

MONSTERS LIKE US: REEXAMINING *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*  
THROUGH THE DECADES

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the multiple versions of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in concert and determine the reason for their continued presence in the American cultural landscape. To do so I will look at the novel and four films (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Jack Finney 1955), *Invasion of the Body Snatcher* (dir. Don Siegel 1956), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Phillip Kaufman 1978), *Body Snatchers* (dir. Abel Ferrara 1993), and *Invasion* (dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel 2007)) and examine the context in which they were created. In reexamining the novel and films, a central theme begins to emerge: interiority. Fear in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* moves from an external to an internal threat. The bodily locus of the monstrous other has been repurposed and re-projected outward. The internal nature of the monstrous threat is displayed in the narrative's use of production and distribution, mental health professionals, pseudo-families, and the vilification of sleep. Finally, this paper will examine the studio influence on the various films and their impact on the relative endings.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the Christmas season of 1954, in between advertisements for cigarettes and champagne for the holidays, *Collier's* magazine released the first iteration of a story that has maintained its presence in the American cultural landscape for nearly 60 years. Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* would eventually take on its better-known name, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, after the release of its sleeper-hit film of the same name in 1956. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel) has been remade as a film three times since the 1950s: *Invasion of the Body Snatcher* (dir. Philip Kaufman, 1978), *Body Snatchers* (dir. Abel Ferrara, 1993), and most recently *The Invasion* (dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2007). The novel and its film adaptation have maintained their hold on the American imagination because they explore the blurred line between paranoia and reality in a way that both satisfies our craving for tension and unsettles our comfortable acceptance of what it means to be human. *Body Snatcher's* continued relevance is due in part to its adherence to the original material while being flexible enough to adapt to changing tastes and standards of the viewing public. Exploring the novel and four films in concert reveals underlying themes that are maintained through the decades, and also changes that are significant enough to reveal something about the decade in which they were created.

Post-World War II prosperity gave Finney the opportunity to comment on disturbing trends in production, distribution, and overconsumption. This commentary continues in some form or another in each film version. In the novel, the production and distribution scene is almost pastoral, with a small town "Bargain Jubilee" and the town's surrounding farmers bringing in their produce and goods (Finney 158). This year's Jubilee, however, has taken a turn for the

bizarre. Instead of “an ordinary but rather shabby shopping street,” (Finney 159) people are passing out giant pods, which will eventually take over the town. In the 1956 film; the main characters, Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) and Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter), watch the outdoor sale from a second story window as their town is transformed into the center of the alien invasion. In the 1978 film, the scene moves from the sub-rural to urban waterfront docks, when Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland) stumbles into the warehouse where the pods are grown and sees them loaded onto ships by the crateful. Here globalization is represented in the most sinister terms. By 1993, it is an already-podified military that attempts to disperse the pods by attempting to move them to all of the hundreds of bases nationwide by convoy. This is a faster, more targeted means of distribution, one that relies on an extant system that values precision. In 2007, the means of distribution shifts to incorporate pharmaceuticals and the Center for Disease Control. Fulfilling the fantasy of every conspiracy-nut, the federally operated CDC is controlled by a man who has been recently podified. He is selling vaccinations to pharmaceutical companies which are in actuality a microbial form of the seed pod. All the while podified drink servers are vomiting the pod-microbe into the cups of the pharmaceutical reps drinks, ensuring their eventual podhood and therefore, compliance.

The various methods the pods use for dispersal highlights the production methods for each decade. The change in setting, from sub-rural, to inner city, to a military base and finally to a seat of power in Washington D.C., comments on the movement of economic power in their respective eras. The pods represent goods moving through their relative economic system as the ousted protagonist must learn to navigate according to a new pod order that mirrors the economic world which he/she already inhabited. It is only because of the pods that the protagonists are

confronted with the reality of an alienating economic system. Each iteration of *Body Snatchers* uses the pods to represent the manner in which goods are produced and dispersed through our economic system. *Body Snatchers* effectively comments on overconsumption and the manner it is executed in each decade.

With the exception of the 2007 film, the manner in which the pods [re]produce is by taking on the characteristics of a sleeping body near it. The pod must be placed relatively near a victim (e.g. in his or her basement, or a broom closet) in order to take on the memories and appearance of the person it replaces. Pods are placed in homes by “local gas- and electric meter reader[s]...[they] enter basements freely, usually with no one accompanying [them]” (Finney 181); the pod develops into a human-like shape before adopting memories and physical characteristics while the characters sleep. Full pod conversion requires one to fall asleep, at which point a cocoon-like membrane forms around the sleeping person, who is reborn as a physically identical, but emotionless version of themselves. The initial family member who is podified acts as the vanguard, bringing already grown pods to lie next to sleeping family members. The large seedpods are “grown on a plant or something” (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956) before being passed around to home. The 2007 version is the outlier in that it substitutes the pod for a spore, which must be ingested or injected, i.e. a fluid exchange must take place. The shift from oversized vegetable to alien fungal infection makes the spread more rapid and less cumbersome, solving the implausible methods earlier iterations chose to ignore. Likening podhood to a disease also allows for a happy ending; diseases can be cured, being replaced by an emotionless alien while your body disintegrates cannot.



Using such a complicated means of producing the pods and the podified person, the novel and its film adaptations set themselves apart from other parasitic narratives, which assume either total or isolated conversion. That is, either the whole world is taken over, and we are following only a few remaining humans e.g., Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and its several film reincarnations, or it is an isolated event and only a few people are wrestling with a single monster (e.g. *The Thing*). Not so with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; here, audiences watch as the takeover unfolds, and with creeping tension pod-people infiltrate further and further into towns and cities.

One notable element of the plot that seemed to defy conventions in the earliest version is the lack of nuclear families. Both Miles and Becky (the almost romantic leads) are recent divorcees and any attempt at romance is interrupted either by friends or pods. Instead of more traditional nuclear families, a quasi-family is formed by Miles and Becky, as well as their married but childless friends Jack and Teddy Belicec (King Donovan and Carolyn Jones, respectively in the 1956 film) who all move in together as the invasion creeps its way through town. The pattern repeats in the 1978 version with Matthew Bennell (unmarried), and Elizabeth Driscoll, who has recently split from her long-term partner Geoffrey under the suspicion that he is no longer the same person (he isn't). As the concern about the invasion mounts Matthew and Elizabeth (played by Brooke Adams) move in with their married (but again, childless) friends Nancy and Jack Belicec (Veronica Cartwright and Jeff Goldblum respectively). In these three iterations, this pattern is copied, but the familial links are deeper than simply staying together: they eat breakfast and dinner together, and much of the decision-making becomes collective rather than individual. The 1993 film sees an apparent shift in this pattern; however, the nuclear

family is overrun with dysfunction: Marti (Gabrielle Anwar) is the daughter of Steve Malone (Terry Kinney), but her mother is dead and had been replaced by Carol (Meg Tilly) and her younger half-brother, Andy (Reilly Murphey). Marti often reminds her father that Carol is a poor substitute for her real, deceased mother. Children become central to the plot in both this and 2007 version, but family units remain fractured rather than harmonious. The 1993 version is from the perspective of the children. There is the added element of disbelief on the part of the adults, particularly with regards to Andy, who witnesses his mother's transformation, only to be dismissed by his father when Andy insists his mother is dead. Marti and her father discover the pods simultaneously, but by then the damage is done, and they are running from a town full of pod-people; if only they'd listened to poor Andy. Aside from a shifted perspective the presence of a child ignites protective instincts among the characters and the audience. Marti refuses to leave the base without her six-year-old brother, for instance, unfortunately he has already been podified and by the end of the film he tries to crash the helicopter in which they are trying to escape. In the preposterously upbeat 2007 film, the children no longer threaten the protagonists' survival, but represent their salvation. Carol Driscoll (Nicole Kidman) searches not only for her son Ollie (Jackson Bond) but the cure his blood evidently contains. Ollie suffered from encephalitis as an infant, which makes it impossible for the pod-spore to "latch" onto his brain; therefore, he is immune. The goals for Carol, however, are less lofty; she is a mother seeking her son after he has been kidnapped by an alien version of her podified ex-husband, the boy's father. The truly gripping moments in the film are centered on Carol trying to control her maternal instincts to evade detection from the pods. It is heavily implied that the ex-husband only requested contact with their son because of his podhood and that previously he was a deadbeat

dad. There is a second child in the 2007 reboot, a podified child, Gene (Eric Benjamin) who not only foreshadows the events but also outs Carol as human, twice. Carol eventually adopts Gene, as his parents did not survive podification. The dramatic shift in casting, from all-adult pseudo-families to more traditionally defined familial roles, which include older and younger members, attempts to raise the stakes in the later films. In general, the presence of children is a gimmick employed to emotionally manipulate the audience, the 1993 film redeems its status as a horror film by tossing the “cute” kid out of a helicopter mid-flight after it is discovered that he has been podified. The children are a dumping ground for our concern, but lack any characterization aside from their cuteness. The earlier films do not rely on such cheap tactics to engender the audience’s sympathy, instead the characters are well crafted, and we feel their deaths because we like them, not because they elicit primordial protective instincts.

The early texts’ childlessness is part of their tendency to focus on friendship rather than genetic relationships. Becky Driscoll (1954, 1956) abandons her father for her newfound ties without hesitation once she suspects he is a pod-person. Elizabeth Driscoll (1978) has the same reaction to her boyfriend and immediately adopts a new partner in Matthew. Even Marti (1993), as mentioned above, shoves her podified six-year-old half-brother out of a helicopter while her new boyfriend flies away. In order to be successful against the invading alien-other, each protagonist, in turn, abandons a family member once podification is suspected and/or confirmed. Complete abandonment of loved ones is a running theme in the middle iterations of the narrative. The novel and the 2007 film include reunification scenes, but they also distinguish themselves in a manner that will be discussed shortly. While the pod-people separate from their communities with no emotional consequences, the protagonists are forced to follow in their inhumane

footsteps. When they are able and willing to do so it blurs the distinction between humanity and pod-people. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* unsettles the concept of family, and then further interrogates the need for any kind of relationship specifically if that relationship is going to hinder the resistance against the pods. Instead of relying on a lone hero, to save the day, *Invasion* focuses on groups of people attempting to subvert pod authority, and mostly failing because of their group ties.

The mental health professionals or psychiatrists play a major role in each text. The psychiatrists dispense either psychobabble or medication in an attempt to contain or redirect the emotions of the protagonists. This character is a pseudo-expert, diagnosing patients as delusional, sometimes without even having met them. It is eventually revealed that the psychiatrist character is a pod-person, and that they have been diverting the protagonists from the truth. Again, twisting the original, the 2007 version that re-casts the psychiatrist as a heroine, Carol Driscoll who avoids podhood, although she comes very close. Because she is essentially heroic instead of villainous, she no longer dispenses psychobabble but (problematic from another angle) medication to help her rattled patients stay calm. Ironically, her prescriptions dull their emotions in a manner nearly indistinguishable from those family members that have converted to pods. While earlier misdiagnosis could be attributed to the pod-psychiatrists' misdirection, Carol is not motivated by podhood, instead, as a psychiatrist, her role is to alleviate her patients' emotions in the same way a doctor alleviates pain—medication. It is because of Carol Driscoll that the role of the psychiatrist becomes clear; the psychiatrist characters are intended to dull the emotions of characters around them. At first they do so by assuring the humans that the pods are part of a neurosis or mass hysteria that is not real, thereby assuaging the fears of the protagonists.

When the pods are discovered, and it is no longer a question of denial, the psychiatrists are at the forefront of trying to convert the remaining humans to podhood, and changing them from emotional humans, to non-emotional pod-people. In Finney's narrative, psychiatrists, the profession normally tasked with providing emotional support; is skewed so much, they are now responsible for delivering a new non-emotional world. Though Carol is responsible for dulling the emotional reality of those around her it is ostensibly to help people, and in spite of her role as a psychiatrist her allegiance to humanity never waivers. Carol could almost redeem her profession, but the film stops short of having Carol defending the emotional reality of all mankind, she is focused on saving her son and her psychiatrist background is just that, background. Her attempts to suppress emotion are damaging only to her patients. For the pods however, the goal is world domination, the pods offer a final solution to humanity's true ill: emotion. What Carol Driscoll and the earlier iterations of psychiatrists have in common is that they are all attempting to control the emotive realities of others. It is because of this that regardless of their pod-status, psychiatrists occupy similar roles as the pods with regard to emotion.

Irrespective of psychiatric involvement, characters are forced to adopt non-emotive personas to evade detection; characters are required to shed elements of their humanity in order to protect what makes them human. Once the pod-invasion is in full swing, the human protagonists become a minority and the pods the majority. The protagonists discover that they can "fool [the pod-people]" by acting as though they have no emotion. With towns and cities converted, identifying the remaining humans becomes a game of "who cracks first." In the earliest iterations, the humans are outed by an accident that elicits an almost involuntary

response; a dog is hit (or nearly hit, it is not clear) by a truck and Becky screams in fright. In the 1978 version, the couple reacts to a malformed pod-animal (a dog with the face of a man) that causes Elizabeth (and probably a few in the audience) to scream, and betray her humanity. In the 1993 film, Marti pleads with what she thinks is a human friend for information on her younger brother, but is outed instead of informed. In 2007, Carol is recognized and outed; she is told to “stop pretending.” Podhood is an inevitability; either characters will become actual pods, or be forced to hide their humanity and become indistinguishable from the pod-people. The question is whether or not the non-emotive persona is permanent.

Shedding one’s emotion in order to survive is difficult enough, but to evade the pods, the protagonists must do the impossible, forgo sleep. Recall that in order to fully transform, a person must fall asleep. Once the protagonists become aware that the transformation occurs during sleep, wakefulness becomes paramount. In order to maintain their already tentative grasp of humanity, they take all manner of uppers, including amphetamines and adrenaline, to stave off podhood. In the novel, no one of note falls asleep, and four out of four main characters survive, and more importantly, maintain their humanity. This is not so in any of the films, almost all of the characters are eventually podified. The alternative is that they escape the area that is most infected by pod-people and hope that their next destination is less vegetal. The 2007 version once again deviates, in that while many are podified, all that survive podification eventually have their humanity restored. Though a few do not survive the podification process, or are killed by fleeing humans, the overall outcome is a happy one. The significance of this will be explored elsewhere in the paper. In every version of the narrative, the protagonists must paradoxically act inhuman in order to maintain their humanity.

Though the novel and each of the films works with similar themes throughout the decades, the endings are decidedly different. In total, they form a sort of “U” shaped pattern with the first and last version having the most upbeat ending, while the second, third and fourth end either ambiguously or in despair. Each ending seems to reflect the relative cynicism or optimism at the time of its release. The novel ends with a bureaucratic *deus ex machina*, as the FBI swoops in to save the day just as the protagonists are preparing to attempt their last stand against the pods. The director of the first film intended a bleak ending; however, the studio, Allied Artists, demanded a happy ending. Don Siegel gave *Allied*, an at best, ambiguous ending; even reading the film in the most hopeful way renders a bleak outlook for Miles Bennell, whose entire town and prospective girlfriend have been turned into emotionless aliens. The 1978 film ends with the bleakest outlook as the protagonist himself is changed into a pod person and stands finger extended, mouth agape and releasing an ear-piercing scream, identifying the last known human, poor little Nancy Belicec. *Body Snatcher* is almost hopeful; although all of Marti’s family is dead (she has killed their pod versions), she and her boyfriend Tim (Billy Wirth) have flown away in a commandeered helicopter. As they make contact with Atlanta, however, an ominous voice plays in the background, echoing what Marti’s podified stepmother asked when her family tried to flee, “Where you gonna go? Where you gonna run? ‘Cause there’s no one like you left.” Though the film is not explicit, the implication is that Marti and Tim will not find a safe landing; it concludes therefore ambiguously at best, in the way Siegel’s 1956 film did. The 2007 film saw a return to the happy ending that echoes that of the original novel; even more cloying and dubious than its progenitor, the ending seems to come from nowhere. After finding Ollie, doctors from the CDC are able to synthesize a vaccine that eliminates the “spore” from the body and

allows a return to normal. The endings speak not only to optimism or cynicism in the age in which they were produced but also to the desire of the studios to produce a film that would attract audiences. The 1950s wanted upbeat, happy endings; Finney provided, Allied Artists continued, though with more ambiguity. The 1970s, post-Watergate, post-Vietnam era cynicism shines through in Philip Kaufman's film. The bleak ending highlights that cynicism as well as staking the film's claim firmly in the horror genre. The ambiguous ending in the 1990s is sinister to be sure, but it is undermined by the relative youth of the surviving humans, which hints at 1990s optimism. If the 1990s were vaguely optimistic, the naughts were glowing with scientific optimism, except that the 2007 film was a notorious flop. The film, however, isn't so much a triumph of humanity over space invaders as it is an admission of fallibility which is reflected in the running theme of our propensity towards violence. The pods were *almost* an improvement on our uncontrollable selves in 2007, but the pod invasion removed all of the good parts of humanity, as well as the bad and therefore had to end.

Though the original film was often lumped in with other bug-eyed-monster and alien movies, the appeal of the story lies in the lack of an exterior monster. Both for budgetary and literary reasons, Hollywood has turned this into an endlessly adaptable story. The monster need not have fancy costumes or special effects. The eeriest moment occurs when the audience realizes along with the characters that something fundamental has changed about their loved ones. The horrifying paradox that faces the protagonists in the novel and all four films is that in order to retain their own humanity they must shed the very things that make them human: emotion, relationships, sleep, among many others.



I will argue that the local production of the pods, the familial relationships, and the psychological and sleep-oriented elements of this narrative indicate an internal fear. That the persistent source of fear in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* comes not from an exterior alien-other, but from a fundamental, invasive shift that causes the protagonist to become the other in a once familiar community. I will also argue that the decades in which these films were produced may have influenced *modus operandi* of the pods or the humans attempting to combat the pods, but that the fears highlighted by the narrative are constant.

The term “invasion” indicates that some force has taken the once familiar and skewed it until it is unrecognizable. The protagonists are all that remains of a once familiar place; they are now “the others” in a world populated by alien beings— The way in which each protagonist copes with the shift is suggestive of the decade in which the narrative was produced.

Throughout all of the stories our heroes must break into homes, steal women from their beds, get chased out of town, commandeer military helicopters and cop cars, and perform many other tasks that would in most instances make them social pariahs. In this narrative, however, the question is not whether or you will survive, but in what form, and the main action is a fight to maintain sovereignty over one’s own consciousness. In order to achieve this, the protagonist subverts heroic norms and in the process becomes monstrous. In other words, to combat the greater evil; the hero in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* must be willing to commit, otherwise evil acts.

#### Critical Context:

Though many critics have read *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as an era-specific science fiction, Al La Valley explains in his edition of the 1956 continuity script: “While the political

parable of the film has occupied critics, it has hardly been the reason for the film's continuing power with the audience" (15). La Valley sums, in brief, the arguments of previous critics: *Invasion* is a "political parable," highlighting either McCarthy-era paranoia, or the end of the "flower power" movement in the 1970s, or as Robert Ebert posits about the 1993 film, "the AIDS engine?" (*Body Snatchers* Movie Review). The most notable incarnation of this argument is from a 1978 article by Arthur LeGacy, who explains, "The context of the Fifties has...parallels in *Body Snatchers* that the historian of the period would be remiss in not pointing out" (288). Though using *Invasion* as a historical signpost is a reasonable means of taking the temperature of 1950s paranoia, reading it this way does not explain its "continuing power with the audience."

More recent critics have argued beyond era-specific readings. Natania Meeker and Antonia Szabari argue for an ontological reading of the plant-human relationship, suggesting that humanity desires a vegetal takeover. There is quite a bit of evidence for this; Don Siegel explained in an interview "There is a very strong case for being a pod, these pods who get rid of pain...are...doing good," (qtd. in La Valley 154). The pod-people in the narrative certainly try to convince the humans that the pod life is a better one. Reading vegetal transformation as a positive experience in the films or the novel, however, seems dubious. Embedded in Meeker and Szabari's argument is the idea that the peaceable vegetal existence depicted in *Invasion* makes way for future films to depict plant transformation as desirable. It may, but, the characters in *Invasion* are not just reluctant to accept podhood, they are violently opposed to it. The pods are the source of fear in the narrative precisely because they make podhood look so enticing, but to accept podhood is to commit suicide and, therefore, anathema. Meeker and Szabari's article looks at the two earliest films, alongside some modern films; strangely, however, it ignores the

most recent remakes in favor of the film *The Happening* (dir. M. Night Shyamalan 2008).

Though I agree with examining factors outside a historical context, ignoring the major conflict (plants versus people) is questionable.

Jennifer Jenkins argues that the 1956 film should be read as Gothic fiction that has been relocated to the suburbs. She explores the pod people as a metaphor for an all-consuming post-war conformity centered on a domestic sphere. She focuses heavily on the first film, and only leaves a few paragraphs for the 1978 and 2007; she completely ignores the 1993 remake.

Though her reading of *Invasion* as a primarily domestic text is valuable for understanding the relationship between the main characters, it ignores the relationships between the pod people and the remaining humans. Further, her article chooses to broadly characterize the pod-people as “Gothic”, but the pods are by nature mundane, making it difficult to read them as an “uncanny Other,” (Jenkins 478). The pods are scary not because they assume supernatural abilities or form, but because they seem normal. As Stuart Kaminsky explains: “ultimately, your greatest enemy is your own pod-self,” the threat of the uncanny Other seems surmountable compared to combating one’s eventual podhood (qtd. in La Valley 157).

Previous criticism has all but exhausted politicizing the 1950s works, and while it is certainly useful, it fails to explain the narratives endurance. Broader themes contribute the continued influence of the pod people, themes which are only detected by accounting for all five of the narratives.

### Chapter Outline:

Chapter 2, ““Why do we always expect metal ships?’: Production and Distribution,” will explore the changing methods of production and distribution employed by the pods, and how the pods use contemporary means of production and distribution to their advantage. The changing economic environment of that decade is reflected in the pods’ distribution. Because of this, the protagonists often find themselves on the outside of this new pod order. They are then required to either become pods themselves so that they can participate in the new socio-economic structure or be permanently ostracized. This chapter will also focus on the changes in setting over the course of the last several decades and the resultant shift in dispersal methods used by the pods.

Chapter 3, “A Family Affair?: Pod Apocalypse and Family Dynamics,” discusses the changing family structure that, at first, subverts the pods, but eventually makes the protagonists more vulnerable. The pods in the 1950s iterations are representations of procreation and become punishments for the adults who have yet to participate in appropriately procreative acts; the 1970s shares similar themes. By the 1990s, however, children are introduced and become the focus of the narrative. There is a third shift in the early naughts, the protagonist of the film is a single mother, and because her procreative duties have been fulfilled, all of her sexuality must be contained. The pod apocalypse gives her both a motive and an opportunity to do just that. The lack of family structure in the early iterations and the fluid familial ties in the later iterations suggests that the remaining humans were outside the nuclear family norm before the pod apocalypse. The pods provide direct pressure to submit to this norm, and, as such, the early narratives engaged in pseudo-family bonds to combat the pod invasion. The loosely associated

families in the later narratives collapse during the pod invasion but reform to better fit nuclear family norms (if the families survive, that is).

Chapter 4, “‘Contagious neurosis’: Psychobabble and Emotional Suppressants in the Pod Age,” will focus on the psychological elements of the narrative, and specifically how the psychiatrists (and related characters) act as the mechanism by which the pods suppress human emotion. The psychiatrist characters manipulate the protagonists into believing that their reality has been skewed by emotion by using psychobabble in the earliest iterations, and drugs in the later iterations. Once the psychiatrists are revealed as pod people, then they try to convince the remaining humans that an emotionless reality is a better reality.

Chapter 5, “‘Sleep is the villain’: Shifting Fears from Pods to Humans,” will explore the most interior element of fear within the narrative, the fear of sleep. Once it is discovered that full pod-conversion can only occur while one is sleeping, staying awake becomes imperative. The human characters are paradoxically required to become super-human in order to maintain their humanity.

Finally, chapter 6, “‘A fierce inhospitable planet’: Studio Interpretations of Pods and Public Perception,” will begin by contextualizing the films’ endings with the upbeat ending of the novel. I will then discuss the studio influence on the various endings of all of the films. Perceptions of what the public wanted heavily influenced how the studios dictated the endings to the directors. The earliest example of this is in the first film, which required that Don Siegel frame the film such that it has a happy ending. The 1978 film had the most creative control and was subsequently the most successful. The 1993 film was a victim of “development hell,” and did not break even. The 2007 film had multiple directors and went through multiple reshoots that

contributed to its notorious flop. All of the films were subject to the fickle direction from the studios, with varying degrees of success.

## CHAPTER 2

### “WHY DO WE ALWAYS EXPECT METAL SHIPS?”: POD PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

There is an expectation about the manner in which humanity would be invaded by aliens. Bug-eyed monsters would fly in on saucers, step from brightly lit doorways and robotically say “take me to your leader,” before we all kowtowed in terror. Alternatively, perhaps they would just blast us from their ships before we even knew they were there. Nancy Belicec begs the question in the 1978 film, “Why do we always expect metal ships?” It is a valid question; a better strategy on the part of the aliens would be to infiltrate, and replicate – the exact strategy of the pods. Replication is part of their reproductive process, but they infiltrate our economic systems as a platform for the dispersal and production of the pods needed to reproduce. The pod-people do not need to demand meetings with leaders; they become leaders.

In a scene from the original novel that prefigures the dispersal of the pods, Becky and Miles sit down to have a soda to keep them awake. An out-of-towner near them comments on the town:

The man beside me leaned toward me, lowered his voice, and said, ‘What the hell’s going on around here?’ ...’How do you mean?’ I said casually and took a sip of my Coke. It tasted bad; it was too warm and it hadn’t been stirred, and though I looked around there wasn’t a spoon or a straw in sight; and I set the glass down on the counter.

'You can't get an order anymore.' The sales man shrugged. 'Not to amount to anything, anyway. Just the staples, the bare essentials, but none of the extras...People just aren't buying,' he muttered sullenly, (Finney 124-123).

Finney directly links a community's vitality to its buying power. Linking an invasive force to its impact on the economic engine of a specific area is a theme that repeats throughout the series.

The pod-people use similar tactics with the economic systems of production and distribution that they use on human bodies. They slowly take over, then pervert the host for their own purposes. Returning momentarily to the quote: the salesman complains that people are purchasing only the "bare essentials," that they are forgoing the "little extras." Compare that to language Wilma uses to describe her Uncle Ira: "There *is* no emotion--none--only the pretense of it. The words, the gestures, the tone of voice everything else--but not the feeling," (Finney 21). For Wilma, the "little extra," is the emotional attachment to the memories she and Uncle Ira share; the loss of this emotive expression of memory is profound enough to alert her to Uncle Ira's loss.

In Finney's novel the transformation takes place on an "ordinary Saturday," (159) at an outdoor sale called the Bargain Jubilee, where shoppers are given pins to show their allegiance to various local shops. Though this is an annual sale, this year, Miles has noticed that they "hadn't bothered repainting the banner," (158). This is, of course, because the merchants have ceased peddling their typical wares and have moved on to world domination. Miles and Becky watch from the window in Miles' medical practice. The podified townspeople place blue and white pins on their shoulder to signify their allegiance with the pods. The badges once represented the Santa



Mirans' participation in the Bargain Jubilee, but now they represent something much more sinister. Santa Mirans that are still humans are given red and white badge by already podified merchants as if to paint a target on them for future podification. Badges which were previously associated with consumerism have been re-appropriated by the pods as targets. The badges draw direct parallels between the pod person and the bargain shopper.

1950s Americans saw unprecedented growth in manufacture and consumption. As products became nationalized, buying shifted from a predominantly local and agrarian production and consumption to manufacture. The shift away from a local economy meant that previous local influences were fading in favor of advertisements. As cultural critic Thomas Hine notes, “[there was a] new way in which standards were set-- not by families and neighbors but by new kinds of authorities whose message came by television, magazines and backs of boxes,” (9). This shift had an alienating effect on local communities. Rather than relying on friends and neighbors for product recommendations, the 1950s shopper trusted the opinions of dislocated disembodied advertisements.

This alienation is reflected in the pod takeover of Santa Mira. The once recognizable economic center of the town is destabilized by the presence of the pods, and it becomes, “stranger,” or “[not] quite...normal,” (Finney 158). As the scene continues, Miles senses a shift in the atmosphere, from “ordinary,” to military: “like a group of soldiers’ assembly for some routine formation...expectation without any special excitement about it,” (Finney 159). This shift from pedestrian to military foreshadows the invasion itself, but it also suggests that the humans that once inhabited the town have changed fundamentally, into a more rigid, less excitable version of themselves. The pods are driven to Santa Mira to continue their invasion. Soon after

the appropriate badges are passed to the appropriate pod-people, trucks come bearing loads of seedpods. The pods organize themselves such that they are “three or four deep, facing the street,” (Finney 162). A lone traffic cop conducts various groups to their correct vehicles as pods are passed out according to their destination. Miles describes the scene as an “open air market,” but it reads as a breadline, with emotionless people waiting until their supply has run out. The trucks empty within “fifteen minutes,” and the street becomes once again, “typical,” (Finney 166, 167).

This sequence also forces Miles to reconsider his position in the town as it can no longer be saved due to the fact that the residents have now become the invading force. Though this scene is predominantly focused on the distribution of the pods, what is significant is that under the guise of an average Saturday in Santa Mira, the pod-people can carry out their plan for world domination as though they were in an “open air market.” They need not conduct nefarious affairs in backroom meetings or away from the public eye. The invading force hardly needs to disguise the affair as a sale, and the out-of-town pod-people *seem* normal until they are handed giant seedpods. The pods have simply become the town’s main export; in a town which once had a multiplicity of goods, they distribute only pods now. The alienating influence is felt *before* the pods are handed out. After they are handed out, Miles realizes that he is simply no longer a Santa Miran; those who remain are now his “enemies” (Finney 167). Miles exiles himself in his medical practice and refuses to participate in the new Santa Miran economy of pods. As a result, he remains locked inside while “The men, women, and children in the street and stores below me were something else now,” (Finney 167).

Aside from being an outcast and a figurative exile in his medical office, Miles can no longer participate in the community with his profession. He is a doctor, but in a town, and soon

to be a state, converted to pod-hood, what use is there for a doctor? Miles can only watch as his friendships, and his livelihood dissolve into “enemies.” Not because they have been taken, or “snatched,” but because he has been excluded. His invitation to join the pods comes too late, and he is no longer necessary.

In the 1956 film, Miles witnesses the pods being loaded into a truck from what was once “Grimaldi’s farm.” He laments that he did not make the connection between the decline of the Grimaldi produce stand and the production of pods sooner. Santa Mira before the pod invasion was a town full of farmers. Though a farming community is a perfect penetration point for a vegetal invasion force, the result of the pod presence is that traditional farming has been supplanted by pod farming. This new version of farming is exclusive to pods, and the necessity of workers has shrunk from the hundreds needed for farming to relatively few workers who load trucks. No longer a part of the civilized town they once knew, Becky and Miles (soon to be just Miles) are consigned to a life on the edge of town, and in remnants of a once thriving economy. Witnessing this perversion of such a bucolic ritual like farming, disgusts Miles. He is unable to stop the production personally, but he makes it his mission to warn others about the impending invasion so that the pods are unable to continue to corrupt California.

In 1978, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was relocated from rural California to urban San Francisco. The change in scenery means that Matthew Bennell will have a similar encounter with the pods’ production line, but with an urbane twist. Many of the elements do not translate from the rural to the urban without having to account for the already alienating experience of living in a heavily populated city. The claustrophobic *mise en scene* is validated by their metropolitan locale, and the difficulty with which Elizabeth and Matthew must navigate their rapidly changing

environment is intensified by crowds. While the sub-rural environment was necessary for watching as familiar faces became alien, the faces in a large city are already, for the most part, alien. Subtle changes cannot be immediately detected by the protagonist, and in a bustling city, the streets are never really “dead” without arousing immediate suspicion. The tension, then, comes from the movement of the crowd, and the inability to remain as anonymous as before the pods arrived (emotion being a dead giveaway).

The 1970s were a time of great economic turmoil. With baby-boomers coming of age into a country that could hardly afford to support them, and an increase in the cost of goods, the United States saw a rise in unemployment. Rising oil prices compounded the problem, just as jobs began to move overseas. According to cultural analyst Kelly Boyer Sagert, the 1970s “shattered” the notion that American would remain a post-World War II economic powerhouse (7). Further, the 1970s saw the first time in the 20th century that more goods were imported than exported (Sagert 7). Kaufman’s *Invasion* reflects these economic trends particularly in the scenes that pay homage to their 1950s predecessors mentioned above. Matthew and Elizabeth work together in city hall’s health inspection department. They both hide there after their homes are invaded by pod-people. As they watch from out their office window, Elizabeth comments, “Look at them, right out in the open,” to which Matthew, responds, “That’s how they do it.” As before, this paradigm shift happens almost overnight, and once it does, there is hardly a need to disguise the invasion. After they are forced from their hiding place and into the streets below, Elizabeth and Matthew disguise themselves. In the throng of pods, humans become the monster, though the pods do not function under the same economic auspices as their predecessors.

Matthew witnesses the shift from the national to the transnational--from personal to alienating production in the pods. The pods have moved from farms to grow houses, and from trucks to ships that are laden with containers full of pods. The pods are going global, shipping production from rural California to parts unknown, and taking with them the last modicum of American production. The 1970s economy was shifting to the global market; pods loaded onto a ship are a logical extension of the new market. Like its 1950s predecessor, the production and distribution scene is only bizarre because of the pods; everything else about it is a representation of that decade's economic mechanism. The pod-people can produce and distribute "in the open" precisely because they are not doing anything out of the ordinary. Though the location has shifted from rural to coastal, the pods are still effectively "typical," (Finney 166).

The grow house of pods that will eventually contain our inhuman replacements speaks to a different horror: our own mass production. The scene recalls something else: newborn infants in plastic bins, rows and rows with only a colored cap to signify sex. Life is supposed to be precious and unique, but in the grow house, as in a hospital, it is banal. Matthew, rare as he may be, is no longer exceptional, and must take his place amongst the pods.

Abel Ferrara's 1993 take on the pod invasion moves from the inner city to an army base. This perhaps more closely reflects the 1950s era version in that an army base is typically in a small, relatively close-knit community whose commercial interests are limited in scope. However, as the pod must now think globally, so shall the economic narrative. The question of a post-Cold-War demilitarization loomed over the early 1990s. By 1993, the United States military had reduced personnel by nearly 200,000 with plans to reduce even further, and closing bases nationwide became a political issue (Gansler x). Even with the reduction, the military's ties to

American industry remained strong. As of 2009, there are over 900 United States military bases in 46 countries, all of which have trillions of dollars' worth of equipment and hundreds of thousands of personnel, both civilian and military (qtd. in Gouliamos et al.). This historically unprecedented power and funding make for an uneasy relationship between the military and the American public, particularly as it relates to the physical presence within the United States. With such a wide reach, the question of American military force with hostile, or indeed, invasive intentions are easy to translate to on-screen horror.

Part of the appeal of using a militarized force is that even the human components would be hesitant to questions orders, making the conversion process that much quicker. Marti and Tim are fleeing the military base, and as they leave, they see military trucks (called LMTVs) loaded to the brim with the large tendril-covered seedpods. General Platt (R. Lee Ermey) is passing by them, just as a general would inspect a formation, calling out the names of the various military installations to which the vehicles will embark. General Platt is conducting military operations as a pod in a manner that is no different from human military operations. Troop movements nationwide are commonplace, and a convoy of LMTVs would not turn many heads. The pods are using mechanisms of distribution already available. This is brilliant on the part of the pod-people; their subterfuge is effective because it relies upon our unwillingness to question the operations of the military. The scene is only a few second long, but the impact is significant. The pods have accomplished more in that few seconds of screen time than in the previous forty years. Rather than a few months or weeks, the entirety of the continent will be converted in the amount of time it takes the truck to deliver the pods. It is the vast military industry which allows the pods to spread so rapidly.

The 2007 film *The Invasion* eschews pods altogether. Instead, the podification occurs in much the same manner as a disease, via a fluid transmission. This allows for the production of “pods” to shift from grow houses and army bases, to fluid contact with former friends, neighbors, and coworkers. As in the 1978 film, the events take place in a city, though rather than exploiting the 1993 film’s use of the military might, the 2007 film opts to place the event in the seat of political power: Washington D.C.. This shift results in the most conspiratorial film yet.

No longer tied to cumbersome pods, podhood can be hidden in hot beverages or an injection. From a position of political and economic power, the pods are able to infiltrate faster than ever. Aside from being unencumbered by physical pods, the location of the narrative is an international hub; the pods go global within a few short weeks. The pod-virus corrupts the city; police forces become some of the first converted, from there, once our last lines of defense have fallen, it is only a concerned parent that stands in the way of complete pod-annihilation.

Per the pharmaceutical nature of both infection and cure in the 2007 film, the majority of nefarious business is conducted in boardrooms rather than on farms or factory floors. Tucker Kaufman (Jeremy Northam), the head of the CDC and the first to be podified, is selling a “vaccine,” to companies who are willing to produce and distribute it (the vaccine, is, in fact, the spore that turns people into emotionless pods). Trucks and large crowds have been exchanged for a conference wherein the spore is consumed after the servers vomit in the carafes of coffee. Again, the only thing peculiar about the scene is the presence of the pod-people and their disease. The business meeting is such a staple of modern economics that no one would blink twice if heads of vaccine distributors and heads of vaccine producers met to discuss terms. Even

spreading a disease in the context of an office chat is bordering on mundane. The pod-people are effective because they use already existing systems to spread.

There is a real world parallel between the spore “vaccine” and the vaccine controversy, which sprang up in the early naughts. There was a spurious paper released in *The Lancet* in February of 1998 that linked the MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine to Autism, a psychological disorder that makes it difficult for a person to connect with another person. This paper launched a vitriolic mistrust of vaccines and the governmental bodies that provide them.

Only manufacturers and the CDC attend the scene in *Invasion*. When one of the attendees questions the new vaccine, Tucker suggests, “perhaps you would not like [to sell] [the vaccine]?”. Tucker is reliant on the facilities of private enterprise to successfully distribute the vaccine, and the parties present at the meeting are more than willing to do so; however, they are, as far as the audience can tell, human. The heads of the pharmaceutical companies are less concerned with what is in the vaccine than with whether or not they can sell it. The questioning attendee backs down immediately as more coffee is poured. Passing the spore along becomes more intimate as well. In the previous films, the pods were placed in homes by meter readers, or, in the 1993 film, soldiers delivering packages; in other words, by people with whom one would not normally interact other than a few minor pleasantries. Not so in *Invasion*, aside from the scene at the CDC, the spore is delivered in various drinks delivered by close friends and family. In one particularly tense scene, Carol’s assistant offers her a cup of tea and watches as she almost drinks it (she is saved last minute by a phone call which diverts her attention). One of Carol’s clients sobs that her husband is always offering her drinks but that she will not take them. Tucker



offers his son a sinister cup of hot chocolate. The spores are, in equal measure, a disease and poison, delivered with a smile.

In the 1950s, the chief concern was with the mechanics of production and distribution of the giant seed pods. If the farm down the road started growing giant pods, one might notice. The 1950s pods, in other words, required a vanguard; many, many pods had to be successfully instituted before they could take over a town or a city. By the 1970s, overcrowding and more industrialization meant that the process took even less time, but it still needed enough screen time to explain the specifics of how and where pods like that could or would be grown and distributed. The 1990s had an answer; a military base acted as the perfect incubator for a pod invasion though they were still relegated to relatively small communities with coordination spreading continent-wide was a virtual inevitability. By 2007, the mechanisms required for a global invasion force were so believable that they hardly require screen time. The early naughts took for granted that there were conspiratorial cabals working to pacify humanity globally, and without the cumbersome pods, the takeover was all too easy. *Invasion*, in this case, functions as a metric by which we can measure concerns regarding changing production and distribution. Tracing the lineage of production and distribution through the films reveals concerns from the loss of the bucolic to the industrial, to militarization, and finally, to an uncontrollable oligarchy.

## CHAPTER 3

### A FAMILY AFFAIR?: POD APOCALYPSE AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

The traditional family is parodied over and over in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; it is perhaps most notable in the earlier iterations because the 1950s are so littered with examples of the contrary. Starting with Miles Bennell in the novel and first film, he along with his love interest Becky Driscoll, are recent divorcees. Finney makes a point of highlighting non-traditional families: Wilma (one of the first pod victims) is raised by her Aunt and Uncle, and according to Miles will be subjected to spinsterhood at the ripe age of “thirty-five,” (11). Then there are the Belicecs, Jack, and Theodora (Teddy in the 1956 film). The married-though-childless Belicecs depart in their own way from 1950s heteronormative imperative. Jack Belicec is a writer, and as such contributes little to the new economic engine. As Jennifer Jenkins explains: “the Belicecs' pseudo-Bohemian lifestyle is belied by their *mitteleuropa* surname and their early American décor” (486). Every family in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a strikingly skewed version of “normal,” or, at least, the 1950s version of normal.

Thus, though they have yet to be podified, Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy already represent the alien other. Jack and Teddy’s home, for example, is outside the bounds of Santa Mira, “sitting by itself on the side of the hill,” (33). In the novel, the Belicecs discover the pod body and place it on a “pretty good second hand pool table” (34) in the garage. Teddy and Jack have chosen (or seemingly chosen) not to have children, and they are instead rewarded with a “blank” medallion-like body (Finney 37). Procreation, or, at least, re-creation, is thrust upon them without their consent, and the body, like a child, will mold itself after the parent figure,

Jack. The scene takes a new shape in the film where instead of being relegated to the garage, the pool table has moved into what looks like a dining room. Indeed, Miles' date with Becky, a dinner at a local restaurant, is supplanted in the film by this macabre gathering. Miles states over and over again that he had to forgo time with his ex-wife to answer calls as the town's doctor, suggesting that he had little time for romance, or the procreative acts needed to make a proper nuclear family. The same, it seems, will be true for Miles and Becky.

In the novel, Miles continually discusses his weaknesses regarding his masculinity. His inability to "keep" a wife is the result of his choice in profession, a direct link to his masculine identity. Almost immediately after Miles and Becky begin developing a relationship, the pods arrive. Miles' failure to adequately secure a mate and reproduce with her is no longer a concern. The pods have arrived to force all humans to procreate regardless of marital status, age, or even sex.

Though the 1956 film is less explicit about Miles' concerns regarding his masculinity, his reluctance to pursue Becky insinuates that this is the case. Once he finally acts upon his affections for her, the presumably post-coital scene (the Hays-Code would have prevented explicit sex) is an annoyed Miles chain smoking and hoping for a call from a non-pod, rather than starry-eyed declarations. For Miles and Becky, their romantic interlude takes place in his medical practice, sex is now clinical, and a remnant of their humanity, rather than a product of marital or romantic affection.

The pods as proxies for children is hinted at towards the end of the film when the podified psychologist, Dr. Kaufman (Larry Gates), explains that there will be no more love and no more need for making children. Becky turns to Miles and exclaims "I want your children!". In

fact, for the pods, there is only procreation. The “spreading one’s seed” metaphor becomes literal as giant seedpods make their way across the landscape. Procreation is the only driving force for the pods, and this drove them to the far reaches of space. Anything that slows down or deviates from the new procreative norm is hunted down and converted. The pods also act as an equalizing force, moving the site of reproduction from the female body to a womb-like structure outside the body. Men and women can participate equally in procreative efforts. The result is that “love” is supplanted by a procreative act that does not require the participation (or indeed, even the consent) of the person being re-created.

In the 1950s, patriarchs represent the guardian of their daughter’s sexuality, and therefore their procreative efforts. Sex is no longer a factor in procreation for pod-people; fathers no longer ward away sexual advances--instead, they participate in asexual procreative efforts. Becky is living with her father after a recent divorce; she has reverted from married woman to child. Her father, now a pod-person, is responsible for placing a pod in the basement and starting the replication process. The relationship between Becky and her father has been perverted by the pods; he is going to ensure that Becky procreates whether or not she is willing.

The 1978 film has only one representation of a bonded family unit in Nancy and Jack Belicec. Jack is once again a writer, and they co-own and operate a mud-bath house in central San Francisco. The 1970s saw a sharp spike in divorce rates, and there was fear, particularly among conservatives, that the traditional American family was disappearing into feminist, gay rights, and black rights movements. San Francisco was a hub of liberalism, gay, and feminist rights in the 1960s and 1970s (Carroll 279). Elizabeth Driscoll represents the newly liberated woman; she is educated, she is working, and she has just separated from her jerk-boyfriend-

turned-pod, Geoffrey. Elizabeth, convinced that her boyfriend no longer loves her, seeks a psychologist, Dr. Kibner, who explains that she needs to “re-evaluate her relationship” rather than “destroy it.” Though Nancy and Jack represent an ostensibly more stable couple, they hardly speak to one another and express almost no affection for one another throughout the film. The budding romance between Elizabeth and Matthew seems to be more expressive, despite the majority of their conversations centering on Elizabeth’s ex-boyfriend.

Nancy, Jack, Elizabeth, and Matthew all spend the night at Matthew’s after the second body is found near Elizabeth’s bed. Here again, they are a group of misfits, who have communalized in the face of an uncertain future. They form a pseudo-family, with Nancy postulating, as Matthew gets ready for work, that: “The [new pod plant] is just like those rocket ships that landed thousands of years ago to mate with monkeys and create the human race.” Nancy’s biggest concern is that the procreative dynamics have been thrown so far off course that zooerasty is the new norm.

The fluidity of the pseudo family relationships is made clear in a particularly striking scene between Dr. Kibner, Elizabeth, and Matthew. Kibner has arrived to comfort the quartet after they have seen pod-bodies. Elizabeth is particularly distraught, and Kibner enters her room to give her a sedative; he situates himself next to her on the bed, with his arm draped across her body. They speak in whispers to one another; it would be a romantic scene if Matthew were not standing at the door watching. Elizabeth is childlike, wearing a full nightgown with a ruffled collar, wide, trusting eyes, and reclined as though she is being tucked in bed. The body language of Kibner is the overly close posture of a lover, and Matthew looks like a father figure standing in the doorway. The relationship between the three characters is completely obfuscated by their

relatively close ages. Kibner's physical proximity to Elizabeth could be read as a doctor tending a patient because of her age and alertness; however, they seem more like young lovers.

Elizabeth's actual romantic interest, Matthew, is standing at a distance, almost voyeuristically watching, as Kibner gets a little too close. The fluid relationship dynamic makes reading Kibner's actions difficult. As a pod-person, it is in his interest to "tuck in," Elizabeth so she can complete her transformation, but the action is tender and loving--antithetical to podhood.

Following Dr. Kibner's exit, and as all four bed down for the evening, the pods begin to grow. Elizabeth and Matthew sleep separately while Nancy and Jack cuddle on the couch in the living room next to an open fire. The romantic setting is unnecessary, however, because the procreation happens near a lonely Matthew, who is sleeping in the back garden. Four infantile pods form and crawl squealing from their vegetal wombs, all resembling their parental figures. A screaming Nancy Belicec rousts Matthew from his sleep, too afraid to enter the garden. Her desperate screams could be screams of labor pains as the humanoid forms resemble newborns covered in vernix. The family is almost completed, but for Matthew brutally smashing the pods with a shovel while fully podified people scream at him. With the pods, there are no fluid relationship dynamics. There are no relationships--the infantile pods are not representations of the new nuclear family but procreation forced on humans too caught up in their adulthood to manage it themselves.

The pseudo family splits soon after; Jack sacrifices himself as a diversion while Nancy runs weeping after him leaving Matthew and Elizabeth the only remaining couple. After the split, their chances of survival are reduced to zero as Jack, then Elizabeth, and finally Matthew fall to the pods. The only survivor as the film ends (though presumably not for long) is Nancy

Belicec, who attempted in vain to stay with her husband, and somehow escaped becoming podified herself. Moreover, though Elizabeth never declares her desire to make children with Matthew, the whispers of love and brief romantic scenes allude to such desires.

The 1993 *Body Snatchers* film disguises itself as a typical family unit and then later reveals that the siblings, Marti, and Andy Malone, are actually half-siblings, and Carol Malone is not Marti's mother. Marti repeats over and over that despite Carol having raised her from a young age, she is not her mother. While most of this could be ignored as a representation of typical adolescent angst, the stepmother is the first in the family to be changed to a pod person. The anxiety for the children seems to lie in their mother's, or stepmother's, Carol's, sexuality. Carol is converted first; as she sleeps, her son, Andy, enters the room. He watches as his mother disintegrates; it would be gruesome for any young child, but he hardly reacts. It is only after his now podified mother exits the closet nude that he begins to scream. The trauma registers in his mother's nudity rather than her quickly decomposing corpse. Marti has her own struggles with her place in the family. After a missed curfew, Marti discusses with her father that she would like to leave. Her father replies, "You don't have to wait until you are an adult to leave, you can leave right now," to which Marti responds, "You'd like that wouldn't you, then it would just be the three of you." For Marti, the body snatching began long ago when her deceased mother was replaced by another woman.

The father in the 1993 film, Steve Malone, is a "hippie saving the planet," among hardened veterans. With his mild demeanor and relatively long hair, he seems more feminine than masculine. Even in the most concrete example of a nuclear family in all of the iterations of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, gender roles are undefined. When Steve is forced to confront the

base commander about their chemical storage, his impuissance is apparent. With one question and a slightly raised voice, Steve is rendered speechless. In another scene between Steve and his as-yet-unpodified wife, Carol, Steve is feminized as Carol pursues then tackles him. The scene is meant to be sweet, but Carol's romantic pursuit of her husband foreshadows her deadlier pursuit as a pod person. In both instances, Steve takes on a submissive role, both to Lt. Tim, his daughter's boyfriend of less than a week and to his wife Carol. After Steve is podified, and his daughter shoots him, Marti's chances of survival increase once she is in the hands of the far more capable Lt. Tim. It is clear from the beginning that Steve is ill prepared to manage even his own family, let alone try to navigate a pod-crisis.

Carol is the mother figure to Marti; her ill-defined status as the wife of Marti's father, however, makes her maternal role questionable. Carol makes weak attempts to parent Marti. In one scene Marti's punk-friend Jenn (Christine Elise) comes to collect her so they can go out. Carol steps in to try to divert them and assert her role as a parent, but after barely a word she calls for her husband to step in. As Steve questions Jenn about their plans, Carol begins listing off drink choices in a pathetic attempt to offer hospitality, both to Jenn and her stepdaughter. Her voice seems to get smaller and smaller as it becomes clear that Marti and Jenn are rebuffing her hospitality. Carol is unable to fulfill her maternal role in that she cannot "get the floor clean," despite her constant mopping (the dust is from podified bodies). It is not until Carol is transformed into a pod person that her role as a mother is more clear. She no longer shies from telling her children what to do, at one-point demanding that her son Andy "get in bed." Even for Marti, her maternal machinations are more forceful; Carol fills the bathtub that would be Marti's grave had the pod/body not fallen on top of her. As a pod-wife, she is no longer playfully



tackling her husband, but massaging him to sleep. Podhood, it seems, is more nurturing than motherhood in the 1993 film.

The setting of the film is a military base; while ostensibly a place for families, the majority of people represented on the base are young, single males. Marti's family, the Malones, and the Platts are the only available representations of family. Jenn Platt is the typical rebellious teen, complete with spiky hair, underage drinking, and a leather jacket. Jenn's mother is an alcoholic and spends the movie passed out until she is podified, at which point Jenn suspects her mother has been replaced because of her newfound consciousness. General Platt, Jenn's father, is converted early on, and there is never a scene that includes all three Platts in the same room.

There is a hypersexualization of the women in the film. Jenn uses her sexuality to get booze from the soldiers on the base while Marti's burgeoning sexuality takes center stage throughout the film. The night she is introduced to Tim, her boyfriend and ultimate savior, her father accuses her of doing "god knows what," and Marti is mortified. Her near-podification experience is unique to the *Invasion* narrative in that it is overtly, rather than subversively, sexual. In her first experience, Marti is sleeping in the bathtub while worm-like tendrils drop from the ceiling and crawl from beneath the water. When Marti awakes she interrupts the pod process and her nearly fully formed double falls from the ceiling. The two Martis wrestle naked in the bathtub until the pod-Marti expires. With the second near-podification Marti experiences, her boyfriend, Tim, prevents her from going full-pod. Marti is lying in an infirmary bed, which has been converted to podify the army base; beside her, a fully formed, nude pod-Marti is usurping Marti's memories. The nude Marti awakes and seductively to Tim says: "Tim, don't" as

he goes to cut the cord. When he does so, Marti awakens and pod-Marti writhes naked and reaching for Tim as he and the real Marti make a quick exit.

After Marti's stepmother is taken over by the pods, Marti, her father, and her younger brother remain, but her father is no longer a romantic hero saving his wife. He has turned senex, keeping his daughter from Tim. Andy is a representation of the woman who supplanted Marti's mother, so he no longer fulfills his familial role either. It must be Tim and Marti who fulfill the familial duties, and indeed, they are the only ones to escape the army base. Marti's father is podified off-screen and later shot by Marti trying to flee with her brother and Tim. Her brother, Andy is also podified off-screen, but his death is far more interesting. Tim and Marti flee the army base with her younger brother in tow. Again they represent a perversion of the stereotypical American family, Mom, Dad and Child, but with a twist. Andy is a brother, moreover a half-brother of Marti. Andy attacks Tim as he is flying the chopper and Tim screams to Marti to "Throw him out!" Marti throws the screaming six-year-old from the helicopter, leaving Marti and Tim to fulfill their procreative duties properly.

If 1993's *Body Snatchers* saw a perversion of motherhood, 2007's *The Invasion* saw a celebration of motherhood. The story's central figure, Dr. Carol Bennell, spends the majority of the film searching for her six-year-old son, Ollie. *Invasion* begins with a family that has been separated for four years. Ollie's father, Tucker, has been inattentive for the duration of that four years and has suddenly decided to spend time with him. Carol is immediately suspicious and says as much to her boyfriend, Ben Driscoll. However, being a dutiful ex-wife and mother, decides that her son should, in fact, spend time with his father but not before she drugs Ollie heavily with Clonazepam so that he can cope with visiting his estranged father. As it becomes

evident that people are being supplanted by emotionless beings, Carol goes on a search for her son, whose father was one of the first people podified.

Though there is certainly nothing questionable about Carol Driscoll's relationship with her child, her ability as a romantic partner is troubled. Her divorce is explained with cold detachment by her already podified ex-husband, "I was third, the thing you loved most was your son, then your job, after that came me." Bearing Tucker out, Carol rebuffs her friend, Ben, claiming that their friendship is more important than a romantic entanglement though there are insinuations of romance at the end of the film. In a pre-podified world it seems one can be a good mother or a good lover, but not both. Though *Invasion* focuses almost entirely on the search for family members, it takes a rather liberal view of what constitutes familial ties. Carol finds her son with Ben's help and even takes on a second child, Gene, whose parents did not survive the transition to podhood. The blended family results after the pod crisis has abated and is perhaps the happiest ending of any of the *Invasion* franchise. The stereotypical American family is restored after 57 years, only instead of mother, father, junior and sis, it has morphed to be more inclusive, and this time, it is successful.

Though the family has been restored in the latest version, the inclusion of children remains emotionally manipulative. To the credit of the 1993 film, creators did not shy away from exterminating the podified child. The 1993 is still manipulative, however, in that it relies on the audience sympathizing with the young couple, who are, after all, still children. The 2007 film is unabashedly manipulative in that they restore the world to its pre-pod state. Podification is immediately undermined as threat because *Invasion* was unwilling to go so far as to kill both the already podified child and Ollie, who could not be podified (and would have been killed by the

Pods). Though the timeline is not explicit, the pod threat is exterminated in a laughably short amount of time, leaving one to wonder if it was indeed a threat.

The pseudo-families in the early iterations allow the films' creators to dispose of the characters as they are podified, without too much emotional manipulation. Characters are truly endangered by the pod threat, and the audience feels endangered as well. The adult casting choice is also appropriate for the typical target audience of horror films: adults. Children tend to whine in horror films; even superb child actors seem out of place in apocalyptic scenarios. Having an all adult cast that must form family ties in the wake of the pod-apocalypse is a believable way to engender sympathy from the audience without pandering.

## CHAPTER 4

### “CONTAGIOUS NEUROSIS”: PSYCHOBABBLE AND EMOTIONAL SUPPRESSANTS IN THE POD AGE

Exploring the psychiatrists in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* one would expect that they help the audience discover the emotional roots of the main characters. Instead, the psychiatrists seem to explain characters' changing emotions without saying anything at all; characters' emotions are redirected or denied altogether. Psychiatrists in the pod-world act as emotional suppressants, at first as pods posing as mental health professionals, and once the disguise is dropped, they continue to attempt to convince human characters to sacrifice their emotive lives for vegetal ones. Rather than mental health experts, the psychiatrists are quacks, cheap imitations of the real thing. When they are revealed as pod-people, they become hucksters, trying to sell the pods to the last potential buyers. The later iterations treat the psychiatrists a bit better, with only a nod to the psychiatrists in the originals. The 1993 film redeems the character, but only just before he blows his own brains out. The 2007 film makes a similar attempt, but fails; instead of dispensing bad advice, the psychiatrist (now the heroine, rather than a secondary character) is giving out mind-numbing drugs though at least she is ignorant of the damage she is causing by emotionally sedating her patients. In the novel and four films, the psychiatrist either suppresses, or redirects the emotions of their patients, and until the subterfuge is revealed the characters doubt their own reality based on the advice of the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist either intentionally or inadvertently becomes the mechanism by which the pods eliminate emotion.

The term “contagious neurosis” comes from the novel. Early on, before the discovery of the pods, Dr. Miles Bennell is trying to understand the numerous patients attending his clinic and complaining that their relatives have been replaced. Bennell seeks the help of a colleague, a psychiatrist, Mannie Kaufman. He states: “Well, it’s the first contagious neurosis I ever ran into” (25). Mannie is speaking not about the people who have been replaced by pods but specifically about their family members who intuit that something about their loved ones has gone wrong. Rather than accept the reality, that neurosis has not become contagious, and loved ones really have changed; Mannie decides to pathologize his patients’ perceptions of reality. Mannie’s disbelief in the new pod reality is duly punished, and he is eventually changed into a pod-person himself. The significance here, however, is not Mannie’s fate, but his attempt to reassert control over his psychologically ordered environment. Once he has succumbed to the pod takeover, the impulse to reassert control remains and becomes the manner the pods use to legitimize their invasion.

The term that best describes this attempt to label and order the unknown is Richard Rosen’s coinage “psychobabble.” Rosen’s 1970s work describes the problem thusly: “terms gained a vulgar, wholesale currency and were used for intellectual one-upmanship” (10). Finney’s novel and its successors portray intellectual one-upmanship, using the psychologist characters, but immediately countermand their authority by turning these advisors into pod-people. Characters who resist intellectualizing the problem in later iterations are not spared but are granted a more dignified exit, particularly in the 1993 film, which forgoes the psychologist in favor of a doctor concerned for the mental well-being of his patients. Alternatively, in 2007 the psychiatrist is the central figure and is as clueless as anyone else.

All of the psychiatrists attempt to suppress the emotions of their patients. Even before three out of the four psychiatrists are podified, they are doing their best to reframe characters' experiences with the pods as a signal of emotional trauma rather than a physical experience. The psychiatrists belittle characters' experiences, particularly in the early moments, before physical pods are discovered, and people are concerned that their loved ones have lost some ineffable quality. They are reluctant to believe that people have indeed changed. Instead, they claim that it is perception colored by emotional, rather than rational reasoning and that is the root of the change. Mannie/Danny Kaufman (the novel and the 1956 film) see the "contagious neurosis," as a symptom of mass hysteria that will clear up like the flu passing through town. Dr. Kibner (1978), believes that shifting social norms are breaking up potential families (Elizabeth and her ex-boyfriend). Kibner's cure for this social ill is that women like Elizabeth, who believe that their family members no longer love them, should simply return home and their feelings will change. Dr. Carol Driscoll (2007), the only psychiatrist to take a central role, does nothing to try to explain why her patients believe their family members no longer love them; instead, she doles out more pharmaceuticals. The only character to fill the role of the psychiatrist whose concern is genuinely his patients well-being, is an army doctor, not an actual mental health professional, Dr. Collins (1993). Instead of claiming solutions to problems; he asks questions and tries to determine the cause of the "delusions." He is never podified because he chooses to commit suicide rather than lose his humanity.

For the psychiatrists who are podified, their role shifts from explaining the emotional trauma their patients are experiencing to redirecting the energies of the protagonists, often by writing off their experiences as delusional. In the first three iterations, the psychiatrists deny the

existence the pod-bodies (podies?) discovered by the protagonists. Kaufman insists that fear has clouded Miles' judgment and that what he saw was "what he expected to see." Kibner has a similar stance on the body/pody discovered in the 1978 films. As pods, the psychiatrists are no longer trying to explain the phenomenon, but trying to impugn the sanity of the protagonists. The protagonists are then put in the position of defending their own sanity and the reality of their collected experience. The irony, of course, is that they are trying to convince a pod-person of the existence of pod-people.

In the novel it is Mannie Kaufman that leads the charge into Miles's office to convert him and Becky into pods; in the 1956 film, it is Danny Kaufman and Jack Belicec along with a few other townspeople who play the villainous role. In either case, it is "the headshrinker" who is the main antagonist, and he uses logic and reasoning to present pod existence as a superior, or at least inevitable, alternative to stressful human existence. "Love, desire, ambition, faith, without them life is so simple, believe me," Manny says; when the previous reasoning fails, Kaufman simply insists, "You'll have to sleep," (Finney 178). In the film, through all of these appeals, Miles is silent, posing only one question: "What about love?" The emotive reality, for a human being, is the only one that counts. Fear of losing the ability to love is what drives Miles and Becky to resist, and in the novel successfully destroy the pods (there is less success in the film). Kaufman is offering to trade one reality (logical, safe, and "untroubled") for another; the less emotional reality is what haunts readers and viewers, perhaps, because the choice is less than clear, particularly as it concerns psychiatry. Forgoing heightened emotional states for dulled ones is the precise occupation of psychology and more particularly psychiatry. The emotions that are lost in the fray, "ambition, excitement," take second place to the "peaceful...quiet," achieved



through podhood. What the podified ask for is merely complacency. While Becky's concern is almost entirely visceral (she wants to have children, something pods cannot do, hence their convoluted reproductive cycle), Miles' concerns remain focused on human achievement and the drive that comes from the human "failing" of emotion.

Cyndy Hendershot argues that paranoia regarding unmanning drives the psychological elements of this *Invasion* plot. She suggests that "[*Invasion*] is a manifestation of paranoid structures that reveal postwar anxieties regarding radiation, gender, and sexuality," (26). Though there are libidinous drives for Becky and Miles – Becky at one point declares "I want to have your children" – the anxiety is always re-centered on the need to possess and determines one's reality. Hendershot also fails to account for the success of future iterations of the film, instead focusing on the 1956 version. Though the 1956 version does indeed smack of postwar paranoia, the *Invasion* story continues outside that context. Indeed, the elements of psychoanalysis continue along with it. Paranoia it seems is not relegated to the 1950s. It is also a stretch to suggest that it is paranoia that drives the narrative of the film; paranoia is defined by fear of the non-existent, particularly in a psychological sense. The pods are in fact, a reality in the film and not a hysterical delusion. Miles and Becky are unraveling a mystery (where did the bodies come from?) not deluding themselves in a false conspiracy.

The 1978 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Philip Kaufman) is claustrophobic and intense from the beginning. No longer relying on the element of surprise to frighten the audience, the pod people are more noticeably emotionless. Elizabeth Driscoll's boyfriend, Geoffrey, is one of the first to be podified in the film and it is clear from the outset that Geoffrey has changed (he no longer wants to go to the game!). Elizabeth fears that he does not love her anymore because

he has suddenly become the ideal boyfriend, an apparent departure from his previous self. Her reality has shifted, from a “bad” uncaring boyfriend to a dapper young man who works too hard. Elizabeth believes this shift in behavior is a result of her action, not a shifting reality. Further, her response is to doubt her own sanity: “You think it’s true that if you think you are losing your mind then you’re not?” she quizzes her friend, Matthew Bennell, in exasperation. “Geoffrey,” she insists, “Is not Geoffrey.” Matthew, the obvious stand-in for Miles (now a health inspector), asks Elizabeth, Becky Driscoll’s replacement and his assistant at city hall, to see a friend of his, Dr. David Kibner. Kibner (perhaps renamed to differentiate him from the director) is played by Leonard Nimoy, who is best known for his role as the half human, half Vulcan on *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock. Vulcans are an emotionless race, the result of this casting choice is that the audience suspects right away that Kibner is one of the emotionless pod-people.

When Elizabeth finally sees Kibner, “Not because she’s crazy, just so he can help explain things,” he is standing in crowded launch party for his new self-help book. In the middle of the room, Kibner stands between a husband and wife, the wife is in hysterics: “My husband is not my husband!” she cries. Kibner forces them to hug while a room full of people watch, some pods, some presumably people, though it is difficult to tell which is which. The scene is horrifying, both because the audience knows the woman is telling the truth and because we suspect that Kibner is in cahoots with the husband (as a pod-person). He is recommending that this woman make amends with her would be, and as it turns out, will be, killer. The possibility that Kibner is doing this as a pod is horrible, but the more frightening possibility is that he is doing this as a publicity stunt, that conducting therapy in this room with the crowd is exploitative, to say the least. He is using her emotional distress to sell his new book on how not

to be emotionally distressed, and yet again, denying her reality: “He is your husband, he loves, you.” “Kibner” as Jack Belicec states prophetically, “is trying to change people to fit the world.” The woman Kibner is “helping” becomes a spectacle; the camera cuts from one patron to another, some are blank faced, others are concerned. Kibner becomes the conduit through which the non-emotive dulls the over-emotive. Standing between the woman and her husband, Kibner is the physical bridge between the pod-people and humanity. He uses his authority as a mental health professional to redirect the woman’s emotions to her own failing as a wife. If she, like the protagonists, would only “calm down,” the situation would resolve itself.

In a scene recalling the midnight call to Kaufman from the previous two iterations of *Invasion*, Matthew calls Kibner after they have found a duplicate of Jack and a duplicate of Elizabeth. They call the police over to Elizabeth’s house, and after much confusion, Kibner steps in and explains to the police officer that “Matthew has been under a lot of emotional strain.” When Kibner enters the room, the relief from the police is audible. It is the psychiatrist’s view of the non-emotive reality that convinces the police to release Matthew. Objective reality is questioned because of its attachment to emotion. The “emotional strain” renders Matthew unbelievable, he does not maintain the necessary qualifications to determine his reality. Kibner, at least according to the police, does. Geoffrey refuses to press charges against Matthew for breaking into his home. Emotion, according to the pod-people, clouds reality—so much so that even breaking the law can be excused. Kibner remains as a bridge between the emotive (human world) and the non-emotive (pod) world. His authority on the subject of emotion helps translate to the pods the emotional reactions of remaining humans. Geoffrey defers to Kibner because he, as a pod, cannot distinguish appropriate emotional reactions from inappropriate ones. Matthew

defers to Kibner because he believes that Kibner is an authority on emotional experiences.

Though this may have been true of the unpodified Kibner, the podified Kibner can only rely on a clinical understanding of emotion, not the experience of emotion.

The 1993 film *Body Snatchers* version shifts drastically in its portrayal of the psychiatrist, for starters he is not a psychiatrist; he is an army doctor. Dr. Collins (Forrest Whitaker) is disturbed by the patients he has seen, and his view of reality is starting to mesh with that of his patients. He is visibly shaken as he describes sleepless patients who are afraid of their families. As he leaves, one of the soldiers suggests that he “take a vacation.” In this much more destabilized version of *Invasion*, the authority that once rested with doctors and psychologists is gone, and is indeed in need of a vacation.

The doctor’s role is more of a nod to the original in this version than a gesture to the psychobabble that pervaded the previous incarnations of the film. The doctor has not been converted to a pod, and never will be. He is as vulnerable as the rest of us. This could represent a shift in authority, from the exterior to the interior, or this could be a symptom of the military environment to which the story has been [dis]placed. In Collins’s penultimate scene, he stands up to the oncoming pods and exclaims “The individual always matters” before blowing out his brains. This is an odd statement for a man who has dedicated his life to an organization which views the individual as expendable (the military). Is this scene supposed to be ironic? Collins’s concern for the people on the base is genuine, as is his insistence that the individual matters. The collective whole is subverted again by one person, Collins, in a state of hyper-emotion. He is hysterical, on amphetamines, and raving about pod-people before he shoots himself.

In 2007, the film *The Invasion* shifted the psychiatrist character to the center. Dr. Carol Bennell is the psychiatrist who begins to notice a strange neurosis in her patients. One of her patients, Wendy Lenk (played by Veronica Cartwright, who plays the character Nancy Bellicec in the 1978 film) explains that her “husband is not her husband.” This scene mirrors its 1978 counterpart in dialogue only. Dr. Bennell is employing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy along with a healthy dose of pharmaceuticals. Wendy is distraught and can barely eek out that her fear is more visceral than a creeping paranoia that her husband has changed: He has killed their dog, and without any sign of remorse thrown him in the garbage. Carol tells her she is “upping her dose,” and sends her home. Carol synthesizes the psychiatrists of previous films, and her lack of belief endangers this woman’s life. Carol alters this woman’s reality by giving her medication, an act she does not reserve just for patients. Her son, Ollie, suffers from nightmares, and she gives him Clonazepam, a type of drug often given to adults with anxiety disorders, to help him cope with the stress of visiting his biological father. Carol alters the reality of those around her in order to combat a more terrifying one: that Wendy’s husband really is not her husband, and that children’s nightmares do not always go away when they wake up. Her role as a psychiatrist quickly fades, as does her mental stability as the world around her stops being emotive. What role exists for a psychiatrist whose patients are suddenly and irrevocably pacified? She must then mask her emotive states to navigate the podified world. This is a situation her profession has well prepared her for; cognitive-behavioral therapists are supposed to act as a sounding board for their patients’ emotive states. Hence her almost apathetic response to Wendy’s husband murdering their dog. The pharmaceuticals, however, aid in changing the literal brain chemistry of a patient such that they are better able to cope with “reality.”

The 2007 film directly relates the emotional void of podhood to the psychiatrist's profession. Carol and her son Ollie are attempting to escape her podified ex-husband when they are trapped in a basement. Her ex-husband tries to convince her of the merits of podhood, "You give pills to make [your patient's] lives better, how is [podhood] any different?" Carol's role as a psychiatrist is no different from the pods; her job is to dull emotion; the pods simply remove the problem altogether. The film never bothers to account for the disparity in Carol's logic. Instead, the film implies that humanity is inherently violent, and psychiatrists like Carol are there only to mitigate the emotions that cause violence.

Carol's profession and the consequences of her earlier actions with patients are largely ignored. We never find out, for example, if Wendy Lenk survives. Carol's profession seems more incidental in the 2007 film than the psychiatrists in the earlier films, all of whom took an active role in the pod-invasion. She spends the majority of the film fleeing pod-people or searching for her son. The scenes that employ her role as a psychiatrist are more concerned with conveying information to the audience than to Carol, who brushes off delusions, or psychological trauma with a prescription.

In every adaptation, the role of the psychological professional is to mitigate reality, either through the assurance that they (that is, the group from the original *Invasion*) are indeed crazy and that their reality has been deluded. Alternatively, the psychiatrist is an adviser who instructs women to return to their husbands, and for everyone to just relax. It could be the military doctor whose understanding of the pods precedes even his superiors, or finally, it could be a magic pill that makes everything easier to take. In any of the scenarios mentioned above, the services of the psychiatrist are required because the people involved cannot reconcile the new reality with the

old one. Supplantation is too difficult to accept, and their resistance to shifting their consciousness into a less human version indicates that survival at any cost is not the ultimate goal of humanity. That, for better or worse, is the goal of the alien other.

## CHAPTER 5

### “SLEEP IS THE VILLAIN”: SHIFTING FEARS FROM PODS TO HUMANS

In an interview with Don Siegel, Stuart Kaminsky said this about the villain in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: “there is no real physical threat from the pods. The threat is from sleep. Sleep is the villain. To fall asleep is to allow the pods to take your mind,” (qtd. in La Valley 155). Combatting this “villain” becomes paramount for the remaining humans. The strange paradox of removing human attributes (the need to sleep) in order to maintain humanity forces characters to go to extreme measures to prevent podification. They inject themselves with drugs, and stay awake for days trying, and usually failing, to thwart the pods. Siegel compared the sleeplessness of the characters to insomnia, but even that is not an apt description. Insomniacs *try* to sleep, whereas the protagonists in *Invasion* are trying to stay awake at all costs, and with no definite end in sight, the futility of their cause is apparent. Like love, ambition, and excitement, sleep is a human element that the pods strip away by their mere presence; they do not need to replicate, only insinuate, and the protagonists will remove their own humanity.

Wakefulness, particularly in the 1950s iterations, becomes an allegory for constant vigilance, and the futility of that endeavor becomes most apparent in the characters’ attempts to stave off sleep indefinitely. The constant state of paranoia that 1950s Americans found themselves in was exhausting. Fending off threats from invisible foreign invaders, and imagining their world ending in blazing atomic fireballs was in the forefront of the 1950s mind. One cultural critic refers to the atomic generation as “those that hear the ticking,” (Phillips 42) of



course referring to the atom bomb. The need for wakefulness in *Invasion* means that the protagonists hear a tick of a different sort: The tick of the clock as nights pass without sleep.

Strangely, the need for wakefulness does not appear until very late in the novel. By the time the main characters discover that the pods fully replicate while their victims are sleeping, Mile, Becky, Jack, and Nancy, have spent at least two nights together. Though wakefulness plays a more prominent role in the films (even nodding off for a few minutes can get you podified), the theme is relatively absent from the source. That said, once Mannie informs Miles and Becky “we [pod-people] have to wait until you are asleep, that’s all” (178). Miles then connects falling asleep to abdicating responsibility: “And the idea of sleep, of just dropping my problems and letting go,” for Miles, forgetting his troubles and falling asleep identical (Finney 179). Before the pods, falling asleep didn’t guarantee an end to one’s emotional problems. Now that the pods have arrived, however, “dropping your problems” is as easy as closing your eyes. Later in the novel, as Miles and Becky are fleeing the town, they lay down in a field of weeds: “In the center of the field now, I had Becky lie down then I lay down beside her. I scattered her armload of yellow weeds over us,” (Finney 204). Much as the pods come from the earth, Becky and Miles must return to the earth in order to hide. Further, they “lay for a long time—motionless...” (Finney 205). Miles and Becky lie in a pseudo-sleep state in order to evade detection, but in order to stave off pod-hood, they cannot actually fall asleep. Their actions here mirror the pods. The pod must mimic humans to evade detection and continue their plans, but the mimesis is inaccurate; they never fully achieve the same conscious state as humans because they cannot adopt their emotive behavior. Similarly, Miles and Becky must adopt the behavior of a plant,

lying on the ground, covering themselves with plant material, and remaining motionless; they cannot, however, adopt the sleeping consciousness necessary to make the complete transition. The readers are aware of Miles and Becky's exhaustion and what is at stake should they fall asleep. Scenes where characters must remain the most still, where they are required to cover themselves and hide, perhaps for hours on end, become the most tense because of their perceived exhaustion. Even reading about exhaustion, one yawns unintentionally, such that the reader experiences the intense fear of sleep along with the characters.

In the 1956 film, closing one's eyes for longer than a blink can begin the podification process. In the earliest instance, Jack Belicec is barely asleep and sitting up when the half-formed body still on his pool table takes on the remainder of his characteristics, including a cut he had received only hours earlier. Teddy, Jack's wife, wakes just as the body on the pool table opens its eyes, her screaming alerts her husband, and the two flee their home. It is not until the next evening, however, that the connection between sleep and transformation is made. Four seed-pods are spitting out half-formed bodies in the greenhouse while Miles, Becky, Jack, and Teddy are grilling dinner just feet away. The fetal pod-people belch out one of their offspring and the noise alerts Miles. As the quartet watches the bodies form, Teddy makes the observation that they do not fully transform "Until you're asleep!" From then on the characters remain awake in fear that they "may wake up changed." After having spent the night in Dr. Bennell's office on some unnamed uppers, the despair from only one night of no sleep is apparent. The scene opens with a telephone ringing, and Becky hoping that it is Jack with help. Miles warns her not to answer, indicating Jack would know not to use the telephones, but in the same breath he says, "Where is [Jack]? Why doesn't [Jack] come?" taking the begging, petulant tone of a damsel in

distress. Miles can hardly contain his emotions, and it is only moments later that his is forced into the street and must completely conceal his emotive behavior. Because of their lack of sleep, Miles and Becky are wearing down their last chance at survival, being able to conceal their human emotions.

The moment that the characters realize that the transformation is linked to sleeping is considerably more subtle in the 1978 film as compared to its predecessors. The reader is counting on you to forge these connections. Nancy Bellicec has discovered a body covered in white fibers and resembling her husband in their family-owned mud-bath house. Shortly after the discovery of the body, Jack becomes weary to the point of collapse. Nancy intuits that the body and her husband's drowsiness may be linked and insists that he get up and walk around and that he "[doesn't] fall asleep." He lies down anyway "just to think," and almost immediately dozes off while Nancy watches the body. Sleep and the body are further linked, as Jack closes his eyes, his pod replacement opens its eyes. Nancy's screams awaken Jack and save him from certain disintegration. Later that evening as Matthew is falling asleep in the garden; large pods begin to grow rapidly. Flesh colored flowers burst and an adult sized fetus-like creature emerges wriggling and squalling. Matthew is completely unconscious through this process, and once again it is up to Nancy's screams to save someone from certain death. In the film it is Nancy discovers the first body. She is depicted as open-minded and a bit bizarre (she believes that "aliens mated with monkeys to make the human race") but cautious and alert. Nancy is the one who suggests staying the night together (throwing decades of horror film tropes by the wayside), and it is again Nancy who announces, "They get you when you sleep." Nancy is also the most emotive character, a stark contrast to the pod-people. She reacts to every horror with a genuine

terror-filled scream and weeping. These traits are punished in other horror films—usually with a bloody death, but Nancy is a foil for the non-emotive pods and is therefore rewarded by surviving the longest.

This realization that they must stay awake forces the main characters to maintain alertness as the story continues. Any less than constant vigilance and your death is guaranteed. Most of the characters in this film fall victim off screen, except Elizabeth, whose body disintegrates while Matthew is holding her. After the human Elizabeth disintegrates, a nude emotionless Elizabeth emerges from a patch of weeds where they had previously been hiding. Pod-Elizabeth is analogous to a primordial Eve, emerging from an inner-city Eden, only instead of an apple, Elizabeth tells Matthew to “sleep.”

Elizabeth is one of three “Eve” characters in all the various iterations of the film, all of whom awaken, nude and podified then beg their male counterparts to join them, Elizabeth is the first. No longer restricted by the Hays Code, the 1978 film could be more explicit in its depiction of podification. Strangely, a nude Brooke Adams does not titillate the audience so much as chill them. Her depiction of the newly formed pod reeks of frigidity, not sexuality. Nothing about Elizabeth’s pod form is appealing. In the 1993 film, the pod-women are more sexually explicit. Carol Malone emerging nude from her closet after podification drips with sensuality—strange considering her son is the only one to see her podified. Later in the film she massages her husband to sleep, luring him to his death while straddling him from behind. After Steve, her husband, interrupts the podification process, Carol insists that if he would only fall asleep, they could “be together.” Marti is seemingly fully duplicated when her much older boyfriend finds her and severs the link between Marti and her pod-clone. The pod-clone lingers, well beyond any

reasonable explanation, and the underage nude clone writhes and reaches for Tim. The inherent sexuality of the sleeping pod-women implies something else: That adults who must “stay awake all night,” insinuates a sexual encounter. The 1956 film is almost explicit on this point, shortly after Miles informs Becky “they can’t close their eyes,” the two share their first kiss. Sleepless nights may be grueling, but the promise of coitus makes them bearable and highlights a reason to try to stay human.

In the 1993 film, the audience is aware of the connection between transformation and sleep even before the pods have appeared. Marti and her family stop at a gas station just before reaching the Army base where they will be staying. Marti is using the restroom when a half-crazed soldier accosts her and attempts to warn her that “They get you when you sleep!” Marti muses in a voiceover that “We spend half our lives asleep.” This immediate concern with wakefulness allows for tension anytime a character nods off, even for a moment. Indeed, the first sleeping character we encounter, Mrs. Platt, gets podified. Initially, her inability to wake is linked to alcoholism, “Vodka,” her daughter Jenn, informs us, but as Jenn and Marti leave the room, the sound of creeping tendrils and ominous music alerts the audience to something more sinister. The horror of the pods is intensified when the six-year-old Andy, Marti’s younger half-brother, is scared to sleep during naptime at his daycare. Instead, he runs away, telling his older sister “They tried to make me go to sleep,” when he is caught and returned home. Something as innocent as naptime at a daycare becomes nerve-wracking in the film as the link between sleep and death is more apparent in this film than in earlier incarnations. It is also Andy who watches as his mother disintegrates, after which, the pod version of his mother emerges from the closet. When the pod-Carol (Andy’s mom) tells Andy’s father that she will “Put Andy to bed,” the

sinister sound is not simply from her non-emotive voice. The action of putting someone to “bed” becomes akin to murder. Later, as Marti is merely relaxing in a bath, her pod-self begins to develop. In this case, simply dropping her guard makes her susceptible to pod-takeover. Marti is eventually taken to the base’s infirmary where people are forced to sleep so that pods can take over. When Tim comes to her rescue, Marti is discovered with worm-like tendrils from the nearby pod squirming across her face. The image, however, is reminiscent of a decomposing corpse, and indeed, the more the “worms” crawl across you, the sooner you decompose to gray dust.

The 2007 film opens with a bedraggled Carol Driscoll searching an abandoned pharmacy for drugs to help her “Stay awake,” as her voiceover narration informs us. Once she has found the appropriate medication (a possible concoction of Ritalin and Clonazepam), she takes them by the fistful while chugging Mountain Dew. The scene is frenetic, with close shots of Driscoll’s hands moving from pill bottle to pill bottle, and the voiceover cutting mid-word. The effect is that the audience is feeling the same exhaustion as the protagonist from the beginning of the film. From there, the film flashes back to the beginning of the pod-outbreak, and *The Invasion’s* pace slows significantly. However, it is clear from the beginning that wakefulness will be central to the protagonist’s success or failure. Though the connection between podification and sleep is made clear from the beginning, unlike the film’s predecessor, this film explains how sleep and the pod are connected. Recall that in the 2007 version, the pods are replaced with a spore which invades the body and produces the change from the outside in. When this happens, a shell forms around the victim. Samples of this shell are taken to be examined by a doctor who explains “a percentage of this [shell] is spent white blood cells like you would find in any infection, but

another percentage of this is hormones produced during REM [rapid-eye-movement] sleep... the sleep hormones acted as a catalyst for some reaction.” Technical jargon aside the connection between REM sleep and podification is significant. REM is the final stage of sleep; it is during REM sleep we dream (American Sleep Association). Linking the podification process with dreaming, medically insinuates that the podified world is, in fact, a “dream” or ideal world. This is supported by the sudden outpouring of peace after the pods have taken over most of the world. The “dream” ends when a cure is engineered and once everyone had awoken, violence, a signifier of humanity, resumes.

Sleep separates the characters from the pod-aliens, but it also leaves them vulnerable to attack. Sleep also offers the illusion of choice: if the characters choose not to sleep, they can forestall their replacement. However, sleep is, of course, inevitable, as is the pod invasion in most of the films. Because sleep is the conduit through which the aliens transform, the characters believe they have a modicum of control over whether or not they podify, providing an ample source of tension throughout the narrative.

## CHAPTER 6

### “A FIERCE INHOSPITABLE PLANET”: STUDIO INTERPRETATION OF PODS AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The beginning of the 1954 novel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* promises “loose ends and unanswered questions” (1), yet, contrary to its initial claims, the novel does “neatly [tie] up at the end,” with regards to the invasion, the relationship between Becky and Miles, and Santa Mira itself. Indeed, the 1950s audience would be happy to hear that the pods themselves “[climb] steadily higher and higher into the sky and the spaces beyond” (212) or in other words, the pods flee Earth. Miles and Becky are “together...for better or worse,” and Santa Mira will “seem no different” (216). This saccharine ending was essential for making the novel palatable to readers from the 1950s. With looming nuclear war, and a steady stream of apocalyptic scenarios to feed their reality, fear of unstoppable alien invasion does not function well as a diversion, so much as a reminder of potential threats. The novel does end with a warning, though: “But...showers of small frogs, tiny fish, and, mysterious rains of pebbles sometimes fall from out of the skies...You read these occasional queer little stories... or you have [sic] vague distorted rumors of them. And this much I know. Some of them--*some* of them--are true” (216). Perhaps this is the moment the audience is supposed to be the most unsettled; immediately following the moment when the pressure is relieved, and the pods are leaving, the audience is reminded to remain vigilant.

Aside from the town eventually returning to normal, the ending is also notable in that all of the main characters are alive and un-podified. Jack was responsible for fetching the FBI and performed his task admirably. Theodora, presumably, is somewhere safe, and Miles and Becky



are exhausted but unharmed. While various members of the Santa Miran community are now podified, the major players are unharmed. It will take 51 years for such an upbeat ending to resurface.

Studios reacted to their perceptions of public tastes and put pressure on directors to change the various films accordingly. Public and studio pressure may have influenced the films, but how much creative control a director had also contributed to varied endings. While studio heads changed the 1956 film into something other than what it was originally designed to be, the director of the 1978 film decided to make his film darker in part as an homage to the previous director who did not have the same privilege. Although, Finney has creative control over his work, he wrote the novel in hope that it would be turned into a film; this would have influenced his choice to give the book the typical Hollywood ending (LeGacy 287). For the other directors, Siegel, Ferrara, and Hirschbiegel, they were beholden to the fiscal interests of the studios that funded the films.

Siegel's version begins with Miles' homecoming and ends with his being chased from Santa Mira. After Becky is converted into a pod, she outs Miles to her pod cohort: "He's in here!" Miles is forced to flee the cave he is hiding in, and he runs towards the highway. He nearly runs into one of the motorists is a semi-truck with the names of west coast cities printed on the side. Miles peers in the back of the truck and realizes the cargo is the large pods, all of them headed to the major cities listed on the side of the truck. "They're here already! You're next!" he screams as the camera closes in on his frantic, exhausted face. This ending left little doubt that the pods would continue to take over, and that none of the motorists would stop to help Miles. His exhaustion from a sleepless 48 hours, watching his hometown's conversion into

something alien, and his escape to a highway full of non-believers makes this scene immensely tense. The passing cars are a threat, not only because they may hit and kill Miles, but because every one of them is a potential pod person. Trust, from the perspective of the audience, has completely eroded, and Miles' expressions of fear, anger, and frustration paint a target on his back. Leaving Miles wearied and vulnerable is perhaps the most effective ending.

Despite the guaranteed spine chill from Siegel's ending, Allied Artists insisted he shoot another. For the ending to be even remotely believable, Siegel shot an opening sequence where Miles is raving in a hospital. A doctor insists he calm down, and Miles begins his story. The problem with the opening is that it betrays the outcome and removes the tension from much of the film; the audience *knows* Miles will survive at least long enough to tell his story. The studio ending picks up on the highway; Miles is screaming at passing motorists and a ripple transition later he is back in the hospital where he began. The doctors, like the motorists, don't believe and are "measuring him for a straight-jacket," as he finishes his story. Just as the doctors are leaving, a patient is brought in; two emergency service workers comment that they "had to dig him out from...seedpods," and the doctors tell the police to put out an "all-points bulletin and block all the highways." The final spoken words are of the doctor telling the operator to, "call the FBI." Miles's emotions are mixed, relieved that someone believed him, but weary and distressed about the loss of his town. Though this ending was meant to convey hope, and perhaps let the audience sleep a little easier, it is hardly a happy one for Miles Bennell. Santa Mira has been practically wiped off the map by the pods, and his burgeoning romance with Becky ended tragically. This is all assuming the best possible outcome; that is, do the authorities succeed in preventing the pod invasion? How many other towns have been converted? Siegel may have capitulated to the

studio's demands for an ending that would sit well with audiences, but it is far from happy. If the studio ending is arguing for postwar optimism, it does so at a high cost. Santa Mira and Miles Bennell become sacrifices; they pay for their vigilance with their lives and their livelihoods. In the 1950s, there is no returning from podhood, and Miles must either face his town as a human pariah or submit to his own pod conversion. His only other option is an exile, which is the choice he makes.

Though this ending is vastly different from its progenitor, the novel, it is a marked improvement. The success of Miles and Becky in the novel seems unbelievable; Jack convincing the FBI to investigate aliens from outer space is a stretch. Of course they arrive just in time to save Miles and Becky as well. Even the studio "happy" ending is at least somewhat believable compared to the "and they lived happily ever after" version written by Finney. The novel was originally published in *Collier's* magazine and perhaps the morbid ending was not suitable for a mass market, but there is no indication that Finney ever intended to write another ending. Siegel moves the story from romance to horror, perhaps contributing to the narrative's endurance.

Philip Kaufman had more freedom with the 1978 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. As such, the film has perhaps the most daring ending of any of the iterations. In a 2008 interview, Kaufman said of his film "I wanted to restore the ending that Don Siegel wanted on the first version" (qtd. in Simon). It is perhaps the bleakest, but the most effective. Aside from the ending, the entire 1978 film has much darker tones. There is a claustrophobia to the shots in Kaufman's film, and a sense of voyeurism on the part of the audience. Many of the scenes are shot from just outside the room where the action is taking place, and we only see characters reflected in windowpanes. Other scenes are in small city apartments crammed with too many

people, in these scenes the tightness of the room makes one feel as though they should not be there, and is, therefore, unsettling. Once the pod takeover is nearly complete, the shots are of empty city streets and gray courtyards that smack of Soviet Russia. The musical score is notable too in that the composer (Denny Zeitlin) wrote precisely one film score and then refused to write another (IMDb). This score is difficult to listen to out of context, with clanging sounds that are disquieting. As dark as the film is it is the end sequence that remains an iconic mainstay for horror and science fiction aficionados.

After an exhausting night of watching his love interest convert and attempting to destroy the pods' grow house, Matthew Bennell seems to head straight back to work. His workspace, however, has changed. There is a chilling silence as the unconverted attempt to maneuver about their lives without attracting the attention of their podified neighbors. Matthew walks home across a suspiciously Soviet looking courtyard in the middle of the city when a shivering Nancy Bellicec steps in from one of the shadows. Nancy, barely above a whisper, says "Matthew, Matthew," he turns to face her, and she walks forward, clearly happy to see him. Slowly, he raises his arm and tilts his head back in an unearthly scream, as Nancy becomes hysterical. This scene recalls Becky beckoning to the Santa Miran pod-people so that they may catch Miles. For Nancy and Miles, their last link to their old lives is severed as their closest friends betray them. If it wasn't clear before, it certainly is now, the pods are not human—they resemble loved ones in appearance only, all loyalty and love is gone the moment they are converted. This ending is unambiguous; the world, for humanity, has ended. The few remaining humans will convert, die, or spend the remainder of their lives evading capture. It is without question one of the most terrifying moments in all of the iterations of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Kaufman certainly

restores the horror that Siegel's original ending intended, but the total bleakness is unique to the 1978 version.

Echoing the trouble faced by Siegel with Allied Artists, Abel Ferrara was the third string director for 1993 film, which was stuck in "development hell," for nearly half a decade (The CineFiles). This film opened in only one theater and despite its \$20 million budget made less than half a million in gross sales. It is likely the film's confused ambiguity that accounts for its poor industrial record. As a horror film, it seems like it was trying to attract a younger audience, but the family drama and petulant attitude of the teenaged lead makes one suspect otherwise. The EPA regulator, Steve, against a polluting military force, might have made this an environmental film, except that Steve is weak-willed, and the hero ends up being Lt. Tim Young. Though we are ostensibly following Marti's story, she is hardly the heroine; she is acted upon rather than acting--and her hormone-driven angst is annoying rather than character building. The end of the film cannot seem to decide on an outcome; it, at first, seems to allow the children (or, at least, the very young) to escape, but the podified six-year-old gets killed very quickly. The remaining humans escape is dubious, and the ambiguous ending reads as hokey rather than dark. As with Siegel's film, the ending is dark for the survivors of the local pod-invasion, who have lost their loved ones, but leaves a sliver of hope for the rest of humanity.

At the end of the film Tim has returned to fetch Marti and her younger brother, Andy, so they can all fly away in the chopper. As they are leaving, Marti sees her friend Jenn; Marti asks if Jenn had seen her little brother, at which point, she screams and point at Marti and Tim. This moment is clearly meant to pay homage to its 1970s predecessor though the punk teenager hardly instills the same fear as Donald Sutherland. Marti and Tim run towards the chopper, and

Andy emerges from the crowd and jumps into the helicopter. Andy attacks Tim and Marti is forced to throw him from the helicopter. Tim takes pot-shots at the trucks loaded with pods and they head to Atlanta they go to land; an ominous voiceover implies that they may not land safely. The ending can be read as humanity's last stand against the pods, with Marti declaring her hatred for them, or as the first in a long series of battles. Because of the age and relative capability of the characters however it is difficult to believe that they will have much success in thwarting the pod invasion. This ending is also an attempt at an homage to the 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead* (Dir. George A. Romero) with only two survivors and a helicopter that represents an escape from emotionless monsters. Though it may resemble the end of Romero's masterpiece, the end of the film, like the pods, is a replication without an emotional impact. The last few moments of *Body Snatchers* are explicit about the prospects of Marti and Tim; they are both exhausted and barely fought their way through one town full of pods. If they land in another, there is little chance they will fight through another pod-hoard. Romero's film is filled with fighters, and regardless of how dire the situation it is understood that the protagonists will fight their way through. Though *Body Snatchers* is not completely hopeless; the audience has little faith in the teenaged couple.

The 2007 version also suffered from studio mishandling; after they test screened Oliver Hirschbiegel's version, they called in the Wachowski siblings (notable for their work on the *Matrix* trilogy) to do major rewrites and eventually re-shoots. As such the film's release date was set back over a year. There has been much speculation about the rewrites the Wachowskis did, particularly with regards to the ending, which is widely regarded as ridiculous. Unfortunately, no director's cuts have ever been released, and Hirschbiegel has gone on record saying he liked the changes (Sahota).

The 2007 film ends in a manner that recalls the film's original source material, the novel. Carol Driscoll has discovered that her son, Ollie, is immune to the podification process. What remains of the CDC (Center for Disease Control) sends in an extraction team so that they may analyze his blood and synthesize an antiviral. The CDC, much like the FBI in the novel, functions as a bureaucratic intervention. Though there are hints of government involvement that are peppered throughout the film, the ending seems tacked on at best. The audience is supposed to buy that in spite of all the government failures in the film the CDC was able to survive intact. Carol and Ollie's escape through the city and to the roof of a building before climbing into the helicopter and taking off is very similar to the 1993 film, though this time the little boy is not thrown from the helicopter, and their future is considerably more certain. It seems that the directors were more concerned with recalling previous versions than producing a believable film. A short news montage later and a vaccine has been developed ensuring the "situation is under control." When questioned about the possible resurgence of the "alien virus," the man responsible for synthesizing the cure says, "pick up a newspaper, for better or worse we're human again." In the film, the pod-people make it explicit that if we accept their takeover, humanity will no longer be violent. Of course, the suggestion is that humans are violent by nature and that to stop being violent, is to stop being human. There is a cut to Carol getting her son ready for school, and a surprise when Ollie's schoolmate and friend Gene steps into the picture. It is clear that Carol has adopted him. As she sends her children to school and Ben Driscoll, reading newspaper comments that there have been "83 deaths in Baghdad, is it ever going to end?" Here again, the implication is that if it were, it would mean the end of humanity.

The 2007 film is not a warning of an invasion, but an indictment of humanities' violence. The pods represent a solution in 2007 while the novel insists that the pod invasion has resulted in a "dead" community; in 2007, it resulted in a peaceful one. The saccharine ending, however, undermines the film's sobering message. This ending goes further even than the novel in that it restores humanity to those who have lost it, and further it shields them from psychological damage by comparing the pod-state to "sleep." This not only restores the happy ending of the 1950s; it surpasses even Finney's. Very few are killed, and survivors have no recollection of the events. Unlike Finney's novel, there are no lessons for the characters in the 2007 version, at least, none that modern science cannot cure.

The rest of the film belies the all-too-happy ending in the 2007 film. The film is tense, and more believable its predecessors. A disease version of podhood ravaging its way through cities is far more believable than people failing to notice giant vegetables hidden in their basements. Scenes where Carol is forced to hide her emotions from the pods and watch as people commit suicide without reacting, or are carted off by podified police are absolutely frightening. Once she becomes infected and has to remain awake to maintain her humanity, the stakes are even higher. At one point she nods off, and her son shoves a syringe full of adrenaline into her chest. This film had all the potential to be a great, or, at least, an adequate, remake. Instead, it opted for a happy ending that would satisfy podified audiences.

The disparate endings of the films are as much a reflection of contemporary attitudes as they are of the studio and directorial desires. Studios capitulate to the perceived desires of the movie-going marketplace, and directors (reluctantly) capitulate to the desires of studios. Perhaps ironically, the film that was the most successful, critically and commercially was the one wherein



the director had the most control, the 1978 film. One could argue the same is the case for the novel. Though the 1956 film is now hailed as a classic, at the time of its release it was considered a B-science fiction film. The 1993 and 2007 films were notorious flops. One critic noted that the 2007 film was the “pod people version,” (Critics At Large). At their best these films interrogate what it is to be human. When they fall flat, they provide a perfect example of the pod-people they are attempting to critique.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The pod person has become such an iconic image that it has entered the national lexicon. As Maureen Corrigan of National Public Radio explains: “The term “pod,” used to connote a blank person, has become so much a part of everyday speech that even people who've never seen the movies or read Finney's novel know the gist of the nightmare he gave to America,” (Corrigan). The “blank” person to which Corrigan is referring becomes the real nightmare. The locus of the monstrous-other in stories like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* shifts from the external to the internal, then is repurposed and re-projected outward. In other words: Gone are the days of the shambling monster that the villagers must chase out with pitchforks and torches; the bodily locus of the monster is now the village itself. Finney captured a fear real and so fundamental that the story can be retold without regard for setting or time.

The idea of an imperfect duplication invading and replacing the original seems to have highlighted an extant fear. Strangely, the process of constantly producing and reproducing less than perfect replications as described in the novel, mirrors the process of remaking a film. As the films have moved through the decades, they have moved further and further from the emotive reality that contributed to its origination. Some might even argue that the emotional center is missing from the most recent incarnation and that the resulting version is hollow. However, even if that is the case, the image of the pod person will persist. This narrative is not constrained by a particular decade, or that decade's fears. The 50 plus years of history behind the story suggests

something more deeply rooted than externalized fears of invading red armies, or shifting cultural paradigms.

The pods' presence forces the protagonists to reexamine humanity through the lens of the monstrous other. When describing monsters of science fiction films in her book, *Screening Space*, Vivian Sobchak had this to say: "He is not other than Man; he is the darker side of Man and therefore comprehensible" (32). This interpretation is useful when examining the pods. What horrifies both audience and protagonist about the pod is the ease with which they assimilate humanity. The resulting post-human is identical, save for the lack of emotion. The protagonists must struggle against their internal mechanisms of emotion in order to subvert the new pod order. When they are unsuccessful, it is the human who fails, not the monster who conquers. Humanity's flaws can only exist against the emerging other, but, like a seed waiting to germinate, they were always there.

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* remains in the collective consciousness, and indeed in the back pocket of many Hollywood studios, not because of its socio-political commentary, but because of the horror it elicits from viewers and readers. The horror of a non-human replacing our human loved ones with an emotionless duplicate, coupled with the physical impossibility of going without sleep, is what excites the American imagination and adrenal glands. A review that preceded the final installment of the first serialized edition in *Colliers* magazine wrote "Mr. Finney's realistic tale scared the devil out of us. For reassurance we showed it to Dr. Harry Charipper; about the 'transmutation' ...he says '...The scientific analysis on which the story is based is most intriguing and certainly within the realm of possibility.' Gulp" (18). From its earliest incarnation *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* terrified its audience enough that they felt the

need to explain the body-snatching phenomenon in the most precise terms. Finney touched a deeply rooted fear—our humanity is not entirely permanent, that either slowly or quickly we can be replaced. It is only when we are faced with imminent extinction that the fight to retain what makes us human becomes paramount.

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