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Who Is (Still) Afraid of the Pods?

If, as Slavoj Žižek claims, films teach us what and how to desire,[1] the plant horror genre seems to show us what happens when desire disappears. Jack Finney's serial *Body Snatchers,* first published in *Collier's* magazine in 1954, tells the tale of alien seedpods that take over a small Californian town by duplicating its citizens one by one and replacing them with unfeeling, conformist pod people. While the short story went through multiple editions and was undeniably popular in its own right, it is perhaps best known now for having inspired the two classic films that have come to define plant horror, both titled *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (released in 1956 and 1978).[2] In these film versions of the narrative, we participate in the dramatic loss of the world of human experience—through the eyes of those who escape initial transformation into humanoid alien vegetables—even as, visually, everything remains the same. Rewatched today, the films continue to confront us with the opposite of what we expect from cinema: instead of a space where our

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projected desires appear, we witness desire's end as the takeover by the pods brings about the demise of human need and feeling.

In their pitting of sympathetic humans against rapacious and invading pod people, the *Invasion* films have long been read as speaking primarily to their audience's paranoia, including the anti-Soviet fears of Cold War–era McCarthyism, anxieties generated by the U.S. government's use of atomic power, and concerns about the creeping standardization and proliferating bureaucracy that are among the privileged symptoms of modernity.[3] With their emphasis on monstrously vegetal life-forms, these films show some affinities with the creature feature, particularly in their reflections on the intrinsic power of cinema to give us access to modes of being that threaten and overwhelm our own. The two best-known versions of *Invasion* can also be understood as especially compelling entries in the plant horror category—a genre that includes twentieth-century works such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951), featuring a vampiric carrot; *Day of the Triffids* (1962), with its carnivorous plants bent on consuming blinded humans; and *Swamp Thing* (1982), in addition to twenty-first-century variants *The Ruins* (2008) and *The Happening* (2008).[4] While all of these films exploit the particular anxieties of the moments in which they appear—from Cold War anticommunism to worries over ecological disaster—the potential of their serial plant monsters (be they pods or people) is not fully exhausted in the projection of various real or imagined fears onto the vegetable's monstrous nature. Indeed, the prospect of vegetal transformation, as envisioned by plant horror films, is not just terrifying but is also fascinating and, on occasion, alluring, as the persistence of the theme indicates.[5] The extinction of human desire within the otherworldly need of the plant holds its own visceral and spectacular appeal. What accounts for the attraction of the monstrous yet visually compelling plant? As we will argue here, if the *Invasion* films deserve our attention today, it is not so much through the era-specific fears that they address but instead in the way in which they make use of the figure of the plant to invoke a form of being that is both emotionless and productive, both shapeless and full of lively forms, both ancient and well suited to navigating the crises that modernity appears to carry in its wake. Plants that devour humans allow us to imagine the demise of humanity itself as not just terrible but pleasurable.

As Michael Marder has recently argued, from the inception of Western metaphysics, plants have been defined as defective and incomplete beings. In their position as "lower" life-forms, plants are subject to being manipulated and consumed by humans who accordingly impose their own goals on them (by cultivating them as

food, decoration, shelter, and commodities, among other things); in a modern context, capitalism readily conspires with philosophy to figure plants as objects, rather than subjects, of exchange.[6] However, while the field of metaphysics has been ungrateful to plants, it has also provided them with an ontological richness that is not only ametaphysical but also antimetaphysical.[7] Because ancient philosophy often equated life with motion, the plant's immobility consigned it to an inferior status. Yet at the same time, plants appeared to represent life in excess, since their growth was understood as unlimited by morphology. In the absence of a defined shape, ontological plants grow endlessly, in a proliferation of organless bodies, with associations of mystical excess whose flip side (the threat of unstoppable invasion) eventually comes to inform the vegetal monsters of plant horror.

In other words, while plants may lack a shape specific to them, this failure gives them tremendous vitality—both in ancient (philosophical) and modern (cinematic) contexts. We initially find the dual nature of vegetal being succinctly expressed by Aristotle's disciple Theophrastus, who takes the Aristotelian account of plant ontology and extends it into a magisterial discussion of plant classification, cultivation, and consumption. Theophrastus begins his discussion in the *Enquiry into Plants* with an account of plant parts but quickly runs into difficulty, since the parts of plants, as it turns out, are both subject to change and indeterminate in number. "Again," he writes, "many plants shed their parts every year. . . . And in general, as we have said, we must not assume that in all respects there is complete correspondence between plants and animals. And that is why the number also of parts is indeterminate: for a plant has the power of growth in all its parts, inasmuch as it has life in all its parts."[8] Even more troubling, where the project of classification is concerned, is that there is no single part that all plants can be said to have in common. Some plants have stems, while others lack them; some have branches, while others do not; and even roots are far from universally shared among all vegetal types.[9]

Theophrastus reveals plants to be as morphologically indeterminate as they are ontologically singular in nature. It is impossible to pin down one bodily character that we might then use in order to categorize the plant in general as a body. Unlike animals, possessed of particular parts by which they might be classified, plants thus exhibit a remarkable diversity of form. What they lack in affect or intellect they make up in their ability to take on multifarious and ever-changing shapes. Modern plant horror, as we will show, exploits a Theophrastean concern with plant morphology as both indeterminate and variable. Absence of need becomes productivity

of form; a quality that registers as a deficiency in metaphysics reappears as a welcome excess in film. Plants have long been ideally suited, as it turns out, for impersonation.

Along with its interest in the plasticity of plant form, the plant horror genre also dwells on the original Aristotelian formulation of plant being as unique in its modes of "striving" toward an end or purpose that is specific to it. Aristotle assigns plant life a distinctive "entelechy," or "actuality"—a particular way of being "at work" (the Greek root from which Aristotle coined the term); for plants this specificity is instantiated in vegetal growth, reproduction, and nutrition.[10] While from an Aristotelian perspective the plant is certainly not endowed with the multiple capacities that define the animal and the human—and thus may be said to "lack" that which humans and animals possess—the plant-as-being, insofar as it is "complete" as what it is, nonetheless continues to express a purpose that is uniquely its own. In *De anima,* Aristotle writes:

> For this is the most natural of the functions of such living creatures as are complete and not mutilated and do not have spontaneous generation, namely to make another thing like themselves, an animal an animal, a plant a plant, so that in the way that they can they may partake in the eternal and the divine. For all creatures desire this and for the sake of this do whatever they do in accordance with their nature.[11]

As this passage makes clear, reproduction is a particularly important element of completion. Here plants are portrayed as having their own desires—and their own relationship to divinity[12]—even as they lack desire, understood as appetite, imagination, movement, and action. Even within the Aristotelian tradition, then, plants, however minimally ensouled (in the sense of being informed by a vegetal *psuchē,* or life principle), continue to mediate in their own peculiar way between the material world, in which they exist as bodies, and the domain of the divine, a projected realm of rationality and intelligence in which they find their purpose and express their own form of striving toward an end.

Plant entelechy, then, is both stripped down (in comparison to the complex sensitive and intellectual life of humans) and highly specific in that plants retain a kind of ontological uniqueness that makes it possible for them to act in accordance with a nature that is their own and not that of another. We may thus speak of plants, animals, and humans as all ensouled, insofar as the soul is that which gives the body its reason for being (and, in effect, causes this body to be).[13] While from the hierarchically metaphysical point of view plants may be said to be missing something, in Aristotle's

ontology and Theophrastus's speculative botany they also contain their own principle that organizes and drives their participation in a cosmic order. Indeed, in certain respects plants are more successful than humans in this mediation—particularly where reproduction is concerned. They are what we might call superreproductive: thoroughly and successfully dedicated to their all-consuming tasks of growth and the production of new members of the species.

Moreover, while plants have nothing of the human within them, humans all contain a little something of the vegetal order: the nutritive faculty is present in the human life principle (*psuchē*), while intellect and desire are not present in the plant. The Aristotelian account of the plant-as-being produces a host of comparisons that link together vegetal, animal, and human ways of being. In an analogy that will be of particular significance for the *Invasion* films, Aristotle writes of human and animal embryos as plantlike, possessing a lower degree of life, and quasi asleep. In *Generation of Animals,* he affirms

> assuming that it is necessary that an animal should possess sensation, and that it is first an animal at the moment it has first acquired sensation, we ought to regard its original state [i.e., the embryo] not as being sleep but something resembling sleep—the sort of state that plants are also in; indeed the fact is that at this stage animals are living the life of a plant.[14]

Although human and animal life (as they are properly defined) require sensation, for Aristotle life is first actualized, with the "sleeping" embryo, as movement in unfeeling growth in a way that specifically recalls the plant. Humans thus retain in their development a connection to vegetal being, even in the latter's failure to be "complete" (when considered vis-à-vis other modes of being). Accordingly, plant ontology is both distinct in and of itself (as a form of entelechy) and intrinsically present in the human.

The first Western plant fiction appears with the waning of the Renaissance (and may be considered one of the earliest forms of science fiction more generally). While the Aristotelian endorsement of vegetal ensoulment gradually falls out of favor as a natural philosophical approach to plant being, the turn away from Aristotle both inspires new ideas about vegetal life and liberates old ones, making the ancient models available for imaginative speculation.[15] Freed from the confines of metaphysics by scientific thought,[16] the plant penetrates slowly into the domain of literature and then cinema. The literary roots of plant horror remain visible in the extent to which so many of the monstrous film vegetables of the twentieth century find their origins in narrative fiction (including those of

the *Invasion* series). What is more, the emergence of the plant as a cinematic character is haunted by the Aristotelian insistence on the extraordinary material flexibility—and energy—of the plant. While, as Marder reminds us, plants have typically taken on secondary and tertiary roles in metaphysics, they explode onto the scene in plant horror films, pushing their way to the forefront of consciousness in all their fleshiness (a quality that often accounts for the literal pulp in these surprisingly visually engaging B-movies). While they seek to inspire terror as well as delight, these images of invasive pod people do more than just provide another venue for the paranoia of being taken over by something that is out there; they consistently allow audiences to imagine, from within a state of delighted fear, the pleasures and pains of becoming another form of lively matter designated as vegetal.[17] Rendering the rapacious alien plant of fiction in visual terms, the two *Invasion* films zoom in on the specific productivity of plants. (Ultimately, the *Invasion* films suggest that cinema is a privileged place for representing nonhuman life in general, specifically in its links to reproduction.) Both films share an acute preoccupation with the question of how human communities and human bonds, public and private, may be sustained at the moment of confrontation with modes of being that are strange to us, even as we recognize ourselves in them. It is in this context that the plant, once again, has a particularly vital role to play, since in the plant horror genre vegetal beings are figured as having found a way to navigate the contradictions of modern social relations that stymie or defeat human (or humanist) impulses. The plant threatens to transform us from within even as it invades us from elsewhere and in doing so challenges our assumptions about the continued capacity of the human to nurture and reproduce itself from within the very frameworks (economic, aesthetic, and finally ontological) that make it visible as such.

Origins of the *Invasion* Films: Finney's *Body Snatchers*

Jack Finney's short story articulates at some length what might be at stake in the notion of a plant invasion, at the moment when the vegetal replicant Professor Budlong explains to the shocked Miles Bennell, the still-human town doctor, that the seedpods' striving to survive at the expense of other species is not so different from human behavior:

> What has the human race done except spread over this planet till it swarms the globe seven billion strong? What have you done with this

> very continent but expand till you fill it? And where are the buffalo who roamed this land before you? Gone. Where is the passenger pigeon, which literally darkened the skies of America in flocks of *billions*? The last one died in the Philadelphia Zoo in 1913. Doctor, the function of life is *to live if it can,* and no other motive can ever be allowed to interfere with that. There is no malice involved; did you hate the buffalo?[18]

Here the plants speak critically about unrestrained human striving, yet they do so from the position of beings whose behavior recalls and even exceeds the callous and irrational human drive for survival. The horror of the pods, as Miles points out, is that they do not care whether other species live or die.[19] It appears that human specificity is required if we are to *care* for the extinction of species, to feel their loss, and thus the very possibility of an environmentalist argument becomes part and parcel of the representation of human exceptionalism. In the story, this attribution of a cold and ruthless survivalism to the vegetal simulacra (or pods) works not to call into question human behavior but instead to highlight humanity itself as in possession of a unique ethical responsibility to the members of its own species, defined in strikingly homogenous terms. The possibility of human heroism, acting both on the individual and the community, is necessary to oppose this alien social Darwinism. Within this framework, Finney's tale provides a nostalgic view of an almost exclusively white small Californian town whose inhabitants mutually recognize each other and are tied by emotional bonds; racial and class differences barely come up in the story and then only to create embarrassment. The film conjures up the vision of a supposedly warmer, more livable, bucolic way of life by presenting the pod people as the standard-bearers of a dully uniform existence in which affect no longer plays a role. Ironically, even as Finney's hero fears the conformism represented by the plants, he remains more or less oblivious to the erasure of difference that marks the small-town public sphere.

Ultimately, human life is held up in Finney's story as not simply superior to the vegetal energy of the plants but also somehow more alive. Even the pods admit that their "duplication *isn't* perfect. And can't be. It's like the artificial compounds nuclear physicists are fooling with: unstable, unable to hold their form."[20] Pod mimesis, like Platonic mimesis, is declared to be secondary to natural reproduction; the pods' striving for survival, in the story, is merely the copy of life, and as such their mode of being remains atomic and brittle, always already crumbling and barren.[21] The true agents of social change, those with authentic vitality, are the humans, and

it is their actions that eventually and almost miraculously force the pods to take off ("climbing up through the faint mist, on and on toward the space they had come from") and leave Earth to its own happy ending.[22] The plants' departure recalls a swarm of bees or a flock of birds; the aliens become yet another species that the now-militant humans, ready to "fight . . . in the fields, and in the streets," have eradicated from Earth.[23] The novella thus acts as an affirmation of human existence just as its ending proclaims the (somewhat unexpected) triumph of specifically human effort. Action, the mark of true or full life, is the prerogative of humans alone, as is a genuinely ethical relation to others.

Body Snatchers promotes the idea of a heroic human individualism and shows that the pod creatures, as extraterrestrial plants, are excluded from the successful reproduction of a society that is idealized in human terms. Even so, the narrative is momentarily destabilized by the fact that the novella shows some men and women to be shut out from this process of idealization. In two brief episodes, juxtaposed by the narrator Miles, racial difference and vegetal being are represented as equivalent. The first is the story of Billy, the black shoe-shine man whose obsequious manner with his clients is revealed as a facade when Miles, after a night of drinking, finds himself in a "run-down section of town" and, lying down in the backseat of his car, overhears Billy imitate his own speech in a "quietly hysterical parody of himself."[24] The second scene gives us the pods masquerading as the townspeople; although they *sound* like the humans whose shapes they have taken on, their true identity becomes clear when they "laugh falsely in a hideous burlesque of embarrassment" about their behavior.[25] In the first episode, Miles's own shame does not simply derive from the fact that Billy turns out to be merely pretending to care about his patrons but also stems from his role as witness to the condescending treatment that Billy receives from these same patrons, all white. In the second episode, the embarrassment both provoked and performed by the pods (since they cannot actually *feel*) is read by Miles as a commentary on the social consensus that accepts the exclusion of black people from the centers of small-town sociability. This embarrassment lingers even as the story's happy ending overwrites it—one blow to our sense of superiority in the face of the confirmation of the unique moral status supposedly shared by all humans.

The 1956 and 1978 cinematic adaptations of Finney's story restage this threat of standardization—and thus the erasure of human exceptionalism—posed by the plants. In both *Invasion* films, the monstrous replicants—grown from enormous seeds—evoke a dehumanization wrought through the stripping away of

affect, passion, and care, while the pods take on human shape and human activities.[26] But the vegetal is not merely a brittle figure of ruthless survivalism and soulless conformism in these filmic adaptations. Don Siegel's and Philip Kaufman's films undeniably lend the plants more vitality than does the novella. Both directors reject the depiction of the pods as lacking in life in favor of a portrayal of the alien beings as oozing, "at work," and, last but not least, visually moving for their spectators. As it turns out, behind the representation of plants as cold invaders there lies another understanding of plants as spectacularly vital beings. Siegel and Kaufman dispense with the sped-up mortality of the pods, thus discarding the hierarchy that Finney's novella sets up between being "really alive" and simply imitating life, being its bad copy.[27] Through these portrayals of material and vegetal vitality, the films reflect anxieties about the declining energy of human communities even as the soulless plants extinguish the most passionate affections that structure human relationships in both intimate and social forms.

Instead of the (crudely interpreted) evolutionary struggle for survival as depicted in Finney's novella, the cinematic pods struggle to express their superreproductive potential—revealing along the way an ability to combine production and reproduction in a manner that far outstrips any human capacities. The *Invasion* films seep with a materiality that saturates the small-town milieu of Santa Mira (Siegel) and the urban space of San Francisco (Kaufman) with not just dramatic tension but also newly fascinating sounds and sights. Siegel's rendering of the pods as frothy bodies that issue forth from uterine cavities calls into question the boundaries separating life and lifeless matter; this tension is heightened in Kaufman's remake.

At the same time, the cinematic plants themselves, speaking with the voices of the former owners of their bodies, advocate on behalf of escape into a physical materiality ripe with erotic appeal.[28] The plants are not only morphologically successful but are also economically successful; they infiltrate the landscapes of these films with their bodies (often enticing) and their spectacular (re)-productivity.

California Antipastoral: The *Invasion* of 1956

Siegel's *Invasion* continues to exploit ideas about the defective being of plants: his pod people are without emotions (including any concern for others), lack desires and ambitions (other than the need to survive), and possess no individuality. As Vivian Sobchack asserts of the pods, "What gives the aliens away? . . . [I]t is primarily

Figure 1: Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) discovers the replicants oozing forth from the pods (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1956).

a matter of *negative* behavior, of *not* doing something: a gasp not gasped, a kiss not returned." If "*suspense is nothing happening*" (Sobchack's emphasis), the domain of the vegetal can seem designed to elicit precisely this kind of response—a breathless, almost lifeless waiting for the void to be filled.[29] Indeed, the heroine Becky (played by Dana Wynter) inadvertently reveals her humanity to the pod creatures by her concern for a dog dashing out into the street. People and animals are linked by the bonds of sentiment. What's in it for plants? Precisely, it would seem, nothing.

Despite the pod people's continued identification with an absence of affect, Siegel's cinematic adaptation, like Kaufman's, succeeds in bringing to life a form of plant-being that undermines and undercuts the assertive humanism championed in Finney's story. In short, things get increasingly vegetal in the films. The pods are depicted onscreen as giant uterine containers oozing and nursing exact replicas of their human hosts.[30] These simulacra are initially presented as incomplete—Siegel shows us a naked male body lacking fingerprints and exact features, while Kaufman's pods excrete the film's characters in miniature—but when the process of duplication is finished, the replicants immediately take over and impose their way of life on the humans. Even though Siegel's *Invasion* features a studio-imposed hopeful ending, in the film the plants work tirelessly to highlight the vulnerability of the kind of Californian good life that the fictional small town Santa Mira (the patron saint of the gaze?) is meant to exemplify. Prior to the invasion, the inhabitants of Santa Mira cultivate a form of mutual recognition (whose racist undertones are not overtly referenced by the

film). As a community, they appear to embody respect for modern, enlightened forms of authority (including the policemen, doctors, and psychiatrists who function as the town's de facto voices of reason), relative economic self-sufficiency, and collective appreciation for what is eventually named by a human-turned-plant psychiatrist as "love, desire, ambition, faith" (a strange and somewhat contradictory list). Before it emerges as a disruptive force, the vegetal backdrop serves as the ambient and nourishing frame for a bucolic small-town capitalism, where prosperity and contentment reign. All too soon, however, the seemingly inert background moves to the forefront of our consciousness. When the protagonist Dr. Miles Bennell (played by Kevin McCarthy) returns to Santa Mira from a medical convention and confronts the disaster unfolding before him, the first apparent sign of the terrible change that awaits him is a deserted vegetable stand—the metaphor of trouble in the social realm that, paradoxically, suggests that the agency of cultivation in the imaginary society of Santa Mira has been wrenched from the hands of humans and taken over by plants, no longer objects to be bought and sold but subjects in their own right.

While the pod beings are recognizable initially for that which they do not have—emotion, a "look in the eye"—they become most threatening for that which they actively undertake: a transformation of the idyllic agricultural economy of Santa Mira into a terrifically effective (and pain-free) social production line, the triumph of an inhumanly efficient form of production amid the destruction of the emotionally connected local community. The plant people of Santa Mira may on the one hand function as figures of a Soviet-style collectivism, where individuals fall easily into line, but they are *at one and the same time* emblems of a U.S.-style postwar capitalism, where a rationalized production system and a "heartless" drive to (re)produce threaten the capacity of the medical and political authority figures to guarantee a happy life to the inhabitants of the California town, previously "living the dream." Indeed, the plants describe their vegetal existence as better—and easier—than that of humans; it is most certainly more successful, both reproductively and, we are led to believe, ideologically as well. In fact, in the new vegetal regime, modes of production blend seamlessly with processes of reproduction: the agricultural backdrop of Southern California becomes a space of breeding and harvesting alike.

The homogenization brought about by the pods has been read many times over as the criticism of various standardizing tendencies in 1950s American life. But even the imposition of uniformity is something that the pods do more successfully than humans. The vegetal pods prove themselves to be masters of crossing all sorts of

boundaries: they are morphologically unstable and thus take on the characteristics both of the townspeople themselves and of their *very opposite*—the "secret" agents of routinized production who invade the town from the inside. The pods also inspire within the few remaining humans "vegetal-like" needs and a fascination with a vegetal vitality that seems to feign being human better than humans themselves can. If humans have built themselves a social order that will eventually collapse around them, it will do so because, as it turns out, this order is a kind of expression of a vegetal drive that coexists alongside (and within) the human. The cinematic image becomes the emblem of both the strangeness of the vegetal and its fascinating-because-formless power over us.

The very "body" of the film—celluloid—suggests that vegetal life participates more intimately in our most "human" fascinations than we might otherwise expect and that the distinction between the human and the inhuman, or for that matter between original life and duplicate, is not just impossible to uphold but is also powerless in the face of more insistent forms of striving.[31] As a narrative of interpenetration of plant and human, the first *Invasion* film is most concerned with the fragility and, ultimately, insignificance of any human desire in the face of a vegetal agency that works better, longer, and harder and in its very success oozes a kind of unearthly erotic appeal, which in the final moments of the film is linked to the allure of cinema itself.[32] Unlike in Finney's novella, the first *Invasion* film does not work to preserve the hierarchical order separating human life-forms from their copies, as indicated by Miles's inability to resist his love interest Becky's gooey duplicate, discovered in the greenhouse during an otherwise convivial barbecue scene. When he comes across Becky's pod, instead of stabbing her vegetal copy to death, Miles turns and puts a pitchfork through the heart of his *own* replicant. The sweat on his brow as he commits this act of *Selbstmord* resonates visually with the foamy slime covering the emergent pod Becky; in destroying the copy of himself, Miles paradoxically reaffirms his connection to his nude and vegetal beloved. This scene shows erotic attachment as capable of moving across the human and inhuman bodies presented to us and circulating from character to spectator and back again.[33] Here Siegel's *Invasion* invites us to envision, in the demise of strictly human forms of desire, a vegetal striving that attaches us not just to other modes of being but also to the image itself as a product of the morphological energies that undergird plants' capacity for limitless growth.

At the same time, the film conveys its own historically specific anxieties about reproduction, as Cyndy Hendershot argues in

claiming that the first *Invasion* film exploits the fear of radiation contamination, believed to be especially detrimental to male sexual potency. Hendershot writes that in the film, "Human reproduction is replaced by an asexual plant reproduction."[34] Transforming into a pod (as a result of the sleep that the characters consistently struggle to resist) would mean that Miles would father no children with Becky; sexuality in this sense, as a propagation of a male line through the generation of individuated offspring, is indeed erased by the plants. However, while individualized reproduction linked to masculinity is clearly under threat, images of female reproduction proliferate and intensify. In this context, there is nothing "asexual" about the pods; instead, they help us imagine an erotic (and reproductive) life in which desire is as much a product of the images that surround us as it is a function of the bodies we embrace. Becky's attempt at quoting Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—"It's summer and the moon is full and I know a bank where the wild thyme blows"—hints at both the magic transformations that occur during sleep and the erotic power of plants to contaminate the human world of reason and normative marriage.[35] Production and reproduction are reunited in an economy of startling efficiency and heightened visual allure, as we learn with the final shot of Becky, lips and eyes glistening, when she invites Miles to join her in the plant-being to which she has ultimately succumbed.[36]

Siegel's *Invasion* initially seems oriented toward a conventional romance plot,[37] but the marriage that might be the expected outcome of Miles's renewed interest in Becky is deferred by the proliferation of the pod people (eventually including Becky herself). In their flight from the plants, Miles and Becky eventually lower themselves into a hole in an abandoned mine, hoping to escape detection there. But unlike the plants whom they resemble despite themselves, they fail to "implant" and are lured out of hiding by a siren song so haunting that it suggests to Becky that "we're not the only ones left to know what love is." When Miles returns to the cave in his continued search of love after discovering to his horror that plants can use technology to mimic the beauties of the local by broadcasting far and wide a seemingly human melody, he finds Becky half-asleep, sighing in response to his embrace. As he attempts to carry her out of the cave, he stumbles and falls upon her body, pressing his lips to hers as they lie together in the mud. In this, the most overtly erotic scene of the film, we soon discover that Becky has already become a plant; Miles's kiss transforms her—but not him—into the vegetal lover of his nightmares. Whereas he first destroys the plant copy of himself, here he seems somehow responsible for the production of Becky's replica through his own desire.

Figure 2: Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter) emerges from the mud as a pod person (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1956).

As she emerges from the mud, lips shining, eyes wide and wet and open, we might remember her earlier lovelorn whisper—"I want your children"—as a kind of threat.

Erotic interest, in this scenario, is linked to the vegetal copy rather than the human original—to cinema that provides and disseminates images rather than to flesh. In this scene the movie makes a reference to its own medium, the celluloid image. It is not so much Miles's desire that is unusual but the *object* of this desire, the plant. For an instant Miles is mesmerized before the simulacrum that he himself seems to have touched and kissed into an eerie vegetal life—a moment that recalls the Pygmalion myth—as the "pod" from which Becky's new body emerges is moving, pulsing, and oozing with life. In other words, Hollywood cinema has given agency to plants, not unlike that bestowed upon them by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* But instead of having recourse to a premodern notion of magic, the film shows us the celluloid image partaking in an erotic economy that effectively blurs the lines between producing and reproducing.

Flower Power: The *Invasion* of 1978

Inspired by a post-1968 disillusionment with U.S. political culture, the creators of the 1978 remake of *Invasion* aim to highlight the increasing pressure on Americans to participate in processes of globalization. In interviews, director Kaufman underscores an intent

to express disappointment with changes in American political life, including the fact that people were being forced to conform to a "standardized new mass culture, something that could work on a world scale."[38] In this context, plants become figures both for soulless managerial standardization and, simultaneously, for the diversity that this standardization fails to cultivate. Bringing vibrancy to an urban environment in which many "types" of beings may flourish, they provide an opening or an escape from the social and political malaise that pervades the city.

Set in San Francisco, the second *Invasion* film explores the tension within a city space characterized by hybridity, difference, and multiplicity on the one hand and intensive bureaucratic management and surveillance (paradoxically required to "cultivate" this multicultural space) on the other. The doctor Miles Bennell of the first *Invasion* film becomes Matthew Bennell (played by Donald Sutherland), public employee for the city's health department, in the second film. Whereas Miles embodies a certain scientific objectivity and authoritative diagnostic powers, Matthew is distinguished less for his rationality than for his ability to care not just for the heroine Elizabeth (played by Brooke Adams), another man's girlfriend, but also for the city itself. In one of the early scenes of the film, Matthew is shown inspecting a French restaurant where he identifies a piece of "rat turd" in the bouillon. The ensuing contentious face-off involving Matthew, the French chef, and the French restaurant owner highlights the point that Matthew's job is to protect humans from dangerous forms of intrusion, including food poisoning. The figures of the rat turd, the rats, and maybe also the French chef—all bent on introducing "foreign" elements into the bouillon—foreshadow the looming invasion by the pods, but Matthew's role is not without its own ambiguity. Is he an agent of homogenization, or is he instead protecting diversity? The film seems to decide in favor of the latter when we see Matthew cooking stir-fry in a wok and hanging a Chinese banner in his office (both acts evoking an ethnic and cultural multiplicity in theory particularly characteristic of San Francisco).

The colorful backdrop provided by the city initially represents urban space as nourishing positive and pleasure-giving modes of heterogeneity until the plants take over in a (successful) attempt to do the humans one better. Kaufman's film adaptation thus reveals a political and social idealism that is structured around hybridity and difference, not, as in Siegel's film, around ideological stability and sameness. But, as in the first *Invasion* film, we soon realize that plants are more successful than humans at precisely this new way of being. Not only does Kaufman's *Invasion* abandon the original

cinematic version's suburban setting by transferring the narrative to an ethnically and racially mixed urban space and from a sunny to a rainy landscape, but the film also makes the vegetal into the figure of the very hybridity that presumably characterizes urban communities.

The second *Invasion* film reintroduces the idea of difference into the narrative by reinventing Jack Finney's cosmic seeds. (The overt cosmic motif is missing in Siegel's *Invasion,* since the origins of the invasion are never shown.) In Kaufman's version, the invaders morph into identical replicas of the city's inhabitants in a process revealed to be analogous to that of a graft. The opening images of the film imply both the danger and the fascinating appeal of this kind of adaptation: alien seeds sprout with amazing speed into red and pink flowers that quickly implant themselves within the verdant, moist, and colorful urban landscape. The fertility of this space no longer stems from standardization and exclusion, as in the first *Invasion* film, but instead stems from the forms of diversity and hybridity that are intensified rather than invented by the plants. As a result, Finney's dream of a human community reconstituting itself in reaction to the homogeneity of the pods retreats even further in the second *Invasion,* even as the vulnerability of the human becomes all the more a source of horror. Finally, in keeping with its intensification of the vegetal motif, the second *Invasion* film reveals the (re)productivity of plants to be both more profoundly feminine (in a ripely physiological sense) and more disturbingly

Figure 3: Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland) discovers Elizabeth's body covered in weblike tendrils. Later more pods emerge to the accompaniment of a fetal heartbeat (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1978).

Figure 4: Elizabeth Driscoll (Brooke Adams) is fascinated by the "grex" (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1978).

effective than ever. With its vaginal images of the replicants emerging from their vegetal shrouds (backed by fetal whooshing noises), Kaufman's film stresses the similarity between biological femininity and modes of vegetal being. The pods, like women's bodies, evoke images of nurture as a form of passivity, an inferior mode of being that is plantlike in its seeming immobility but ultimately awesomely successful in its ability to captivate and transform an audience.

As the film's images embrace the ideal of a hybrid city, ethnically and culturally diverse, they simultaneously portray this hybridity as both replicated and surpassed by the colorfully beautiful flowers that invade it. The heroine Elizabeth is so taken by the reddish-pink buds of the alien species that she (unsuspectingly) takes one home at the outset of the movie. After perusing a botanical manual in a flurry of botanophilia, she manages to identify the blossom as a "grex" or "cultivar" (in a terminology that recalls orchids and other hybrid plant species). Is her interest in an unknown plant species, portrayed as a mysterious hybrid adapting to its new environment, another figure for the racial and ethnic diversity of the city whose heterogeneity the creators endorse even as the apocalyptic narrative unfolds?

This "indigenous" hybridity, emblematized and heightened by the alien presence of the plants, simultaneously engages us (and the heroine) visually and stirs up anxieties about the extinction and demise of the human species. Once again, the plants seem designed both to awaken the vegetal impulses latently present in

the human characters and to render the most intrinsically "human" qualities of these characters always already plantlike in nature. Early on in the film, we see Elizabeth coming home to her disaffected boyfriend Geoffrey (played by Art Hindle), who will shortly be transformed into a pod (but is for the moment still human). Rooted to the couch watching football and barely acknowledging her except when he later cajoles her into having sex, the portrayal of Geoffrey suggests that the mutuality and reciprocal affective bonds supposedly unique to humans (as in the first *Invasion* film) are already absent where this couple is concerned. We realize that some humans have already made themselves into plants and do not even really need the arrival of the pods, which (as the opening of the movie suggests) may or may not have taken place before the film begins. (The origin of the pods might be prehistoric or quite recent; the credits themselves do not clarify this point.)

In a similar vein, we find the character of the original *Invasion*'s psychiatrist, Dr. Danny Kaufman, transformed into a feel-good psychotherapist and author of popular self-help books, ironically played by actor Leonard Nimoy. Nimoy is of course best known for the role of the Vulcan, "Spock," the iconic figure of the original *Star Trek* television series and the representative of an imaginary alien species distinguished primarily by a lack of emotion. Nimoy's presence onscreen suggests, even before we learn that Dr. David Kibner (as he is known in the remake) is in fact a pod, that the therapist has never cared for his patients. Here, too, the invading plants seem to make visible a transformation that has already happened rather than providing the impetus for it. Finally, in yet another scene identifying humanity with plant life, we witness in the Bellicec mud baths row upon row of human beings comfortably reclining in tubs of slime; the baths' clients seem to resemble potted plants as they luxuriate in the therapeutic mud. In all of these instances, the nourishing me-generation attitude toward pleasure is shown to be already vegetal—in part responding to a human desire for emotional responsiveness and connection, in part exposed from within as susceptible to cold manipulation—and capable of making humans into plants, albeit with diminished vitality. Gradually the images of flaccid plantlike humans are reinjected with an excess of life, thanks to the invasion; the alien beings bring with them the promise of not only biological vitality but also a vigorous efflorescence that can be substituted for the failed utopia represented by multiethnic and multicultural San Francisco and Elizabeth's lifeless relationship. The film revels in simultaneously representing hybridity as a source of aesthetic pleasure and of fear—the motivating principle behind a grotesque, but not always

unpleasant, world whose avatars include the rat turd in the French bouillon, the invading seedpods drifting langorously toward Earth, flowering plants, a dog with a human head, and the naked body of Elizabeth, who becomes, posttransformation, a kind of alien Eve.

In a scene toward the middle of the film, Nancy Bellicec (played by Veronica Cartwright), wife of the poet-philosopher Jack Bellicec (played Jeff Goldblum), in a semihysterical attempt to make sense of the invasion, frames the mission of the aliens in the context of the extraterrestrial-origin theories propagated in the 1970s. "They could start getting into our systems and screwing up our genes like DNA, recombining us, changing us," she says. "Of course, this is just the same way spacemen came to mate with monkeys and create the human race." This statement, dominated by the image of a vegetal other that is both alien and already intrinsic to the human, not only expresses a fear of hybridization as bringing about the end of the human race but also (ambivalently) acknowledges the fundamental role played by hybridity in making all life, including human life. We are getting ever more plantlike, the film suggests, even as we cultivate our humanity.

The plants, in San Francisco, are a global force to be reckoned with, undeniably more successful than their human competitors. The greenhouses of Santa Mira have become, in the 1978 film, a giant shipping depot where the pods are grown in spaces that are at once flowerbeds, incubators, and industrial production lines. When Matthew runs to the city's harbor in the hopes of escaping on an enormous shipping tanker, he finds out that the ship, seemingly a beacon of optimism, is carrying a massive load of seedpods. It remains unclear whether the ship is coming in or going out, but we do know that the invasion has already taken place on a global level. The ship embodies the threat of globalization as a force that is antithetical to American life and limits the heroes' attempts to foster human freedoms and the economic structures that sustain them. In the film's images, judging from Matthew's frightened expression, the global stands for the closing of social and political horizons. It anticipates the waning of the "American century" which, in the film's dystopian view, is brought to a close by the pods, who set out to make the latter half of the twentieth century, on the screen at least, into the age of pods, not people.

Clearly, the second film dispenses with the optimism (however obligatory) of the first. However, Kaufman transforms the vegetal threat of standardization posed by the pods into images and sounds that conjure vitalism even as the city itself is shown to be in peril and losing its vital energy. While Siegel's *Invasion* embraces, at least initially, the prospect of heteronormative romance as the source

of a potential happy ending to the narrative (even if the imagined remarriage never occurs), Kaufman's *Invasion* follows a tragic plot, only to conclude with a bleak affirmation of the importance (and impossibility) of individual desire and nonconformism. Matthew is a "tragic hero" (in director Kaufman's terms) not only because he loves and loses Elizabeth but also because his focus on the care and cultivation of both public and private spaces come to an end with his abrupt transformation into a screaming pod. The famous final scene—featuring an open-mouthed Sutherland shrieking into a void—is one in which the viewer is once more disabused of his illusions: what seemed to be the warm and nurturing Matthew has in fact been exposed as an alien. In the previous scene, both less famous and more significant, we see Matthew in his office in the Health Department headquarters clipping newspaper articles—possible evidence of either a strikingly human inefficiency (and rebellion against the pressures of productivity) or a pod-like compulsiveness; when he gets up from his desk along with his coworkers (presumably all already pods) at noon to go to lunch, he follows Elizabeth with his eyes, watching her through a tiny window in the elevator door as it closes in front of him. For a moment, we believe that his care for her is intact. If in the film it is Matthew who promises Elizabeth a way out of a soulless, passionless relationship with Geoffrey—not through intense romance but by cooking Chinese food and manifesting his sublimated, asexual desire as loyalty—then this scene, paradoxically, provocatively shows that his libido now can continue to thrive.[39] His desire subverts rather than reinforces the standardization represented in Elizabeth's relationship and her stale domestic life with Geoffrey. The scene at the elevator, when we are made to recall Matthew's genuine affection for Elizabeth, even though neither of them is human any longer, thus functions as a commentary on the moment early in the movie when Elizabeth returns home with the hybrid pink flower that fascinates her much more than her first relationship does. Once more, the line between our most human impulses and our most vegetal obsessions is blurred. Plant pods bring with them not only a dystopian new social order but also the promise of social and affective vitality that humans themselves are in the process of losing.

Finney's novella contrasts vegetal growth with the human ability to reproduce and perpetuate (as well as to protect) the species, even as it contains an implicit commentary on the cost of that human authenticity. The films, on the other hand, reimagine his scenes of diminished pod materiality as evidence of the fascinating power of plant life; the two *Invasion* films reveal to us the vegetal striving that undergirds our fantasies of a more human future. Both

films investigate the possibility that there is a species that is more successful, indeed unique, in cultivating aims that might seem to be intrinsically human: a capacity for productive labor, an ability to transcend the material realm of needs, and an investment in the image as a source of erotic fulfillment. At the same time, humans come to seem more and more limited in their ability to manipulate the systems that they have put into place. What is more, the cinematic plants of the *Invasion* films expose the fact that the human environment, instead of being richer than that of plants, is itself experienced as empty: plants fill it. In the *Invasion* film of 1956, plants—in a lushly cinematic disguise as a beautiful woman—supply the sexual desire that first fuels then exceeds the marriage plot. Not only are *they* always awake, but humans are all on the verge of sleep. And plants, unlike humans, work all the time. In Kaufman's remake, plants excel at both the urban cultivation of multicultural diversity and the surveillance and policing of nonendorsed otherness. Matthew as tragic hero may remind us of the positive impact of human affect on communities, but he is doomed to fail (at least as a human) in his efforts to nurture, while plants proliferate and, in doing so, fill in this tragic space with economically successful hybridity and life—providing the most alluring images of the vitality toward which we all tend. They are thus capable of negotiating contradictions that undo us; they stand not only for soulless forms of standardization but also for the kind of vital energy (and openness) that the two *Invasion* films celebrate. In plant horror, vegetal beings generate this vitality aesthetically thanks to their forcefulness and shapeliness, just as they show the disappearance of vital force from human society. In the end, we witness with the *Invasion* films not so much desire's demise as its transferal onto the plants themselves. The vibrancy of the image complements and supplements the morphological potency of the plants.

The Twenty-first Century: The Return of the Plant?

In both the first and second *Invasion* films images of vegetal vitality abound. The cinematic pods thus provide solutions to the social and political ills—fears about creeping standardization, worries about the effects of global capitalism on diversity, and anxieties around the negotiation of difference (sexual as well as racial) in the public and private spaces of the modern United States—envisioned in both the novel and the films. The tensions that structure plant ontology allow the vegetal invaders to navigate the contradictions that structure human relations in modern U.S. society; more

troublingly, the pod people succeed where people-people appear to have failed (themselves). The *Invasion* films render plants as both formless and alluringly shapely, both uncannily passive in their reproductive energies and highly active in their ability to take over systems of production that appear to have exceeded human capacities to manage or even comprehend them (including the aesthetic production of cinema itself). In doing so, the vegetal beings of the two films make a positive use of the atomic materiality of the pods as the latter is described by Finney.[40] In the films, the pods acquire more and more life; their images transform the gray matter that oozes out of the pods in the novella like slow-moving lava into a dynamically cellular/celluloid materiality that takes us out of the realm of (nearly) inert minerals and into a vegetal vitality.

Anticipating an ecological discourse that postdates these films, we might say then that they gesture toward the possibility of a new mode of environmental thinking, one in which the separation between natural object and human subject no longer informs our relationships to the world around us. Moreover, insofar as it uncouples the figure of the other from the humanoid monster or automaton, the plant horror genre provides us with a kind of preview of what Timothy Morton has recently described as "the ecological thought"—a way of acting and thinking that refuses the long-standing distinctions between outside and inside, between "us" and "another," that have so often informed the human approach to nature.[41] The *Invasion* films show us that our environment not only resists our attempts to manage and control it but is always already present within us—as a challenge to forms of human exceptionalism that present the capacity to engage with (or care about) the natural world as yet another in an array of heroically human traits. In this context, the *Invasion* films point the way to a new form of realism, one in which the imagined separation between human and vegetal being is consistently shown up to be both a figment of our imagination and a symptom of our own failure to acknowledge the ways in which the systems we have created to order our worlds in fact threaten us with the fact of our own vulnerability.

The *Invasion* films force us to confront the knowledge that there is no dissociating the human from the vegetal and that modern life (with its cinematic investments and its global economic ambitions) is itself plantlike to the core. This modern reformulation of an ancient interest in the plant-as-being, both powerful and formless, becomes a way of imagining and rendering visual not the superiority of the human but rather our own extinction—our collapse into a mode of vegetal being that outperforms men and women on the production line as well as on the screen. In

other words, the pod people of plant horror reveal themselves to be uniquely suited to the twin milieux of global capitalism on the one hand and cinema on the other. In both films the pods/plants represent escape from the homogenizing forces of society, without, for all that, standing in for an alternative form of political subjectivity. Their concerns are not the environmentalist ones of the twenty-first century in which the plant, in art and philosophy, emerges as a politically active force. In other words, we are not close to a "vegetal politics," as Michael Marder has recently envisioned it.[42] Instead, the *Invasion* films help warn us of the dangers of a political position that slides too easily into narratives of self and other—that attempts to manage an environment that already lies within. Might they also make way for a new form of vegetal cinema for the twenty-first century, one in which the ontological possibilities inherent in vegetal being become a source of pleasure rather than of fear?

Notes

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[1.] Slavoj Žižek, "Part One," *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema,* directed by Sophie Fiennes (P. Guide Ltd., 2006), DVD.

[2.] In this article, we will concentrate on the earlier versions of *Invasion,* in part because they follow Finney's narrative quite closely and in part because later iterations tend to move away from the vegetal theme. For a helpful discussion of the adaptation of Finney's work into the first *Invasion* film, see Barry Keith Grant, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (London: Palgrave-BFI Film Classics, 2010). According to Grant, Finney wrote the story with filmic adaptation in mind.

[3.] On paranoia and 1950s science fiction, see Vivan Sobchack's by-now classic study *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Ungar Publishing, 1993); Cyndy Hendershot's *Paranoia, the Bomb, and 1950s Science Fiction Films* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); Ray Pratt's *Projecting Paranoia: Conspiratorial Visions in American Film* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); and Barry Keith Grant's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (London: Palgrave-BFI Film Classics, 2011).

[4.] *The Thing, Day of the Triffids, Swamp Thing,* and *The Ruins* are all drawn from print sources and have been remade in various media.

[5.] Plant horror is in fact a global phenomenon, as works such as *Les Raisins de la mort* (made in France in 1978 by cult director Jean Rollin) and *Matango: Attack of the Mushroom People* (filmed in Japan in 1963 with director Ishiro Honda) suggest.

[6.] Michael Marder, "Plant-Soul: The Elusive Meanings of Vegetative Life," *Environmental Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 83–99.

[7.] The metaphysical tradition is also, Marder argues, a battlefield where the plant brings about the very undoing of the hierarchical notion of life that relegates it to an inferior position, thereby effecting an "anti-metaphysical" reversal of the values propagated by metaphysics. See "Vegetal Anti-Metaphysics: Learning from Plants," *Continental Philosophy Review* 44 (2011): 469–89.

[8.] Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants*, vol. 1, bk. 1, Leob Classical Library no. 70, trans. Arthur F. Hort (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 3–4.

[9.] Theophrastus explains:

> In fact your plant is a thing various and manifold, and so it is difficult to describe in general terms: in proof whereof we have the fact that we cannot here seize on any universal character which is common to all, as a mouth and a stomach are common to all animals; where in plants some characters are the same in all, merely in the sense that all have analogous characters, while others correspond otherwise. For not all plants have root, stem, branch, twig, leaf, flower or fruit, or again bark, core, fibres or veins; for instance, fungi and truffles; and yet these and such like characters belong to a plant's essential nature (*Enquiry into Plants,* 11).

[10.] Theophrastus calls this way of being plant "striving."

[11.] Aristotle, "On the Soul," in *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath* , bk. 2, Leob Classical Library no. 288, trans. W. S. Hett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 1957), 165.

[12.] This term suggests that plants, while bound up in materiality and characterized as simple, nevertheless have some relationship to the forms of rationality that rank the highest in Aristotle's metaphysical hierarchy.

[13.] As Aristotle explains, "And in animals the soul is naturally such, all natural bodies being the soul's instruments, those of plants in just the same way as those of animals, and existing, then, for the sake of the soul" ("On the Soul," 166).

[14.] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, Leob Classical Library no. 366, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 497.

[15.] See in particular Cyrano de Bergerac's proto–science fictional *Les États et Empires de la Lune* and *Les États et Empires du Soleil,* written toward the middle of the seventeenth century. Later examples of plant fiction include Tiphaigne de la Roche's *Amilec, ou la graine d'hommes* (1753) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappaccini's Daughter* (1844). *L'Homme-plante* (1748)—often attributed to Julien Offray de la Mettrie, author of *L'Homme-machine*—uses the figure of the animated plant to highlight the vitality of human sexuality. Erasmus Darwin's popular poem *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) expands greatly on this analogy.

[16.] Marder moreover claims that the notion of the "soul"—the Aristotelian *psuchē*—is likewise liberated by this move. In its subsequent interpretations, the *psuchē* became identified with the Latin *anima* even though its original meaning evokes a "life principle," inherent in matter, rather than some immaterial origin of life. In

their modern capacity as disenchanted objects, plants come to provide especially fertile ground for new forms of speculative ontology.

[17.] Both writer Jack Finney and director Philip Kaufman admit to having been inspired by stories circulating in the press in the 1950s and the 1970s, respectively, about alien sources of life on Earth. They also both turn to the plant (primarily in the form of spores, seeds, and seedpods) to provide the figure of a vegetal being that reveals to us something fundamental about who we are rather than focusing on humanoid aliens arriving in spaceships. ("Why do we expect them to arrive in metal ships?" asks one of the protagonists of Kaufman's *Invasion*.) The vegetal dimension of these creatures forces audiences to formulate an image of a being that is both inhuman and vital. Finney mentions an unspecified newspaper article as a source, while producer Robert Solo of the 1978 version refers to an article from *New Scientist* (November 1977). See Charles Freund, "Pods over San Francisco," *Film Comment* 15, no. 1 (January–February 1979): 22–25.

[18.] Jack Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 1st Scribner Paperback Fiction edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 184–185.

[19.] "There is no real joy, fear, hope, or excitement in you, not any more. You live in the same kind of grayness as the filthy stuff that formed you," Miles exclaims to the pod replica of Budlong (Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 182).

[20.] Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 183.

[21.] Finney's seedpods, described in great detail, emit a "grey substance" that exudes from the pods "slowly as lava" (Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 98). Their opening resembles a "brittle leaf snapping in two"; they are composed of dry, lifeless, or no longer living matter, bearing the stamp of inauthenticity.

[22.] Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 214.

[23.] Ibid., 214.

[24.] Ibid., 134–35.

[25.] Ibid., 136.

[26.] See Neil Badmington's *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) for a reading of this "defining lack" as the marker of the boundary between human and inhuman.

[27.] The new vitality of the pods recalls the notion of entelechy as it was revived by early twentieth-century vitalist thinkers such as the French philosopher Henri Bergson and the embryologist Hans Driesch. In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), political theorist Jane Bennett explains that while entelechy in Aristotle is almost synonymous with the idea of actualization or completion—as in the actualization of a piece of marble as a statue or of the human being in the act of thinking—later vitalist notions of entelechy (élan vital, in Bergson's case) carried with them connotations of freedom and political possibility. "Perhaps one of the reasons they enjoyed great popularity in America . . . was because they were received as defenders of freedom, of a certain open-endedness to life, in the face of modern science whose pragmatic successes were threatening to conform the picture of the universe as a godless machine" (64). In the early decades of twentiety-century American culture, vitalism thus could resonate with Progressivism, the multifaceted ideology that promoted individual engagement in politics—including workers' and women's rights—as part of a critique of corrupt

and monopolistic capitalism and left a deep imprint on the political, social, and economic institutions of the twentieth-century United States.

[28.] As we shall explain later, the films focus in on images of vegetal matter as uncannily alive—from the rendering of moving lava to the uterine depiction of the pods.

[29.] Sobchack, *Screening Space,* 125.

[30.] Kaufman's version also makes ample use of sound effects that, as the makers of the film explain in their commentary, were in part created by squishing vegetables, in part by slowing down the recording of a fetal heartbeat obtained from the director's pregnant wife.

[31.] In a banal sense, plants are everywhere; they function as the material support for a whole variety of media, including the printed word. In plant horror, the ubiquity of plants themselves becomes an object of fascination, forcing us to reflect on the monstrous urgency of our need of them by focusing in on their monstrous need of us. Film gives them substance, even as they provide the very substance of the film itself.

[32.] In *Alien Chic,* Badmington gives a reading of the 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* that suggests that the film is centrally concerned with the moment when "humanism begins to falter" (137) and "things are most certainly not what they seem" (139). Badmington carefully unpacks the scene in the film where the doctor hero, Miles, hesitates when given the opportunity to destroy the vegetal replica of his lover, Becky. For Badmington, Miles's hesitation is borne of his (human) desire: "Because the alien reminds him of Becky, Miles cannot avoid acting as if it/she were the true object of his desire." His amorous interest in the plant thus threatens the human Becky, who will be consumed by her replica if Miles does not act. For Badmington, "To be human is to desire, to possess emotions, but to desire is to trouble the sacred distinction between the human and the inhuman" (139). We are arguing here that in crossing this boundary, the film envisions a plant-being that succeeds not just in standing alone but also in fulfilling human promise better than humans ever could.

[33.] Thus, we disagree with Jennifer Jenkins's claim that "Unlike the automata of E. T. A. Hoffman's stories—and films from *Metropolis* onward—Becky's double is neither seductive nor appealing" (488). The pods are attractive not as humanoid automata but as vegetal others. Jenkins's contention that "pods ooze goo and a foamy web-like substance reminiscent of the moss that covers the House of Usher" comes closer to describing the source of this fascination (490). Although Jenkins argues that the *Invasion* film of 1956 engages in a critique of marriage as a powerful tool of social normativization, she only identifies this subversive potential in the early scenes where Miles and Becky both act as transgressors (in that they are flirtatious and sexual as opposed to asexual and married); however, she does not see the pods as subversive but instead sees them only as agents of homogeneity. See Jennifer L. Jenkins, "Lovelier the Second Time Around: Divorce, Desire, and Gothic Domesticity in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,*" *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 3 (2012): 478–96.

[34.] See Cindy Hendershot, "The Invaded Body: Paranoia and Radiation Anxiety in *The Invaders from Mars, It Came from Outer Space,* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,*" *Extrapolation* 39, no. 1 (1991): 26–39.

[35.] In *Midsummer Night's Dream,* the transformation that Titania (and others) are subjected to by the potion (drawn from a "little flower") is revealed to be love itself, while in the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* it is sleep that threatens to make the characters all over as pods.

[36.] U.S. plant horror is not alone (or even pioneering) in its fascination with the visual possibilities inherent in plant-as-being. The interwar generation of French film theorists (including Blaise Cendrars, Colette, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, and Emile Vuillermoz) often relied on time-lapse footage of plant growth in an attempt to articulate theories of cinema. Likewise, plant films were popular in the cinemas of the day. We thank James Leo Cahill for drawing this important moment in vegetal cinema to our attention.

[37.] Both Miles and Becky are divorced and are on their way to a romance that could potentially end in a second marriage.

[38.] See Philip Kaufman's statement, "Commentaries," Disc 2, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* DVD.

[39.] In an interview that appeared in French two decades after the making of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* Philip Kaufman describes himself as a director of films about rebellion and sexuality. Kaufman's conversation with Michel Henry focuses on his film *Quills* (2000), loosely based on the life of Marquis de Sade, in which the French libertine writer is devoured by a chocolate crucifix—a commentary on the artist's role as rebel. See "La joie du cinéaste, c'est d'entrer dans le rêve" [Being Part of the Dream Is the Director's Delight], *Positif: Revue mensuelle de cinéma* 482 (April 2001): 25–29.

[40.] Even professor-turned-pod Budlong acknowledges in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* that the reproduction of matter atom by atom, mere materiality, has an element of unpredictability and openness: "Life takes whatever form it must: a monster forty feet high, with an immense neck, and weighing tons—call it a dinosaur. When conditions change, and the dinosaur is no longer possible, it is gone. But life isn't; it's still there, in a new form. Any form necessary" (Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* 174).

[41.] See Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[42.] Marder ultimately seeks to develop a "vegetal politics" out of the movement of the plant to the forefront of our concerns. See "Resist Like a Plant! On the Vegetal Life of Political Movements," *Peace Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 2012): 24–32, and "Vegetal Anti-Metaphysics: Learning from Plants," *Continental Philosophy Review* 44 (2011): 469–89.