

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

(Siegel, 1956)

Component 1: Key Developments in US Film Focus Areas: Genre, Narrative, Context

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1: Opening Seq 0 – 00:04:00 (From titles to driving away from the train station)

Sequence 2: Closing Seq 01:10:00-01:17:00 <https://goo.gl/QEpfpF>

Sequence 3: Greenhouse Seq 00:40:00-00:46:00 <https://goo.gl/aCIVLd>

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

- **The Greenhouse Scene:** Film Noir influences, including claustrophobic and cluttered mise-en-scène, venetian blind effect suggests that there is no escape, they are trapped.
- Dutch (canted) camera angles to imply that something is ‘not right/normal’.
- ECU of Dr Bennell’s reaction to noticing the pods mirrors the ECU in the final scene (“You’re next”).
- **The Opening Scene:** High Angle view of the ‘perfect town’ perhaps from the POV of their alien masters, looking down at their helpless, oblivious victims.
- Tracking shots as the Psychiatrist, Dr Hill, enters the Hospital connote a sense of urgency and authority.
- **The Final Scene:** Dr Bennell breaks the 4th wall and engages directly with the audience “You’re next”, putting the audience on ‘high alert’.
- Intimate CU shot reverse shot after the kiss, positioning the audience as part of the couple to share the feeling of betrayal.
- On the highway, the camera frantically follows

Dr Bennell’s movements, creating a sense of panic. The High Angle makes Dr Bennell look small, ignored and insignificant.

- The truck passes slowly allowing the audience to absorb all the cities destined for the pods.
- Dutch (canted) angles are used to imply that something is ‘not right’ with the world.

Mise-en-Scène

- **The Opening scene:** The titles: A focus on the sky, the threat, clouds cross the screen a sign of the incoming ‘storm’, nostalgia for small town Pre-war America and society yearns for a simpler time. “At first glance everything looked the same, but it wasn’t, something evil had taken possession of the town” a reference to the invisible threat to American ideology, communism.
- The police car racing through rain soaked city streets is a motif of Film Noir.
- The hospital is clinically white.
- **The Greenhouse scene:** A feeling of claustrophobia and entrapment is created by the cage like structure of the greenhouse.
- The pods replicate birth, they explode open, covered in a bubbling milky substance, very few special effects were used in the film, and this is one of the few instances.
- The perfect replica humans imply the sense of paranoia that was prevalent in the USA at this time, suggesting mistrust of those around you, that you cannot tell who are either alien/other/communist and that you should be prepared for an invasion.

Editing

- Very traditional cause and effect, continuity editing in line with Classical Hollywood Narrative techniques.
- Opening scene: At 00:03:00, a blur/cross dissolve is used to indicate the flashback, a method primarily used in Noir at this time.

Sound

- Dramatic music to anchor the feeling of imminent threat, or romance.
- From the first scene we observe a motif of Sirens, a symbol that help is on the way, but they are not always welcome like a nuclear alert.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

Gender Stereotypes:

- there was a changing dynamic in terms of gender relations in this time, both Miles and Becky are divorced, they fear a world without love.
- Becky has been in London, she is sophisticated and beautiful, her costume on her introduction is overtly feminine and innocent, but also sexualised (she is showing quite a lot of skin). Her costume changes to a more masculine look after their implied night together, then to a very prim and proper housewife look as the film progresses. This suggests that it is expected for Becky to conform to a housewife role.
- In **the final scene** when Becky 'turns', she is cold, not seduced by his kiss, a monster. She has betrayed Dr Bennell, Eve to his Adam.
- Women are weak and hysterical; their roles are subservient to men, their fears ignored.
- The voice over demonstrates the male POV, the need to assert patriarchal order following post war uncertainty about their role in the world. Dr Bennell is the steady voice of reason that is ignored.
- Traditional symbols of authority like the police are shown to be corrupted by the pods, this can be a projection of Segels view of the McCarthy witch hunts

Historical:

- This was a period of rapid social change it was the Cold War era, the dawn of the Atomic Age.
- **McCarthyism**, This film reflects the fears of a society gripped in its own paranoid mass hysteria, fears of communist conspiracy and the colourless conformity of a loss of individuality that communism implies.
- **Hays code**, implies they spent the night together, issues of 'wrongdoing or sin' had to be suggested, never explicit, to 'protect the moral fibre of the audience'. Therefore Segal has to rely on verbal innuendo. The scene where Becky makes breakfast implies they had spent the night together, but it is not explicit.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - Genre & Narrative

Genre Hybrid Sci-Fi/

Horror(Psychological)/Noir:

- This was a very cheap 'B' movie.
- The 'aesthetic of destruction' (Sontag) audiences gain pleasure from the cathartic release of seeing authority threatened and control restored.
- Miles uses traditional weapons of horror - the flaming torch, the steak through the heart.
- This is primarily a sci-fi, on the surface concerned with the effects of the atomic age, with an undercurrent of cold war paranoia.
- The aesthetic influence is that of a Film Noir, creating a sense of realism to this text.

Narrative:

- Narrative bookending: The prologue and epilogue were added by the studio to soften the message of despair.
- The use of flashback and V/O are Noir conventions.
- Is the ending hopeful? The authorities are aware of the threat, does that appease the audience's fears? Is the threat neutralised because the military have been called? Do we react differently to this a contemporary audience? Why?
- The ending is ambiguous, it is implied the order is restored.