Cinema, state socialism and society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917-1989

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2 Thinking again about Cold War cinema

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Tony Shaw and Denise Youngblood's *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* opens with the story of Choe Eun-hui and Sin Sang-ok, a South Korean actress and movie director kidnapped by the North Korean government in 1978 and forced to make propaganda films for the communist government of Kim Il-sung (Shaw and Youngblood 2010: 1–2). A sensational tale of political intrigue, cross-border abductions and harrowing escapes, the Choe-Sin story is also the story of the power of cinema in the era of Cold War politics. Like many totalitarian leaders before him, Kim Il-sung's son Kim Jung-il recognized the ideological force of cinema. By making movies for Kim Il-sung, the South Korean couple would show the world the greatness of the North Korean communist state.

The role of cinema in the production of fear and paranoia is perhaps best expressed by the 1959 horror film *The Tingler* (dir. William Castle), in which the tingler, an insect-like creature that grows on the spines of men or women when they experience fear, gets loose in a movie theatre. Castle's film technique Percepto involved turning off all the lights in the theatre in the course of the movie's action and simultaneously activating electrical buzzers that had been placed under some people's seats so that they would think the tingler was after them (see Brottman 1997; also cited in Hendershot 2001: 1). An apt metaphor for Cold War cinema, *The Tingler* revealed the way American culture of the Cold War produced rather than reflected the fear and paranoia of its time.

The Cold War lasted forty-five years (from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990), and although there were plenty of "hot" conflicts all over the globe, the bulk of the fighting was done at the level of rhetoric and ideology. On both sides of the East–West divide, films broadcast ideology – some "soft", concentrating on showing a particular way of life, some "hard", actively displaying the consequences of choosing the wrong side. The American and Soviet struggles "for hearts and minds" took place both at home and abroad. Along with economic and material support provided by the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, for example, the USA exported films that demonstrated the greatness of US-style capitalism and democracy – Europeans watched over 260 films that could not

be shown in the USA because of their status as pure propaganda (the Smith-Mundt law forbade the showing of these films to audiences in the USA because Americans were not to be "propagandized" with their own tax money). However, even regular Hollywood films did not simply have "broader appeal" than their Soviet counterparts on the European and world market. The Franco-American credit agreement, signed in Washington in May 1946, carried a rider, inserted under pressure from Hollywood, which radically changed the quotas on films imported to France. In return for a very generous credit agreement, the USA was given access to North African military bases and a guarantee that 68 per cent of the screen time in the French houses would be available for "foreign" (that is to say, Hollywood) film. Similarly, James Bond films – although British and made at Pinewood Studios – were backed by American dollars (United Artists) which kept flowing long after Hollywood withdrew its capital from the British film industry.[1]

Like the Cold War itself, studies of the period have rarely crossed borderlines between East and West, *us* and *them*. Shaw and Youngblood's 2010 *Cinematic Cold War* may be the first Cold War study to place American and Soviet Cold War cinema in direct dialogue. Indeed, *Cinematic Cold War* provides a way to begin to see past the basic dichotomy of good versus evil, and propaganda versus entertainment, to a more subtle understanding of the workings of ideology. Their choice of films speaks to a desire to move beyond the standard formulas of the East–West split, but it is worth considering how even such well-known Cold War productions as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel, 1956) or *The Manchurian Candidate* (dir. John Frankenheimer, 1962), *Soy Cuba*/*I am Cuba* (*Ia Kuba*, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov, 1964), or the Soviet TV mini-series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (*Semnadtsat' mgnovenii vesny*, dir. Tatiana Lioznova, 1973), might be read against the grain to reveal a more nuanced relation to the ideology of the Cold War than appears at first glance.

My own goal in this chapter is to offer a series of close readings of texts we might not think of immediately as forming part of the Cold War canon, yet which nonetheless speak to a fundamental desire to go beyond the binary logic and oppositional rhetoric of Cold War culture: beyond us and them, self and other. The goal here is also to move across both national and disciplinary boundaries: I am interested in the ways both Soviet and American cultural production, particularly in its science fiction manifestation, reflected and refracted Cold War ideology, from the most overtly paranoid productions to examples that positioned themselves largely outside the political framework, yet nevertheless can be read productively as "Cold War" texts.

Pulp and paranoia: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

According to official history, the Cold War did not begin until the enunciation in 1947 of the Truman Doctrine to "contain" communism. Yet, we might argue, as Susan Buck-Morss does, that in the Western imagination the Bolshevik

Revolution in 1917 was an absolute threat from the beginning, first and foremost because it challenged national space as a determinant of sovereignty. The Revolution was meant to spread throughout the capitalist world, with no regard for borders or nations, which problematized the notion of national defence. Speaking at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, US General Tasker H. Bliss described the threat in the following way: "It is true that you can prevent an army of Bolsheviks from coming out of Russia by posting on its borders a sufficiently large military force, but you cannot in this way prevent Bolshevism from coming out" (Thompson 1966: 204; Buck-Morss 2000: 2). Reporting from the same conference, US Secretary of State Robert Lansing wrote, "Bolshevism is the most hideous and monstrous thing that the human mind has ever conceived …" (Thompson 1966: 15; Buck-Morss 2000: 282, fn. 39). As Buck-Morss notes, the imaginary effects of Bolshevism within US political discourse were hallucinatory in ways that became the hallmark of the Cold War. Bolshevism was a "fire", a "virus", a "flood" of barbarism, "spreading", "raging", "out of control", a "monster which seeks to devour civilized society" and "destroy the free world" (Buck-Morss 2000: 2–3).

In the USA the Red Scare equated the foreign threat of Bolshevism with all organized domestic challenges to the First World War effort, of which there were many, whether from workers, socialists, pacifists, women or African Americans. Political radicals were lumped together with prostitutes and lunatics as a potential threat, and were vulnerable to the new deportation laws. The Sedition Act of 1918 made criticizing the armed forces, the national flag, or military uniform punishable by twenty years in prison. The Postmaster General was given the power to remove both anti-war material and socialist papers from the mail.[2] Women's suffrage leaders, protesting against a war to protect "democracy" that all women were denied at home, were imprisoned as political subversives. When racial demonstrations in cities turned violent, this "Negro subversion" was attributed to Bolshevik propaganda among the demonstrators.

This anti-communist crusade climaxed during the "Palmer raids" of 1919–1921, when US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's men, striking without warning and without warrants, smashed union offices and the headquarters of communist and socialist organizations. Palmer believed that communism was "eating its way into the homes of the American workman". In his 1920 "The Case Against the Reds", Palmer's language to describe the communist threat (and defend taking military action against suspicious persons and organizations) anticipated the Cold War rhetoric to come: "Like a prairie fire, the blaze of the revolution is sweeping over every institution of law and order […] eating its way into the homes of the American workmen […] licking the altars of churches" (Palmer 1920). To criticize in the name of democracy the existing economic and political structures of the USA was equated with being un-American in the sense of both an alien presence and a moral threat.

The threat of Bolshevism was first and foremost presented as a threat of contamination and this rhetoric persisted after the Second World War, when

borders were re-established, but the threat had not been eliminated. Senator Joseph McCarthy called Bolshevism an "infestation", calling for the American people to rouse their moral indignation which had until that moment lain dormant. The language of the Cold War – imaginary creations such as the Iron Curtain, and real ones like the Berlin Wall – emphasized the division of space and the marking off of territories; however, this fundamental reorganization of territory and a redrawing of the map was still not enough to keep the Bolsheviks "out". The possibility of invasion became a favourite theme of 1950s Cold War movies. As a character in *Invasion, U.S.A.* (dir. Alfred E. Green, 1952) puts it, "This is the last game of the World Series and we're the home team".[3] On the other side of the world, the sentiment was similar. As Stalin summed up in a major speech on the state of the Soviet Union, following the Shakhty trial in 1928, "We have internal enemies. And we have external enemies. This, comrades, must not be forgotten for a single moment".[4]

The discourse of internal and external enemies characteristic of the Cold War was not, of course, limited to the political realm. Mass culture, both in the Soviet Union and in the USA fed the popular imagination. Musicals, for one, managed to combine entertainment and propaganda and to be used successfully by both sides to promote their way of life against the enemy's. However, if musicals mostly concentrated on what Ayn Rand called propaganda – that is, presenting an exaggeratedly "happy" view of the world[5] – another genre was devoted to demonizing the enemy: that genre was, of course, science fiction. In the 1920s, the contrast of "communist heaven" and "capitalist hell" was a generic theme in Soviet science fiction, projecting onto the "other" all of the negative aspects of industrial society. However, as Vivian Sobchak has pointed out, while the sci-fi film existed in isolated instances before the Second World War, "it only emerged as a *critically* recognized genre *after* Hiroshima" (Sobchak 2004: 21, emphasis in the original).

After the Second World War, a whole series of US catastrophe movies concerning "alien invaders" connected fear of communism with these science fiction fantasies. By the early 1980s, when Ronald Reagan spoke of the Evil Empire of Red Communists that ruled the Soviet Union, he was drawing on images already deeply ingrained in the American collective unconscious, as well as, of course, on George Lucas's 1977 *Star Wars*, itself based on Second World War movies. In his "Evil Empire Speech", delivered on 8 March 1983 to the National Association of Evangelicals convention in Orlando, Florida (following an earlier version in 1982, delivered to the British Parliament), President Reagan labelled the Soviet Union the world's "focus of evil", prayed "for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness", and urged the members of his audience to "speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority" by ignoring "the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire", and thereby removing themselves "from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil" (Reagan 1983).

It is worth noting that since the end of the Cold War, the number of alien sightings in the USA has dropped precipitously, and it was certainly not incidental that much of the Hollywood imagination of the 1950s and 1960s expressed its Cold War anxiety through films about alien invasion (either explicitly or metaphorically marked as communist). In 1950s science fiction films, the threat of "alien invasion" becomes metaphorized on the screen as an invasion by the truly "alien". As Miles Bennell explains the origin of the pods to Becky Driscoll in the 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, "So much has been discovered in the past few years, anything is possible: atomic radiation, weird alien organisms, mutation of some kind". We might wonder if that mutation isn't what Ayn Rand is talking about also when she claims that Russians have become inhuman – they have been subject to a mutation of some kind, "a mutation called communism", which breaks down moral fibre and restructures the organism (Rand 1947). "This is the oddest thing I've ever heard of", says Dr Bennell; "Let's hope that we don't catch it. I'd hate to wake up one morning and find out that you weren't you." Thinking of the communists as truly alien helps, of course, to feed the fear that fears most that which is most different from it. Yet over and over again, the real trauma of invasion is located not in an external, but in an internal threat: "Think about it, and then you'll know […] that the trouble is inside you", Miles Bennell tells Becky's cousin Wilma early in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a film about doubles, about the substitution of one body for another that is identical to it externally, but lacking human "emotion". The film, told in flashback, opens in jail where a frantically screaming man is being held in custody. The man identifies himself as Dr Miles Bennell, and recounts the events leading to his arrest – specifically, the takeover of the small town of Santa Mira, California, by the "pod people". Miles's story begins when he and his former love interest, the recently divorced Becky Driscoll, find that no one in the town of Santa Mira is behaving quite like they used to. It is as if the entire town has been seized by a case of "mass hysteria". When they see duplicates of themselves, emerging from giant pods, Miles and Becky conclude that the townspeople are being replaced in their sleep by perfect physical copies, now devoid of any humanity. They try to escape together, but Becky falls asleep and is changed. The film concludes with Miles Bennell running onto the highway, frantically screaming to passing motorists, "They're here already! You're next! You're next!" as truckloads of pods are seen arriving in neighbouring towns, to replace even more humans.

The change from human to pod happens precisely at the moment of the loss of vigilance (to use the language of Stalinism), the moment when the subject falls asleep. "One moment of sleep", explains Dr Bennell, "and the girl I loved was an inhuman enemy bent on my destruction". Yet, like the 1962 *Manchurian Candidate*, which famously blurred the lines of interpretation by making it impossible to tell if it was participating in or reacting to the paranoid fantasies of McCarthyism, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* can just as

easily be read as a representation of the conformist 1950s in the USA, about a culture that in its fear of the *other* was trying to eliminate all difference within. As Sobchak points out, much of the attraction of the "invisible invasion films" has been attributed to their metaphorical realization of the *angst* of modern man living in a technological, bureaucratic and conformist society.

Thus, for example, Ernesto Laura (1972: 71) feels "it is natural to see the pods as standing in for the idea of communism which gradually takes possession of a person, leaving him outwardly unchanged but transformed within". Brian Murphy bases the film's appeal on its convincing atmosphere of paranoia: "the image of people, your postman, your policeman, your wife, being taken over by an alien force was rendered with horrible and frightening conviction" (Murphy 1972: 42). Charles Gregory writes: "Made in 1956 in the middle of the decade, peopled by men in gray flannel suits, the silent generation, the status seekers, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and lonely crown, Siegel's science fiction thriller was a cry of frustrated warning against the conformity and the uniformity of society that was blissfully living in the best of all possible worlds" (Gregory 1972: 3–4; all three of these are also cited in Sobchak 2004: 121–23). To quote Cyndy Hendershot (2001: 1–2), sociologists of the Cold War era "saw monsters everywhere". For J. Edgar Hoover, communists enacted "their evil work" on the unsuspecting. In an equal and opposite vein, anti-McCarthyists, like Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, labelled McCarthyism as an evil force that "has even entered the universities, great citadels of our spiritual strength, and corrupted them" (both cited in Hendershot 2001: 1–2).

In the "invisible invasion films" discourse is centred not so much on the fear of difference as on the possibility of identity: not so much on the fear of the enemy as *other*, but on the fact that the real enemy is already "inside us". In *Invasion, U.S.A.*, The Enemy, when they land, are dressed in American uniform. As the radio operator at Peace Harbor cries out before she is killed: "The enemy is here!" Or, as Miles Bennell shouts as he runs through highway traffic at the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, "They're here already!" The repeated indexical sign "here", points to a location in space: the enemy is *here*, they have landed on our soil. However, Miles Bennell's emphasis on the adverb "already", suggests that the enemy is "here already": that is, they landed long ago, we just never noticed. The paranoia of alien invasion is driven by an inability to locate the enemy as outside yourself, in the impossibility of distinguishing between self and other.

Blade Runner as a Cold War film

Noël Carroll, writing about horror films, has argued that the two essential characteristics of the monster are its impurity and its dangerousness. Borrowing from Mary Douglas's analysis of "dirt" in *Purity and Danger* (1966), he notes that monsters are always hybrids and therefore difficult to categorize. As a result, they cross boundaries of cultural schemas. Monsters are, Carroll

emphasizes, interstitial. They are not only (or not simply) physically threatening, but also cognitively threatening – their unclear or mixed origin (King Kong is half man, half ape, for example) means that they exist in between the rigidly binary systems that produced them (Carroll 1990: 31–34). The pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* are monstrous precisely because they are human and yet radically different. This discourse of same-but-different replicates itself in a number of films of the Cold War, finding its culmination in a film that we might not at first think of as forming part of the Cold War canon: Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner*.

A film that poses "questions about the nature of man, God, and beast, the meaning of existence and the workings of the universe", a "postmodern" text par excellence (see Marder 1991; Silverman 1991; Bruno 1987; Begley 2004), Ridley Scott's brilliant adaptation of Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* cannot be reduced to the usual Cold War schlock of Hollywood cinema, which takes such delight in staging and restaging alien invasions (of pods, of Russians, of monsters and aliens) and their eventual destruction. Yet, *Blade Runner* does not appear in an historical or ideological vacuum, but comes squarely on the heels of Brezhnev-era stagnation, Jimmy Carter's failed optimism, SALT II nuclear anti-proliferation treaties, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and Ronald Reagan's apocalyptic rhetoric.

Blade Runner is the third in a series of breakthrough science fiction films to emerge in the late 1970s–early 1980s – following *Star Wars* and Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*. Between them, the three films might be said to mark a transition away from a knowable world of good and evil (typically configured as a Manichaean structure of Cold War ideology), and the viciously *alien*, to a nuanced, complex and incomprehensible confrontation with the *other* of *Blade Runner*. The three films represent a dialogue about an imagined future, a dialogue that may be said to begin by imagining a radical difference between the forces of right and wrong, and to end with the erasure of that difference.

Lucas's *Star Wars* participates in what might be called a "conservative" division of the universe into good and evil: the Nazi uniforms of the Empire leave no room for doubt about their broader goals and intentions, while the notion of a totalitarian Empire always ready and willing to deploy its weapons of mass destruction to squash rebellious (or dissident) citizens reminds us – even before Ronald Reagan's great speech – of the vast and incomprehensible enemy sprawling across Asia and half of Europe. Scott's *Alien*, on the other hand, makes use of the sci-fi/horror genres of the 1950s, reminding us of Japanese *Godzilla* films, monster movies and, of course, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The emphasis on the body, on the evil and alien *other* existing inside every "normal" American citizen, already shifts the Cold War rhetoric of *us* vs. *them* to a less clearly delineated space of good and evil, suggesting (quite literally on the visual level) a symbiotic relationship between the self and its horrifying alien *other*. The alien creature in *Alien* does not

merely kill humans, it uses them as hosts for a process of reproduction (which is, of course, also a motif of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*). Like the vampire, the werewolf and the zombie, the alien is a threat to the integrity of the body itself. However, as Peter Lev (1998: 32) notes, in *Alien*, the threat is more visceral, the body more subject to transformation than in a classic horror film: "The eruption of an alien from a human body could be seen as a disguised version of 'monstrous' processes that are normally hidden, such as birth and sexuality."

This eruption is precisely "uncanny": it is the sudden manifestation of something "which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (Freud 1919: 241). As such, it speaks to the existence of the unconscious – a system of incomprehensible drives, repressed desires and forgotten memories – the Thing, as Slavoj Žižek would put it, "from inner space" (Žižek 1999). It speaks to subjective division, to the impossibility of maintaining a belief in a unified and knowable self, and the attempt to project outward, onto the *other*, the paranoid knowledge of the self's atavistic and murderous wishes: *I* don't want to kill it, *it* wants to kill *me* (or, to put it in the language of the fetishist and American Cold War rhetoric: "I know very well that we dropped two bombs on Japan, but nevertheless, I will continue to believe that it is the Russians who want to drop bombs on us"). Like the earlier *Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Alien* tries to maintain the division between good and bad, sane and insane, exterior and interior, but in the end, succumbs to the impossibility of certainty.

Stephen Neale's description of the monster in horror films focuses on bodily disruption. "The monster, and the disorder it initiates and concretises", he writes,

> is always that which disrupts and challenges the definitions and categories of the "human" and the "natural". Generally speaking, it is the monster's body which focuses the disruption. Either disfigured, or marked by a heterogeneity of human and animal features, or marked only by a "non-human" gaze, the body is always in some way signalled as "other", signalled, precisely, as monstrous.
>
> (Neale 1980: 21)[6]

In *Blade Runner*, the monstrous is signalled not by deformation or disfigurement, but by perfection. As J.F. Sebastian puts it, looking at the Nexus 6 replicants Pris and Roy, "You're so perfect". Even here, though, difference is located at the level of the body. *Blade Runner* opens with an extreme close-up shot of an eye, the privileged organ of sight and knowledge. Yet, as Kaja Silverman (1991: 111) notes, "if the opening shots work in an anticipatory way to break down the dichotomy between replicants and humans by focusing on an eye which could represent either, it is because that organ represents precisely the site at which difference is ostensibly discernible within the world of *Blade Runner*".

Blade Runner continues to blur the line between self and *other* by finally making it impossible for the viewer to maintain his/her belief in any tangible difference between human and replicant. A strange mix of sci-fi (which generally preserves distinctions between good and evil) and film noir (which actively erases that difference), *Blade Runner* begins by suggesting that difference can be seen via the prosthetics of technology. The film centres on the problem of recognition. Four replicants (Roy Batty, Leon, Zhora and Pris) have escaped from an *off-world* colony and come back to Earth, searching for a way to escape death by prolonging their four-year life span. Because replicants are identical or superior to humans in every way, they pose a threat not only of physical violence, but also of ontology, a threat that is made more palpable by the presence of Rachel, a new model endowed by the Tyrell Corporation with "memories" – implants which prevent her from realizing her status as *thing* rather than being.

The Voigt-Kampf "empathy" test with which the film opens and which acts throughout as a kind of "primal scene" (that is to say, a memory that becomes traumatic upon its later repeated recollection and understanding), stages the initial belief in the possibility of recognition of the alien – in this case, replicant – *other* (see Marder 1991: 92–95). However, it also suggests from the outset that this difference is invisible to the "naked" or "unarmed" eye, but rather is the product of an elaborate technological construction. Replication, "more human than human", simulacrum, a copy with no original – the replicant poses the problem of origins, of essence, of where we come from and where we are going. Moreover, the replicant threat is the threat of self-knowledge (and of its ultimate failure): as Deckard says in reference to Rachel, "How can *it* not know what *it* is?" Self-knowledge is unattainable because, as *Blade Runner* suggests, our memories, our feelings and emotions, our actions and experiences have been "implanted" – which is to say, produced on the outside and incorporated within ourselves as our own. Two decades later, *The Matrix* (dir. the Wachowskis, 1999) will pose a similar problem of "simulacra and simulation", but will ultimately suggest that we can get beyond the fake to the real – *Blade Runner* offers no such resolution. We can go to Sigmund Freud to talk about the "memory trace" as a product of external stimuli (the body's contact with the outside world) which leaves marks on the psyche (see Freud 1986); or to Lacan and talk about our mistaken identifications with external images that we then internalize as our selves. In either case, the *external* world produces *internal* realities, constructs what is inside by what is outside – our memories, like those of the four replicants, like those of Rachel (and of Deckard) are "implants".

Thus the replicant threat is the threat that the constructed *other* may be no different from the self that maintains its coherence through a series of misrecognitions (I have family photos and therefore must have had a family), projections (*it* wants to kill *me*), and identifications (with laws, prohibitions and structures of power). *Blade Runner* ultimately disrupts Cold War binaries by suggesting that the self and its *other* are one and the same. As critics have

pointed out, paratextually, Harrison Ford brings with him the prospect for the continuity and clear protagonist/antagonist distinction from *Star Wars*, but the viewer encounters a film that deals with the results of the historically troubled post-Watergate, post-Vietnam America instead of escaping from it. The ideological characteristic of *Blade Runner* involves the despair and confusion of "the very lonely, powerful yet impotent America which emerged from the war", no longer believing in its future, or even for that matter, in its past – a characteristic of a genre that Naomi Greene had termed a "new melodrama" (Greene 1984: 34). The actions of the Soviet Union (the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan) and President Reagan's Manichaean rhetoric help to situate *Blade Runner* still firmly within the discourse of the Cold War, but its emphasis on *not knowing* the truth, places it beyond binary categories that keep "self" and "other" distinct.

Soviet aliens: Abram Tertz's "Pkhentz"

We see a similar logic at work in Abram Tertz's (Andrei Sinyavsky) fantastic short story "Pkhentz", which also centres on questions of the aliens among us, but now from the Soviet perspective. Assumed to have been written in 1956–1957, but not published until 1966,[7] "Pkhentz" has always been understood as political allegory: the plight of the writer-intellectual (alcoholic, criminal, madman, pederast), of the writer as outsider or "illegal alien" trapped within the conventions of socialist realism and the Soviet way of life. As Catharine Nepomnyashchy (1995) notes, Tertz's works consistently showed the way the writer became an outlaw, the act of writing – a crime, and text – the site of transgression. However, "Pkhentz" is also a sci-fi text and, as such, it reproduces a similar paradigm to that of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but now from a Soviet perspective, describing in its own terms the paranoia over invasion and anxiety over contamination.[8]

The narrator of the story, Andrei Kazimirovich Sushinski, "half-Polish, half-Russian", "not a Party member", "never been abroad" (Tertz 1966: 9), whose assumed name and biographical information echo the real name of his author, Andrei Donatovich Sinyavsky, is an alien plant from the planet that may or may not be called Pkhentz. The plot of the short story – told in the first person and called an "irregular diary" – concerns the alien's quest to find others of his kind, his valiant resistance to the sexual advances of his all-too-human neighbour Verochka, his severe illness and eventual decision to remove himself far away from Soviet civilization, back to the site of his original crash landing, where he will speak only the words of his own language while awaiting certain death. The narrator's "alien" being, his inability to understand or fit into the world around him, his fear of losing his identity through eventual and inevitable assimilation and the forgetting of his own language – finally, the status of the text as an irregular diary and criminal text that explicitly turns the narrator into an underground author – have provided the main interpretive tools for a coherent reading of "Pkhentz" as a

personal/political allegory. However, in the framework of the Cold War's obsession with self and other, with spies, aliens, cover-ups and exposures, "Pkhentz" also opens up to the possibility of a different – perhaps "fantastic" – reading that tells a story of the relationship between identity, alienation, assimilation and the ultimate confrontation with the *other*.

"Pkhentz" opens with two possibilities of contact with the *other*, contact that is in both cases thwarted. We begin the narrative in the laundry – a place not only where dirty sheets can be exchanged for clean ones, but also where meetings can take place, identities established and secrets revealed. "I met him at the laundry again today", writes our narrator. "He pretended to be completely taken up with his dirty washing and unaware of me" (Tertz 1966: 3). The "he" under examination is a hunchback, whom our narrator (mis)takes for a member of his own alien race. From the beginning, therefore, we are introduced to the possibility of identity – the narrator believes that he recognizes in the hunchback his fellow creature, another member of the same alien species, while the hunchback pretends not to recognize the narrator and busies himself with his dirty linen.

This preoccupation with the laundry is itself of vital concern for the narrative, since exhibiting dirty linen is allied in the text with the possibility of giving something away – a "secret" that should have remained hidden but now might come to light – and is linked to Andrei Kazimirovich's obsession with passing through this world without "attracting attention". Suspicion, secrecy, contamination, attention and visibility together form the framework within which the story is constructed. As the story progresses, we quickly learn that along with drawing attention to himself, pollution and contamination are precisely what Andrei Kazimirovich fears the most. Both in his confrontation with his neighbour Verochka and with the hunchback Leopold, Andrei Kazimirovich shrinks back in fear of the co-mingling of species that would ultimately result in a loss of self. Indeed, Andrei Kazimirovich's encounter with Verochka's "alien" body is one of the key scenes in the text, in part because it represents the first possibility for a "Cold War" reading of this story. Described as an "alliance" (Tertz 1966: 4, in the Russian: "*voennyi soiuz*") against "common enemies" (3), Andrei Kazimirovich's relationship with Verochka hinges on an "*us* versus *them*" model, which her hints at marriage threaten to make permanent.

Coming into her room one morning to borrow ink for his irregular diary, Andrei Kazimirovich is confronted by what he calls Verochka's "uncovered" body. Having gotten fed up with Andrei Kazimirovich's lack of attention, throwing off the covers, Verochka reveals her naked body, crying triumphantly, "Look what you've turned down, Andrei Kazimirovich!" (Tertz 1966: 5) Yet, unlike the earlier scene in the laundry and despite Verochka's admonition, it is not Andrei Kazimirovich here who *looks*, but rather, Verochka's body that stares back at him: "Verochka, her eyes flashing, threw back the counterpane, and her whole body, completely uncovered, stared up at me angrily" (5).

Verochka's eyes flash and her body stares, confronting Andrei Kazimirovich with a totally foreign other, the sight of which is both fascinating and repulsive. Andrei Kazimirovich, in fact, tries hard not to look. His first thought is to reinterpret this sight within the context of something familiar: he remembers studying closely the pictures and diagrams of an anatomy textbook, "to know what was what" (Tertz 1966: 5). Second, he recalls seeing little boys bathing in the river at the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest. However, nothing he has seen up to this point has prepared him for the sight of a naked woman: Verochka's breasts are at the same time excessive and lacking – Andrei Kazimirovich claims that at first he "took them for secondary arms, amputated above the elbow" – while her "spherical belly" collected all of the food swallowed in the course of the day "in a single heap". The "lower half" was "overgrown with curly hair like a little head" (5). We have already had, by this point, the narrator's long discourse on the disgusting human practice of eating, but we do not yet know that the narrator's body has many arms and many eyes, some of which have already begun to atrophy from being forced to assume human shape. It is easy, in that case, to read Verochka's body as a direct threat to the narrator: her body, with its extra set of arms amputated at the elbows and voracious stomach, is both castrated and castrating.

The description of Verochka's lower bodily stratum (as Bakhtin would have it), which the narrator, having recovered from his initial shock, takes the opportunity to examine more closely, similarly follows this fetishistic logic: "I caught a glimpse of something resembling human features. Only it didn't look female to me, but more like an old man's face, unshaven and grinning. A hungry, angry man dwelt there between her legs" (Tertz 1966: 5). Thus, Verochka is othered not only in relation to Andrei Kazimirovich, the alien plant from Pkhentz, and not only in relation to the standard drawings of an anatomy textbook (which only dared to hint at the secrets contained between a woman's legs) – she is also othered in relation to herself. Her body hides within itself its own alien other – the hungry, angry man who snores at night and swears from boredom (5).[9]

This encounter with Verochka's alien body is part of the text's discourse about the confrontation with the other, about the struggle for identity and differentiation. In contrast to American films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or *The Manchurian Candidate*, "Pkhentz" can be read as a metaphor for the Cold War that has its roots, in part, in the uneasy alliance of two fundamentally different and ultimately incompatible nations – the USA and the Soviet Union – during the second half of the Second World War. Like Andrei Kazimirovich's temporary alliance with Verochka against the other neighbours, the Soviet-American alliance brought together beings so fundamentally different that only the presence of a "common enemy" could unite them for any length of time. Unlike *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where the subject is forced to recognize the fundamental identity of the self to the other, here, as Andrei Kazimirovich's encounters with both Leopold and Verochka suggest, each side looks for other beings like itself, but finds only the "alien

other". Exposure of the true, undisguised self produces (instead of understanding or sympathy) only fear and loathing. The attempt to penetrate into the other's secrets is both inevitable and disastrous. At the same time, there remains the constant, lurking fear that too much proximity will produce contamination and we will lose that which makes us different and unique and individual, to be completely dissolved in the *other*.

We see this perhaps most clearly toward the end of the story, in Andrei Kazimirovich's illness and concomitant fears of the loss of his alien identity through assimilation into normal "human" culture. The last illness, says the narrator, has not only broken his body, but has crippled his soul. He now has strange desires to go to the pictures or to play draughts with Verochka's new husband (Tertz 1966: 13). His main worry, however, is language. Looking back at the entries in the irregular diary, Andrei Kazimirovich finds "the influence of an alien *milieu*" (13) in every phrase. Cold War phrasing resurfaces here when Andrei Kazimirovich laments that *nashi* – "our lot" – will never read his diary and never find out anything about him; "they'll never fly such an unearthly distance to this outlandish place" (13). His dream is to find the crater in the ground where his alien ship crash-landed thirty-two years ago and to wait there for the coming of winter, never thinking a single human thought, never hearing a single alien word (13). The final paragraph of the story is a series of near-nonsense words, directed, we would presume, at the alien race far away on the planet that may or may not be called Pkhentz:

> Oh, native land! PKHENTZ! GOGRY TUZHEROSKIP! I am coming back to you! GOGRY! GOGRY! GOGRY! TUZHEROSKIP! TUZHEROSKIP! BONJOUR! GUTENABEND! TUZHEROSKIP! BU-BU-BU! MIAOW, MIAOW! PKHENTZ!
>
> (Tertz 1966: 13)

To understand this turn away from language as a tool of communication, we might take as a counter example the 1943 US film *Mission to Moscow*, and the conversation between Madame Davies and Madame Molotov about the two nations learning to "speak the same language". Directed by Michael Curtiz for Warner Bros.,[10] and based verbatim on "Plain" Joe Davies's account of his brief sojourn in Moscow as the first US ambassador to the Soviet Union, *Mission to Moscow* was one of a handful of American films made during the Second World War that bent over backwards in order to show Stalinist Russia in a positive light. Immediately dubbed by wits as "Submission to Moscow", this film became a national embarrassment with the escalation of tension between the USA and the USSR following the end of the war and the start of the Cold War. Yet what this film represents is precisely the romance with the other that the Cold War both desired and feared.

Unlike the dream of speaking "the same language" proffered by Curtiz's film, "Pkhentz" is a story about language's ability to make contact with the other and the final rejection of that contact in favour of self-preservation (and

certain death). Perhaps someday, says Madame Molotov we will all speak the same language – and there is something both hopeful and sinister in that remark. In order for us all to speak the same language we must either assimilate or be assimilated by what we perceive as the other. In this case, either Russia will begin to speak English, or America, Russian – either way, one language will win out. The third alternative, though immediately promising, turns out to be no less destructive: the two languages, cultures, peoples, will blend together into what may be a greater whole, but certainly spells the annihilation of both (just listen to Russians complain about the infiltration of English into everyday speech).

At stake in Andrei Sinyavsky's "Pkhentz" is precisely the desire to preserve individual identity by means of language, to resist the temptation of self-destructive communality made manifest by the utopian idealism of this American version of Madame Molotov and suggested by Verochka's perverse attentions. Language, expressed in *Mission to Moscow* as the desire to erase the boundaries between nations and peoples, is in this story the only tool/weapon left (besides the body) by which identity could be established and preserved. The radical disintegration of the (Russian) language with which the narrator/author/alien confronts the reader in the last paragraph of the story is Andrei Kazimirovich's final attempt to preserve that which is different and unique – his "alien" self. Yet, it is also a sign that if this radical difference is in fact preserved and remains untranslatable (either linguistically or socially), then the self will remain completely alien and incomprehensible to the *other*. All communication, then, is either treachery or misunderstanding.

Solaris and the Things from Soviet space

As Kevin Reese has pointed out, to anyone familiar with the science fiction that was being written in the Soviet Union in 1956, "Pkhentz" is "a revelation" (Reese 2008: 441–42). The careers of such writers as Boris and Arkadii Strugatskii, Ilia Varshavskii, and Vladimir Savchenko were still in their infancy, and the watershed event for Thaw science fiction, the publication of Ivan Efremov's novel *The Galaxy Andromeda* (*Tumannost' Andromedy*, 1957), took place only the following year. Indeed, Tertz was writing his alien short story at the moment when Soviet science fiction had been reduced to what was called "close aim" – instead of imagining the distant future (as nineteenth-century Russian and early Soviet sci-fi had done), Stalinist science fiction was set "tomorrow", and limited itself to anticipation of industrial achievements, inventions and travels within the solar system. Heavy censorship together with the implementation of socialist realism in the mid-1930s to early 1950s spelled a period of stagnation for Soviet science fiction, during which it was no longer possible to dream of a distant future.

Two films made during this period of "close aim" are of interest in the Cold War context, both for their plots which involve Soviet-American cooperation, and for their complicated distribution histories: *The Heavens Call*

(*Nebo zovët*, dir. Mikhail Karyukov and Aleksandr Kozyr, 1959; released in the USA as *Battle Beyond the Sun*) (see Figure 2.1) and *Planet of Storms* (*Planeta bur′*, dir. Pavel Klushantsev, 1961, released in the USA as *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*). *The Heavens Call* was the Soviet Union's first post-war science fiction film.[11] Made two years after the launch of Sputnik and two years before Gagarin's space flight, *The Heavens Call* imagines (literally, as a day-dream) the moment when space flight and space exploration become easy and possible. The film tells the story of the space race as one of collaboration and Soviet sacrifice. Two manned space crews – the Soviet "Rodina" (Motherland), and the American "Typhoon" – are getting ready to make the first voyage to Mars. The Americans, driven by capitalist competition and the need to produce "sensational" news stories, set out first, risking their own lives and the lives of everyone around them. Because of bad planning their ship goes off-course and must be rescued by the Soviet crew, now lacking the fuel necessary for the return home. Manning a pilotless rocket, a fifth cosmonaut brings fuel to the stranded crew, but dies as a result of radiation poisoning. The film ends with an invocation of peace – all scientists must learn to work together – and the possibility that the next generation will achieve the dream of conquering space.

Planet of Storms (based on a novella by Aleksandr Kazantsev) similarly imagines the conquest and exploration of space as a joint venture between the Soviet Union and the USA. The film begins in open space, with the

Figure 2.1 The fantasy of Soviet-American cooperation (*The Heavens Call*, dir. Mikhail Karyukov and Aleksandr Kozyr, 1959)
Source: Screen capture, YouTube

destruction of one of three Soviet ships on course to Venus. Despite the risks posed by having only two ships proceed with the mission, the crew makes the decision to continue with the exploration of the planet, landing two separate parties, one of which includes an American scientist and a robot, while leaving one crew member – Masha, the only woman on board – to orbit the planet and wait for their return. The crew's time on the planet is filled with adventure: there are prehistoric man-eating plants, dinosaurs, an exploding volcano, and what may be the underwater remains of a city, complete with a primitive sculpture of a dragon with a ruby for an eye. While on the planet, the scientists hear the persistent call of some kind of creature – possibly of a woman whose image we see in the final shots of the film. Breaking apart a rock to discover a cast of a face, one of the explorers realizes that the "aliens" look just like "us", but it is too late: the ship must leave Venus immediately or be destroyed by an earthquake. As the ship departs, we see a figure approach the edge of the pool, where the ship had been: though we can only see her reflected upside down in the water, we understand that not only does she indeed "look like us", but also that she is beautiful. In a shot that anticipates American 1960s sci-fi (specifically, the TV series *Star Trek*), the alien woman is dressed in flowing white robes that reveal her shoulders and bare midriff, looking very much like a Greek goddess. She is Venus embodied – a creature that is at once like and unlike the men on the spaceship.

Here, the concern is with likeness: many of the crew's philosophical discussions revolve around the question of where life came from and Darwin's theory of evolution, and whether or not it is possible that life on Venus and life on Earth had the same origins. Besides the alien woman in the final shot, two beings in the film qualify for the position of "other": the American-made robot, John, whose absolute logic and mathematical calculations are prized for their emotionless efficiency (until the robot's self-preservation module causes him to endanger the human scientists); and the female crew member, Masha, whose "heart" briefly overpowers her intellect and nearly costs everyone their lives. Like the earlier *The Heavens Call*, the presence of an American scientist on board signals the transformation of the standard rhetoric of the space race of *us* vs. *them* (or, in Soviet propaganda – "*dognat' i peregnat' Ameriku*" – to "catch up to and overtake America"[12]) into a discourse of cooperation and camaraderie. It is the woman and the robot, rather than the American scientist, who pose a problem for the crew.

In a strange reversal of this spirit of cooperation, *Planet of Storms* and *The Heavens Call* were both pirated, re-edited and released in the West under new titles. Purchased by 28 countries, including the USA, *Planet of Storms* was bought for US distribution by B-movie producer Roger Corman, who proceeded to cut it up and use the pieces for two other films, an act of cinematic cannibalism that gave us Curtis Harrington's 1965 *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* and Peter Bogdanovich's equally classic 1968 *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women*. For *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*, Harrington added several American-made scenes (starring Basil Rathbone and Faith Domergue

to replace the Russian actress Kiunna Ignatova[13]), removed the credits and either renamed the Soviet actors with non-Russian names (Gennadii Vernov as Robert Chantal, Georgii Zhzhonov as Kurt Boden), or left them completely uncredited to hide the film's origins. In 1968 Peter Bogdanovich (under the name Derek Thomas) eliminated the female cosmonaut altogether, but added new scenes starring Mamie Van Doren – Miss Palm Springs 1948 – and other attractive blond women in shell brassieres, now telling a parallel story of a group of telepathic women whose god (a pterodactyl) is killed by the men from Earth. When the men escape, the telepathic women reject their old god and erect a new one – the lava-burnt and no longer functional robot, John.

Harrington's *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* and Bogdanovich's *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women* also included scenes taken from Kariukov's *The Heavens Call*, thus using the "best" of Soviet sci-fi to tell an American tale. *The Heavens Call* was also acquired by Corman and re-edited by the young Francis Ford Coppola into *Battle Beyond the Sun* (1962). Coppola's film opens with models of spacecraft "currently under development by the United States Government" and the explanation that "the motion picture you are about to see, may be called 'a fantasy of the future'". Set in November 1997, in the "fear ridden years following the great atomic war", the film depicts a world that has been divided into north-south hemispheres. The two countries, North Hemis and South Hemis, are clearly analogues for the United States and the Soviet Union (with the former Soviets now representing the good Americans, and the former Americans now representing the evil Soviets). The plot of competition, deception, sacrifice and cooperation remains largely the same, but for the addition of some monsters. As one reviewer has noted, there is nevertheless "a very clear indication that this film wasn't made in America: there are far too many women involved in the space program, even, horror of horrors, in positions of authority" (Anonymous n.d.). In addition to preparing a dubbing script free of anti-American propaganda and supervising the dubbing, Coppola filmed a few shots of two space monsters fighting and cut them into the Soviet material. According to fellow director Jack Hill, who also worked on the film, Coppola's idea was that one monster would look like a penis (with an eye) and the other a vagina (with teeth) (see Hill 2012). The presence of monsters somewhat justified the new title, *Battle Beyond the Sun*.

Visually striking for its space flight sequences, *The Heavens Call* was inspirational for many filmmakers on both sides of the Cold War divide, with both Stanley Kubrick and George Lucas apparently claiming that without it, neither *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), nor *Star Wars* (1977) would have been possible. Indeed, while Lucas's *Star Wars* fits the standard pattern of an American sci-fi action film, Kubrick's pensive *2001*, as Alex Cox (2011) has recently suggested, "is, by contrast, famously slow-paced and enigmatic. Its meaning remains unclear four decades on, and it still resembles its own seamless monolith, 'its origin and purpose a total mystery'". He continues: "In its pace, its attention to the mechanical detail of space flight, and its

memorable computer, *2001* is, in some ways, the perfect Russian science-fiction film" (Cox 2011). Yet, as he goes on to point out, this is only because many film enthusiasts will have seen the film the Russians actually made – Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 *Solaris*.

Solaris, Tarkovsky's third full-length feature film, is a lengthy science fiction project (the original cut was supposed to be over three hours, but was released in the Soviet Union and abroad in several shortened versions), based on Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel. Though Tarkovsky was never happy with the final result, the film nonetheless captured many of its author/director's perennial concerns: the relationship between memory and history, of art and science, and of confrontation with an incomprehensible and alien other.[14] The film, which, unlike Lem's novel, includes a long opening sequence set on Earth, opens and closes with an extreme close-up of underwater reeds. Blue-green in colour and swaying gently in the water, giving off the feeling of time slowed but not completely erased, the reeds are the first in a series of images of organic and yet, simultaneously, disturbingly inhuman life, culminating in the shots of the seething Solaris Ocean glimpsed through the portholes of the space station that orbits the planet. As Cox puts it:

> It is an extraordinary film: not as fine as Kubrick's in its special effects, but much more complex in its depiction of human beings captured by aliens and placed in an imaginary world based on an incomplete understanding of their memories. *2001* is about the big picture – the great gas planets turning, the vast space station wheeling around Earth – while *Solaris* deals with little things, like why a man can't undo his wife's dress, or why it's raining indoors.
>
> (Cox 2011)[15]

Made as a kind of response to Stanley Kubrick's coolly scientific *2001*, *Solaris*, with its prolonged Earth sequence, nearly non-existent space flight, dilapidated space-station and mahogany library filled with works by Brueghel and Cervantes, wants to show us the power of love, memory and history lost in the world of scientific and technological progress. Yet, as the uncanny image of the swaying underwater reeds of the opening sequence suggests, *Solaris* also tells another story, giving us a glimpse into the truly unknown and unknowable that both attracts and repels us at the same time. Indeed, all Tarkovsky films are filled with images, the power of which lies precisely in the two-fold nature of their inexpressible beauty that is at the same time frightening and repellent. His 1975 *Mirror* (*Zerkalo*) ends its documentary sequence with shots of the atomic bomb exploding over Hiroshima, and this image of nuclear annihilation likely informs the vision of monstrous beauty found at the heart of all of Tarkovsky's films. The image of the Solaris Ocean, produced through combination shots of oil and mercury superimposed on water and creating an impression of a richly hued, thick, viscous liquid that seems recognizable but is, at the same time, completely alien, is itself a

product of a Hiroshima/Nagasaki vision of post-apocalyptic life, similar to the landscape of *Stalker* (1979).

The plot of *Solaris* centres on Kris Kelvin, whose job is to visit the dilapidated space station orbiting the planet Solaris to determine the continuing viability of its scientific research. Upon arrival, Kelvin discovers that one of the scientists has died under mysterious circumstances, while the others harbour secret "visitors" – visions from their unconscious made manifest by the Solaris Ocean. Soon Kelvin, too, has to face his own unconscious desire in the form of his late wife Hari, who committed suicide some years before. Like the other "visitors", Hari is both attractive and repellent – she is both the object of desire and the traumatic memory Kelvin tries to repress.

In Cold War terms, we might think of "contact" as the other side of "containment" (which is itself a response to the fear of invasion and contamination). To define the enemy is also to define the collective – when you know who or what the other is, you know yourself – and this is precisely the form of knowledge that breaks down at the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Blade Runner*, and again, at the end of "Pkhentz". In *Solaris*, Hari holds up a picture of herself in front of the mirror and asks Kelvin who it is. Although precisely identical to her, this Hari is not the same as the Hari that once was; she is, as another scientist on the space station tells her, merely an echo, a reincarnation, "a mechanical reproduction, a copy, a matrix", who only exists now as a result of Kelvin's desire. In *Solaris*, contact with the "visitors" produces not knowledge of the other but self-knowledge: they represent the unconscious, the thing that is hidden within the self.

In his reading of *Solaris*, called, "The Thing from Inner Space", Slavoj Žižek takes up Lacan's notion that art "as such is always organized around a central void of the impossible/real Thing", a statement that recalls for Žižek Rilke's thesis that "beauty is the last veil that covers the horrible" (Žižek 1999: 221), and for us Tarkovsky's description of Leonardo da Vinci's portrait *A Young Lady with a Juniper*.[16] In his essay, Žižek proposes to analyse the way the motif of the Thing appears within the diegetic space of cinematic narrative: "to speak about films whose narrative deals with some *impossible/traumatic Thing*, like *the alien Thing* in science-fiction horror films" (Žižek 1999: 221, emphasis in original). Starting with the first shots of *Star Wars*, Žižek suggests that the object-Thing (the gigantic spaceship that triumphantly enters the screen from somewhere behind us in the opening sequence) is clearly rendered as part of ourselves that "we eject into reality". It comes, in other words, not from outer, but from *inner* space.

The "visitors" of *Solaris* similarly come from this "inner space". The Solaris Ocean is a "decentered opaque machine which 'reads' [Kelvin's] deepest dreams and returns them to him as his symptoms" – that is to say, as his own message in its true form (Žižek 1999: 224–25). For Žižek, Tarkovsky backs away from the more radical confrontation with the Thing that Lem's original novel proposed, because in the end he reduces the enigma of Solaris to the question of love. In Lem's novel, the planet Solaris retains its inert and

external presence – it is a fundamentally impenetrable Other with no possible communication with us – while in Tarkovsky's film love and self-discovery become the answers to the question of why Solaris communicates by reincarnating our traumatic memories (Žižek 1999: 225). This gap between the novel and the film is most apparent in the two different endings. At the novel's end, we see Kris Kelvin alone on the spaceship, staring into the mysterious surface of the Solaris Ocean, the meaning of which is forever foreclosed, real contact with which, forever denied. The film, on the other hand, ends with what Žižek calls an "archetypal Tarkovskian fantasy" of combining within the same shot "the otherness into which the hero is thrown (the chaotic surface of Solaris) and the object of his nostalgic longing", his father's house to which he longs to return (Žižek 1999: 225). With Hari gone, Kelvin once again seems to find himself at his father's house, on the shores of the lake that opened the film. It is raining inside the father's house, and as father and son embrace, the camera pulls back to reveal that the house and the lake are located on an island in the middle of an ocean on the planet Solaris.

In the narrative of *Solaris*, the Ocean represents a possible alien intelligence, which is responsible for generating physical manifestations of the dreams and memories of those on board the space station. In the historical/cultural/political context of the film and of Tarkovsky's work, however, the image of the Ocean – the seething alien mass that fills the screen – seems representative of the end point of humanity's scientific advance: the aftermath of technology's anti-human drive, but also of humanity's inevitable confrontation with the truly incomprehensible and uncomprehending other. Filmed in part in Tokyo and Osaka, while Tarkovsky had been hoping to make his autobiographical and intensely personal *Mirror* (originally titled *Belyi, belyi den'* (*White, White Day*) 1973), *Solaris* seems to speak to the tragedy of the human race pushed toward its furthest technological frontier. The images of the de-saturated all-white screen that pervades the film and the seething tides of the Solaris Ocean force the viewer into a momentary confrontation with what Lacan and Žižek have called the Real – with that which is inassimilable and which cannot be placed within narrative or other symbolic structures – but of which Hiroshima's atomic explosions are one blinding manifestation.[17] Science taken to its limits is the magnificent and incomprehensible beauty of nuclear holocaust (as the ending of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, 1964, similarly suggests), and the Solaris Ocean, with its seething images of non-anthropomorphic life, is the closest visual representation of this at once beautiful, terrifying and incomprehensible presence. As the camera moves away in a helicopter shot in the final moments of *Solaris*, it reveals the father's house from the opening sequence gradually becoming obscured by clouds. The final cut shows us the Solaris Ocean with its newly formed islands – one of them contains the dacha, the pond, the trees and the highway. As the camera continues to move away through the clouds, the screen fades to white. This completely desaturated screen is the space onto which we project our desires.

For Žižek, Lem's novel preserves the *other* as the *other*, and in this way, does not attempt to deny the *other's* radical otherness in relation to ourselves, while Tarkovsky's film ultimately reduces this alien presence to something familiar. I would argue, however, that in an attempt to counteract Cold War binary thinking, Tarkovsky produces a fantasy of getting beyond that binary structure, of making "contact", of incorporating the other within oneself, and of projecting oneself onto the other. While Sartorius suggests bombarding Solaris with radiation in order to prevent the "visitors" from returning, Snaut proposes beaming Kelvin's brainwave patterns at Solaris in hopes that it will understand them and stop the disturbing apparitions as a form of communication. The islands that form on the surface of Solaris at the end of the film, and which contain the dream of Earth within them, seem to be an answer to this new form of understanding, an attempt to erase the boundary between self and other, interior and exterior, us and them. Ultimately, whether staged as a paranoid fantasy or as unconscious desire for contact, each of the texts discussed in this chapter undoes the sharp distinction between Soviet and US. It was not until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, when the two countries were no longer caught up in imaginary projections, that they discovered how truly alien they actually were.

Notes

1 As Shaw and Youngblood argue, throughout the Cold War conflict, both industries interacted with their states' information apparatus in various, often subtle ways, sometimes openly and on other occasions covertly. While the Soviet cinema industry was from its inception conceived as an arm of the state, Hollywood has cultivated an air of ideological and financial independence. Yet, as the authors point out, though never direct, the involvement in Hollywood of various special interest groups was at various times quite extensive: starting with the Catholic Legion of Democracy which had close ties to the Production Code Administration run by Joseph Breen, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which ran a comprehensive surveillance operation in Hollywood, laundering its intelligence through the House Un-American Activities Committee, while helping to produce movies that fostered a positive image of the FBI as a the protector of the American people. See Shaw and Youngblood 2010: 15–62.

2 The Sedition Act of 1918 extended the Espionage Act of 1917 to cover a broader range of offences, notably speech and the expression of opinion that cast the government or the war effort in a negative light. Anti-immigrant, anti-anarchist in spirit, the Sedition Act of 1918 was meant to "protect wartime morale by deporting putatively undesirable political people". Out of the thousands of resident aliens illegally arrested and deported, fewer than 600 deportations were substantiated with evidence.

3 Several historical events may be seen as contributing to the repeated emphasis on "invasion" that graced the titles of so many American Cold War films: first, the US involvement in Europe, which meant that a generally politically isolationist country was now spread thin trying to keep Western Europe from going the way of Eastern Europe; second, the memory of Pearl Harbor and the possibility of Americans being attacked on their own soil; and finally, the Soviet acquisition of

an atom bomb in 1949, which could now be (in theory) delivered either by plane or by submarine to US soil.

4 Speech delivered on 13 April 1928 at the Shakhty trial of engineers. See, among others, Tucker 1972: 55.

5 See Rand's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) on 20 October 1947 (Rand 1947).

6 For a racialized reading of monsters, see Rony 1996.

7 "Pkhentz" was the last of the writings of Andrei Sinyavsky to be sent to the West under the pseudonym Abram Tertz before his arrest in 1965. Although the story was referred to at his trial, it did not figure in his indictment. "Pkhentz" first appeared in print in Polish translation in the January-February 1966 issue of the Paris-based Polish émigré journal *Kultura* (no. 219: 66–84), and a few months later, an English translation was published in the April issue of *Encounter* (no. 26: 3–13). The story was published in the original Russian in the volume *Fantasticheskii mir Abrama Tertza* (London/New York, 1967). In Russia, "Pkhentz" was not published until 1992, in Tertz's *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh.* All references here, including original English spellings of names, are to the 1966 English translation published in *Encounter*.

8 On Andrei Sinyavsky's interest in science fiction see his "'Bez skidok': o sovremennomnauchno-fantasticheskom romane" [Without Compromise: On the Contemporary Science Fiction Novel], published in the 1960 issue of *Voprosy literatury*. For a detailed account, see Reese 2008.

9 The man's face appearing between Verochka's legs is partially a vulgarization of the myth of Christ's face that appeared on St Veronica's apron, linking the sacred and the profane.

10 Curtiz is better known for having also directed *Casablanca* (1942) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945).

11 On the film and its position within the history of Russian sci-fi, see Kaminskij. Kaminskij points out that until the 1960s, the Soviet science fiction film canon comprised two films: Yakov Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924) and Vasilii Zhuravlev's *The Cosmic Journey* (*Kosmicheskii reis*, 1936); see Kaminskij 2013: 276, fn. 10.

12 "To catch up to and overtake [developed capitalist countries, later – America]" is an oft quoted Lenin phrase from his September 1917 work, "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Fight it". It again became a slogan in the 1950s in the propaganda rhetoric of Nikita Khrushchev.

13 In Kazantsev's novella, the female astronaut was an American named Mary; in *Planet of Storms*, she was Russian and named Masha (played by Kiunna Ignatova); in *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*, the character was replaced with an American actress (Faith Domergue) and renamed Marcia.

14 Tarkovsky's theoretical and critical writings are collected in his diary (published and translated into English as *Time within Time*, 1991) and the volume *Sculpting in Time* (1986); they trace the origins of Tarkovsky's films and dwell on the general possibilities and limitations of cinema as art.

15 For detailed readings of Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, see, among others, Le Fanu 1987; Turovskaya 1989; Johnson and Petrie 1994; and Bird 2008.

16 Writing about his use of Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of *A Young Lady with a Juniper* in *Mirror*, Tarkovsky explained that the picture affects us simultaneously in two opposite ways: "It is not possible to say what impression the portrait finally makes on us", he wrote. "It is not even possible to say definitely whether we like the woman or not, whether she is appealing or unpleasant. She is at once attractive and repellent. There is something inexpressibly beautiful about her and at the same time, repulsive, fiendish" (Tarkovsky 1986: 108).

17 For a detailed reading of the all-white screen, see my "*Solaris* and the White, White Screen" (Kaganovsky 2008).

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