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The Horrific “Mother/ Monster” and the Spaces Between in Ridley Scott's Alien and James Cameron's Aliens

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THE HORRIFIC “MOTHER/ MONSTER” AND THE SPACES BETWEEN IN RIDLEY
SCOTT'S *ALIEN* AND JAMES CAMERON'S *ALIENS*

by

TERRI NICHOLSON

Under the Direction of Calvin Thomas

ABSTRACT

Despite the wealth of scholarship on the films in the *Alien* series, the first two films connect the most to the universe created in the original film and effectively complete the primary narrative arc for the series hero, Ellen Ripley. A preponderance of the research offered on the *Alien* film series focuses on Ripley, the iconic xenomorphs, and their Alien Queen. However, I also explore the roles of other liminal characters in the films, such as synthetic humans Ash and Bishop. Addressing the recurring motifs in the films, I discuss the sliding signifier of "mother" and track how the signifier "child" undergoes many other interesting distinctions. The outcomes of the liminal beings and the mother/ child relationships provide another range of perspectives for analyzing these films. Furthermore, the Weyland-Yutani company exemplifies one of the more powerful motifs of the film: the power of corporations and governments to define our bodies.

INDEX WORDS: Horror, Science Fiction, Criticism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism

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TERRI NICHOLSON

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Georgia State University
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my work, as always, to my mother, Maggie Nicholson. Her unwavering support and love is with me still and has been my greatest motivator. I hope I have made her proud, and I wish she were here today to share this journey with me. Mom, you will always be my "lucky star."

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1 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE *ALIEN* UNIVERSE

When the film *Alien* was released in 1979, it was marketed as a haunted house story set in space. The trailer's first image is of a barren planet; the first sound is of strong wind and a low hum. The sound then incorporates a mechanical whir and a heartbeat, connecting the organic with the technological. Suddenly, the camera zooms over a moon-like landscape, and then, looming in the foreground, an egg-like form appears. The egg bobs and dips out of the frame while the camera continues to move across the landscape. Underneath this series of lap dissolves, transitions in which one image appears gradually over a preceding image, one can hear whispers or growls. As the title appears over the egg, the sound grows more intense. When the egg finally opens, the interior emits an unnatural bright green light and a chilling non-human scream. Immediately after, the screen fills with images from the movie: shots of the crew in panic, images of a wrecked spacecraft, a cat hiding in the walls, and brief glimpses of an amorphous, alien form. The sound of the heartbeat grows louder, more intense. The final close up of Ellen Ripley, security officer of the *Nostramo*, is cut, as is the sound, by the image of a planet and a ship in the depths of space. The ominous tagline is then revealed: "In space, no one can hear you scream." The audience ascertains from this trailer that this is a horror film set in space, as it is difficult to determine what the film is about at all from its theatrical trailer alone. The film, however, demonstrates a deeper complexity than what is offered by its promotional reels.

Through its pursuit of the Other, or 'thing' that lacks signification and thus dwells in the symbolic realm, *Alien* explores the symbolization of the pre-Oedipal phallic mother, the connection with birth and death to the experience with the Real, and the

annihilation of abject objects. Jacques Lacan defines myth as “as a way of approaching the real, which resists symbolization” (Leader 36). Additionally, it explores the positioning of the crewmembers of the fated ship *Nostramo* in the Oedipal scene, and the emergence of meaning defined by the signifying phallus, as well as the annihilation of the self that is required once one attempts to re-enter the Real. When read as a text that explores how one’s symbolization can become altered by many forces and as a representation of the experience of approaching the Lacanian Real, Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979) and James Cameron’s *Aliens* (1986) become stories of how subjects become haunted by the abject Other left behind at the entrance into the Imaginary and Symbolic realms.

In a recent article that examines academics’ fascination with the film, Tom Shone muses, “*Alien* has issues. It has mommy issues. And sex issues. It has a thing for strong women...It’s a hot mess-- a Freudian fever dream, with its crabby and post-coital atmosphere, its rebirthing imagery, its queasy gynecological production design, its night-sweat of male anxiety” (3). A preponderance of the research offered on the *Alien* films, including Barbara Creed’s “Horror and the Archaic Mother: *Alien*,” focuses on its hero Ellen Ripley, as well as the iconic xenomorphs and their Alien Queen. However, I explore other characters in the film, in particular Gilbert Kane from *Alien*, crewmember of the *Nostramo*, and Jenette Vasquez from *Aliens*, a private with the United States Colonial Marine Corps. I explore the role of these and examine the liminal characters in the narrative, synthetic humans Ash and Bishop. Furthermore, in order to discuss the difficulty of nailing down the term ‘mother’ in the narrative, I relate this with the signifier ‘child,’ which also undergoes many interesting distinctions. The outcomes of the liminal beings and the troubling of the mother/child relationships provide range of

perspectives for analyzing these films. The company that commands the *Nostramo* and the Hadley's Hope colony, Weyland-Yutani, creates a new situation of signification for the subjects of the films. Weyland-Yutani's directive to preserve and transport the xenomorphs despite the destruction of the crew provides another perspective: the power of corporations and governments to define our bodies. The term 'xenomorph' "suggests both species difference (from *xenos* meaning stranger) and difference in behaviour from the norm (*morph* can classify genetic mutation)—that is inhuman and therefore abnormal" (Edwards 105). With its signification as the 'Other,' it justifies the exploitation of these creatures. This idea follows in *Aliens* when company man Carter Burke releases a captured 'facehugger¹,' a xenomorph life form that plants an embryonic xenomorph into a host, to impregnate Ripley, Rebecca "Newt" Jorden, a young survivor from the Hadley's Hope colony, and the soldiers in the USCMC. He intends to use the bodies of the team to pass the xenomorphs through quarantine and sell them as biological weaponry.

My method is to examine various critical approaches to *Alien* and *Aliens* and view them through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in order to create a mechanism for exploring these analyses of the films. My research adds to the growing scholarship of the films from a literary studies perspective and explores the popular and compelling genres of horror and science fiction. In this, I examine the various approaches to the most important analyses offered for the films, Barbara Creed's *Monstrous Feminine*, as well as Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. Both works connect the studies of horror and the monstrous with the psychoanalytic perspectives provided by Jacques Lacan,

¹ The xenomorph life cycle begins as an egg, then the 'facehugger' that implants an embryo into its host, then the 'chestburster,' which is an infantile xenomorph that emerges from its host, then the adult xenomorph. Throughout this paper, I will refer to the xenomorphs by the names given in the script in relation to its development in its life cycle.

amongst others. These models connect the Lacanian Mirror Stage to Julia Kristeva's studies on abjection, as well as Judith Butler's explorations of gender binaries examined in *Gender Trouble*, and Barbara Creed's discussion of the archaic mother in *Alien*, and synthesize the aesthetics of the films and the signified meanings within the text.

It is important to note that monsters, including aliens, represent the return and revenge of the repressed psyche. Indeed, the film's iconic xenomorph facehugger, as argued by Slavoj Žižek, clearly represents the Lacanian "lamella," the residue left behind once one emerges from the Real into the realm of the Imaginary. Žižek's discussion of the lamella in his essay "Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears" provides a framework for the exploration of the alien xenomorphs as representations of the horrific Other. In *Alien* with Kane's exploration of LV-426 and in *Aliens* with the USCMC's rescue mission of the Hadley's Hope colony, the viewer experiences the mythological archetype of the 'Underworld Journey,' the traveler's descent into a 'hellish' realm of the dead and emergence back into the world of the living 'reborn' as a newly-signified being. Both situations clearly illustrate one's obliteration when reconnected with the Real. The descent onto LV-426 and towards the Hadley's Hope colony draws the ill-fated characters to a place of the abject, or the repulsive object placed outside of the symbolic order. At this descent, the subjects encounter the xenomorphs and come face-to-face with these 'monsters.' Kane, in particular, emerges from this descent with the 'lamella-like' xenomorph facehugger. As the crewmembers of the *Nostramo* and the USCMC move outside the boundaries of the paternal company, the realm of the Symbolic and Imaginary, the audience experiences the breakdown of the characters' symbolic significations and seeks to place the characters into a new, relatable defining order.

Several situations within the films exemplify this breakdown of Symbolic order,

in particular within the realm of gender coding and binaries. At its core, *Alien* and *Aliens* illustrate the male fear of female power, in particular the fear of childbirth, and perverts this image into one of a fearful devouring womb that not only consumes, but also expels as garbage what it creates. The Alien Queen, revealed in *Aliens*, exemplifies the monstrous archaic mother-- “the mother who conceives all by herself, the original parent, the godhead of fertility and the origin of procreation. She is outside the morality and the law” (Creed 27). The *Nostramo*’s synthetic human science officer Ash, while admiring the Alien Queen’s offspring, gushes “I admire its purity; a survivor unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of reality” (Hill and Giler). Indeed, this being is “the phallic woman, the castrated and castrating woman” (Creed 27). The alien intrigues Ash due to its 'completeness'—obviously the creature emerged from something indefinable and developed without the castrating signification of the phallus. The phallic signifier, otherwise defined as the Law of the Father, provides the framework for a "conscience conscious"-- the defining walls that create a reality. This completeness, the archaic, life-giving feminine creator, fascinates and terrifies those who experience it. Becoming life-giving and life-taking, both creator and consumer, and liminally both alive and dead, the *Alien* and *Aliens* films signify our fears of coming face-to-face with the rejected objects our unconscious leaves behind.

The opening sequences of both films demonstrate Kristeva’s opening vision of the horrific narrative. In *Power of Horror*, Kristeva explains

The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject, a boundary and a limit. A fantasy, if you wish, but one that brings to the well-known Freudian primal fantasies, his *Urfantasien*, a drive overload of hatred or death, which prevents images from crystallizing as images of

desire and or night, are and causes them to break out into sensation (suffering) and denial (horror), into a blasting of sight and sound (fire, uproar). Apocalyptic vision could thus be the shattering or the impossibility not only of narrative but also of *Urfantasi*en under the pressure of a drive unleashed by a doubtless very “primal” narcissistic wound. (155)

In the opening sequence of *Alien*, the screen is black apart from an ominous yellow cloud. It appears this fog surrounds a planet; the shadow of this planet becomes clear as the camera pans right to reveal its rim. An unknown source emits strange noises. It is difficult to determine which of the sounds in this opening sequence are diegetic or non-diegetic as we have yet to see a source for this sound. This opening sequence, which ends as the camera 'penetrates' the hull of the *Nostramo*, speaks to the primal fantasy of witnessing the parental coital act and the moment of one's conception. In this scenario, the audience questions whose conception they are witnessing in this primal scene. As if presenting the phallic defining bar between signifier and signified, the title of the film gradually appears as lines and angles, but not clearly defined letters, as the indefinable sound grows louder and more intense. Finally, the title is revealed and the fated ship *Nostramo* emerges from the yellow fog of space. This image of the title *Alien* paired with the *Nostramo* signifies the ship as the alien being, or the thing that contains this alien being. Certainly, this juxtaposition of the movie's signifying title and the image of the ship forces the viewer to begin the construction of binaries that govern the *Alien* series. It is at this point that the viewer questions who represents the 'alien.' Kim Edwards explains:

the conception of binary means a thing that is and a thing that is *not*, first a substance and then a lack...when we examine what is made Other in this text, and how constructed this act of labeling and exclusion can be, we are forced to recognize what we are afraid of and why, to question the notion of what is "alien." (104)

We know that what is "alien" is defined as what is outside of ourselves and our realm of understanding, the "thing that is *not*." When the *Nostromo* emerges, the audience does not know what is in the ship, what guides the ship, or who has constructed the ship until the crew, obviously human, is revealed inside. The crewmembers become the alien beings when aligned with the title and the setting of outer space, yet recognizable enough for the audience to empathize with their plight. Indeed, the name of the ship *Nostromo* hints towards a thing that has been transformed—the word itself is an amalgam of *nostro uomo*, meaning "shipmate" or "our man," connecting us to the action that is about to occur.

The birth of *Aliens'* narrative begins in a much similar way. Rather than appearing from the dark of space, the title slowly emerges from a completely black screen. The 'i' in the word *Aliens* glows and throbs, resembling a vaginal opening. Soon, the viewer is thrust into the film's narrative, quite literally by the explosion of the 'i' that takes over the screen in a blinding white light. The scene darkens and transforms into "Silent and endless" space. As Cameron notes in the *Aliens* script, "The stars shine like the love of God...cold and remote. Against them drifts a tiny chip of technology." Thus, Ripley's escape pod, the *Narcissus* from the *Nostromo*, emerges from the background, barely perceptible. Like the first film, the camera penetrates the hull of the ship to expose the characters inside. In *Alien*, the crewmembers of the *Nostromo* rest in

hypersleep chambers monitored by the ship's computer mainframe, MU-TH-UR². In *Aliens*, the interior of the *Narcissus* appears barren, frozen, and lifeless. When the camera finally reveals Ripley, asleep in her own hypersleep chamber and seemingly alone, her breathing is faintly detectable. Ripley, in her corpse-like state, contrasts with the vision of the clumsy, infantile crewmembers of the *Nostramo* in the first scene of *Alien*. While under hypersleep in the *Narcissus*, she has been ejected from the *Nostramo* after its destruction and becomes, in essence, "Space Junk." The *Narcissus* docks onto the Weyland-Yutani *Gateway* Station and recovered for parts or other items of use; however, the initial intent of the Weyland-Yutani crew was a recovery and not a rescue mission. The medical crew on the Gateway only revives Ripley and Jonesy the cat, her companion, after they determined that the passengers have not perished while in the pod. According to Kristeva,

Defilement is what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*.' It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*. (65)

As such, the Weyland-Yutani crew determine Ripley and Jonesy, jettisoned from the *Nostramo* and saved by the Gateway, are not vile 'corpses' discarded from their ship, take them in, and explain how they have emerged into a new order, a time fifty-seven years since the *Nostramo* was destroyed. As a reversal of the primal scene of the first film, the paternal company revives the sleeping Ripley rather than the 'motherly'

² For the purpose of my paper, I refer to the *Nostramo*'s computer mainframe as MU-TH-UR unless used in passages taken directly from the scripts or from secondary source material.

computer mainframe. When expelled from the *Nostramo*, Ripley and the *Narcissus* become the abject. Indeed, her corpse-like state at her discovery makes her even more repulsive. She appears 'dead'-- a symbolic "Snow White," as marine Jenette Vasquez later calls her, that awaits her reawakening. In this case, the awakening occurs through the aid of the paternal company. Just as the 'i' in the title sequence self-destructs and refigures into the Imaginary symbol of the ship and is later taken in by the paternal company and re-signified into the Symbolic realm, Ripley enters into a new world of signification outside of her role as a miner on the *Nostramo*. She gains, as we later discover, a position of phallic privilege by the obliteration of her former self, which the Company grants her.

The most horrific and iconic image in the film series begins in *Alien* with *Nostramo* crewmember Kane's encounter with the xenomorph facehugger. The film opens with the crew's emergence from hypersleep. After the crew emerges from their hypersleep chambers, there is no dialogue for the first six minutes of the film. Gilbert Kane utters the first words of the film as the crew settle at the galley table for their first meal since their hibernation. The camera frames Gilbert Kane at the center of the table, where he is seen smoking a cigarette. This cigarette becomes the phallic bar between signifier and signified; it indicates Kane's separation from the Real in his hypersleep chamber, symbolically the 'womb' of MU-TH-UR, and his entry into the imaginary and the symbolic realm of language. The first words Kane speaks are "I feel dead" (Hill and Giler). At his utterance, Kane becomes the focus of this conflict with the phallic Mother. Kane's 'birth' from hypersleep at the beginning of the film and his 'birthing' of the xenomorph represent what has "long been appreciated in the study of horror and dances close to Lacan's bifurcation of human development as one from the mute, mysterious

feminine to the enlightened order of masculine reason" (Burfoot 67). These images, of Kane's emergence from hypersleep and of the alien xenomorph attached to his face, "present the possibility of a changed corporeality in terms of the body invaded and colonized by a life-taking force" (67). Kane is the first to awaken, the first to explore, and ultimately the first obliterated by the alien species the crew of the *Nostramo* encounter on the planet LV-426. The cycle of Kane's separation from the union with the mother, his journey back to the womb-like planet of LV-426, and his confrontation with the alien-lamella represent the impossibility of one to experience the oceanic feeling of the Real without total self-obliteration, which defines Thanatos, or the death drive: one's unconscious desire to return to an inorganic state. His first lines culminate in the termination of the narrative, his death, and the destruction of the *Nostramo*. It also begins Ripley's new signification from part of the *Nostramo* team to the lone hero who carries on the story of the fated ship.

By command of the Weyland-Yutani company, the *Nostramo* prepares to land on Acheron LV-426, an obvious allusion to the mythic river of pain surrounding the Underworld. The vessel separates from its cargo hold and leaves the ship in orbit. At this point, the *Nostramo* enters a new defining realm. Originally a cargo ship for ore, it now becomes a mechanism for transporting and retrieving the alien xenomorphs, essentially 'mining' these beings. Three crewmembers, Gilbert Kane, Dallas Arthur, and Joan Lambert, agree to explore this planet and determine the source of the distress signal. The landing is treacherous and the planet itself, "a barren, frozen landscape whipped by ferocious winds," resembles the re-entry into the Real and the descent into the unconscious (Torry 345). As they continue to explore the terrain, they discover the shipwreck, later known as The Derelict, and the wreck's victim, a fifteen-foot skeleton

referred to as the Space Jockey who appears to have been ripped apart from the inside. The scene continues *Alien's* "images of impregnation and birth" with The Derelict resembling "a gigantic pair of spread legs" with the crewmembers of the *Nostramo* penetrating the form (Scobie 84). James Kavanaugh describes the explorers as "three clumsy spermlike figures entering the vaginal opening" (qtd. in Scobie 84). Executive Officer Kane "insists that the exploration team continue its difficult trek toward the alien shipwreck, and it is he who volunteers to explore the cavernous air shaft in which the deadly eggs lie" (Torry 357). He descends farther into the space in order to find the source of the signal. Davis notes that Kane's journey is one of the abject. He argues "at stake is not just identity but meaning itself because the abject draws the subject 'toward the place where meaning collapses'" (Kristeva qtd. in Davis 248). Elizabeth Grosz continues this idea in terms not unlike Kane's own experience:

...even at times of its greatest cohesion, the subject teeters on the brink of the yawning hole which threatens to draw it in. This abyss marks the place of the genesis and the obliteration of the subject, for it is a space inhabited by the death drive. (qtd. in Davis 248)

As if alluding to their descent into Hades after crossing Acheron, Kane describes the interior of this space within The Derelict as "Hotter in here" than above with "Warm air rising from below" (Hill and Giler). Michael Davis describes this cavernous nest of eggs as "the imago of the pre-oedipal, phallic (m)other," despite the role of the imago as being one that demonstrates the unconscious ideal that a parent imprints on a child during early stages of development (246). Davis states the scene

...confronts us with this protean figure and brings both its characters face to face with the various symbolic derivatives of this terrifying maternal

imago. Not only this but, as we witness when three of the characters enter the derelict spaceship, and to cite [Julia] Kristeva, the film's phantasmatic scenarios take us deep inside "the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject...maternal body." (246)

The representation of space as a grotesque image of the feminine dominates science fiction. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. notes, the grotesque, in particular in science fiction, "is essentially a response by exaggerated male rationality to exaggerated female physiology" ("Grotesque" 86). The set design of the late H.R. Giger suggest warm, damp, organic, technological, phallic, and yonic landscapes. Csicsery-Ronay explains images of the Derelict and the interior of LV-426 refer

back to dark and moist interior spaces, and the metaphoric energy is easily associated with the momentous, uncontrollable, and juicy changes that occur in the female body (at least compared with the conventional norm of the male body) in menstruation, pregnancy childbirth, lactation, menopause. (86)

The Derelict and LV-426, by representing the monstrous feminine of space, become a place of destruction for the crewmembers of the *Nostramo*. Indeed, "a great deal of visual and spoken detail enforces a crucial distinction between the crew's apparent safety within the technological enclosure of the *Nostramo* and a threatening deadly exterior" (Torry 345). Space, according to Csicsery-Ronay, becomes coded as feminine from the "phallogentric male perspective" and physiologically represents "women's grotesque mental processes" ("Grotesque" 86). The unknown depths of space signify female bodies as "prone to disease because they are too open to the world; they are liable to infect, because their interiors can flow out onto others" (86-7). This construct

reversal of the safe interior of the ship and the danger lurking outside develops as Kane continues his exploration. When the alien facehugger, hatched from its egg, attacks Kane, he encounters the grotesque feminized evil other of space. This plays out in *Alien* in the form of “monstrous mothers, and in the disorienting feminization of male sf bodies made vulnerable to penetration and contamination” (87). This violation of the male body occurs once Kane leaves the safety of the “paternal/ male” company to the changeable, unpredictable “feminine” wilds of space, thus embodying the ultimate phallogocentric horror of rape and male birth.

Kane, through this contact with the phallic (m)other on LV-426, becomes the carrier of the thing that was sloughed off from his emergence from the Real, the alien lamella. This alien lamella, the xenomorph facehugger, will ultimately obliterate Kane. Lacan’s myth of the lamella closely resembles that of the alien xenomorph that inserts itself and, as we later discover, its embryo into Kane. In “From Love to the Libido” in *Seminar XI*, Lacan explains

The lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba. It is just a little more complicated. But it goes everywhere. And as it is something...that is related to what the sexed being loses in sexuality, it is, like the amoeba in relation to sexed being, immortal—because it survives in division, any scissiparous intervention. And it can run around...but suppose it comes and envelopes your face while you are quietly asleep.

(197)

Slavoj Žižek, in his essay “The Troubles with the Real: Lacan as a viewer of *Alien*,” describes the lamella as “an entity of pure surface, without the density of a substance, an infinitely plastic object that can not only incessantly change its form, but can even

transpose itself from one to another medium " ("Troubles"). After the alien attack on Kane, Dallas and Lambert bring Kane, with alien tightly clenched to his face, out of the belly of The Derelict back to the *Nostramo*. Because of the possibility of an alien infestation on the ship, Ripley denies access. Ash, the ship's scientific officer and synthetic human, serves as the enforcer of the Paternal Law. He opens the interior hatch and allows Kane and the others on board, despite Ripley's order. Kane, with the facehugger firmly attached, dwells in a state that is both living and dead, both subject and Other. In his essay "Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears," Žižek defines the existence of the subject as "only as nonsubstantial self-relating subject that maintains its distance toward inner-worldly objects" (66). The image of Kane joined with the facehugger is the visual representation of what Žižek calls the subject and "The Thing":

Only in monsters does this subject encounter the Thing that is his impossible equivalent- *the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing...*The subject and the Thing are not two entities but rather two sides, the two "slopes," of one and the same entity. The subject is "the same" as the Thing; he is, so to speak, its negative, the trace of its absence within the symbolic network. (66-7)

Kane has now become part of the Other through the 'rape/ implantation' of the xenomorph, thus destroying his role as crewmember of *Nostramo* and re-signifying him as a living-dead subject. With the protective faceplate destroyed by the acid from the alien's blood, the xenomorph's tube-like appendage forced down Kane's throat keeps Kane alive and provides him oxygen. Conversely, Kane provides a life source for the

xenomorph and the embryo that it has implanted into Kane. The facehugger resembles the lamella in that it

is first heard as a shrilling sound, and then pops up as a monstrously distorted body...indivisible, indestructible, and immortal...the obscene immortality of the 'living dead' which, after very annihilation, re-composes themselves clumsily and goes on. ("Troubles")

If one were to connect the alien facehugger with the description of the Lacanian lamella, then one cannot overlook the etymology of this term. Darian Leader explains that the word 'lamella' is in reference to an “ancient burial practice” of burying the dead with “lamellae...thin gold plates or foils...containing instructions and passwords for use in the next world” (46). Following the earlier idea that the “birth of the subject and the advent of the Other is (literally) through information,” as posited earlier by Torry, the facehugger becomes this lamella/ lamellae for Kane, a warning to the others to avoid intrusion into this Real dimension. Indeed, Kane will awaken briefly from this death-like state before the embryo the facehugger has implanted destroys him, further connecting the lamellae’s Orphic rebirth symbolism to the lamella of the xenomorph facehugger. Leader also explains that the connection with the real and the lamella indicates the “opposition between the mortal body and an enduring separate life substance linked to it” (46). He states that Lacan identifies “objects buried with the dead with the objects of jouissance, in other words, with a form of libido” and furthermore deals “with a disparity of registers: the mortal body, reduced to a signifier, and the real, and the objects of enjoyment around it” (46). The film demonstrates the suffering associated with jouissance in Kane’s monstrous 'male birth' to the alien embryo implanted by the facehugger.

Dallas and Ash attempt to remove the facehugger from Kane's face once inside the *Nostramo*. Ash notes how the alien is kept alive by Kane and how Kane himself is kept alive by the alien, but does not recognize the implantation of the alien embryo that occurred while Kane has been in this 'living/ dead' state. The men's attempts to remove the facehugger are futile; the xenomorph tightens its grip when it is agitated and it exudes corrosive acidic blood when the men try to cut it off Kane's face. After the implantation is complete, the facehugger simply falls away and dies. The viewers are unaware that the facehugger has been anything other than an attacking alien being, or possibly a parasite feeding on its host. It becomes apparent after Kane returns to consciousness and joins the crewmembers of the *Nostramo* that he has become a victim of rape. Vaughn argues that images of rape and exploitation begin early in the film. Once the signification of the *Nostramo* attaches with that of "alien," the Weyland-Yutani Company becomes the rapist to the fertile "feminine" frontier of space. The resulting offspring is the alien race, now exploited for use as a biological weapon by Weyland-Yutani. Following this idea, Vaughn states that the aliens now exploit humans as "their resource" and argues, "rather than a passive rape of the frontier, both alien and corporation violate one another" (428). The abject object then becomes the humans who are part of the paternal Company. Julia Kristeva determines that "abjection assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various 'symbolic systems'" (qtd. in Davis 247). In this state, Kane is between many worlds, both living and dead, both masculine and feminine, both in the Real and in the Imaginary/Symbolic realm. He dies on the table in the galley, being consumed in an area marked for nourishment and consumption. As with the food consumed at the table that will eventually become waste, Kane's body is wrapped in a sheet and ejected from the

Nostramo into space, like MU-TH-UR's shit. Davis states "examples of the abject are certain foods and food loathing, body fluids and the corpse. These are met with disgust and loathing on behalf of the subject" and who will eventually aim to "evacuate the abject" (247). Davis continues

...although inimical to the subject's stable identity, abjection emerges...as the subject's necessary pre-condition and persistent primer. Once, expelled, however, the abject does not remain quiescently at bay but continues to exercise its claim on the subject...No wonder then that the abject is powerfully uncanny, the familiar becomes loathsome and alien and which, if not fended off, threatens the subject with undifferentiation and death. (248)

Torry states that prior to the death of Kane, "the creature is both metonymically and metaphorically associated, through its ghastly emergence as the crew eats...[with] the alien artificial food ingested by the crew [and] the embryonic alien deposited in Kane's stomach" (345). Interestingly, when this scene was shot, director Ridley Scott did not inform the actors as to what was about to occur, eliciting authentic reactions to the 'chestburster' and Kane's demise. The crew, now aware of the horror that Kane had brought with him in the form of the Other, now live in fear of their own abjection and obliteration. As Kristeva explains

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (4)

The crew of the *Nostramo*, having experienced the ability of technology to prevent death through their use of the hypersleep chambers, faces death through the spawn of the uncontrollable Archaic Mother. Technology becomes useless to defend them. Kane, as a reminder of their fate, becomes the trash— a repulsive and frightening reminder of the *Nostramo's* fate.

Once the alien bursts from Kane's body and slithers into the hull of the *Nostramo*, it thrives within the body of its new 'Mother' and devours the crew of the *Nostramo*, all except for Warrant Officer Ripley and her cat, Mr. Jones. The alien kills Lambert, the only other female crewmember of the *Nostramo*, by penetrating her body with its tail. Ripley discovers Dallas cocooned by the alien for later consumption and he begs to be killed; Ripley fulfills his wish and thus becomes the film's "narrative ego...the ego through which the story will be resolved and our identification made" (Kavanaugh qtd. Torry 357). She and the cat enter into the escape pod and jettisoned from the catastrophic destruction of the *Nostramo*. In a scene repeated in *Aliens*, Ripley screams out to MU-TH-UR "you bitch!" before she escapes. Once clear from the blast, Ripley enters into a state of apparent ecstasy. As the blast fades, she says softly to herself "I got you, you son of a bitch," connecting the alien xenomorph as the child of MU-TH-UR and coding it as masculine.

The final scene of *Alien* encodes the final struggle between the subject with the Other. Ripley, believing her and the cat safe in the escape module, undresses and prepares for hypersleep, thus signaling of the narrative and a return to the interrupted sleep from the beginning of the film. She does not notice the alien who has hidden itself within the walls. Arguably, for the first time in the film, the audience acknowledges Ripley's femininity with the removal of the androgynous uniform. Torry argues this

sexualization of Ripley in this final scene “is crucial to the film’s transformational strategy...her actions thus serve as intimations of narrative closure, create that cessation of the ‘flow of action in [a moment] of erotic contemplation” (347-8). The removal of the uniform represents a symbolic 'castration'; Ripley, without the masculine trappings of her Weyland-Yutani Company issued *Nostramo* uniform, is simply a woman and subject of castration. With Ripley exposed as 'feminine,' the viewer then joins the alien in the male gaze, thus positioning the alien as the masculine role in this scene. Apart from the impregnating role of the facehugger, the sexual coding of the alien has not been determined. Through the phallic presence of the alien, Ripley is re-signified as the classic 'damsel in distress,' the female that must be saved and protected. Indeed, this 'damsel in distress' signification continues when the Weyland-Yutani Gateway Station saves her in the escape pod in the opening sequence of *Aliens*. It must be noted, however, that Ripley does not require a male hero to protect her from the alien Other. As she moves slowly away from the beast, she steps into a space suit and seizes a harpoon gun. Torry notes that Ripley “exchanges her role as object of erotic contemplation and emblem of castration for that of an armed and armored phallic warrior” (348). She reassures herself with a children’s song “Lucky Star...Lucky Star.” The alien then becomes Ripley’s abject object, as she purges the monster through the door of the shuttlecraft. According to Torry

In Ripley's ultimate ability to 'rid herself of badness via projection and then [destroy] the projected badness' *Alien* thus offers the audience a regressive fantasy of the self purged of troubling aggressivity. When its final shot returns Ripley to the sleep interrupted by the advent of the alien,

the film...closes with the representation of a 'nonambivalent, all-good, blissful union with the...mother.' (349)

To signify the end of the narrative and completing the birth process begun by Dallas' request for the story from MU-TH-UR, Ripley records her final message before returning to her hypersleep, mournfully listing the dead, including the *Nostramo* "I should reach the frontier in another six weeks. With a little luck the network will pick me up...This is Ripley, last survivor of the commercial starship *Nostramo* signing off" (Hill and Giler). Her final words, and her return to the cryogenic chamber with her cat, signal the end of the narrative and Ripley's return to the oceanic feeling before the destruction of her crew and ship.

2 BRIDGING BINARIES IN THE *ALIEN* UNIVERSE

The structure of *Alien* and *Aliens* relies on our understanding of a variety of binary structures; however, many liminal beings work to bridge those binaries. Interestingly, the blurring of the lines between humans, non-humans, and machine constitute the vast landscape of the films. As noted by Kristeva, the borders we create define what becomes the abject. These liminal beings and characters trouble our definition of what constitutes 'abject' by existing outside and between these boundaries. These liminal subjects bridge the binaries in masculine and feminine gender coding, the boundaries between life and death, the line between human and non-human, and the bodies of the manufactured and natural. The most recognizable iconic image of the *Alien* series is of the xenomorph chestburster ripping through the body of *Nostramo* crewmember Gilbert Kane. While the xenomorph facehugger and Kane remain attached, Kane becomes the horrific 'male mother.' He exists in his 'pregnant' state in a position between male and female, as well as both life and death. Furthermore, the

United States Colonial Marine Corps troops featured in *Aliens* trouble binaries between the masculine and the feminine. The soldiers are gender neutral and shaped, as Thomas Caldwell argues, to become part of the military machine. Private Jenette Vasquez leads these soldiers in their rescue mission on the Hadley's Hope colony on LV-426. She becomes one with her weapon—a phallic M56 Smart Gun. This places her in the unique position of phallic privilege that women in the film, including Ripley, do not experience. Her masculine appearance becomes the focus of many gags within the film; however, she maintains her position of power. Being of Latin descent, the other soldiers sometimes address her as 'alien,' further denoting her as liminal—one who is both within as leader and without as the 'other.' Lastly, Ash and Bishop, synthetic humans developed by the Weyland-Yutani company to aid its space missions, embody the conflict between the organic and the technological that is inherent in the narrative. Ripley's distrust for the synthetic humans reflects our own revulsion with the liminal. The world of *Alien* and *Aliens* blur various lines of difference and challenge the audience's ideas of the abject.

Certainly, this blurring of binary signifiers extends beyond the characters. Aided by the elaborate designs of H.R. Giger, the viewer questions whether the landscape and architecture of the scenes are manufactured or organic, especially through the representation of the alien xenomorphs and their lairs. Tim Blackmore notes that the alien "nest" appears "organic in appearance" as "it has been concocted with the usual Gigeresque mixture of 'forms suggestive of bones, machinery parts and flexible conduit'" (220). In fact, "Giger described his disturbing art as 'a combination of art nouveau and technical stuff. I call it biomechanics'" (220). These creatures and the nests they create blend seamless in with the uterine-esque inner bodies of the manufactured structures

they inhabit. It is important to remember that although much attention has been placed on the xenomorphs, what draws the *Nostramo* to the alien nest, and later the colonists in Hadley's Hope, is a distress signal emitted from the wrecked Derelict and the 'other alien,' the Space Jockey. In fact, the destructive womb-image of the Derelict contrasts with the sterile womb-image of the *Nostramo*'s computer mainframe room, MU-TH-UR. By comparison, before Kane's facehugger "attack a great deal of visual and spoken detail enforces a crucial distinction between the crew's apparent safety within the technological enclosure of the *Nostramo* and a threatening deadly exterior" (Torry 345). In *Aliens*, vaginal-like openings line the walls of the Alien Mother's lair. The Alien Mother's organs and egg-laying bodily apparatus are visible and entwined with the wreckage of Hadley's Hope. It becomes increasingly difficult to determine the separation between the alien body and the architecture-- the Alien Mother herself seems to be part of the enclosure. Bundtzen explains "There's a disturbing sense in which the Alien's polymorphous body lacks integrity and identity. The technological environment is, much of the time, as dark and maze-like as the Alien's and spatial orientation...is nearly impossible" (14). Furthermore, the colonists in Hadley's Hope have been cocooned for further consumption and "bear disconcerting resemblance to dusty religious icons" as if ensconced in "a perverse Alien shrine" (14). In *Aliens*' final scene, Ripley herself must become a liminal monster to fight the Alien Mother by operating the robot Power Loader exoskeleton— part human and part machine—and, in her new "phallicized form," she is able to battle the archaic phallic (m)other, the Alien Queen. In her Power Loader, "Ripley is less woman than a cyborg," and "inorganic machine" (16). This transformation removes any agency to Ripley's female body or power as it is endowed with the decidedly masculine machine of heavy labor. In order for her to fight

a creature that has been coded as neither masculine nor feminine, male or female, Ripley must remove the boundaries that define her.

The story of *Aliens* centers on the rescue mission for the Hadley's Hope Colony by the United States Colonial Marine Corps. Within the USCMC, there is an illusory sense of gender equality; however, Blackmore notes that the women seem to be to be separated "into three categories: 'dykes,' androgynes, and frigid, asexual princesses" (213). The USCMC, a hypermasculine, yet oddly gender-neutral unit, mirrors the 'grunts' of the Vietnam-era United States Marine Corps, down to their uniforms and military banter. Jenette Vasquez, the Smart Gun operator on the *USS Sulaco*, demonstrates this genderless/ hypermasculine military ideal. She fearlessly leads the battalion into the decimated colony. Her Smart Gun becomes her phallus, granting her power she appears to lack. When directed to turn over her ammunition once inside Hadley's Hope, she refuses, thereby maintaining her agency and power until she sacrifices herself for her crew. Blackmore observes that Vasquez has become a "total warrior," and as such "is no longer a woman" (213). The other marines, in particular Hudson, often make jokes about her appearance. When the viewers are first introduced to Vasquez, she exercises by performing pull-ups in the unisex locker rooms. Hudson asks "Hey Vasquez! Have you ever been mistaken for a man?" She smugly replies, "No. Have you?" (Cameron). As Edwards explains

Vasquez...with her muscles, crew cut, and Hispanic looks, becomes the focus of racial and sexual jokes; and she herself perpetuates the stereotypes...the question continues to privilege male over female, as the implication that Hudson is girly is an insult. (105)

Peter Fitting, in his article "The Second Alien," notes that in "everyday linguistic practices *alien* refers not to beings from outer space, but to 'citizens of a foreign state' (289). Indeed, Hudson also mocks Vasquez's Chicana heritage. He jokes, "Somebody said alien...she thought they said illegal alien and signed up" (Cameron). Edwards argues "This last remark, drawing a parallel between American/ Hispanic or naturalised citizen/ immigrant and colonist/ invader or human/ alien, exposes the racism implicit in the team's contempt for the object of their mission" (105). These jokes signify Vasquez' otherness-- she defies the gender binaries and race-otherness by being a leader amongst the marines and arguably the most levelheaded and competent at the time of battle. In addition, by being referred to as 'alien,' her image as 'other' becomes more defined. In Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, she discusses Lacan's assertion that "Women are said to 'be' the Phallus..." (61). Interestingly, Vasquez's role within the USCMC exemplifies her assertions. Butler states women

...maintain the power to reflect and represent the 'reality' of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position. In order to "be" the Phallus, the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must "be" (in the sense of "posture as if they were") precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the function of men. Hence, "being" the Phallus is always a "being for" a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through recognition of that "being for." (61)

Clearly the most masculine and most effective of soldiers, Vasquez highlights and challenges the hypermasculinity of the USMC soldiers. Vasquez represents the foil to

the Alien Queen-- the phallic mother who does not consume. Furthermore, Vasquez does not create life; she destroys evil, saves the living, and sacrifices herself to bring order.

Arguably, Vasquez is more closely aligned with the warrior figure that Ripley will become in the final scene with the Alien Queen. Vasquez, although never directly addressed in the film, appears as a "stylized Chicana lesbian grunt" and the first to notice Ripley as she enters the *Sulaco* (Zwinger 84). Initially, Vasquez does not respect Ripley and challenges her knowledge of the "bugs" on LV-426. Zwinger argues that despite the 'macha' exterior, it is evident that Vasquez desires Ripley and is therefore threatened by her presence. Vasquez represents the archetypal 'Virgin Warrior,' and lacks any sexual or maternal desire. Ripley appears to also lack these desires at this point, until she discovers the 'feral' child, Newt. When Vasquez and her male counterpart Gorman sacrifice themselves in a "noble death-scene embrace," it furthers Ripley's transformation into a new signification (84). Zwinger states "just as Vasquez sacrifices her desire and her life to the cause, it is only in order to preserve her position as new, nuclear, sentimentalized mom that Ripley appropriates military, masculine attributes. The repatriarchalized Good (virgin/ dyke) Mother is a Good Soldier" (84). Through Vasquez's demise, Ripley "proves to be more 'macho' than the rest" without risking her image as a "sentimental mother" (84). However, the most threatening liminal beings are not the gender-neutral, yet hypermasculine killing machines of the USCMC, but the 'androids,' or synthetic humans, Weyland-Yutani creates to aid its missions.

The synthetic humans that occupy the *Nostramo* and the *Sulaco* represent another set of liminal beings-- bridging the line between technology and humanity.

When MU-TH-UR instructs the crew of the *Nostramo* to answer a distress signal on LV-426, the crew initially refuses-- Parker, the *Nostramo*'s engineer, being the most vocal. Soon Ash, the synthetic human and chief science officer of the *Nostramo*, reminds them of their contractual obligation to follow the orders of MU-TH-UR and the Company. Dallas tells Parker to "Just listen to the man," which symbolically aligns Ash with the paternal Company (Hill and Giler). Of course, Ash is not a 'man,' but an android placed on the *Nostramo* to ensure the crew meets the Company's objectives. While Dallas is the captain of the ship and the figure of patriarchal authority available only to MU-TH-UR, his only phallic-privilege comes from the relay of MU-TH-UR's messages to his crew. Ultimately, he is a puppet to the greater patriarchal law determined by The Company. By comparison, Ash becomes the third enforcer of the Law of the Father, one sinister and simply in existence to carry forth orders in the name of science. Ash embodies the conflict between the organic and the technological that is inherent in *Alien*'s narrative. The crew, simply cogs in Weyland-Yutani's corporate machine, will become transporters of the alien xenomorphs that the Company intends to use in biological warfare, unbeknownst to them.

Ash, the synthetic human who is the enforcer of the Paternal Law, insists the crew preserve the alien. He prevents Ripley's access to MU-TH-UR's computer mainframe 'womb,' but Ripley reminds him that at the death of Kane and the disappearance of Dallas, she is the next in command. Zwinger muses that Ash is, himself, the "truest child" of this MU-TH-UR (75). She explains

Mother's (real) story is aided and abetted by...her truest child: Ash turns out to be an android, his uncanny hybrid mechanical-organic status horribly and suddenly revealed in the battle-to-the-death with

Ripley...Ash is not only closest to Mother in his uncanniness, he is also...the most abject object of the film... (75)

After the death of Kane, the alien slithers away to complete its growth within the bowels of the *Nostramo*. When it re-emerges, it attacks the crewmembers of the *Nostramo*, either killing or cocooning its victims for later consumption. The survivors of these attacks assume Dallas dead as he has encountered the alien. Ripley, the next in command after Dallas, establishes her phallic control by entering into the computer mainframe room and demanding to speak to MU-TH-UR. She discovers that MU-TH-UR, who she once believed to be the caregiver and protector of her crew,

...is the link to the shadowy and sinister “Company,” which controls the action, and which initiates the entire “story” by dispatching the *Nostramo* to pick up the Alien embryos...she reveals to Ripley its decision that the crew has become “expendable.” Mother knows the story, but she is a detached, impersonal narrator. (Scobie 83)

Ash, aware of this directive, attempts to stop Ripley and the remaining crew from destroying the alien. He attacks Ripley with a 'phallicized' rolled-up magazine and shoves it into her mouth to suffocate and silence her. When the remaining crew, Parker and Lambert, discover this attack, they rip apart Ash's body in the ensuing battle, and it is revealed, for the first time, that Ash is an android. Ash is neither living nor dead, a non-human physical representation of the world of the organic and the technological, thus a liminal being that must be destroyed to maintain order. The headless body of Ash reveals the intent of the Weyland-Yutani Company and the complicit MU-TH-UR: “Special Order 937, in essence, asked me to direct the ship to the planet, investigate a

life form, possibly hostile and bring it back for observation. With discretion, of course” (Hill and Giler). Torry observes:

Considered in the context of the *Nostramo*'s putative mission, the mining and refining of raw materials, the creature which begins in an uncompleted state and which achieves its deadly maturity at the expense of the crew's lives, becomes the expedition's true “product.” It is the raw material to be processed by the *Nostramo* and its workers. (347)

Judith Newton in her essay "Feminism and Anxiety in Alien" notes that "the time of the Alien ship... 'nostro homo,' our man, makes allusion of course to [Joseph] Conrad's working-class hero, another company man, who dies understanding that he has been betrayed by 'material interests'" (293). The "nostro oumo" for the Weyland-Yutani Company is Ash, literally shaped by The Company and for The Company's benefit. While sequestered in the hospital bay where Kane and the alien were held for observation, the disembodied Ash muses:

You idiots. You still don't realize what you're dealing with. The Alien is a perfect organism. Superbly structured, cunning, quintessentially violent. With your limited capabilities you have no chance against it.

LAMBERT: You admire it.

ASH: How can one not admire perfection? (Hill and Giler)

Unable to acknowledge the threat the xenomorph presents, Ash's programming, set by the Weyland-Yutani company, incorporates only cold scientific facts and research and does not include empathy towards potential human suffering. In fact, Ash's prime directive delivered by MU-TH-UR is "Special Order 937...to direct the ship to the planet, investigate a life form, possibly hostile, bring it back for observation. With discretion, of

course" (Hill and Giler). As noted by Fitting, Ash and MU-TH-UR represent the "images of the stereotyped fears of the inhuman subjection and control..." (289). Ash states that he is "programmed to protect human life," and then, when Ripley notes that he has "contempt for it," Ash accuses the crew of being "egocentric morons" (Hill and Giler) At this point, Ripley pulls the plug on Ash, removing him as the enforcer of the Paternal Law. She then moves forward to save herself and the remainder of her crew. Ash's 'demise, as indicated by Zwinger, mirrors that of Kane as he is temporarily in a state between "life," albeit synthetic, unnatural life, and "death." She explains

During his "death" scene, he gushes and spurts and oozes blood and guts and electronic components of an entirely unacceptable milky color; he also occupies, incidentally, the place of the undead for a moment, when his severed head is reattached long enough for a final, horribly mobile sneer at the mere humans and their chance for survival. (75)

In Ash's final act, Parker burns Ash like trash, signifying the android as the crew's object.

In *Aliens*, Bishop, a synthetic human who works for the USCMC, beyond his role as a science officer on the *Sulaco*, becomes entertainment and a puppet for the battalion. Unlike Ash, Bishop has a respect for all life, human or alien, and serves as the moral voice of the film. Blackmore notes, "He refuses to be a combatant and instead ministers to life as a protector, pacifist, and healer" (218). When forced to perform a 'knife-trick' on Hudson, a trick that Bishop detests, he assures Hudson to trust that he will not hurt him. In the process, Bishop pricks his finger and oozes white blood, signaling to Ripley that he is an android. Immediately, Ripley distrusts Bishop due to

her experiences on the *Nostramo* with Ash. Indeed, it is Bishop who asserts his humanity by correcting Ripley when she refers to him as an 'android':

RIPLEY: You never said anything about an android being on board. Why not?

BURKE: It never-- never occurred to me. It's just common practice: we always have a synthetic on board.

BISHOP: I prefer the term 'artificial person,' myself. (Cameron)

Bishop explains that his newer model of "artificial person" has been modified since Ash's model Hyperdyne Systems 120-A/2. He states "The A/2's were always a bit twitchy. That couldn't happen now with our behavioral inhibitors. It is impossible for me to harm or, by omission of action, allow to be harmed, a human being" (Cameron). Bishop, like all synthetic humans, works as the science officer on his vessel. When an alien facehugger escapes from the lab, attacks Ripley, and then killed, Bishop performs a dissection on the beast in order to determine what makes it so difficult to destroy. The facehugger, under scrutiny, resembles a 'penal dentata'-- a combination of a vaginal opening, labial folds, and phallic appendages. Rather than studying the alien with a sense of awe in its power and perfection, such as Ash, Bishop fears it. Ripley, aware of the intent to harvest these beings for use in biological warfare, confronts Burke, an executive at Weyland-Yutani, about the dangers of the xenomorphs. Bishop agrees that they must be destroyed. Despite his role as a scientist and as one who must carry out the directives of Weyland-Yutani, Bishop's programming cannot allow harm to come the humans he serves. Slowly, Ripley begins to gain trust in Bishop. In the final battle with Alien Queen, Bishop attempts to save Ripley and Newt, only to be penetrated by the Queen's tail and ripped in two, mirroring the rape/ murder of Lambert in *Alien*. Unlike

Ash, Bishop is saved and his body is restored. His destruction and resurrection aligns him with the recoding of these liminal beings as more 'human' than 'machine.' The struggle between organic and mechanical pervades much of the encodings within the *Alien* series.

Finally, the joined figures of Kane and the facehugger xenomorph create a new realm of liminality. Through his lone penetration into the 'body' of the phallic mother within the Derelict wreckage, Kane discovers a nest of eggs. He notes the mist surrounding each of the ovoid pods. This mist hints towards the yellow fog of space from the opening sequence of *Alien*. Suddenly, one of the pods opens to reveal a throbbing, amorphous blob. Inside, the pod reveals “viscera and mandible...the interior surface spongy and irregular” (Hill and Giler). As Kane moves closer to the pod to examine the inside, a small creature leaps towards Kane’s face “with shocking violence...and melts through the mask” (Hill and Giler). The alien xenomorph attaches to Kane’s face and inserts a phallic appendage down his throat, which provides oxygen to keep Kane alive despite LV-426’s poisonous atmosphere. The image of Kane’s face obliterated by the facehugger “dwells in a kind of preontological state...as if deformed by anamorphosis” (“Grimaces” 47). Žižek states beings with “the amorphous distortion of the face” elicit horror not because of its “death mask,” but because “anyone who catches sight of this amorphous life-substance has entered the forbidden domain and must therefore be excluded” (47). Through this implantation of the xenomorph, Kane has entered into a new place “of the ‘living dead’” that “is not somewhere between the dead and the living,” but has “access to the life-substance prior to its symbolic mortification” (47). This places Kane into the unlikely world of the “uncanny and ambiguous” (Zwinger 75). Arguably, the now 'living dead' Kane and the facehugger are

experiencing a short-lived jouissance, one being kept alive by the other and one becoming the carrier for the other's next symbolic identification. Kane becomes "the creature's...Victim? Lover? Spouse? Food? Mother?" and, even though 'penetrated' by the alien's "tubal/ phallic appendage," the facehugger "...looks like female genitalia" (75). Kane has not only been raped, but also impregnated, by a genderless, grotesque 'thing' that initially defies signification. Žižek argues that in this state, the alien becomes the Lacanian lamella, and Kane is closest to experiencing the Real. He explains

the myth of the lamella presents the fantasmatic entity that gives the body to what a living being loses when it enters the (symbolically regulated) regime of sexual difference...one can also say that lamella is a kind of positive obverse of castration: the non-castrated remainder, the indestructible partial object cut off from the living body caught in sexual difference. ("Troubles")

Kane as the 'living dead' subject becomes the embodiment of the grotesque. Creed posits, "When male bodies become grotesque, they tend to take on characteristics associated with female bodies; in this instance man's body becomes grotesque because it is capable of being penetrated. From this union, the monstrous creature is born" (19). The monstrous creature exists outside the borders of signification.

Through the various stages of its development, the xenomorph slides between different gender identifications. The xenomorph facehugger itself appears to be a "fusion of male and female sexual organs" with what appears to be "a vaginal cavity" and a "penis-like" appendage which it "juts into the throat" of its victim in order to implant "an alien embryo deep into the viscera of a host" (Bundtzen 12). Bundtzen argues, despite the apparent androgyny of the xenomorph, the facehugger appears 'female'(12).

Arguably, the gender coding of this being does not happen until much later when Ripley becomes the subject of the 'male gaze' in the final scene of *Alien*. Zwinger notes that the alien, discovered hidden in the walls of the *Narcissus* escape pod, appears "huge, menacing, and even seems to be lasciviously having Ripley in its (? his, her, their, whatever) power at last. But like the crudest of melodrama villains, it lingers just a little too long" (76). Before ejecting the alien into space, Ripley refers to the creature as a "son of a bitch," applying the final male signifier to the creature that up until this point lacked any definitive gender identifiers. The Alien Queen, however, is undeniably female, which provides a framework for the "good mother/ bad mother" battle between Ripley and the Alien Queen.

3 "WHAT'S THE STORY, MOTHER?"

The *Alien* series troubles the defining binary relationship between mother and child. In fact, "Mother" takes on many different identities throughout the films. In *Alien*, as previously discussed, MU-TH-UR is the computer mainframe of the *Nostramo* that monitors the crewmembers and then directs them on their ill-fated trip to LV-426. Later, Kane becomes 'mother' to the alien xenomorph, whose birth destroys Kane himself. In the final scenes of *Alien*, Ripley becomes mother to Jonesy-the-cat, the non-human/ non-machine subject that defies clear signification. In *Aliens*, the audience discovers that Ripley was a mother before she left on her expedition with the *Nostramo*, and her daughter Amy died within the fifty-seven years since Ripley left her home. Ripley then becomes mother to Newt, whose presence is a reminder of how a child becomes 'feral' without the presence of a mother. In the final battle, Ripley as 'good' mother battles the Alien Queen's 'bad' mother, but only by arming herself with an inhuman exoskeleton in the form of the Power Loader.

The sliding signifier of 'Mother' dominates many feminist critical discussions. In *Alien and Aliens*, Lynda Zwinger states

Mother is a problem. She's figured, refigured, configured, disfigured as (and the following list is partial, incomplete, fragmentary—the usual feminine mess): who we must think back through; who we want to/ don't want to/ can't/ won't be; who is locked up in the attic; who seduces *everybody*—really, first, and always; who we must and will (and possibly can't altogether) abject; who is or is not the object, an object, our object; who has or has not, is or is not the Phallus. (77)

With its many faces, the definition of Mother changes its signification in relation to the Paternal Law. For instance, when controlled by the computer mainframe MU-TH-UR 6000, the *Nostramo* acts only to the commands of the Weyland-Yutani company, which is the purveyor of the Paternal Law. MU-TH-UR, along with her 'true child' Ash, is the enforcer of the law. She lacks her own 'voice' as the messages she delivers to the crew are from the 'voice' of Weyland-Yutani. Weyland-Yutani represents the foil to the xenomorphs; whether by man or by nature, both designed to destroy and consume, either for profit or for procreation. MU-TH-UR ensures the Weyland-Yutani's objectives are met.

In *Alien's* opening sequence, the viewer discovers, through superimposed titles, the *Nostramo* contains a seven-member crew whose mission is to ship mined ore back to Earth. The ship passes overhead and the camera then 'penetrates' the hull, allowing the viewer to enter the *Nostramo*. Stephen Scobie frames this primal/ primary scene as the “first ‘penetration’ of the Mother’s body (by the viewer, or by the cinematic apparatus) which generates the story and sets it in motion” (83). There appears to be no

sign of human life on board at first, life whose revelation the viewer anticipates by the preceding titles. Lights blink and reflect off a pair of helmets, which “signal to one another” in “an electronic conversation” (Hill and Giler). These helmets are the first signs of life, as much as the reflected flashing of the lights from the computer screens imply language spoken between these inanimate objects. After the frenzied blinking of the multicolored lights stop, only the yellow light remains, which the viewer later learns is the beckoning signal for MU-TH-UR. Robert Torry suggests the animated faceplates of these helmets in the opening scene point towards later events:

In the mirrored appearance of computer information spread across the faceplate and “filling” the previously empty helmet, *Alien* activates its chain of images suggesting awakening consciousness, the “birth” of the subject...the birth image will be repeated in the opening of the egg that initiates the alien attack upon Kane. (351-2)

He later claims that through “foreshadowing the initial alien assault through its inaugural narrative event, *Alien* dramatically affiliates inception and alterity, the birth of the subject with the advent of the Other as (literally) information” (352). If one follows the idea that these opening shots are a representation of the primal scene leading to birth, it becomes increasingly troubling that MU-TH-UR, represented by computer screens and flashing lights, cares for and 'delivers' the six crewmembers and their synthetic human companion, Ash. Ultimately, this event points towards the destruction of the crew through Kane's initial impregnation by the xenomorph facehugger.

MU-TH-UR awakens the crew, who are asleep in cryogenic vaults, by gradually turning on the interior lights of the ship. The pod doors rise to reveal the seven crewmembers. All of the seven crewmembers of the *Nostramo* are in their own

individual sleep pods that are part of one larger unit controlled and monitored by MUTH-UR. Kane, the Executive Officer of the *Nostramo*, awakens first. Dressed in what comically appear to be diapers, he voicelessly gasps for air and through a series of lap dissolves, groggily comes back to consciousness after an undetermined length of time, and gradually removes himself from his hypersleep chamber. This 'rebirthing scene,' described by Barbara Creed, is

marked by a fresh, antiseptic atmosphere. In outer space, the birth is a well controlled, clean, painless affair. There is no blood trauma or terror...a primal phantasy in which the human subject is born fully developed—even copulation is redundant...the father is completely absent; here the mother is the sole parent and life support. (18)

Indeed, this 'birth' is in conflict with one of the determining factors of Lacan's Mirror Stage, species prematurity at birth. If one emerges from the Real in their fully realized state, the Imaginary and Symbolic realms cannot shape the individual. However, this is not entirely the case in this awakening. The scene represents "a paradigmatically Oedipal moment: the sudden, unexpected disruption of the crew's cryogenic sleep, an interruption of the pre-Oedipal 'blissful union with mother'" (Torry 349). The crew's separation from the safety of the hypersleep chamber begins a series of signifiers that "define and secure our own sense of personal, social, or cultural identity," and therefore, "through comparison and contrast with otherness," the crew comes to know their mission and how the Company defines the crew's purpose (Edwards 104). The crew, while in their hypersleep, expects to awake as they come closer to home. However, MUTH-UR awakens the crew at the command of the Weyland-Yutani Company, the ore-mining corporation that employs the *Nostramo*, specifically to follow a transmission

emitted from the planet Acheron LV-426, and away from their intended destination, Earth. This new direction redefines each crewmember's role. Torry explains:

In that this awakening is demanded by the (paternal) Company and affected by the complicit Mother, *Alien* depicts the Oedipal crisis as parental intrigue: Mother and the Company act in concert to direct the crew toward their fatal engagement with the Other to which they will be sacrificed... [and] thus displays its crucial fascination with the Oedipal intervention as a coming to self-consciousness. (349-50)

As a hint towards the Company's intent, an early symbolic representation of the 'devouring Mother' of this ship is the checkerboard logo on the door of the hypersleep chamber, which indicates these crewmembers are to become 'chow' for the aliens brought upon the ship by the command of MU-TH-UR and The Company. Like the womb-like hypersleep pods, the *mise-en-scene* suggests "uterine like enclosures" throughout the *Nostramo* that point towards "the imago of the archaic mother" (Davis 246). Rather than a comforting womb, these seemingly infantile adults sleep in a claustrophobic and suffocating environment. The *Nostramo*, its controlling MU-TH-UR, and the yellow smoke of 'Real' space become a devouring, destructive void, rather than a safe womb that protects and nourishes life. Thomas Vaughn argues that *Alien* and *Aliens*, "become metaphors for the birth process" where the space "frontier has not grown into a place of fertility, but through the reversal of the womb metaphor, becomes hungry and savage. That which once produced, now consumes" (430). As the members of the *Nostramo* rise from their state of unconsciousness, their defining roles, once assigned by the Company, become re-signified through their experience with the Other.

While the crew enjoys their meal at the galley table, the crew hears the same beeping from the earlier 'conversation' between the helmets in the first scene, a reminder of the fate that awaits the crew. Ash tells the captain of the *Nostramo*, Dallas, "Mother wants to talk to you," in a tone not unlike a demanding sibling (Hill and Giler). Dallas then acknowledges the signal as "Yellow light: For My Eyes Only" (Hill and Giler). At this command, "Dallas enters the computer room by inserting a phallic key in a lock; the room itself is womb-shaped, the only site of warm flickering lights in an otherwise cold and harsh metallic décor" (Scobie 83). As he sits inside the womb-like computer mainframe, he greets the computer with a warm "Morning, Mother" (Hill and Giler). The diegetic sound within this room has the 'oceanic' sound of the womb, as well as the soft 'breathing,' paired with the beeping and whirring one would expect from a machine. The image is both comforting and sinister. Once seated, Dallas then types the ominous question and asks the computer mainframe "What's the story, Mother?" (Hill and Giler). This sets in place yet another symbolic birth in the film, the beginning of the narrative. His directive becomes "the semiotic operation through which the subject assumes a position in the symbolic through an identificatory relationship with the father (or, more precisely, with the 'paternal metaphor,' the Name-of-the-Father) in the Oedipal drama" (Torry 350). Just as the awakening of the crew has defined the "Oedipal mother's complicity with the Law of the Father," MU-TH-UR's command to land on the planet in order to address what appears to be a distress signal "evokes immediately the ultimate consequence of that separation: the mechanism of secondary identification" (350). When Dallas emerges from MU-TH-UR's 'computer womb,' he instructs the crew to prepare to land on the planet Acheron LV-426, and sets the crew of *Nostramo* on their path towards their destruction laid by the paternal Company and MU-TH-UR.

In the most striking reversal of the birth motif in this film, Kane delivers the xenomorph chestburster in the most violent and gruesome representation of birth.

Creed states

The birth of the alien from Kane's stomach recalls Freud's description of a common misunderstanding that many children have about birth, that is, that the mother is somehow 'impregnated' through the mouth—she may eat a special food—and the baby grows in her stomach, from which it is also born. Here, we have a version of the primal scene in which the infant is conceived orally. (19)

In contrast with the clean, blood free 'awakening' birth in the opening scene, Kane experiences “the sudden onset of pains, the thrashing around on the table, the crew members trying to hold him down” which represent “clear echoes of childbirth” and “gives birth’ in a horrendous scene in which the Alien bursts bloodily out of his chest” (Scobie 84). From the beginning of the film, *Alien* blurs the lines of sexual difference. The women on the ship are just as 'in charge' as the men. They work in the masculine field of mining. They sleep in the same pods. However, the image of a man on the galley table experiencing the pains and throes of childbirth challenges this seemingly non-existent difference. Scobie argues that this is “a very *male* fantasy; that is, a male fear of the mystery and unknown of women’s power” (84). He continues, “it is an extremely powerful, if crude, image of the disruption of the ‘natural’ order, not only in the direct association it sets up between birth and death, but also because it is *male* childbirth” (84). The birth of the alien, being from a man, is “monstrous” (91). The question asked at the birth of the narrative, delivered by Dallas's inquiry “What’s the story, Mother?” is answered with Kane’s death. According to Scobie

...the disruption of order also acts to engender narrative; it is the beginning of the “story” for which Dallas asked “Mother.” As a narrative act of beginning, it is also, of course an act of death, Kane brings death into the story as he starts it, and as his own story ends. (84)

In fact, Kane’s story begins with his first words when he emerges from his hypersleep, “I feel dead” (Hill and Giler). The crew turn away from Kane and the alien chestburster that breaks forth from his body “as the creature bares its teeth and hisses in defiance...it is seen as monstrous, as a fearsome, bloody, inexplicable extrusion of the alien within” (Scobie 84). The chestburster slithers off the table and into the belly of the *Nostramo* to continue its gestation within the womb of its true nurturing 'MU-TH-UR.' Kane, having served his purpose as a cocoon for the alien, and as the surrogate 'birth mother' for MU-TH-UR, becomes the abject object. Creed points to Daniel Derwin's definition of the science fiction convention of ejecting bodies from a mother ship as another version of the primal scene. She explains that Kane, now possessing "the mother's body," must be removed from the ship as it has "become hostile" (19). Kane's body "contains the alien whose one purpose is to kill and devour all of Mother's children who, in terms of normal burial procedures, would be ejected from the ship to float away into a more friendly environment—outer space rather than inner space" (19). This scenario also applies to the escape of Ripley and her cat from the *Nostramo* upon the escape pod *Narcissus*.

Ripley, whose femininity and mothering abilities until this point have been latent, becomes mother to her cat, Jonesy. When the xenomorph overtakes the *Nostramo* and destruction of the ship becomes the only option for the remaining crewmembers' survival, she chooses to save the cat rather than her crewmates, Parker and Lambert. The cat becomes 'fetishized' at this point, an attempt by Ripley "to continue to 'have' the

phallus, to take up a 'positive' place in relation to the symbolic" (22). Creed discusses how the fetishism of the cat, Ripley's totem of phallic completion, contrasts with that of the Alien Queen:

the monster as fetishized phallus of the archaic mother is represented through the chameleon figure of the alien and the phallus as a fetishized child or 'little one' is present in the dynamic between the heroine and her cat. (22)

Once discovered asleep in their chambers aboard the escape pod *Narcissus*, the salvage crew takes Ripley and Jonesy to the Weyland-Yutani transport, the *Gateway*.

Interestingly, Kristeva claims, "abjection...is a precondition of narcissism," which further aligns Ripley and Jonesy with the abject as the 'living salvage' in the *Narcissus* (13, emphasis original). Once aboard the Weyland-Yutani vessel *Gateway*, Ripley recovers from her fifty-seven year hypersleep under close observation by the Weyland-Yutani's medical team. Carter Burke, a junior executive at Weyland-Yutani, reveals that Ripley's daughter on earth, Amy, died while Ripley was in hypersleep. Burke, at the request of the Weyland-Yutani company, asks Ripley to accompany the USCMC on a rescue mission to the terraformer colony, Hadley's Hope on LV-426. She reluctantly agrees. Once they arrive, they discover the colonists have perished due to an infestation of alien xenomorphs. Soon, they discover the only living colonist, a young girl named Rebecca "Newt" Jordan. Ripley assumes the role of mother and protector to this child—who, interestingly, has survived effectively without the means of weapons or 'adult supervision' despite the alien infestation. Bundzten argues this relationship "is dangerously attractive in the way that it revises the myth of Demeter and Persephone;" however, rather than celebrating "female fertility and a mother-daughter relationship,"

Ripley represents "an antifertility mother" whereas the Alien Queen demonstrates "the female body's reproductive powers" (17). Indeed, the Alien Queen's mythic significations move beyond that of the primal creator and destroyer.

The Alien Queen, only hinted at in *Alien*, becomes fully realized in *Aliens*. She is the embodiment of the "Monster Mother" Barbara Creed discusses in her essay "The Monstrous Feminine." According to Janice Hocker Rushing, the Alien Queen is

Virgin, Mistress, and Mother simultaneously. She is certainly not a virgin in the patriarchal sense, but in the sense that she is unrelated to and independent of any one male figure. Her consorts are drones, aiding her in her reproductive process and protecting her and her eggs from attack. Shaped like a hulking pelvis with fangs, she is also a frightening open womb, the Devouring Mother at her horrendous best.

(14)

The USCMC refer to their extermination of the aliens as a "bug hunt;" however, these xenomorphs, in particular the Alien Queen, exhibit intelligence and cunning unlike a mere insect. Edwards argues

...in contrast to Hudson's claims they are animals or insects and therefore a legitimate object for culling, the aliens demonstrate sentience, higher brain functions, and even developed emotions. They can communicate, plan and coordinate; they can operate machinery, navigate and negotiate, and make calculated rather than instinctive decisions; and they display a social hierarchy, family feeling in protecting and caring for their young, and personal passion. (107-8)

The question of whom or 'what' is alien recurs often in the series. In *Aliens*, the USCMC

rescue team half-jokingly remarks that they are unable to determine the aliens from the crew in their monitors, further conflating the humans with the alien creatures. In truth, "the opposition stages the narrative working to effect: the difference between the alien mother Ripley (it's not, after all, *her* planet) and the alien Mother Alien (neither is it hers—or his—or its)" (Zwinger 82). Newt brings this difference to Ripley's attention when she asks, "My mommy always said there were no monsters—no *real* ones...Why do they tell little kids that?" (Cameron). Newt never specifies the 'real' monsters; the audience automatically assumes it is the alien xenomorph due to its Otherness.

Arguably, Ripley and the Alien Queen are fighting the same battle—the protection of their children. However, Ripley herself must become something monstrous in order to fight off the Alien Queen through becoming one with the Power Loader exoskeleton and facing the beast.

Many of the film's battles consist of Ripley's 'natural/ good mother' facing off with the Alien Queen, the archaic 'bad mother' and representation of the monstrous feminine. In one scene, USCMC Hudson, along with android Bishop, observes the Alien Queen amongst a nest of eggs. He fears there is "one female that runs the whole show...the mama. She's a bad ass man, I mean big" (Cameron). Michael Davis observes that the signifier of 'mother' begins a new slide at this point. He claims

The slippage is initiated by the presence of Ripley herself in this exchange who is, at this stage in the narrative, *also* running the whole show and who has also become a mother, or at least a surrogate mother, to the tragically orphaned Newt. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, Ripley has effectively displaced the authority of the men around her and has assumed a powerful position *vis-a-vis* the other characters. (251)

Thus, the Alien Queen is now aligned with Ripley. It appears Hudson expresses another fear of feminine power. Davis suggests that the "monstrous imago" of the Alien Queen suggests a "displacement of the unconscious aggression which he and the other marines feel towards Ripley, beneath...the representation of egalitarian gendered authority in the film's imagined future" (251). The Alien Queen represents the "oral-sadistic mother of the pre-Oedipal...the cannibalistic parent" and completely abject (Creed 23). Not only does this 'archaic alien mother' run the show, she destroys what she creates. The establishment of a 'nurturing mother' must occur in order for the narrative to reach a satisfying conclusion.

In *Aliens*, Carter Burke asks Ripley about her daughter left on Earth. This scene, not included in the original release, reveals that Ripley's daughter Amy, who Ripley left when before the daughter's eleventh birthday for the *Nostramo* mission, has died since Ripley left Earth. In the original release, Newt asks Ripley if she had a child and Ripley tells Newt that she has a daughter on Earth. In this version, Ripley never reveals that this child has died; however, it is evident that Ripley has suffered due to the lost opportunity of mothering. Newt reveals her own birth fear in this scene, as her only means of signification for birth has been the monstrous birth of the alien chestbursters:

NEWT: Isn't that how babies come? I mean, people babies...they grow inside you?

RIPLEY: No, it's very different.

NEWT: Did you ever have a baby?

RIPLEY: Yes, I did. I had a little girl.

NEWT: Where is she?

RIPLEY: She's gone.

NEWT: You mean dead. (Cameron)

Newt, having recently lost her family, clings to Ripley; however, Ripley connects to Newt as a means of phallic completion. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan explains

If the mother's desire *is* for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her desire. Thus the division immanent in desire already makes itself felt by the virtue of being experienced in the Other's desire, in that this division already stands in the way of the subject being satisfied with presenting to the Other the real [organ] he may *have* that corresponds to the phallus; for what he has is not better than what he does not have, from the point of view of his demand for love, which would like him to be the phallus. (582)

Like Casey, the doll-head that Newt clings to, Ripley is incomplete without her daughter and clings to Newt. A second-grade citizenship award reveals Newt's real name, Rebecca. However, since this was the name given by the now-dead parents, Newt is given a new name, a reptilian name that aligns her with the aliens that have taken over Hadley's Hope. Furthermore, Ripley's need for completion, in the form of saving Newt from the colony, stems from her guilt in her inability to save her crew on the *Nostramo*, as well as from her latent mothering instincts. These were first applied to the cat Jonesy and now to Newt-- instincts that she was denied when she left Earth and her daughter. This completion comes when Ripley faces the Alien Queen. There lies a symbiotic relationship between the 'good mother' of the upper world, Ripley, and the 'bad mother' of the lower world, the Queen. These mothers face off several times in the lower levels of Hadley's Hope. The Queen is connected to the ship, laying eggs, and protecting her nest. Ripley, with Newt in her arms, silently communicates with the Queen as both

mothers wish to protect their young. Bundtzen notes "Initially Ripley reacts as if they have violated an animal mother's lair, quietly and calmly stepping backwards as if to say, 'I won't bother you and your eggs, if you won't bother me and my child'" (15). At the opening of an egg, Ripley uses the only weapon she knows will destroy the newly-hatched xenomorph-- fire. The Queen screams in agony and detaches herself from the walls. Once part of the landscape of Hadley's Hope, much like the xenomorphs were part of the landscape of the wrecked Derelict on LV-426, she is now a singular fierce Archaic, Pre-Oedipal Mother. The fight for the phallus, in this case Newt, begins at this point. Driven by the same desire to protect their offspring, Ripley must remove the Archaic Mother, the mother that does not require phallic completion, in order to achieve her own completion. At the end of the final battle, once the Alien Queen has been ejected into space, Hicks saves Newt, Ripley, and Bishop. The scene elicits a perfect reestablishment of the hetero-normative familial ideal: Hicks as father, Ripley as mother, and Newt as child.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The films *Alien* and *Aliens* address many questions concerning our fears of moving across boundaries, in particular gender-binary relationships and fears of human and non-human interaction. They also create an atmosphere of fear and dread of the unknown. This fear, inherent in horror, becomes something greater, incomprehensible yet unconsciously familiar, when set in the infinite unknown of space. While the final film reestablishes order from the chaos of space through presenting a traditional family unit, the origin and generation of the alien species always lurks in the margins. There is no way to know for sure if order has been established in infinite space. Science fiction always tests the boundaries of the unknown, lurking within our unconscious, and forces

the viewer to face our unspeakable fears and desires. The suppressed Other emerges as alien, as threats from the unknown, as the residue from our emergence from the Real.

As Žižek explains

...the Real, at its most radical, has to be totally de-substantialized. It is not an external thing that resists being caught in the symbolic network, but the crack within the symbolic network itself. The Real as monstrous Thing behind the veil of appearances is precisely the lure... as in the Joseph Campbell's notion of the monstrous God...some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct. ("Troubles")

One cannot place the monstrous, the alien, and the abject into a realm of signification. By definition, these monsters dwell outside of the Imaginary and Symbolic. And, as the end of the film *Aliens* suggests, any hint of order exists as a façade in the Real of space.

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