half a century, this ninety-three-metre tall structure invited visitors to see exhibits 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. Crucially, though the range of technological marvels on display was vast and dizzying, and though the Hall of the Future in Glasgow housed a 1,000,000-volt lightning generator that served to demonstrate nuclear fission to a bewitched audience, there was not so much as a model of a nuclear weapon in sight.

It is easy to imagine that, with mushroom clouds rising over the Pacific, Australia and Nevada, and uranium being fed into power stations in Obninsk and Cumbria, when people in 1950s Britain thought about science and technology, their minds filled with images of splitting atoms. However, this was also the

decade in which a vaccine against polio was discovered, all but eradicating the disease in Britain by 1963, 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, bolstered by the growing presence of new technology in ordinary homes. 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 and optimistic, 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 characterize 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.

This sense that, with the exception of nuclear weapons, the current rapid pace of scientific progress was both exciting and potentially highly beneficial to the public was broadly shared. New technologies of recording and broadcasting in particular were seen as harbingers of an anticipated scientific revolution that would transform the nation, bringing all manner of labour-saving atomic devices into the home. At the same time, while the British were beginning to imagine a new, scientifically sophisticated world emerging to replace their own, cinema was itself experimenting with a range of innovative technologies. 3D and CinemaScope, for example, were used by significant numbers of science fiction films, which in turn transformed them from ordinary moving pictures into scientifically mediated experiences for 1950s Britons. Not only were science fiction films about the future, but in many instances they also felt like an experience of the future too since they seemed to offer a taste of the exciting advances that new technologies would soon bring to all aspects of life.

Tomorrow comes today

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. The nation's newspapers, for example, made much of Britain's Sir Alexander Todd being awarded the Nobel Prize in 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.[2] 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*.[3] 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.[4] Jet 1 was 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.[5] *999's New Home* (1957) claimed that new technologies used in emergency services control centres had halved the time it took to dispatch personnel.[6] 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, such newsreels constructed an image of a

second, parallel and technologically superior Britain that existed alongside the world that the viewer inhabited, tantalizingly close but always out of reach. This science fictional convergence of 1950s Britain and its futuristic counterpart is perhaps most evident in *House of Ideas* (1957), a newsreel film that depicted what domestic life might be like in the coming years, but which set these optimistic fantasies within recognizably contemporary contexts.[7] 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 collides the old and the new, constructing a futuristic reality within the context of the recognizable world. The traditional Georgian house depicted in the newsreel 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 enmeshing 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 tomorrow, nestling within the London of today, 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.[8] 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 recognizable landscapes and urban spaces through its technological expertise.

Newsreels of this period frequently framed audio-visual 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.[9] 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 flows in the city centre via a CCTV feed.[10] *An Eye on Your Wheels* (1959) showed cameras being used to relay images of the testing of car parts to a nearby laboratory.[11] 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 in anticipation of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, bringing more Britons than ever before into contact with the technology.[12] 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.[13] 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 amid 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).[14] 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, whose viewership peaked at 11 million, or just under one-fifth of the country's total population, 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 revitalized 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 popularizing 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 British technologies of science fiction

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 *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956)
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'.[15] This is certainly true of 1950s science fiction films, many of which
were not merely about advanced technology, but were necessarily and osten-
tatiously products of advanced technology. British cinemas became locations
where new technologically mediated audio-visual thrills could be experienced.
Watching science fiction films in 1950s Britain might well have felt like a futuris-
tic, 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'.[16] 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.[17]

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'.[18] 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).[19] *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'.[20] 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'.[21] 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'.[22] 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'.[23] 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'.[24] *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'.[25] 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'.[26] Despite their humble 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 1958–1959). 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*, 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 many of the lower-budget films in 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 or its peers, *Flying Saucers* looked as if it was created using an advanced and technologically sophisticated production process.[27]

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'.[28] During the climax of this film, the human characters discover that the monstrous creatures that surround them are susceptible to gunfire. What follows is a disturbing and bloody sequence in which the beasts, which 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'.[29] 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.[30] While records of the specific cuts that were made by the British Board of Film Censors are not available, 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'.[31] While certainly unpleasant, these gory sequences display remarkable ingenuity, with the models appearing to recoil and bleed realistically. 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'.[32] Just as Harryhausen's work was technically accomplished
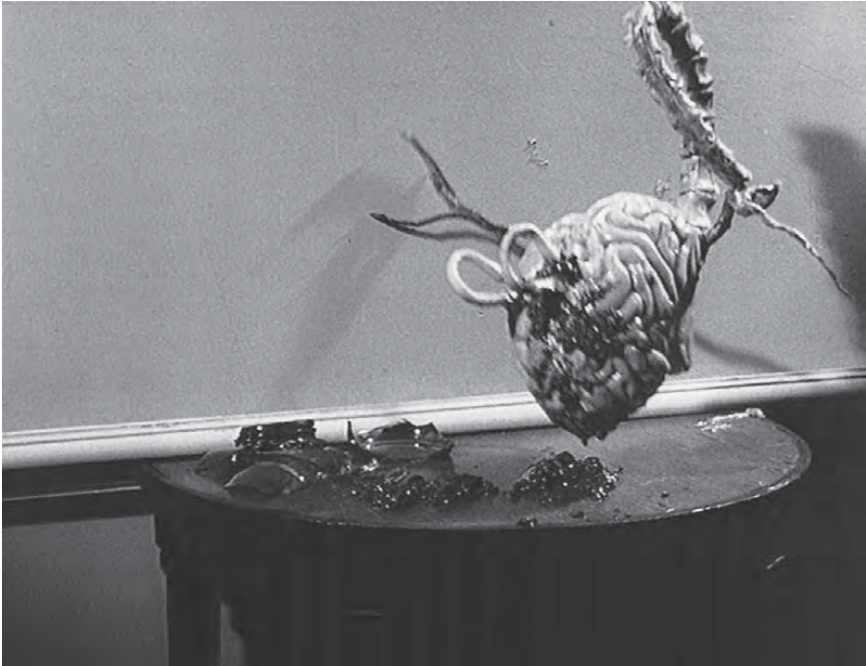
Figure 10 The intricate, grisly special effects work in *Fiend without a Face*.

enough to suggest a technologically sophisticated production process, the same is also true 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 earlier, *The War of the Worlds* was one such production. Despite being dismissive of much of the film, Margaret Hinxman, *Picturegoer*'s reviewer, was struck by George Pal's animation and model work. She 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.[33]

Hinxman describes how 'Pal's special effects pulverise you into a state of breathlessness'.[34] She recalls witnessing 'eye-popping incident upon eye-popping

incident with barely breathing space in between'.[35] 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'.[36]

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'.[37] This sense of wonder was also 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'.[38] British reviewers found great pleasure in wondering at the array of special effects technologies utilized 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 theatrical release. In 1953, the same year that *Bwana Devil* made its way into British cinemas, Universal brought science fiction into the 3D age with *It Came from Outer Space*. 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 emphasized 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.)'.[39] 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" '.[40] 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.[41] 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'.[42] 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'.[43] 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.[44] This technique 'helped to revolutionise how films were constructed and dramatically changed the experience of cinema-going'.[45] 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.[46] 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 projection, 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 also 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.[47] 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.[48] 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

From giant crabs on a sweltering jungle island to disembodied brains on a frozen military base, and from amorphous alien blobs in the British countryside to hollow people in American desert towns, 1950s science fiction cinema offers a diverse and dizzying array of wonders. Even only in its British and American forms, its stories span the globe and reach out to the stars, imagining stowaway monsters, marauding mutant beasts, man-made doomsday scenarios and full-scale alien invasions. The creativity, vibrancy and sheer spectacle of these films remains untarnished despite the passing decades, even if some of the special effects now look a little wonkier than they once did.

Given the vast canvas on which these films paint, it is surprising that the discourse around them in the years since their release has been relatively narrow in scope. In much, though not all, scholarly writing these films are routinely connected to either the nuclear bomb or the threat of Soviet subversion, with few other elements of their historical contexts informing the debate. This has become the 'critical orthodoxy' that Lincoln Geraghty suggests dominates scholarship on 1950s US science fiction cinema, and both he and Mark Jancovich have noted this repeated emphasis placed on similar interpretations of these films.[1] There have been attempts to broaden this critical horizon, and authors such as M. Keith Booker, Phillip L. Gianos, Barry Keith Grant, Mark Jancovich, Bonnie Noonan and Patrick Lucanio, for example, have demonstrated the possibility of opening up new ways of looking at and thinking about the genre during this decade.[2] However, these fresh interjections have not become widely acknowledged or familiar enough to challenge the dominant narrative about the meaning of 1950s science fiction cinema, which continues to be recirculated in an all but unchallenged form in popular publications, academic articles, university classrooms and online.

The issue here is one of constant reiteration producing a type of historical dogma. There is, of course, room for interpretations that link the genre to nuclear bombs and the Soviets to exist alongside other readings, but the frequency with

which they are repeated and the unequivocal ways in which they are sometimes presented crowd out other possibilities, particularly in popular writing. Online articles, for example, regularly posit Soviet infiltration and nuclear destruction as the only issues addressed by the genre. This is as true in Britain, where other national concerns were prevalent, as it is elsewhere. The British Film Institute, for example, tells visitors to its website that 'in the 1950s, cold war paranoia and the fear of imminent destruction gave rise to an unparalleled wave of alien invasion movies and apocalyptic space adventures'.[3] Little space is left for other possible causes or interpretations. A summary of Cold War culture on the BBC news website similarly observes that 'in the 1950s, science fiction movies were often allegories of Cold War politics. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was interpreted as a reference to McCarthy-era paranoia, *Invaders from Mars* as a parable of Communist infiltration'.[4] Opinions such as these on institutional websites are also reflected in less official spheres. For example, the Institute of Light, an arts venue in Hackney, argues on its website that 1950s science fiction films were 'vehicles (and a kind of catharsis) for Cold War anxieties and fears of nuclear annihilation'.[5] This is, of course, anecdotal evidence, but does appear to be broadly representative of a trend in popular writing that limits the interpretative framework which is deployed when discussing such films. The genre is consistently imagined in relation to only two of the wide range of public debates that took place either in Britain or America during the decade.

This tendency to imagine 1950s science fiction films only having meaning when seen through the lens of the bomb and the Soviet menace tallies neatly with the ways in which we now most commonly imagine the decade itself. Christopher B. Strain describes how 'even today, Americans tend to remember the 1950s as a placid, antiseptic decade – a rather boring time of suburban puttering, backyard barbecues, and plastic smiles', an anaemic 'prelude to the 1960s'.[6] The same is often true in Britain, where the decade looks back at us through black and white photographs of stern mothers in plain aprons watching their children playing in ginnels, or of prime ministers such as Clement Atlee, with his impossibly old-fashioned moustache, and Winston Churchill. These figures seem to have much more in common with the drab war years than with the eruption of colour and youth that now characterizes the cultural memory of the 1960s. As such, the British 1950s is often recalled as being either an extension of the post-war 1940s or the eye of a temporal storm, the monotonous calm between two very different types of explosions. In tedious years such as these,

it is easy to imagine that people had little else to think about other than the Russians and mushroom clouds.

However, as with all easy fantasies of the past, this image of 1950s Britain could not be further from the truth. Britain was no sleepy backwater, waiting as if under a bell jar for Vidal Sassoon and John Lennon to shatter the glass. Among all the humdrum routines of their day-to-day lives, the British were a complex and contradictory people whose fears, anxieties, hopes and ambitions orbited around the tensions of the Cold War, but also many other issues besides. While people were certainly worried about Soviet infiltration and nuclear annihilation, they also flocked to Russian cultural performances in London and looked to nuclear power to save the country from postcolonial economic ruin. They celebrated the development of new vaccines, marvelled at the patriotic wonders of the Festival of Britain, held parties to welcome their new monarch, watched their empire slowly fade into history, seethed with conflicted sentiments at the arrival of exotic new immigrants from the Commonwealth, shipped off in search of a better life in Australia, giddily anticipated owning nuclear motorbikes and washing machines, danced to the beat of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, stared up in amazement at the new radio telescope emerging from the Cheshire countryside at Jodrell Bank, bought their first television sets, worried about delinquent Teddy Boys in their chunky brogues, and any number of other activities besides. The bland 1950s of the popular imagination does little to capture the true diversity of opinion and experience that characterized Britain in this decade. People were interested in and confounded by a wide range of issues extending far beyond the Cold War political climate. To imagine that they shut all of this out on entering a cinema and only understood and reflected on science fiction through the lens of Soviet indoctrination and nuclear weaponry is as much a fantasy as the stories that they watched play out on the screen.

The tonic that is required to redress this illusion is the reintroduction of a sense of relativity and perspective into discussions about the genre during this period. The lack of attention paid to the ways in which these films sat within specific national reception contexts beyond the United States has inadvertently enabled American interpretations of the genre to stand in for the meanings found in these films elsewhere. This accidental overreaching of conclusions that are sound within their intended scope, but which have become problematic when extended beyond their initial arena, risks conjuring up the impression that 1950s science fiction films have inherent and innate meanings, rather

than acquiring interpretations through a complex interaction with individual audience members and a range of extra-textual materials and discourses. Just as in Maltby's discussion of West African masks and Kwakiutl totem poles, when 1950s science fiction films were exported, they came to mean different things to different cultures as a result of the ways in which they nestled within their new-found discursive surround.[7] To understand this new relationship between the films and their adopted national contexts is also to provide an historical corrective to the unwarranted extension of their American meanings. By filling the gap with new knowledge about how science fiction was understood in, for example, France, South Africa and Britain, one prevents other national interpretations from erroneously taking hold.

As has become clear through this book's exploration of the specifically British reception contexts of 1950s science fiction cinema, there are multiple ways in which it can be demonstrated that audiences here would have been able to find in these films a different range of meanings from their American counterparts. Two distinct strategies have been used to articulate this differentiation. In the first of these strategies, the key discourses that have been seen as determinants of US responses to the genre are recognized as significant debates in Britain too, but are reframed through the unique character they adopted in the UK. This is possible with both nuclear annihilation and Soviet indoctrination. Just as Americans feared a nuclear strike from across the Iron Curtain, so too did Britons. However, on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean this fear was rooted in very different geographic, social, political and environmental conditions. America occupies a large landmass where blasts would be dispersed and, for many, likely far away; Britons lived on a small island and did not have the luxury of imagining that they would be at least somewhat unaffected. Radioactive material from a strike on America would cover a large expanse, but this would only be a fraction of the country; in Britain the whole country could potentially be exposed. Americans were advised to shelter from this fallout in their basements; Britons, many of whose homes lacked cellars, were instead advised to shelter in often non-existent windless rooms, giving rise to a sense that even the nation's civil defence guidance would not adequately protect them. Similarly, while both nations feared that the USSR had snuck sleeper agents into their countries, in Britain suspicions were largely directed at figures in the government, the diplomatic service and the army, while in the United States this coalesced into a more nebulous, pervasive fear that anyone in any community might be an undercover spy. While the same issues festered under the two societies, leaking out into

public debate and policy, the form they took was shaped by dissimilar national contexts. While the results of this may seem to be minor national differences, they shaped the ways in which British and American understandings of the nuclear and Soviet threats interacted with the paranoid images and stories of many 1950s science fiction films. For example, 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.[8] 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 US readings of 1950s science fiction films. 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. In relation to both the bomb and the Communists, this provides the first means of distinguishing between the ways in which British and American audiences are likely to have interpreted 1950s science fiction cinema.

The second method of differentiating these two national responses has been the insistence on recognizing that, despite being extremely close allies during the Cold War, Britain and the United States each had their own concerns that were not major issues for the other. America's golden age of unrivalled and increasing prosperity sat in contrast to Britain's stagnating economy that, for much of the 1950s, struggled to recover from the damage done to it by the Second World War. In addition, America remained overwhelmingly white, but had a long and bloody history of racial violence, while race riots erupted on Britain's street for the first time as a result of significant and rising colonial and Commonwealth migration to the metropole. While independence movements in Africa and Asia washed away Britain's former empire, America expanded both its influence and its territory through the ascension of two new states. The United States used its economic and military might to project power across the world, from Europe to Korea; Britain was humiliated on the global stage after having its plot to take control of the Suez Canal exposed and thwarted by its American allies. While the two countries may have shared a fear of nuclear devastation and Soviet

infiltration, however differently these fears were expressed, they clearly found themselves in unique and radically different positions on a wide range of other issues.

While these topics have rarely been a feature of the discussion of 1950s science fiction films, they are no less valid frames of reference through which to consider the genre than the Soviets or the bomb. While the latter two have the distinction of being key concerns across the West during this era, they were not necessarily more prominent nor more concerning than nationally specific issues with which these countries contended. Britain had its own problems quite apart from those being felt in America and, if the Soviets and their bombs could shape the reception of 1950s science fiction cinema in the United States, these domestic issues were certainly capable of doing the same in Britain.

However, it is important not to set the films themselves aside entirely in this focus on reception contexts. After all, much science fiction consumed in British cinemas originated in America and, if American films were produced in an environment saturated with anxieties about the USSR and the bomb, those were the concerns most likely to be evoked by them, regardless of where they were screened. Similarly, many British films of this genre adopted tropes and iconography established in US films, which may have led some to address similar concerns. However, this deprives both British film producers and audiences of agency, reducing them to the status of mere copies of their American counterparts. This was certainly not the case for British film producers, who made science fiction films with a style, atmosphere and character that did not simply mimic US output, but instead responded to British concerns and production contexts.[9] While personal accounts of science fiction film viewing by British audiences from this period are rare, the spectrum of possible interpretations open to them certainly suggests that they too were not simply pale copies of their American cousins. They had their own concerns, priorities and understandings of major and minor geopolitical issues, and hence their own strategies for understanding cultural productions. Much work has been done to differentiate British films of this period from American productions; the same process has now begun for their audiences too.

Of course, these two points in the lifecycle of a film, production and reception, are not unconnected. Highlighting how 1950s science fiction cinema was available for interpretation and reinterpretation within different national contexts also reveals something about the character of the films too. They are slippery, shimmering things, able to take a clear stance on particular issues when

seen in one light, but to become much more ambiguous when seen in another. This is never more clear than in relation to the classic *It Came from Outer Space* (1953). In its identity-snatching aliens, its remote, small-town setting and its lone scientist hero, it is a very close relative of paranoid Red Scare films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and its predecessor, *Invaders from Mars* (1953). Much of *It Came*'s DNA is held in common with such films, but the configuration of the shared components is very different. Far from being another reactionary, anti-communist production, *It Came* is now remembered as a bold and cautionary allegory of Cold War compromise. Indeed, Jack Arnold, the film's director, has argued that:

> *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.[10]

What is apparent here, then, is the shifting meanings that can be found in the iconography of such films. When pieced together in one manner, they can make a film appear to be deeply anxious about the prospect of an unseen Soviet invasion, but when reconstructed in a different form they produce quite the opposite effect. However, one could also argue that, given how difficult to pin down these icons of the genre are, it is not only the form they adopt in the film but also the contexts in which audiences come to comprehend them that would render them open to reinterpretation. As I have argued in these pages, there are elements of *It Came*'s message of tolerance that could have found a receptive audience in Britain, but there were many who could also have seen in it a nightmarish vision of Establishment figures being corrupted in a dangerous hinterland, away from the stabilizing forces of society, just as they feared had happened to their own countrymen. *It Came*'s reputation as a staunch critique of the excesses of McCarthyism seems much less secure in this context, both as a result of the film's availability for opposing readings and also since McCarthyism was itself seen as alien to Britain. Lacking the American political context against which the film is often seen to react, it arrived in Britain untethered, unstable and ripe for renegotiation. The iconography of the depersonalization films may have been able to shift its meanings through reconfiguration, but it was also able to find new meanings again when situated within very different sociopolitical contexts.

The point here is not simply that one film was able to mean different things to different people, but rather that 1950s science fiction cinema itself is particularly polysemic in character. This has often been the case for science fiction,

which tends to comment on the wider world through allegory, a narrative form that relies on polysemy. If during the 1950s, for example, science fiction films engaged with Cold War political discourse through stories of colossal monsters, flying saucers and possessed villagers, these stories needed to refer to ideas that they did not directly represent, which is to say that they would operate at the level of allegory. In this sense, allegory operates much as it does in literature, where there is 'the possibility of an otherness, a polysemy, inherent in the very words on the page; allegory therefore names the fact that language can signify many things at once'.[11] When transferred to the screen, this account of allegory explains the ability of possessed bodies in 1950s science fiction films to tell stories about the fear of Soviet infiltrators, since the image of the former is polysemic in its reference both to itself and to the latter. However, this form of allegory is dependent on 'the logocentric coherence of its meanings, grounded in the material unity of its signs'.[12] Only when the two referents to which the image on screen points are intelligible to the viewer can the hollow men in the desert indicate both the victims of alien depersonalization and the victims of Soviet brainwashing. Where one of these referents is rendered unclear by the audience's lack of familiarity with the cultural context to which the film alludes, the allegorical meaning of the film vanishes, or, where a new referent is available to substitute, is replaced with a different allegorical meaning. As such, 1950s science fiction films utilize their iconography as signs and symbols, assuming that their audience is properly equipped by their shared cultural reference points to decipher and interpret the political commentary. However, when seen outside of that shared culture, where references that may have once seemed clear and precise are rendered obscure, these signs and symbols can become tethered unexpectedly to any number of new ideas and debates. As such, the icons of the genre are rendered polysemic not only through their ability to refer at once to the science fictional and the political, but also through their ability to slip between different political referents in different contexts and for different audiences. It is this second, more radical type of polysemy that renders the genre during this period so fluid and open to an array of readings.

This is, of course, true of all allegorical texts, but comes into particularly sharp focus when the texts in question are widely exported into different national contexts, where their connection to their original allegorical referents is significantly weakened, and when this occurs at a time of significant domestic tension, which fractures the audience through their adoption of sometimes oppositional perspectives. Films are, of course, a readily exportable commodity and are often

produced with the aim of reaching an international audience, while the early Cold War years of the 1950s saw rifts form in British society that would crack wide open during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. These were ideal conditions for allegory to become confused and to be redirected. Alongside the fact that science fiction took an even stronger allegorical bent than usual during this period, this explains the genre's radical polysemy and resultant ready availability for reinterpretation in the 1950s.

In light of this 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'.[13] The malleability of *Body Snatchers*' metaphors is certainly worthy of note, but it is not unique. It is a quality that this film shares with much science fiction of the era. Science, the alien, the mutated beast and numerous other 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.

This brings matters back to the central argument that has underpinned this book, which is that there exists a British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema that is both unique, in that it relies 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. There are necessary caveats here in that the paucity of information about the responses of real audiences in British cinemas during the 1950s makes it all but impossible to know how these films were actually understood at the time. Reviews in newspapers and periodicals are compromised by their own industrial agendas and by the often narrow socio-economic backgrounds from which their authors emerged, while surviving diaries of ordinary cinema-goers are few in number and often do not record specific responses in any detail. Memory, another possible source of information, is malleable and changes shape, losing information and reconstructing experiences inaccurately, especially after six and a half decades have passed. As such, the real people who made up British cinema audience of 1950s science fiction remain elusive, while the need to give form to their experiences to resist the Americanization of British film reception increases. Other methods for filling this void are required. Tracing the range of possible

allegorical meanings enabled by the relationship between these films and the sociopolitical contexts of their reception may not provide a definitive account of the British understanding of 1950s science fiction films, but it does map out the landscape within which that understanding was located, which in turn enables the differentiation of these two countries' reception histories, as this volume has demonstrated.

While this differentiation has partly relied on the dislocation of the allegorical elements of US 1950s science fiction films when viewed outside their home country, many 1950s films watched by Britons in this decade were produced at home and had a strong relationship to the contemporary sociopolitical environment of this country. 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 country's science fiction films at this time.[14] Much as in America, the genre was both keen and able to address the current political climate through allegory. While this may initially indicate that the allegorical aspects of such films would be readily comprehensible to British audiences, as has become clear the flexibility of the metaphors employed by the genre was as evident in these British productions as it was in their American counterparts. Rather than finding their allegorical meanings refracted through a new international context, British films were instead presented with a British audience that was fracturing around pressing issues, such as immigration or the Anglo-American relationship. The various positions taken by members of the public on a wide range of contemporary public debates meant that domestic 1950s science fiction films were liable for renegotiation and reinterpretation in much the same way as their US cousins. The genre sustained its radically polysemic nature across productions from both countries during the 1950s. As such, this slipperiness of allegorical meaning 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 contexts of these films provided here suggests that it might now be possible to produce a more holistic account of the genre in Britain during this period. Both areas of research 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 book, such as nuclear science and Britain's imperial decline, are also discussed in this earlier work. By situating these two areas of research alongside one another, some indication of

the relationship between the production and reception of these films in Britain may emerge. Although this conclusion is not the place to begin such an analysis, it is certainly worth noting the opening up of broader avenues of enquiry into the place that science fiction cinema occupied in 1950s Britain.

While shining light on the British reception history of 1950s science fiction cinema is valuable in its own right, not least since it encourages the disruption of the international adoption of US readings and challenges the underpinning assumption that Western countries received these films in a largely uniform manner, it also encourages questions that could have consequences not only for the study of science fiction cinema, but also for research into the circulation of films beyond their own national contexts more broadly. For example, although I have provided some sense of the British reception contexts of films produced in the countries that dominated the genre during this period, I have only been able to provide a few insights into how the differences between these two national science fiction cinemas may have been understood and interpreted by their audiences. While the discussion in Chapter 7 of American actors in British productions and British films that attempted to hide their national origins, such as *Fiend without a Face* (1958), suggests some of the ways in which the interpretation of British and American films may have differed in Britain as a result of their nationality, there remains more work to be done in this area. Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston have identified several important ways in which the science fiction of these countries, both on film and television, differed during this period, but the consequences of this for the British reception of the genre have only been touched on in this volume.[15] Consequently, there remains scope for future research.

Questions could also be asked about the relationship between these films and other countries besides Britain and America. The arguments presented here have indicated that the meanings generated by science fiction films of this period were largely dependent on reception contexts that varied, sometimes substantially, 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. 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 true of these aforementioned countries.

While contextualizing the genre within British public debates of the decade can go some way towards guarding against the use of American readings to address its British reception, further work is necessary to describe the unique reception histories that also existed in other countries.

Alongside this broad, internationally focused research, I would also suggest that investigating the ways in which the familiarity of US interpretations 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, for example, are partly to be found in 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.[16] 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 or in London. In exposing the risk posed by the international adoption of US cinema memory to the preservation of localized histories of film reception, this book calls 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.

These are, however, concerns for another author on another day. For now, it is sufficient to note the small contribution that returning to light the specificity of a national reception history can play in attempts to resist the dangers that Erich Fromm associated with pseudo thought. Writing during the Second World War, Fromm wonders what causes humanity so frequently to relinquish its 'freedom from the political, economic, and spiritual shackles that have bound men'.[17] 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'.[18] He discusses three means by which we seek to minimize our exposure to these negative aspects of freedom, one of which is the human tendency towards the 'suppression of critical thinking'.[19] 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.[20] 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'.[21] 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'.[22] For Fromm, this uncritical adoption of received wisdom is prevalent across human experience and is the same mechanism through which, for example, 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'.[23] 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 capacity to accept and internalize received wisdom without question. This process can be observed in a wide range of human interactions, from the most meaningful to the most trivial. Somewhere on this spectrum sits the cultural imperialism of American memories of 1950s science fiction cinema. Claims about the reception of these films in America have to some extent been implicitly applied to British audiences despite their seemingly obvious inability to speak to the responses of cinema-goers in that country. In this sense, these interpretations have been accepted unquestioningly as a form of received wisdom. The international adoption of American readings of 1950s science fiction films is one example where our capacity for critical thinking has not been fully exercised and, as such, there has emerged a reliance on received wisdom. By failing to challenge the limitations of this example of the globalization of memory, the popular understanding of these films has succumbed to what Fromm terms 'pseudo thinking', the uncritical acceptance of opinions from an external authority.[24] In this case, the authority in question is the critical orthodoxy that has found its claims about US readings of 1950s science fiction cinema being applied more broadly than is tenable, sometimes as a consequence of the space left open for ambiguity about the geographic limitations of its claims. The repeated emphasis placed on American

anxieties about the bomb and the Soviets in interpretations of 1950s science fic-
tion cinema, and the resultant obfuscation of the fact that other countries would
have their own reception histories, brings to mind the type of compulsive con-
formity against which Fromm cautions. Acknowledging the different relation-
ships that these films could have had with their audiences in varied reception
contexts provides a means of breaking out of these 'accepted patterns' of thought
and moving towards a more pluralistic history of the genre.[25] In so doing it
encourages the dismissal of the types of pseudo thought that has established and
defended authoritative or dominant interpretations of films and genres.

Sarah Street, Sue Harper and James Chapman have spearheaded recent devel-
opments in this process by showing how the contexts of a film's reception can
play a central role in determining its meaning for an audience.[26] This approach
offers the opportunity 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. Sometimes a radioactive ant may well be a
metaphor for the nuclear bomb, but the time has come to wonder what else that
monstrous, mutant insect might mean.

Notes

Introduction

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

2 Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', in *Liquid Metal*, ed. Sean Redmond (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 40–47. See, for example, Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World as We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 110; and M. Keith Booker, 'Science Fiction and the Cold War' in *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 176.

3 Keith Chapman, 'Energy' in *The Changing Geography of the United Kingdom*, ed. Vince Gardiner and Hugh Matthews, 3rd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 43.

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

5 American films were often exported to Britain some time after their domestic release. Since this book is interested in their relationship to British reception contexts, all release dates provided represent the year in which they entered circulation in Britain. However, films were distributed across 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.

6 Paul Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1987), 5.

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

9 Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 140.

10   Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s*
     (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 17.

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

12   M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold
     War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946–1964*
     (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), 10.

13   Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower,
     2007), 7.

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

15   This raises questions about what the term 'science fiction' is taken to mean and
     the definition of the genre employed here. There is a long history of scholarly
     writing about the boundaries of science fiction, both on screen and in literature.
     See, for example, Brooks Landon, *Science Fiction after 1900: From the Steam Man
     to the Stars* (London: Routledge, 2002), 31; and Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of
     Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale
     University Press, 1979). 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 book
     was framed as science fiction, or some analogous classification, 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 book a more concrete definition of what is meant by 'science
     fiction' is largely unnecessary.

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

17   Keith M. Johnson, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Berg,
     2011), 76.

18   Ibid., 77.

19   Ibid.

20   Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*, 6.

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

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

23   '*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*', *Picturegoer*, 6 October 1956, 12.

24   Wheeler Winston Dixon, *A History of Horror* (Piscataway: Rutgers University
     Press, 2010), 88.

25   Swann, *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain*, 6.

26 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, the Hammer film will be referred to here as *The Quatermass Xperiment* and the BBC serial as *The Quatermass Experiment*.

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35 Charles A. Willis, *America in the 1950s* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 9–10.

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37 Willis, *America in the 1950s*, 27.

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47 Willis, *America in the 1950s*, 5–6.

48 Ibid., 6.

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63 Hendershot, *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*, 1.

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91   Ibid.

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93   Ibid.

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95   Ibid., 48.

96   Ibid.

97   Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*, 133–135 and 138.

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104 Booker, *Alternate Americas*, 65; Lucanio, *Them or Us*.

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Chapter 8

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15   Vieth, *Screening Science*, 38–39.

16   'Bud and Lou Meet the Ladies', *Picturegoer*, 18 October 1952, 17.

17   Ernie Player, 'The Monster is a Load of Tripe . . . and Confidentially That's Just What it is', *Picturegoer*, 11 February 1956, 11.

18   David Marlowe, 'Now We're Shooting Stars into Space', *Picturegoer*, 3 January 1953, 17.

19   '*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*', *Picturegoer*, 18 June 1955, 28.

20   'Flight to Mars', *Picturegoer*, 28 June 1952, 19.

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22   Ibid.

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24   Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton, *Ray Harryhausen: An Animated Life* (London: Aurum Press, 2003), 80.

25   John D. Daugherty, *Exploration: Themes of Science Fiction, a Brief Guide* (Victoria: Trafford, 2004), 16; '*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*', *Picturegoer*, 13 July 1957, 16.

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27   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 David Butler, *Fantasy Cinema: Impossible Worlds on Screen* (London: Wallflower Press, 2010), 77.

28   John Johnson, *Cheap Tricks and Class Acts: Special Effects, Makeup and Stunts from the Films of the Fantastic Fifties* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1996), 197.

29   James Kendrick, *Hollywood Bloodshed: Violence in 1980s American Cinema* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 42.

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31   '*Fiend without a Face*', *Picturegoer*, 22 November 1958, 15.

32   Johnson, *Cheap Tricks and Class Acts*, 71.

33   Margaret Hinxman, 'What a War and What a Fake!', *Picturegoer*, 9 May 1953, 12.

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Conclusion

1 Geraghty, *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, 20; Jancovich, *Rational Fears*, 17.

2 Booker, *Alternate Americas*, 66; Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film*, 140; Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 68; Jancovich, *Rational Fears*; Noonan, *Women Scientists in Fifties Science Fiction Films*; Lucanio, *Them or Us*.

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8 Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*, 111 and 140.

9 For more on the character of British films from this period, including science fiction productions, see Chibnall and McFarlane, *The British 'B' Film*.

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14 Hutchings, ' "We're the Martians Now" ', 33–47; Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond*, 37–50; Conrich, 'Trashing London', 88–98; Street, *British National Cinema*, 88; Chibnall, 'Alien Women', 57–74; Chibnall and McFarlane, *The British 'B' Film*, 282–284.

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