

University of Pardubice  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Red Scare and Cold War in American 1950 s movies  
Bachelor Thesis

Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
Akademický rok: 2023/2024

# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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Studijní program: **B0231A090018 Anglický jazyk**  
Specializace: **Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi**  
Téma práce: **Red Scare and the Cold War in American 1950s movies**  
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

## Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce se bude věnovat problematice zobrazení období 50. let 20. století v USA v americkém filmu. V úvodu práce studentka s oporou relevantních sekundárních zdrojů stručně nastíní dobový kontext a definuje pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (Red Scare, McCarthyism, Cold War, apod.) Dále představí zvolená filmová díla a svůj výběr zdůvodní. Jádrem práce pak bude tematická analýza filmů, v níž se studentka zaměří na způsob prezentace padesátých let, tj. jaká témata a jakým způsobem tvůrci ve filmech uvedli. Závěrem své analýzy shrne, jednotlivá díla porovná a vyjádří se k případným dobovým proměnám (filmového) pohledu na dané období.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:  
Rozsah grafických prací:  
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**  
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Barnhisel, Greg. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.  
Barson, Michael, and Steven Heller. *Red Scared! : The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Pop Culture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001.  
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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **29. května 2024**  
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **29. května 2025**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D., for her valuable guidance, helpful advice, and continuous support throughout the writing of this thesis. I am also deeply grateful to my family and close friends for giving me encouragement and motivation.

## **ANNOTATION**

This Bachelor thesis examines the portrayal of communism and anti-communist propaganda in American movies of the 1950s. It analyzes how narrative techniques and thematic elements were used to reflect and strengthen the Cold War anxieties, particularly in movies such as *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *Red Planet Mars*. The study also compares these portrayals to a modern example, *Oppenheimer*, and explores how contemporary perspectives interpret historical narratives. Using a comparative approach, the thesis highlights the cultural and political influences on cinematic representations of communism and examines the evolution of these depictions over time.

## **KEYWORDS**

The Red Scare, McCarthyism, the Cold War, Propaganda, Communism, Anticommunism, The Manchurian Candidate, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Red Planet Mars, Oppenheimer

## **NÁZEV**

Rudá panika a studená válka v amerických filmech 50. let 20. století

## **ANOTACE**

Tato Bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením komunismu a antikomunistické propagandy v amerických filmech z 50. let 20. století. Analyzuje, jak byly narativní techniky a tematické prvky použity k reflexi a posílení obav ze studené války, zejména ve filmech jako Mandžuský kandidát, Invaze lupičů těl a Rudá planeta Mars. Studie také porovnává tato zobrazení s moderním příkladem, Oppenheimerem, a zkoumá, jak současné perspektivy interpretují historické narativy. Pomocí komparativního přístupu, práce zdůrazňuje kulturní a politické vlivy na filmové reprezentace komunismu a zkoumá vývoj těchto zobrazení v čase.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Rudá panika, Mccarthismus, studená válka, propaganda, komunismus, antikomunismus, Mandžuský kandidát, Invaze lupičů těl, Red Planet Mars, Oppenheimer

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## Introduction

In the post-World War II America, a new kind of fear gripped the land of opportunity: the fear of communism and communistic infiltration. Known as the "Red Scare," in this period the American society grew progressively suspicious of the hidden communist threat, both within and outside of the American borders. The communist ideology posed a direct threat to core American values and the future of the country was at risk. Politicians, artists, government employees and ordinary citizens found themselves caught in a web of paranoia created and driven by an anti-communist campaign of the American government and Senator Joseph McCarthy. Hollywood played a unique role at this point in American history, not only did it reflect public fears, but it was also used as an effective tool for the spreading of anti-communist propaganda. What the American people saw and heard on the big screen deeply shaped their understanding of the conflict. The American government used the entertainment industry to promote their anti-communist ideals and promote America as the good side, while showing the Soviet Union as the villain.

In this context, the 1950s American movies such as *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *Red Planet Mars* created narratives that addressed the tensions of the Cold War. Through certain metaphors and depictions these movies continue to reveal a lot about the cultural and political climate of the time. Many years later, modern movies such as *Oppenheimer* revisit this infamous era of American history and portray these themes in different light. Due to being shot retrospectively, *Oppenheimer* was allowed a degree of creative freedom, it revisited the Cold War era with a reflexive and critical mindset and provided fresh insight.

In this thesis I aim to examine the portrayal of communism and anti-communistic sentiments in *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Invasion of the Boddy Snatchers*, *Red Planet Mars* and *Oppenheimer*. By analyzing these movies in broader historical context, this work aims to shed light on how the American entertainment industry responded to and helped shape public perception of communism during one of the most politically charged periods in American history. Through a comparative approach, this study will also explore how contemporary cinema reinterprets these themes, offering new insights into the Red Scare and how it shaped the American cultural memory

## 1 Definition of Communism

Communism emerged as a major ideological force during the late 19th century and continued to spread. As mentioned by Holmes, communism used to be prevalent during the 20th century in countries across Eastern Europe and at its peak, ruled over more than a third of the world's population. However, in most of the countries, the regime eventually collapsed, and a new regime was established. Although it failed to remain as intentionally envisioned, it still remains the leading system in countries such as China, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos and North Korea.<sup>1</sup>

The ideology of communism was first clearly defined by German philosophers Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, who wrote about it in their shared book, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. This book is the most famous and widely read book on communism and serves as a direct opposition to the capitalist system, which as Frederick Lane mentions, is based on private ownership, market competition and economic inequality.<sup>2</sup> As Leslie Holmes sums up, in a capitalist system, power is held by the higher classes, and the lower ones are exploited. According to the theory mentioned in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels believe that history is a continuous class struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed, therefore, they believe that the lower oppressed classes (the proletariat) will eventually overthrow the higher capitalistic classes (bourgeoisie) and restructure the former society into an egalitarian communistic one.<sup>3</sup>

Another core idea Engels mentioned in the book is that the government and society as a whole should hold all property and abolish private property; this applies to the running of the industry as well as all means of production. According to their theory, a new system should be created which would not be based on competition but collaboration.<sup>4</sup> This was supposed to be just a temporary measure to help redistribute the resources as Marx and Engels believed the state would eventually disappear once the proletariat had restructured the society and eliminated private ownership, the outcome would be a stateless society. The

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Holmes, *Communism: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic C. Lane, "Meanings of Capitalism," *The Journal of Economic History* 29, no. 1 (1969): 5–12.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, *Communism: A very short introduction*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party: Followed by principles of communism* (Paris: Foreign languages press, 2020) 85–86.

book advocates for an overthrow of the capitalist system and supports the conquest of political power by the proletariat, while clearly defining the main concepts of communism.<sup>5</sup>

As Mark Sandle mentions, communism is an attempt to establish an egalitarian society. It aims to remove economic inequalities that lead to class divisions and envy as well as liberating people from the oppressive system of capitalism. Communists believe that the people of a communist country should strive to work together to ensure the progress of their country and have a community-focused mindset. All property should be held in communal ownership and society should be harmonic and cooperative. A true communist society should transcend beyond individualism and selfishness and work hard to benefit the larger masses.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, and Tariq Ali, *Manifesto of the Communist Party: A modern edition* (London: Verso, 2022), 24 – 28.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Sandle, *Communism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013) 3–4.

## 2 The Red Scare

In the late 1940 and early 1950s, the United States of America were consumed by a strong fear of communism, commonly known as the "Red Scare". This period of paranoia shaped American politics, society, cultural life and strongly influenced the everyday life of American citizens. The Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union intensified USA's concerns about communist influence and infiltration. As Tony Shaw mentions, in this ideological battle, one of the most powerful tools for spreading the anti-communist propaganda was Hollywood. Millions of people went to the theatre every week and what they saw or heard on the big screen would deeply shape their understanding of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> Understanding this context is essential to examining how Hollywood's portrayal of communism reflected the anxieties of 1950 s America.

While communism offers a seemingly marvelous vision of a classless society where everybody is equal, its central ideas directly oppose the capitalist system of the Western world. This clash of ideologies caused fear and suspicion among citizens, especially in the United States. Many Americans were worried that communism could destroy the capitalist system and democratic principles established in the country, thus leading to a period of anxiety and mistrust known as the Red Scare. As Landon Storrs states, the Red Scare is a term used to refer to the fear of communism, socialism, and other leftist ideologies infiltrating the American society and gaining power over the country's government. It is commonly used to refer to a period of mass hysteria in the USA when the American government believed they were facing a severe threat concerning their national security.<sup>8</sup>

The fear of communism is rooted mainly in its opposition to capitalism, which is the established economic system in the United States. As Frederick Lane states, capitalism is a production system and has a broader social and political framework. It relies on a market-driven economy where goods and services are produced specifically for exchange in markets. Another key element of capitalism is private property, this means that the resources and production assets are owned by individuals or entities rather than the state, making private ownership and market participation essential features of capitalism.<sup>9</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>8</sup> "McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare.", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, accessed January 12, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.6>.

<sup>9</sup> Lane, "Meanings of Capitalism," 5–12.

contrast, communism advocates for communal ownership of resources, classless society and people working for the benefit of all.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it presents a direct ideological challenge to core American values like individualism, competition, and materialism.

The Red Scare is divided into two periods commonly referred to as "the First Red Scare" and "the Second Red Scare." The first Red Scare happened immediately after the First World War in the 1920s and the second Red Scare started developing during the Second World War in the 1940s and continued in the 1950s. It was centered around the threat to national security and the fear of communist infiltration and espionage.<sup>11</sup> Both Red Scares had a tremendous effect on a significant number of people of all social classes, organizations, businesses, and institutions. As Larry Ceplair emphasizes, it must be understood that anti-communism is not a political movement in the literal sense; but rather a political reaction and ideological opposition to the ideas of communism, and it does not stem from any written doctrine or ideology.<sup>12</sup> The Red Scare was significantly influenced by the American government and was supported by the government's spreading of anti-communist propaganda amongst American people. Anti-communism was a strong political force that affected the political, social, and cultural life of 20th-century America. One of the most powerful drivers of this fear was the growing nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, which intensified public anxiety and reinforced the idea that communism posed an existential threat.

As mentioned by Ceplair, the post-war years in the USA were filled with growing wealth and well-being, and the American people enjoyed the new peace, but there was a new source of fear: the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. During the Second World War, a new type of weapon of mass destruction was invented, the atomic bomb, and as a consequence, a new type of rivalry between the Soviet Union and the USA kicked off. While both nations tried to expand their influence, they also had significant ideological differences. While the United States aimed for global military security and free trade, the Soviet Union focused on ensuring that the neighboring countries had a pro-Soviet government through military pressure. Misunderstandings and political rhetoric made both sides see each other as significant threats; even though neither posed an immediate danger, the leaders in each country used fear to create a sense of insecurity. Between 1949 and

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx et al., *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> "Red Scare: Cold War, McCarthyism & Facts," History.com, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/red-scare>.

<sup>12</sup> Larry Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth Century America: A critical history* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 2.

1952, the domestic Cold War intensified due to the explosion of a Soviet nuclear device in March of 1949, as well as the growing communist influence. In reaction to that, American President Harry S. Truman announced that America would continue developing new weapons of mass destruction, including the hydrogen bomb, also called the super bomb. The anxiety surrounding the race was evident when Klaus Fuchs, a scientist involved in the Manhattan Project, was arrested in the United Kingdom and was later found guilty of spying for the Soviet Union. This confirmed the fear that the Soviet Union most probably gained access to American top-secret nuclear research data.<sup>13</sup>

The nuclear arms race intensified Cold War tensions, as both the U.S. and the Soviet Union saw nuclear superiority as essential for security. The fear of mutual destruction, which was fueled by the advancements in atomic weapons, created a climate of paranoia. This competition shaped public perception and reinforced the widespread anxiety that defined the Cold War era.

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<sup>13</sup> Larry Ceplair, *Anti-Communism in Twentieth Century America*, 75 – 91.

### 3 Rise of McCarthyism

Joseph McCarthy was an American political persona and a republican senator, who significantly contributed to the spreading and strengthening of anti-communistic sentiments in 20<sup>th</sup> century America during the second Red Scare. As Ellen Schrecker mentions, although Senator Joseph McCarthy significantly contributed to anti-communism, he was not its inventor. The anti-communist movement had been going on for several years before his emergence and continued several years after his downfall. Although he was a prominent political figure in the 1950s, he was not the driving force behind the anti-communist movement. Figures like J. Edgar Hoover played a much more significant role in the anti-communist movement than Senator Joseph McCarthy, who instead became its face and helped make it more extreme.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned by Fried, the speech given by senator Joseph McCarthy in the January of 1950 in Wheeling, West Virginia, is thought to be the beginning of the anti-communistic political campaign known as McCarthyism. His accusations got a significant media attention and were harmful to those mentioned by him. In his speech he positioned himself as someone exposing a major security threat and accused the state department of hiding 205 communists who have infiltrated the American government. The Truman administration introduced the Truman doctrine, a set of policies invented to stop the spreading of communism to other countries, it argued that the USA must economically and militarily support countries which were facing a potential communistic uprising or were susceptible to soviet influence. Although being a foreign policy doctrine, its rhetoric contributed to heightening the domestic fears surrounding communism and essentially laid the groundwork for McCarthyism.<sup>15</sup>

Although Senator Joseph McCarthy presented his information without any proof, his speech started a wave of fear of the communistic infiltration of the American government. This speech led to the investigation of government employees, politicians, teachers and people involved in the entertainment industry. His practices caused the investigation of Hollywood actors and actresses and led to blacklisting. His claims caused significant harm to those mentioned, often causing social exclusion, harassment or the ruining of professional career.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellen Schrecker, "McCarthyism: Political Repression and the Fear of Communism," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (December 2004): 1041–86.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Fried, *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare: A documentary history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1- 4.

#### 4 Anti-communism and its impact on cultural life in the USA

The Red Scare not only affected politics but also the entertainment industry and it deeply influenced the cultural life of the second half of 20th-century America. Anti-communist messages eventually influenced every aspect of American society, from literature and theatre to education and entertainment. As Tony Shaw states, cinema was one of the most powerful weapons when it came to influencing the people's opinion of the Cold War. Hollywood became both a target of the HUAC and a tool for spreading anti-communist propaganda.<sup>16</sup>

As Reynold Humphries mentions, one of the most memorable impacts of anti-communism was the blacklisting of individuals in the entertainment industry. Due to being pressured by the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hollywood studios were forced to investigate actors, directors, screenwriters, and other professionals who were suspected of having communist ties or sympathies. Many were forced to testify their innocence in front of the House of Un-American Activities Committee, and those who refused to do so were labelled as "uncooperative" and faced severe consequences like social exclusion, their professional career being ruined and being blacklisted by major Hollywood studios.<sup>17</sup>

When discussing the problem of blacklisting, it is worth mentioning the Hollywood Ten. As Athan Theoharis mentions, it was a group of screenwriters and directors who fought against HUAC's demands. Many of them tried to defend themselves in front of the HUAC by referring to the first amendment, challenging the committee's right to question them on their political beliefs, but most failed to do so. While being persecuted by the government, their careers were effectively destroyed and most were blacklisted, forcing many talented artists to work under pseudonyms or leave the industry entirely. The Hollywood Ten later became a symbol of the bad treatment of entertainment personas.<sup>18</sup>

As Grant Watts mentions, even though being a target of the HUAC investigation and suspicion, Hollywood also became a powerful tool which was used for promoting anti-communist propaganda. Movies produced during the Red Scare era often portrayed

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<sup>16</sup> Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 81 – 110.

<sup>18</sup> Athan G. Theoharis, "A Lawless Agency: The FBI and the 'Hollywood Ten,'" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1999): 415 – 427.

communism as a significant threat to American values and national security.<sup>19</sup> As Humphries suggests, the entertainment industry collaborated closely with the government to ensure that the products of mass entertainment media aligned with the ideological campaign led against communism.<sup>20</sup>

As Jon Lewis mentions, the intense fear of being labelled a communist had a significant effect on artistic expression as well. Directors, writers, and actors/actresses usually avoided themes or plots that could be interpreted as critiques of capitalism or could be seen as declaring sympathy for leftist ideologies. This self-censorship slowed creativity and innovation, leading to a narrower selection of cultural output and led to the establishment of the New Hollywood which advocates for reduction of federal oversight of the movie industry and less restrictions on movie content.<sup>21</sup>

The trend was not limited only to the film industry; television, radio, and print media also played significant roles in spreading anti-communist propaganda. Anti-communism deeply affected American cultural life in the second half of the 20th century. Due to blacklisting, many talented actors, directors, and writers were forced to leave not only the American entertainment industry but America as a whole.

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<sup>19</sup>Grant Watts, "Communism Amongst the Stars: Anti-Communism in Film during the 1940s-50s," *Historia: Eastern Illinois University* 23 (2014): 60-67.

<sup>20</sup> Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists*, 128 – 141.

<sup>21</sup> Jon Lewis, "We Do Not Ask You to Condone This': How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood." *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 2 (2000): 3–30.

## 5 Selection of movies and summary

These movies were selected based on personal research and through reviews available online. The selected movies include *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *The Invasion of the body Snatchers* (1956) and *Red Planet Mars* (1952). The movies were analysed mainly based on the historical context, narrative themes and characters present in the movie. The analysis is focused on the content of the movies.

### 5.1 Invasion of the Body Snatchers

*Invasion of the body snatchers* is a sci-fi horror directed by Don Siegel. The movie is set in a small imaginary town of Santa Mira in California. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* begins with Dr. Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) returning home from a convention. Despite not being away for too long, after his return he is met with an unusual number of patients wanting to see him. The patients complain that their loved ones are not themselves, although they look identical, behave the same way and have all their memories, they are simply not the same person.

Miles initially dismisses these concerns as some form of delusion, but suddenly, his patients do not need his help anymore, they seem to be cured. Only when Miles' former girlfriend, Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter), comes to visit him and tells him that her cousin also believes her uncle is not the same person, Miles starts to wonder. While going out for lunch with Becky, Miles meets his colleague, a psychologist called Dr. Dan Kauffman. While engaging in a conversation, Miles learns of other cases similar to the ones he is dealing with. Dr. Kauffmann believes that the cause of this strange illness is an epidemic of mass hysteria which stems from the current state of world. Miles is sure that everybody must be infected with a mystery temporary illness, but he soon discovers the horrifying truth when he and his close friends, Jack and Theodora Belicec, discover a mysterious, partially formed body in Jack's home. The body has no distinct facial features but appears to be growing into an exact replica of Jack. Soon, Miles finds out that alien "pods" are cloning humans, replacing them with emotionless doppelgangers that take over the human mind when they sleep.

As Miles and his former girlfriend, Becky Driscoll, attempt to uncover the truth, they realize that the town is slowly being invaded and taken over. The pods grow rapidly fast, and Miles realizes he and Becky cannot fall asleep otherwise they will be cloned as well. They try to contact the authorities to stop the invasion and escape the town but are

chased by the clones and must hide. Miles and Becky seek refuge at Miles' office, while hiding, they witness the clones working together to spread their race and they realize that the whole country is at risk. A few minutes later, Miles and Becky are relieved to see their friends, Dr Kauffman and Jack Bellicec, they hope for help from their friends, but they were mistaken. Their dear friends have already been replaced by the alien pods and are now ready to clone Miles and Becky as well. After being caught Miles engages in a conversation with the clones and learns that these "pod people" lack individuality and emotion and function as part of a collective. Anyone who resists the invasion is either replaced or ostracized. Thankfully, Miles is an intelligent man and finds a way to outsmart the clones and escape.

The movie builds up to a tense climax as Miles and Becky try to escape Santa Mira to warn others of the invasion. They hide in an abandoned mine and Miles leaves Becky alone to go search for help. Despite her best efforts, Becky eventually falls asleep and succumbs to the pod transformation, leaving Miles all alone. The movie ends with a desperate Miles running into traffic, trying to get help, warning drivers and shouting, "You fools! You're in danger! Can't you see? They are after you! They're after all of us—our wives, our children, everyone! They're here already! You're next!"<sup>22</sup>

At the end, Miles managed to escape the town and is brought into a hospital. He was examined by a doctor, who initially diagnosed him as crazy, and Miles' rambling about an alien invasion is not taken seriously. He tries telling the doctors of what had happened, he wants them to contact the authorities, but the doctors do not believe him. Later, another patient is brought into the hospital by an ambulance, seemingly in a similar state to Miles. The doctors are shocked, because the new patient is talking about the same alien invasion as Miles. They decide to hear Miles out and immediately start acting on it, potentially saving the world or not, making the ending of the movie ambiguous.

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<sup>22</sup> Invasion of the Body Snatchers, directed by Don Siegel (Allied Artists, 1956), <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8nrxpr>, 1:17:54 – 1:18:07.

## 5.2 The Manchurian Candidate

Although released in 1962, this movie perfectly captures the paranoia of the 1950s. The *Manchurian Candidate* is a political thriller based on the 1959 novel by Richard Condon. This movie delves into the Cold War era and explores the themes of brainwashing and political manipulation.

The story follows Major Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), a U.S. Army officer who is haunted by reoccurring nightmares after serving in the Korean War. In his dreams, he recalls a fellow soldier, Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), being brainwashed by the communists and turned into an assassin, triggered by a specific phrase or symbol. Initially, Marco thinks he is going crazy and is but later learns of other soldiers who suffer from the same reoccurring nightmares. He grows increasingly suspicious that these nightmares are not just ordinary bad dreams but pieces of actual memories of real events.

Raymond Shaw returns to the USA and is celebrated as a war hero. Unbeknownst to him, he and his platoon were captured by Communist forces in North Korea. All the soldiers were taken to Manchuria, where they underwent intense brainwashing at the hands of Soviet and Chinese communists and Raymond Shaw has been brainwashed and programmed into a sleeper assassin. After returning to the USA, Shaw's programming is tested by his communist creators and to make sure everything is working, they order him to kill his newspaper superior, Holborn Gaines. They want to make sure that he will work perfectly well when he is handed over to his American master, his ambitious mother, Eleanor Iselin (Angela Lansbury), who manipulates him to serve her political ambitions. Eleanor's husband, Senator John Iselin, is a McCarthy-like figure and wants to become the president of the United States but lacks the ambition to do so. For that reason, Eleanor uses Shaw's condition to further her husband's political agenda and orchestrate a coup, planning to install herself as the de facto ruler of the United States. She orders Shaw to kill his wife's father, Senator Jordan, as he is opposing Iselin's candidature for the presidency; in the process of doing so, Shaw kills his own wife as well. However, his most important quest is to kill the opposing presidential candidate.

Marco is suspicious of Shaw, and as he unravels the truth, he attempts to deprogram Shaw and stop the assassination plot. In a climactic sequence, Shaw is ready to kill the presidential candidate but manages to resist his programming and turns the gun on his mother and stepfather before taking his own life, effectively thwarting their plans.

### 5.3 Red Planet Mars

The movie follows an American scientist Chris Cronyn (Peter Graves), and his wife, Linda Cronyn (Andrea King), who possess a powerful hydrogen-powered radio transmitter, which they built based on the work of a Nazi scientist Franz Calder (Herbert Berghof). This transmitter can send and receive signals from other planets, but the Americans are not the only ones aware of this technology.

In the beginning, Chris and Linda learn about the existence of an alien civilization on the planet Mars; this information is based on pictures of the planet taken by an American observatory. The pictures show an advanced infrastructure, artificial canals, and large-scale environmental changes happening on the planet, which could only be accomplished by an intelligent civilization with advanced technology. After learning of the civilization, the government urges Chris and his wife to contact the Martian population through their transmitter. At first, they struggled to establish contact with the Martian population but later figured out a way to make their communication universally understandable and receive a response. During this time, the viewer learns that Frank Calder, a Nazi scientist and an inventor of the communication device, also possesses a transmitter and is actually the one receiving the messages as well as responding to the Americans. However, it is not specified whether he was the author of all the responses or not. Throughout the movie, we can see Calder working with Russia in order to steal information and spy on America.

The messages from Mars claim that the Martians live in a utopian society without war, disease, or poverty; they do not need oil or coal because they use clean cosmic power. Based on the messages, their civilization appears to be far more advanced than Earth's, especially considering the conflicts and suffering which are undeniable parts of human history. The American government urges Chris to keep communicating with Mars to discover more about their civilization and possibly advance humans with Martian help. The Martian messages are released to the general public and cause a national upheaval as well as economic and political chaos. As the messages keep coming in, they grow increasingly religious, suggesting that the Martian society is based on divine principles and lives in peace under the rule of a higher power. The increasing religious tone of the messages causes a religious revolution all around the world; people see the messages as proof of God's existence and revive the old faith they had once lost.

At first, Russian officials are happy about the revolution because of its negative effect on the American economy and national security. They are ready to take advantage of

this situation and destroy America once and for all. However, before they can do so, the religious revolution also reaches Russia and has catastrophic consequences for the regime. Their atheistic regime, which prioritizes state control, is seriously affected by the religious uprising, as the Russian people see the regime as flawed. The people of Russia organize a revolt to overthrow the communist regime and establish a theocracy. People all around the world are joyful to receive a message from Russia about its revolution, including Chris and Linda. The Americans received the new information well and celebrated it as the end of the Cold War rivalry. A few moments before that, the viewer gets to see the nazi scientist, Frank Calder, get buried by an avalanche along with his transmitter.

Towards the movie's end, we learn that Frank Calder is not actually dead and faked his death to escape from the communists. He travelled to America to reveal the truth not only to Chris but also to the whole world. He admits to faking the messages and provides evidence, making it impossible to doubt him. Calder has already called the press and is ready to reveal the truth; Chris and Linda do not want that to happen and willingly sacrifice their lives to protect the hope humanity gained from the Martian messages. The transmissions caused a religious awakening and the collapse of the Soviet Union. They reinforced the idea that faith and hope in some higher power can actually stabilize society and bring peace. Just as the couple releases explosive hydrogen into their office, we see another message arrive, seemingly authentic. The message confirms the earlier messages and hints at possible divine intervention, but the message is not finished due to Frank Calder. Obviously, in disbelief and shock, he shoots at the transmitter, ultimately blowing up the whole laboratory. The movie ends ambiguously, leaving the viewer to wonder about the authenticity of the messages and the existence of a Martian civilization

## 6 Analysis of the 1950 s movies

### Invasion of the Body Snatchers

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a 1956 sci-fi horror movie that serves as a powerful allegory for the paranoia and fear of the red scare in 1950s America. As Watts states, science-fiction was a popular and growing genre, which was significantly influenced by anti-communism. Science fiction movies of the 1950s were mostly B grade movies with low budget cost, which made their production quick and could be produced at large quantities. As the number of sci-fi movies was high, they served as a great opportunity for the spreading of anti-communistic propaganda and *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* can be seen as a prime example of a sci-fi movie making a commentary on ideology.<sup>23</sup> The movie acts as a critique of communism and reflects the widespread concerns about the communist ideology infiltrating American society and destroying their traditional values. Through its narrative and character quotes, the movie encapsulates the anxieties of the era very well.

The pod people are described as emotionless clones that lack individuality and are central to the movie's portrayal of conformity. In a scene where Miles and Becky are confronted by the clones of their friends, the clones inform Miles about their lack of emotion saying: "Love, desire, ambition, faith... Without them, life is so simple. Believe me."<sup>24</sup> The clones willingly suppress their emotions in favour of the greater mass and to serve their greater goal, to clone and replace every single human on earth. Another quote that shows the pod's lack of emotion happens during a conversation between Miles and Becky. While hiding in Miles' office we hear Becky say: "We may wake up changed... into something evil and inhuman."<sup>25</sup> and then Miles responds: "In my practice, I've seen how people have allowed their humanity to drain away... only, it happens slowly instead of all at once."<sup>26</sup> Later in another scene Miles comes to a realization and says: "Only when we have to fight to stay human, do we realize how precious it is to us... how dear."<sup>27</sup> All emotions are a basic human need and the pod's lack of them symbolises one of the fears associated with communism, which was the suppressing of personal freedom and individual expression in favour of unity and the collective. The pods continuously work as

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<sup>23</sup> Watts, *Communism Amongst the Stars*, 64 – 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1:00:46 - 1:00:52.

<sup>25</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 54:16–54:21.

<sup>26</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 54:23–54:30.

<sup>27</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 54:41–54:47.

a unified force, spreading their race in hopes of capturing every single person. The idea of destroying individuality supports the belief that communists demanded complete conformity and loyalty to the collective.

At the same time, the film could be interpreted as a critique of conformity within America itself. During the Red Scare, Americans were pressured to share the same anti-communist beliefs and report anyone who deviated from the norm. As Grant mentioned, although conformity was a common and criticised feature of communism it was also used as a way to fight communism, the government urged their citizens to stay vigilant and report anyone suspicious.<sup>28</sup> That is why the movie's message is so complex: while it condemns the conformity traditionally associated with communism, it also hints at the dangers of forced uniformity in American society and shows the irony of that situation.

The alien pods also represent the slow but continuous spread of communism. Their infiltration begins in a single town but threatens to expand across the country and, if not stopped, the whole world. Miles' comment, "First our town, then all the towns around us...it's a malignant disease spreading through whole the country."<sup>29</sup> suggests that America has already been affected, and other countries are next. As mentioned by Shaw and Youngblood, this could reflect the Cold War fear that if communism took root in America and communists succeeded in destroying the American society, communism would continue to spread and would eventually dominate globally.<sup>30</sup> While Miles is being confronted by the pod people, one of them says: "Don't fight it, Miles. It's no use...sooner or later you'll have to go to sleep."<sup>31</sup> This quote shows that the pod people were very determined to spread their race and were sure that there was no way of stopping them. This could be a reflection of a cold war fear that if not resisted, communism would slowly but successfully infiltrate the American society. During the last few scenes, when Miles tries to escape the clones and warn other people coming into the town, he screams: "You fools! You're in danger! Can't you see? They are after you...They're after all of us—our wives, our children, everyone! They're here already! You're next!"<sup>32</sup> highlighting the urgency of stopping this "malignant disease" as he describes it before it eventually consumes

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<sup>28</sup>Watts, *Communism Amongst the Stars*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 57:41–57:48.

<sup>30</sup> Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War the American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (La Vergne: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 59:02–59:04.

<sup>32</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1:17:54 – 1:18:07.

everything. This scene was powerful and very straightforward and gave a clear anti-communistic message.

Paranoia is one of the main themes of the movie's narrative, directly reflecting the atmosphere of suspicion during the McCarthy era. As mentioned by Mintz and Roberts, this fear of infiltration by pod people directly mirrors the fear of communist subversion, infiltration and alienation.<sup>33</sup> Also, as mentioned by Shaw and Youngblood, the theme of communist subversion was the predominant theme to stem for the Cold War filmography.<sup>34</sup> As Dr. Dan Kauffman states when he is being asked by Miles about the possible cause of the sudden illness: "I don't know... a strange neurosis, evidently contagious... an epidemic mass hysteria."<sup>35</sup> He believes that the new hysteria spreading through the town of Santa Mira most likely stems from some unspecified global tensions, hinting at the Cold war situation. Miles asked him about the possible cause of the epidemic and Dr. Kauffmann responds: "Worry about what's going on in the world, probably"<sup>36</sup> These quotes again mirror the widespread anxiety of the time as well as hint at the real-world conflict. The fear of being replaced by a clone reflects the Red Scare's suspicion of hidden communists among ordinary citizens. The idea that these impostors look identical to people and act like everyone else only intensifies the fear, making it clear that vigilance is necessary to protect the American society. Although looking and acting like humans these clones pose a hidden and serious threat to humanity.

Another important topic of the movie is the symbolism of sleep. In the movie, falling asleep symbolizes the act of surrender. This could act as a metaphor, if Americans "fall asleep" and fail to remain vigilant, the communist threat will overtake them. As mentioned by Watts, this reflects the era's rhetoric about constant awareness and action against the threat.<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned by the character of Dr. Dan Kauffmann, the pod people promise an "untroubled world" without love, desire, ambition, or faith and promise that life without them is simpler. These qualities are directly tied to traditional American values like the pursuit of the American Dream and individual success. The loss of emotion and especially aspiration is portrayed as a fundamental threat to humanity and the American way of living.

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<sup>33</sup> Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, eds., *Hollywood's America: United States History through Its Films*, 3rd Edition (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 223.

<sup>34</sup> Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 15:53 – 15:58.

<sup>36</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 16:03 – 16:06.

<sup>37</sup> Watts, *Communism Amongst the Stars*, 65.

The pods' declaration, "You have no choice."<sup>38</sup> highlights their confidence and the inevitability of their takeover unless stopped.

During the movie, the main characters, Miles and Becky, constantly try to contact the government officials for help. However, they are unable to do so due to the alien clones taking over the city's telephones. In the movie's climax, the protagonist and two other doctors turn to the FBI and the military for salvation. While being confronted by the clones, Miles says: "We're not the last humans left... they'll destroy you."<sup>39</sup> As mentioned by Watts, this reflects that the government wanted people to trust them and believe that the government wants to protect the American society. This aligns with the Cold War-era belief that the government should strive to counter external threats like communism.<sup>40</sup>

As mentioned by Watts, the movie's promotional poster also reinforces the allegory. With its red and yellow colour scheme, which is commonly associated with communism, it depicts the protagonists fleeing from a giant handprint, which could symbolize the inescapable reach of the communist threat. The hand in the background appears to be "snatching" at Miles and Becky, mirroring the title of the movie.<sup>41</sup>

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* captures the paranoia and fear of the Red Scare through its themes of conformity, alienation, and paranoia. It uses a metaphor of Alien pods, thus allowing for a more exaggerated message. By portraying the pod people as a malignant force that spreads through the country and threatens to erase individuality and destroy traditional values, the movie serves as both a critique of communistic ideology but also a warning.

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<sup>38</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1:00:58 – 1:01:01.

<sup>39</sup> *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1:00:09 – 1:00:13.

<sup>40</sup> Watts, *Communism Amongst the Stars*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> Watts, *Communism Amongst the Stars*, 66.

## The Manchurian Candidate

Although being released after the 1950s, *The Manchurian Candidate* serves as a mirror for the Cold War era. Not only does it explore the themes of paranoia, ideological conflict, and political manipulation, but it also critiques the American government and the way it handled the Red Scare.

The tension between the two ideologies is evident in the movie's first few minutes and the movie is very straightforward regarding the Cold War topic. Not only are we shown scenes of a communist gathering that plots against America, but it is also explicitly stated in the movie multiple times. Quotes made by both sides of the conflict, such as "Beware, my dear Zilkov. The virus of capitalism is highly infectious. Soon you'll be lending money out at interest!"<sup>42</sup> and "We are at war... it is a cold war,"<sup>43</sup> clearly define the movie's main theme.

*The Manchurian Candidate* explores the loss of autonomy and individuality under an authoritarian and collectivist regime, a topic common during the Cold War era. The movie's characters mention multiple times that liberty and freedom are two values dear to them and to America as a whole. In contrast to that, communism is portrayed as an oppressive system that strives to erase individuality and strips people of their autonomy. This problematic can be seen in Raymond Shaw's lack of autonomy while being controlled by the communists. This lack of freedom shows the dehumanizing impact of authoritarian regimes like communism. Another instance is the brainwashing of Shaw's platoon. Whenever asked what he is like, they are forced to praise him, despite disliking him, because they were programmed to do so in order to protect him from being under suspicion. Every time they were asked about Raymond Shaw, the soldiers say: "Raymond Shaw is the kindest, bravest, warmest... most wonderful human being I've ever known in my life."<sup>44</sup> This brainwashing of the platoon also supports the theme of the loss of individuality under an authoritarian influence.

Shaw's brainwashing into a cold-blooded assassin highlights the fear of subversion and espionage and suggests that anyone could be a traitor. While Raymond Shaw is being examined, the communist doctor states: "His brain has not only been brainwashed, as they say... it has been dry-cleaned."<sup>45</sup> At first, Shaw was a good American citizen who

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<sup>42</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer (United Artists, 1962), <https://prehrajto.cz/mandzuský-kandidát-the-manchurian-candidate-1962-sk-tit/5891e72a96b7a>, 31:57 – 32:02.

<sup>43</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, 1:12:51 – 1:12:54.

<sup>44</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, 18:20 – 18:26.

<sup>45</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, 33:44 – 33:49.

participated in the Korean War and became a national hero, but later, he was unwillingly turned against his own country. This shows that even the most loyal citizens can become subversive and could be used to destroy the country from within. As stated by Ray Pratt, the director of the movie, John Frankenheimer, expressed that the movie was not only about the Cold War fear of brainwashing, but also commented on a broader problem. It critiques the manipulation and “brainwashing” of the ordinary population by the politicians, advertisement and the television and states:

We believed that we lived in a society that was brainwashed. And I wanted to do something about it. I think our society is brainwashed by television commercials, by advertising, by politicians, by a censored press (which exists in the country whether you want to admit it or not) with its biased reporting. More and more I think that our society is becoming manipulated and controlled.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned by Ray Pratt, the movie was a clear attack on McCarthyism and its remaining influence.<sup>47</sup> The movie clearly criticizes the manipulation of anti-communism for personal and political gain. It is evident that Senator Iselin is a satirical portrayal of Senator Joseph McCarthy. In his speeches, he uses McCarthy's tactics and claims he has a list of communists who have infiltrated the nation. In his speech, he says: “I am the United States Senator John Yerkes Iselin, and I have here a list of the names of 207 persons who are known by the Secretary Defense as being members of the Communist Party!”<sup>48</sup> Later, we learn he has no evidence for his claims, and his ever-changing number of communists highlights the absurdity and lack of evidence for McCarthy's claims. Through this satirical portrayal, the movie critiques political figures such as McCarthy, who used fear to grow their political power. These political figures usually undermined the principles of democracy. During the McCarthy “witch hunts” they willingly violated constitutional rights, such as the Sixth Amendment which guarantees a fair trial for everyone and the First Amendment which promises the protection of free belief.

Another important character is Raymond Shaw's mother, Eleanor Iselin, who embodies the danger of ambition and hunger for power. Despite her strong anti-communist

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<sup>46</sup> Ray Pratt, *Projecting Paranoia: Conspiratorial Visions in American Film* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 92.

<sup>47</sup> Ray Pratt, *Projecting Paranoia: Conspiratorial Visions in American Film*, 92.

<sup>48</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, 20:19 – 20:32.

stance, she did not hesitate to collaborate with communists in order to achieve her ambitious goals. Ray Pratt mentions that Raymond Shaw's mother could be seen as a hidden agent of the Soviet Union due to her actions and cooperation with the foreign government, but it was never clearly expressed in the movie.<sup>49</sup> This ambiguity causes the viewer to wonder what her actual role in the movie is. Is she an anti-communist who is simply taking advantage of the communist and Raymond to achieve her goal? Or is she actually connected to the Soviet Union and planning to overthrow the U.S government with her husband as a president. This uncertainty about her role evokes a sense of paranoia and unpredictability in the movie. Her plan to use fear and paranoia to grow her husband's political power mirrors how Cold War politicians exploited anti-communist hysteria. Senator Jordan's statement, "I think if John Iselin were a paid Soviet agent, he could not do more to harm this country than he is doing now,"<sup>50</sup> shows one of the movie's central arguments: the biggest threat to democracy often comes from within, through corruption and personal ambition, rather than external forces.

The motif of the solitaire game and the Red Queen card could serve as a powerful metaphor. The appearance of the Red Queen in a game of solitaire is inevitable. This symbolizes Shaw's limited autonomy because his assassin side will get triggered no matter what, and he cannot escape this process. This could also represent the manipulation of individuals through propaganda because, in the light of an ideological conflict, it is very hard to escape it and not get injected with a particular narrative that is constantly being pushed onto you. Also, the chosen trigger card, the red diamond queen, could symbolize the ideological conflict itself, as the card's red color is commonly associated with communism. However, the diamond symbol could be associated with materialism, which is a trait common for capitalism.

*The Manchurian Candidate* highlights the dangerous combination of ambition and political power and shows how it's the abuse of this power can become a direct threat to democracy. Through the character of Eleanor Iselin, the movie demonstrates how political figures could take advantage of fear and paranoia and use them for personal gain, even at the cost of those closest to them. The brainwashing of Raymond Shaw could serve as a metaphor for how individuals can be stripped of autonomy and used as tools for political agendas. Ultimately, the movie can be seen as a warning. It makes it clear that fear and

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<sup>49</sup> Ray Pratt, *Projecting Paranoia: Conspiratorial Visions in American Film*, 92.

<sup>50</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, 1:28:38 – 1:28:44.

control can be abused in pursuit of power, and in such scenarios, democracy is at risk and could collapse under corruption and manipulation.

## **Red Planet Mars**

*Red Planet Mars* is a Cold War-era sci-fi movie directed by Harry Horner. It reflects the common anxieties of the time together with the ideological struggles. The movie portrays a world that is on the brink of self-destruction due to the post-WW2 competition between the USA and the Soviet Union. The movie uses themes of scientific progress, political rivalry, religious revival, and the potential for both destruction and salvation through knowledge and faith.

The movie centers around the character of Linda Cronyn, a wife of Miles Cronyn and a respectable scientist. She is an example of a modern woman; she is educated and seen as equal by her husband. She is also allowed to obtain top-secret data and voice her opinion at any time. Although she is a scientist and is very concerned with her scientific work, she is still a religious woman who acts as a voice of reason in this movie. She often expresses her concerns over scientific progress in general as well as the specific progress that could happen after contacting the Martian population. She knows that advancing the human race is a great opportunity as well as an opportunity for destruction. At the beginning of the movie, she expresses her thoughts to her husband and compares humans to a volcano: “We have lived on the edge of a volcano all our lives, one day, it has to boil over.”<sup>51</sup> And in a later scene, she remarks: “Science has made the volcano we are sitting on.”<sup>52</sup> This clearly shows her stance towards scientific advancements. She suggests that human civilization is constantly on the brink of self-destruction. She implies that, much like a volcano, society has been constantly building up pressure over time, and eventually, it must erupt in a catastrophic event. Her worries mirror the common Cold-war fear of nuclear annihilation. Although a scientist, she is still sceptical about contacting Mars and says: “You’ll be the next to advance science — and maybe us — right into oblivion!”<sup>53</sup> This clearly shows her sceptical view and fear that any new technological advancements could possibly lead to another war or destroy humanity entirely. While arguing with her husband, she says: “Nobel invented dynamite to ease a man’s life... it seized a good many into annihilation. Einstein split the atom to create energy... is terror energy?”<sup>54</sup> In this

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<sup>51</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, directed by Harry Horner(United Artists, 1952), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9EVfkYniZo&t=1681s>, 6:59 – 7:04.

<sup>52</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 7:50 -7:52.

<sup>53</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 8:44 – 8:50.

<sup>54</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 7:54 – 8:03.

quote, she references Alfred Nobel and Albert Einstein together with their inventions, which were originally intended to benefit humans but were ultimately used for destruction. This aligns with the Cold War context, where scientific advancements, especially nuclear weapons, were perceived as an escalation of global tensions rather than possibly being used to improve human life.

As Hendershot mentions, the portrayal of a modern American woman is in sharp contrast with the depiction of the low-standing soviet women in this movie.<sup>55</sup> Soviet women are depicted mostly as part of the common public; they are shown as living in poor conditions, and the only notable female Soviet character is a telephone operator. This portrayal suggests a sharp difference between the perceived gender roles in democratic America versus communist Russia.

Throughout the movie, the portrayal of communists and the Soviet Union is very consistent. They were portrayed as ruthless and willing to sacrifice human lives for political gain, as seen in multiple scenes. For example, when the Soviets save Calder, a nazi scientist and an inventor of the transmitter, from an American jail, they treat him purely as an investment and value him only for the potential advancements and information he could bring. During a scene in Calder's laboratory, the Russian official says: "We want scientists of your caliber, Mr. Calder ... we treat them well... when they serve us."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he makes it clear that they are willing to execute him if he fails to contact Mars before the Americans do. Another instance of this portrayal could be seen during the religious uprising in Russia. In one scene, we can see Russian common people rediscover their long-lost religion; they rise up against the atheist regime, and once discovered by Russian soldiers, they are mercilessly killed. Later in the revolution, the high-ranking Russian officials were not opposed to killing their people to protect the regime; this is evident during a scene where we can see the Russian official looking out of a window, seeing the revolt, and saying: "What do these superstitious peasants think they can accomplish against our guns?"<sup>57</sup> All these examples support the common Cold War stereotype of communists as inhumane and power-driven.

The movie strongly mirrors the Cold War's technological and ideological race, with both America and Russia attempting to contact Mars. Both Americans and Russians

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<sup>55</sup>Cindy Hendershot, "Anti-Communism and Ambivalence in *Red Planet Mars, Invasion USA*", and *The Beast of Yucca Flats*," *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol 28, No. 2 (2001): 250 – 251.

<sup>56</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 13:23 – 13:30.

<sup>57</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 1:05:49 – 1:05:54.

frequently express their desire to obtain knowledge from a superior Martian civilization, but their intentions are different. Americans not only want to scientifically advance themselves but also hope to learn of possible peaceful solutions for their conflicts with the Soviet Union, showing good intentions. While the Americans seek for help, the only intention of the Soviet Union is to seek new weapons they could use to destroy the Western world. This contrast in the film portrays America's motives as noble and good while the Soviets' intentions are shown as purely destructive.

Additionally, the common fear of subversion is connected with science in this movie. During a scene in the Cronyn laboratory, we hear a conversation between an American general and Linda. The general says: "I wonder where he is now."<sup>58</sup> and Linda responds: "Where are all the good scientists we don't hear of... in Russia, I suppose."<sup>59</sup> This mirrors the Cold War fear of Russia enrolling defected American scientists or possibly abducting them. These scientists could be both willingly and unwillingly giving top-secret American data to the Soviet Union, which could use this data to surpass America, this is similar to the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. As mentioned by John Seven, the Rosenbergs were an American couple, who were convicted of espionage for the Soviet Union in 1951 and later executed in 1953. They were found guilty of allegedly giving details of the atomic bomb project to the Soviet Union. This case remains controversial and mirrors the strong anti-communist paranoia of the time.<sup>60</sup>

The movie's title, *Red Planet Mars*, also carries a significant amount of symbolism. Not only is the colour red commonly associated with communism, but the planet Mars is also a symbol of war as it is named after a Roman God of war. Thus, the title could be seen as a metaphor representing the ideological battle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The messages from Mars, whether authentic or not, eventually disrupt America's economy and stability, a great goal of the Soviet Union.

Another major theme of the movie's plot is the religious uprising triggered by the supposed religious Martian messages. The movie presents religion as a powerful force that is capable of destroying communism and stabilizing the world. The power of religion can be seen when Soviet citizens rediscover their long-lost faith and start a rebellion. The religious messages confirm the existence of a higher power, possibly God. This information

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<sup>58</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 27:54 – 27:55.

<sup>59</sup> *Red Planet Mars*, 27:56 – 28:00.

<sup>60</sup> John Seven, "Why Were the Rosenbergs Executed?" History.com, accessed March 16, 2025, <https://www.history.com/news/rosenbergs-executed-spies-cold-war>.

makes them realize the flaws of the communist regime and gives them strength to resist. An important scene features a group of Russian villagers excavating hidden Christian relics, only to be later executed by Soviet soldiers. This scene confirms the movie's portrayal of the Soviet regime, it is portrayed as an oppressive one and unwelcoming towards religion. As mentioned by Hendershot, there is a stark contrast between the Americans being portrayed as the believers and the people in the Soviet Union portrayed as atheists. She also mentions that this contrast of religion can also be seen between Linda and her husband. Linda acts as a spokesperson of religion and Chris as the spokesperson of science. Although Chris is against releasing the religious messages, Linda acts as a promoter of religion and convinces the president to release them, ultimately using religion as a tool to fight the regime and cause the fall of communism.<sup>61</sup> This reflects a common Cold War-era narrative that framed communism as a godless and oppressive regime while associating American democracy with religious freedom.

The movie's climax reveals that the messages from Mars were fake and were orchestrated by Franz Calder. His messages had manipulated not only the Soviet Union but the United States together with the rest of the world. This demonstrates how easy it is to use religion as a way of manipulation and possibly propaganda.

*Red Planet Mars* is a pro-American and pro-religious movie whose stance aligns with American anti-communist propaganda, portraying communism as a force of oppression and faith as a liberating power. The movie successfully shows that scientific advancement should be approached sceptically as it has both a good and a bad side.

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<sup>61</sup> Hendershot, "Anti-Communism and Ambivalence," 250.

## 6.1 Portrayal of Communism and the Communist threat

*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Red Planet Mars*, and *the Manchurian Candidate* are all Cold War-era movies depicting communism and the communist threat and act as a warning against the ideology. However, all do so in a different manner. This chapter aims to highlight the differences as well as similarities in the portrayal of the Soviet Union and communism.

A stark difference among the films *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Red Planet Mars*, and *The Manchurian Candidate* is the degree of their explicitness. In *the Manchurian Candidate* and *Red Planet Mars*, we are directly told who the enemy is: the Soviet Union and the ideology of Communism. For example, in the first few minutes of *the Manchurian Candidate*, we are shown a communist gathering plotting against America, and the Soviet Union working closely with communist China to brainwash American troops. These scenes are abundant with distinct communist symbol such as the red star and pictures of communist leaders such as Joseph Stalin or Mao Ce-tung hanging in the background. The Soviet characters call each other “comrades” while American characters discuss the communistic threat. *the Red Planet Mars*, similarly depicts a communist government gathering, scenes showing the oppressed people of Russia, and the race for scientific advancement. The enemy is evident from the beginning in these two movies unlike in *the Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is less explicit and uses the Alien Pods as a metaphor for communism. However, it similarly highlights the ideological threat they pose. The pods are given certain features of the communist reality like collectivism, absence of personal freedom, individual identity, and emotions. Utilising the metaphor allowed the movie’s creators to exaggerate their message, intensifying the themes of paranoia and subversion as compared to the *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Red Planet Mars*. *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Red Planet Mars* serve as a direct depiction and critique of the communist regime. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* does the same while using the metaphor of an alien race.

The portrayal of communists in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Red Planet Mars*, the two movies that directly depict them, was fairly consistent. In both movies, the ideology of communism is portrayed as a significant ideological threat to the United States of America, an evil force trying to destroy the U.S. government and cruel human beings. Both in *the Manchurian Candidate* and *Red Planet Mars*, the communist leaders are willing to

sacrifice the lives of people on both sides of the conflict. In the scene where Shaw is introduced to the communist gathering as a brainwashed assassin, he is ordered to kill two of his fellow soldiers, Bobby Lembeck and Ed Malevole. While Shaw is executing the order right in front of the gathered people, none of the communists bat an eye, and the presenter even appears to be smiling while he watches the terrific crime happen. In *Red Planet Mars*, the willingness to execute people can be seen for example in the conversation between Calder and the communists in his hiding spot in the Andes. One of the communist officials mentions that if Calder does not manage to establish contact with Mars, he will be executed. Another scene portraying communists as inhumane happens during the religious revolution, where we can see ordinary people being brutally murdered by the Russian soldiers simply for excavating their buried Christian relics. This was an intense moment as the people themselves did not pose an immediate threat to the soldiers and did not have any weapons or intentions to harm others. The last scene depicting this happens towards the movie's end, where we can see the communist leaders watching the Russian citizens being murdered from the window. They express that they do not care for the lives of their people and are ready to sacrifice them in the light of a greater goal: to destroy the Western world and build a new one on the ruins.

Communism is portrayed as a significant threat to society in all three of the movies; communists are constantly portrayed as plotting against America and the American government. However, in the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, it is not portrayed as just a threat but as something already happening and needs to be acted upon. The aliens are already lurking among the ordinary citizens, cloning them and taking over the town of Santa Mira. The movie's message is not simply to warn but to scare the viewers and to show them what could happen if they do not fight against the real-world threat. In this movie, communism is depicted as something unstoppable, a strong and determined force that has the potential to destroy the world.

All three movies shared some similarities in depicting communism and the communist threat but also showed differences in certain aspects. In accord with their realistic mode of depiction *Red Planet Mars* and the *Manchurian Candidate* take a serious and toned-down approach, while the sci-fi genre and the metaphor of alien pods in the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* allows for a more exaggerated perspective.

## 6.2 Anti-Communist Sentiments and Propaganda Techniques

All three movies include the theme of paranoia, loss of individuality, communistic infiltration, and destruction of the USA or possibly the world. This chapter aims to discuss these themes in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Red Planet Mars*, and *the Manchurian Candidate* and contrast them.

The first theme shared by all three movies is the theme of paranoia. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* uses a different approach to the theme of paranoia compared to the other two 1950s movies. In this movie, paranoia is caused by a powerful metaphor of an alien race invading a small town in Santa Mira. The thought of aliens hiding among ordinary citizens, lurking and getting ready to attack, causes the viewer to wonder who can or cannot be trusted. Similar to the fear experienced by the American population during the Red Scare. The aliens are an obvious metaphor for communists; they exhibit the traits commonly associated with communism, like conformity or collectivism. The invasion is also silent and gradual, making it hard to notice and thus fight. This hidden and slow development of an invasion only intensifies the paranoia surrounding it, making the characters and the viewer second-guess everyone.

In *The Manchurian Candidate*, the theme of paranoia is caused by the subversion of an American war hero who is turned into a murderous assassin by the communists. The fact that a good American citizen was brainwashed to possibly serve the communist cause and manipulate the political sphere of the United States raises a fear that anyone can be turned subversive, even the most devoted patriot like Raymond Shaw. Another person who can be seen as a source of paranoia is the mother of Raymond Shaw, Eleanor Iselin. Her role in the movie is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether she is simply using the communists to reach her power-motivated goal or whether she may be a communistic agent secretly working with the Soviet Union to establish communist sympathizers in the top government positions silently. Her character helps strengthen the paranoia by using the fear of communist infiltration to push her husband's political agenda, using strategies similar to the ones of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

In *Red planet Mars*, paranoia is caused by scientific advancement. The thought of one nation becoming superior to the other using the new information obtained from the Martian civilization and possibly using that knowledge to destroy the other raises a significant amount of paranoia. Also, the scientific advancement itself is a source of

paranoia in this movie; this is evident in the character of Linda Cronyn. She is paranoid and sceptical about contacting the alien population because she knows it is a double-edged sword. Although there is a possibility that the newly obtained information could advance humans, it could also cause their doom.

Another core theme shared by the movies is the loss of individuality. In the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the loss of individuality can be seen in the people of Santa Mira. After being cloned, the once regular American citizen becomes an emotionless robot with no individual identity, whose sole purpose is to gradually spread its race all over the world. They become part of an organized team, abandoning individualism and working towards a greater goal.

In the *Manchurian Candidate*, the loss of individuality is evident. Sergeant Raymond Shaw loses his individuality after being brainwashed by the communists. He is manipulated by the communists and later his own mother to commit crimes against his own will, even killing his wife and father-in-law.

In *Red planet Mars* the loss of individualism can be seen on the people of Russia. In contrast with the thriving American society, we can see the Russian citizens being oppressed and dictated. The Russian government is intensely focused on the survival of their atheist regime to the point of banning the people of Russia from any religious faith. The citizens are dictated what to believe by the government, which enforces conformity, and if they do not obey, they will face severe consequences.

Another very important theme shared by the three movies is the theme of communist infiltration. In the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the theme of infiltration is once again depicted through the metaphor of an alien race. There is a hidden enemy among ordinary citizens; they look identical to others but pose a significant ideological threat. Their infiltration is hard to recognize not only because they look like normal people but also because it is silent and gradual, thus hard to fight against. If not noticed and met with resistance, they will eventually clone the whole United States and, most possibly, the world.

In the case of the *Manchurian Candidate*, an invasion is also going on, but unlike *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, it is not a physical takeover; it is a political one. As mentioned before, the character of Eleanor Iselin is confusing. Although it is evident that she is a power-hungry woman, we are not sure about her other motivations. Although power could be her only motivation, she could also be a Soviet sympathizer or a communist agent, planning on winning the elections by manipulating her husband and disrupting the country from within. Raymond Shaw is used against his own will to kill anyone in

Eleanor's way and manipulate the outcome of the elections. Additionally, Senator Iselin is a McCarthy-like character who built his political agenda on anti-communism and claimed to have a list of hidden communists. Unbeknownst to him, his political career is, in a way, supported by the communists through the cooperation of Eleanor Iselin and the Soviet Union.

In *Red Planet Mars*, the theme of communist infiltration is less evident than in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or *the Manchurian Candidate*. Although there is an apparent fear of the communist ideology spreading, the American government is more focused on scientific advancement and obtaining new information sooner than the Soviet Union. A communist invasion could have happened but did not due to the religious messages, which caused a religious revolution, ultimately destroying communism, an atheist regime.

### 6.3 Social and Cultural themes

All three movies also include themes close to culture and social life. Two themes that stood out as contrasting were gender roles and the portrayal of the government. This chapter aims to compare these two themes in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *the Manchurian Candidate*, and *Red Planet Mars*.

#### Portrayal of women

A theme shared by the three movies in the portrayal of women, which in these cases is very contrasting. In the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the most prominent female character is Becky Driscoll, an ex-girlfriend of Miles Bennell. She is gentle, feminine, and submissive, embodying the ideal of a traditional 1950s woman. In contrast with the new, independent, modern women like Eleanor Iselin and Linda Cronyn, Becky relies on the male protagonist for protection and guidance to survive the invasion. It is evident that she manages to resist the invasion only because she is with Miles, who, due to his intellect, is able to protect both of them. Her vulnerable character is evident in the scene where she falls asleep, gets cloned, and becomes part of the alien race. Becky Driscoll could also serve as a symbol of humanity and emotions, two things endangered by the communist ideology. She is deeply emotionally invested and fears losing her individuality and emotions to the clones, reflecting the fear of communism stripping people of individuality and free will.

In the *Manchurian Candidate*, the most prominent female character is Eleanor Iselin. Compared to Becky Driscoll and Linda Cronyn, she is portrayed as a powerful and ambitious woman. She is power-driven, determined, and, most importantly, an antagonist. She is a modern, educated woman and is the mastermind behind the whole campaign of her husband, Senator Joseph Iselin. She does not rely on a male character, instead, she is using her husband and manipulating him to achieve her goal of establishing herself as the de facto president of the USA.

In *Red Planet Mars*, we are again shown a new modern woman but in a different way. The character of Linda Cronyn is an ideal modern woman; she is a highly educated scientist, but at the same time, she is still a good housewife who takes good care of her kids. Although she is a scientist and is most possibly tempted by the possibility of contacting an alien civilization, she is still concerned by the consequences it might bring. These concerns mainly stem from her sceptical views of scientific advancement and partly from her concern for her children. She fears the consequences that might occur after the

contact is established. It could backfire and cause a new war, either a world war caused by the new scientific advancement or a possible war with the Martians. In *Red Planet Mars*, she is portrayed as equal to men, taking part in significant decisions and having access to top-secret information concerning national security. On top of that, she represents faith and gives good moral guidance.

### **The government**

In the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the government is portrayed as unaware of the invasion and thus ineffective. It is evident that Miles depends on the government to stop the invasion; while confronted by the alien clones, he tells them that the government will destroy them and even tries to contact the government but is unable to do so due to the clones blocking the phones in Santa Mira. When he manages to escape the invaded town, he immediately attempts to tell the government officials what is going on. They do not believe him at first and diagnose him as crazy. Later, they are proven wrong due to another patient arriving with the same story of alien cloning pods. In the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the government was ineffective as they were not aware of the invasion; when confronted with the truth, they at first brushed it away but later realized that Miles was telling the truth. The movie ends on an ambiguous note, as the ending scenes do not explicitly state the fate of the world.

In the case of *The Manchurian Candidate*, the government is endangered by two threats: the communists and power-hungry politicians. *The Manchurian Candidate* shows that communism is not the only threat, but corrupt politicians also pose a serious threat. The American government could be seen as weak in this movie. Not only because it allows itself to be manipulated by the anti-communist campaign of Senator Iselin, but because it also allowed a communists, Senator Jordan, into its higher positions.

In *Red Planet Mars*, the government is portrayed as strong and determined. They are aware of the Russian threat and are working hard to maximize their national security and advance the country. They are determined to contact the Martian population first and get ahead of the Soviet Union. It is stated multiple times that the American government wants to scientifically advance the country to establish itself as superior to the Soviet Union. Additionally, the American government, including the president, also repeatedly mentioned that they are interested in stopping the Cold War with Russia. In the *Red Planet Mars* the government is strong and reliable. They are transparent with their citizens, unlike the government of the Soviet Union, which dictates their people and restricts their access

to information. Although the American government faced hardship during the chaos caused by the religious messages, they managed to survive the social unrest, unlike the Russian government. In this movie, the biggest threat to communism is not capitalism but religion.

In *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the government is portrayed as either corrupt, weak, or ineffective. In contrast, in *Red Planet Mars*, they are seen as the saviours of the world. By listening to Linda Cronyn, the religious voice of the movie, they release the religious messages that ultimately cause the fall of Soviet Russia.

## 7 Revisiting the Cold War Themes in *Oppenheimer*

*Oppenheimer*, a movie directed by Christopher Nolan and released in 2023, is an Oscar-winning biopic about the life of Robert J. Oppenheimer, a well-known scientist who is better known as “the father” of the atomic bomb. This film not only explores the creation of the first weapon of mass destruction but also comments on the Cold War era and critiques the prosecution scientists faced during the Red Scare. *Oppenheimer* shares the most similarities with the 1952 movie *Red Planet Mars*; both explore the theme of scientific advancement and moral consequences. For that reason, the comparison focuses mainly on *Red Planet Mars*.

In contrast to *Red Planet Mars*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *The Manchurian Candidate*, where the anti-communist message is powerful and easy to spot, *Oppenheimer* takes a more liberal and open-minded approach to the portrayal of communism and the Soviet Union. In the 1950s movies, anti-communism is depicted as necessary and, most importantly, right sentiment. The majority of movies made during the Red Scare utilized fear, paranoia, and the sci-fi genre to portray Cold War anxieties about communist subversion and presented it as an immediate threat. In contrast, *Oppenheimer* does not paint communists as heartless and cruel monsters like the 1950s films usually did. Although it portrays the Soviet Union as a significant threat and a powerful rival to the United States, it also depicts both the American and Soviet governments in a similar light—both eager to develop and use the atomic bomb. The American government is not portrayed as the good side, as seen in *Red Planet Mars*, but rather as one with flaws and power-hungry intentions. This is evident in the scenes where U.S. officials decide to bomb two Japanese cities filled with innocent civilians to show off the bomb’s power and establish themselves as the superior nation. Later, the same can be seen in the unjust security hearings of Robert J. Oppenheimer. Also, the death of Jean Tatlock, a long-time love interest of Robert J. Oppenheimer, was used to depict the paranoid atmosphere of the Red Scare, as the movie suggests she did not commit suicide but was actually murdered by the American government as she posed a serious threat to national security. Her inclination towards communism and her relationship with the scientist was seen as a risk as she could be a communist spy trying to get information about the Manhattan Project. This caused the American officials to see her as a security concern and thus make the decision to eliminate her. Additionally, the American government obviously does not intend to stop the development of even more dangerous weapons, and this intention can be seen in its support

for the hydrogen bomb. While the 1950s movies visibly promote anti-communist views, *Oppenheimer* offers a critical and reflective perspective, not placing either side at an advantage. As mentioned by Jack Maxwell, the portrayal of communists in *Oppenheimer* is indeed noticeably less critical than the depiction of the American government. The movie does not attempt to defend communism or promote it as a better alternative, but it very clearly highlights the dangers of anti-communist paranoia. The American political figures like Lewis Strauss or President Truman are portrayed as power-driven and more concerned with maintaining dominance than with avoiding global catastrophe. In contrast, leftist characters are treated with a degree of sympathy, and their political beliefs are not presented as dangerous or threatening. This reversal of the typical Hollywood approach makes the American government appear more harmful than the communists it feared.<sup>62</sup>

Since the film is shot retrospectively, Christopher Nolan was allowed the creative freedom to explore the theme of government overreach without significant censorship or controversy. This allowed him to question the U.S. government's treatment of Robert J. Oppenheimer and highlight the consequences one might face when perceived as subversive. The case of Robert J. Oppenheimer was extensively documented and widely known, which made it possible for the film to question the fairness of his security hearings and critique the persecution of scientists. In a way, the U.S. government becomes a greater enemy to Robert J. Oppenheimer than the Soviets themselves. He was seen as a serious national security risk due to his past ties with the Communist Party, even though he stated in his security hearings that he was neither a communist nor a communist sympathizer. In *Oppenheimer*, Robert J. Oppenheimer is portrayed almost as a martyr. He was persecuted by the government despite his great service to the country. Although the movie criticizes how he was treated during the Red Scare, it also hints that the government's fears were not entirely baseless. As mentioned by Matthew Wills, Oppenheimer did in fact have close ties to communism. He supported several left-wing causes, both of his known lovers, one being his wife, also had ties to the Communist Party, as well as his brother. While he denied being a member himself, these associations understandably raised concern during a time of intense political paranoia.<sup>63</sup> The government then intentionally used these ties to discredit him and ultimately ruin his career. Despite his enormous contribution to the country,

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<sup>62</sup> Jack Maxwell, "Oppenheimer's Surprisingly Sympathetic Portrayal of Communism," *Trinitonian*, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://trinitonian.com/2023/08/31/oppenheimers-surprisingly-sympathetic-portrayal-of-communism/>.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Wills, "The Annotated Oppenheimer," *JSTOR Daily*, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-annotated-oppenheimer/>.

Oppenheimer was stripped of his security clearance, publicly humiliated, and ostracized. Once Oppenheimer became consumed by the devastating consequences of his invention, he began to advocate against its use and warn of its destructive power. However, his concerns were not welcomed by the American officials, who used his warnings against him during his security hearings. He was judged simply for speaking his mind, as his opinions on atomic bombs did not align with the opinions of those in power. The government even breached his rights of freedom by following him, tapping his phone, and going through his trash. This suggests that the government was not trying to protect democracy or freedom but rather suppressed individuals to protect itself.

Both *Oppenheimer* and *Red Planet Mars* depict science as a double-edged sword—it is a powerful tool for human advancement, but it could also have devastating consequences. A similarity can be seen between the character of Linda Cronyn in *Red Planet Mars* and Robert J. Oppenheimer. Like Oppenheimer, Linda Cronyn is a scientist driven by a persistent desire to discover and innovate. Although being paranoid and scared of the possible consequences, she decides to contact the Martian civilization and does so nevertheless. This scientific ambition pushes both the characters of Linda Cronyn and Robert J. Oppenheimer forward despite the moral and ethical dilemmas they both face. Oppenheimer is very aware of the potential consequences and destruction his invention could cause, which leads him to become consumed by deep psychological and moral scruples. Both the characters know the effect their work will have, but their desire for scientific progress ultimately outweighs their fears.

In *Red Planet Mars*, the invention of an atomic weapon is seen as necessary to end the Cold War and defeat the Soviet Union. *Oppenheimer* offers two contrasting opinions. An opinion shared among the scientists is that the atomic bomb is a creation that, once invented, sets humanity on a path toward destruction. Not only by granting people access to its deadly power but also by accelerating the nuclear arms race and, thus, the development of new, even deadlier weapons. While the majority of soldiers and government officials in *Oppenheimer* see the bomb as a necessary and useful tool, the scientists involved in its creation express significant moral and ethical concerns. *Red Planet Mars* presents the bomb as a tool to win the Cold War, whereas *Oppenheimer* presents it as a symbol of destruction from the protagonist's perspective. As similarly noted in an article from the Carnegie Council by Alex Woodson, *Oppenheimer* does not just show the technical success of the atomic bomb—it also focuses on the trauma that follows. After the Trinity test, the character of Robert J. Oppenheimer is no longer motivated by patriotism

or scientific victory but is rather haunted by what he created. He begins to suffer from panic attacks and is tormented by visions of destruction. The movie makes it clear that, although he was not a pacifist, Robert J. Oppenheimer understood the moral consequences of unleashing such a weapon, and the guilt stays with him long after the war ends. This highlights a central ethical dilemma: the irreversible impact of scientific progress when guided by fear and political ambition rather than morals.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, *Oppenheimer* offers a sharp contrast to the anti-communist messages found in 1950s movies like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *Red Planet Mars*. It critiques both sides of the conflict while highlighting the dangers of government overreach. As it follows the development of the first atomic bomb, the film also explores the ethical dilemmas of scientific progress. Unlike the Cold War paranoia emphasized in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *Red Planet Mars*, *Oppenheimer* provides a reflective critique of the era, questioning the cost and misuse of power.

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<sup>64</sup> Alex Woodson, "Ethics on Film: Discussion of 'Oppenheimer,'" *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, accessed March 22, 2025, [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/series/ethics-on-film/ethics-on-film-discussion-of-oppenheimer?fbclid=IwY2xjawJLh8BleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHWO8cG8TzD-Z5vdr5VZgOro2bZBEP-0cug06fhn2bI\\_wPDCzmRJup8l2g\\_aem\\_f11u5zthbc15337EKRnqTw](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/series/ethics-on-film/ethics-on-film-discussion-of-oppenheimer?fbclid=IwY2xjawJLh8BleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHWO8cG8TzD-Z5vdr5VZgOro2bZBEP-0cug06fhn2bI_wPDCzmRJup8l2g_aem_f11u5zthbc15337EKRnqTw).

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the portrayal of communism and anti-communist sentiments in American 1950s movies and to examine how they reflect the Cold War era's anxieties and ideological conflict. This was done by analyzing three selected movies: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, and *Red Planet Mars*. All three of these movies engage with these fears differently. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* chose to use a metaphor of Alien pods, which silently infiltrate the small society of Santa Mira and work hard to clone every single person. These pods lack emotion, have no individual personality and are absolutely conform, thus possessing qualities which were commonly associated with the communist ideology.

On the Other hand, *The Manchurian Candidate* used direct political critique and highlighted the fact that, not only do the Soviets pose a threat to the American government but power-hungry politicians do as well. This was done mainly through the character of Eleanor Iselin, Raymond Shaw's mother and an intelligent woman, who did not hesitate to kill anyone who stood in her way to success. *Red Planet Mars* also chose direct critique but used religious allegory as a powerful force to fight the ideology of communism. This movie highlighted the importance of religion and also commented on the dark sides of scientific advancement. It showed science as a double-edged sword, something which has the power to help people but also has the potential to destroy them. Although the three of the movies approach the themes differently, all support the narrative of communism being an existential threat to American democracy, individual freedom, and cultural values. The theme of Paranoia and the intentional use of fear are undeniable elements present in all three of these movies. The cinema was a significant source of public entertainment and was visited by millions of people worldwide, so these movies significantly contributed to shaping the public perception of the communist threat.

A comparative look at *Oppenheimer* shows a shift in how modern cinema approaches the Cold War themes. Unlike the 1950s movies, which often depicted communists as cruel and oppressive, *Oppenheimer* offers a more complex perspective on the topic. Because it was shot retrospectively, the movie was allowed to critique the government and to explore the theme of government overreach without a significant amount of censorship or controversy. Although it does not exaggerate or dismiss the threat the Soviet Union posed back in those times, it also critiques the flaws of the American government, particularly their attempt to suppress individuals with different opinions and

their willingness to sacrifice those individuals in the name of national security. This contrast highlights a significant transformation in historical perception of the conflict. While the 1950s Cold War movies often relied on the genre of sci-fi, fear and paranoia, modern movies like *Oppenheimer* revisit this era with a critical mindset and question the motivations and moral dilemmas of both sides of the conflict.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how film serves as a powerful medium for not only reflecting the anxieties of the time but also shaping historical awareness. The analyzed 1950s movies supported a black-and-white narrative of the Cold War, painting the Soviet Union as the bad side and the USA as the good side. In contrast, *Oppenheimer* offers a complex view and lets the audiences reconsider the consequences of the political actions taken in the name of ideological supremacy and national security. The evolution of these depictions highlights the lasting impact of the Cold War on American cultural memory and reveals how cinema continues to engage with the fears and consequences of that era even decades later.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce si klade za cíl zjistit, jak byl zobrazován komunismus a antikomunistické sentimenty v amerických filmech 50. let 20. století. Zaměřuje se na to, jak tyto filmy reflektují dobové obavy, ideologické konflikty a jakým způsobem tyto filmy přispěly k formování veřejného vnímání tohoto konfliktu. Filmy produkované během této doby nejen odrážely atmosféru strachu a obav o národní bezpečnost, ale často sloužily i jako nástroje pro šíření propagandy a podporovaly vládní postoj vůči Sovětskému svazu a komunistické ideologii. Práce se zaměřuje na tři konkrétní filmy: *Invaze lupičů těl* (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956), *Mandžuský kandidát* (*The Manchurian Candidate*, 1962) a *Rudá planeta Mars* (*Red Planet Mars*, 1952). Každý z těchto snímků zachycuje antikomunismus jiným způsobem a využívá odlišné strategie ke ztvárnění tehdejších obav z infiltrace komunismu do americké společnosti.

V případě *Invaze lupičů těl* je komunistická hrozba vyjádřena prostřednictvím metafory, film využívá motiv mimozemské invaze a klonů, kteří nahrazují skutečné lidské bytosti. Obyvatelé malého městečka Santa Mira jsou postupně nahrazováni mimozemskými klony, které absorbují jejich mysl když spí. Tyto klony postrádají veškeré emoce, osobní identitu a pilně spolupracují, aby svou rasu rozšířili nejen po celém USA, ale i po celém světě. Tyto mimozemské vlastnosti a kolektivismus odráží hlavní rysy, které byly v době studené války připisovány komunistické ideologii. Paranoia je v tomto filmu vyvolána skrze neviditelného nepřítele, který se schovává mezi občany a nenápadně se infiltruje mezi ně. Toto odráží tehdejší obavy Američanů z možné infiltrace komunistů do státních či vzdělávacích institucí a běžného života. Tento snímek reflektuje tehdejší společenské klima a také slouží jako příklad toho, jak mohou být filmy využity k vyvolání strachu a také k propagaci politické propagandy.

Naopak *Mandžuský kandidát* je otevřenou kritikou nejen komunismu, ale i způsobu, jakým americká politika manipulovala s veřejným míněním během studené války. Film se zaměřuje na postavu Raymonda Shawa, válečného veterána a hrdiny, který je během korejské války zajat a byl mu vymyt mozek. Shaw se tak stal vražedným nástrojem Sovětského svazu a později jeho matky. Jeho postava odráží obavy z ideologické subverze a otázky o tom, do jaké míry mohou být jednotlivci ovládáni politickými silami. Film kritizuje nejen sovětskou propagandu a manipulaci, ale také americkou politickou scénu. Toto je vidět na postavě senátora Iselina, který je očividně inspirován reálnou historickou postavou senátora Josepha McCarthyho. Film kritizuje jeho politické strategie a způsob, jakým zneužíval strach. Hlavním antagonistou filmu ale není senátor John Yerkes Iselin, ale matka Raymonda Shawa, Eleanor

Iselinová. Tato inteligentní žena je odhodlána dosáhnout svých politických ambicí, i kdyby to znamenalo vzít někomu život. *Mandžuský kandidát* tímto způsobem ukazuje, že nebezpečí nespočívá pouze v komunismu a Sovětském svazu, ale že i američtí politici v té době zneužívali strach pro vlastní cíle. Film tedy nabízí hlubší a komplexnější pohled na studenou válku a politickou sféru té doby.

*Rudá planeta Mars* představuje jiný přístup k tématu studené války a komunismu, protože využívá náboženskou alegorii k podpoře antikomunistického narativu. Film sleduje příběh páru amerických vědců, kteří skrze svůj vynález komunikují s vyspělou civilizací na Marsu. Tato civilizace je velmi vyspělá a žije v harmonii, bez válek a chudoby. Z počátku jsou mart'anské správy normální, ale později nabývají náboženského rázu. Když se tyto zprávy dostanou na Zemi a jsou zveřejněny, způsobí globální politickou, náboženskou a společenskou revoluci. Zatímco v Americe posilují víru a stabilitu, v Sovětském svazu tomu tak není. Náboženský ráz mimozemských správ vyvolává chaos a později způsobí duchovní obrození, které má za následek pád komunistického režimu. Tento film tak otevřeně propaguje myšlenku, že náboženství a křesťanské hodnoty jsou jakousi zbraní proti komunismu, který je ve filmu zobrazován jako bezbožná a opresivní ideologie odsouzená k zániku. Tento silně antikomunistický a propagandistický ráz filmu ukazuje, jak se studená válka promítla do masové kultury a jakým způsobem byla filmová produkce využívána k podpoře politických názorů.

Práce se také zabývá tím, jak se vnímání studené války a jejího zobrazování ve filmové tvorbě změnilo. K tomu bylo využito srovnání s moderním snímkem *Oppenheimer* (2023), který se na studenou válku dívá retrospektivně a s kritickým odstupem. Na rozdíl od filmů z 50. let, které často prezentovaly komunisty jako nelítostné padouchy, *Oppenheimer* poskytuje komplexní pohled na tuto problematiku. I když tento film nepopírá hrozbu, kterou Sovětský svaz představoval, zároveň otevřeně kritizuje i americkou vládu a její postupy během studené války. Dotýká se problematiky potlačování jedinců s odlišnými názory a politických procesů proti vědcům, kteří byli podezřelí ze sympatií ke komunismu. *Oppenheimer* také poukazuje na nespravedlivý způsob, jakým bylo zacházeno s vědci, zejména Robert J. Oppenheimer. Jedním z centrálních témat *Oppenheimera* je vládní dohled a potlačování jednotlivců, což odkazuje na reálné události, jako byly například výsledky v rámci kampaně senátora Josepha McCarthyho, nebo odnětí bezpečnostní prověrky Robertu Oppenheimerovi kvůli jeho kontaktům s komunistickými sympatizanty. Film ukazuje to, že nejen Sovětský svaz, ale i Spojené státy používaly propagandu a zneužívali politickou moc, aby ospravedlnily své skutky během studené války. Tento posun v pohledu ukazuje na to, jak se změnilo historické vnímání studené

války. Zatímco v 50. letech byla americká propaganda jednoznačně zaměřena na očernění komunismu, moderní filmy přistupují k tématu s větší reflexí a kritickým pohledem.

Tato práce měla za úkol ukázat, jak silný vliv měly filmy na utváření veřejného vnímání studené války a jak filmové zobrazování komunismu ovlivnilo tehdejší společnost. Srovnání s moderní tvorbou ukazuje, že studená válka nadále zůstává relevantním a zajímavým tématem i v současné kinematografii, i když je dnes vnímána s větším odstupem a také se snahou o větší objektivnost. Filmy jako *Oppenheimer* umožňují divákům přehodnotit minulost a klást si otázky o tom, jak propaganda a ideologie ovlivňují vnímání historických událostí.

Závěrem lze konstatovat, že filmy z 50. let 20. století, jako *Invaze lupičů těl*, *Mandžuský kandidát* a *Rudá planeta Mars*, významně přispěly k formování antikomunistických nálad ve Spojených státech a odrážely tehdejší společenské obavy. Moderní filmy, jako *Oppenheimer*, však přinášejí složitější pohled na studenou válku a umožňují hlubší zamyšlení nad jejími důsledky. Vývoj interpretace tohoto tématu ukazuje, jak se historická paměť mění v průběhu času a jak film slouží nejen jako obraz doby, ve které vzniká, ale i jako nástroj pro utváření veřejného povědomí.

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