

## Women in Film Time: Forty Years of the *Alien* Series (1979–2019)

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### Abstract

Cultural theorists have had much to read into the *Alien* science fiction film series, with assessments that commonly focus on a central female ‘heroine,’ cast in narratives that hinge on themes of motherhood, female monstrosity, birth/death metaphors, empire, colony, capitalism, and so on. The films’ overarching concerns with the paradoxes of nature, culture, body and external materiality, lead us to concur with Stephen Mulhall’s conclusion that these concerns revolve around the issue of “the relation of human identity to embodiment”. This paper uses these cultural readings as an entry point for a tangential study of the *Alien* films centring on the subject of time. Spanning the entire series of four original films and two recent prequels, this essay questions whether the *Alien* series makes that cerebral effort to investigate the operations of “the feminine” through the space of horror/adventure/science fiction, and whether the films also produce any deliberate comment on either the lived experience of women’s time in these genres, or of film time in these genres as perceived by the female viewer.

*Keywords:* Alien, SF, time, feminine, film

## ***Alien* Films that Philosophise**

Ridley Scott's 1979 S/F-horror film *Alien* spawned not only a remarkable forty-year cinema obsession that has resulted in six specific franchise sequels and prequels till date, but also a considerable amount of scholarly interest around the series. The film's lasting impression on 1980's film studies and cultural scholarship in general is matched perhaps only by its generic companion, *Blade Runner* (1982). The sheer volume, breadth and depth of the *Alien* series allows us a wider field of speculation: including Scott's original, the series consists of James Cameron's adventure-war film *Aliens* (1986), David Fincher's brooding psychological thriller *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* (1992), Jean-Pierre Jeunet's dark fantasy *Alien Resurrection* (1997) and two recent prequels by Scott, *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017). The four original films follow the life of a female central character, Lt. Ellen Ripley, as she participates in a series of futuristic events that revolve around 21st century space colonisation and monstrous alien encounters, while the prequels return to a time before Ripley to understand how the organic matter that later becomes the race of aliens, particular to the franchise, came into contact with humans in the first place. My interest in this essay is to think about how time is constructed as a part of the series' narratives, as a thematic focus as well as, from outside, a factor in the longevity of its popularity and production. A specific interest herein is in positing the *Alien* series as a meditation on the oft-discussed subject of women's time.

In the original 1979 *Alien*, a crew aboard a space trading company ship (the Nostromo) are awakened from their cryo-sleep to find their journey automatically diverted to a planet named LV246. Here an alien parasite awaits them with a massive silo of unhatched eggs. The horror of the film (and arguably, the memorable set-piece for its sequels) kicks in with the parasite's penetration of and attachment to a male crewmember, his violent 'pregnancy' and birthing, leading to the presence of the alien on-board. The action revolves around the crew's concerted efforts to kill it while the ship's resident android Ash attempts to preserve it even at the cost of the crew's lives. After a prolonged battle the heroine Ripley gets away in an escape pod with her cat, only to find the alien on board with her. She blasts it into outer space and returns to cryo-sleep in the pod. This general frame of events is repetitively represented in the following sequels; each beginning where the last left off with Ripley asleep in her cryo-pod. In 1986's *Aliens*, Ripley's pod is discovered 57 years later, and she is taken as consultant on board a special assignment to investigate violent events on LV246, where a human colony now resides. The alien species on the planet has multiplied with the presence of an Alien Queen, and subsequently annihilated the human population, all except for a girl child named Newt. Together with the assigned marines, Ripley must guard Newt and escape the planet. Eventually only Ripley, her love-interest Hicks, Newt and the android Bishop escape to safety in their pod. In the next decade's *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>* this pod crashes upon Planet Fiorina 161, a maximum-security penal colony for "YY-chromosomal" hard criminals. An alien egg on-board has hatched and killed Ripley's co-passengers while impregnating her with an alien queen embryo. The pregnant Ripley must battle both the hyper-masculinity of the planet's inhabitants as well as the alien infestation she has brought amongst them. Since she is carrying the alien queen, Ripley's suicide must end the action of this instalment, and she must be cloned anew 200 years later for *Alien Resurrection* (1997). Ripley's clone is developed by scientists to reproduce the 'prized' alien species for defence use. A fourth-generation alien is thus born half-human, while Ripley's new avatar is half-alien. Ripley 2.0 must help a crew of space-pirates rid the facility of the rampaging alien clones as well as the fourth generation humanoid one before they crash land and find themselves safely upon Earth.

We might, as Stephen Mulhall (2002) does, organize the entire conflict of the series around the issues of nature versus culture, nature versus science, or nature versus industry. Mulhall goes as far as to claim that the *Alien* films, because they are discursive exercises themselves, are films that philosophize. A significant proportion of critical analysis centering on the *Alien* series has been marked by feminist enquiry into its themes, provoked not only by the centrality of a female character, but also because images and metaphors in the series are markedly female throughout: the central computer on the Nostromo is named Mother, apart from which the womb-like interior spaces, cryo-sleep pods that “give birth” to their inhabitants at the start of every film, parasitic aliens that make the Host give unnatural births, male mothering/female mothering, egg-laying and the like are the obvious outward images that suggest this. Horror and terror, suspense and action in the films hinge on both the unfamiliarity and repulsion of the excessively female, grotesque images, as well as on the familiar knowledge the audience have of the natural repetitive cycles of birth and death. But does this knowledge only serve to propel the action and reaction in these films or does it provide the series itself with a frame of experience that is different? In this essay, I seek to investigate whether the experience of the female or feminine informs the temporal quality of the series – is the conceptualization and experience of time in any way different in the *Alien* series?

#### Four Types of Women’s Time

The question of time has been a central concern that preoccupies feminist thought in the 20th century and endures in the work of Rita Felski, Sharon Marcus, Elizabeth Grosz and Emily Apter among others in the 21st century. Is the experience of time different for women? What relation does time itself bear with feminine lived experience? How does time figure within the movement of feminist history? What current structures of time must women accept or resist? Do current theoretical notions of time work against women? The *ur*-text among the clamour of responses to these concerns is Julia Kristeva’s seminal article “Women’s Time” (1981) where she proposes that:

...[F]emale subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality ... whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word “temporality” hardly fits: All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space... The fact that these two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity insofar as the latter is thought of as necessarily maternal should not make us forget that this repetition and this eternity are found to be the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones. (pp. 16–17)

Kristeva’s two modalities – cyclical and monumental – go against the contemporary Western notion of time as linear sequence. Against a chronology of time, they present either first, the nature of repetitive time as experienced through gestation and menstruation cycles, birth/death

and other cyclical natural events or second, the gaping maw of incommensurate eternity as emblemized in primitive mother-cult figures that are uncontrollable symbols of excess and infinity. But also, in postmodern thinking we have the notion of time as rupture, or time as new event, a non-linear conceptualization that need not run counter to Kristeva's *Aeminine* modalities. In her update to Kristeva's concepts, Rita Felski (2002) proposes four models of time that women respond to – the four 'R's – 'time as redemption, time as regression, time as repetition, and time as rupture' (p. 21). Felski's first two Rs revolve around optimism and nostalgia: to see time as redemptive is to look hopefully towards a redemptive future, whereas to see it as regressive is to look mournfully back at a golden past. The second two Rs evoke more complex reactions: to see time as a Kristevan repetition or as a postmodern rupture/discontinuity could either evoke serenity or terror, according to Felski. In sum we are left with five possible models of time – monumental/eternal, repetition, redemption, regression, and rupture – of which I find the models of the monumental/eternal, repetition and regression could be read as important temporal themes in the *Alien* series.

Susan Sontag claims that S/F films allow us to "participate in the fantasy of living one's own death and more the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself" (as cited in Byars, 1980, p. 280). She suggests that these films permit us to cope with the simultaneous banality and terror of life and death cycles. Indeed the death of cities and human populations are stock themes in S/F films, where often the disintegration of Earth pushes mankind into the outer reaches of space for living and resources (as in *Alien*, the *Star Trek* series or *Avatar*); where the ruined skylines of modern cities are stock motifs (as in *Blade Runner*, or the *Terminator* series). But if this is a generic norm, then in the *Alien* series we are forced to cope with the horror of a spatio-temporal reality that is somewhat the inverse of big cities, civilization and outer space: the womb-like interior of the maternal body/mothership. This is reflexively acknowledged in the shot of the probe that breaks into the EV Pod carrying Ripley at the start of *Aliens*. It is the same probing camera lens that invades the dark, quiet womb enclosures of the films' spaceships.

...[F]emale subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival – in other words, the time of history. It has already been abundantly demonstrated that this kind of temporality is inherent in the logical and ontological values of any given civilization, that this temporality renders explicit a rupture, an expectation, or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal. (Kristeva, 1981, p. 17)

Science and technology, capitalism and industry are the markers of a positivistic teleology of human history that is in turn the basis of S/F, but it is these very projects that are endangered by the grotesque female excesses of birth and death in the *Alien* films. Similarly, scientific enquiry and its uses for human industry are thought to be the impetus that draws viewers to S/F in the first place, but it is this human attribute that is negatively portrayed in the series. This moral negativity is most obviously conveyed in the plot outlines of the films, where company or governmental missions and projects inevitably come to ruin or are the reasons for tragic action. Always in S/F the hopeful look towards a redemptive future propels the interest of the viewer or the movement of a film's action, but this hope that a new project, a new mission, a radical turn in the page of history will solve humankind's troubles ends in disappointment here. I find that in this way the redemptive model in S/F time is closely associated with the model of rupture. After all, it is a conventionally male heroic impulse that moves positively in the

direction of the new and the transformed that is symbolized in the futuristically designed spaceship hurtling light years towards its unknown destination in space-time. Felski says feminist scholars have long argued against using crisis as an organizing metaphor; questioning what Cornelia Klinger calls the “futile gesture of heroic rupture” (as cited in Felski, 2002, p. 21) they suspect that the fetish for the new originates in an oedipal tendency to see the past as a foe to be vanquished. Felski sees repetition as the enemy in modernity: “It is a sign of dull compulsion, grey routine, the oppressive regimen of natural or man-made cycles. It threatens the existential dream of authentic self-creation by yoking the self to a preordained pattern” (2002, p. 25).

If we take this “existential dream of authentic self-creation” (the goal of modern artistic or scientific creation?) to be the objective of the futile heroic gesture above discussed, we understand why the *Alien* series’ cyclical events and insistence on the feminine betray the goal of the conventional S/F narrative; a goal as primitive as S/F’s prototypical overreachers, Prometheus and Frankenstein. The Prometheus myth and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) (subtitled ‘The Modern Prometheus’) are both proto-S/F narratives of unnatural male mothering, of creation that goes against the eternal human feminine role and consequentially merits punishment. Perhaps then, the *Alien* films are not so unique in their conclusions.

The *Alien* films’ attitude towards the past is largely in tune with Felski’s regressive temporal model. There is undoubtedly a yearning towards the Earthly past and the quiet normalcy of family and society that Ripley and her crew cannot have in space. This is signified most poignantly by the reference to a daughter that Ripley has left behind on Earth in *Aliens*. This daughter is given no mention in *Alien* unless we read her cat Stanley as a displaced daughter-figure, but in the sequel she is an important device to set up Ripley’s desire for a family again. (It could even be argued that it is the viewer’s desire to fix Ripley within a family role as a mother/sexual being that maintains some level of our engagement with the films). The backward glance is also conveyed in the melancholic last shot of *Alien Resurrection*, when Ripley 2.0 and the android Call arrive on an Earth they have never actually seen, sit looking over a ruined Paris skyline, and instantly recognise it and perceive their loss. For Felski (2002) the lost preoedipal mother is the locus of this regressive model, and the civilising process is an alienation from the feminine, which is just what the action of *Alien* suggests. It is ironic, therefore, that a series of films that hark back to a lost maternal core must convey their horror element by making a monstrosity of mothering.

### **Monstrous and Other Mothers**

Several scholars have noted that the *Alien* series locates the monstrous-feminine within the maternal principle. Barbara Creed lists this mother-monster as being everywhere in *Alien*:

She is there in the text’s scenarios of the primal scene of birth and death; she is there in her many guises as the treacherous mother, the oral sadistic mother, the mother as the primordial abyss; and she is there in the film’s images of blood, of the all-devouring vagina, the toothed vagina, the vagina as Pandora’s box; and finally she is there in the chameleon figure of the Alien, the monster as fetish-object of and for the mother. But it is the archaic mother, the reproductive/generative mother, who haunts the *mise-en-scène*. (Creed, 1990, p. 128)

The *Alien* series' mother figures are many and of many kinds: protective and possessive but also violent and destructive to their own (like the Nostromo's Mother), a product of science and culture (like Dr Shaw or the android Call or Ripley 2.0) or unnatural mothers (like the impregnated men). They are also either tiny like Dr Shaw or immeasurably massive like the hulking Alien Queen whose egg sac stretches out like a vast membranous dome from which Ripley and Newt recoil in horror in *Aliens*. The massiveness of the Alien Queen, her egg sac and her innumerable eggs (just a few of the thousands that viewers have seen from the first film to the last) suggest the incomprehensible mass of the feminine eternal – there will always and have always been mothers, just as the all-mother of myth herself is beyond time and the measure of space. From this scheme of things we might tend to disqualify the mechanical Mother of Nostromo, whose functioning is outside of human morality, meriting her the title of “Bitch” from a frustrated Ripley. But in *Aliens*, Ripley will repeat this phrase at the Alien Queen while trying to save Newt, shouting the now infamous “Stay away from her, you bitch!”, implicating both Mother and the Queen in a kind of monstrous fellowship that is unacceptable to Ripley's evaluation – either because it is immoral or because it not human... or because to be immoral *is* to be inhuman.

The films show a variety and hierarchisation in the types of living beings they present. There are in this respect three types of beings in the *Alien* series – humans, aliens and androids (not counting the human-alien hybrids that form later). The latter two are humanoid in that they are the unnatural offspring of human creation or hosting, Frankenstein-like monstrosities that originate from humans but are portrayed as questionable on the scale of what it means to really be human. Stanley Cavell (1979) claims that “only what is human can be inhuman”; perhaps then only the human can be monstrous. With this syllogism he goes on to say that only humans can feel horror and perhaps horror is therefore “the perception of the precariousness of human identity” (as cited in Mulhall, 2002, p. 17). It can be said that in the *Alien* films to be human is to be moral. It is the android Ash's lack of morality in the first film that demarcates him and all androids as taboo and untrustworthy for Ripley. After Ash's betrayal of the Nostromo crew, she is hard pressed to trust the next android she encounters in *Aliens*, Bishop. Bishop and the female android Call of *Resurrection* must both make moral choices in favour of humans and against the company/government wiring in order to be found ‘acceptable’ in Ripley's sight. On the theme of humanoid creations, *Resurrection* takes up the issue of cloning as well, dwelling on the failings of the project and ultimately exposing the limits of the franchise itself.

Cloning is an apt metaphor for the larger temporal framework of the series' production. The endurance and success of the franchise finds its embodiment in the recurring character of Ripley. Fused together in her character are both the cyclical quality of return and the eternal quality of persistence. Even though director David Fincher, in his characteristic search for closure, kills off Ripley in *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, she is cloned and regenerated for a fourth appearance in *Alien Resurrection*. Her persistence is not only a feature of the script, but an external imposition of the presence of Sigourney Weaver as a fixture of the franchise that producers could never quite shake off. (Her vice-like grip over the films' writers and directors and their struggle to keep her on against the wishes of studio bosses is well-documented.) It is interesting to note that, if it were not for the effects of excessive pre-release marketing, one might have taken John Hurt to be the central hero of *Alien*. Stephen Mulhall describes how the opening shots of the Nostromo's crew waking up focus on him, and combined with the instant recognisability of his face and name, it comes as a surprise to the viewer when he is the first character to die in the action. It is not only Ripley who alone endures, but so does her character type: the sterile, celibate mother-figure of the scientific world who resists sexuality both in her choices and her

physical image (Ripley's physical representation as an aggressive, gun-toting heroine has been popularly christened 'Fembo'). Even in his 2012 prequel *Prometheus*, Ridley Scott splits the Ripley-type metaphorically into two separate characters: the tender but sterile Dr Shaw and the aggressive, efficient Vickers. Shaw alone survives the film but only as a ghostly acousmatic voice and cadaver in *Alien: Covenant*, the next film.

One notices a paradox here – that of the depiction of Ripley as both maternal and sterile. This paradox is kept alive in the films by allowing Ripley to 'mother' other characters, protecting her own kind, but at the same time ensuring that she remains fiercely independent and somewhat celibate. Her alter-ego of the Alien Queen provides a fecund, over-reproducing foil against which to analyse Ripley's sterility. While in *Alien* she is untouchably frigid, in *Aliens* Ripley engages in some level of romantic attachment with a male hero-character, Hicks, and together they metaphorically adopt and protect their 'child', the survivor Newt. When this happy trio is destroyed at the start of *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, Ripley starts over as a sexual being: first because she is impregnated with an Alien Queen embryo growing inside her, our/her greatest fear throughout. In a beautiful but exquisitely brief flash of images in his title sequence, Fincher spells out Ripley's doom even before the film begins, but also manages with this flashing brevity to deny the viewer a lasting, memorable image of Ripley's alien impregnation. To me, this mystery almost turns religious, like an immaculate conception, foreshadowing the film's Christian overtones. Unaware of her conception, Ripley becomes the object of desire in the all-male prison camp of Fiorina 616 and is sexually involved with Clemens, the prison medic, before he is killed. In *Resurrection* we encounter a new Ripley, freed of her previous sterility and now the mother of an alien race; she is also an aggressively sexual being because her character has fused with that of the Alien Queen, physically as well as mentally. In *Prometheus*, the duo of female characters, Dr Shaw and Vickers, deviate somewhat from the model Ripley sets up. Dr Shaw, like Ripley, does become pregnant with alien offspring, but by an inversion of events she conceives 'naturally' through intercourse with her infected partner, but delivers 'unnaturally' by conducting a robotic Caesarian section upon herself. Shaw's flawed conception and delivery in *Prometheus* set us up again for the theme of maternal disappointment and horror, following which we find her cadaver being used as genetic raw material (an extreme form of mothering) for the android David's experiments in *Covenant*. In Shaw's absence from *Alien: Covenant*, the role of sterile woman is transferred to a new character: Daniels, who is widowed by and from the initial few moments of action in the film.

### Repeating Ripley/Eternal Ripley

The persistent all-mother figures of Ripley and the Alien Queen often mirror and parallel each other until they finally fuse in the cloning experiments of *Resurrection*. What is important is that the films, though not linked by a unified directorial vision, nonetheless create a movement of progress, a process of development of Ripley's character. She must go from sterile Fembo to pseudo-mother to the nurturing, protective biological mother of the last two films. However, it is as if director Jeunet inscribed his own critique of the franchise into the concerns of the last film. In resurrecting a new Ripley and Queen for a fourth instalment, Jeunet exhausts the creative potential of the two beings, both as mothers and as successful film characters. The new Ripley is not half as engaging as the old and some might balk at the thought of a fifth sequel starring her. In a sense, the real-world bounded-ness of an actresses' career comes to impact the 200-year span of her character. I think this highlights the contradiction that even while a film franchise can make a female character eternal, it cannot undo the irreversible ageing of its female star, or the distaste that is conventionally tied with the ageing female body in

commercial cinema. Furthermore, I would suggest that the dogged reappearance of Sigourney Weaver in the franchise began to erode its popularity by creating a sense of cyclical redundancy, a thirst for something or someone new. The Ripley character might transcend the time of the franchise but the immanence of the female body ties the actress down.

Repetition is linked to the everyday, and the everyday to woman. For feminists, this connection can be a problem or a source of strength. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, laments the fact that women are mired in the repetitive tasks of everyday life. "Woman," she writes, "clings to routine; time has for her no element of novelty, it is not a creative flow; because she is doomed to repetition, she sees in the future only a duplication of the past." Here, repetition is a sign of women's association with immanence rather than transcendence. Unable to create or invent, she remains trapped in the deadly grip of cyclical time. (Felski, 2002, p. 25)

After presenting the core argument of this paper to a postgraduate class, one student (who admitted she had not seen the films) complained that the repetitive structure of the franchise's plot sounded "boring". Indeed, if summed up in five minutes it does sound like a banal cycle, the routine quality of which we abhor as feminine, everyday and restrictive in its creative possibilities. It is this abhorrence that marks the male attitude both as audience and as characters within the films. As much as the films' overarching themes might seem to highlight the feminine and create space for it within the S/F genre, the inner victimizations of its women characters run another trajectory. Yes, Ripley does manage always to survive death, but apart from the combative action-figure role, she is allowed a very restricted freedom of speech in the series. Many scholars have pointed out the regressively patriarchal quality of Ripley's verbal output, from her operation within male mechanical work ethics to her co-option within the patriarchal language of derogation when she uses the term "bitch".

Verbal excess and melodrama have always been associated with the feminine in psychoanalysis and cinema history. There is only a fine line between the words 'histrionics' and hysteria, and in modern psychoanalysis, hysteria has always been associated with the feminine. Kristeva says that the "obsessional time" of the hysteric who suffers from reminiscences correlates more to the cyclical and monumental modalities (Kristeva, 1981, p. 17). For her, the hysteric is pointedly outside of linear time and all its rules – the syntax of language and sequence of history. It has often been argued that the silencing of the hysteric is the normative fate of women in narrative, and this is no different in the plotlines of the *Alien* films. In the second and third instalments, there is heavy emphasis on Ripley's verbal accounts of events now past and their repeated discrediting by the Company/government. The only sanctioned version of the films' history is the product of official communication and computer logs, company records and official statements. So, when Ripley produces a testimony of events in *Aliens*, she is called crazy and false. Later in the film, company officer Brooks physicalizes this silencing abuse by shutting her and Newt in a sound-proof lab to die, where their shouts for help cannot be heard. By the time of *ALIEN<sup>3</sup>*, Ripley has internalized the official response to her spoken accounts and is wary of producing information. She has to constantly be asked, prodded for information and is loath to provide because she knows she will be called crazy again. There is apparently no space in official history and time records for the truth statements of the lingering female witness figure. This might be why little Newt's response to events is usually only a scream.

This conscription makes apparent the conflict between female and male subjectivity that the films carry out. The denial and resistance of the feminine that is systematic to the capitalist



science and industry that creates *Alien*'s human world is the root of its repeated failure to conquer space. Of course, that is what we expect science fiction films to do: like *Star Trek*, to go where no man has gone before. But wherever the crews of these films go, they encounter death, defeat and escape. This could suggest that the overarching view of the franchise is that the incommensurate mass of space and time is not something that can be accessed if we deny the symbolic familiar of eternity, the Mother.

In his 2010 lecture on eternity and time, Alain Badiou proposes several possible philosophical models by which to access eternity, of which the first model is that of the mystical experience. I liken this mystical point in time that Badiou describes to the moment of birth/creation. For Badiou, this experience is the possibility to recognise an immediate relationship between the pure present and eternity, in which we recognise eternity in the pure present itself. At this moment, there is a fusion of two levels, like the presence of God in the immediate present – a moment often mythologized in religion as either annunciation (fusion of human and divine) or the birth of monstrosity. (Kristeva too points at the annunciation of the Virgin Mary as typical of this.) For Badiou the creation of this moment is the creation of new time, a moment of absolute freedom in which we glimpse Truth and experience an interruption of the dictatorship of the outside/world. The moment something is created, the birth of the thing is the birth of something eternal, he says (as cited in EGS Video Lectures, 38:01). In Badiou's vision, the modalities of the eternal and rupture are fused at the moment of birth.

It would seem, then, that in the *Alien* series, the moment of birth is proffered as a replacement for the masculine heroic impulse of the S/F film. The multiple birth sequences repeatedly offer a glimpse of eternity, but by turning these births monstrous in the viewer's eyes, we and the characters are denied that glimpse, denied that participation in a moment of absolute possibility, a moment of total creation. Ripley herself, though implicated within this frame, will repeatedly turn away too.

In *ALIEN<sub>3</sub>*, in fact, David Fincher suffuses a religious tone to the overall narrative itself, not only with the violent conception scene of the title sequence that I have already discussed, but also by portraying a radical Christian sect within the penal colony of Fiorina 161 that is waiting for its apocalypse and redemption, but yet fail to recognize the Mother Mary-like character of Ripley when she comes amongst them. Fincher's narrative arc being already closed by our foreknowledge of Ripley's death, we are forced to concentrate on the significance of redundancy and banality as characters live and die before us and an elaborate plan is laid out to trap and kill the intruding alien. The elaboration of the plan and its execution in fact mirror the drawing out of the same events film after film but tellingly highlight the brevity of the opening sequence where the real "action" took place. The prison's pastor-figure Dillon reminds us, as he prays over the interment of Hicks and Newt, that "within each seed there is the promise of a flower; within each death, no matter how small, there is always a new life, a new beginning". As Ripley plunges into the fire at her death, we glimpse the Alien Queen bursting forth from her but then both vanish in the engulfing flames. Still, we know from Dillon's reminder that the two life-forms will find renewal in a fourth instalment, and once again we will be given the chance to participate in the possibilities of the eternal.

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