

Seeing the xenomorph, Giger's alien in the context of machinic modernism

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ABSTRACT

This article contextualizes H. R. Giger's influential alien designs and the extended Alien mythos, represented by the popular films, with what has been called machinic modernism. That twentieth-century aesthetic is examined here in fine artworks and related literature by artists with distinct relations to so-called desired dehumanization, including Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein and Michael Ayrton. The research outlines the ways in which particular social forces cohere to influence common aesthetic decisions evidenced in the art practices discussed. The analysis indicates that an anti-humanist position is incubated in the alien designs and in the extended mythos, and how this is politicized in relation to ideas of heroism, leadership and social organization as proto-fascistic. The designation 'proto-fascist' in this article is not intended to defame the creatives involved in the creation of the Alien mythos, or the audiences that have enjoyed and engaged with it – of which the author is a part – rather, it is used to describe a common world-view, and a type of fantasy operational in many nationalistic narratives and aesthetics, and widely consumed by the public. It is an aim of the research, in exploring the problematic but compelling aspects of the Alien mythos, that what is later described as fealty to primitive and atavistic patterns in popular culture can be resisted in the name of a reflexive and complex subjectivity.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Michael Eden is a visual artist, researcher and writer at the University of Arts London exploring relationships between monstrosity, subjectivity and landscape representation. Eden employs theories and representations of eeriness and flux as critiques of returning fascistic right-wing ideologies, identified in overt political discourse and implicit in much popular culture. Eden obtained his Ph.D. from Middlesex University where his project ranged across various disciplines: contemporary art criticism and its relationship to histories of modernism, medieval literature, theories of landscape and space, notions of national myth making and monster studies: bringing these together through the lens of art practice.

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INTRODUCTION

This article, explores an interpretation of the alien or xenomorph, concentrating on the first two films of the franchise, *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (Cameron 1986); taking in the designs of H. R Giger, *Necronom IV* (1976) – the original inspiration for the xenomorph – and *Alien III*¹ (1978): representative of the final concept design used in the films (Figures 1 and 2). With the forthcoming release of *Alien: Romulus*, this research is intended as a timely contribution to the literature around the artistic and ideological legacy of the Alien franchise. The analysis represents a particular concern with proto-fascism, salient in the contemporary moment and film’s ability to perpetuate problematic tropes in the form of contemporary iterations of the mythic that are considered to bolster proto-fascist attitudes in alluring aesthetic ways. It is argued that Giger’s concept for the alien, which is key in all the related films that feature the monster, should be understood in the context of other artists who explored armoured aggression, zoomorphism and what has been called a ‘desirable dehumanisation’, enacted to become a ‘contemporary manifestation of an atavistic masculinity’ following key shifts in social organization (Tickner 2000: 112, 87). Those changes include the general de-centring of man in the ‘Copernican turn’ (Foster 2004: 110), breakdowns in traditional class and gender hierarchies – levelling politics – due to humanist concepts of equality and increasing mechanization and industrialization effecting social relations. There was also a considerable blow to optimism for modernity due to the First World War and the Second World War: these are the macro-forces of concern to the practices discussed here.



Figure 1: H. R. Giger, *Necronom IV*, 1976. Acrylic on paper on wood. 100 cm × 150 cm. © Estate H. R. Giger.

¹ Where I refer to *Alien III* this is the artwork by Giger, where I refer to *Alien*³ I am referencing the film by David Fincher.



Figure 2: H. R. Giger, *Alien III, Side View III*, 1978. Acrylic on paper. 140 cm × 100 cm. © Estate H. R. Giger.

The context in which Giger's work is placed here includes the Tyro, a figure conceived and depicted by Wyndham Lewis, the intimidating armoured figure from the sculpture *Rock Drill* (1913) and the associated work *Female Figure in Flenite* (1913) by Jacob Epstein, and the related figures depicted by Michael Ayrton, namely his Oracle and Talos images and sculptures. Those figures can all be called monstrous and are linked by a concern with phallic power – which manifests in common aesthetic ways – as well as being related to strict hierarchy, sexualized violence and ambiguous zoomorphism, all features that the xenomorph has. It is therefore argued that the alien must be considered alongside those other fine art expressions of the same forces, since 'the very stake of high Modernism at this time involves wagers with reification and death' (Foster 2004: 149). This is the idea that the proper response to dehumanization in modernity is a physical and mental hardening, an 'embrace of animal mechanisms' which is anti-humanist (Stevenson 2020: 1416) defined by a predatory attitude that dominates with violence; described as both zoomorphic and 'machinic' in character (Foster 2004: 110). In that approach, the human as survival-machine is animalistic in order to thrive. Stevenson, in relation to Lewis's practice, explains that such an antihumanism prefers the body to the mind (2020: 1408). Lewis's Tyros emphasize demonstratable physical potency, as does Epstein's *Rock Drill* (1913) which Lewis praised (1915: 78), before Epstein mutilated it in defiance of his previous sympathies.

In relation to 'desirable dehumanisation', Lewis, Epstein and Ayrton are illuminating because they can be said to represent distinct attitudes; Lewis being for this position throughout his artistic career, Epstein engaging and then rejecting that position following the First World War – a turbulence which is materialized in his damaging of the original *Rock Drill* (1913) – and Ayrton who explored dehumanization as problematic through the prism of Daedalus. Looking through the complex and reflexive prism of Ayrton's construction of Daedalus in his novel *The Maze Maker* (1967) allowed him distance from the compelling pull from both heroism and its agonistic conditions: monstrosity and dehumanization.

Each of those artists are specifically linked with the macro-forces in modernity mentioned above; for example, Lewis's Tyro figures, where his 'anti-humanism held sway', are seen as a reaction to traumatic upheavals that disrupt traditional hierarchies, gendered and class relations as well as the forces that emerged as stabilizing following war, 'corporatisation' and 'industrial rationalisation' (O'Donnell 2020: 83, 78). The Tyros represent a predatory iteration of social mobility, and their threatening grin is an aggressive consequence of the culturally unprocessed trauma of war, as well as their inert animality reanimated. Epstein's imposing sculpture *Rock Drill* (1913) is linked to Taylorism and responds to mass industrialized modernity and his experience working with heavy machinery (Willette 2016). In its triumphalist first iteration, astride the eponymous drill, the human-like form, violently dominates the environment with its phallic instrument. Finally, in Ayrton's *The Maze Maker* (1967) – in which the depicted Oracle and Talos figures appear – that world is an 'analogue to the industrial organisation of modern times' (Davie 2004: 75) and Ayrton is concerned generally with modern iterations of power, oppression and the Second World War (Appendix 1). Giger's xenomorph exists in a world dominated by a corporation and its business interests that are highly ambivalent about human life, reflecting the same anxieties around corporatization.

PROTO-FASCIST PARABLES

The Alien franchise is extremely popular and has produced five subsequent films directly related to the original *Alien* (1979). These comprise *Aliens* (1986), a third film, *Alien³* (1992), and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), which all feature the character Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), as well as *Prometheus* (2012), and *Alien: Covenant* (2017) which deal with the origins of the xenomorph and include female leads with similar attributes to Ripley. A stand-alone film, *Alien: Romulus* is planned for 2024 (upgraded recently to have a full theatrical release) and other secondary films such *Alien vs. Predator* (2004) and *AVPR: Aliens vs. Predator – Requiem* (2007) attest to how potent the fascination for the xenomorph is in contemporary popular culture. In the context of repeated viewing, and consistent popularity with audiences, the nature of that fascination is questioned, especially since the aesthetic of the xenomorph established by Giger, specific visual spectacles and persistent narrative patterns present in *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) recur throughout the films.

This article aims to establish that the alien mythos is an ever expanding proto-fascistic parable, which is primarily concerned with the reorganization of social relations around a heroic individual, this is, in effect, what the emergence of the xenomorph achieves narratively speaking. Additionally, the article will address the aesthetic of the alien, and many of the visual and cinematic sequences that have bolstered other interpretations: attempting to show how even the most strangely grotesque events are also bound to fascistic logic. A link between the practices of Epstein with Giger is made in Quema (2004), highlighting general anti-humanist aesthetics:

Giger in particular, and the Gothic in general, belong to the twentieth century trend of anti-humanist representation of identity. This iconoclastic project has its roots in early European avant-gardism so that Epstein's *Rock-Drill* [...] and Giger's biomechanoids are part of the same genealogy.

Additionally, to Quema, the inclusion of *Rock Drill* (1913) alongside the work of Giger occurs in Borst (2009) as examples of posthumanism, specifically the merging of machine and human. Furthermore, Gilfedder (2021: 44) asserts briefly that Lewis can be seen as a forerunner of Giger's aesthetic, where humans engage in a sexualized 'communion' with machines.

PROTO-FASCISM AND MYTHMAKING

Rather than a prerequisite, or a first step towards a fully fascist or totalitarian subjectivity, analysis reveals the proto-fascist position as one that, despite its turbulent manifestations, is a position itself, which is popular and far reaching. Furthermore, that it is a position maintained in resistance to representations of fascism proper, which justifies hero worship, the valorization of violence and the call-to-arms rhetoric in proto-fascism. Additionally, that it is an ideology in direct opposition to liberal humanist and democratic forms of organization and subjectivity. Relevant qualities of proto-fascism include 'aggression, elitism, racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny' and archaism (Peppis 2009: 1). Furthermore, there is a reliance on fixity, order and fantasies of permanence. In the alien mythos, there is no blatant anti-Semitism, rather the paranoia of the social body being infiltrated by traitors – Ash in *Alien*, Burke in *Aliens*, Golic in *Alien³*, Wren in *Alien: Resurrection* and David in both *Prometheus*

and *Alien: Covenant* – this allows for an ethnically non-specific version of that foundational fascistic paranoia to contrast the people led by Ripley and her predecessors. The hierarchical ordering in proto-fascism is a result of the conviction that superiority is innate and belongs to exceptional people (Spackman 2008: 80), represented in the alien mythos by Ripley and those survivors who become bonded in conflict. Relative to subjectivity, proto-fascism is a reactive position (Jameson [1979] 2008: 184; Stocker 2015: 46); for Prince (2023: 74), the rise of modern fascisms is linked directly to idealized constructions with a mythic emphasis since, in part, ‘myths were created to advance and justify domination of the other’ (2023: 71). Prince goes on to argue that fascistic myths touch features that are ‘primitive, and fundamental in human longing, hatred, and fear’ (2023: 72); that they are replete with a sense of rage, violence and a feeling of paranoid victimization. Additionally, he argues that they are primarily concerned with a central leader and with passions, rather than making sense, and that these constructed realities ‘demand fealty’ which give rise to ‘an attitude of mind’ (Prince 2023: 74, 76). Of particular interest in this analysis is prompting the reader to consider the possibility that our repeated viewing and the continued popularity of the Alien franchise may be ‘fealty’ to a fascistic mythos that stages tragi-heroic confrontations between a fascistic monster and a proto-fascist heroine to justify the latter’s replacing of a flawed hierarchy which stands for our normality – a multicultural and democratic organization – where, in the films logic, the weak are indulged, the treacherous remain undiscovered and the incapable are promoted to leadership.

Vilfredo Pareto’s theory of ‘the circulation of elite[s]’ in *The Mind and Society* (1935: n.pag.) is useful in accounting for proto-fascist qualities and the function served by fascistic mythmaking. Pareto was influential on the fascism of Mussolini, viewing democratic ideas as fraudulent (Di Scala and Gentile 2016: 21, 86, 198). The idea of ‘the circulation of elite’ is one which sees human civilization develop via the honing and domination of an elite caste that replaces an established, but degraded, elite that has failed to make space for exceptional individuals. The ‘great man theory’ of history attributed to Thomas Carlyle in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, originally published in 1841 (see Carlyle 2008: n.pag.) is also useful in understanding this phenomenon (where the hero is the emergent leader of the new elite). Keshishyan (2021: 2) and Landa (2012: 162) both link Pareto and Carlyle to the notion of ‘elites’ as essential to good governance. It stands to reason that defining the character of an ideal leader should fall, in some part, to popular culture and the arts: This article asserts that the alien mythos serves this purpose: a rite of survival for atavistic notions without a specific real-life champion in mind.

A further result of asking the reader to consider the above also has implications for the ways we might see Ripley as a progressive figure, a strong woman in a world of men and/or the ways we might intellectualize the alien as a returned repression of the feminine, for example, or a category crisis that forces us to confront some underlying truth of our unknowable subjectivity. Alternatively, such framings might actually provide many of us with palatable rationalizations that allow us to deny the fundamental wish fulfilment at the core of the Alien franchise, that being: we enjoy watching the hapless crews, with their petty complaints about work, their narcissism and self-regard, and their lack of surety in their leaders – but continued obedience for remuneration – pay the ultimate price for being cogs in a morally degraded social world. When they are ripped apart by the apoplectic alien(s), we can take comfort in the familiar outline of a beautiful, but resourceful, athletic and morally strong woman whose

bonds with others are formed in the fire-and-brimstone of violent struggle, and in who we can project our longing for any number of idealized female icons, from Boudica to Britannia and beyond.

Following an initial outline of the proto-fascist and patriarchal anatomy of the alien, given below, in relation to the artist examples, the article will address Barbara Creed's canonical text, *The Monstrous-Feminine, Film Feminism Psychoanalysis* (1993), in detail. That text is highly influential and differs from the reading of the alien given here, allowing for opportunities to highlight this argument. A key difference is the emphasis placed here on what are problematically called 'traditional' qualities of femininity: self-absorption, reflexivity, naturalistic representation, softness in psychic and physical nature, and adaptability to change. Tickner (2000: 114) and Stevenson (2020: 1405) give accounts of those qualities linked to the feminine and to humanism, which is rejected in the machinic modernism and to which it is argued here Giger's alien belongs. This rejection is made in favour of the brutal, the harsh and the mechanical. For Creed, the emphasis is the female reproductive body that is made monstrous in patriarchal narratives, essentially the fear of woman as castrating other. My analysis suggests that the alien is a vanishing mediator – the castrating other is just a tool of macro-forces – that focuses fascistic and phallic qualities into a defining force that works through humans and defines them according to proto-fascist values.

Another canonical text which my claims here differ from is Cohen's and his emphasis on the xenomorph as a category crisis, where the aliens are defined as 'disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions' (1996: 5–6). This article claims that, rather than smashing distinctions, the alien acts to define and sure up a proto-fascist subjectivity. Cohen's writing is convincing and insightful regarding monstrosity, but his analytical lens is deconstructionist, through which all outlines and symbolic parts are seen to dissolve and are viewed separately (1996: 4–6, 15, 16). As a result, the coherent form that the alien makes – phallic-fascistic vanishing mediator – is obscured by multifarious detail.

MACRO-FORCES GIVING FORM TO A COMMON AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY

The following analysis will examine some of the common aesthetic strategies in examples of the art practices of Giger, Lewis, Epstein and Ayrton, and explain more about the distance we can get from their allure by using Ayrton's practice as a key. In an article on Ayrton's *Maze Maker* (1967), the critic Donald Davie states that 'a fable [...] [has a] single purpose and the novel [...] is multifarious and complex' (Davie 2004: 64). This is one way that Ayrton is useful in understanding the rationale behind the aesthetic decisions of the practices discussed and in resisting the totemic pull of the resulting monstrosities. This is because the Oracle and Talos figures, as well as the heroic figures and gods in *The Maze Maker* that are seen as relevant to the alien mythos, are understood in the round through the prism of a sceptical and nuanced construction – in that case, Daedalus. The result of that prism is that the mytho-heroic single purpose of heroes and monsters is exposed to other ways of seeing. Davie observes Ayrton's construction of Daedalus as being directly connected to Ayrton's own concerns and as being 'introspective, complex and changeable' (Davie 2004: 76); opposed to heroes, who in Daedalus's words, 'refuse to die and therefore will not change' (Ayrton 1967:

155). Moreover, Daedalus notes that heroes are disdainful of others, are arrogant (Ayrton 1967: 115) and the most common type is murderous, where killing is their 'principal demonstration of power' (Ayrton 1967: 243):

Daedalus: Since I am beset by my own personality I am better off [than heroes]. I prefer cognition to revelation and in my view the valiant act is to live as long and as fully as possible, but then I make things which take time. Honour lasts longer if it is gained by patience rather than by some noble gesture rapidly made (Ayrton 1967: 137).

This attitude is possible in Daedalus, according to Ayrton scholar and art historian Justine Hopkins, because:

Daedalus himself acts in some sense as a focus of both male and female power – he is a man, with a man's understanding of the world. But he is also a maker – a creator not a destroyer and so aligned with the feminine rather than the masculine (Appendix 1).

This suggests that Daedalus is a character whose interiority includes the complex tensions, inclusive of the traditionally feminine qualities, that are being eroded in machinic modernism. Although Ayrton's visual works possess similar features to Giger's alien and the examples drawn from Lewis and Epstein, evidenced below, they are tinged with a tragic absurdity, rather than a tragic heroicness, or, in the case of Lewis's Tyros, a totemic aggressivity. Ayrton's other way of seeing these visual strategies means that his renderings of the Oracles or Talos are pained, ridiculous and humane. The power that makes all the examples discussed monstrous is linked, in Ayrton, to a withering lack of agency, which makes his approach more compelling than even Epstein's self-criticism, whereby he attacked his original sculpture following the Battle of the Somme (1916) – because he was disgusted by its triumphant seeming stature in regard to machinic subjectivity – in so doing, he granted the object an agonistic authority that in Ayrton's work was always absent.

A striking visual resonance between both Epstein's *Rock Drill* (1913) and Giger's *Necronom IV* (1976) is the elongated head of Ayrton's Oracle figures; we see this in both *Oracle (Large Version)* (1963–64) (Figure 3) and *Oracle I* (1964) (Figure 4), where the seated female figures are physically and psychically defined by gendered authority. Nyenhuis describes why Ayrton makes this choice:

here the artist examines how the oracle's head begins to break up under the stress of receiving the god's message. Shown at the point just before utterance, the oracle is represented as having the words forced through her lips. There is a consequent distention of the face and head (Nyenhuus 2003: 105).

This reading of Ayrton's Oracle images helps us appreciate that elongation of the head is not only a type of zoomorphism, but an abstraction caused by sexed authority moving through and defining form. These common features, lack of individual agency, zoomorphism, armoured surfaces and physical strength coupled with phallic representations of female figures, are all visual indicators of a shared concept of dehumanization as caused by hyper-masculine power. 'I his woman, am straddled open to him here in the earth and yet he never leaves his ordained circling of the world. He wears me round his sex as you wear your serpent emblem around your wrist' (Ayrton 1967: 213–14).

Above Deiphobe, an Oracle, describes her relationship with the voice of Apollo, a power that moves through her, as it does it changes her form. Metaphorically, it seems to say that individuals have minimal agency to comport to macro-forces. The Oracle in Ayrton's novel makes little resistance and is phallicized by gendered authority. As a result, her form has similarities to Giger's *Necronom IV* (1976) (Figure 1), an exaggerated humanoid with an armoured surface and blank resistant face, as if standing against some terrible entropy:



Figure 3: M. Ayrton, Oracle (Large Version), 1963–64. © Estate of Michael Ayrton.

There was no woman. There was a brazen, extended throat rising from a drum which had become part of the tripod cauldron. It was an entity, boneless as a snake but ridged as metal standing upright on tripod tangs. This image, topped by a head as featureless as an axeblade (Ayrton 1967: 219).

This is what the beautiful woman Deiphobe becomes, analogous narratively to the xenomorph's victims from *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986), who begin as people and become vessels for the monster that combines their DNA with alien biology: a sci-fi-horror version of Ayrton's mytho-religious communion with abstract authority. In such a way, femininity is rendered as phallic (a conduit for male power and reproduction). Subsequently, escape from such power is eliminated as femininity is seen not as an alternative way of seeing or ordering the world, but as a fully supporting scaffold to phallic power.



Figure 4: M. Ayrton, Oracle I, 1964. © Estate of Michael Ayrton.

Armoured surfaces as the result of physical and mental hardening are aspects of all the examples given, which link Giger's gleaming exoskeletal forms to Ayrton's Talos and Oracle figures, Epstein's *Rockdrill* (1913) and *Female Figure in Flenite* (1913) (discussed below) and Lewis's Tyros. Lewis's Tyro figures particularly celebrate surfaces (Figure 5). Tyros are

demonic seeming and totemic representations of man; Lewis characterizes Tyros as having ‘abominable nature[s]’ and as ‘religious explosions of laughing elementals’ that are aggressive and powerful (Lewis 1921: 2). They are seen as ‘imperious but mechanical’ (Tickner 2000: 106) and are associated with the root meaning of Tyro as ‘beginning soldier or recruit’, linked to Lewis’s desire to fight cultural battles (Klein 2004: n.pag.). Their form is influenced by insectoid ferocity – Lewis praises beetles with ‘hideously carved detestable masks [for faces]’ (Klein 2004: n.pag.) – a form of ‘desirable dehumanisation’ (Tickner 2000: 112) that Lewis identifies with as the provider of ‘seeds’ (Lewis 1921: 2). Their distinct grin is a sexualized grimace: for Quema, the grin conflates animal aggressivity with cannibalism related to sex, where women are devoured (1999: 108). There is a strong link here with the *Necronom IV* (Figure 1) and the alien generally, in the form of salivating shows of teeth combined with outer hardness, and with the idea of intercourse rendered violent. On the issue of cannibalism, xenomorphs are partly human; incubated in their host and influenced in form by the species they use parasitically, that feature of their behaviour prompts the traitorous Ash (Ian Holm) to refer to the xenomorph as ‘Kane’s son’ in *Alien* (1979).



Figure 5: W. Lewis, *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros)*, 1920–21. Courtesy of National Galleries of Scotland.

Tyro society, which is outlined in an unpublished manuscript by Lewis called ‘Hoodopip’ (1924–25 unpublished), is the subject of O’Donnell’s article where he describes Tyro society as strictly hierarchical and militaristic. O’Donnell is clear that Lewis is ‘allied’ with Tyros and argues that while ‘conflicted’ Lewis’s ‘anti-humanism held sway’ (2020: 83), favouring strict stratification of types drawing from his essentialism to imagine a ‘harmonious social order’ (2020: 81). The organization of the xenomorph’s social structure is clearly hierarchical and thus more effectively violent, both collectively and individually, than the flawed crews that are decimated. The xenomorph in *Alien* (1979) behaves like a conflation of an animal predator and a lone soldier, while in *Aliens* (1986), they behave like an army in service to a greater authority: the alien queen. It is emphasized here that not in spite, but because of these qualities, Ripley is ever more closely related to the creature: ‘the purpose is finally an exposure of the distressing aspects of the phallic ideal represented in the triumphant Ripley, an ideal initially embodied in the Alien creature itself, the Imaginary Other whose position she ultimately assumes’ (Torry 1994: 344). Torry’s argument overall is excepting of the phallic status of the xenomorph, of Ripley and of the subjectivity it affirms, ‘that of armed and armoured phallic warrior’ (1994: 348) which is anti-humanist, and he also sees the alien as having a ‘phallic coherence’ (1994: 359), a characteristic this research applies to all examples given. The alien focuses phallic sensibilities with a proto-fascist idea of social mobility (where existing leaders are replaced by new and preferred heroic forms).

Regarding the human-like qualities that are focused by the abstraction of monstrous forms: in *A Reading of Ovid (Tyros)* (1920–21), we see two Tyros in conversation (Figure 5). What is typical in their depiction to all of Lewis’s Tyro figures is the sharp sculptural facets of the face, an intense stare and animal grimace. They are engaging with ‘Ovid’ in a lurid way, mockingly, in contrast to an introspective, bourgeois or connoisseurial reading. Their Reading of Ovid as ballast for bawdy sexist talk is a subversive (albeit obscene) comradeship and there are parallels to this depicted scene in *Alien* (1979) where Parker (Yaphet Kotto) and Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) joke about women, complain about remuneration and scheme regarding their place in the hierarchy of the crew. Furthermore, in *Aliens* (1986), the soldiers share sex stories, sexist jokes, complain about their pay and mock their superiors: in Tyro society, O’Donnell explains the lower castes experience a ‘confused desire for the life of the [ruling caste]’ (2020: 84) and that this is the basis for comedy. It is from those groupings that Ripley draws her recruits that form the band of worthies that replace the existing weak leadership in each film and go on to fight the creatures – those who, in the film’s logic, possess a kernel of animal vitality. As an outlier to this logic, Lambert (Veronica Cartwright) of *Alien* (1979), who is clearly hysterical and introspective, does survive into Ripley’s leadership but is, as a result, raped to death in an infamous scene by the alien in a hyperbolic iteration of the exception proving the rule.

Epstein’s *Rock Drill* (1913) (Figure 6) offers a more morbidly serious iteration of the ‘desired dehumanisation’ discussed than Lewis’s laughing elementals. The figure is an imposing image of the union of human and machine, conceived by Epstein during a period defined by ‘themes of sex and procreation [...] [combining] violently’ (Tate Gallery Report 1975: n.pag.). For example, ‘the drill protrudes from between the legs and suggests an enormous mechanical phallus’ (Walker 2019: 164) which in turn genders the earth it penetrates, violently, as female. Like Giger’s xenomorph, *Rock Drill* (1913) is a coherently phallic form. Further analogous visual features to the alien include the extended head, blank metallic-like

face and armoured ribcage acting as exoskeletal shell. As aforementioned, it is also a result of Epstein's initial response to mass industrialized modernity, corporatization and Taylorism (see Willette 2016), his 'ardour for machinery' (Epstein 1940: 56). Later following the sculptures partial destruction by Epstein (Figure 7), the dehumanization had taken on a darker less triumphal feeling:

I made and mounted a machine-like robot visored, menacing and carrying within it its progeny, protectively ensconced. Here is the armed sinister figure of today and tomorrow. No humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into (Epstein in Walker 2019: 164).



Figure 6: J. Epstein, Reproduction of 'The Rock Drill' at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1913–15. Courtesy of The New Art Gallery Walsall Archives.



Figure 7: Unknown, Black and White Photograph of Jacob Epstein with 'The Rock Drill', 1913–15, c.1952. Courtesy of The New Art Gallery Walsall Archives.

Gormley, reflecting on the subjectivity announced in *Rock Drill* (1913) describes 'a form of becoming with unknown completion' (2009: n.pag.). It is in characters such as Ripley where oscillations around this becoming are explored, and where she, in line with the theme of toughened surface and phallic potency, key to all the above examples, is figured in *Alien* (1979) donning a space suit and wielding a harpoon, and in *Aliens* (1986) encased in the robotic loader which acts as both protective second skin and a weapon. Such an image of armoured heroism is directly problematized by Ayrton's Talos figure. Ayrton explores this figure in *The Maze Maker* (1967), as well as in sculpture and drawings. Talos was 'a great metal worker' who has transformed himself 'into the metal work he makes' merging and enlarging himself with a second skin while losing his mind and becoming a kind of automaton, 'an armoured figure like a bronze fortress' (Ayrton 1967: 108, 111). The description that Daedalus gives following his attempts to communicate with Talos serves as a withering perspective on intimidating marshal prowess, rendering that iconic sight ridiculous:

The thing shook a long spear in its covered right hand and made a great combination of noises, a clanking of bronze and creaking of leather combined with hoarse war cries which came from behind its clenched teeth. Those teeth and the bearded lips were the only parts of the whole which were visibly human, and the mouth was set to a rictus grin which reduced that humanity and would have chilled the blood but for a sort of idiotic cordiality registered in the grimace (Ayrton 1967: 109).

In Ayrton's sculptures and drawings of this figure, there is an anonymity to the head and use of awkward proportions that lessen the figure's sense of threat (Figure 8); while his busts of Talos show the violent merging of the head with the helmet, such as *Talos Armed Head II* (Figure 9) which includes a mounted projectile (which is also present in *Talos, Armed Head I* 1954). Talos can serve us as a caveat to all the weaponized forms discussed and is particularly relevant to the alien and the Tyro, where a dehumanizing grin is also present on the exoskeletal surfaces. As mentioned above, the armoured-hero archetype that Ripley represents in her closing combat with the aliens of both films is the closest we get visually to a direct equivalence between Ripley and the alien. It needs only a nudge to turn an armoured human into a metaphor for physical and mental rictus.

Finally, returning to elongation of the throat and head in Ayrton's Oracle images, there is a breakdown in differentiation between where the throat begins and the head ends. However, like the alien the face of both projects from the end. In *Necronom IV* (1976) (Figure 1) and in *Alien III* (1978) (Figure 2), the back of the head extends, arcing behind, over the shoulders of both forms; this is also an aspect of Ayrton's figures. *Oracle (Drawing)* (1963) (Figure 10) shows clearly that this backwards protrusion is separate from the shoulders and, despite the Oracle's seated position, the head becomes dynamically animated: distended in extremity like an attacking predator. This protrusion in Ayrton's figures is perhaps an abstraction of the hair of the figure made solid as a single form; however in Nyenhuis's (2003: 104) text, which shows *Oracle III* (1962), it is clear that this abstraction has morphed fully into the back of a head rather than hair, increasing the overall grotesquery and animality.



Figure 8: M. Ayrton, *Talos*, 1950. © Estate of Michael Ayrton.



Figure 9: M. Ayrton, *Talos Armed Head II*, 1957. © Estate of Michael Ayrton.

Female Figure in Flenite (1913)² (Figure 11) by Epstein is a sculpture of a pregnant woman, its vertical stance and curvature creates a phallic outline – rather like the diminutive chest bursting xenomorph used in *Alien* (1979); the face is simple, eyes and a mouth with the head extending at the back in what could be again an abstraction of hair, but which has the overall effect of an elongated cranium. Regarding its exaggerated upright stance, the sculpture is described by Quin as a ‘contorted’ form and, quoting Ezra Pound, as a ‘monster’ that should be admired for that very reason (2017: 49). This is related to its ‘tragic greatness’ and the way it breaks with ‘Renaissance humanism’, that legacy in modernity, and the naturalisms that bolstered and depended on it (Gasiorek 2013: 57–58). Moreover, it shows that Epstein was regarded as an ‘exemplar of the change [more broadly in culture] from a progressive, liberal view of life to a tragic, anti-humanist one’ (Gasiorek 2013: 56).

Rock Drill (1913) and *Female Figure in Flenite* (1913) are monsters that announce, albeit in atavistic terms, an epochal change. Lewis’s Tyros and Giger’s alien fit into this category also. The mode of presentation is key, and this is why Epstein, having lost his ‘ardour for machinery’ (Epstein 1940: 56), destroyed the original *Rock Drill* (1913) and, for want of better term, marred its darkly totemic perfection, presenting it as a degraded entity (Figure 7). Ayrton’s Talos and Oracle figures are less resolved in the matter of phallic sensibility and retain more of their humanity – as such, their vulnerability is present. In the Oracle figures, the human form remains alongside exaggerated abstraction; the fleshy belly, breasts and naturalistic arms alongside the outsized throat, head and torso mean that the pressure the Oracle is under due to her exertion is clear (Figure 10); while Talos’s form is absurd, presenting a failed seriousness due to his small head and spindle-like legs which undermine his otherwise frightening stature (Figure 8).



Figure 10: M. Ayrton, *Oracle* (Drawing), 1963. © Estate of Michael Ayrton.

² This sculpture and others of the series are linked to *Rock Drill* (1913) and share its concerns for sex, procreation and atavistic influences, ‘a sheet of notations of ideas connected with “The Rock Drill” which includes embryonic Venus and “flenite” figures’ (Tate Gallery Report 1975: n.pag.).

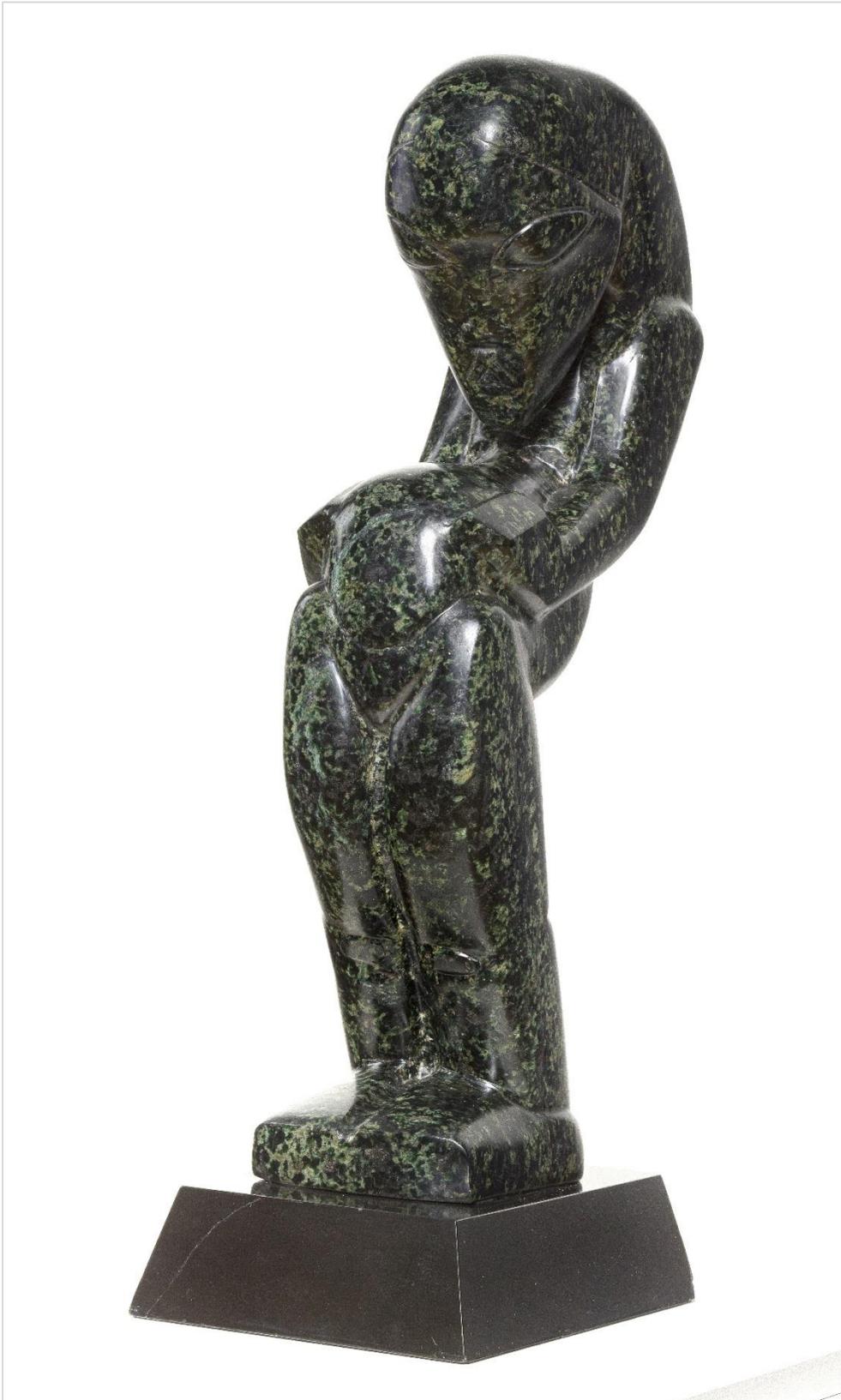


Figure 11: J. Epstein, *Female Figure in Flenite*, 1913. Jacob Epstein. © The Estate of Sir Jacob Epstein and Tate.

As a result of this contextualization, it is hoped that the reader will be convinced that those aesthetic choices are linked and are not coincidental but are reactions to macro-forces. The following analysis presents two possibilities for consideration. First, that the xenomorph and Ripley are entirely in the service of phallic power, the fantasy of totalized femininity – totalized by phallic power – represented by the alien queen, and the ever more blatant link between Ripley and the aliens attests to that. Totalized femininity, which is monstrous, is the desired outcome of phallogocentric ideology not what it seeks to repress: its form is female without femininity, a biologically functional animality, defined by and for a corrupt masculine social order.

Second, that the xenomorph is not a category crisis made of incoherent parts but a coherent form that addresses a crisis, a reactionary manifestation. Hopkins, analysis of the psychic function of monsters in subjects suffering trauma helps us understand such figures as reactions, ‘monsters appeared to represent a compromise between their terrors of real aggressive assaults and terrors related to their own aggressive impulses’ (1986: 65). The alien possesses a coherence informed by phallogocentric violence, indicated in predatory cannibalistic aggression, armoured stasis and hierarchical social ordering. The art practices discussed should help to see that concern for particular macro-forces, such as the breakdown of strict class distinctions, anxiety around gendered relations and work as dehumanizing result in common aesthetic strategies: armoured surfaces, phallic exaggerations, grimacing aggressivity and zoomorphism.

RESPONSE TO THE READING OF ALIEN IN BARBARA CREED’S TEXT

In *The Monstrous-Feminine, Film Feminism Psychoanalysis* (1993), Barbara Creed offers an influential and convincing reading of the alien mythos, taking in the first, second and third Alien films to explore notions of the archaic mother, while drawing on psychoanalytic discourse to make sense of its spectacular monstrosity. Creed’s reading of the figure of the alien and its meaning or function within these films does have some parallels with the reading offered in this article, although the differences, especially in conclusion and emphasis, are worth noting to clarify the position taken in this study. In particular, the emphasis offered here of proto-fascistic wish fulfilment, which acts as a criticism of liberal democratic chains of command (represented by the fated crews of the first two films, for instance) while throwing up in front of itself the totalitarian, or fully fascistic, horror of the alien, which justifies the reordering of the original hierarchy: the crew of the Nostromo in *Alien* (1979) and the ill-fated colonial soldiers of *Aliens* (1986). In this reading, the monster and its community – sometimes a potentiality, as in *Alien* (1979), and otherwise fully expressed, as in *Aliens* (1986) – is a vision of a fully militarized society with a weaponized leader, the Queen, a horror which justifies the proto-fascistic reordering of chains of command, a moral and physical necessity of the texts, because in the film’s reality the liberal and multicultural crews are not prepared to resist this threat. The narrative of both films through the inclusion of the monstrous simultaneously expresses a limit, the horizon of violent expansion and dehumanization represented in the alien, while using this limit as a vanishing mediator that moulds the mytho-heroic, and proto-fascistic central leader (Ripley) defined by classical heroic qualities. The figure of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) mediates, in a way which is tasteful to the viewer, between qualities apparent in the original crew – friendship, humour, mutual

cooperation – and the qualities of the alien: aggression, survival skills, lack of moral ambiguity. This is a tasteful mediation in that those qualities which are activated by confrontation with the monster, and which define the monster's initial superiority, are associated with animal qualities and are in that sense de-politicized as apparently innate in humans and the alien. Parallels between Ripley and the alien, a factor also emphasized by Creed (1993: 51), would be far less morally acceptable to a broad audience should the monster be replaced with a human militarized society, whereby the comparison rests on direct social and political contrasts, instead of physical animal qualities. The monster's appearance obfuscates this obvious trajectory, that Ripley becomes the de facto leader because she is the best (strongest, most consistent, psychically and physically pure), in short because she is more like the alien than the other crew members and essentially more like the alien than the flawed Captain Dallas (Tom Skerritt) of the crew of the *Nostromo*, and the dithering Lt Gorman (William Hope), head of the colonial marines in the second film. Those leaders ascended to authority in a flawed society defined by internal corruption and lack of conviction in its own values: Dallas disobeys the quarantine protocols due to sentimentality, thereby allowing the alien to kill all but Ripley, and Gorman is an inexperienced officer with little to no actual combat experience, resulting in the death of many of his soldiers.

Creed's reading emphasizes a fear of the 'castrating mother' (1993: 23) which she characterizes as 'phallogentric' and as existing in 'the texts patriarchal "discourses"' (1993: 24). That position is seen as challenging the idea of women as victims, since it is ultimately the female reproductive body which is repressed and returns as the alien queen. Creed's premise is that masculine inflected authority/society fears woman as castrator, hence the potency of the alien's form and behaviours. It is proposed here, instead, that it is the flexible subjective interiority, represented by the traditionally feminine, that is a problem for phallogentric and/or proto-fascist cultures. The idea of the traditionally feminine is a position that can be seen as limiting for women, and while making biological females the place holder for what we see as feminine may be a way of oppressing woman, it is nevertheless still femininity, not biological femaleness, that is targeted in the alien mythos. The alien queen is not what is repressed by, but what is desired by, and defined by, phallogentric power: woman as a breeding machine without femininity is no problem at all for patriarchy. There are areas of equivalence with Creed's text in the reading offered here such as Creed's assertion that '[*Alien*³] develops parallels between Ripley [...] and the alien in more depth' (1993: 51) – this is also a factor of the fourth instalment (made after Creed's text), *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) where Ripley is genetically linked (via cloning technology) to the alien and, as a result, literally has qualities such as enhanced strength, acidic blood and a psychic link with the aliens.

Creed draws a comparison between the body of the 'archaic mother' as a horror and the 'reassuring' body of Ripley (1993: 23). The archaic mother is described as 'present in all horror films as the blackness of extinction – death'; this is explained as 'non-differentiation' a drawing in of all things to oneness with the mother (1993: 28). Alternatively, this research emphasizes the expansive aspect of the alien species, which colonizes the bodies and the spaces of its enemies. The phallic mother is an empire builder, and her progeny are soldiers of familiar and terrible epochs – the empires of the past and the totalitarian nightmares of the twentieth century – as a figure, the alien represents the unacceptable extreme of expansive empire building (a dark mirror of human expansion and militarism) and simultaneously acts

as a justification (by representing a threat) to reordering weak liberal societies around true heroic leadership (as is a central tenet of proto-fascism). This reading is bolstered by a powerful enemy within (traitor) motif, present in the first two films, reminiscent of the so-called Jewish threat of Nazi ideology and of the paranoia responsible for Soviet purges, these subplots attest to the corruption and weakness in the original social organization of the crew of the *Nostromo* (*Alien*) and the colonial soldiers (*Aliens*): in each case, this problem is dealt with by Ripley. Real leaders, and real comrades, are forged in war and resistance it appears to say. Ash (Ian Holm) the science officer of *Alien* (1979) is the traitor who looks and sounds human but who is an intruder, he knows that the company prioritizes potential biological weapons and money over the crew's life, and in a macabre twist, he is revealed as an android who attempts to murder Ripley to keep the secret mission, to bring back an alien specimen, on track. In *Aliens* (1986), company man Carter Burke (Paul Reiser) performs a similar role, prompting Ripley to make a shocking comparison that favours the alien attitude: 'You know, Burke, I don't know which species is worse. You don't see them fucking each other over for a goddamn percentage!' Burke's scheming extends to the privileging of money over comradeship and to actively seeking the incubation of the alien inside the child Rebecca (Newt) (Carrie Henn) for the purposes of biological weapons research. In contrast, the heteronormative romance between Ripley and the soldier Hicks (Michael Biehn), which includes Rebecca as adopted child, is linked to maternal instincts which are mirrored by the alien queen's care of her own progeny.

Below, the analysis accounts for some of the more visual or cinematic aspects covered in Creed's text, with the aim of showing how such motifs and symbols are concurrent also with the interpretation offered here.

THE IMAGE OF RIPLEY'S BODY

As aforementioned, Creed contrasts the appealing body of Ripley to the monstrous feminine represented in the alien queen: 'Ripley enters her sleep pod, assuming a virgin-like repose. The nightmare is over and we are returned to the opening sequence of the film where birth was a clean, pristine affair' (1993: 24). Contrasts and parallels between these two female figures are of course key to the potency of the *Alien* franchise, but in contrast to Creed this research asserts that Ripley represents an attempt to justify a proto-fascistic order by contrast and mediation between two positions; the original flawed organization of the human crew/soldiers (which stand for a democratic and loose structure) with that of the aliens (that represent fully fascist-totalitarian organization). As such, Ripley is contrasted not only with the aliens but with the other human leaders, Captain Dallas (Tom Skerritt) of *Alien* (1979) and Lt Gorman (William Hope) of *Aliens* (1986), in key scenes. Ripley's superiority is first moral; resisting Captain Dallas's order to come aboard with the infected Kane, whereby the crew is annihilated, then emotional; remaining calm in the face of social disintegration and hysteria, defined against Angela Cartwright's Lambert, then strategic – uncovering the truth of the vessel *Nostromo*'s mission by extracting this from Mother, the onboard computer – and finally physical: defeating the alien via use of a space suit and harpoon and by mastering the environment (understanding the function of the airlock). In *Aliens*, Ripley's superiority emerges similarly, via contrast, Ripley is weighed against the soldiers who express a naïve machismo (including a fraught exchange with the tough woman Private Vasquez played by

Jenette Elise Goldstein) and pivotally with the inexperienced Gorman's dithering and panic during the first alien attack.

To return to the cinematic image of Ripley's emergence and re-entombment (as it could be seen) in the stasis pod, this can be understood as an image of a potent mytho-heroic, essentialist and proto-fascistic fixity. In the time defying sleep chamber (which preserves her perfect form until we need her again), we have the archetypal messianic warrior. King Arthur's prophesized return acts as one such precedent of a mythological motif that serves as a potent national allegory (see Padel 1994: 10). Arthur is laid out, mortally wounded in a boat going to Avalon where he will be enchanted and is said to return when his people are in need. As a proto-fascist figure, Ripley represents the replacement of a ruling elite, not with a popular revolt or by the masses but by a better elite. Pareto describes the ways in which aristocratic power maintains itself and where it is vulnerable to overthrow from newly forming elites if it cannot for example, 'find ways to assimilate the exceptional individuals who come to the front in the subject classes' (Pareto 1935: 1516). Ripley as a figure represents an 'exceptional individual' whose mytho-heroic status is found superior in trial by fire, to those who have existing leadership positions.

THE IMAGE OF KANE'S IMPREGNATION

Kane's 'oral rape' by the crawling alien creature, which implants an embryo in the host's stomach, is another key cinematic spectacle accounted for by Creed. Creed notes that 'the primeval mother does not need the male as "father", only as a host body, and the alien creature murderously gnaws its way through Kane's belly. Its birth leads to the male mother's death' (1993: 28). Horror is accounted for by Creed as masculine fear of irrelevance in the face of the 'primeval mother' actualized in this spectacle. This is an entirely plausible rationale for being disgusted and fascinated by the alien bursting forth, but as an abiding locus of horror, it is undermined by two facts, one known at the time of Creed's text, the other a subsequent addition to the evolving alien mythos. Regarding that unknown development, in the reality of the fictional alien mythos, the paterfamilias is David (Michael Fassbender), the android from *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017), he is revealed as the biological engineer who crafts the alien species. David is male and heterosexual, so symbolically, as creator, the father in this sense was always present, as fathers are, at a key juncture before birth.

The second fact, regarding irrelevance again, in this case the death of the specific 'male mother' (Creed 1993: 28) referring to Kane's discarded body in *Alien* (1979), is undermined in *Alien³* (1992), where we know that the alien is affected in form and behaviour by the host. In that film, a dog is impregnated, and the resultant alien has canine features. This idea may have been inspired by the use of human skulls by Giger in the original alien prosthetics, the alien as symbolic human variation (see Kulcsar 2021). As a result of this genetic inheritance, Kane, in some respect, is still there following his death, as fathers are, in the make-up of their progeny. The little alien which grows to be a full soldier carries that genetic identity forward.

With that in mind, rather than male irrelevance, in this analysis the abiding horror of the spectacle is accounted for as one which shows us the result of 'interpellation' (Hartley 2003: 8), graphically. This is realized as a base, physical, rather than psychic, process in the films,

whereby an idea encountered in the world (the alien egg, in this case) becomes part of us, taking us over, becoming part of our 'libidinal apparatus' (Hartley 2003: 147). That process is symbolically represented by the alien gestation inside Kane, who is totalized by it, defined by it, until the alien emerges like Lewis's 'seeds' from man (1921: 2) as a Tyro, a new recruit. What emerges is Kane as his inner predator, what is eschewed is the psychically complex liberal bourgeois individual, which Kane's human body represented. This analysis interprets Kane's deathbirth as a spectacle of individual subjective un-becoming.

THE FEMALE STATUS OF THE ALIEN LEADER

The sexed status of the alien queen, her appearance and lair (surrounded by unhatched eggs) in *Aliens* (1986), is vividly described in Creed's text (1993: 51) as key in her reading of the archaic mother. The question remains that if it is phallogocentric power as a defining factor, then why not a male apex predator as the leader of the aliens? How does this fact, that the most powerful alien is female, work in the context of this analysis, where notions of permanence and fixity as well as the fascistic and imperial aspects of the alien are highlighted as hyper-masculine? By way of accounting for this, it is suggested that it functions as a dark mirror of human expansion. The notion of a queen is first a symbol of total closure regarding phallic dominance (femininity offers no alternative, escape or difference to authority); it is an example of potential difference terribly eliminated and displayed as a trophy or fixture of phallic power. In the case of the lair of the alien queen, birth is mechanical, perfunctory and insectoid. This way of representing femininity (phallic, violent and consuming) is analogous to Lewis's representation in *Kermesse* (1912), his first proto-Tyro image, as discussed via Tickner (2000). Tickner highlights two axes of femininity in modernism, into which the alien queen is placed in this study.

Firstly, that position represented by Lewis's treatment of femininity in *Kermesse* (1912), as in service to the masculine, as being phallic, abstract and concerned with sexual violence, 'imperious but mechanical', 'demonic' (2000: 106–11). Consider the following description of *Kermesse*: 'a demented arthropod with limbs akimbo, its face a mask of fury, a voracious puppet with the appetite of a praying mantis' (Tickner 2000: 89). Such a description could be applied to the alien queen which actualizes that terrible 'desirable dehumanisation' (Tickner 2000: 112) that Lewis willed, and which the films suggest is needed in a world defined by war (with other men and with nature). The other axis, the anathema of that hardening, is femininity expressed by the Greek or Hellenistic traditions (Tickner 2000: 106) – initial examples include: 'Fauvism', 'Isadora Duncan', 'The Ballet Russes (Tickner 2000: 108) as highlighting 'expressive and spontaneous femininity' (Tickner 2000: 90). Later Tickner emphasizes Peter Wollen, Bakst-Poiret-Matisse and the John Duncan Fergusson painting *Les Eus* (1911–13) as representative of 'Bergsonian vitalism' and a 'new more harmonious race' (Tickner 2000: 111).

This femininity is nowhere in the alien mythos; it is in gradations of the former models of femininity, concerned with desirable dehumanization, that the alien films mediate. Second, regarding the sexed status of the alien queen and the links made to proto-fascistic phallogocentric power, there is a resonance with the British Empire, the most expansive empire in history, which had a queen at three key junctures, during its expansion under Elizabeth I (reign: 1558–1603), during its stabilization and peak power under Queen Victoria (reign:

1837–1901) and finally its transformation via the Commonwealth with Elizabeth II (reign: 1952–2022).

CONCLUSION

This research has suggested that Giger's alien should be considered in the context of machinic modernism. An aesthetic sensibility which has penetrated popular culture and is present due, in part, to the popularity of the Alien franchise. Furthermore, that machinic modernism is an atavistic phallic comportment that is ambivalent about dehumanization, seeking an acceptable compromise with modernity for those considered innately superior. In respect to heroism and stratification, it is claimed that this compromise is politically reactive and inflected with the turbulent and antinomic ideology of proto-fascism. Efforts have been made to illustrate that the possibility of power for the innately superior in the alien mythos, and in machinic modernism, is derived from zoomorphism, a dehumanization that holds predatory action and violence, as well as hard exteriors, as the dominant subjective position in modernity, rather than soft reflexive interiorities. A goal of this research has included showing that femininity and humanism are conflated and targeted in machinic modernism; as a result, the complex individual, such as Ayrton's Daedalus represents, who is said to retain so-called feminine qualities, is anathema to proto-fascism and to machinic modernism.

A further aim of this study is to assert that Ayrton's practice directly problematizes both the heroism of figures like Ripley and the aesthetic zoomorphism of monstrous fixity, otherwise lorded in machinic modernism, and is therefore uniquely useful in avoiding the totemic and seemingly magical qualities created by that aesthetic approach. Ayrton represents those motifs as tragically absurd rather than tragically heroic, removing them from grandiose agonistic conflict and showing that they lack all agency.

A result of the comparisons between the three positions present in the films – (1) the existing, capitalist-inflected, liberal democratic normalities, (2) the band of worthies led by a heroic executive and (3) the fully militarized and inhuman aliens – is that proto-fascism, an otherwise unstable and incendiary ideology, emerges as the right measure, or balanced position, between the other options. In this way, the allegorical purpose is to legitimate protofascism. To put it another way, proto-fascism in the alien mythos is the middle way between positions that the audience are shown to be deeply flawed (the existing human normality); or inhuman to abstract extremity (the aliens). However, it is also clear from Ripley's rage at the company's indifference to the crew in *Alien* (1979) and her comments to the traitor Burke in *Aliens* (1986) – as well as her gradual alignment with the xenomorphs – that when considered hierarchically, the aliens are superior to the initial flawed organizations and are needed to expose this failing.

Considering the aesthetic of Giger's initial design in relation to other practices dealing with 'reification and death' (Foster 2004: 149) in the twentieth century helps to see that those proto-fascist potentialities are far from a result of his pictures being pulled into an existing film narrative and defined by it. Rather, those potentialities were inherent all along in his design and the development of the alien's phallic form, which was always overtly sexualized and armoured as a reaction to macro-forces acting on creatives of the period. Finally, the reader is asked to consider that we, the audience, have incubated proto-fascist

sympathies and go on to do so. These include connections to the heroic that depend on an attitude of destruction, murderous intent and iconic constructions of the subject that are simple, potent and totemic. In the context of popular culture's continued uptake of this subjective hardening, we should seek to redress this with a complex interiority and explore the other so-called feminine axis of modernism.

APPENDIX 1

Correspondence from Dr Justine Hopkins, Ayrton scholar and art historian via e-mail on 26 July 2021.

The key link between the three figures is really Daedalus himself, as comes through very clearly in *The Maze Maker*. You don't say if you have read this, but I think it is crucial to understanding all of Ayrton's visual work on the theme and that you would find a great deal of relevance in terms of your project. Daedalus himself acts in some sense as a focus of both male and female power – he is a man, with a man's understanding of the world. But he is also a maker – a creator not a destroyer and so aligned with the feminine rather than the masculine. He also stands against the idea of the hero, and Ayrton makes him the mouthpiece of some interesting discussion of the concept of the hero as 'someone whose deeds are praised for qualities anyone would despise except in a hero or perhaps a god' – an idea similar to the inspiration behind the Talos bronzes (Ayrton 1967: n.pag.).

In terms of situating these figures – just as for Ayrton myth was always about making links across time, so also it made spatial connections. *The Maze* became for him not simply the labyrinth of Knossos but also the twisting caverns of Cumae, the fabled defences of the city of Troy, the mediaeval turf maze at Saffron Walden, near his home and the passages of the maze he designed and made himself for Armand Erpf in the Catskill Mountains of New York State.

He also found mazes in the human brain and intestines and latterly developed a series of mirror mazes combining bronze figures with neutral density Perspex. The spatial logic of *The Maze* became for him the spatial logic of all human life – we create mazes in our gardens and our cities because we are maze-creatures.

The space which the Oracle, Minotaur and Talos inhabit is specific to their time and myth (Cumae, Knossos, the Cretan Sea) and at the same time has relevance to the spaces we inhabit (and put people in) today, and to abstract notions of space, power and oppression – just as Icarus, for Ayrton, was simultaneously a mythological hero falling into the Cretan Sea, an RAF pilot of the Second World War, an early astronaut undergoing high velocity training and a story invented to explain how Minoan Crete taught lost-wax bronze-casting to mainland Italy.

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