# "She Has To Be Controlled"

# Exploring the Action Heroine in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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"She Has to be Controlled":

Exploring the Action Heroine in

Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema

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## Abstract

In this dissertation I explore a number of contemporary science fiction franchises in order to ascertain how the figure of the action heroine has evolved throughout her recent history. There has been a tendency in film criticism to view these strong women as 'figuratively male' and therefore not 'really' women, which, I argue, is largely due to a reliance on the psychoanalytic paradigms that have dominated feminist film theory since its beginnings. Building on Elisabeth Hills's work on the character of Ellen Ripley of the *Alien* series, I explore how notions of 'becoming' and the 'Body without Organs' proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari can be activated to provide a more positive set of readings of active women on screen. These readings are not limited by discussions of sex or gender, but discuss the body in terms of its increased capacities as it interacts with the world around it. I do not argue for a Deleuzian analysis of cinema as such, because this project is concerned with aspects of representation which did not form part of Deleuze's philosophy of cinema. Rather I use Deleuze and Guattari's work to explore alternative ways of reading the active women these franchises present and the benefits they afford. Through these explorations I demonstrate, however, that applying the Deleuzoguattarian 'method' is a potentially risky undertaking for feminist theory. Deconstructing notions of 'being' and 'identity' through the project of becoming may have benefits in terms of addressing 'woman' beyond binaristic thought, but it may also have negative consequences. What may be liberating for feminist film theory may be also be destructive. This is because through becoming we destabilise a position from which to address potentially ideologically unsound treatments of women on screen.

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**Introduction**

This thesis is both an examination of the representation of the body in the contemporary popular American science fiction cinema and, where appropriate, the discursive response to it. The primary focus of this project is the representation and reception of the female body. The female body here is given primacy as this is a political project. It has its roots in, and is a response to, feminist discussion of film, and it explores new methods of analysis for the female-embodied subject on screen. It is a challenge to dominant modes of reading these women through the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and its appropriation by the feminist scholars such as Laura Mulvey (1975, 1981) and Mary Ann Doane (1987, 1991). Science fiction is a genre that now regularly presents us with strong, active, independent women. It is therefore necessary to explore other theoretical models to analyse this subject that do not reduce the action heroine to exhibiting a figurative masculinity. As Elisabeth Hills has argued, "feminists working within the dominant theoretical model of psychoanalysis have had extremely limited spaces with which to discuss the transformative and transgressive potential of the action heroine" (39). The purpose of this project is to expand these spaces and explore new ways to address the action heroine, specifically in relation to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

This is not to say that the work undertaken in this area by the likes of Mulvey is redundant, but that it can now be activated in an alternative fashion. Fredric Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious* that:

> Texts come before us the always-already-read; we apprehend
> them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations;
> or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented
> reading habits and categories developed by those inherited
> interpretive traditions. (9)

This need not be the case. The texts that are examined in this project, the

*Alien* series[1], the *Matrix* franchise[2], the *Batman* franchise[3] and the *X-Men*

film trilogy[4] are prime examples of texts under the sediment of which

Jameson speaks. For example, any new exploration of *Alien* (Ridley Scott,

1979) as a singular text requires an excavation through its critical history to

prove its validity. Any attempt to appropriate Lt. Ellen Ripley (Sigourney

Weaver) as a positive feminist icon must wrestle her away from a

psychoanalytically inclined interpretative convention that would see the

character as passive or only in terms of 'lack'.  This psychoanalytic tradition

is one that insists that her activity and power are, problematically, seen as

appropriations of masculinity. But, as Jameson  continues:

> No interpretation can be effectively disqualified on its own terms by
> a simple enumeration of inaccuracies or omissions, or by a list of

[1] For the purposes of this project, the *Alien* series refers to the films *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992), *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet) *Alien vs. Predator* (Paul W. Anderson, 2004) and *Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* (Colin and Greg Strause, 2007).
[2] For the purposes of this project, the *Matrix* franchise refers to the films *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (The Wachowski Brothers, 2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (The Wachowski Brothers, 2003), the feature-length documentary *The Matrix Revisited* (2001), the video games *Enter the Matrix* (2003)*,* the collection of Matrix inspired animations *The Animatrix* (2003) and the graphic novels *The Matrix Comics* and *The Matrix Comics: Volume Two* (2005).
[3] For the purposes of this project the *Batman* franchise refers primarily to the Warner Brothers film franchise consisting of *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989), *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, 1992), *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, 1995), *Batman and Robin* (Joel Schumacher, 1997) *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005). I also have brief recourse to the comic books *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and *Batman: Year One* (1987). My consideration of Catwoman examines *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman* (Pitof, 2004).
[4] The *X-Men* trilogy includes *X-Men* (Bryan Singer, 2000), *X-Men 2* (Bryan Singer, 2003) and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Brett Ratner, 2006).

> unanswered questions. Interpretation is not an isolated act, but takes place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict. (10)

This project does not do 'battle' with psychoanalysis as such, but rather challenges its status as the dominant methodology for feminist film theory. I do not deny psychoanalysis's extremely important role in the advancement of the theorisation of women and female identification in film. I do, however, propose that since the representation of women in the science fiction film, and indeed the action cinema more generally, has changed since feminist film theory's beginnings, so new theories are required to explore the subjects that are now regularly presented to us.

As Hills has argued, "psychoanalytic accounts which theorise sexual difference within the framework of linked binary oppositions ... necessarily position normative female subjectivity as passive or in terms of lack" (39). This is because psychoanalysis "regards the body as a developmental union or aggregate of partial objects, organs, drives, orifices, each with their own significance, their own modalities of pleasure" (Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 169). Hills advocates reading the body of the action heroine from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective. Rather than view the body how Elizabeth Grosz implies that psychoanalysis does, as an entity with prescribed meanings, functions and desires, the body should be seen as existing in a constant process of 'becoming', or as a 'Body without Organs' (BwO). Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the BwO sees the body as existing in a state of becoming, constantly forming assemblages with the world around it. This body is one without the "internal cohesion and latent significance"

(Grosz *Volatile Bodies* 169) provided by psychoanalytic accounts, but is in a constant state of flux as it connects with other bodies. This body is not reducible to what a body does, but rather an experiment allowing us to ascertain what a body can do. As Lori Brown notes, for Deleuze and Guattari it is important that we understand the body's "potential for interacting with other bodies, whether or not that interaction will bring harm to either body and whether there is potential for exchange or a joining together to form a still stronger body" (268). This project examines the possibilities that a Deleuzoguattarian reading of the body can provide in addressing the action heroine. It is an analysis which views her 'transgressions' as positive becomings which subvert traditional gender roles and codes.

This dissertation begins with a review of the elements of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming that are important to this project. It has been broadly recognised that Deleuze and Guattari "refuse to offer their readers a closed system or 'recipe' to work from" (Colombat 10) but rather offer a conceptual 'tool box' for their readers to work with. Therefore, the terms Deleuze and Guattari use are complex and slippery, and it is necessary to attempt to pinpoint these elements as a basis of discussion. This review also aims to broaden Hills's discussion to consider the complexities of adopting Deleuze and Guattari for feminist film theory. This is because further investigation reveals a number of potential pitfalls with undertaking the Deleuzoguattarian method. I demonstrate this with a discussion of the feminist response to Deleuze and Guattari in line with Elizabeth Grosz's balanced appraisal in her *Volatile Bodies*. Although there are benefits to

looking beyond the psychoanalytic paradigm for addressing women on film for feminist interpretation, it remains that turning to Deleuze and Guattari is a potentially problematic undertaking. This is because they aim to undo the notions of 'being' and 'identity' by breaking down the individuated subject through this process of becoming. Therefore the category of 'woman' itself is left in a precarious position, and how we proceed to speak about women is unclear.

Underpinning this project is Louis Althusser's notion of the 'guilt' of interpretation: "as there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of" ('From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy' 14). Althusser continues: "we must abandon the mirror myths of immediate vision and reading, and conceive knowledge as a production" (24). There is, as Jameson has also argued in *Unconscious*, always a political impetus behind interpretation of this sort. If, as Althusser impels us to, we conceive knowledge itself as a production, it comes that interpretation itself, and the context of interpretation, is as much in need of interpreting as the interpreted object. This thesis therefore does not treat film and its criticism as two separate objects, but rather as an intertwined object of study that is in a constant state of flux. The text and its criticism come together to be read together as co-text.

The first section of this thesis has this historicising of the interpretative method as its purpose. Its object of analysis is both the *Alien* films and critical and theoretical responses to them. As Yvonne Tasker notes, Ripley has been an especially privileged character within the trajectory of the

action heroine, describing her as a "significant development" as she combined "icons of the action narrative with borrowings from the horror film" (*Spectacular Bodies* 15). In a review of literature devoted to the *Alien* series, Pamela Church Gibson notes how "the films should be contextualized not only within the parameters of critical theory itself, but could now be reviewed in retrospect, as products of particular political moments which they, in so many ways, reflect" ('"You've Been In My Life So Long"' 41).  I begin with Scott's original film *Alien*, examining the cultural climate in which the film was made and the academic climate in which it was received and I explore how these intertwine. Sherrie Inness has argued that in order to assess the aesthetic of the action heroine, "one needs to recognise how second-wave feminism rippled through society" (5). As women's real lives in society began to change with the successes of the second wave feminist movement, so did their representation on screen. I argue that the film's presentation of Ripley and the Alien, and indeed much of the mise-en-scene, is itself is a product of an increased interest in psychoanalysis as a discourse. This is seen through the film's sexualised imagery, in particular the sexualisation of the eponymous Alien.

Furthermore, I examine the interpretive 'bias' that criticism of this film has sometimes suffered. This largely manifests itself it in the desire to sex the Alien as either male or female. Critics can fall to either side of the gender binary to suit their argument, or as a result of a changing cultural climate. For example, many critics read the Alien as inter-sexed after the advent of Queer theory in the early 1990s. I propose a number of challenges to negative readings of Ripley and accusations of sexism in her treatment by

Scott. Following Hills, I argue that a Deleuzoguattarian analysis of Ripley

may be liberating when assessing her as a positive cultural figure for

feminism. Here I have recourse to ideas of becoming and the body explored

in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

Following my analysis of *Alien*, I pay closer attention to its sequel *Aliens*

(James Cameron, 1986). At the conclusion of *Alien*, Ripley drifts into space

in an escape pod. *Aliens* shows her recovery 67 years later, and her eventual

return to the Alien planet with a squadron of Marines. The film itself is very

much a product of the 1980s action cinema, utilising 'musculinity' and the

'hard-body' aesthetic discussed by Tasker in *Spectacular Bodies*. I focus on

two differing aspects of this film for my discussion: firstly the inclusion of a

child called Newt (Carrie Henn) whom Ripley and the Marines discover as

being the only surviving colonist after an Alien attack. Ripley's relationship

with this child is more often discussed in terms of mothering or maternity

than not. This, I argue, is a product of the cultural context. Secondly, is the

inclusion of what the narrative discusses as the Alien 'Queen'. This clearly

imposes the human biological/sociological gender binary onto the Alien

species. As there are now two types of Aliens, this Alien, responsible for

laying the eggs from which the Alien of *Alien* hatched, is Ripley's female,

alien counterpart. If we view the predominance of the theme of mothering

and maternity as a product as much of the academic climate as the text, we

can open up discussions of the female body in this film and view this

intergenerational female to female relationship in an alternative way.

My analysis of *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1993) concentrates on the Queer associations of the text and examines criticism from its period of production. I again make reference here to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. This is because the Alien figure in this film takes on a new configuration: the 'face-hugger' lays its egg not in a human character, but a Rottweiler called Spike. The Alien then takes a partially canine form in *Alien 3*, whereas in *Alien* and *Aliens* the Aliens have been humanoid. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the subject in a continual process of 'becoming' as opposed to 'being' is of considerable relevance to this new figure. Here we are given a visualisation of a Deleuzoguattarian interaction of bodies, an image of a body and its 'potential for interacting with other bodies'. The conception of the Alien here is one of a creature in a constant state of evolution and becoming, whose power rests in its ability to adapt physically to new environment with speed and to literally join together with other bodies 'to form a still stronger body'.

The analysis of *Alien Resurrection* (Jean Pierre Jeunet, 1997), where Ripley has been 'resurrected' via the technique of cloning, strengthens a Deleuzoguattarian reading as the film "explores even more comprehensively the theme of liminality, of threshold states and double natures" (Kaveney *From Alien to The Matrix* 189) and the joining together of bodies. The character of Ripley here is not the Ripley we have seen in the previous *Alien* films. Her DNA has become entwined with that of the Alien Queen, and vice versa. This leads to a new presentation of the Aliens: one that is white skinned with blue eyes and a 'Queen' Alien that, like humans, feels pain in childbirth. But it also offers us a new Ripley, a character who is, as Anna

Powell suggests in *Deleuze and Horror Cinema* (2005), now 'becoming-animal' with the Alien. I do, however, note the risky nature of Deleuzoguattarian analysis here, as the film can be seen to end somewhat precariously. Having undergone this change at a molecular level, the Clone Ripley may be capable of both positive and negative becomings because we are no longer sure what her capacities may be.

My analysis of *Alien vs. Predator* (Paul W S Anderson, 2004) and *Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* (Colin and Greg Strause, 2007) explores how the figure of the Alien has mutated since its initial appearance in 1979. Both films pits the Alien against the Predator of *Predator* (John McTiernan, 1987) and *Predator 2* (Stephen Hopkins, 1990) drawing their inspiration from a computer game and comic book series of the same name. The Alien, I argue, has moved through the postmodern aesthetic of *Alien 3* and the parody of *Alien Resurrection* to become what Jameson calls 'blind parody':

> In this situation parody finds itself without a vocation: it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style … but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse … pastiche is thus blank parody. *Postmodernism; Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (18)

The Alien is included in these texts with little regard to its intellectually provocative nature and functions mainly as a selling point. The narrative of *Alien vs. Predator* vaguely shadows that of the *Alien* series: the film has one lone human survivor, Alexa Woods (Sanna Lathan). Likewise *Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* draws loosely from the themes of *Aliens* as there are

only three survivors at the close of the film: Kelly (Reiko Aylesworth), her biological daughter Molly (Ariel Gade) and Kelly's former romantic partner Dallas (Steven Pasquale). Not only is 'Dallas' is an allusion to Tom Skeritt's character in *Alien*, but the closing shots of the trio in the helicopter escaping the scene of carnage echo those of *Aliens* where Ripley, Next and Hicks are fleeing the Sulaco.

The purpose of chapter one is to demonstrate how Ripley can act as a 'lens' to view contemporaneous ideas of femininity and the representation of women in cinema. However, ultimately I aim to relocate these texts and explore how a Deleuzoguattarian frame may be applied. I do not wish to imply that this in an 'innocent reading', but rather a 'justified crime' as Althusser defines it: a reading which "takes responsibility for its crime … and defends it by proving its necessity" (15). My readings of Ripley from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective build on those of Hills and will demonstrate how her becomings can separate her from readings that reduce her appearance and actions to a symbolic masculinity.

My discussion of the *Matrix* franchise in chapter two continues the discussion of another co-text, and explores the *Matrix* films alongside the vast discursive reaction to them. '*The Matrix*' is an especially complex text to locate. The franchise began in 1999 with the release of the first film *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999). Although its success at the box office was not spectacular, its release on home video and eventually the conversion to Digital Versatile Disc (DVD) made the film a financial success. This led to the two sequels *The Matrix: Reloaded* (The Wachowski

Brothers, 2003) and *The Matrix: Revolutions* (The Wachowski Brothers, 2003). With these sequels came a number of other products: the video game *Enter the Matrix* (2003), a collection of Japanese-influenced animated short films *The Animatrix* (2003), as well as the comic books *The Matrix Comics* (2003) and *The Matrix Comics: Volume Two* (2005).

However, it is not unusual for a film franchise to include this array of media spin offs. For example, the James Bond franchise regularly releases video games such as *Nightfire* (2002) and *Everything or Nothing* (2004), and the *Star Wars* franchise continues to release animations such as *Ewoks* (1985) and, more recently, *The Clone Wars* (2008). What distinguishes the *Matrix* franchise from the other examples is the narrative interweaving of these separate elements. For example, the first short film on *The Animatrix* DVD, 'Final Flight of the Osiris' (Andy Jones, 2003) is situated in the narrative chronology of the filmic trilogy, between *The Matrix* and *The Matrix: Reloaded* – 'Final Flight of the Osiris' shows a hovercraft previously not seen in the diegetic world of the *Matrix* series delivering a piece of software which is the focus of the meeting that begins *The Matrix: Reloaded*. The video game *Enter the Matrix* is regularly interspersed with clips from *The Matrix: Reloaded* as well as film clips that were filmed alongside *The Matrix: Reloaded* and linked to *The Matrix: Reloaded*'s narrative.

I discuss the film in relation to the many 'discursive hooks' that the franchise contains – meaning the inclusion of references to cultural works and philosophical concepts that people are encouraged to use as a basis for discussion. I use as examples the references to texts such as Room 101 from

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and, most importantly for

this discussion, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1984). The

deliberate placing and the quotation from *Simulacra and Simulation*

encourages a reading of the film in light of this text. I argue that the film has

equal relevance to Foucault's theories of the body as set out in *Discipline*

*and Punish* (1975) as here we encounter a nightmare of the docile body.

It is not just this intertextual play that is of concern. *The Matrix* has also

attracted an immense amount of discursive attention in the form of popular

philosophy anthologies. These include volumes such as William Irwin's *The*

*Matrix and Philosophy* (2002) and *More Matrix and Philosophy* (2005), as

well as popular theological anthologies such as Garrett and Seay's *The*

*Gospel Reloaded* (2003). But these have occurred precisely because they are

encouraged by the text's repeated allusions to philosophy and religion, and

to literary and filmic texts. The anthologies themselves also have a formula:

they (generally) include an essay about Baudrillardian philosophy, an essay

about Trinity, an essay about Marxism and an essay about epistemology. It

is for this reason that Slavoj Žižek described *The Matrix* as a Rorschach test

(240) – a text of which any reading of the text is available to the reader.

Chapter two explores both of these occurrences – the intertextuality of the

individual elements of the franchise and the emergence of the popular

philosophy anthologies devoted to discussing the philosophy of the Matrix –

as similar in design. *The Matrix* is a text that deliberately sets out to engage

discourse. The anthologies act as a metatext – they join together as a text to

read as is *The Matrix* itself.

After situating the *Matrix* franchise as an especially playful one, I turn my attention to the character of Trinity. I argue that Trinity also functions as a discursive hook, or more specifically half of Trinity. Trinity's digital self has attracted far more critical attention than her material self. In the space of the Matrix, Trinity is clad in tight, black PVC, with short hair. Her androgyny is often discussed. However her material body remains relatively unexplored. I discuss Trinity in relation to another set of screen women treated with similar critical ambivalence. I have recourse here to the great wealth of writing on women in film noir, in particular the writing concerned with the femme fatale. One observation made is that this figure has a counterpart, as Sylvia Harvey has labelled them, "the boring, potentially childbearing sweethearts" (38) of film noir. These characters are almost always eclipsed by the femme fatale in criticism discussing women in film noir.  I examine Trinity as her character develops throughout the film trilogy, and also her characterisation in 'A Detective Story' (Shinichirô Watanabe, 2003), a short film which comprises part of *The Animatrix*. 'A Detective Story' in particular lends Trinity to be considered as a femme fatale as it draws particularly from the noir aesthetic of chiaroscuro, featuring urban landscapes and other noir tropes. As the films are set for long spaces outside of the Matrix, it appears peculiar that her material body is overlooked, as it is this body that is so important to the narrative. My discussion of Trinity begins to explore Trinity as a BwO as a starting point to address this critically neglected material body.


Following on from my discussion of the *Matrix* series comes a discussion of the character of Batman in chapter three. When using the Batman franchise

as an object of study, one is similarly faced with the problem of definition. Jim Collins has noted the complexity of situating the Batman as an object of analysis. This is because the character has been subject to "multiple narrativizations" (164) over his history, which is complicated because many of these narratives are "not just continuations of an Ur text, but, in the case of [Burton's] *Batman* and *Batman: Year One*, very ambitious attempts to reconstruct the beginnings" (164).

Batman as a character dates back to 1939, when he first appears in a comic strip in *Detective Comics* (*DC*). His popularity led to his own volume *Batman* in 1940. This led to a fifteen episode serial, shown in cinemas in 1943 and a second serial in 1949. Then came the television series *Batman* (1966 – 1968), created by the American Broadcast Company (ABC) and its 'spin-off' movie, *Batman: The Movie* (Leslie H. Martinson, 1966). Batman returned to screen with Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992), both distributed by Warner Brothers, whose franchise was continued by Joel Schumacher with *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997). For the purpose of this study, however, I shall be addressing the Warner Brother film franchise, as well as the offshoot *Catwoman* (2004), as Catwoman is character who has been an adversary to Batman since her first appearance in *Batman #1* (Spring 1940) having featured in the ABC television series and Burton's *Batman Returns*.

Batman has been chosen as a figure for study for two reasons. Firstly, Batman functions as a transient sign that has responded to critical evaluation in a variety of ways. Batman has, since the publication in Fredric

Wertham's *The Seduction of Innocent* (1954), been associated with 'Queer'

readings. Wertham's study identifies the figure of Batman as an especially

popular figure of young male homosexual fantasy. However, rather than

close down readings of Batman as a figure of homosexual desire and

identification, I argue that his reading had the adverse effect of further

circulating these readings in culture. The Wayne household, consisting of

Batman, Dick Grayson/Robin and Alfred the Butler, has according to

Wertham, functioned as a homosexual "wish-dream" (190). I argue that

Wertham assisted the Queer readings of the Batman world become

legitimate, and thus serves as another example of critical writing influencing

the thematic and aesthetic concerns of a text. Through an analysis of

*Forever* and *Batman and Robin*, I examine how Schumacher has

deliberately employed a camp aesthetic and engaged with Queer discourse.

Secondly, I explore the difference in Nolan's imagining of the body of

Batman and I return to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and their

notions of becoming and the BwO. I look specifically at becoming-animal

as it is "found in the mutations and hybrids of myth" (Powell *Deleuze and*

*Horror Cinema* 67). Batman, unlike superheroes such as Superman,

Spiderman, and the X-Men, does not have a superbody: he does not have

any special powers or supernatural mutations. Although Batman differs

from these other characters in this way, he shares with them the

"estrangement and the liminal status" (Kaveney *Superheroes!* 5) that shapes

the character of the superhero. His position as a superhero, then, is due to

the training and disciplining of his body in addition to his use of

technologically advanced weaponry and chemistry. He can fly because he

has hand glider-like wings, he can disappear because he can create instant smoke screens. The supernatural element of the *Batman* films pertains more to his adversaries; the Joker comes back from the dead, Catwoman has nine lives. What this means then, in relation to Deleuze and Guattari, is that Batman is in a process of becoming-animal, in this case becoming-bat.

*Batman Begins*, as the title suggests, explores Batman's origins: why and how he 'becomes' the Batman. The tale has been told many times before in the comic books and in both *Batman* and *Batman Forever*: Bruce Wayne, when witnessing the murder of his parents on the streets of Gotham City, vows to return to Gotham to cleanse the streets of crime. *Batman Begins*, however, shows this origin story in a considerably different manner. Whereas the myth is recounted on a single page in *DC* in November 1939, and recounted in flashbacks in Burton's 1989 *Batman*, Nolan spends large quantities of screen time explaining the importance of both the bat iconography and the process Wayne undergoes in order to become this figure.

*Batman Begins* differs from the previous filmic adaptations in that it is bereft of the supernatural element completely, and is therefore more concerned with what the human body can do. Wayne is shown to have disciplined his body to be the Batman, to use scientifically-advanced gadgets designed by Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman) for use by the military which have been considered redundant by his father's company Wayne Enterprises. The bat origin is given more depth – in the original comic the choice is quite arbitrary – one flies into the window when he is trying to

think of a figure that will instil fear in the criminals he is attempting to defeat. In *Batman Begins*, a flashback shows Wayne falling down a well in the grounds of his family home, Wayne Manor, and being attacked by a swarm of bats before he is rescued by his father. It is Wayne's becoming-bat as he is becoming Batman which is foregrounded in Nolan's narrative, how he forms a BwO. Although, as Lori Brown has noted, this body is "formed out of an ongoing series of different becomings" (265), Rosi Braidotti notes that it is "stable enough ... to undergo constant, though necessarily contained, fluxes of transformation" ('Teratologies' 159).

Following my discussion of the Batman's becoming-bat, I will focus on the characterisations of Catwoman, one of the most renowned characters from the Batman world who appears in almost all Batman media. This section will explore these differences in representation between the Batman and Catwoman's becoming-animal. In *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman*, the characters of Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer) and Patience Phillips (Halle Berry) become-cat at a molecular level which leads them to further becomings. Kyle in *Batman Returns* is murdered by her boss Max Schrek (Christopher Walken) after he discovers her reading his private files revealing a dastardly plan to steal Gotham's power supply, and she is resurrected with catlike qualities. Similarly, Phillips is murdered on Laurel Hedare's (Sharon Stone) orders after Patience is discovered to have overheard Hedare's plan to market a poisonous and addictive beauty cream. Both films feature extended sequences of their resurrection. During Kyle's a number of cats congregate around her body, biting and scratching her until she flickers back to life. In *Catwoman*, Midnight, an Egyptian Mau that has

been following Phillips, breathes life back into her body and she is

resurrected with catlike reflexes, senses, abilities and cravings. Pfeiffer's

Catwoman is more subtly catlike throughout most of the film, although she

is in the early stages of her transition shown to gorge on a carton of milk.

Although these Catwomen are becoming-animal in a different way to

Wayne's becoming-bat because their transformations are literally molecular

and supernatural, their becomings offer them a useful way of transgressing

and evading traditional gender codes and conventions. A Deleuzoguattarian

analysis of each film's conclusion allows for a more positive reading of

each Catwoman's final position. Rather than being excluded from a society

which no longer tolerates their transgressions, it is an active rejection of

societal norms which may serve to empower each character.


The discussion of the body with Deleuze and Guattari leads us to a

discussion of the *X-Men* films to conclude this dissertation. Again, the X-

Men have their origins in comic books, but it is the films, particularly as

they were released at the beginning of this century, that are of interest. The

mutants in the *X-Men* films are superhuman, literally post-human. It is

explained that they are in possession of their powers because they belong to

the next stage in 'human evolution'. They represent a post-

Deleuzoguattarian ontological fantasy of 'becoming'- bodies that are not

assessed by what they are but by what they can do and potentials they have.

It is the fact that the human characters attempt to classify them, eradicate

them or reduce them to molar being that precipitates the action in the three

films. The films themselves are occupied with characters that typify certain

aspects to Deleuzoguattarian theory. For example, Rogue (Anna Paquin) as the girl epitomises certain qualities of becoming-woman and Wolverine, a becoming-animal. Braidotti has recognised that "contemporary culture has shifted the issue of genetic mutations from the high tech laboratories into popular culture" ('Teratologies' 157). As well as allowing a number of new monsters into popular imagery, this also allows this new band of Deleuzoguattarian superhero.

Here I pay particular attention to the character of Jean Grey (Famke Janssen). A Deleuzoguattarian frame is especially useful in certain instances for analysing the female body on screen independent of psychoanalysis. But as the trilogy progresses her representation becomes increasingly problematic and the benefits of such analysis are less clear. A distinct change occurs in her character in the third film *The Last Stand* (Brett Ratner, 2006). At the close of *X-Men 2* (Bryan Singer, 2003), she sacrifices herself in order to save the remainder of the X-Men, but is resurrected in the opening stages of *The Last Stand* as the 'Dark Phoenix' – her alter-ego that had, as the narrative explains, hitherto been kept dormant in her subconscious. Grey is shown to be vastly more powerful than any of the patriarchs that feature in the films, but this power is shown to be overwhelmingly destructive and beyond even her control. It is here that the risks of the Deleuzoguattarian method become their most apparent. This is because the becomings Grey/Phoenix undergo are ultimately uncontrollable. The becoming-molecular she represents – which involves her literally reducing everything around her to its molecular components – reveals that

the process may take us into dangerous areas where chaos and death are the logical consequences.

It is through this last analysis that I conclude that although Deleuzoguattarian readings may open spaces in order to discuss the active female on screen that allow her freedom from a restrictive psychoanalytic paradigm, with that analysis there is something vital to be lost. Although I am in agreement with Hills that "some new model of understanding has to be developed to take account of the new and changing representations of women in the action cinema" (39), I am apprehensive about proposing a complete turn towards Deleuzoguattarian readings. This for two reasons. Firstly, this is because they are not inclined to critique representations of this nature. Secondly, the potential risks of adopting the Deleuzoguattarian method of becoming to both 'woman' and real women may outweigh the advantages it has for looking beyond the binary machine.

As Inness has stated, the rise of the action heroine was dependent on movements in real women's lives: a greater social independence allowed the representation of strong, active women as not only possible, but plausible. If as Inness claims, that these images resound in turn and are "influencing real life" (15), the characterisation of Jean Grey potentially has very real negative consequences for women. As Inness notes, "we have yet to discover ... where these new notions will take us" (15), and it is the purpose of this study to expose the problematic representations in this series to prevent them negating the continued transgressive potential of the action heroine.

**Literature Review**

The concept of 'becoming' is one that runs throughout Deleuze's

philosophy and that is expanded in Deleuze's work with Guattari in *A*

*Thousand Plateaus.* Becoming, as Stagoll identifies, is encapsulated by the

phrase 'becoming-different' (21) or becoming-other i.e. that which departs

from the dominant and normative identities, practices and codes enforced by

society at a given time. These codes and identities are what Deleuze and

Guattari refer to as molar identities or molar aggregates, which are

"molecular elements that group themselves into relatively stable

configurations" (Lorraine *Irigaray and Deleuze* 121). All becoming can

therefore be seen as a form of resistance to dominant cultural ideals. This is

because it is these codes that attempt to thwart becoming – the free flow of

desire – by restricting it to regimented ways of being. In this sense,

becoming is always a political undertaking. Becoming is an "antidote to

what Deleuze considers to be the western tradition's predominant and

unjustifiable focus upon being and identity" (Stagoll 21) through the

rejection and displacement of these notions of being and identity.

Molar identities or aggregates, for Deleuze and Guattari, form part of a

binary and include dualisms such as male/female, human/animal and

subject/object. They are absolutes and cannot account for difference and

positions between the points of a given binary. But this does not mean that

the molar concepts cannot alter over time and throughout different societies.

As they are 'aggregates' of molecular elements they can be subject to

change and shifts. The molar identity 'par excellence' has remained 'Man':

the standard from which all activity and thought is compared. Deleuze and Guattari do not formulate a becoming-man, because in their philosophy of becoming there can be no becoming-man. As Patty Sotirin explains, "becomings resonate to the subordinate figure in the dualisms constituted around man as the dominant figure" (103). Becoming is the process through which one eschews and deconstructs these restrictive molar identities and begins to think of the world beyond. Becomings encourage life beyond the binary by finding new possibilities for the subject beyond the molar boundaries of being: "becoming explodes the ideas about what we are and what can be beyond the categories that seem to contain us" (Sotirin 99). Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming has been an attractive one for feminists looking to challenge the normative definition of woman or dissatisfied with the prescriptive position of woman in philosophy. However, its relationship with feminist theory has been complex and many writers present some serious misgivings about their work and what it may mean both for 'woman' as a signifier and for real embodied women.

This literature review will firstly examine the key elements of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming and explain why they are important to this project and the texts I examine. I will then continue to discuss how Deleuzoguattarian concepts, in particular the concept of becoming-woman, have been received by writers from a feminist perspective. I undertake this in relation to Elizabeth Grosz's series of drawbacks and advantages as presented in her *Volatile Bodies* as she offers a particularly balanced appraisal of the advantages and drawbacks of the Deleuzoguattarian method. As we shall, the adoption of Deleuzoguattarian theory by feminists

has been a long and complex undertaking. This is perhaps because Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is inherently dependent upon 'risk', entering the self and the concept of 'woman' into what Jerry Aline Flieger as described as a "journey of diminishment" (39). They continually ask the reader to push the boundaries of what is safe and what is known about themselves and the world they inhabit in order to challenge the dominant order of things. Although this element of disintegration has some attractions for feminism as a project, by challenging the molar concept of 'woman' Deleuze and Guattari "urge women to conceive of a molecular political movement" which is "no longer confined to the subject of woman's rights, bodies, histories and oppressions" (Sotirin 103). Deleuze and Guattari ask feminism to shift its concerns to the project of becoming instead of politics based of the perceived identity of woman. To ask a movement that has struggled for decades to find a position from which to speak in philosophy and culture is a particular worry. Their pronouncements raise a number of questions, not only because they seem to be adhering to the 'man standard' they critique, but they also imply that their project is a utopian one divorced from the realities women's political struggles.

Deleuze and Guattari propose several different types or stages of becoming, the first of which is becoming-woman. This is not to say that becoming is a linear process that is the same process for each entity that enters into becoming: "becoming is a rhizome" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 239). Deleuze and Guattari use the rhizome as an example because it grows in a significantly different manner to other plant life. The roots of plants such as couch grass and mint are prolific and do not adhere to any strict course

(Sotirin 100). The root may break off in different directions at different speeds and therefore "its function appears to be much more complex", and prevents this concepts and subjects "from being trapped in a closed static system" (Colombat 15).

Nevertheless, Deleuze and Guattari claim that "a kind of order or apparent progression can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child; becoming-animal, -vegetable, or –mineral; becomings-molecular of all kinds, becomings-particles" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 272). They explain: "on the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child ... on the far side, we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 248). As Deleuze and Guattari attach particular significance to becoming-woman and it has particular significance to feminism, it is with becoming-woman that this review will begin.

Claire Colebrook has written that "if man is the concept of being then his other is the beginning of becoming" ('Introduction' 12). Deleuze and Guattari insist that the process of becoming must be begun by undertaking a becoming-woman because "becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 248). Becoming-woman does not mean that biologically identified men must become literally women or behave in 'feminine' ways or like a woman. Nor does it mean that the female-embodied subject is necessarily privileged in the passage of becoming. As Rosi Braidotti reminds us, biologically identified women have not automatically become-woman in the

Deleuzoguattarian sense: "women are not *a priori* molecular; they too have to become-women" ('Woman' 303). Rather than literally becoming a woman, one must adopt a philosophical position, standpoint or perspective that is 'outside' or detached from traditional Western philosophical concepts such as being, identity, the subject, and mind and body. It involves demolishing molar aggregates, concepts and identities, positioning oneself against the 'man standard'. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, "becoming-woman represents the dismantling of molar sexualities, molar identities, definite sexual positions as the prevailing social order defines them" (177) and this social order is one which does "tend to privilege men" (177).

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not say that embodied women are closer to becoming-woman than embodied men, Rosi Braidotti recognises that "Deleuze does grant a head start to the feminists" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 308). Although Braidotti does not continue to define which feminists she or Deleuze are discussing, she states this is because "they are the women who have already taken their distance from the institution of traditional femininity" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 308). These feminists, for Braidotti, "are disidentified with its modes, codes, qualities, and prerequisites" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 308). Breaking down and questioning the molar concept of woman, which much third-wave feminism has endeavoured to, represents a process of thought akin to becoming-woman.

Deleuze and Guattari locate becoming-woman as the starting point of the process of becoming because, as Claire Colebrook states, "it is woman that

blocks or jams the conceptual machinery that grounds man" ('Introduction' 11). Therefore "all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all the other becomings" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277) because 'woman' is automatically positioned opposite 'man' in the binary machine. Becoming-woman is a metaphoric positioning against the normative, the molar. Deleuze and Guattari recognise, as do many feminist philosophers such as Christine Battersby, that Western philosophy has, since its very beginnings, been dominated by male thinkers and that the subject in philosophy is positioned as, and presumed to be, male/masculine. Indeed, so pervasive is this standard that even feminist philosophies suffer from this bias. As Grosz explains: "the very categories, concepts, and methodologies for both phallocentricism and its critique are received from our received history of texts and knowledges" (164). Colebrook echoes this by stating that feminism "has always been obliged to use the master's tools to destroy his house" ('Introduction' 4). Therefore, while becoming-woman does not directly concern a relation to real, embodied women, it has, as Paul Patton, comments "everything to do with the incorporeal body of woman as it figures in the social imaginary" (81). This is one of the dominances that Deleuze and Guattari seek to subvert through their concepts of becoming. To think 'woman', as opposed to man, is to start on the line of becoming-woman, is to begin to escape the molar terms of thought.

For Deleuze and Guattari, 'woman' is a molar concept, which like subject positions such as 'man', 'white' etc. must become destabilised. This is woman "as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 275). As Grosz states, "if one

*is* a woman, it remains necessary to become-woman as a way of putting into question the coagulations, rigidifications, and impositions required by patriarchal power relations" (176).

Deleuze and Guattari advocate what they term a 'micropolitics'. Feminism, for Deleuze and Guattari, offers what he describes as a 'macropolitics' because it has tended to be concerned with the molar identity 'woman'. However, they do not dismiss the very real need for feminism to relate to molar concepts: "it is, of course, indispensible for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 276). But Deleuze and Guattari continue to declare that "it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 276). There is a sense, however, in their work that this molar politics prohibits the life of becoming which is ultimately the life that they advocate.

But, as Christina Gordan argues, Deleuze and Guattari wish to use becoming-woman, and becoming more generally, as a means to eradicate all forms of biological essentialism (95). Rather than man or woman, Deleuze and Guattari want to do away with the male/female binary and think in terms of the production of a "thousand tiny sexes" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 278). As Verena Andermatt Conley argues, these 'tiny sexes' would take on "a lesser importance" (27) than the binary of male/female, masculine/feminine. A benefit of this is, as Todd May explains: "when we no longer privilege the masculine over the feminine, when we see that these

categories bleed into each other, then we are no longer worried about the 'essence' of the masculine or the feminine" (13). This process can therefore be attractive to third-wave feminisms that have been concerned with deconstructing the notion of an 'essence' of woman and deconstruct 'feminine' identities. As embodied entities we are somewhere on the threshold between the molar aggregates of 'male' and 'female', 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Powell similarly agrees, describing becoming-woman as "molecular, non-genitalised and minoritarian. It intends to fragment, not reinforce, essentialist gender binaries" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 73).

The figure of the girl in Deleuzoguattarian philosophy is a privileged one but like the 'woman' of becoming-woman functions conceptually and is detached from the reality of the embodied girl. Lorraine notes how the girl may even be privileged above becoming-woman:

> Becoming-girl may entail deconstructing patterns of stabilized molecular flow to an earlier node of an unfolding series of molar aggregates. Thus, the girl represents an earlier node or branch in a series of disjuncts leading to the other molar entities opposed to her. *Irigaray and Deleuze* 185.

Grosz also writes:

> The privileged personage, the figure of resistance they advocate, is the little girl. Not the little as vehicle for (pederastic) fantasy or the little girl as pure innocence, or indeed the girl as a romantic or representative figure, but rather the girl as the site of a culture's most intensified disinvestments and recasting of the body. 174-5.

Deleuze and Guattari describe her as: "an abstract line, or a line of flight" and claim that "girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277). The girl therefore acts as a figurehead for their demolition of the binary machine. The girl is not man, not woman, not adult, not child, not

animal – she is on the strata, situated on the threshold between many of Western society's grand molar aggregates.

She is also presented as a tragic figure by Deleuze and Guattari: "the girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 276). Lorraine supports Deleuze and Guattari by noting how "the girl is told how she is and is not to behave, while the boy is allowed a greater freedom of movement. The girl is the first victim and a trap for the boy" (*Irigaray and Deleuze* 185). Deleuze and Guattari state that "it is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277). The body then is an unmarked, an in-between, what Elfving describes as the ideal "condition for the binary subject positions and sexualities of boy, man and also woman" (76). For Deleuze and Guattari, when the girl becomes a woman, i.e. when she physically develops into a woman during puberty, she reaches the molar condition of woman. She has entered into a system of signification, defined by her sex and subject to the characteristic features of the feminine defined by patriarchal culture. Her body then joins the molar system of aggregates as it is sexualised and forced to be read in certain ways.

However, Deleuze and Guattari are also guilty of 'stealing' the body of the girl. As Sotirin notes, "the notion that the girl is a becoming seems also to 'take away' her body" (107). Similarly, Grosz notes how "the girl's specificity, her body, is once again robbed, this time ... by Deleuze and Guattari, who render it equivalent to a generalized and indeterminate in-betweenness" (175). The girl is presented as the block of becoming, a

subversion of the dualisms of molar identity so often imposed upon the subject and force it into rigid subject positions. If Deleuze and Guattari state that "the only way to get outside the dualism is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo" (277), the girl then 'becomes' something quite different, a vehicle towards true becoming.

If all becomings pass through and produce the girl, she is therefore denied any specificity. She "remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult" (277) but she is nothing in herself. Taru Elfving has noted although the challenge of the body girl in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy provides an insight into the workings of the binary machine, ultimately "this abstract notion of the girl is problematic in stripping her of any specificity" (76). The body of the girl is written over and ridden over in favour of becoming.

The figure of the girl is significant in this project as girls feature in a number of the films this project examines. The first figure is the Newt (Carrie Henn) in *Aliens*, and the second is Rogue (Anna Paquin) in the *X-Men* films. As we shall see, the criticisms levied at Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the girl are clear in the character of Rogue, as her mutation involves her continually being written over by other mutants' powers.

Another concept Deleuze and Guattari use in their formulation of becoming is becoming-animal which seeks to break down the binary of human/animal and displace 'man' as the focus of thought. Becoming-animal, in a similar manner to becoming-woman, does not indicate a process of becoming, or

behaving more like an animal, although becoming-animal may involve 'animalistic' or 'bestial' behaviours. As Deleuze and Guattari write: "you become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 275). It is not simply that the act of imitation (barking *like* a dog) is a becoming-animal. As Lorraine explains: "making a list or correlations between oneself and a dog and correlating behaviors of corresponding parts can only impose a new plane of organization on an already stratified subject" (182). Becoming-animal continues the project of destabilising molar identities that begins through becoming-woman in order to "break old behavior patterns" (182).

Rather, it is that one's capacities have altered akin to that of the dog. By adopting non-human behaviours in the act of barking, the body's capacities and flows alter to create an affinity between the human and dog. They are linked by capacity. Because becoming does not have an end as such, "becoming-animal does not mean acting *in order to* impersonate or *be* like an animal, it means changing and varying inhuman (animal) ways without any sense of pre-given purpose or goal" (Colebrook *Gilles Deleuze* 145). It is a "feel for the animal's movements, perceptions and becomings" (Colebrook *Gilles Deleuze* 136). Or, as Lorraine describes it, "one allows oneself to be 'contaminated' by the dog particles in a way that sweeps human patterns of molecular flow into dog patterns of organization and behavior at the expense of human ones" (*Irigaray and Deleuze* 182). It is a meeting of the two on the threshold.

Becoming-animal is Deleuze and Guattari's tenth plateau and relates to Deleuze's larger ontological project of rethinking 'man'/humanity as the centre of thought. As Grosz acknowledges, Deleuze and Guattari "produce a radical antihumanism that renders animals, nature, atoms, even quasars as modes of radical alterity" (179). Becoming-animal is a response to the perception of humanity at the centre point of importance of the universe. As Colebrook explains, "the problem with the human is not that it is one concept among others, but that it presents itself as the origin of all concepts, as the presence from which all concepts arise or become" ('Introduction' 11). The becoming-animal allows another avenue, a line of flight, away from the man-standard by encouraging connections with other sentient beings and acknowledging that man does not necessarily have dominion.

Deleuze and Guattari identify three types of animal in *A Thousand Plateaus*: the first being the bourgeois or Oedipal family pet, the second being State animals – genii and species subject to classification, and third being "demonic animals, pack or affect animals" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 241). The first of these animals has little interest for Deleuze and Guattari. They describe them as "sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, 'my' cat, 'my' dog. These animals invite us to regress" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 240). For Deleuze and Guattari, these animals have lost their transgressive potential. Because they have been co-opted and tamed by humanity, this means that their potentials have been curtailed in order to form another part of the bourgeois family home. They have become human

or humanised, and therefore correspond more to the molar aggregate of 'human'.

The second type of animal is similarly problematic for Deleuze and Guattari. Here we see the animal as it is classified by humanity. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is another instance of the animal becoming integrated into and subject to the societal codes concerned with being and identity. The animal in this second sense is classified by what it *is*, by what it *can do* and therefore subject to Western society's preoccupation with classification. But Deleuze and Guattari are concerns with possibilities, what may become, what an animal may be able to do and pushing limits. These are animals-with-organs discussed in terms of what they are and what they do, by their biological functions and socio-cultural inheritance, rather than animals that can invite you into becoming-different.

It is the third type of animal that is of import to Deleuze and Guattari, as it is in the pack that becomings may more readily occur. Indeed, as they write, "a becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 239). It is being part of a pack that challenges one's individual or individuated identity. It is a field, a zone that is rich in transformative potentials and lines of flights from the man-standard. It is a threshold where these becomings can readily take place as it is a "major line of flight from identity" (Grosz 174).

Anna Powell has written that "vampires, werewolves and other hybrids of horror fantasy are inspirational images of human affinity with beasts, plants

and minerals" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 67). The films I examine

feature similar hybrid figures. The concept of becoming-animal is important

to this project due to the science fiction genre being awash with figures that

are mutant or hybrid. In the *Alien* films, we are confronted with an alien

subject whose very existence depends upon a molecular becoming with a

host, taking on its form. In the *Batman* films and *Catwoman*, we are

presented with two figures, Batman and Catwoman, who are becoming-

animal in various ways. The *X-Men* films feature many characters such as

Wolverine, Sabretooth, Toad and Mystique who have become-animal at a

molecular level through genetic mutation and are thrown onto further lines

of flight.

In Deleuze and Guattari's 'mapping' of becoming, "becomings-molecular

take over where becomings-animal leave off" as the purpose of becoming is

to "become progressively more molecular" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 248).

True to the philosophy of becoming, becoming-molecular is difficult to

locate. This is because Deleuze and Guattari are not concerned with being or

beings, or what they call the "unity of substance" (*A Thousand Plateaus*

254). The molecular, for Deleuze and Guattari, is that which is opposed to

this being and the molar condition. All becoming, as opposed to the molar,

is therefore molecular. As Sotirin explains, molecular becomings are

"effects destabilizing dominant molar forms and relations" (103).

Becoming-molecular therefore continues the breaking down of concepts of

being into increasingly smaller fragments.

The molecular as Tom Conley explains is indicative of Deleuze's (and

Guattari's) tendency to study "objects not as they seem to be before the

naked eye but as dynamic masses of molecules" (172). Deleuze and Guattari

state "all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower or stone one becomes

are molecular collectivities, haeccities, not molar subjects, objects, or form

that we know from the outside and recognize, through science, or by habit"

(*A Thousand Plateaus* 275). Therefore they do not think in terms of objects

and beings but different intensities of matter. Tom Conley explains in

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy the "chemical definition" of the

molecule/molecular "is broadened to include subjectivity" (172). It is here

that we see the breaking down of molar identification points and the desires

associated with these. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "if this is true, then

we must say the same of things human" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 275).  As

Grosz writes:

> If molar unities, like divisions of classes, races, and sexes, attempt to form and stabilize an identity, a fixity, a system that functions homeostatically, sealing its energies and intensities, molecular becomings traverse, create a path, destabilize, energize instabilities, vulnerabilities of the molar unities. 172.

Becoming-molecular, then, can be seen as the uncoded flow of desire which

avoids capture by molar configuration and societal convention. Molecular

becoming serves life where the molar serves to inhibit life, to reduce it to

knowable forms contained by dominant codes and representations seen in

molar aggregates.

Becoming-molecular is an especially useful concept when discussing the

character of Jean Grey/Phoenix in the *X-Men* films, in particular the last

film of the trilogy, *The Last Stand*. We may understand becomings, as

Sotirin has described them, as "processes of desire" (102) that flow away

from restriction. In this sense, because Grey/Phoenix is described as "all

desire, and joy, and rage", the character has a Deleuzian resonance. As we

shall see, Grey/Phoenix's becoming is juxtaposed literally with the

molecular implying that it is not just the world around her that is

disintegrating but herself as well.

Grosz writes in a summary of becoming that "becoming-woman

desediments the masculinity of identity; becoming-child, the modes of

cohesion and control of the adult; becoming-animal, the anthropocentrism

of philosophical thought; and becoming-imperceptible replaces, dismantles,

problematizes the most elementary notions of entity, thingness" (178-9). As

Gordan has acknowledged, the process of becoming is "ultimately aimed at

becoming-imperceptible" (91). Grosz explains that this move "towards

imperceptibility ... is in many ways similar to the quest of physics for the

microscopic structures of matter, the smallest components, the most

elementary particle" (*Volatile Bodies* 179). But, as Stagoll points out,

"becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous

terms and tending towards  no particular goal or end-state" (21). Becoming-

imperceptible, then, is not a position or a static point. As Colebrook states,

"becoming-imperceptible is not something that can be achieved once and

for all; it is a becoming, not a being ... it is the challenge of freedom and

perception: of opening ourselves to the life that passes through us, rather

than objectifying that life" (*Gilles Deleuze* 132). Lorraine notes of

becoming-imperceptible that:

> Deleuze and Guattari's notions of becoming-other and becoming-imperceptible ... involve challenging conventional body boundaries, taking the risk of becoming indiscernible as a social subject, and unsettling a coherent sense of personal self. *Irigaray and Deleuze* 183.

But she also makes a distinction between becoming-imperceptible and becoming-invisible because she "does not get the impression from reading [Deleuze's] work that he really intends to disappear" (135). Rather, as Flieger comments, "the point of becoming, is, in a sense, to lose face, to become imperceptible, in order to counteract the very notion of individual stature" (47). This is because, according to Andermatt Conley, Deleuze and Guattari see a world in which "humans are forced to live in a world of clichés" (28). In this world of clichés, which is perpetuated by "prefabricated images", many embodied humans "have tended also to become molar" (28). To become-imperceptible is to continually dismantle this world of representation and cliché and to perpetually see rethink life anew.

However, this project is, to an extent, concerned with the ways that women are shaped by dominant codes and with exploring the potential of Deleuzoguattarian theory to provide readings that undermine these codes. In sense, it is concerned with how these women are 'perceptible'. Becoming-imperceptible remains an important consideration, however, as I explore how and to what extent these female-embodied characters move towards becoming-imperceptible. Ripley, Trinity, the Catwomen and Jean Grey/Phoenix all undertake becomings which allow them to transgress dominant codes surrounding femininity. They therefore all journey toward

becoming-imperceptible to varying extents with varying successes. For example, where the Catwoman's becoming-animal allows her to escape convention and lead a new of becoming-imperceptible, Jean Grey/Phoenix's becoming-molecular demonstrates how becoming-imperceptible has the potential to be extremely destructive.

Feminist Responses to Deleuze and Guattari

Writing in 1994, Elizabeth Grosz comments that at that point, "most feminists have said nearly nothing about [Deleuze and Guattari]" (161). Writing in later in 2000, Verena Andermatt Conley acknowledges that "only recently and reluctantly have feminists taken a positive turn in the direction of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy"[5] (18). It is clear that in the years in-between these two appraisals there had been a marked proliferation in feminist discourse addressing Deleuze: the volume in which Andermatt Conley's essay appears, *Deleuze and Feminism*, comprises of a number of revisionist articles examining the relationship between Deleuze and feminist theory indicating clearly that the two areas of thought have entered into a dialogue.

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[5] Conley's comments do not however pertain to the arena of Film Studies. It was as early as the early 1980s that feminist film scholars began to turn to Deleuze's own work in order to attempt to build more positive models of female-embodied spectatorship than afforded by the Freudian and Lacanian models that were then becoming dominant in the realm of spectatorship studies. Gaylyn Studlar and Kaja Silverman are two early advocates of Deleuzian theorising. Both writers have recourse to Deleuze's work on masochism *On Coldness and Cruelty* (1973) in order to challenge then dominant discourse of Oedipal psychoanalysis. They looked to the pre-Oedipal masochistic phase to account for spectatorial pleasure. It has, however, argued that Studlar's work at least is not entirely successful in creating the models desired (Constable, *Thinking in Images*).

Feminism has historically had an uneasy relationship with Deleuze and

Guattari. Alice Jardine offered one of the first critiques of Deleuze and

Deleuze and Guattari's work and focuses on the potential risks of becoming-

woman for the real female-embodied subject. As Grosz acknowledges, she

"clearly articulates the anxieties posed for feminists by Deleuze's radical

refiguring of ontology" (161). Jardine's article presents concerns regarding

the dissolution of the molar category of woman and the appropriation of

woman and women's struggles for Deleuze and Guattari's project. She

quotes Deleuze and Guattari's comment that saying that real "woman as a

molar entity *has to become-woman* in order that man also becomes- or even

can become-woman" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 275-6, original emphasis). In

short, Jardine fears that women must be first to disappear, because the

process of becoming heads towards becoming-imperceptible.

This clearly would leave the category of 'woman', and indeed real women,

in a very precarious position. As Grosz explains: "her anxieties seem related

to the apparent bypassing or detour around the very issues with which

feminist theory has tended to concern itself: 'identity', otherness, gender,

oppression ... all central and driving preoccupations of feminist thought"

(162). Although becoming-woman is part of a larger philosophical project,

Jardine's article highlights the huge sacrifice there is to be made in

abandoning a molar identity politics in favour of a minoritarian politics of

becoming.

Verena Conley's essay is an attempt to historicise the work of Deleuze, and

in part aims to account for the increased discursive activity surrounding his

philosophy towards the dawn of the twenty-first century. Echoing Jardine, she situates the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes as very much the result of the revolutionary spirit of 1968. She implies that one reason why feminist writers had turned more favourably upon Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's work more recently is the emergence of third-wave feminisms. It is often said that one shortfall of second-wave feminism is that it does not account for difference amidst the category of woman. As Colebrook comments, "the problem with this 'second-wave' feminism was its assumption that women's identity existed and was knowable" ('Introduction 10). It is this assumption which much third-wave feminism has endeavoured to undo. It is perhaps in the second wave that we can see the benefits of breaking down the 'molar' identity of woman, allowing a discussion of woman's multiple identities as it intersects with issues such as class and race.

As Colebrook also notes, "it is in this third-wave, or poststructuralist phase, that feminism encounters the work of Gilles Deleuze" ('Introduction' 10). This led to an increased interest in feminism's potential intersection with Deleuzoguattarian ideas in the 1990s. In her *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz offers what she describes as "clearly a highly selective" (167) use of Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian philosophy in that she develops "only those elements of their work, only those plateaus, that are useful for feminist reconceptions of the body, for rethinking materiality" (166). She does this because she believes that they can "provide an altogether different way of understanding the body in its connections with other bodies, both human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate" (165).

Grosz discusses a number of oppositions that feminist writing has raised in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's work even though "it is not always clear to [her] that these objections are justified" (163). She recognises that many of the problems feminists have encountered are serious and significant, and cannot be overcome easily. The first problem she discusses is Deleuze and Guattari's apparent "male appropriation of women's politics, struggles, theories, knowledges" (163) which was also of concern to Jardine. This is a major critique levied against them and the concept of becoming-woman because becoming-woman involves a deliberate placing of your self in a position akin to the subordinated position of women outside of dominant culture, philosophy and politics. Grosz comments, "at the least Deleuze and Guattari can be accused of aestheticizing and romanticizing women's troubles" (163).

However, it is a stark reality that Deleuze and Guattari are writing from the position of dominance as white, male Western men whose academic position presumably provides them with both a cultural and economic authority. As Braidotti has commented, "only a subject who historically has profited from the entitlements of subjectivity and rights of citizenship can afford to put his 'solidity' into question" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 310). However, it should be remembered that this position of dominance is one that the project of becoming, at least in theory, attempts to undo or dislodge. Indeed, Braidotti also comments that "Deleuze shows more sensitivity of the woman's question than many of his followers so far" because he is "singularly attuned to the issues linked to the dissymmetrical

power relations between the sexes" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 306).

This is certainly true in comparison to many of Deleuze's contemporaries.

For example, the question of sexual difference is barely glimpsed at in

Michel Foucault's corporeal philosophy in his *Discipline and Punish*.

This leads to Grosz's second objection, where she notes that the metaphors

and concepts that Deleuze and Guattari use tend to "neutralize women's

sexual specificity" (163). This is seen both in their concept of becoming-

woman and in the concept of the girl. The use of these concepts denies the

very real question of real corporeality, sexual difference and women's lived

experience. Colebrook recognises that "becoming must then go beyond

binary oppositions and pass through to other becomings, so that man and

woman can be seen as events within a field of singularities, events, atoms

and particles" ('Introduction' 2). But this is a massive undertaking which

assumes that 'woman' is not a helpful category on the road to real political

equality.

Indeed, the very notion of dismantling what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as

the 'molar woman' is cause for anxiety itself. Braidotti has questioned

whether feminists can "actually afford to let go of their sex-specific forms

of political agency" (*Patterns of Dissonance* 120). Colebrook states that "we

might argue that this strategy is typical of a masculine cannibalisation of

thought [because] women's non-identity and writing have always been used

to shore up a male identity that refuses to acknowledge genuine otherness"

('Introduction' 4). It seems a grand request, and risk, that real women

abandon the progresses of the feminist movement in favour of a life of

becoming that may, eventually, lead to a greater social equality for all. In this sense it is a utopian philosophy that may not be successfully practicable.

Grosz also offers a number of drawbacks which foreground the flaws in fundamental areas of Deleuze and Guattari's theories. Her claim that Deleuze and Guattari "seem to have little if any awareness of the masculinity of their own pronouncements, of the sexual particularity of their own theoretical position" (182) implies that their philosophy of becoming has failed at a fundamental level. If they propose becoming and the erosion of molar identities such as 'woman' in order to escape the 'man standard', that their philosophy suffers 'masculinity' and 'sexual particularity' suggests that they have, to an extent, failed in their own project. As Lorraine articulates the problem:

> Deleuze and Guattari seem to assume a stable standard against which war machines must continually be launched. The man-standard thus becomes a kind of point of origin, or worse, a point of reference required for orienting the direction of deterritorializing lines of flight. *Irigaray and Deleuze* 186.

This leads Lorraine to suggest that "the kind of becoming they describe is a masculine one with a masculine bias" (*Irigaray and Deleuze* 186). It may be that in their formulation it is the male/masculine subject whose becomings are privileged. It is clear that Deleuze and Guattari are adamant that 'man' is the standard from which lines of flight, becomings and deterritorialisations must flow. In this formulation the man standard, however, seems to remain. Flieger also supports this observation by commenting that "the essay does seem to be written from a masculine subject position" (39).

Lorraine is also concerned that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-woman is to "trade in stereotypes" regarding femininity and the experience of the female-embodied subject. Indeed, this is echoed in Paul Patton's work *Deleuze and the Political*. After acknowledging that becoming-woman has little to do with 'real' women, he states becoming-woman is "creating a molecular or micro-femininity in the subject concerned by reproducing the characteristic features, movements or affects of what passes for 'the feminine' in a given form of patriarchal society" (81). Although he does not acknowledge it as such, Patton's comments suggest that Lorraine is accurate in her assessment. What 'passes for the 'the feminine'' sounds remarkably like stereotyping.

Echoing Jardine's earlier critique, Grosz is concerned that women in their philosophy are "still the vehicles, the receptacles of men's becomings" (182). Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-woman and, therefore, becoming more generally, is dependent upon 'woman', either as a molar category or otherwise, being second to man in binary opposition. It remains to be explained how the concept of becoming-woman can offer any real change for real women when 'woman' necessarily remains in a subordinate position. As they write, "it is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291).

It is clear that the models that Deleuze and Guattari advocate involve very real risks for the feminist project. As Lorraine acknowledges, Deleuze and

Guattari "caution against their dangers" and "they never minimise the risks

the pursuits of such lines entails" ('Lines of Flight' 146). But it is this

element of risk that means that the application of their ideas for feminism is

a problematic undertaking. Indeed, as Lorraine acknowledges elsewhere,

becomings may have "unpredictable effects" (*Irigaray and Deleuze* 181).

But it does not somehow seem enough merely to acknowledge these risks

and proceed with a philosophy that may damage the already precarious

position of woman.

As Grosz writes, "it is important to tread warily on grounds where one

knows there are risks involved" (180). Although I have highlighted some of

the misgivings and problems that feminist writing has encountered when

addressing Deleuze and Guattari, there has been a dialogue with Deleuze

and Guattari because there are a number of perceived advantages with their

work. These advantages will be explored in relation to the central female

characters of the *Alien*, *The Matrix*, *Batman* and *X-Men* franchises.

**Chapter One – The Talented Lieutenant Ripley: The Changing Sign of Ripley and the Alien in the *Alien* Series**

Since its beginnings with the release of *Alien*, the *Alien* series has been the subject of much feminist and psychoanalytically inclined criticism. This has occurred for a number of reasons. Firstly, the protagonist of the first four films is a woman, Lieutenant Ellen Ripley. At the time of its release, the inclusion of an active female heroine in popular cinema was rare and largely confined to the horror genre. The character of Ripley has therefore been retrospectively identified as a major development in the representation of the 'action heroine'. As Sherrie Inness has stated, Ripley "led the way for the large number of tough female characters who appeared in subsequent years" (3). Discussions of Ripley have also engaged with a number of prominent issues in feminist theory more generally. Her representation has not only been read as symptomatic of the changing role of women in society, but she has been used to demonstrate feminist concerns such as cultural representations of motherhood.

In addition to the character of Ripley, the series involves a violently destructive Alien species. This Alien species is dependent upon a host in order to fully develop. These Aliens, in their various incarnations, have also attracted much, often contradictory, commentary. This is partly because the Aliens exhibit an uncertain 'sex' in that they have a "fusion of male and female organs" (Bundtzen 12). Despite this 'fusion', early critics tended to identify the Alien as either male or female rather than address the Alien as inter-sexed. Jim Naureckas (1987) has, for example, argued that "in the first

film, all the creature's forms ... were iconographically male" (1). Lynda

Bundtzen (1987), conversely, describes one of its forms as "a graphic

display of femininity" (12). Writing later, Amy Taubin (1992), however,

observes that "its toothy, dripping mouth was hermaphroditic: while the

double jaws represented the inner and outer labia of the vagina dentata the

projectile movement of the inner jaw was a phallic threat" (9).


That the Alien is dependent upon the body of an Other as a host makes the

body a major site of horror. The Alien makes a mockery of the human body

and the boundaries which we have assigned to it in order to understand it.

For example, *Alien* sees the male body symbolically raped and giving birth.

*Aliens* sees the hard and disciplined bodies of a squadron of male and

female marines easily disposed of. This indicates that despite efforts to

prevent it from being so, the body will always be a vulnerable and insecure

site. *Alien 3* sees a new breed of Alien. It takes a partially canine form as it

gestates inside a dog, revealing that the Alien replicates its hosts' DNA.

Ripley's body also supports the Alien as it grows inside her, which collapses

the boundary that had previously existed between Ripley and the Aliens.

*Alien Resurrection* compounds this scenario by offering Ripley's Clone as

protagonist. The figure of Ripley is now genetically entwined with the Alien

species and vice versa. As Pamela Church Gibson has noted in "' You've

Been In My Life So Long'", "there is only one constant in that Ripley is

always played by Weaver – for Ripley mutates, alters and changes

throughout the films in the same way as the Alien" (38).

Criticism regarding the Alien demonstrates a fundamental flaw in much early feminist film theory. Many of the psychoanalytically inclined readings have approached this Alien body with an essentialism that has denied alternate readings. Rather than approaching the Alien as a new body demanding a different methodology, critics such as Barbara Creed (1986, 1990, 1993) have imposed a psychoanalytic framework upon it. This has resulted in the Alien body being discussed in terms of the human body, and thus not a consideration of the Alien's bodily capabilities and potentialities in its own right. The Alien itself demonstrates that much of this criticism is unavoidably flawed in that we lack a methodology in which to fully address its body and its functions without resorting to dichotomous definitions, which in some case results in contradiction. This criticism demonstrates that a feminist formalist discussion of these texts requires consideration of more contemporary theories of identity and the body, as much of this criticism has been guided by the belief that these contradictions can be resolved discursively. As a result, these texts need to be subject to a reappraisal that takes account of the complex nature of these bodies, and I explore how this may be possible using the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

This chapter explores the changing bodies of the Ripley and the Alien. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how both the figure of Ripley and the figure of the Alien have 'mutated, altered and changed' throughout the series. I examine the films chronologically, assessing them within the context of their production. However, I also offer an alternative to analysis of this nature. Following Elisabeth Hill's critique of analyses of the action heroine, I offer a number of Deleuzoguattarian assessments of both the

figure of Ripley and the Alien in its various incarnations. Hills's article is motivated by a frustration with feminist theory describing the action heroine as "'pseudo males' or as being not 'really' women" (38). She acknowledges that Ripley has been "an important site over which changing theoretical responses to sexual difference and film have been mapped" (40). Hills continues to argue that Ripley "illustrates the importance of creative thinking in response to the new signs which occur in her environment, a willingness to experiment with new modes of being and the ability to transform herself in the process" (40). As we will see, dominant readings that are equally dependent on their period of production can close down interpretation and leave uncovered alternative ways of reading that explore Ripley's transgressive potential. Church Gibson has noted now psychoanalytic readings of the films "disregard, overlook, or perhaps fight shy of Ripley's repeated confrontations with this creature" (37). This chapter offers readings of Ripley and the Alien that challenge psychoanalytic readings and attempts to explore some of the relations that previous criticism has not considered.

Sexing *Alien* and Psychoanalytic Criticism

Released in 1979, the original *Alien* clearly engages with contemporaneous ideas of womanhood and femininity by introducing a female character that differed significantly from the representation of women in previous science fiction films. Rebecca Bell-Metereau sees *Alien* as "one of the first science fiction films to offer woman as a true heroine and survivor rather than as the

helpmate to man" (9). Previous texts in the genre had utilised female

characters as passive victims needing to be rescued by their male

counterparts, largely in a manner described by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual

Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Bell-Metereau largely views Ripley as a

positive image of woman, as she is "tough-minded and sensible" (18) and

notes that the other female character, Lambert (Veronica Cartwright)

"serves as a foil by behaving in a more stereotypically feminine mode" (16).

This emergence of a strong minded and successful woman was clearly

dependent on larger social ideas. As Gallardo C and Smith have noted, the

character of Ripley was "the product of 1960s and '70s Second Wave

feminism" (3). As women found themselves with greater mobility in

Western society, the manner in which they were represented in popular

culture also had to change. Similarly, Inness has commented, "the rise of the

action heroine was a sign of the different roles available to women in real

life" (6). The increased political and social mobility of real women made

this figure not only plausible as a leader of narrative but, in doing so, also

financially viable. The concept of this strong woman did not 'alienate' the

audience in denying a suitable identificatory subject, though, as will be

discussed later, this figure is not entirely free from compromise.

*Alien* is set on the Nostromo, a freighter spaceship that is delivering mineral

ore to Earth. The crew consists of seven diverse individuals: Captain Dallas

(Tom Skeritt), the handsome male given top billing whom one supposes will

adopt the mantel of protagonist until he is slaughtered by the Alien off-

screen in an air vent; Kane (John Hurt), the inquisitive intrepid explorer, punished for his curiosity; Warrant Officer Ripley, third in command; Lambert, the female and 'feminine' navigator; Ash (Ian Holm), the Science Officer who proves to be an android programmed by, and thus devoted to, the Company; Parker (Yaphet Kotto) the only black member of the crew, who is presented as a lowly and, at times, vulgar mechanic; and his monosyllabic assistant Brett (Harry Dean Stanton).

The film begins as the crew is awakened from cryosleep by the ship's computer, MU/TH/UR, which the crew refers to as 'Mother'. The opening shots, like many science fiction films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), view the ship drifting through space, emphasising the vastness of the vessel. As Harvey Greenberg has noted, "detailed immensity has been a commonplace of genre iconography" ('Reimagining the Gargoyle' 88). The film then cuts to the interior of the ship, where it tracks down empty clinical corridors, indicating that the ship, at this moment, is dormant. This lifeless scene contrasts greatly to the opening of *Star Wars*, where the film cuts from the vast exterior to the interior of a spaceship in the midst of battle. The camera settles on a computer screen that flickers into action, and shortly afterwards, the crew wake up. The camera tracks forward towards a number of 'cryotubes' in which the crew are sleeping, and as the tops of the tubes begin to rise, and Kane is shown to stir slowly and silently.

It becomes apparent to the crew, and thus the audience, that they are not at

home and something is amiss. Their return journey has been interrupted.

The reason provided by Mother is that it has intercepted signal on a nearby

planet, LV426, which may indicate intelligent life. As part of their contract,

the crew are forced to investigate or they will receive no payment for their

work. The crew leaves the main ship in a shuttle which becomes damaged

whilst setting down on the planet. Dallas, Kane and Lambert (only Kane

with any enthusiasm) investigate the foreign planet and find a wrecked

spaceship (Figure 1). Inside, Kane discovers a chamber filled by hundreds

of organic eggs. As he moves his hand towards one of them, the egg begins

to open and, as he begins to enthuse about discovering organic life, an alien

being (which will become known in popular discourse as a 'face-hugger')

springs forth, and crashes through the visor of his helmet and attaches itself

to Kane's face. On their return to the space ship, Ripley refuses to let them

board the ship as Kane is 'contaminated' and to do so would be breaking the

Company's quarantine regulations. Ash, the science officer, however,

overrides Ripley's decision despite her higher rank, and lets the trio on

board. On examination by Ash it is discovered that the Alien has implanted

a tentacle down Kane's throat which is feeding him oxygen. The crew are

unable to remove the creature, as it is discovered its blood is acidic and that

it is affixed so tightly to Kane's skin that any attempt to pull it off would

remove Kane's face. In addition, the face-hugger has another long tentacle

wrapped around Kane's neck which strangles him when the crew interferes.

Mysteriously, however, the Alien suddenly disappears leaving Kane with little memory of the event besides a nightmare of 'smothering'. Dallas, Ash and Ripley search for the Alien which eventually falls from the ceiling, apparently dead, but still with reflexes. Whilst the crew dine before returning to cryosleep for the remainder of their journey to Earth, there is banter and conversation, which is interrupted as Kane begins to wretch. He writhes on the table in agony whilst the crew try to aid him, and eventually he convulses and a splatter of blood is shown soaking through his white t-shirt. He convulses again, the blood patch grows, and an Alien of a different form (now known as a 'chest-burster') erupts from his chest (Figure 2), screeches, showing metallic teeth, and quickly departs the scene leaving Kane's twitching corpse and a stunned crew.

There are many connotations in the establishing section of the film that have attracted a multitude of psychoanalytic and feminist readings, as bodily and sexualised imagery is utilised throughout. The most influential of this criticism has been Barbara Creed's analysis of the series in a number of publications: '*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' (1990), 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine' (1986) and 'From Here to Modernity' (1987). She states that *Alien* is "a complex representation of the monstrous-feminine in terms of the maternal figure as perceived within a patriarchal ideology" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 128) arguing that one of the primary concerns of the film is "the reworking of the primal scene" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129). Creed argues that the archaic mother – "the mother as the origin of all life" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129)

permeates the text as acting as a "vast backdrop for the enactment of all the events" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 131). This is demonstrated by the opening sequence where the dormant ship is explored by the camera, and thus the spectator, that settles on the awakening crew operates as "the first birth scene" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129) of the text. It is her contention that this sequence is exploring the 'inner body' of the Mother, which "culminates with a long tracking shot … which leads to a womb-like chamber" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129) in which the crew awake. The crew's emergence from the pods is seen as a 're-birthing' which implies that "in outer space, birth is a well controlled, clean, painless affair … this scene could be interpreted as a primal fantasy in which the human subject is born fully developed" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129).

The second representation of the primal scene occurs in the wrecked ship that Dallas, Kane and Lambert explore. Creed comments that the ship "is shaped like a horseshoe, its curved long legs spread apart at the entrance" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 129) noting that they enter through a 'vaginal' opening and that the egg chamber in which Kane is 'attacked' is "womb-like" ('*Alien* and the Monstrous Feminine' 130). Greenberg similarly asserts that the crew enter through "unmistakably vaginal hatches" and that "the investigation of the derelict has been interpreted as a symbolic return to the maternal womb" ('Reimagining the Gargoyle' 89). It is here that the 'violation' of Kane occurs "an act of phallic penetration" which sees him "taking up the place of the mother, the one who is penetrated" ('*Alien*

and the Monstrous Feminine' 130) and thus becoming a part of the primal scene. Kane's ensuing violent and agonising death, which constitutes the third primal scene, Creed argues is a result of this forbidden union. The male body here is said to have been 'feminised', in that it has adopted the position of the mother to gestate and give birth to the monstrous Alien. Similarly Joseph Chien has noted, "the process of impregnation necessarily involves, for the male, emasculation in the sense that he must be penetrated and fertilized" (14). A further version of the primal scene is considered by Creed in Kane's body being dispatched into space and as Ripley jettisons the escape pod in the final stages.

Both Creed and Greenberg's examinations insist upon the bodily imagery being feminine. In 'From Here to Modernity' she argues that, "virtually all aspects of the *mise-en-scène* are designed to signify the female: womb-like interiors, fallopian-tube corridors, small claustrophobic spaces" (58, original emphasis). Later writings, for example that by Taubin, have suggested the imagery throughout the series is not solely 'feminine', and this implies that it is the psychoanalytic framework from which Creed is working that insists upon this coding. The wealth of psychoanalytic criticism this text has received can be viewed as a product of larger critical concerns. As we have seen in the previous section of this thesis, the critical texts were released during a period when psychoanalysis dominated feminist film theory.

What is especially interesting concerning *Alien* as a cultural product in light of the emergence of psychoanalytic feminist film theory in the 1970s is that

the text could be read as a response to Mulvey's charge in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Although the character of Ripley does not entirely refute Mulvey's thesis, there are certainly moments where Ripley challenges Mulvey's assertion that narrative is driven by the male protagonist. As Church Gibson has noted, "the first film appeared at the very end of the 1970s, a decade in which film study had been dominated by psychoanalysis – and offered itself up almost as a justification of this particular approach" (41). It is my contention that *Alien* is a text that consciously engages with psychoanalysis as a discourse. This is clear in the array of psychoanalytic or psychoanalytically inclined readings that have been circulated since its release. However, I would argue that although the film is specifically referencing these themes and ideas, it does not necessarily follow that they should be taken up in this manner. What is of interest to this study is, as Church Gibson notes above, that while the film can be a 'justification' of the psychoanalytic approach, it also reveals the extent to which psychoanalytic ideas had entered the popular imaginary.

It is not the purpose here to critique or build upon Mulvey's thesis, as much subsequent work on spectatorship in cinema has sought to do, but to explore how *Alien* fits into this schema, as it offers an interesting challenge to the work. Firstly, Ripley is the only survivor, and for this to be the case she has to assume the position of active protagonist rather than purely as passive spectacle. Ripley cannot afford to wait to be rescued by the strong male protagonist that normally occupies texts of this genre, as all the male characters, and indeed the whole crew, have been killed. She must act in

order to survive, and therefore we see a femininity that is active and resourceful. Also, it is the male body that is the site of the majority of the violence. It is the 'rape' of Kane and the subsequent 'birth' of the Alien that is the most horrific death. It has been suggested, however, that part of the horror of this scene is precisely because it is the male body that is violated in this way. Taubin notes, "that a man could be impregnated was the ultimate outrage" (9).

However, to suggest that *Alien* is a completely revolutionary text that shatters the somewhat sexist conventions of Hollywood cinema is sadly inaccurate. This is demonstrated most overtly in the final scene where Ripley disposes of the Alien, an individual scene that has again attracted a great wealth of critical attention and criticism (Tasker *Spectacular Bodies* 149). Ripley, at this stage, is in the belief that she is alone in the escape pod after successfully destroying the Alien along with the remainder of the Nostromo. However, as generic convention signals to the audience, she most probably is not alone. Ripley begins to undress and prepare herself for 'hypersleep'. Greenberg states that when Ripley undresses, "she becomes intensely desirable and achingly vulnerable. The sight of her nearly nude body is highly arousing" ('Reimagining the Gargoyle' 93). Gerard Loughlin in *Alien Sex* has described this as "the most obviously voyeuristic scene of the film" in which "the pleasure of watching Weaver's young body distracts the audience from what it fears is about to happen" (108). Although here Loughlin assumes that every member of the audience takes voyeuristic pleasure in seeing Ripley in semi-nakedness, he is accurate in suggesting

that there is a shift here in concerns. Ripley here can act as sexual spectacle. Bell-Metereau, as she is arguing for Ripley as a positive feminist icon, suggests that this is an innocent part of the scene, as she is undressing as if preparing for bed (21).

Ripley notices the Alien when its hand slips out from its hiding place. Ripley prepares to do battle with the Alien by donning a spacesuit and arming herself with a harpoon. Whatever innocence provided by the 'bedtime' sequence, as suggested by Bell-Metereau, is removed by Scott's low angle shot as Ripley steps into the suit. Scott's choice of camera angle foregrounds Ripley's crotch, the very locus of sexual differentiation (Figure 3). This shot of the female crotch presents a contrast with the previous body imagery. Whereas in the image of the Alien this genital imagery is associated with the monstrous, here it is shown as nicely covered by tiny white pants, a convention that Nadine Wills has noted presents the female crotch as "socially presentable" (123) where in its natural state, it is not.

Vivian Sobchack discusses this scene in 'The Virginity of Astronauts'. She argues that the character of Ripley is sexed and sexualised in this scene because until this point she is "hardly female" as she is "confused with her companions and denied any sexual difference at all" (106). This is one example of criticism that Hills notes is problematic as it positions Ripley as figuratively male. Sobchack describes Ripley's undressing as "truly disturbing and horrific" (106) as:

In becoming a woman at the level of the narrative, Ripley is clearly
marked as a victim; however, in becoming a woman as a fleshy
representation of biological difference, Ripley takes on the concrete
configuration of male need, demand, desire and fear. (106-7)

Sobchack is clearly influenced by the traditional psychoanalytic reading as
she assumes a male dominated point of view. I disagree with Sobchack's
observation for two reasons. Firstly, Ripley's difference is more clearly
marked in an earlier scene where she is attacked and 'symbolically raped'
by Ash soon before he is revealed to be an android.

The scene where Ash attacks Ripley in *Alien* occurs after Ripley has
discovered the truth about their mission from MU/TH/UR. Ash attacks
Ripley with some force, ripping her hair out of her head with his hand, and
knocking her unconscious. He moves Ripley to a bench, picks up a
pornographic 'girlie' magazine, rolls it up and attempts to kill Ripley by
forcing it into her mouth in order to choke her (Figure 4). Ripley here is
clearly marked as victim, and it takes Parker to beat Ash off. As Kaveney
observes, "Ripley is helpless against Ash; it is the one time we see her
without resources" (*From Alien to The Matrix* 144). Ripley is seen as a
sexual object that is abused by Ash, in an act that is a "quasi-rape"
(Kaveney 143) that shadows the violation of Kane and has connotations of
enforced fellatio. The implications of this scene are reinforced by the
content of the pornographic magazine and the posters of semi-clad women
that surround the bench.

Loughlin has also noted the sexual significance of this scene, commenting on Ash's behaviour after Parker has prevented his attack on Ripley. As Parker delivers a blow to Ash's head, Loughlin notes the "white liquid spurting from his mouth" and that "Ash's broken neck reveals a squelchy interior, with hydraulic fluids ejaculating onto the floor" (109). Through the use of the term 'ejaculating' Loughlin here is clearly aligning the 'white liquid' to semen, implied further when he comments that "Ash thrusts himself between Parker's legs, as if in a frenzied sexual act" (109).

Not only is Ripley's sexual difference emphasised in this earlier scene, but she is more clearly marked as a victim, here of a simulated rape. Like the final scene, it contains a sexual undercurrent. However, this scene has not received as much criticism, possibly due to the fact that Ripley remains fully clothed. Secondly, I believe it is possible to read this scene more positively once the psychoanalytic paradigms used to assess become destabilised. This reading can be provided by a consideration of Susan Lurie's argument provided in 'The Construction of the "Castrated Woman" in Psychoanalysis and Cinema'. It is undeniable that this scene also continues the sexual undercurrent of the film, as has been noted by many critics, but it does not necessarily follow that the exposure of Ripley's body is problematic.

James H. Kavanagh has stated that he would "disagree with an ideological denunciation of the film as simply another exercise in conventional sexism" (77) on the basis of this scene. "Such criticism," he argues, "would be hard-pressed to avoid repressive and self-defeating assumption about what

constitutes sexism and irrelevant assumptions about what constitutes the film and its ideological discourse" (77). Similarly, Bell-Metereau sates, "the viewers who see this scene as sexist do not comment on the parallel opening scene" (20-21) in which the crew awakes. Sobchack, as Mulvey before her, appears to accept the ideological and theoretical stances prescribed by the Oedipal psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan that had dominated film theory. Lurie offers a challenge to this theory at a fundamental level: that of the origin of castration fears. Where it is assumed in the Oedipal paradigm that the female genitals appear castrated and thus inspire castration anxieties, Lurie argues that the reason these fears occur is precisely because she is not castrated/castratable or "objectively vulnerable" (55) as the male.

If one views the female genitals in this way, by not accepting that they always signify a 'lack' but a "different kind of presence," (55) then a reading of this scene as progressive is possible. The female genitals do not become the site of monstrous feminine force that Creed suggests permeates the text, nor the site of passivity and inaction as seen in Lambert's death. Rather, Ripley's female body is exposed, purposely by the text, not to underscore Ripley as victim as Sobchack suggests, but as victor. This scene could very well serve to attempt to dislocate the notion of victimhood from the female biology, once the notion of the female biology is unsettled and Oedipal myths dismantled. Paula Graham similarly argues in a more 'queer' reading that this moment serves to "empower Ripley as an eroticized presence" (201). Therefore the text can be seen to present the female body and sexuality as a more positive force.

Hills offers an alternative reading of this scene from a Deleuzoguattarian

perspective, in order to break away from a psychoanalytic perspective which

she sees as problematic. Like many other thinkers deemed post-structuralist

such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari do not imagine a stable being, but

one that is in a constant process of becoming as it interacts with various

technologies and the world around them. As Hills explains:

> For Deleuze, then, the body lived to its highest potential is not
> organized according to the particular organs it has, indeed for him it
> is a 'Body without Organs' consisting instead of a multiplicity of
> independent parts … which can connect and disconnect with other
> machines, elements or object from multiple frames of reference to
> produce particular types of 'assemblages'. (44)

This approach divorces the female anatomy from the negative connotations

supplied by Freudian psychoanalysis. Therefore, that Ripley's body is

exposed is not as negative or significant. Another important factor regarding

Deleuze in this context is his challenge to psychoanalysis which functions in

his view as a "'philosophy of capture'" (Hills 44). This occurs when a new

concept such as the action heroine is interpreted through an outmoded

structure of thought which is problematically applied. Hills writes

specifically of this final scene that:

> Stripped down to her underwear, she presents audiences with an
> image of a female character who is *both* victim and her own rescuer:
> a character which breaks down the hierarchical division of active-
> male/passive-female. Whilst shots of Ripley in her bikini briefs
> certainly eroticize her image, her *actions* supply a strong counter-
> narrative. (43)

Utilising Deleuzoguattarian philosophy here, Ripley's body is in a sense

freed by the coupling of her body with other machines. These provide the

means of creating a new body which subverts the hierarchal divisions and

limitations posed by the gender system. When she connects with the

harpoon she becomes a different body with different capabilities. She is not

necessarily masculinised or figuratively male. As Hills comments:

> From a Deleuzian perspective, it makes no sense to read technology,
> such as a gun, as a fixed referent for the phallus. Rather it can be
> understood as part of a machinic connection … this has nothing to
> do with the attempted compensation for some original 'lack' but,
> rather, it is an activity which produces a new 'body'. (44)

Hills turns to Deleuzoguattarian theory in order to provide a framework that

frees Ripley, and the action heroine more generally, from a critical

inheritance that has (sometimes) reduced her 'transgressions' to

appropriations of masculinity. By using Deleuze and Guattari's theories of

the body, Hills finds a position from which to speak of the action heroine's

activity and use of weaponry in a more progressive manner.

Themes of Mothering in Criticism and *Aliens*

Barbara Creed's analysis of *Alien* discussed above notes that the figure of

mother is not depicted, yet is always 'present':

> She is there in the images of birth, the representation of the primal
> scene, the womb-like imagery, the long winding tunnels leading to

inner chambers, the rows of hatching eggs … she is the generative mother. ('*Alien*' 131)

Gallardo C and Smith comment that, "Creed's outstanding analysis of the film prefigures James Cameron's concept and design for the monstrous Alien Queen in *Aliens*" (20). Cameron inserts a different kind of Alien that will become known as 'Queen' or 'Mother' Alien. This 'new' Alien is an egg-layer, a biological function that will align it to the feminine. Ripley is once again juxtaposed with this Alien, and the 'monstrous femininity' it encompasses, but in simultaneously more complex and more obvious ways. Through the inclusion of the child Newt (Carrie Henn) and the sensitive-yet-strong figure of marine Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn), Ripley is allowed to develop conservative maternal and personal relationships largely absent from the original text. Furthermore, Ripley also maintains a more feminine demeanour despite 'unfeminine' actions and appropriation of heretofore 'phallic' powers. Not only is this achieved because her violent actions are performed to protect her 'adoptive child', but through the comparison of Ripley's body to the "stereotypically 'butch'" (Graham 205) female marine Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein).

*Aliens* is set 57 years after the close of *Alien*, as Ripley has been drifting through outer space in the escape pod of *Alien* and the film acts as a logical extension of the narrative of *Alien* (Doherty 185). An early scene in *Aliens* is a dream/nightmare sequence from Ripley's point of view. Ripley's nightmare consists of a 'birthing' scene similar to that of Kane in the first film, where the Alien erupts from Ripley's chest. Where the male body was

the site of this horror in *Alien*, 'the ultimate outrage' has now been
transferred onto Ripley's female body, its more 'natural' locus. It is
apparent when she wakes that Ripley has, psychologically, been deeply
affected by the events shown in *Alien*. Ripley is told, to her horror, in the
early stages of the film that the Alien planet, LV426, now has a number of
colonists living there altering the atmosphere to make it habitable. Ripley is
persuaded to return to LV426 to 'exorcise her demons' as she is shown
again awaking from a violent nightmare clutching her chest. These moments
for Greenberg and Blackmore, equate her voyage to the trial of a Vietnam
veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, an issue they contend was
pertinent in 1980s America. Ripley is to return to the planet as the
Company, now known as 'Weyland Yutani', has lost contact with the
colonists and suspect an Alien attack. Accompanying her will be a group of
highly trained Marines and the 'Company man', Burke (Paul Reiser).


The company of marines that accompany Ripley is as ethnically diverse, if
not more so, than the crew of the Nostromo, incorporating a black African-
American Sergeant Apone (Al Matthews), the Hispanic female Vasquez,
Bishop the 'synthetic human', and a cocky white male Private Hudson (Bill
Paxton) whose machismo dissolves after the Alien attack, amongst many.
Thomas Doherty, in his consideration of the *Alien* trilogy's generic
hybridity, states that the company "would be at home in a World War II
combat film" and suggests that its inclusion of 'marginal groups' "is in line
with the progressively open admissions policy of the military" in 1980s
America (191).

Vasquez is one of the female marines with which Ripley returns to LV426 and is stereotypically 'butch' (Figure 4). She is shown to be engaging in the traditionally masculine pursuit of body building in her first screen moments, and to hold a typically masculine bravado where the male characters, such as Gorman (William Hope) and Burke, do not. Vasquez's presentation can begin to be understood by Tasker's term of 'musculinity'. Tasker argues that musculinity occurs when "some of the qualities associated with masculinity are written over the muscular female body" (149). Characters such as Vasquez, and Ripley to a lesser degree, indicate how "signifiers of strength are not limited to the male characters" (149).

The child Newt is the only survivor of the Aliens' attack and acts as surrogate 'daughter' to Ripley, allowing Ripley's protective instincts to be juxtaposed to that of the Alien 'Queen's'. Because of the inclusion of this character and the theme of mothering that is associated with her, much criticism of *Aliens* has similarly been devoted to themes of mothering. As with the predatory creature of the original *Alien*, this unfamiliar being has to be coded within our terms of the familiar, with the creature being termed the Alien mother or Queen, not only by the text but discourse concerning the text. Considering the artificial nature of Ripley's surrogate mothering, and the boss Alien's determination to prevent and then avenge the destruction of its eggs, the text has encouraged a number of readings considering the difference between biological mothering and cultural mothering.

A consideration of the theme of mothering and criticism devoted to it is complicated by the two versions of the film available. In addition to the theatrical version of *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) is a Special Edition, essentially a director's cut, which features several scenes cut from the 'original' film. The first of these scenes is cut from the early stages of the film, after Ripley's first nightmare and preceding her appearance at her inquest. Here Ripley learns of her daughter Amanda's death during her own period in hypersleep. The second omission is relatively insignificant when considering the theme of mothering, and informs us that Ripley has had her flight status rescinded and criminal charges dropped but replaced by psychiatric evaluation. The third scene tells of a family of colonists on LV426, now also referred to as Acheron, and reveals them to be Newt's mother (Holly de Jong), father (Jay Benedict) and brother Timmy (Terry Henn) in the process of discovering the ship that housed the Alien pods in *Alien*. The fourth omission features Hudson boasting to Ripley about the marines' weaponry, fire power and military prowess. The fifth omission is Ripley talking about her daughter with Newt. The sixth and seventh omissions are sequences showing sentry machine gun towers exhausting their ammunition as the Alien targets are too resilient and numerous for them to dispose of.

The first and fifth of these omissions from the theatrical release clearly enhance a vision of Ripley as mother and their inclusion in the Special Edition certainly alters Ripley's motivation in her relationship with Newt. In the Special Edition, Ripley is allowed to show her distress in her grief for

her deceased daughter and her surrogate mothering of Newt comes from this grief. However, in the theatrical release, this relationship appears to arise from 'nature'. Newt shies away from the male and female marines, but Ripley instantly manages to build a rapport with the child. Although Ripley is less conventionally 'feminine' than her cinematic ancestors in the science fiction genre, she conforms more to a feminine behaviour than other female characters shown. Most visibly these are the females in the marines, most instantly visible in the character of Vasquez, who, as much criticism notes, is asked by another of the company, Hudson, whether or not she has been mistaken for a man. In the theatrical release Ripley's relationship occurs out of a natural affinity with the child. The male characters who try to communicate with Newt, with the exception of Hicks in the later stages of the film, simply do not know how to handle the distressed child, and the remainder simply does not even try to.

These two versions of the film offer two very distinct characterisations of Ripley and her relationship with Newt. This relationship is integral to the film in a number of ways, and has been often discussed in feminist and *Alien* scholarship. On a fundamental level, Ripley's affection for the child precipitates a large section of the action. After Newt falls through the flooring during their flight to the Sulaco, Ripley is determined to rescue her, and it is this endeavour that leads Ripley to the Alien egg-chamber and her first encounter with the Alien 'Queen'.

However, to say that Ripley's motivation is derived solely of her natural position as a woman is inaccurate. The Special Edition is more interesting as a text as it gives Ripley a specific motivation and reason for her attachment rather than this instinct emerging purely from nature/culture. In the Special Edition the change in Ripley's character is not simply an apology for her transgressive non-feminine behaviour in *Alien*, but rather is motivated by a distinct event in her life. For this reason textual analysis in this chapter shall pertain to the Special Edition of *Aliens*. This is not because it is Cameron's 'preferred' version of the film, as this project is not concerned with debates of authorship or the power of the studio within the American film industry. Rather this is because the characterisation of Ripley in this film does not fully adhere to the notion of biology-as-destiny which is implied in the theatrical release.

The two 'mothers' of this text are pitted against one another directly in the concluding scenes, as Newt is captured and Ripley has to enter the boss Alien's lair to retrieve her. Hicks, at this point, has been seriously injured by an Alien, and Bishop is predisposed fetching a spaceship, leaving Ripley alone to undertake the mission. Ripley comes across the boss Alien, laying a multitude of eggs in a process that bears more resemblance to excretion than childbirth. With Newt and a flamethrower in her arms, the boss Alien and Ripley appear to come to an arrangement: Ripley may leave quietly with Newt, in return for Ripley leaving the Alien eggs intact. Ripley however destroys the eggs in "a frenzy of weaponry" (Gabbard 38), seemingly at this point for no reason other than revenge for the traumas she has suffered. The

boss Alien then retaliates and infiltrates the shuttle returning to the Sulaco,
leaving Ripley once again to fight the Alien hand-to-hand, this time encased
in the mechanical shell of a piece of loaded machinery depicted earlier in
the text. This showdown has been described by Pauline Kael (79) and Susan
Jeffords (73) as "the battle of the big mamas."

The creature that lays the eggs is immediately assumed to be 'female', both
by the text and responses to the text. As the concept of mothering has been
so well documented it is perhaps now more fruitful and progressive to
enquire of the text why Ripley bellows at the creature "get away from her
you bitch!", not only immediately associating the creature as female but as a
derogatory one at that. Other than reiterating Sobchack's point that science
fiction texts, having introduced the viewer to the alien, reintroduces them to
the familiar (*Screening Space* 37): the unfamiliar unavoidably is presented
in terms of the familiar. In our natural world, the female produces eggs, but
this is not our natural world. As this Alien 'gives birth' in laying eggs, it is
undeniable feminised within our understanding. However, as Butler has
taught us, femininity is distinct from femaleness, and this feminisation is far
from meaning that the Alien is female.

Christine Battersby offers an interesting challenge to the deconstruction of
gender proposed by postmodernist and poststructuralist critics such as
Donna Haraway and Butler respectively. Interestingly, in respect of the
recent dominance of these theories on the formation of gender identity as
fragmented and subjective, Battersby argues for an 'essence' of woman that

may be construed as positive, as it offers a position from which to speak of female experience without neglecting or silencing woman and denying individual experience. In doing so, Battersby argues that maternality, the ability of woman (generally) to give birth and reproduce should be utilised to constitute a new metaphysics of identity, as, she proposes, existing systems of thought have previously only constituted the body as male. The female body and its ensuing capacity for childbirth, and thus the containment of an other within the self is, she demonstrates, an issue that previous philosophical traditions have neglected to theorise, largely as philosophers such as Kant simply cannot conceive of this body.

Battersby insists that this capacity for reproduction is essential to an understanding of femaleness as:

> Whether or not a woman is lesbian, infertile, post-menopausal or childless, in modern western cultures she will be assigned a subject-position linked to a body that has perceived potentialities for birth. (16)

This criticism does not in any way challenge this assertion, and links femaleness to embodiment in a fashion described by Battersby. Battersby argues for five 'features' or characteristics of the female subject-position as it is defined in Western culture. Fundamental to these features is, as noted above, natality – "the *conceptual* link between the paradigm 'woman' and the body that births" (7 original emphasis). The fourth feature Battersby notes is how "female identities are fleshy identities" (9) in that this capacity

has 'tied' woman to the natural and physical world in a manner that has not affected the male.

What this demonstrates is that woman's reproductive capacities are essential for an understanding of womanhood and even perhaps that womanhood is essential for an understanding of reproduction as Battersby argues. The speed at which association is made between the creature and femaleness, both by the film and in critical responses, indicates the extent to which this prevails. When it becomes apparent that there is a different sort of alien other than the ones at first encountered, Bishop muses that "it must be something we haven't seen yet", but unfortunately not. We have seen this figure many times before, Bundtzen demonstrates in 'Monstrous Mothers: Medusa, Grendel, and now Alien', and it is unfortunate that the creature does not challenge these assumptions. It is unlikely that mainstream Hollywood production will ever truly be able to show us something we 'haven't seen before', but it would be a welcome change for these assumptions to remain unfounded.

Tim Blackmore has also argued for a reappraisal of *Aliens* in light of damning criticism. Using Greenberg ('Fembo'), Berenstein, Bundtzen and Penley as examples, he notes that a major theme running throughout *Aliens* is the Vietnam War, which these critics have overlooked. Blackmore advocates a formalist approach to the text. Looking at Bundtzen's article reveals some bias at the basic level of textual analysis when she is discussing the 'sex' of the Alien. Bundtzen acknowledges, and then

dismisses, the potential for a different reading of the Alien creature. Why does the fusion of male and female organs not make the Alien androgynous? Why is the creature's femininity confirmed by imagery of the female genitalia? Why do the phallic elements not confirm the monster's masculinity as Naureckas suggests above? Bundtzen does not take time to elaborate on these claims, or consider in her own analysis why she believes this to be the case. What this demonstrates, again, is the inability to understand a creature other than in these dichotomous terms. Further to this, however, as Blackmore argues, this analysis closes the potential for alternate readings denying heteroglossic readings of the text.

After this boss Alien has been dispatched, Ripley returns to cryosleep with Newt, Hicks and the remnants of Bishop, a grouping that has, conducive to this discussion of mothering, been dubbed a surrogate nuclear family. Krin Gabbard argues for this occurrence being the consequence of Reaganite 'family values', as the 'family' is heralded here as both desirable and prevalent, but notes conflict in that "the Reagan revolution has authorized nostalgia for the patriarchal nuclear family at the same time that expanded roles for women have become all but universally accepted" (35). This conservatism is seen not only in the depiction of Ripley, having her action excused by the socially acceptable catalyst of her supposed mothering and the adoption of her new 'family', but also the depiction of the Company.

It becomes apparent in the original *Alien*, as Ripley gains access to Mother after the death of Dallas, that the scenario was orchestrated by the Company

for the purpose of returning the Alien to Earth for their weapons division. The crew had been labelled 'expendable' in this pursuit. Having the horror of this capitalist endeavour so graphically and horrifically depicted has led some critics to comment on the film's 'anti-capitalism', with Greenberg asserting that Scott's film acts as a "critique" ('Fembo' 169). Where *Alien* referred to Weyland-Yutani as simply 'the Company' implying a singular, globalised corporation, in *Aliens* it is named and we are shown its representatives in the form of Burke and those at the appraisal meeting in the early stages. The evil of the Company shown in *Alien* is displaced in *Aliens* solely on to the character of Burke, whom we learn deliberately instructed the colonists to investigate the derelict spaceship containing the eggs and offers Ripley and Newt as prey for the face-huggers in order to smuggle Alien embryos back to Earth. This endeavour is not presented as the desire of a ubiquitous and faceless company, but the greed and ruthlessness of the individual typified by the figure of the 'yuppie' in 1980s culture. This "Reaganist solution to the conflicting attitudes of American culture in the 1980s … cleans up the unsightly mess left by *Alien*" by "giving us back the traditional values that were so definitively missing from the original" (Gabbard 40).

Susan Faludi has written extensively of a perceived adverse cultural and discursive reaction to successes in women's realisation of social equality in *Backlash*. Faludi describes the backlash as "an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did win for women" (12) and comprehensively examines a multitude of different media

forms. In the chapter 'Man Shortages and Barren Wombs', Faludi argues that backlash opinion makers were discouraging women from delaying having a family in favour of developing their careers and entering the labour market.

The myth of 'infertility epidemic' aimed to persuade women that they were increasingly less likely to conceive the later they waited to have children. *Aliens* can easily be read as a metaphor for these two supposed tactics. Through the lens of the backlash, Ripley becomes another example of a 'punished' career woman. In the theatrical version of *Aliens*, Ripley is entirely without a family and psychologically traumatised. In the Special Edition, it is made clear that she has lost her family because of being away from them due to her 'work'. On her return to civilisation, she lives entirely alone in a miniscule apartment and the only human contact she has is with officials from the Company and the Military. Although she is economically independent, her material conditions and social status have altered since having her pilot's license downgraded. Ripley's return to civilisation can clearly aid Faludi's backlash thesis that society at large was trying to retrench woman's progress towards full equality: in the continuation of the *Alien* narrative, the assertive heroine that survived is now degraded and punished for her heroism. The opening stages of *Aliens* introduce an enforced dependence and passivity to Ripley that was largely absent from her character at the close of *Alien*, and must leave the human society to regain her assertiveness, as demonstrated once crisis occurs on LV426.

Similarly the premier Alien can be read as symptomatic of the fears that underpinned the 'birth dearth' thesis. Faludi describes the birth dearth as a pro-natal campaign aimed at white, middle-class women by appealing to American society's "xenophobia, militarism and bigotry" (52). She argues that the creators of the birth dearth discourse sought to pressurise women in the workforce into abandoning their career goals in favour of having children by presenting their reluctance to procreate as endangering the future of American society. As Faludi states, "if white educated middle-class women didn't start reproducing … paupers, fools and foreigners would" (52) meaning that:

> The United States would lose its world power status, millions would be put out of work, multiplying minorities would create 'ugly turbulence', smaller tax bases would diminish the military's nuclear weapons stockpiles, and a shrinking army would not be able 'to deter potential Soviet expansionism'. (53)

Procreation, Faludi suggests, was presented as an issue of national security and racial survival.

Gabbard has suggested that the Alien species' black skin suggests that the Alien is not only a sexual Other, but also a racial Other. The Alien is pitted against primarily white characters: the survivors of the Alien attacks at the close of both *Alien* and *Aliens* are all white. Viewing the juxtaposition of Ripley and the Alien as a backlash text, the Alien 'mother' embodies the xenophobic and racist fears that underpin the birth dearth, and Ripley's own loss and trauma can function as a pro-natal morality tale. Richard Dyer in

*White* similarly explores the racial identity and sexuality of the Alien as a non-white other:

> It is a specifically white, aghast perception of the unstoppable breeding of non-whites, that deep-seated suspicion that non-whites are better at sex and reproduction than are whites, that, indeed, to be truly white and reproductively efficient are mutually incompatible and that, as a result, whites are going to be swamped and engulfed by the non-white multitudes. (216)

Similarly Taubin argues:

> If Ripley is the prototypical upper-middle-class WASP, the alien queen bears a suspicious resemblance to a favourite scapegoat of the Reagan/Bush era – the black welfare mother, that parasite on the economy whose uncurbed reproductive drive reduced hard-working taxpayers to bankruptcy. (95-6)

Arguments supporting a reading of *Aliens* as a backlash text in terms of its parallels to supposed social concerns of the period are numerous, but these readings do confirm that the backlash occurred in the manner proposed by Faludi. The backlash remains Faludi's interpretation of discursive and cultural activity throughout the 1980s, and the backlash lens itself provides another means of retrospectively interpreting cultural products from this period.

It remains, however, that the cultural scenario that Faludi terms a backlash may be more appropriately titled a 'backwash'. To label the entirety of cultural and discursive activity of a period as a backlash against the women's movement is inaccurate, as Christina Hoff Sommers has argued in

*Who Stole Feminism?* (1995). Hoff Sommers describes the backlash as

Faludi describes it as a 'myth' and demonstrates that "reliable statistical

evidence for the backlash hypothesis is in terribly short supply" (232). Hoff

Sommers' own work is a reproof of a number of prominent feminist

thinkers such as Faludi and Naomi Wolf, whose *The Beauty Myth* is subject

for a similar denunciation for the manipulation of statistical information.

Hoff Sommers argues that feminists writing in this manner "are helping no-

one … their divisive and resentful philosophy adds to the woes of our

society and hurts legitimate feminism" (17). Hoff Sommers attempts to

contextualise Faludi's work and argues that Faludi's conviction in a

concerted effort in the regression of women's rights stems from the

increased influence of Foucauldian thought on the American academy. Hoff

Sommers refers specifically to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in which

Foucault argues for panoply of dispersed 'microphysics' of power, where

institutional power is rigorously applied over the individual through a

number of tactics.

However, Faludi is not alone in feeling that feminism at this period was

under a real risk of failure. For example, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*

(1990) was published in the year preceding *Backlash* Therefore, to dismiss

Faludi's project as a misguided example of stringent sex/gender feminism

that 'hurts legitimate feminism' that is purely conflictual is excessive. The

critical reception to and negative assessment of *Aliens* from feminist critics

to the themes of mothering and Ripley's feminism is symptomatic of the

cultural climate that similarly produced Faludi's *Backlash*. Faludi has not

simply invented the scenario; rather she has interpreted this discursive activity for a political purpose.

Although, as Hoff Sommers examines, Faludi's statistics and analysis in many areas are dubious, it remains that the 1980s were a period in which a significant number of feminist critics felt a weakening in feminist progress and potential for regression. Faludi's use of the term backlash for this period of discursive activity is perhaps too strong, but it is apparent that she is reporting on a period where there was clearly some response to the progress toward equality for women. It is naïve to have ever thought that women's integration into a male-centred society would not have gained some reaction, positive or negative. However, these negatives cannot, as Hoff Sommers demonstrates, be thought to constitute a backlash, but rather a backwash – a less violent, negative and considered reaction that nevertheless constitutes a response to social changes caused by feminist successes, not in a singular contrived motion but a number of disparate actions.

From analysis of the backlash scenario, it is clear that there is a strong correlation between the social situation of Reaganite America and the representation of Ripley. The representation of Ripley here is far more conservative as her actions are excused as they are precipitated by her maternality. *Aliens* can be seen as being symptomatic of Faludi's contention that "by the mid-eighties, as resistance to women's rights acquired political and social acceptability, it passed into the popular culture" (14). However,

to expand Hills's analysis of Ripley from a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, the relationship that Ripley develops with Newt is just one of many assemblages or becomings that Ripley experiences. That Ripley and the boss Alien are discussion primarily in terms of mothering, reduces the debate only to consider what the female body does, the functions of its organs. The Deleuzoguattarian project seeks to go beyond this, and envisages a body "that is not determined, not ruled or structured by those (organs), whether sexual organs, heart, or lungs" (Olkowski, 57).

In the philosophy of becoming proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, the figure of the girl occupies an especially privileged position. This is because the girl is "the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277). As Patty Sotirin explains, she is "an 'in-between' to all of the most pernicious dualisms that constitute us as subjects and that give significance to our most fundamental relationships" (107). Thus the inclusion of Newt can be seen to allow something quite different than solely acting as a substitute daughter for Ripley. She can underscore Ripley's becomings. She does not "belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom ... (she can) slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277). She reminds us how the body is 'stolen from us' by discourses such as psychoanalysis that prescribe limits and meanings on to it. The girl's becoming, when she becomes a woman, they argue "is stolen first, to impose a history, or prehistory on her" (276). Newt can serve to remind us of this history, and foreground this history.

When Ripley engages in the final battle with the 'mother' Alien, Ripley

forms an assemblage with a loader designed for moving heavy objects

(Figure 5). Ripley here is becoming-machine as joins with the mechanism to

increase her bodily capacities. In Hills's discussion of this final showdown

between Ripley and the Alien, she suggests that:

> A Deleuzian view would refuse this dualistic manner of articulating
> the similarities between them. Their commonality is not simply at
> the level of sexual difference or 'maternal desire and instinct', but at
> the level of actual capacities and speeds of their bodies and the
> connections they make. (46)

Although the functions of these bodies may in some senses be similar:

Ripley in *Aliens* is presented as an adoptive mother to Newt, and the Alien

as an egg layer, the relationship between the two figures is not strictly

analogous. A Deleuzoguattarian perspective encourages us to think beyond

the bounds of human perception and push the body beyond analysis that

results purely from its capacity. This approach may be useful in re-reading

this film to claim positive models of identification for women away from

the backlash thesis and readings that reduce Ripley function solely to that of

a mother. In refusing to apply the gender binary to the non-human figure of

the Alien, we may also begin to separate notions of the monstrous from the

feminine which certain psychoanalytically inclined criticism has

compounded.

Towards the Postmodern and the Abject: *Alien 3*

As Church Gibson has noted, the *Alien 3* and *Alien Resurrection* have not attracted the same wealth of discussion as the first two films. She suggests that this may be because "some feminist critics found the new, vulnerable Ripley, the female intruder in the celibate world of the all-male penal colony, problematic" (46). *Alien 3* marks an interesting stage of the *Alien* series, not only as it differs greatly stylistically and thematically from the previous instalments, but also as the Alien threat takes on a new physical state: firstly in the semi-canine Alien that poses the original threat (Figure 6) and secondly in the Alien 'Queen' that is gestating inside of Ripley. Ripley herself also adopts a more androgynous appearance, with a shaved head and wearing fatigues (Figure 7). Where *Aliens* is essentially an action blockbuster akin to Cameron's previous mode of filmmaking typified by *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), *Alien 3* is considerably lower key and intimate, returning in theme and atmosphere to *Alien*. *Alien 3* sees the eventual death of Ripley, in a self-sacrificial act to prevent the Company from retaining the creature that is growing inside of her. As Ripley is presented as a 'terminal case' from the middle stages of the film, the mood of the text is considerably bleaker than its predecessors, as there is no escape from death this time for the protagonist in which audiences had invested considerable time, money and emotion.

The opening titles are interspersed with scenes from the escape shuttle jettisoned from the Sulaco in which Ripley, Hicks, Newt and Bishop were

shown to escape the mother Alien. These titles tell the viewer that an Alien was aboard the escape shuttle, and suggests that one of the company has been is carrying an Alien embryo. The escape shuttle crashes on Fiorina (or Fury) 161, a remote planet utilised for a prison colony: a "kind of maximum security monastery" (Murphy 19) containing serious criminals that have converted to fundamentalist Christianity. The nuclear family shown at the close of *Aliens* have not survived: Hicks and Newt are dead, retrospectively leaving Ripley once again as the sole survivor. Their bodies are shown being removed from the wreckage, not in a clean sterile manner seen in the previous films, but "unclean, corrupt, fallen" (Gallardo C and Smith 124) as the opening scenes of awakening seen in *Alien* and *Aliens* have been replaced with those of death and contamination.

This colony consists entirely of 'YY chromosome' prisoners, bar a small number of Company employees: the medical officer Clemens (Charles Dance), the prison warden Andrews (Brian Glover) and his assistant Aaron/85 (Ralph Brown). As Graham argues, the film is dealing expressly with the deviant body (208). These men are supposedly genetically predisposed to their horrific crimes. These men are the abjected from society, "whom society excludes in order to constitute itself as a stable order" (Graham 208). This homosocial community has reason to fear the arrival of Ripley in this text, not for her sex or sexuality, but the arrival of two more Aliens: the face-hugger that attaches itself to Spike the prison dog, and the embryo of an Alien 'Queen' that is gestating inside of Ripley.

Ripley is given a less than warm welcome, and instructed to stay in the medical quarters 'for her own safety', which, much to the annoyance of Andrews, she ignores. As she is attempting to retrieve the mangled remains of Bishop, she is attacked by a number of the prisoners who attempt to rape her, stopped only by one of the other inmates, Dillon (Charles S. Dutton). The attempted rape scene, as Gallardo C and Smith suggest, foregrounds three main issues (138). Firstly, the motivation for this attempted rape is shown to be biologically determined and implies that Andrews is correct in 'quarantining' her for her own good. Secondly, it indicates a failure of the spirit over bodily desires: the vow of chastity that Morse so readily proclaims the men have taken at the beginning of the film has been broken. Thirdly, it suggests that rape is an act of power. There is no flesh revealed in the scene, it represents "man defining himself through Woman" (138). As Louise Speed has written in '$Alien_3$: A Postmodern Encounter with the Abject', the prisoners find themselves "without identity through sexual differentiation" (125). Ripley's arrival creates imbalance in the colony, disturbing the boundaries and laws they had created for this all-male community. This attempted rape scene may well be as much an attempt at sexual congress for genetically predisposed criminals long from female company as an attempt to restore some identity from that which Ripley has disrupted.

For the first time in the Alien series, it is implied that Ripley indulges in sexual activity, here with Clemens. It is Ripley that initiates this act. This liaison with Clemens is not incidental. As Kathleen Murphy suggests:

> It is as though, in satisfying the flesh's appetite for primal connection, she is assenting to that final crucifixion, the moment that she will take leave of the physical home she has defended for so long. (20)

Speed similarly sees great significance of this act in her analysis of Ripley as an example of Carol Clover's 'Final Girl' as a convention of the slasher horror genre. The comparison is also noted by Doherty who comments that "the three *Aliens* could pass for an extended, extraterrestrial stalker film where the killer/rapist ultimately achieves his goal, violating, impregnating, and destroying the too-adventurous, too-assertive female" (197). Clover herself notes Ripley's resemblance to the Final Girl in *Alien* and *Aliens* ('Her Body, Himself' 66). She describes Final Girls as those "who not only fight back but do so with ferocity and even kill the killer on their own, without help from the outside" ('Her Body, Himself' 84) which also adequately relates to Ripley's final encounters with the Alien in both *Alien* and *Aliens*. Sexual inactivity is one characteristic that is vital for the Final Girl's survival as:

> The male viewer may be willing to enter into the vicarious experience of defending himself from the possibility of symbolic penetration on the part of the killer, but real vaginal penetration on the diegetic level is evidently more femaleness than he can bear. ('Her Body, Himself' 97)

However, this convention is subverted in *Alien 3*. The sex act and any physical intimacy occur off-screen. Rather than show this the film cuts from Ripley's proposition to Clemens, to Murphy (Christopher Fairbank) cleaning an air vent. As he notices a hole burnt in the floor, he investigates thinking Spike is hiding there, only to be attacked by the Alien and forced

into the fan and 'diced'. In light of Clover's comments regarding the

necessity of the sexual inactivity of the Final Girl, this scene foreshadows

not only Clemens's imminent disposal by the Alien and Ripley's death at

the conclusion as "postcoital death, above all when the circumstances are

illicit, is a staple of the genre" (*Men, Women, and Chain Saws* 53)

Criticism has argued for many contemporary social influences on the text.

Amy Taubin has written of *Alien 3*, "Aids is everywhere in the film" (10).

Taubin's reasoning lies in the iconography of the prisoners with shaved

heads, the death of Clemens after sex with Ripley, the fetishisation of

intravenous narcotics, the all-male celibate society being attacked by a

"mysterious deadly organism" (10). Taubin even suggests that Ripley's line,

"they think we're scum and they don't give a fuck about one friend of yours

who's died" is "an Aids activism line if ever there was one" (10). With the

advent of the AIDS epidemic and popular discourse creating the myth that

AIDS was a homosexual disease, there was a homophobic backlash, which

Taubin argues is evident in *Alien 3*. Taubin comments that:

> The alien's basement lair, with its dripping pipes and sewage
> tunnels, represents not only the fear of the monstrous feminine; but
> homophobia as well. It's the uterine and the anal plumbing
> entwined. (10)

The liaison between Ripley and Clemens receives new meaning in light of

Taubin's comments and considering the following narrative events.

Clemens's death quickly follows their liaison. Similarly, Ripley discovers

she is 'infected' with the 'queen' Alien. This sexual act is then related to

death in the parallel editing with Murphy's demise. Indications that the film may be 'all about AIDS' are further implied by Fincher's fetishisation of the ritual of intravenous injection. Ripley is shown to be injected twice in quick succession, in scenes sandwiching the sexual liaison. Needles, tourniquets and syringes receiving and injecting fluids are all glamorised and shown in fragmented close-ups.

Taubin's argument in this article is especially poignant as it is so contextualised to the 'aftermath' of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. She is one of the first critics to describe the bodily imagery in dichotomous terms and not to insist that either sex prevails. Here she suggests that both sexes are to be feared in the representation of the monstrous other, and this is largely because of the social context shortly following the AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s and the resulting effect on the homosexual community. Hollywood was preparing itself to profit from this crisis and shortly produced such texts as *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), the story of a young lawyer persecuted because of his contraction of the disease through homosexual acts. Gallardo C and Smith also note a reference to syphilis and other "diseases of the blood" in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992).

This aside, Taubin's article was published shortly after Judith Butler's hugely influential *Gender Trouble*. Doherty's article similarly follows this publication and significantly describes the Alien as "*vagina dentata* and phallic drill, the alien is a cross-dressing monster from the id whose sexual

confusion mirrors the shifting gender dynamics of the series" (196, original emphasis). Viewing Taubin's and Doherty's work in this context, the choice to not sex the Alien by swaying to one side of the female/male dichotomy is especially poignant and indicative of the tremendously broad effect Butler's work has had on academic criticism. However, to suggest that all criticism of the series written at this time adopts this stance is inaccurate. This is demonstrated by Graham who despite acknowledging 'phallic' characteristics returns to suggest the creature's 'femaleness':

> The alien/other has phallic characteristics, but is generally coded as female, both in its reproductive functions, its fatal implacable beauty and its amoral survival instincts. (202)

Reasoning for this can be seen in the polemical purpose for Graham's essay. Graham is attempting to formulate a platform from which to discuss a heretofore under-discussed area: that of lesbian spectatorship. Much theory, such as Evans and Gamman, reacts to Mulvey's original thesis has argued that there is no position from which to speak in concrete terms about rigid subject positions be they 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual'. Graham is aware of this and seeks "not to argue for a definitive structure of lesbian identification, but to offer a conceptualization of how lesbian spectatorship might work in specific narratives" (217) in an approach that is indicative of the advent of Queer theory.

Graham rereads the final scene of *Alien* discussed above from a (potentially) lesbian point of view. Noting that this scene has been "criticized by feminists because it objectifies the female body as site of sexual violence"

(200) she suggests that "lesbians may, however, respond quite differently to this scene" (201). Suggesting that the lesbian spectator resists identification with the feminine object is a grand claim that assumes a lesbian spectatorial position as stable and fixed. However, Graham is attempting to pioneer work in this area and thus her work can provide a point for reaction in this area. Her choice to sex the Alien can thus be seen as symptomatic of this purpose. Although there are still contradictions in criticism of this period, these writings show that Queer concerns had, by this period of the early to mid-nineties, infiltrated not only cultural texts, but the criticism concerning these films.

The Alien that emerges from Spike's entrails is perhaps the most interesting incarnation of the Alien shown thus far in the series, as it takes a partially canine form. Previously, the Alien has adopted a humanoid form, and has only erupted from the human form. This new incarnation is rarely discussed in criticism but has interesting implications when considering Otherness and the formation of identity. Previously it was assumed that the Alien naturally adopted a humanoid form, but this new quadruped Alien demonstrates it is dependent upon its host for its future physicality. As will be explored further in *Alien Resurrection*, the Alien must fuse with the DNA of its host in order to develop.

Similarly, the Alien inside of Ripley has connotations as there is no longer as clear a distinction between the self and the Other as seen in *Alien* and *Aliens*. Absent from *Alien 3* is a dramatic and lengthy 'show down' between

the Alien and Ripley because the distinction between the two figures does

not exist in the same way. This Alien is destroyed by a communal effort,

and the hand to hand battle is taken place not by Ripley but by her ally

Dillon. This Alien is an interesting concept as the unfamiliar is now seen as

familiar for a reason. The Alien can only come into being through the body

of an/Other; the Alien has to partially adopt the form of this Other.  On a

superficial level, this factor corresponds to Deleuzoguattarian theories of the

body. The creature has an ability to 'become' with its victim at a molecular

level.

Becoming Deleuzoguattarian: *Alien Resurrection*

After Ripley's self-sacrifice at the conclusion of *Alien 3*, a further chapter of

the saga seemed unlikely. However, the power of the franchise prevailed

and Ripley was 'resurrected' for the fourth episode of the series. In a

conversation between Ripley and Dr. Gediman (Brad Dourff), she, and

therefore the viewer, is informed that she is not exactly the Ellen Ripley of

the previous three films: she is clone number eight, made from traces of the

DNA in her blood found on Fiorina 161. She has been created a laboratory

by a new batch of evil scientists, working not for the Company, but the

'United  Systems Military' in order to extract the Alien foetus that was

growing inside of her. The Clone Ripley is described thoroughly

derogatively as merely a "meat by-product" by General Perez (Dan

Hedaya), who is in charge of the primary operation to bring the Alien back

to Earth. It is in this instalment, as discussed by Powell in *Deleuze and*

*Horror Cinema*, that the *Alien* series resonates most clearly with Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian philosophy.

From its very beginning, *Alien Resurrection* establishes itself as a film concerned with the themes of genetic mutation, hybridity and fusion between the species of 'human' and 'alien'. Jackie Stacey has drawn attention to the credit sequence, describing it as showing "cellular mutations in flowing motion" which cross "the usual internal/external boundary of bodily integrity" (253). The first half of the sequence features an indeterminate mass of flesh, membrane and hair that warps and twists revealing eyes and teeth, which are characteristic of both human and alien bodies. It is a fleshy amalgamation of these two bodies. For Stacey, this sequence "places the mutability of the cell at the heart of [*Alien Resurrection*'s] spectacular display of monstrous bodies", because in its "golden flow" the cells "mutate into more monstrous distortions" (254). Indeed, her description of this sequence resonates with the Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian 'lexicon' as they are philosophies concerned with flows and mutations.

The action in *Alien Resurrection* is precipitated by a transaction between General Perez and the crew of the Betty, led once again by a male character Captain Elgyn (Michael Wincott), a likely protagonist who, like Dallas, is slaughtered in the early stages of the film. Perez has paid Elgyn for the bodies of a mining crew to act as host for the 'Queen's' eggs. Similarly to the first film the human body is commodified by 'the powers that be' to enable the life of the Alien for their own benefit. As in the previous texts,

the Aliens prove uncontrollable, escape the laboratories and quickly

despatch most of the military aboard the spaceship, leaving the remainder of

the crew of the Betty to escape to Earth.


The Ripley of this film can be seen to epitomise Deleuze and Guattari's

concept of becoming-animal through the assemblage formed with the Alien

species. The genetic mutation that has occurred in her fusion with the Alien

species has resulted in the Clone Ripley having certain Alien qualities and

behaviours. For example, after the fight that ensues from her first encounter

with the crew of the Betty, she is hit in the face with a dumbbell.

Considering the force of the blow, she, surprisingly, only looks slightly

startled and her nose begins to bleed. Not only does this reveal that she is

stronger and more resilient in her new body, but after she wipes the blood

from her face and flicks it onto the floor, it burns the floor like an acid.

However, this burning is significantly different from the sequence shown in

*Alien* when the crew of the Nostromo discover the face-hugger has acidic

blood. In *Alien*, this is a fairly long sequence because it involves the crew

running down a number of the ship's floors as the blood burns through

them. Therefore, the Clone Ripley's acidic blood is not shown to be as

potent: she is not entirely human and not entirely Alien, but a hybrid

between the two. She is positioned on a threshold between two points of

identification, between the multiplicities of 'human' and 'Alien'. As

Stephen Mulhall states:

> One cannot even regard Ripley's clone as human – as a member of
> the same species as Ripley herself ... she is, in fact, neither fully
> human nor fully alien, but rather a hybrid – a creature whose genetic
> base is constituted by a grafting of human and alien stock. 120.

Indeed, Stacey identifies her as a "transgenic clone: a clone whose original already combined the DNA of two different species – human and alien" (253). This refers to Ripley's previous becoming with the Alien in the previous film, *Alien 3*. The confusion between physical boundaries between the species was introduced in *Alien 3* through the depiction of the Alien-dog assemblage shown in the quadruped Alien, and Ripley's 'impregnation' with the Alien Queen. But this relation is expanded. Not only is the Alien dependent on the host's form and DNA in order to take form, but the Alien also alters the DNA of host. It is a becoming for both species, albeit a non-consensual one for the non-Alien party.

Anna Powell has described *Alien Resurrection* as a film that "operates a complex assemblage of woman becoming-monster in which the monster becomes-human" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 74). She also writes of Ripley's becoming-alien, and notes how the camera works to accentuate this becoming (Figure 8):

> Her senses are preternaturally acute. On the run with the pirate gang, she bends on all fours and snuffs the air like a beast. As she hears an alien approach, the camera takes a 360 degree turn that emphasises her fluid movements and beast-like body language. *Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 75.

This occurs shortly after the Clone Ripley realises they are nearing the Aliens' 'nest.' She declares that she can "hear them", and also that that she can sense that the Queen is in pain. The Clone Ripley is also shown to have an affinity with the pack, with the hive. As discussed earlier, the pack is given primacy in Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the becoming-animal. This is because it allows, or gives opportunity for, multiple

exchanges and connections which in turn allow multiple becomings. It is a 'space' to break down and diffuse individuated identity and subjectivity.

This sequence is dislocated from the temporal and physical space of the rest of the film. After she falls to the floor in a bestial manner, the floor is ripped from under her. When she is shown writhing on the floor amidst a mass of throbbing alien viscera, it is difficult to locate her. The shot/reverse shot exchange marking Call and Purvis's (Leland Orser) view of her does not quite tally in terms of perspective. We do not know quite where she is in relation to the rest of the crew. This sequence is Deleuzoguattarian because it depicts the Clone Ripley's connection with the Deleuzoguattarian pack of the becoming-animal. Call and Purvis believe she is going to her death, but she lies there in calm and quiet. As Powell describes, "she wallows with luxuriant abandon in a sea of tentacles" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 75). She eventually slips through the middle of the writhing multitude to join the Queen in the birthing chamber. This action itself signifies a becoming with the Alien species, as Powell identifies: "she sinks back into it by folding her arms with a rhythm and speed corresponding to the pulsing mass itself" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 75). The Clone Ripley is connected to the pack not only in a molecular fashion, but because she corresponds to the flows and movements of that pack. She has entered into the "relation of movement and rest of the animal particles" (Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* 274).

Attention is drawn to the Oedipal animal, the animal type that she and the Aliens are not, in a conversation with Wren. Wren realises the benefits of

the kinds of becoming the Alien is able to undertake, and it is this capacity

that the United Systems Military are wishing to capitalise from. He

describes the Alien as "the animal itself ... wondrous ... potential

unbelievable, once we've tamed him." The Clone Ripley responds by saying

"roll over? Play dead? Heel? You can't teach it tricks." The Clone Ripley

here makes references to the commands and whims that the human bestows

upon the Oedipal animal and realises that the Alien far from being this

'kind' of animal. The molar man here – Wren – believes that he and his

band of other molar men can be master of this creature. They adhere to the

conception that "man is the subject: the point of view or ground from which

all other beings or becomings are supposedly determined" (Colebrook *Gilles

Deleuze* 139). They have already engineered one becoming between Ripley

and the Alien, and wish to control all of their other potential becomings.

They exhibit an arrogance that is synonymous with the belief of man as the

centre of all creation and thought. It is, perhaps, the white, patriarchal, molar

males that are vilified the most, representative of military and scientific

power. Powell describes them as "the most monstrous beings on the ship

despite their fully human genetic status" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 74).


The Clone Ripley is not, however, the only mutant or cyborg to be seen in

*Alien Resurrection*. Many feminist writers such as Patricia Pisters, Rosi

Braidotti and Patty Sotirin have written of Donna Haraway's theory of the

cyborg and its relation to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix

Guattari. Behind both theorists' work is a perceived need for a

'postanthrocentrism' which aims to dislodge the 'human' as the centre of all

thought and integrate the subject more thoroughly with its environment.

This involves thinking more fluidly about how the subject interacts with others subjects, objects, animals, machines etc. Both Haraway's cyborg and Deleuze and Guattari's BwO and philosophy of becoming privilege interrelationality of this nature. The BwO and the cyborg are, according to Braidotti, "connection-making entities" (200).

Where Deleuze's philosophy endeavours to challenge the "binary machine" (*Dialogues*), Haraway takes arms against certain "dualism machines" (477) perpetuated by Western culture. They are interested in exploring and promoting the space between binaries in order to destabilise those binaries. Sotirin identifies the cyborg as a threshold, that which is "an 'in-between' human and machine, organic and inorganic, biological and technological, natural and unnatural, real and artificial" (101). It is a becoming-woman which aims to dissolve the fixity of the man standard by operating in conceptual spaces in-between. The cyborg for Sotirin is a very real phenomenon, as we are all now becoming 'hybridized', 'biomatic' and 'technocorporeal' (101). As Haraway herself writes, "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (475).

Haraway describes the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" and notes how "contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted" (475). She notes that her "cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions" (478). This figure resonates

clearly with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming in that it aims

to dismantle and challenge molar aggregates and societal conventions. But

Haraway also acknowledges that the territory that this may lead to is

uncertain and potentially unsafe, leading to "dangerous possibilities" (478).

Haraway identifies three areas of slippage between what Deleuze would

term 'molar' identities or multiplicities. The first of these resonates with

Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal:

> By the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the
> boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached ...
> many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed,
> many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection
> of human and other living creatures. 477.

Indeed, as Pisters comments, "the cyborg is situated on a molecular level,

creating becomings, connections, and affinity groups (the cyborg chooses on

the basis of affinity, not on the basis of identity and origin, which is anyway

undermined in politics of becomings)" (119).

The survivors of this film are, with one notable exception, all cyborgs to

varying extents. Johner is the exception here: a 'molar' white male. Johner

is a cliché of masculine behaviours. His first encounter with the Clone

Ripley involves him propositioning her for sex while she plays with a

basketball. Indeed, he continually makes references of a sexual nature, for

example, when he discovers that Call is an android he declares "can't

believe I almost fucked it". But Johner differs significantly from other

examples of Man seen in the film. He does not wield institutional power in

the same way as General Perez or Dr Wren. He is fairly lowly ranked in the

crew of the Betty also: the captain is Elgyn, and the second in command is a woman, Hillard, both of whom die in the early stages of the film.

Vreiss is also cyborgal. He is paraplegic, and only shown using a customised electric wheelchair. To say he is wheelchair 'bound' is inaccurate in a sense, as the wheelchair allows him to smuggle weaponry aboard the space station which will ultimate aid his survival. He is shown to have no feeling in his legs when Johner is sown dropping a knife which lodges into his thigh without him noticing. Where we see the Clone Ripley having become with the Alien to embark on a specific becoming-animal, Vreiss is in a process becoming-machine. He forms a different assemblage with his chair which significantly enhances his ability to survive. He is a clear Body without Organs – his disability requires him to look beyond what his body can do but what it can become through interaction with different technologies. Vreiss is at his most vulnerable when he is forced to abandon this connection-making machine as the company need to move underwater through a section of the Auriga that has been flooded.

Call the android does have organic elements and like Ash and Burke before her can 'pass' for being human. Call is gendered. She is an example of Haraway's second 'leaky distinction' which is "between animal-human (organism) and machine" (477). Call operates in-between a number of binaries or dualisms. The most obvious is organic/inorganic and human/machine. More subtly, however, Call destabilises the male/female binary. Although she does not have a 'sex' as such, she is certainly gendered. But this gendering is complex. She is gendered as 'female' but

does not strictly adhere to convention feminine behaviours and appearances. Her look is somewhat androgynous and she appears somewhat boyish (Figure 9). As Haraway writes, "cyborgs might consider more seriously the potential, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be a global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth" (490).

Her own physical boundaries are compromised in the sequence where she plugs into the ship in order to communicate with it. She is shown to have a here she enters into a becoming-machine, forming a different assemblage with the ship. This occurs after she is shot in the abdomen by Wren and is subsequently revealed as an android. She is able to 'plug in' to the ship in order to control it by inserting a cable into a socket in her body disguised under a mole. By undertaking this procedure she creates a new circuit which enables her to increase her capacities to control the ship. As a figure she jams the binary logic of many molar aggregates. These are both physical in that her body challenges the organic/inorganic, human/machine binaries by containing qualities of both. Her connection with the ship also demonstrates a breaking down of being and object, as she is able to form a different assemblage with the vessel which alters the capacities of both entities. This 'jamming' is also social in that she questions and challenges notions of gender and therefore the male/female binary is destabilised.

The Alien Queen similarly is not what she once was, and conversely to the Clone Ripley, is becoming-human. One of the qualities that Dr Gediman identifies as Ripley having 'passed' to the Queen is that the Queen now has

mammalian birthing processes and experiences pain when she give birth.

This is hardly an innocent allusion to the 'original sin' which continues

religious themes of the series such as 'resurrection' and the sacrifice shown

at the conclusion of the previous instalment.

As noted earlier, Powell describes this transformation as the Alien

experiencing a 'being-human'. It would be unfair to suggest that the Alien

Queen is now on a trajectory of moving towards the molar. Rather, the

Queen is now presented as situated on a threshold. This again resonates with

Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal because the intensities and

capacities of the Alien Queen and the Clone Ripley have been cross-

contaminated. Their affinity occurs at the level of their potential, partially

due to the alterations of their molecular makeup, but also because they share

capacities. Elisabeth Hills has commented that one reason why much

discourse has been produced that pertains to the relation between the Alien

Queen and Ripley is because "they are similar throughout the series because

of the actions they perform and what they do with their bodies" (46). As

Deleuze and Guattari explain, becoming-animal "is a question of composing

a body with the animal, a body without organs defined by zones of intensity

or proximity" (274) and it is this zone of proximity, or threshold, that the

Alien Queen and Clone Ripley share.

Tamsin Lorraine, when discussing the becoming-dog theorised by Deleuze

and Guattari reminds us that:

> Becoming-animal (or becoming-insect or becoming-plant) for a
> human being involves the cross-circulating of the two heterogenous
> series which constitutes a line of flight from the molar identities of
> each. Becoming-dog entails a becoming-human of the dog as well as

a becoming-dog of the human. What is 'human' becomes deterittorialized and reterritorialized onto what is 'dog,' and vice versa. *Irigaray and Deleuze* 183.

Therefore the description of the Alien Queen being-human is perhaps inaccurate. The Alien Queen to the same extent as the Clone Ripley has entered into a becoming. The Alien Queen and the Clone Ripley share an affinity at a molecular level. Hills writes, albeit as an aside, that the unity between the Alien and Ripley, is "a theme which can be read through [*Alien Resurrection*], where the hybridization of Ripley's and the alien's DNA works to cancel the distinction between them altogether" (46). Indeed, as Sotirin remarks, "when we are 'in-between', on the threshold, what keeps us distinct from this or that can become indiscernible or indistinct or imperceptible" (100).

The new breed of Alien shown in *Resurrection* continues the mixture between the human and the Alien species. Unlike the drone Aliens before it and those hatched form eggs, the 'child' Alien has white skin and is shown to have blue eyes, which have been described as "baby blue" (Constable 'Becoming the Monster's Mother' 195). The birth scene for Constable functions as an "intersection point for both human and alien aspects" (195). This considered, the Alien child does not function as Other/enemy in the same fashion as the Aliens before it. That the Clone Ripley disposes of the Alien in such a fashion – a slow agonising death – is more problematic. Indeed, as Constable comments, the "traditional dispatch of the final monster cannot be regarded as a triumph" ('Becoming the Monster's Mother' 196). She presumably kills the Alien because she believes it will endanger humanity's survival. Powell notes that this fusion complicates

emotional reactions to the final scene because "Ripley's awareness that she is the baby's 'grandmother' produces ethical dilemmas" (74). However, it could equally be accounted for by her becoming-animal. Indeed, in Gediman's laboratory, the means of the Aliens' escapes is made possible by two Aliens killing another so that its blood will burn through the floor allowing their flight.

Eaton's description of the disposal of the Alien child also resonates with the Deleuzian lexicon. He states, "using her non-human properties she sets in train a gruesome climax that – with its end-product of minced-up tissue fragments, blood and bone" (12). The Clone Ripley uses her own acidic blood to burn a small hole in one of the windows in the ship. The Alien child is sucked to the window, and is slowly sucked through the small hole whilst screaming in agony. The film cuts to the ship's exterior, where Alien blood, tissue, flesh and bone are slowly ripped out and disappear in fragments into space. The Clone Ripley watches on, albeit with some distress.

Powell argues that Ripley does "remain an inspirational figure for Deleuzian becoming-woman" (*Deleuze and Horror Cinema* 77). This is because "when the ship finally lands on Earth, she is left with potential for future becomings" (75) and because she has "already adapted to becoming-alien and is ready for further transformations" (77). However, Powell also acknowledges that "we are no longer sure of her nature, her powers or her agenda" (75). We are therefore unclear as to what these becomings will mean for both her and the society that she will inevitably encounter. She has

already killed her 'grandchild' and may continue on to further destructive transgressions. This perhaps demonstrates the potential dangers of the Deleuzoguattarian 'mode': we, by definition, do not know what will become if we undertake the "journey of diminishment" (Flieger 39) towards becoming-imperceptible that Deleuze and Guattari advocate.

## *Alien vs. Predator*

Writing before its release, Kaveney states "it remains to be seen what new variations screenwriters and directors will find to add to the subject matter and look created by the original movie" (*From Alien to The Matrix* 204). *Alien vs. Predator* is an interesting addition to this series that had been planned by Twentieth Century Fox since the early 1990s (Church Gibson 38), as it utilises the deadly force of the Alien without the character of Ripley. The plot is somewhat more fantastical, as it pits the Alien against another cinematic alien monstrosity, the Predator of *Predator* (John McTiernan, 1987) and *Predator 2* (Stephen Hopkins, 1990). *AvP* borrows considerably from the previous *Alien* films, most notably in its portrayal of an active female protagonist, Alexa Woods (Sanaa Lathan). Significantly, Alexa Wood is an African-American character rather than a white female as Ripley. However, it appears that Kaveney was somewhat optimistic in her estimation that something would be added to the 'subject matter and look of the original movie': the use of the Alien is superficial at best, and cynical at worst.

The catalyst for the action is the discovery of an ancient pyramid 2,000 feet below the surface of the ice in Bouvetøya, Antarctica. In one of the film's many nods to the previous films, this pyramid is discovered by Weyland Industries, owned by Charles Bishop Weyland, played by Lance Henricksen of *Aliens* and *Alien 3*. Weyland employs a team of archaeologists, engineers and guides to investigate this pyramid, which his investigators claim has a combination of Aztec, Egyptian and Cambodian origins. It becomes apparent that this pyramid was built by the Predators for the purpose of hunting the 'ultimate prey' - the Aliens. The Predators taught humanity how to build structures, and in return they demanded worship and a sacrifice every hundred years, namely several people to act as hosts for the Aliens in order for the hunt to begin. The ensuing fracas inside the pyramid sees the human characters divided by the pyramid, the rooms of which reconfigure creating a maze, a concept 'borrowed' from the science fiction horror *Cube* (Vincenzo Natali, 1997) and, bar Alexa, the company is quickly eradicated by both the Predator and Alien species.

Like the original crew of the Nostromo in *Alien*, there are only two female characters in the team: Alexa and Rousseau (Agatha de la Boulaye). Rousseau is somewhat androgynous and closely resembles *Alien*'s Lambert, being waiflike and adorned with short spiky blonde hair (Figure 10). Her sexuality is also ambiguous. As the team is preparing to leave for the pyramid, Alexa sees her loading a hand pistol and enquires why Rousseau is taking it along. Rousseau says because it is the "same principle as a condom … I'd rather have one and not need it than need it and not have one."

Superficially this comment appears to attempt to confirm her heterosexuality in light of her androgynous appearance: that she needs a condom implies she indulges in heterosexual acts. However, her androgynous appearance and the possession of this 'phallic' weapon can be interpreted as her being masculinised and thus may not require the condom as a passive recipient. Although the penis is distinct from the phallus, here the two become confused in her equation of guns with condoms.

Significantly, Rousseau is the first to suffer from the Alien attack in the sacrificial chamber. After being told by Stafford (Colin Salmon) to remain in the chamber with Thomas (Sam Troughton) and a team, Thomas gives her a flirtatious, suggestive glance, which she receives with some annoyance. As the remainder of the group triggers the pyramid to reconfigure, the chamber is sealed, trapping Rousseau, Thomas and the team in the chamber, and a number of Alien eggs rise from the floor. The face-huggers erupt from the eggs, and one leaps toward Rousseau, accentuated by the use of bullet-time cinematography. She is the only member of the group to be shown to be violated in this manner and similarly the only one to be shown as having the Alien erupt from her torso.

If one accepts the psychosexual readings of the Alien proposed by many critics towards the original series of which Anderson would have been well aware, Rousseau is being punished for her sexual ambiguity in not conforming to traditional iconography of the feminine female, for 'unfeminine' behaviours and for denying the male sexual gratification.

Rousseau, then, suffers a bizarre kind of date rape, in which Thomas's

frustration is acted upon by the Alien species. This treatment of Rousseau

recalls Graham's comment regarding Ripley's androgynous appearance in

*Alien 3*, in that Ripley must die because of her "uncontrollable and

unlocatable gender" (210) as she can neither "be situated as phallic

protagonist nor as 'feminine other'" (211). Rousseau, similarly, is an image

of the uncontrollable female that must be controlled.


The critical reception to *Alien vs. Predator* has not been favourable. Joshua

Tyler comments that, "*Alien vs. Predator* is not the worst movie of 2004,

but it is the most blatant exploit of a franchise, and maybe that is worse" and

Stacy Layne Wilson as "all façade and no foundation." These comments

recall the 'constituent features of postmodern' presented in Jameson's

*Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* as, "a new depthlessness, which finds it

prolongation both in contemporary "theory" and a whole new culture of the

image or the simulacrum" (6). *Alien vs. Predator*, as the criticism above

suggests, is symptomatic of this 'new depthlessness'. All previous

instalments of the *Alien* series have built upon its precedents. *Alien vs.

Predator* however does not, despite the new scenario and absence of Ripley,

but merely draws from the convention of the previous films. This is seen,

however, in *Alien Resurrection*, but Jeunet's film is also a parody in

Jameson's terms. Anderson's *Alien vs. Predator*, however, is an example of

pastiche. *Alien vs. Predator* tries to avoid this blank parody, but only

foregrounds itself as such, in its continual referencing to the origin *Alien*

films. These references are not necessary, and not subtle, and only serve as an attempt to link the film further to the *Alien* franchise.

The Alien body here has clearly become a commodity, mimicking the Company's and United System Military's attempts to 'domesticate' the Alien for their own purposes. This is also clearly mirrored in a scene in which the Alien 'Queen' awakes from its own frozen sleep: the moment it becomes animated it begins to lay, not freely as depicted in *Aliens*, as it is kept in chains. The 'ovipositor' is positioned so the eggs land on a conveyor belt. This is a production line for monstrous life. *Alien vs. Predator* suggests this is exactly what the franchise itself has become. The film lacks a strong and memorable protagonist (Alexa Woods only survives because of help from one surviving Predator) and the skilled artful direction of the previous films. The Alien body here is used purely to evoke the horror of the previous texts, mimicking actions and events, another step in a chain of self-referential signification that began with *Aliens* and is foregrounded in *Alien Resurrection*.

Conclusions

In a consideration of the representation of the body within these texts and its subsequent critical reception, it is evident that both are heavily mediated by larger critical trends and concerns. The emergence of the strong female protagonist *Alien* and its subsequent psychoanalytic interpretations are not

independent and isolated occurrences: both are the result of movements and shifts in ideological thought, manifested critically, socially and culturally. The issue of mothering in *Aliens* similarly is not innocent. *Aliens* contains conservative coding conducive with Reaganite politics within a conventional narrative that incorporates the then current trends of the action cinema, such as the 'hard body' and invocations of Vietnam.

The wealth of discourse produced in feminist criticism concerning the issue of mothering is the result of the academic climate, as E. Ann Kaplan notes, "the 1980s have seen an unprecedented amount of attention paid to the mother from a whole variety of perspectives, including feminist and theoretical ones" (5). As discussed above, *Alien 3* similarly is dependent on its specific time of production for its iconography, and the criticism devoted to this text is indicative of dominant academic modes of thought. *Alien Resurrection*, is also dependent on context: *Alien* suggests a singular, globalised Company; in *Alien Resurrection*, we are told, this company has been "bought out by Wal-Mart", currently the second largest company operating in the world, whose exploitation of humanity and society is well documented[6]. That *Alien Resurrection* is the most Deleuzoguattarian film of the series may also be indicative of the increased visibility of Deleuzoguattarian themes in popular culture.

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[6] See, for example, Naomi Klein *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. London: Flamingo, 2000.

These texts and this criticism are both the symptoms of larger material and social forces. Illuminating and furthering thought in specific areas, such as mothering in *Aliens*, leaves areas unexplored. Where the discussion of *Aliens* describes how the texts treat the issue of maternity and the cultural and political scenario that produced this representation, it does not enquire beyond its own immediate concerns. I do not deny that this is a valid and useful enquiry, only that it is more pertinent to readdress these texts with a consideration of the material origins of corresponding criticism.

The occurrence of the discourse devoted to maternity is one example which supports Hills's argument that feminist film theory requires a new methodological approach to address the action heroine. I do not in any way want to suggest that these readings are now redundant, rather that they are guilty readings in Althusser's terms – they are as dependent on their period of production as the films themselves. But what is of concern is that these readings inevitably filter into a dialectic and thus all future readings have to in some way have recourse to them. *Aliens* is not necessarily an anti-feminist film about mothering, but readings continue to make these links. For example, Gallardo C and Smith devote approximately a quarter of their book about Ripley discussing motherhood. What I argue is that the film and its criticism can be seen as a co-text to explore relations between culture and criticism and once done so, can allow alternative readings of these figures. Deleuze and Guattari offer one such approach, as the evolving and mutating characters of Ripley and the Alien lend themselves to a philosophy which constantly questions the bounds of human experience, desire and capability.

**Chapter Two – Matriculating the *Matrix* Franchise: Popular Philosophy and Polysemy**

In her introduction to *The Matrix Trilogy* (2005), the first distinctly 'academic' collection of essays to examine the *Matrix* franchise, Stacy Gillis rightly notes that "the films have had more material published on and about them since the release of the first film than any other film in the same length of time" (1). *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999) and the franchise that followed it are certainly not alone as science fiction texts in capturing popular and academic attention. Even the briefest literature surveys devoted to the *Alien* saga, discussed previously, or *Bladerunner* will demonstrate the extent to which science fiction texts and franchises have initiated a wealth of discursive activity in both the popular and academic realm.

What distinguishes the *Matrix* franchise as a topic for this study is the speed at which this "avalanche of studies" (Lutzka 113) has arisen. Since the release of the original film, a great number of popular philosophy anthologies have been published that explore both the original film and the ensuing franchise's narrative themes. These include William Irwin's *The Matrix and Philosophy* (2002) and *More Matrix and Philosophy* (2005) which, as the titles indicate, explore *The Matrix*'s philosophical themes, and Garrett, Garrett and Seay's *The Gospel Reloaded* (2003) which concentrates on the film's use of religious metaphor[7]. These are demonstrative of a recent

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[7] Further to these are Yeffeth's *Taking the Red Pill: Science Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix* (2003), Haber's *Exploring the Matrix* (2003), Condon's *The Matrix Unlocked* (2003), Faller's *Beyond The Matrix* (2004), Kapell and Doty's *Jacking in to the Matrix*

phenomenon that Thomas Wartenberg has described as "philosophers ...

turning with increasing frequency to film as a way of doing philosophy"

(270). Indeed, as Christopher Falzon has also noted, "a striking part of the

Matrix phenomenon is the way in which it has excited interest in academia

and amongst the broader public for its treatment of philosophical themes"

(97).

However, these treatments are problematic, because rather than offering an

analysis of *The Matrix*'s status as a cultural or filmic product, they tend to

expand upon philosophies foregrounded in the film, or to draw out

analogous relations between the narrative and existing philosophical

metaphors and allegories. As will be discussed later, the films do much to

encourage these readings, by "overtly, self-consciously alluding to or

drawing on philosophical themes and positions" (Falzon 100). However, as

Joshua Clover has noted, with this method "we give ourselves to

understanding the Matrix, rather than *The Matrix*" (14). The *Matrix*

franchise status as a cultural and/or philosophical work in itself is

undermined by a body of writing that largely refuses to engage with the

franchise in a serious manner.

As Catherine Constable has discussed in detail in *Adapting Philosophy*

(2009), this is an unsatisfactory treatment of the films from the standpoint of

Film Studies. As she comments, "the majority treat the trilogy as a

beginner's guide to philosophy" (1) and tend to discuss the film in two

ways: either "positively, as useful examples that make the theories

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*Franchise* (2004), and Lawrence's *Like a Splinter in Your Mind: The Philosophy Behind
the <u>Matrix</u> Trilogy* (2005).

accessible, or negatively, as misinterpretations/distortions of the

philosophical sources" (1) that they reference. These works largely dismiss

the film in two important ways. Firstly, these commentaries take for granted

their means of engaging with film as a visual medium and do not "bother to

engage with the rich, image-literate, textual detail of the trilogy" (5).

Secondly, these readings tend to fail to take into any account the wealth of

writing in Film Studies or engage with the films specifically as filmic texts.

As she notes, "there is almost no engagement with any works from Film

Studies" (5). This is, she feels, demonstrative of a "lack of respect for the

subject area" (5) and privileges philosophy as an academic discipline,

keeping the "traditional hierarchies firmly intact" (12).


It is clear that something unique has occurred here. This section aims to

evaluate both the *Matrix* franchise and the discursive reaction to it as a

distinct cultural phenomenon. As Sven Lutzka has noted, several other films

dealing with a similar subject matter were released in the same period. He

cites *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998) and *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir,

1998) as examples, but these texts also include *eXistenZ* (David

Cronenberg, 1999) and *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998), as films which "deal

explicitly with [the] blurring of boundaries between the real and the unreal"

(Lutzka 114).  Situating the *Matrix* franchise as an especially 'self-aware'

text that consciously aimed to produce a discursive reaction of this nature

through creating a philosophical 'metanarrative,' I shall demonstrate how

this tactic of deliberate polysemy has been perpetuated  and complicated

throughout the ensuing 'intertextual' franchise.

Although all texts are, to a degree, polysemic, I argue that *The Matrix*

differs from texts such as *eXistenZ* and *Dark City* because the Wachowski

Brothers "deliberately spliced many philosophical and religious themes with

futuristic science and technology" (Lutzka 114). Although texts such as

*Dark City* and *eXistenZ* do raise philosophical issues such as the nature of

reality and memory, the *Matrix* films go further in that they directly

reference philosophical texts. The anthologies are symptomatic of the

original film's invitation to interpretation, and as products in themselves,

can form a 'border' of fandom and platform from which to engage with the

*Matrix* franchise.

For the purposes of this chapter, the *Matrix* franchise will include the major

narrative elements endorsed by the Wachowski Brothers and/or Warner

Brothers from various different media groups. This includes the trilogy of

films, (*The Matrix*, *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*), the

computer game *Enter the Matrix*, the comic books *The Matrix Comics* and

*The Matrix Comics: Part Two* and the collection of animated short films

inspired by the original *Matrix* film, *The Animatrix*. The narrative of each or

part of each of these additional elements of the franchise are interlinked,

referencing one another, offering more information about the story world,

explaining the origins of the Matrix, and to some degree *The Matrix*'s

aesthetic as a text. I will refer to the 'technological metanarrative' that Dan

North has identified in his article 'Virtual Actors, Spectacle and Special

Effects. This runs concurrently with the diegetic *Matrix* narrative in the

form of director's commentaries and the 'Follow the White Rabbit' function

on the original *The Matrix* DVD release. I shall not be discussing elements

such as the *Matrix* soundtracks as these products do not contribute to the intextextual play that distinguishes the *Matrix* franchise for the purposes of this study in the same way.

After exploring the intertextual play and the *Matrix* franchise's philosophical 'project', I examine the ways in which the body is presented within this narrative scenario. It is my contention that the films are similarly complex in their representation of bodies. Drawing on the work of Foucault, I consider how these bodies are examples of 'docile' bodies and their function within the systems of power shown in this society. In order to address the films' representations of gender and sexual difference, I offer a detailed case study of the character of Trinity. I argue that the representation of Trinity as an action heroine is compromised due to the films' larger project. Rather than offer a radical imagining of active femininity, the films offer a superficial image of woman. Although Martina Lipp and Stacy Gillis have both commented on how Trinity enacts the traditional function of 'woman' within the Hollywood narrative, I argue that *The Matrix* and *The Matrix: Reloaded* at least use this function with some subversive intent. Trinity may function broadly as a love interest for the male hero of the films, but this is given a specific narrative function: without her love, there would be no One, and the One 8.0 would give way to the One 9.0.

Ceci N'est Pas Une Coulier: Polysemy and *The Matrix*

> A mise-en-scene analysis of *The Matrix* reveals that every visual
> sign that can be deciphered by the audience – titles of books, tattoos
> and the like – is charged with allegorical, metaphorical, or
> metonymical layers of meaning.

Sven Lutzka, 'Simulacra, Simulation and *The Matrix*', 116.

It is useful in beginning to explore the impetus behind the popular philosophy anthologies devoted to *The Matrix* to consider the scene that introduces the protagonist Neo (Keanu Reeves) to the viewer. The film immediately establishes him as a loner, slumped over his desk amongst a mass of computer hardware, having fallen asleep running an internet search for the elusive Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne). He wakes from his slumber and witnesses his computer 'behaving' in a manner he (presumably) has not programmed it to in that it displays the text "wake up Neo ... knock knock". He is then interrupted in his confusion by a knocking at his door. The film then cuts to the exterior of his apartment from the point of view of Choi (Marc Gray), his guest, with the number 101 clearly visible on Neo's front door, which is situated on the left of the frame (Figure 11). This is, of course, binary code, but also has further mythic value. The allusion to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the horrors associated with its own Room 101 is hardly subtle, and instantly signals to the informed viewer that, within this diegetic world, something is amiss.

Room 101 is the room of horrors in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in which victims, mostly 'thought-criminals', are subjected to their worst fears as a form of torture. In the case of its protagonist, Winston Smith, this is to have his face gnawed by rats. However, Room 101 as a concept has mutated from Orwell's original intent, and now largely acts as a theoretical space in which to banish one's pet hates forever more. This is demonstrated by the BBC's comedy chat show *Room 101* that has been running since

1994 and numerous internet sites that provide web space for posting one's

own grievances. Other examples of the use of Room 101 in culture are the

inclusion of a Room 101 in the MI6 headquarters of Alan Moore's *The

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: The Black Dossier* and the British

television programme *Big Brother*.

O'Brian, Winston's primary torturer in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, explains to

Winston when answering the question as to what is contained within Room

101 that:

> The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world ... [this]
> varies from individual to individual. It may be burial alive, or death
> by fire, or by drowning ... there are cases where it is some quite
> trivial thing, not even fatal. (296)

Room 101 as a concept is in itself terrifying because in this scenario State

control must have attained the ability to ascertain an individual's own

personal nightmare against their will by reading their thoughts. That this

knowledge should then be utilised against a victim in order to make them

comply entirely to the State's wishes is equally as horrific. As O'Brian

explains:

> Pain is not always enough. There are occasions when a human being
> will stand out against pain, even to the point of death. But for
> everyone there is something unendurable – something that cannot be
> contemplated ... [these] form a pressure that you cannot withstand.
> (297-8)

However, although there are analogous relations between the characters of

Neo and Winston, the inclusion of the figure 101 on Neo's door is

problematic. Both are subjects of totalitarian societies; both are 'rebels'. Yet

both of their rebellions, as we learn in the latter stages of both narratives, are anticipated and encouraged by the system of which they are part. As the One is revealed in *The Matrix: Reloaded* to be a computer program designed by the machines, specifically by the Architect (Helmut Bakaitis), Winston is deceived by Carrington the shopkeeper, and led to his ultimate demise by O'Brian's lies regarding the Brotherhood.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of the number on Neo's door remains problematic as it anticipates some prior knowledge of the concept of Room 101 for its effect yet it is not directly comparable. Neo's apartment is not a torture chamber in the sense that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Room 101 is a torture chamber. Though his physical positioning in a pod in the Matrix or indeed the conditions of machines ruling over humanity may be an unendurable for Neo, these spaces do not function in the same way. However, the occurrence does indicate what Paul Condon refers to as an "attempt to reinforce the thematic similarities" (157) between the two texts.

An understanding of this mutation is provided by John Ellis's analysis of literary adaptation. He states that, "the adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated cultural memory" (3). For the allusion to function in the manner intended, it is necessarily reliant upon the memory of Room 101 and how this has come to function in popular culture; and not necessarily upon the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself. For this to be usefully employed the viewer must merely be aware of Room 101 *as a concept* rather than its function in Orwell's novel. The

widespread use of Room 101 in popular culture implies that as a concept it exists more in 'generally circulated cultural memory' than as a direct reference to the novel. Its inclusion in *The Matrix* certainly further adds to this mutation, distancing Room 101 from its original context and meaning.

This occurrence is closely followed by a similar moment that has attracted multifarious observations from a variety of commentators (Lee, Constable, Merrin, Felluga, Gordon) though its connotations are not as instantly recognisable to the 'average' viewer. As Neo reaches for the illegally obtained software that Choi has come to collect, he picks up a copy of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* which has been hollowed out to accommodate the illicit material (Figure 12). As Dino Felluga rightly notes, *Simulacra and Simulation* is a work that "had has a major influence in contemporary understandings of the age in which we live" (85) which he acknowledges as largely being referred to as 'postmodern.'

The very appearance of the book itself is worthy of analysis, as also noted by Lutzka (120). Firstly, the text itself, in most published editions, is one hundred and sixty four pages long, meaning that it is approximately a centimetre and a half thick. In *The Matrix*, however, the work appears to be several inches thick and bound in leather. Neo opens the book at the chapter 'On Nihilism' which in actual copies occupies the final six pages. In this copy, however, it is approximately a quarter of the way through the tome. The book in *The Matrix* corresponds more to stereotype or a generally circulated belief of what a great work of philosophy should look like i.e. leather bound and lengthy. In tandem with the fact that the book has been

hollowed out, that Baudrillard's proclamation that "the critical stage is empty" (163) has given way to literal emptiness, the text's inclusion functions in an appropriately paradoxical fashion. The text that claims that we live in a world of simulation, where "the real is no longer what it was" and "there is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality" (6) becomes an image, a simulation itself. As we learn later, this has particular significance as this room does not exist in the way Neo believes it to – it is part of the 'neural interactive simulation' of the Matrix.

This alteration of the appearance of *Simulacra and Simulation* may well be one of the first film's many "self-conscious references to the erosion of boundaries between reality and virtuality" (Wolmark 83). The nature and appearance of *Simulacra and Simulation* may have changed to suit a more apt appearance for a work of philosophy, but this is the very point: "objects shine in a sort of hyperresemblance ... they no longer resemble anything, except the empty figure of resemblance, the empty form of representation" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 45). As William Merrin has rightly commented, "Baudrillard's inclusion is ... an acknowledgement that his theory of simulation is, in some way, central to the film" (Paragraph 1). I will return to Baudrillard's theory further on in this chapter.

Foreshadowing the remainder of the narrative, the script then runs:

> Choi: Halleluiah. You're my saviour man, my own personal Jesus Christ.
> Neo: You get caught using that...
> Choi: Yeah, I know. This never happened. You don't exist.

> Neo: Right.
> Choi: Something wrong, man? You look a little whiter than usual.
> Neo: My computer, it ... you ever have that feeling where you're not quite sure if you're awake or still dreaming?
> Choi: Mmm, all the time. It's called Mescaline. It's the only way to fly. Hey, it just sounds to me like you need to unplug, man.

It is here that the first allusions to a structural relation between Neo and Jesus Christ appear. For the first time viewer, the use of popular parlance and hyperbole that Neo is Choi's 'own personal Jesus Christ' does not instantly signal that Neo will eventually become the saviour of humanity. Similarly, needing to 'unplug' does not immediately imply that someone's distress is caused by an inability to accept the world around them is as 'real' because they are 'jacked in' to a 'neural interactive simulation', but rather that one needs to relax; in Neo's case this is to turn off, or unplug, his computer. To the second time viewer this text is open to new insights, which implies that the text anticipates repeated viewing.

Thus within the first two minutes of Neo's time on screen, the foundations for an unprecedented level of discursive activity concerning a singular science fiction film are handed to the potential critic. As Slavoj Žižek has notoriously asked:

> Isn't *The Matrix* one of those films which function as a kind of Rorschach test ... setting in motion the universalized process of recognition, like the proverbial painting of God which seems always to stare directly at you, from wherever you look at it – practically every orientation seems to recognize itself in it? (240-1)

The narrative of the trilogy follows the 'path' of Neo from his inert life inside the Matrix (where the above scene takes place) to his Christ-like self-

sacrifice to ensure the survival of humanity at the conclusion of *The Matrix: Revolutions*. After his awakening from the Matrix approximately halfway through the original film, he is told by Morpheus that he is 'The One' – the prophesised saviour of humanity from imprisonment and cyber-slavery by a collective of Artificially Intelligent machines. These machines keep the human race alive in order to utilise their body heat as energy to fuel their own continued existence. As Morpheus conveniently explains, being born and existing in the Matrix equates to being "born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch".

This idea of a master ruling class exploiting an underclass for capital, i.e. the exchange between what is rewarded to the underclass and what is taken creates a surplus for the ruling class, is familiar to those with even the slightest knowledge of Marxist political theory and thus invites another mode of interpretation. Similarly, this last quote from Morpheus evokes a central tenet of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, a work that charts the 'birth of the prison'. He argues that liberalisation did not enable or follow changes in the penal system, but rather the manner of enacting power over the body morphed into more diffused systems within surveillance societies, which he describes as 'microphysics of power'.

The Matrix is a computer programme which operates with the purpose of controlling these imprisoned human minds, preventing them from revolt by immersing them in a "neural-interactive simulation ... a computer generated dream world" into which the mind is, literally, plugged. This process gives the illusion of this simulation being the 'real world', and, more importantly,

is predicated on the illusion of freedom and autonomy. Whilst the mind is plugged into this system via a socket in the back of the head, the body floats inertly in an incubation pod, kept alive by being fed intravenously through a number of black tubes (Figure 13). During his monologue where he introduces the Matrix construct programme to Neo, Morpheus proceeds to ask a number of rhetorical questions long considered by philosophers:

> What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.

Indubitably, the invention of the Matrix as a concept provides the opportunity to rework allegories firmly within the Western philosophical tradition, namely Plato's 'Simile of the Cave', Descartes' malicious demon and 'deception hypothesis', and Jonathan Dancy's brain in a vat, all of which are radicalised for the digital age. The narrative scenario, for Wartenberg, provides an example of the "least problematic and most straightforward way in which film and philosophy can intersect," this being "when a film illustrates a philosophic claim or theory" (270).

The process by which Neo discovers the truth about the Matrix occurs shortly after he meets Morpheus and takes the red pill. He is told that they have begun a tracing programme. For Falzon, moments such as these suggest a "further way in which film may invoke or engage with philosophical themes" (99). "*The Matrix*," he argues, "is full of this sort of deliberate allusion" and this "brings certain philosophical themes to the fore" (99). This is because the film disorientates the viewer, firstly by

showing Neo's body taking on the physical attributes of the mirror, and

secondly, by zooming down Neo's throat and abruptly cutting to Neo's pod,

where his body is shown plugged into to the Matrix machine. Here, the film

takes the viewer on the same journey as Neo; the viewer has their

perceptions of the diegetic world shattered as well, which may well lead to

reflexive thought on the nature of our own reality.

The correlation between the scenario of the Matrix and the scenarios

explored by Plato, Descartes and Dancy is the basis of much writing in the

popular philosophy books. Matt Lawrence, for example, describes the

relation of the Matrix and Plato's 'Simile' as "one of the most striking

philosophical parallels" (4) found in the original *Matrix* films. Similarly,

Charles L. Griswold Jr. describes the allusion to the allegory as

"unmistakable" (128). Plato describes the cave in *The Republic*, in a

dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, as follows:

> An underground chamber ... with a long entrance open to the
> daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have
> been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks
> being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead ... someway
> off ... a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and
> above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been
> built, like the screen at puppet shows. (256)

Seeing only the shadows of men and animals projected on to the screen, the

men in the cave then would "assume that the shadows they saw were the

real things" (257) and that if a figure on the outside spoke "that the voice

belonged to the shadow passing before them" (257). Having no alternative

manner of experiencing the world, they assume the shadows and

appearances they see to be 'real'. When one of the prisoners is released

from his bondage and forced into the outside world, he sees the world as it 'really' is and how he and the other prisoners have been deceived. Speculating on how the other prisoners would react if the freed man were to return and tell the others of their misconception, Socrates muses:

> Wouldn't he be likely to make a fool of himself? And they would say that his visit to the upper world had ruined his sight, and that the ascent was not worth even attempting. And if anyone tried to release them and lead them up, they would kill him if they could lay hands on him. (259)

The scenario of the body being held in the Matrix and deceived by the images provided by the 'neural interactive simulation' is analogous to the bodies of the prisoners in the cave deceived by the shadows projected onto the curtain-wall. There are, however, some significant points of difference. Neo already has some awareness of his situation, as he is aware of the existence of a Matrix and is searching for answers, but is unaware of what it actually is. The prisoners in the cave are oblivious to their own situation, and presented as being reluctant to believe the truth even when it is presented to them. Neo is, however, similarly reluctant to believe the 'truth' after experiencing the construct programme, and vomits. For Wartenberg this indicates that "Neo is not convinced that the world that he believes to be real is anything but that" (277). However, unlike the Matrix, we know little of why these men are being held in the cave and to what purpose, and even if their misconception of reality was an intentional undertaking on the part of the jailer. That we know anything of the real world is, however, one element of the Matrix scenario that has been criticised as it does provide a grounding for notions of the 'real'.

Plato's use of 'The Simile of the Cave', although clearly engaging with ideas of perception and reality, is part of the larger project of *The Republic*. Plato has often been attributed with pioneering the fascist state by modern philosophers such as Karl Popper (Pappas 195). This is because Plato envisions a society that is not governed democratically, but by an elite ruling class, informed by the Forms. The 'Simile' is also used to argue the case for the 'Philosopher Ruler': the prisoner who escapes is derided for seeing the truth. However, in Plato's republic, "the philosophers' knowledge of the Form of the Good licenses their complete domination over the other citizens' lives" (Pappas 196). The rebels can be seen as being analogous to the Philosopher Rulers: they possess knowledge about the truth which allows them to manipulate the Matrix and have 'domination' over the other citizens that are still part of the system.

The simile of the cave is not the only philosophical allegory that is comparable to the scenario of the Matrix. Falzon comments, "in the film there are various allusions to Descartes' arguments in the first chapter of *Meditations*, designed to call into question what we think we know on the basis of experience" (99). René Descartes's sceptical arguments laid out in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) are also comparable to the process which Neo undertakes and his initial meetings with Morpheus. Descartes undergoes a process of doubting all that he had previously beheld as truths, stating that he had "suitably freed [his] mind" (196) to do so. This moment is certainly echoed in the script of *The Matrix* shortly before Neo undertakes the 'jump sequence' where he is challenged to 'free his mind'

from the pervasiveness of the Matrix in order to jump across a street from the top of one tall building to another.

Descartes acknowledges that all that he has previously beheld as true he has "learned either from the senses or through the senses" (197). However, he states "these senses I have sometimes found to be deceptive; and it is only prudent never to place complete confidence in that which we have even once been deceived" (197). Again this is echoed in the script of *The Matrix* when Morpheus is demonstrating the construct programme to Neo, and when he explains that "if real is what you can feel, smell, taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain".

That Neo fails in the jump sequence is also reminiscent of the process that Descartes presents in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Descartes notes his problems in breaking out of his established ways of thinking and believing in the world, making it "impossible for him to maintain his skeptical attitude" (Wartenberg 275). As Descartes explains:

> For long-established customary opinions perpetually recur in thought, long and familiar  usage having given them the right to occupy my mind, even amongst my will, and to be masters of my belief. (200)

It is this problem that leads Descartes into proposing that there is some other being that is controlling him and his perceptions. This being is "not a true God" but rather "some malignant genius" who is "exceedingly powerful and cunning" and "has devoted all his powers in the deceiving of me" (201). This allows Descartes to "suppose that the sky, the earth, colours, shapes,

sounds and all external things are illusions and impostures of which this evil

genius has availed himself for the abuse of my credulity" (201).

The correlations between Descartes' text and the script of *The Matrix*

continue shortly after Neo has taken the red pill when Morpheus asks him

the "quasi-Cartesian puzzle" (Wartenberg 277):

> Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real?
> What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you
> know the difference between the dream world and the real world?

Descartes similarly addresses the nature of dreaming. Although he states

that his experience of being at the time of writing seem more "clear" and

"distinct" (198) he acknowledges that he must "remind (himself) that on

many occasions" that he was "deceived by similar illusions" (198). Again,

the correlations with the scenario of the Matrix are clear, but here the evil

genius has been "replaced by a diabolical machine intelligence" (Falzon

100).

Jonathan Dancy, in his *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (1985)

describes a sceptical dilemma which is more directly comparable to the

Matrix scenario:

> You do not know that you are not a brain, suspended in a vat full of
> liquid in a laboratory, and wired to a computer which is feeding you
> your current experiences under the control of some ingenious
> technician scientist (benevolent or malevolent according to taste).
> For if you were such a brain, then, provided that the scientist is
> successful, nothing in your experience could possibly reveal that you
> were. (10)

Dancy, like Plato and Descartes again argues that as you do not have any

other experience of being other than that which you experience, you cannot

be certain. It is clear, then, that the Matrix scenario is indebted to debates

that have dominated Western philosophy since its beginnings.

It is understandable then, only from a brief overview of the central narrative

and philosophical themes, why the *Matrix* films have attracted such a great

deal of critical attention. Foremost is the inclusion of Baudrillard's

*Simulacra and Simulation* as a prop, which has invited a plethora of

postmodern readings and it has begun to function as the "chief interpretive

grid" (114) for the *Matrix* films. Although it is important to recognise its

inclusion at the level of the Wachowski Brother's intent for the film, it does

not necessarily follow that the film should be considered an example of

postmodern cinema or that it engages with Baudrillard in a significant way.

What is more interesting about *Simulacra and Simulation*'s appearance is

that the Wachowskis seem to be willingly lending the film to such a reading.

As I have demonstrated, the film opens up as many questions about reading

and interpretation as it does about metaphysics and epistemology. Although

there is validity in interpreting *The Matrix* in the terms of Baudrillard's

theoretical framework, there are clearly other readings and ways of reading

available.

A rarely discussed moment in *The Matrix* which is overlooked by most

critics discussing the postmodern themes and influences, specifically those

concerning themselves with the relation of Baudrillardian theory to the film,

occurs as Neo is waiting to see the Oracle (Gloria Foster). In her 'waiting

room' there sit a number of other 'potentials' – characters that presumably

are also waiting to be told whether or not they are 'The One' – one of whom

is a boy bending a spoon (Figure 14), seemingly with the power of his mind,

though at this stage we know he is merely manipulating the code of the

Matrix. He and Neo begin to talk:


> Spoon Boy: Do not try and bend the spoon. That's impossible.
> Instead only try to realize the truth.
> Neo: What truth?
> Spoon Boy: There is no spoon.
> Neo: There is no spoon?
> Spoon Boy: Then you'll see that it is not the spoon that bends, it is
> only yourself.


The aptly named Spoon Boy (Rowan Witt) is, on one level, referring to the

collection of code feeding into Neo's 'jacked in' brain that is giving him the

illusion of a spoon. However, and importantly for theorists of the

postmodern, this can serve as a reminder to the audience: this is a film, this

is not a spoon. All that is seen is the effect of light beamed through celluloid

onto a blank screen, or the controlled variation of pixilation on a television

set, depending on the medium in which the film is consumed.


However, this moment cannot only be said to be understood purely as one

of the film's many self-referential or metafictional moments, and in this

moment the theory of Baudrillard perhaps becomes its most useful. This is

due to the technology involved in producing this scene, namely Computer

Generated Imaging (CGI). The spoon is, at least in part, a computer

generated image, as it appears to bend according to each character's wishes.

Therefore, there is no spoon on a number of levels. There is no spoon inside

the fictional space of the Matrix, as, as Morpheus explains at length, it is a

computer generated dream world. There is no spoon in front of us when we watch *The Matrix* as it is, similarly, a celluloid dream world. There is also no spoon being held by the embodied entity we know as Keanu Reeves on a film set, as it is merely a computer generated spoon, created by computer designers.

There is one level, however, on which this spoon exists when considering Baudrillardian theory specifically. The 'spoon' mentioned above corresponds roughly to Baudrillard's four 'phases of the image':

> It is the reflection of a profound reality;
> It masks and denatures a profound reality;
> It masks the *absence* of a profound reality;
> It has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

The first phase corresponds to the simple representation of a spoon, which is not present in this scenario. The second phase is embroiled in myth or "maleficence" (6) for which the narrative purpose of this spoon adequately accounts. The choice of the spoon is certainly not arbitrary. Any object could have been used in this scene, but it would not have had the same significance if the Wachowski Brothers had chosen an alternative object, for example a spanner. This is a reference to the phenomenon of 'spoon-bending', the belief in the ability of individuals to utilise paranormal and psychic powers in order to manipulate physical objects, popularised by magicians such as Uri Geller. There are those who believe that this activity is unexplainable by science and opposing those who see it as simply a magic trick. Regardless, this image and use of the spoon in *The Matrix* is certainly referring to the phenomenon of 'spoon-bending' and thus associates the

spoon with cultural qualities it does not naturally have. Therefore we see the masking and denaturing of 'reality'.

The CGI technology utilised in the creation of the *image* of the spoon corresponds to point three. There is no spoon here, only the image; in Baudrillard's words, "it plays at being an appearance" (6). The spoon then 'exists' as point four: there is no denying that there is *some kind* of spoon: we have the experience of what we recognise and accept (though here with some question) as being a spoon, the article itself packed with myth and meaning, with a tenuous link to any corresponding 'reality', but becoming real in its own manner "of complete simulation" (6).

That this moment has drawn so little critical attention is surprising, as it is arguably more relevant to Baudrillardian theory that other more extensively discussed points of the film and generalised discussions of the analogous relationship between the experience of the Matrix and of 'Western society' more generally. To my knowledge, only one critic, Michael Sexson, has drawn attention to this moment. In 'The Déjà Vu Glitch in the *Matrix Trilogy*', he equates this episode with Magritte's painting 'Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe' from the collection entitled *The Treachery of Images* (1928-9) (Figure 15). Sexson rightly comments that Magritte's purpose is to remind us that the painting is not a pipe, but a representation of a pipe, and a "simulacrum" (119). Sexson, however, does not elaborate on this relationship or expand on its relation to the postmodern, but rather uses it to draw attention to the filmic product, *The Matrix* rather than the Matrix.

Reasoning for this may well be that *Simulacra*'s inclusion serves as an invitation to interpretation that the critic may or may not choose to accept.

An alternative manner of interpreting this film is as representative of an underlying Buddhist perspective. Commentators (Ford, Brannigan) have noted how Spoon Boy, appearing with a shaven head and wearing a toga, bears an aesthetic resemblance to a Buddhist monk. When he declares that "there is no spoon" he may well be offering Neo a lesson in Buddhist thought rather than merely exposing the constructed diegetic and extra-diegetic nature of the object. Both Ford and Brannigan's essays do, however, serve more as basic introductions to Buddhism as interpretations of the filmic product of *The Matrix*.

The franchise continues in this vein. The video game *Enter the Matrix* makes direct reference to philosophers such as David Hume, Søren Kierkegaard, Baudrillard and Friedrich Nietzsche, to name but a few. A story in the second volume of the *Matrix* comics is entitled 'I Kant', undoubtedly with reference to the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. However, what is more important about the ever-growing franchise for this study is the element of intertextuality that permeates the individual products.

This complexity stems from the narrative chronology. *The Matrix* does little to explain the story world's origins. This is explored in two of the animated short films, 'The Second Renaissance: Part One' (Mahiro Maeda, 2003) and 'The Second Renaissance: Part Two' (Mahiro Maeda, 2003), that form part

of *The Animatrix*, which was released subsequently and shortly after *The Matrix: Reloaded* in 2003. Also included in *The Animatrix* is 'Final Flight of the Osiris' (Andy Jones, 2003) which features the character Jue (Pamela Adlon) posting details of the machines' attack on Zion inside the Matrix that will feature as the catalyst for the narrative of both *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*. Chronologically, then, this narrative event takes places between *The Matrix* and its first sequel *The Matrix: Reloaded*. This is similar to the short 'Kid's Story' which shows the Kid (Clayton Watson) escaping the Matrix and mentions Neo as the boy's saviour. This therefore takes place after the narrative of *The Matrix*, but since the Kid appears in the early stages of *The Matrix: Reloaded*, this event takes place between the first two films.

However, the retrieval of the information in 'Final Flight of the Osiris' is not shown in *The Matrix: Reloaded*. This is a task to be undertaken in the video game *Enter the Matrix*. In a detailed analysis of the *Enter the Matrix* video game, Krug and Frenk note how the game "contains one hour of full-motion; actual cinematic footage" that was "never shown in cinemas and produced on the set of *Reloaded*" (76). This appears in the game as short scenes after the successful completion of certain tasks. After the data posted in 'Final Flight of the Osiris' has been successfully retrieved during the game-play, *Enter the Matrix* then skips to one of these scenes. In this scene, the captains of the Zion hovercrafts are assembled awaiting the arrival of Morpheus. The scene ends when his arrival is announced, which is the point at which the narrative of *The Matrix: Reloaded* begins.

*Enter the Matrix* was released on the same day as the cinematic release of *The Matrix: Reloaded*, and it is these two texts which are the most intertwined, both in terms of the narrative chronology and 'hypertextually' as the user can jump between the two objects to illuminate the narrative. As Krug and Frenk note, it is the franchise's "most interactive manifestation" (74). Not only do you play as secondary characters from *The Matrix: Reloaded* (as Niobe or Ghost), but you have to play events/sequences that occur off-screen in *The Matrix: Reloaded*. The best example of this interaction is during the chase scene on the freeway where Morpheus falls from a moving truck and is caught on the bonnet of Niobe's vehicle. In *Enter the Matrix*, one of the tasks is to navigate the freeway in this vehicle to arrive in time to rescue Morpheus at a specific point. Failure to do so means that one has failed the task and one must start again in order to progress.

Krug and Frenk note how this is one occasion where the interactivity of *Enter the Matrix*, and indeed its status as a videogame in its own right, is relegated to providing a supporting narrative for *The Matrix: Reloaded*. As they state, "the limited level of interactivity provided by the game takes two familiar forms: advancing the plot line and providing visual gratifcation" (81). This is one of the moments in the game where you do not have a choice as to which character you play as: because it has to connect with the filmic product and the viewer cannot choose which character rescues Morpheus, this game sequence has to be played as Niobe. Thus players have to "interact 'correctly' in key passages of the game" or they will not "advance any further ... or they will die" (81). Although *Enter the Matrix*

was presented as being an "integral part of the movie franchise" and not just a "movie tie-in" (74), its use of cinematic footage and continual deference to the narrative of *The Matrix: Reloaded* relegates its status to "just one more part of the *Matrix*-as-product, an all-encompassing franchising innovation" (92). Deborah Carr's article 'The Rules of the Game, the Burden of Narrative' (2005) also argues that the "manner in which *Enter the Matrix* has been drafted into the story arc of *The Matrix* cycle is detrimental to its ability to function as a game" (46). Krug and Frenk similarly note how "the film still claims supremacy" (75).

But Aylish Wood acknowledges, these elements of the franchise can stand alone as independent products and make narrative sense with or without each other. She then notes that these elements, or connections, remain possibilities. They may not be taken up, or used. It is perfectly possible that fans of *The Matrix* stop there as it is stands alone as a complete narrative, and do not wish even to watch the sequels. Similarly, film fans may not want to, or have the means to, indulge in playing the computer game. They may not want to read or have any interest in the concept of the Matrix outside of the texts or the elements of the franchise. The *Matrix* films are especially playful texts in gathering a discursive response which has aided the production of the popular philosophy anthologies, which I suggest, are consumed in a similar manner to the products of the franchise. They offer another avenue of investigation into the story world, and function as what Cornel Sandvoss would term a 'border' of fandom. He argues that:

> The object of fandom always consists of a textual hybrid, a meta- or super-text composed of many textual episodes whose boundaries are

> defined by the fan him or herself. The reader does not ... beat the text into a shape which will serve his or her own purposes but cuts his or her own text out of all available signs and information. (131-2)

Fans may choose which ever elements of a franchise to consume – in the case of the Matrix this could be the films, or the films and the documentaries. The wealth of popular literature devoted to the Matrix is also indicative of the many ways in which the films are consumed. For some it is the special effects that make the film interesting, for others the philosophical issues that it raises, and for others it may merely be the presence of Keanu Reeves. Dan North for example has identified a 'technological metanarrative' highlighting the "apparatus behind (the film's) production" (50). As he notes in respect of this:

> More than most film cycles, the *Matrix* trilogy has fostered a network of discursive articles, behind-the-scenes footage, fan fiction, crew interviews and on-set photographs all clustered around the mainframe of an official website ... and profusely scattered across various DVD releases. (50)

These anthologies function as another border for the philosophical fan faction highlighting a philosophical metanarrative akin to the technological metanarrative discussed by North. It even manifests itself in similar ways, in particular through DVD special features such as 'Follow the White Rabbit', the DVD commentary by Cornel West and Ken Wilbur and internet discussion. This is a faction that is encouraged not only by the original film and elements of the franchise in its use of discursive hooks such as the ambiguous spoon, but also by Warner Brothers in that they have devoted a

section of whatisthematrix.com to philosophical debates which continues to be expanded.

The notion of polysemy is crucial to understanding the *Matrix* franchise and the discursive responses to it. Cornel Sandvoss, in arguing for fan texts as 'mirrors' of consumption, introduces the idea of a polysemic text. He defines this as a text which allows for multifarious meanings and uses in the realm of fandom. He argues that polysemy in certain cases descends into 'neutrosemy', in that a text can carry so many divergent readings in acting as a self-reflective space for fan activity that it carries "no inherent meaning" (126) Here the individual constructs meaning to which the subject is integral, meaning that theoretically, a text as a fan text can assume any reading dependent on the individual approaching the text.

Sandvoss's methodological approach to fan studies, by viewing fan texts as utilising 'borders' which vary from person to person and faction to faction, and viewing the polysemic nature of the fan text as them constituting 'mirrors of consumption', allows a consideration of the discursive response to the franchise. In recalling Žižek's comment that "practically every orientation seems to recognize itself in (*The Matrix*)" (241), which is evinced by the number of divergent readings available, *The Matrix* assumes a similar position to that of a fan text. Whereas, for Sandvoss, the fan text operates as a mirror of consumption, *The Matrix* functions as a mirror of interpretation, which offers multiple interpretive invitations to be accepted or declined by scholars and fans alike. Matthew Hills has noted how there is great similarity between fan and academic attitudes towards cultural

hierarchy in texts, and Sandvoss has identified how these often intersect,

using the example of the notion of cult:

> It comes as no surprise that the notion of cult has enjoyed popularity with academics and scholars who are under particular pressure to legitimize their own consumption patterns in relation to educational capital. (41)

Although the definition of cult is not exact, it is clear that what elevates a

given text to the status of cult is reaction to it rather than some specific

quality within the text. Mendik and Harper argue that:

> The cult film draws on a (hard) core of audience interest and involvement which is not just the result of random, directionless entertainment seeking, but rather a combination of intense physical and emotional involvement ... the effect it produces is not merely an affectionate attachment to the text, but a ritualistic form of near obsession. (7)

In consideration of this notion of cult, *The Matrix* self-consciously attempts

to locate itself firmly in the cultural consciousness by creating a core of

audience interest which will remain due to its polysemic nature. The

franchise continued to expand until July 2009 when *The Matrix Online*, a

'Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game' (MMORPG) ceased to

function after Sony Entertainment stopped supporting it. Previously it was

updated with new missions every six weeks. Although this is a speculation,

*The Matrix Online* was probably as intertextual as the other elements of the

franchise. Popular philosophy anthologies have continued to be released

regularly. Not only does this 'cult' activity give a study of the franchise

academic legitimacy, but this in turn strengthens fan enthusiasm for the franchise.

Both Wartenberg and Falzon argue that the film engages the viewer in the active act of philosophising. Falzon argues that "the film does not merely allude to a philosophical theme; it actually engages in philosophising, because it puts its viewers in a position where they are confronted with the unsettling question: how do you know you are not in a similar situation?" (101). Wartenberg similarly argues that the many self-reflexive moments of the film encourage the viewer to engage philosophically. The sequence that begins when Neo takes the red pill and arrests after beginning to replicate the malleable mirror and ends with his awakening in the real world, is important for Wartenberg. He argues that the original film:

> Actually provides its viewers with a visual experience that is analogous to Neo's, an experience in which the world that was taken to be real ... begins to exhibit irregularities that suggest perceptual experience is not an accurate guide to the nature of reality. (278)

According to Wartenberg is *The Matrix* therefore a film that "genuinely philosophises" (281) and encourages the viewer to do the same. Catherine Constable has, however, noted that "the contention that *The Matrix* causes its audience to philosophise really needs to be backed up by the appropriate empirical research" (32).

Although Constable has written that Sven Lutzka's article pursues a "well-worn line of argument" that "conforms to the dominant tradition" (18), I feel his work is of great use when addressing the phenomenon of the *Matrix*

franchise and the critical reaction to it. Putting aside his comments that specifically pertain to the relation of the original film to the theory of Baudrillard, Lutzka proposes that the original film should at least be read in terms of Frederic Jameson's notion of 'pastiche' as it exists as "another meta-interpretative foil (that) lurks beneath the surface of the movie (114). He explains that the "advantage of this approach lies in the fact that it allows for an overall interpretation of the film encompassing the henceforth unrelated aspects" (114). Lutzka argues that the film does not engage in any profound way with any of the texts or philosophies that it references and therefore it is not only the references to Baudrillard that suffers this 'depthlessness'.

## The Body in the Matrix

Mary Ann Doane has noted that science fiction is a "genre specific to the era of rapid technological development" and therefore "frequently envisages a new, revised body as a direct outcome of the advance of science" ('Technophilia' 163). The Matrix scenario presents us with characters that have 'double bodies' – that is, they have a digital avatar in the space of the Matrix and a physical body outside of the Matrix in Zion. Although a 'neural interactive simulation' akin to the Matrix does not (yet) exist in our society, it is clear that the Matrix scenario engages with debates regarding the body in cyberspace which have arisen since the advent of Virtual Reality and the internet.

The representation of the body in the *Matrix* trilogy is another example of the films' complexities and ambivalences. In the early stages of *Reloaded*, there is a clear celebration of embodiment, shown in the 'Zion Rave' scene - a scene which is entitled 'Celebrating Humanity' on the DVD release. After the crews' return to Zion, the Council calls a gathering of the citizens of Zion to inform them that the city will be shortly be under attack from thousands of sentinel droids that are set to destroy the city and thus the remainder of humanity. After Morpheus has delivered his speech, a dance ensues which Bahng has described as an "orgiastic rave" (173). Trinity (Carrie Ann Moss) arrives scantily clad and searching for Neo, and they return to their room to 'make love'. Their sexual act is intercut and juxtaposed with the dancing, which involves provocative, mostly gyrating dancing of a sexual nature. The scene climaxes (as does Trinity) with a repetition of the vision that has been plaguing Neo and which opened the film: that of Trinity's death in the Matrix. This celebration, of the multiple pleasures of the body, its physicality and functions ends bathetically with the realisation that this body, unlike the bodies of the machines above, will inevitably cease to function.

This scene has been discussed in detail by Rainer Emig who describes the love scene as "not very explicit" and notes how the couple appears "almost as if they were presented to us on an alter" and engage in "carefully choreographed caresses" (200). That "their sexuality also differs from the rest of Zion in that it remains a private affair" (Bahng 177) serves to privilege their union. That this scene is so obviously contrasted to the dancing in the cavern is criticised by Aimee Bahng because Neo and Trinity

typify "the stock, heterosexual resolutions and unimaginative formulations of race and gender that plague the *Matrix* films" (170). In noting that "the rave sequence is riddled with extended, slow shots of barefoot stomping, mud between the toes, and anklets jingling to the beat of the drums" (173), Bahng equates this scene to "the colonialist myth" which Cornel West has described as representing black people as "closer to nature (removed from intelligence and control) and more prone to be guided by base pleasures and biological impulses" (126-7). That Neo and Trinity's love scene is so clearly set apart and 'carefully choreographed' separates them from 'base pleasures' of the crowd. It is thoroughly heteronormative and white.

Bahng notes that the real world of Zion differs greatly to the space of the Matrix as it is overwhelmingly white: "while hemp-clad, black bodies predominantly inhabit Zion, bodies within the Matrix are almost always white and urban" (171). That the dance scene is "comprised mostly of golden- and brown- toned bodies" alongside "the playing of drums, the temple carved out of nature itself, and the slow-motion dreadlocks" (173), Bahng associates the scene with Rastafari movements.

The body in the Matrix also contrasts to the body in the rave scene, particularly the body involved in scenes using the bullet-time effect. Clover notes that *The Matrix* did not offer the first demonstration of the bullet time technique, rather this was undertaken by advertisements for The Gap and Smirnoff Vodka (17). The innovation in *The Matrix* was to combine this technology with the technique of wire-fighting seen regularly in Eastern Asian cinema, particularly Hong Kong Kung Fu films. The result is a body

that can produce seemingly impossible physical movements as time is slowed for the character, allowing them to 'dodge bullets'. This combination of technique and technology complicates the trilogy's attitude to embodiment: in the Zion Rave scene described above it is indubitably attempting to project a positive imagining of the body and its faculties. The love scene between Trinity and Neo is, in comparison to other examples of science fiction cinema, fairly explicit and lengthy, and is shot, as is the dancing, in sensuous colours and tones and utilises slow motion, a technique classical associated with the fetishisation of the body/image.

However, as spectators there is visual pleasure in the bullet time/wire-fighting technique. Delight is taken in viewing the body exceed its natural capacities and it begins to function as pure spectacle. Clover has argued that the function of this special effect differs in *The Matrix* as the importance in understanding the occurrence of this spectacle is inextricably linked to an understanding of the narrative:

> The plot designs to render such moments as not being amazing absurdities; we are not asked to suspend our disbelief so much as to understand the terms by which these episodes are believable. (18)

Bullet time, Clover argues, demands a different way of viewing than the average special effect; it differs greatly in purpose and meaning than, for example, a pyrotechnic explosion, as seen in the destruction of the Nostromo at the conclusion of *Alien*. The narrative of *The Matrix* demands these kinds of effects, and may well, as Clover later suggests, foreground the spectacle and reveal it as such. Bullet time is situated in a peculiar

position here as it indicates in the narrative that it is spectacle, that a character shown in bullet time is bending the rules of the Matrix. As Clover notes, "within the matrix everything else is a special effect" (66).

A Foucauldian reading of the body as the 'site and locus of power' as articulated in *Discipline and Punish* is useful in beginning to understand these bodies. Looking at the inert bodies plugged into the Matrix they appear to be situated between Foucault's imaging of the 'docile' body and slavery. The analogies to slavery are clear: the body is appropriated within the machinery of the Matrix and exploited for their productive qualities. However, it is not enough to accept that this is simply a form of slavery because the correlation to docility is strong in this representation.

Foucault claims that "the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power" (136) and that this created social systems where control is exercised throughout all social institutions including "monasteries, armies, workshops" (137). This power, he argues, is held directly over the body, manipulating its state as the State "obtained holds upon it at the level of mechanism itself" (137) as a "subtle coercion" to achieve "an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result" (137).

Foucault begins his description of the docile body by describing the body of the soldier. He describes this body as one which bears multiple signs, namely strength through a muscular physique and, in some cases, the scars of combat. This body is one that "can be made; out of a formless clay"

(136). This body is then forced to adopt certain disciplines and routines pertaining to the body, such as military drills and training in the use of weaponry. This body is that which is "manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces" (136). It is a docile body that "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (136). This, according to Foucault, is the working of the 'disciplines', a self-regulatory ordering of power relations.

A correlation to the 'jacked in' bodies of the Matrix is clear from this description. Apart from the bodies of the rebels, the human bodies are 'subjected, used, transformed, and improved' by the machines who have captured them, and have adapted them by inserting alien technologies to store their body heat and plug their minds into the Matrix. They are kept 'docile' within this system, unaware that this 'subtle coercion' is working over their bodies due to the pervasiveness of the 'neural interactive simulation.' Foucault also notes that "the body can become a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (26) and this imagining is an extreme of both qualities. The machines subject the human bodies to this system of control because within it they are useful in that they provide the machines with the energy they need to function. These bodies are completely subjected, at least physically. The *Matrix* does not offer an image of slavery as such, as the subjects are not aware of their captivity; they are not aware of the system of which they are part and believe themselves to have free will.

This is how Foucault's notion of docility, and indeed his model of power relations, functions. The subject is not aware of its subjection. The subjects who form part of the Matrix believe they are leading a life of variety and choice, but in fact are a part of a determined system that dominates their existence so that their bodies may be used by those in power with the minimal amount of resistance. This is acknowledged in the script of *The Matrix* when Morpheus explains that:

> The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside you look around. What do you see? Business people, teachers, lawyers, carpenters ... you have to understand that most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inert, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it.

Similarly, Foucault argues that the body in Western society is used and disciplined without the subject being truly aware of how these 'microphysics' of power are exercised over it. The representation of the body in the Matrix puts perfect efficiency at the centre of its vision of the docile body. Many pains are taken in the creation of the state of docility in the natural human subject as it has to be trained. In the case of the soldier, this involves many years of military training, an investment of time and money. In the case of the body in the Matrix, it only requires a plug in the back of the head.

The notion of docility, and Foucault's ideas of power more generally, can account for the contradictory imaginings of bodies – the inert 'docile' bodies plugged into the Matrix, the spectacular bodies within the programme of the Matrix, and the bodies in *The Matrix* –as continually

caught in a number of disparate power relations. The first example, outlined above, is clear. The spectacular bodies are slightly more complex, and for an understanding of these, a useful character to examine is Cypher (Joe Pantaliano) who betrays the rebels and is killed by Tank (Marcus Chong). It becomes apparent that Cypher is a traitor, so disillusioned with the real world and 'nostalgic' for the simulation of the Matrix that he strikes up a deal with the Agents to get himself plugged back in to the Matrix. This character is generally discussed in arguments about the morality of living within a simulation - again another oft discussed moral philosophical issue (Griswold, Blackford).

Most see Cypher as simply a hedonist, but within a Foucauldian framework his character becomes more complex, and perhaps more informed, than the other crew members. The film does, however, encourage the viewer to consider him as a hedonist. Neo catches him drinking alcohol to numb his brain cells, and a major attraction of him returning to the Matrix is the sensation of good living: whilst chewing on a piece of steak, he declares that "ignorance is bliss". When attempting to explain the reasoning behind his treachery, Cypher asks Trinity whether she considers her life outside of the Matrix to be 'free'. He does not, declaring that "all I do is what [Morpheus] tells me to do." It is perhaps fairer to Cypher, to see him as simply exchanging one set of power relations for another.

Within the system of the Matrix, the bullet time technique becomes emblematic of resistance or control. Only those characters who have freed themselves from the Matrix, those who have sufficiently freed their minds,

can manipulate the Matrix in this way. As Christina Lee has commented, "the awesome power of the heroes resides in their acts of invention and transcendence of the parameters of the impossible. Fantasies give way to potentialities" (564). This effect or action differs when enacted by the rebels: for them it is an act of delinquency, of transgressing and manipulating the rules. For the Agents, to move through time and space in this manner is a natural right, they can do it as they have the correct programming, and they are in charge of the Matrix. Parallels may be drawn to Foucault's own discussion of delinquency, particularly when one reaches the concluding stages of *The Matrix: Reloaded*. After Neo has met with the Architect, the programme that designed the Matrix, the Architect explains to him that the rebel movement and the Zion council are greatly mistaken as to Neo's importance. He is in fact the eighth 'One' and part of the system of control. This is perhaps indicative of one of the major criticisms levied against Foucault's thesis in *Discipline and Punish*, in that his theories of power relations are totalitarian and he offers no alternative to the systems that he proposes are in action. His critics, as David Couzens Hoy has stated, "believe that [Foucault] fails insofar as he has no social alternatives to offer and moral or political standards in which to base his angry charge that modern society is becoming more and more like a prison" (13).

This is also explored in 'The King of the Never Return', a graphic story that forms part of *The Matrix Comics: Volume Two*. This piece focuses on a rogue group of 'free' rebels who have broken away from the Zion collective, and utilise the Matrix for 'thrill seeking'. They place themselves at risk from the Agents in a number of their own programmes and scenarios,

such as robbing banks and Spaghetti Westerns. As one character explains
they "used to just sit around ... waiting for orders from our superiors,
supposed to be grateful for being freed from the Matrix's system ...
Grateful? Yeah right ... Wondered when the time would come where we
could truly be free again" (49). This both affirms and denies Foucault's
notion of the microphysics of power in that the characters acknowledge that
they have passed from one system of control to another; from being a unit in
the Matrix to being a citizen of Zion. However, Foucault would challenge
the notion of being 'truly free'.

Foucault proposes the double body of the delinquent, in that the physical
body remains the offender, but upon this body the penal system ascribes the
level of delinquency. He describes at length the reasons for recidivism, in
that once the prisoner becomes part of the system, controls are put in place
that keep the body within the system. On a superficial level it seems that re-
offending prisoners indicate the failure of the prison system, but Foucault
claims that this 'failing' is in fact the functioning of the prison, as it
produces the delinquent as an 'object of knowledge'.

The bodies in *The Matrix* are also part of a system called Hollywood.
Arguing from a Foucauldian perspective, Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg
Manifesto' is a poignant example of criticism to use when discussing the
limitations of the *Matrix* franchise's representations. Haraway explores the
possibilities of a "creature in a post gender world" (425) arguing that the
definition of human, with developments in technology, has become as the
animal/human, human/machine dichotomies that have become increasingly

blurred. The characters and bodies in the *Matrix* films are offered an opportunity to challenge the continued reproduction and unfavourable myths and ideologies that this film industry is oft to circulate specifically concerning gender.

For the sake of continuity, very little apart from costuming separates the appearance of the avatars in the Matrix and their corresponding bodies in the real world. The appearance of an individual inside the space of the Matrix is accounted for by the concept of Residual Self Image. Morpheus explains this to be the "mental projection of your digital self" though the use in contemporary psychology is not as literal and refers more to how one sees oneself socially and/or culturally. Although a body within the Matrix will never have seen itself (as Morpheus explains when Neo asks why his eyes hurt, it is because he has never used them before), the mind projects the (mostly accurate) image of the body into the Matrix. It is extraordinarily difficult to explain this phenomenon in certain terms. We could understand these bodies in Lacanian terms of misrecognition in the mirror stage but it is easier, and more useful, to understand these bodies in terms of Hollywood. A version of *The Matrix* could be possible where the character of Neo, either in or out of the Matrix, is overweight, or disfigured, black, or even a woman. These are arbitrary examples to highlight how such an imagining is theoretically possible within the terms of the narrative, despite the corresponding bodies being less easily identifiable for the audience. However, the films exist within a system where experimentation of this kind is rarely encouraged. Leading men have to adhere to the popular consensus

as to what is desirable in a movie with the target audience of the *Matrix* films.

It must be remembered, however, how greatly the physique of Neo/Keanu differs from so many of his science fiction/action hero counterparts. Christina Lee notes how the very inclusion of virtual reality and the 'technologised body' have "particular implications for the imagining of the action hero" (564). Neo's body is vastly different in appearance than the typical action hero of American film. In fact, Keanu Reeves's body is completely different in build than it appeared in *Speed* (Jan de Bont, 1994). In *Speed* his body is considerably more muscular and corresponds more to the hard/spectacular bodies that have become associated with the action genre, particularly since the 1980s (Tasker *Spectacular Bodies*).

Considering Haraway's manifesto, the *Matrix* films are disappointing in their representation of bodies. As she states, her work is "an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (476, original emphasis). The *Matrix* films seem oblivious to this responsibility. Continuing in their ambivalent mode, they are films that do go some way to blurring boundaries in certain areas but then ultimately reinstate them. In terms of gender, the character of Trinity is a prime example. Although the physical resemblance between Trinity and Neo is often remarked upon (Lipp), a further examination of their characterisation and roles within both the Matrix and the *Matrix* films exposes the analogous relation between them as problematic. But this is not to say that the *Matrix* films do not go some way to overturning myths about sexual difference and

the body. As Lee notes (564), the very details of the narrative scenario allow for a different kind of body to be displayed in the action genre. Neo's physique is not muscular and toned, his muscles are atrophied as he has never used them before.

Trinity

Mary Ann Doane states that "when technology intersects with the body in the realm of representation, the question of sexual difference is inevitably involved" (163). This case study explores the nature of sexual difference and argues that Trinity is a character, as are the *Matrix* films themselves, which anticipates a critical reaction. As has been discussed, *The Matrix* and the following franchise have proved to be texts that intentionally straddled the popular and academic realms of discourse through their use of discursive hooks as props. Thus a vigorous investigation of the central female figure that engages with gender and/or feminist issues/theory was practically inevitable when considering the pervasiveness and importance of these forms of analysis. There are two 'aspects' of Trinity that I wish to explore: firstly, her involvement in the plot of the film trilogy and franchise, and secondly her appearance both in the Matrix and Zion.

This case study aims to fully explore the 'double body' of Trinity. She is not only seen in the Matrix as an "ass kicking, leather-wearing cyberpunk" (Gillis 'Cyber Noir: Cyberspace, (Post)Feminism and the *Femme Fatale'* 74), but also in the real world of Zion where she is, for the most part, clad in more utilitarian clothing and fulfils many different roles in the narrative.

Some critics, such as Sarah Street, have seemingly treated the contrast between her roles in and outside of the Matrix with some derision, and described her role as akin to a "handmaiden" (94). Inside the Matrix she can accomplish such feats as single-handedly disabling a squadron of policemen, whereas outside of the Matrix, Trinity appears subservient to Neo, taking him food, facilitating his actions, and dying doing so. A thorough study of her character is necessary not only to discuss the complexities and contradictions in her representation, but also to address why most critical attention paid to Trinity pertains mostly to her digital avatar in the Matrix and not her body in Zion.

Trinity's complexity, I argue, is rooted within the complexity of the filmic texts discussed previously. As I have demonstrated, the *Matrix* franchise comprises several elements which are especially and deliberately playful in encouraging multifarious ways of reading. The character of Trinity is not separate from this. Trinity is a character that wants to be read as powerful, subversive and progressive. She appears first dressed in skin-tight PVC which immediately aligns her with subversive and 'underground' practices, which is consolidated in her first meeting with Neo in an underground fetish club. There is, however, something more significant containing her. As Stacy Gillis comments, "as her function is to support Neo both in and out of the Matrix, Trinity's meaning is ultimately contained by the inscrutable category *and* function of woman" ('Cyber Noir: Cyberspace, (Post)Feminism and the *Femme Fatale'* 74). Martina Lipp has similarly commented that "Trinity might be important for the plot, but she will never be the chosen one" (18).

There are three major points regarding Trinity's role in the narrative I wish to discuss. After the first half of the original film, Morpheus is captured within the Matrix and held by the Agents trying to 'hack' his brain for the coordinates of Zion. This is the catalyst for the remainder of the film's action as it now becomes necessary for Neo, Trinity and the remaining crew of the Nebuchadnezzar to rescue him. Armed with an arsenal, they re-enter the Matrix. In *The Matrix: Reloaded*, after Neo discovers that 'The One' is a computer programme and thus part of the system of the Machines' control, the Architect gives Neo the choice of rescuing Trinity from death inside the Matrix or restarting the programme and rebuilding Zion with a handful of chosen subjects. He opts to save Trinity, and resurrects her after she is shot in the heart by an Agent. In *The Matrix: Revolutions*, Trinity rescues Neo from the train station where he has been exiled and assists him in reaching the Machine City. After Neo is blinded by Smith (who inhabits the body of Bane), Trinity pilots Niobe's hovercraft which eventually crashes. Trinity dies after being penetrated by multiple objects.

The immediate impact of Trinity is remarkable. After she is described as being just 'one little girl' by a policeman in charge of a SWAT unit that is attempting to arrest her, she is shown to defy time and gravity and escape the would-be captors. This introduction encourages an amount of subversion in her characterisation, as indeed does her physical appearance. Critical reactions to Trinity have, obviously, varied. Gillis, in her essay 'Cyber Noir: Cyberspace, (Post)Feminism and the *Femme Fatale*' (2005), sees Trinity as a re-imagining of the film noir figure. Martina Lipp describes Trinity's

"hypersexualisation" (21) and implies that her appearance corresponds to the notion of masquerade as theorised by Joan Rivière in her 'Womanliness as Masquerade'. Here she has to "hide her position of power behind an exaggerated femininity, thus reaffirming her status as a woman by constructing her as sexual spectacle" (21). Sarah Street describes the tightness of her tailoring as being "suggestive of fetishistic pleasure through constriction" (96).

However, far much more critical attention has been paid to the character of Trinity in the Matrix. Her 'body' in the Matrix is extraordinary: not only is it bound in tight PVC, but it can defy the law of gravity and move through space and time in a manner only emulated by few other characters in the *Matrix* films. This criticism does not pertain to Trinity's body outside of the Matrix, her material body in Zion. Trinity, like the rest of the 'pod-borns' has, in a sense, a double body – that of her actual material body and her digital avatar inside the space of the Matrix. It is this material body that critics seem reluctant to address to the same degree. Street pays her aesthetic appearance some attention, though this is only discussed as a point to contrast to Trinity's digital avatar. Street notes in *The Matrix* that:

> Trinity's clothes are ordinary and her hair is longer and softer than we have seen in the Matrix and she is cast in the role of handmaiden, quietly serving Neo his food and saving him at the end by declaring her love for him. This is in stark contrast to her black, shiny, body-hugging cat-suits and short, slicked-back androgynous haircut. (94)

Trinity's 'real' body is considerably less 'spectacular' than her digital body, but this does not mean that it should not be remarked upon. Street, writing

in 2001 and therefore before the release of the sequels, also notes that the

digital Trinity is shown considerably more than the material Trinity, and

therefore one can perhaps expect more detailed analyses of the digital body.

However, towards the end of the series of films, the digital Trinity is seen

less as the action becomes increasingly set outside of the Matrix. Therefore

it is not solely the matter of screen time as to why this body has remained

under-explored.

It also does not logically follow that the reason why the digital Trinity has

had more critical attention is due to efforts put into her costuming, which is

an element of her character that is frequently discussed (Street, Gillis,

Church Gibson). As much time would have been spent on designing her

costume for the real world scenes by costume designer Kym Barrett. In the

feature length documentary *The Matrix: Revisited* (Josh Oreck, 2001), she

describes her role as "to take the script and to show people who the

characters are through what they wear and why they wear them in the

environment in which they're placed". The costumes in the real world are

for some reason deemed unremarkable by critics. The standard clothes the

rebels wear are not as visually 'interesting' or intricate as those inside the

Matrix. They are standard within in the space of the Matrix. Trinity's

uniform in the real world does not cling to her flesh, it is not revealing,

provocative or otherwise, and it neither accentuates nor negates her

femininity.

Her appearance at the Zion Rave scene is the only occasion where Trinity in

the real world is shown to be wearing something other than her Lieutenant's

uniform. The film cuts from the mass of writhing bodies to a less crowded hallway, where Neo is seen conversing with several others. He spots Trinity emerging alone from a corridor, wearing pale, brown, skimpy clothing that reveals much of her torso (Figure 16). After embracing and kissing, she tells Neo to follow her and they return to their room. It is here that the love scene discussed earlier takes place. This is one moment where Trinity's character ceases to be subversive and resorts to the traditional function of woman in narrative film. Within the diegetic space, she appears purely for the gaze of Neo. He is the only character to notice her arrival which is intercut with a close-up of him gazing in her direction, implying that her function here is to satisfy his gaze. The couple then retreat, with no other character having acknowledged her arrival.

The lack of attention paid to Trinity's body is reminiscent of another collection of screen women that have until recently suffered a similar critical neglect. These women are found in film noirs, as the counterpart to the femme fatale. The term film noir is ambiguous, and as a critical concept has drawn lots of attention from critics trying, or being unable, to define it. One identifying factor of the film noir is often thought to be the presence of a femme fatale, again, another ambiguous term that on closer examination seems to blanket a set of exciting, provocative and critically interesting screen women. As noted earlier, Sylvia Harvey has identified two prevailing female character types in film noir and describes them as "the exciting, childless whores, or the boring potentially childbearing sweethearts" (38). The character of the femme fatale, I would argue, cannot be used as a stable point of identification for film noir as a genre, but the *concept* of the femme

fatale and her associations to noir are clear and exist (if only) in the history

of criticism devoted to noir. Gillis states that "one way of understanding

Trinity is as a simulation" (81) as she is a Baudrillardian reflection of the

"profound reality of the *femme fatale*" ('Cyber Noir: Cyberspace,

(Post)Feminism and the *Femme Fatale*' 81, original emphasis). However, as

recent criticism surrounding the femme fatale has explored, the character of

the supposed femme fatale has always been contradictory. The only

'profound reality' that the femme fatale refers to is as a critical concept.

Using Trinity to discuss the problematic nature of the femme fatale is

perhaps more beneficial to exposing the inherent problems on categorisation

of this sort. Trinity's double body represents both of the archetypes that

Harvey refers to. Trinity's avatar and indeed character in the Matrix

corresponds more to the 'exciting childless whore' than the 'childbearing

sweetheart' to which Harvey refers. In the real world of *The Matrix* at least,

her character seems to assume this latter role. But as the trilogy unfolds her

two roles begin to merge.

'A Detective Story' (Shinichiro Watanabe, 2003), the ten minute animated

short film that comprises part of *The Animatrix*, strengthens Trinity's

affinity to the film noir tradition that Gillis foregrounds. Utilising primarily

black and white animation and frequently picturing contrast akin to

chiaroscuro, an aesthetic technique found frequently in film noir, the

animation is clearly drawing influence from the noir canon (Figure 17).

With long sweeping shots of busy cityscapes, and other typical noir tropes

of retrospective, unplaced voice-overs, smoke and a moody jazz soundtrack,

the story follows the experience of Private Investigator Mr. Ash (James Arnold Taylor) as he is commissioned to track down the allusive Trinity, here voiced by Carrie Anne Moss, the actress who also plays her on screen.

'A Detective Story' is the only short on *The Animatrix* to feature one of the major characters from the film trilogy. There are certain correlations between the aesthetic and the style of *The Matrix* as they both utilise these classical tropes from the film noir. In terms of gender, there are also correlations. Ash makes the same mistake as Neo in assuming that Trinity is male. If one of the characteristics of noir is the strong and sexual dangerous woman exemplified in the femme fatale, Trinity again occupies a complex space. Clearly her persona in this short is linked to that in the film. To continue Gillis's analysis, Trinity's position in relation to this character archetype is complex. In a sense Trinity is the unobtainable woman of the 1940s film noir. She is also the one to kill Ash as he is turning into an agent. This is clearly not the same characterisation of Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) of *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), for example, who eventually shoots her former lover Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray).

Like *The Matrix*, 'Detective' confuses the dichotomy of feminine archetypes that is characteristic of film noir. The role of the good woman here is taken by Dinah, Ash's cat, who plays the part of the faithful secretary seen in classic noirs such as *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) where Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) is continually supported by Effie Perine (Lee Patrick) in contrast to the femme fatale, Bridgid

O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor). The cat assumes the role to the extent that it tosses Ash's hat to him as he leaves in a rush. As the role of good woman has been usurped by a feline imposter, the role of good and bad woman falls to Trinity.

The majority of the short film centres on Ash's search for Trinity. He is shown in smoky bars, talking to 'undesirables' on street corners, driving through the city space and interacting in primitive forms of internet cafés (under the pseudonym White Pawn), all typical activities for the hardboiled Private Investigator. After solving a complex riddle which references Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), Ash meets Trinity aboard a train. Instantly the other passengers in adjoining carriages become Agents and he realises he has in fact been used as a pawn in order for the Agents to find Trinity. Ash is left to die as Trinity escapes. This does not correspond to the typical ending for the femme fatale – as she is considered a dangerous force of female power and sexuality, the femme fatale is contained and destined to die (Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*) or to be incarcerated (Bridgid in *The Maltese Falcon*).

A major absence from critical writing on film noir is that devoted to these supposedly 'boring' women. The femme fatales seem to demand more attention, but it does not follow that these other women are unworthy of attention and remain weak in the femmes' wake. If Trinity follows in the film noir tradition, it follows that the reason why her material body has been given so much less attention than her avatar can be linked to similar reasons.

The assumption seems to be that we have seen the real Trinity in film many times. Her body has significantly less critical currency than her avatar.

A more complete reading can be provided if we approach Trinity through the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari as Elisabeth Hills suggests in relation to the character of Ripley discussed earlier. Within the narrative, her digital avatar is only provided through the interaction of her body/mind with the machinery used to 'jack in'. As much of the philosophical writing devoted to the franchise has argued that the film re-imagines Platonic and Cartesian ideas of the mind and body, it may be useful to discard this dualism that the film arguably encourages, and employ Deleuzoguattarian ideas of Becoming and the Body without Organs. This gives opportunity to see Trinity as a whole and distinct entity that forms different assemblages with different technologies or machines as it is demanded of her by the narrative.

Gillis has also noted the potential benefits of Deleuzoguattarian theories of the body for addressing the subject's interaction with cyberspace in her essay 'Neither Cyborg Nor Goddess' (2005). Because the essay explores "how cyberfeminism's transgressive potential is limited by the specificities of embodied online experience" ('Neither Cyborg Nor Goddess' 168-9), it is of great use when examining the character of Trinity. Trinity herself seems to suffer this problem: whatever radical potential she has in the Matrix is explored in criticism, but is this problematised by her comparatively 'limited' role in Zion. As Gillis notes, Deleuze and Guattari's "reading of the notion of *assemblage* holds that meaning, like all other bodies, is only

temporarily stratified, and fragile in its construction out of multiplicitous lines of becoming" (176-7, original emphasis). This means that Trinity functions in an interestingly paradoxical manner. Gillis notes how cyberfeminism, as a "movement which celebrates the potential for moving beyond the confines of the (gendered) body ... remains remarkably concerned with the corporeal" (169). However, criticism devoted to Trinity remains remarkably unconcerned with her corporeality.

J. Macgregor Wise describes the assemblage as "a concept dealing with the play of contingency and structure, organization and change" (77). He continues to explain that:

> The concept of the assemblage shows us how institutions, organizations, bodies, practices and habits make and unmake each other, intersecting and transforming: creating territories and then unmaking them, deterritorializing, opening lines of flight as a possibility. (86)

Trinity's becoming-machine is most clearly seen in her interaction with the technology that allows her to jack in to the Matrix. One moment from the first film demonstrates this strongly. After Trinity and Neo resolve to rescue Morpheus from the grasp of the Agents, they find themselves on a rooftop with no way of escape. Trinity spots a helicopter, and calls Tank to get him to upload the knowledge required to fly the helicopter to her knowledge bank. She is then able to control the machine. It is the interaction with the technology that allows her to control the situation.

As Patty Sotirin comments regarding Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, it is "concerned with what a body can do when we think in terms of becomings

... rather than essential forms, predetermined subjects, structured functions or transcendent values" (101). If we start to view Trinity from this perspective, her material body becomes part of the critical agenda. As Deleuze and Guattari view the self as "only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 249), Trinity's body becomes the locus of experimentation of its limits, a BwO. Although Trinity is arguably presented as a 'handmaiden' and corresponding to more 'feminine' roles, she is also envisaged as a subject with multiple capabilities.

The BwO is also demonstrated by the development of her abilities in the real world as depicted on screen. In the original *The Matrix*, there is a more distinct juxtaposition between her capabilities in and out of the Matrix, largely because the majority of the action scenes are set inside the Matrix. As previously noted, as the film series continues, more of the action becomes set in the real world. After Neo and Trinity have made the decision to go to the Machine City in *The Matrix: Revolutions* they attempt to leave in Niobe's ship upon which Bane (Ian Bliss), now carrying the Smith virus, has stowed away. When they experience a loss of power during take-off, Trinity goes to see why and is attacked by Bane, who holds a scalpel against her throat. Trinity manages to overcome Bane, exerting a considerable physical force. Although she eventually is overcome after Bane smashes her head against a wall, we here see the strongest merging of her personae, where her becomings have directly worked over her physical body.

Trinity's very death in *The Matrix: Revolutions* also underscores her position as woman in the narrative. After the hovercraft she is piloting crashes, the film cuts to a close-up of her head lying on the floor. After some conversation with Neo, he realises that something is amiss, and the film then cuts to a medium shot revealing that Trinity's body has been penetrated several times by power cables (Figure 18). The scene mimics the concluding scene of *The Matrix*, where Trinity's declaration of love and eventual kiss saves Neo from dying in the Matrix, only here Neo kisses Trinity and she slips into death. Martina Lipp has offered an alternative reading of this scene, stating that it "could also be interpreted as the glorious end on the battlefield associated with male heroic warriors" (29). Although Trinity's death is indeed reminiscent of the noble hero's death in many action films, being allowed the time and space to speak her final words of farewell and love, I would argue that this is diminished by the death of Neo shortly afterwards.

At the conclusion of Neo's epic battle with Smith, the film cuts from the battle arena to Neo being held aloft by cables. Light pours from his eyes and ears as he lets out a final cry, and the film cuts back to the arena where the Smiths also exude light and disappear. We then cut to an overhead shot, where the machine is holding Neo in a Jesus Christ pose, which then cuts to a medium shot of him being gently, and respectfully, lowered to the ground as the cables connecting him to the Matrix disconnect and retreat. After showing Zion's reaction to the machines' ceasefire, the film cuts back to the Machine City to show the machine carrying Neo's body, which is glowing, to an alternative place. Issacs and Trost have suggested this is symbolic of

the ascent into Heaven (74). Although there is no indication of what is to be done to Neo's body, it is clear that something is being done – his body is in some way being attended to. Trinity's body, as far as we know, remains penetrated by and entangled within the wreckage of the hovercraft.

When addressing the question of representation of the body with technology, it should be remembered that all action in the films is set against the backdrop of the machinery of the Matrix. The naming of the Matrix is hardly neutral. As the Oxford English Dictionary states, the word 'matrix' was synonymous with 'womb', 'source' and 'origin'. It also cites one definition as "the womb, the uterus of a mammal" (www.oed.com). That the machinery of the Matrix is synonymous with the womb and that the machines have appropriated the maternal function is made clear in the sequence where Neo awakens in his pod in the Matrix. Indeed, this sequence is entitled 'Slimy Rebirth' on the DVD release. The film cuts from Neo screaming as he begins to replicate the mirror, to a mass of black tubes amidst a tank of pink liquid (Figure 19). Neo's bare arms and torso are scarcely visible amongst this assemblage. The film cuts to an overhead shot of the tank, where Neo is shown to raise up one of his arms to be constricted by a gelatinous membrane. As Neo breaks through this membrane, we then cut to a medium shot showing Neo removing a long tube from his throat. In this shot we can clearly see a number of black tubes penetrating his arms and body. Neo is also shown to be completely bald, with no head or body hair. He reaches to the back of his head and notes the plug that allows him to be jacked in to the Matrix. He looks around him to see thousands of other pods all containing inert human bodies.

He is spotted by one of the machines who grabs him and unscrews the connection at the back of his head. The black tubes begin to pop off his body, and an opening is shown to appear at the bottom of his pod. In what Cynthia Freeland has described as a "birth parody" (208) the camera follows him as he slips through the opening aided by the slimy liquid, until the film cuts to a hole in a wall from which he emerges and falls into a body of water below. He sees lights above him and begins to lose consciousness. He is rescued by the rebels and is shown on board the hovercraft wrapped in a blanket, still covered in the slime.

The womb-like nature of the Matrix pods is further accentuated during Morpheus's explanatory speech with Neo. When he is explaining that the human bodies are kept alive in these pods specifically so they can be used a source of energy, the film cuts to an image of a foetus feeding inside a smaller pod. Morpheus explains "there are fields Neo, endless fields, where human beings are no longer born, but grown". As he explains to Neo that the machines liquefy the dead bodies in order to feed the living, the film cuts to an image of a young baby inside a pod suckling on a feeding tube.

This is a grotesque imagining of the appropriation of the reproductive function. As Mary Ann Doane has commented, the association of technology with femininity is a common trope of the science fiction cinema. Discussing early science fiction works such as *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926), she recognises that fears towards the technological are often projected onto the figure of woman. In the case of *Metropolis*, this is seen in

the evil robot Maria, juxtaposed with her good, angelic human self. She continues to argue that the relation between technology and the feminine has become more complex as "questions of the maternal and technology are more deeply imbricated" (168). This is because "technologies of reproduction seem to (have) become a more immediate possibility" (168). This has resulted in the relation between technology and the feminine becoming "less localized" (169). Rather than this being demonstrated in figures such as demonic androids where the threat is immediately perceived and located, the representation becomes more complex. Echoing Creed's analysis of the parthenogenetic mother, Doane refers to the *Alien* describing the narrative as:

> The story is longer one of transgression and conflict with the father but the struggle with and against what seems to become an overwhelming extension of the maternal, now assuming monstrous proportions. (169)

We are faced with a similar imagining of the maternal in *The Matrix*. The technology of the Matrix, like the archaic mother identified in the *Alien* films, forms a "vast backdrop for the enactment of all the events" (Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine* 17). If the Mother is synonymous with the Matrix, it is presented as a system to be escaped, that can be aligned with Kristevan notions of the abject: "the state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself – thereby creating the borders of an always tenuous 'I'" (McAfee 45). This is confirmed when Trinity declares to Neo that "the Matrix cannot tell you who you are". The subject in the Matrix must leave in order to 'know itself'.

Conclusions

As we have seen the *Matrix* films are clear examples of cinema that engage with philosophy and theories of the postmodern. Not only does the Matrix scenario contemporise epistemological debates that have taken place over a number of millennia, but *The Matrix* makes numerous references to other texts to accentuate thematic similarities. This has led to a huge amount of critical and theoretical discourse surrounding the films. However, although many writings have explored the films in light of their philosophical themes and their philosophical project, few writings have concentrated on examining how the films themselves function as texts. It is my contention that the philosophical themes, metafictional moments and intertextual play of the franchise have enabled this text to acquire 'cult' status. It has established itself within the canon of science fiction cinema specifically by overtly engaging with philosophical texts such as *Simulacra* in addition to referencing literary texts such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

However, in this scenario, gender and raced bodies are treated conservatively. This is not to say that the films do not offer some commentary and critique of gender roles or subvert dominant codes of representing the body. As we have seen, the body of Neo contrasts greatly to the muscular, spectacular bodies which are traditionally associated with the action genre. As Wolmark acknowledges, this is provided by the Matrix scenario itself. As the majority of the action and fight scenes take place within the space of the Matrix, the body does not need muscles as a sign of

strength as has Reeves's body in action films such as *Speed*. However,

within the bounds of the narrative the white male body is given primacy.

There are problems with the representation and the reception of the body of

Trinity. Reference to Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the body can aid a

reading of Trinity that incorporates her material body. However, a reading

of Trinity as a BwO may ultimately fail because of the limits of her

representation in Zion. Sotirin describes the BwO as a "body that is not

organized in accord with biological functions, organic forms, or cultural-

historical values. Rather a BwO deconstructs these seemingly inviolable

arrangements" (101). Her material body is organised in a conservative

manner. Whereas, as Wolmark notes, within the space of the Matrix

"definitions of gender identity are treated with a certain amount of ironic

playfulness" (84), the representations of gender in Zion remain, for the most

part, heteronormative. Whereas Trinity is presented as being "at odds with

traditional constructions of femininity" (Wolmark 84) in the Matrix, she is

shown to conform to them in the 'real world'. She acts as a safe spectacle

to-be-looked-at in feminine dress at the beginning of the rave scene, she

assumes the stock, passive position during her sexual liaison with Neo, her

'transgressions' and appropriations of power are neutralised by death, akin

to the fate of the femme fatale.

That this complexity surrounds both the figure of woman and the

representation of the feminine in these texts, I argue, is inherently linked to

the franchise's playfulness as a text. As we have seen, the *Matrix* franchise

is one that explicitly engages with signs and themes that are included to

bolster its claim as an 'intellectual action movie'. It is clear that the representation of Trinity is linked to this imperative. She draws from discourse concerning the femme fatale and the cyberpunk movement. On one level she is as much a sign, a referent to other cultural phenomena as the '101' that adorns Neo's door. We have also seen how the backdrop of the archaic mother links the films to canonical texts in the science fiction genre. The Matrix scenario contemporises the archaic and abject mother explored *Alien* and *Aliens*, and therefore links the films thematically with these texts. But this is also problematic, because as Creed has argued, "the concept of the parthenogenetic, archaic mother adds another dimension to the maternal figure and presents us with a new of understanding how patriarchal ideology works to deny the 'difference' of woman in her cinematic representation" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 20). Although, as I have demonstrated, there is room for reading otherwise, it is my contention that the representation of woman and the feminine is largely explainable in terms of Jameson's pastiche. The body of Trinity and the archaic mother are absorbed into the metafictional, intertextual, and philosophical play that signifies the *Matrix* franchise's larger project.

**Chapter Three – Becoming-Bat and Becoming-Cat: Differences in the Representation of Becoming-Animal in the Male- and Female-Embodied Subject in the *Batman* Series**

By examining the characters of Batman and Catwoman, this chapter endeavours to demonstrate a significant difference in the representation of the male and female-embodied subject in the *Batman* franchise. I argue that the Batman and Catwoman have evolved into figures that readily lend themselves to interpretation using the notions of the Body without Organs and 'becoming-animal' proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. However, I also argue that there are significant differences between the representations of this becoming. Whilst the Batman has ultimately continued to a human character whose abilities are expanded by the use of advanced technology, chemistry and weaponry, Catwoman's transformation is supernatural and absolute. The Batman remains the alter-ego of the philanthropic Bruce Wayne, whereas the female characters of Selena Kyle in *Batman Returns* and Patience Phillips in *Catwoman* encounter an entirely new mode of molecular being when they become Catwoman.

I explore Batman's subjectivity and identity and how this has changed because, as Uricchio and Pearson have noted, "the Dark Knight's identity has fluctuated over time and across media as multiple authors and fan communities competed over his definition" (183). Although I do refer to Tim Burton's *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, my argument centres on the Joel Schumacher films *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin*, and the

Christopher Nolan films *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* as they offer two very distinct imaginings of the character.

I pay particular attention to the Schumacher films for two reasons. Firstly, this is because they have been received almost entirely negatively by both the fan base and in academic writing. This has led to a lack of critical consideration. It is my contention that *Batman Forever* and *Batman and Robin* are heavily indebted to the socio-cultural moment in which they were produced, in which Queer concerns were prominent in academic and cultural discourse. This leads to the second reason, as I explore how critical discourse, namely psychiatrist Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, has influenced the representation of the Batman. With reference to Will Brooker's *Batman Unmasked*, I explore how Wertham's discussion of his young male patients' sexual fantasies involving the Batman helped to circulate Queer readings of the character in popular discourse.

It is in the Nolan films that the correlation to Deleuzoguattarian theory becomes its most clear. Because Nolan essentially 'rebooted' the franchise with *Batman Begins*, he explores in detail the origins of the character and how and why Wayne chooses to embark on his crusade. The processes that Wayne undertakes are shown in detail. Although Burton and Schumacher both referred to the Batman origin story, neither director actually depicted his 'transformation'. Nolan spends much of *Batman Begins* showing Wayne developing his fighting skills and consulting with scientist Lucius Fox regarding combat equipment. I begin my analysis of these films with a discussion of Thomas Nagel's 'What is it Like to be a Bat?' in order to

introduce ideas of Being, as I believe Nolan's Batman films specifically

address the nature of Batman's subjectivity. This then leads to a

consideration of the process that Wayne undertakes in becoming the

Batman, which I argue is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of

becoming-animal, in this case, a becoming-bat.

My analysis of Catwoman centres on *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman*. After

demonstrating Bruce Wayne's becoming-bat, I explore the stages of

becoming-cat that these films present. As Lori Brown has noted, becoming-

animal "is not a linking together of two distinct points" (264) but "results in

the *disappearance* of these two discernable points, (and the) freeing from

fixed form" (264 original emphasis). I argue that Catwoman is subject to

this becoming-animal in a significantly different manner to the Batman.

Although she does undergo a transition, she has become-animal at a

molecular level and therefore, in a sense, continues to adhere to a fixed

form. However, the Deleuzoguattarian frame remains relevant because this

becoming in both films allows her to undergo further becomings and eschew

certain societal codes imposed upon her.

I argue that Pitof's and Burton's Catwoman are subject to this restriction for

differing reasons. In relation to Burton's imagining of Catwoman, I have

recourse to Priscilla Walton's argument that his depiction is dependent on

'backlash' politics. However, rather than accepting Kyle's representation as

a result of backlash politics or as further evidence for the backlash thesis, I

argue that Kyle ultimately critiques the cultural phenomenon of the

'backlash'. My discussion of Pitof's *Catwoman* explores how the

representation of the Phillips/Catwoman characters corresponds to postfeminist discourse. Here I refer to Christina Lucia Stasia and her discussion of the postfeminist action film. I argue that the Deleuzoguattarian 'frame' is still useful when considering the characterisation of Catwoman. The transition that she undergoes allows her to resist many of the societal codes and ways of being-perceptible that Deleuze and Guattari aim to resist with their philosophy of becoming. However, I also argue that the male body of Wayne/Batman has retained a privileged position which is open to the same kinds of experimentation and opportunity without the same risks that accompany the philosophy of becoming for the female-embodied subject.

## *The Seduction of the Innocent* and the 'Gay Batman'

It is common in scholarship and criticism that explores Batman to have recourse to psychiatrist Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham's text is an exploration of the effects of comic books, specifically the violence and sexual imagery within them, on children and adolescents. The text largely pertains to horror and crime comics, and Wertham's major arguments are based on the belief that the mass media, namely comic books, television and movies, could incite children and teenagers to "imitate criminal acts" (Gilbert 9). *Seduction of the Innocent* proved an especially popular text, providing the "source material for a national crusade against violence in the media" (Gilbert 92) as Wertham "spoke to already existing fears about the effects of mass media on children" (9). It was the comic book in particular, however, that attracted the majority of Wertham's ire,

which James Gilbert attributes to the "special character of these

publications" (97). Whereas films, television and radio were aimed at

general audiences, the comic was aimed at a specifically young audience,

and was, prior to the publication of *Seduction of the Innocent* and the

subsequent enforcement of the Comics Code in 1954, subject to less

regulation and censorship than these other mediums.

But *Seduction of the Innocent* is also the text "which brought to light the

'gay readings' of the [Batman] character which had previously been hidden"

(Brooker 101). The discussion of Batman in *Seduction of the Innocent*

appears over just four pages of the book, in which Wertham recounts the

homosexual fantasies of a number of his young gay patients that involve the

Batman and/or Robin. His identification of the homoeroticism present

between the residents of Wayne Manor remains one of his most famous

pronouncements which, Brooker argues, has had a profound effect on the

development of the character and series (161), not only in that it led to the

'reheterosexualisation' (Medhurst 32) of the character in the immediate

aftermath, but also that it helped to circulate these Queer readings in the

cultural consciousness.

Brooker notes that even despite the relatively small presence of Batman

within *Seduction of the Innocent*, the discussion has been "narrowed down

... to a single much-quoted paragraph" (101) which is as follows:

> Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is
> shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are
> Bruce Wayne and 'Dick' Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a
> "socialite" and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward.

> They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown ... It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his hand on his friend's arm. (190)

Wertham's discussion of homoeroticism in the Batman comics has been met with an almost universal disdain, though there is a certain paradox in this negative reaction. As Brooker notes, Wertham has been accused of homophobia from critics writing from a Queer perspective, and derided by the (largely homophobic) fan base for daring to suggest that Batman could be identified as a homosexual.

Andy Medhurst, in his article 'Batman, Deviance and Camp' (1991), takes particular objection to Wertham's comments, describing them as symptomatic of his "homophobia" and "bigotry" (26), and comments that his ideas, particularly concerning the 'origins' of homosexuality, were "crazed" (27). In particular, Medhurst lambasts Wertham for suggesting that male homosexuality resulted from a "disdain for girls" (Wertham 188). Medhurst reads Wertham as implying that homosexuality is intrinsically linked to misogyny, and states that "the implications of this are breathtaking" (25). Brooker is, however, much more sympathetic to Wertham and takes a far more objective stance when discussing *Seduction of the Innocent*. Brooker is intent on contextualising Wertham and emphasises the cultural climate in which *Seduction of the Innocent* was published. The accusation of audacity that Medhurst throws at Wertham occurs as Medhurst "neglects to recognise" that this way of thinking about homosexuality was "a product of its time, and a mild echo of the official

government line" (Brooker 122). Gilbert also recognises that in general "Wertham's personal politics were nothing if not hostile to the conservative agenda of many of his ardent admirers" (106).

But Brooker also highlights a worrying contradiction in the work of Medhurst, which is similarly present in Johnson's 'Holy Homophobia!'. Medhurst, and Johnson to a lesser extent, seems to champion privileged points of view for reading and discussing the homoerotic subtext of Batman texts. Both similarly criticise Wertham for his analysis in the paragraph quoted above. Medhurst responds to Wertham's reading of the homoerotic subtext as follows:

> To avoid being thought queer by Wertham, Bruce and Dick should have done the following: never show concern if the other is hurt, live in a shack, only have ugly flowers in small vases, call the butler 'Chip' or 'Joe' ... never share a couch ... and never, ever, wear a dressing gown. (151)

Echoing Medhurst, Johnson, deriding Wertham, comments that, "obviously, they *must* be fags: otherwise they'd have a butler named 'Butch', live in cramped quarters littered with beer-cans, wouldn't show concern for one another's injuries or be caught dead in a dressing gown" (original emphasis). Nikki Sullivan also recognises this contradiction. She notes that Wertham highlights what "we might think of as queer moments or queer signifiers" but that "as much as Werther's [sic] politics are opposed to Johnson's, her task could be described similarly" (194). Although Wertham's expression of the Queer signifiers is perhaps clumsy, it remains that he is responding to his patients' homoerotic/homosexual fantasies surrounding the Wayne household and repeats these fantasies fairly

objectively. It is unusual that when Wertham reads a homoerotic subtext abounding in Wayne Manor that it is classified as homophobic 'finger-pointing'. However, others, namely Medhurst, Johnson and the interviewees freely comment upon it without such censure. As Brooker notes, "for Wertham's patient to pick up signs of gayness from a Batman comic is 'rather moving'; for Wertham to perform the same reading himself earns him the moniker 'Doctor Doom'" (126-7).

Brooker and Medhurst agree that perhaps without Wertham's comments regarding the relationship between the Batman and Robin, the character may well have evolved entirely differently. Although Brooker disagrees, Medhurst believes the camp aesthetic of the ABC series to be a partial reaction to Wertham's discussion of the Queer subtext. But Brooker does agree that "attempting to deny and censor the 'gay Batman' only made this interpretation more visible; accepting it, and drawing it into the mainstream portrayal of the hero as one facet of his cultural persona" (169). Indeed, the popularity of *Seduction* itself ensured that these Queer readings circulated further in culture.

Adrian Brody aims to dismiss discussion of the homoerotic subtext in Batman and Robin narratives as to him "Dr. Wertham seems all wrong" (176). To Brody, the "issue of Batman is not one of sexual orientation" because "there is a lack of sexual interest" which is "sublimated into his rage and crime fighting" (176). However, Brody seems completely oblivious to the concepts of repression and displacement. But it is not a question of Wertham being right or wrong regarding the sexuality of the

Batman, as this is indeed in many ways a pointless dispute. Wertham, as Brody recognises, relates a "number of clinical anecdotes" (176) about his male patients who legitimately see the Batman as an object of homoerotic contemplation. As Brooker notes, it "seems hardly surprising that the boys interviewed by Wertham, their own lives dominated by the very real fear of discovery and its consequences, should have found some appeal and even solace in Batman's fantasy world" (138). Brody suggests that the inclusion of the Robin character, whom he describes as "colourful" (176), was undertaken to "brighten up the gloomy dark Batman (or to) serve as a source of identification for young adolescents" (176). Robin was most probably not specifically or consciously intended by Batman's creators to be a source of homoerotic identification for young men, and the intent behind his creation does not deny the fact that young men did utilise him in this manner. Although the comics may not encourage these readings, they do clearly facilitate them, and this is a fact that Wertham brought to light.

I do not, however, wish to dwell on arguments regarding the sexuality of Batman and Robin, or indeed whether or not Wertham's text is homophobic. I would agree with Brooker when he describes Wertham's views as naive and 'of their time', but disagree with Medhurst that Wertham was instigating a 'witch-hunt'. Indeed, the comments were a small part of a larger project which was "more concerned with violence than homosexuality" (Gilbert 93). Wertham, as Brooker also comments, executes a "measured concern" as he "understands that in a climate where homosexuality is a great taboo, gay fantasies might be a source of worry for young men" (112). Brooker also comments that:

> Some forty-five years since *Seduction of the Innocent*, it seems that Batman's producers may also be in the process of accepting that an edge of homoeroticism is integral to Batman's relationship with his sidekick, just as an element of camp is invoked, for many readers, by his costume alone. The reading identified by Wertham has been circulating for almost five decades now, and Batman himself has only been around for six. (170)

What is of importance to this study is the effect that Wertham's discussion has had on the development of the character of Batman and his subsequent representation in film. It is my contention that Wertham's identification and widespread dissemination of the homoerotic subtexts that may have been read in Batman literature of that time has influenced the aesthetic and themes of subsequent Batman media. This is particularly clear in the ABC television series, which, as we shall see, in turn influenced the Joel Schumacher films.

## Schumacher's Batman

The process of 'reheterosexualisation' that Medhurst identifies is evident in Tim Burton's *Batman*, the first of his two films featuring the eponymous character. As Medhurst notes, "if one wants to take Batman as a Real Man, the biggest stumbling block has always been Robin" (32). Philip Orr has argued that Burton chose to "drop the anoedipal sexual identity of the 'Dark Knight'" (179). Orr acknowledges the process of reheterosexualisation described by Medhurst and notes that this may be a "simple appeal to a popular audience's conventional notions of romance" (179). Batman appears without his sidekick in the film and, contrary to previous

imaginings of the Bruce Wayne/Batman character as a chaste individual,

*Batman* features a romantic interest for him in the form of Vicki Vale, a

photojournalist. This, Brooker notes, is "clearly antithetical to the *Bat-*

*Bible'*s ruling that Batman is celibate" (290) and thus stands out as

deliberate ploy to dispel the homoeroticism that has permeated Batman

discourse since Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* and the ABC series.

However, Joel Schumacher's imagining of the character is vastly different

to that of Burton. He returned to the camp, colourful style of the ABC

series, incorporating "elements of the 1960s TV Batman" (Brooker 178). He

also reintroduced Dick Grayson/Robin as a supporting character.

Schumacher makes numerous, at times rather crass, references to the show

throughout the film. These are sometimes visual, for example Dick

Grayson/Robin is first shown performing as part of a trapeze act, 'The

Flying Graysons', who are all wearing similar red, green and yellow

costumes to that sported by Burt Ward's Robin in the series (Figure 20).

They also appear in the script: when Batman and Robin attempt to rescue

Batman/Wayne's romantic interest Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman) from

the Riddler (Jim Carrey) and Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones), Robin declares

"holy rusted metal Batman!" as he steps onto the off-shore fortress. When

Batman reacts with confusion, Robin explains that they are stood on some

holey, rusted metal. This is indeed included with the intention to raise a

laugh, as it makes reference to the somewhat absurd practice of Burt Ward's

Robin to repeatedly declare "holy ..." at every available opportunity. To

Brooker, this indicates that "this facet of the character may be gaining a

degree of acceptance" (178).

Brooker argues that Wertham's reading of the homoerotic undertones of the Dynamic Duo's adventures has been "taken up again by gay audiences in a less condemnatory social context, and in turn has been incorporated by the producers of mainstream Batman films" (103). This is nowhere so evident than in Schumacher's two films, which Brooker notes have "played a major part in incorporating the 'gay Batman' reading into official – that is Warner Brothers-sanctioned – portrayals of the character" (166).

Although it is perhaps misleading to say that Val Kilmer's body is specifically more eroticised than Michael Keaton's, it is definitely more exposed, which itself can encourage erotic contemplation. Schumacher opens *Batman Forever* by showing Wayne changing into the Batman costume. Schumacher shows this in a fragmented manner akin to the model of fetishisation identified by Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. He mainly uses medium shots that quickly zoom in to close-ups of various parts of Wayne's anatomy. Although this may not work in the same way psychically, it remains the case that Schumacher is using a cinematic code traditionally associated with filming the female body and putting it to work on the male body. That this attention is paid to his buttocks and crotch is reminiscent of Wertham's comments regarding the display of the "muscular male supertype, whose primary sex characteristics are usually well-emphasised" (188). He sees this figure as the "object of homoerotic sexual curiosity and stimulation" (188) and challenges Christina Lucia Stasia's assertion that "the male action hero is objectified, but the camera focuses on his muscles, not on his groin" (243).

Schumacher's villains in *Batman Forever*, the Riddler and Two-Face, also

return to the high camp of the series, but here function as 'bad camp' which,

as Johnson argues, draws attention "away from the homoerotic electricity

between the heroes" and works to "keep queerness and villainy aligned".

Roz Kaveney has also identified a "weird homoeroticism" between the two

villains as a "progressively more sequined Carrey entwines himself around

his partner in crime" (*Superheroes!* 245). It is his status as villain which

excuses him, as Johnson (1995) explains, "prancing around in a diamond

tiara and skin-tight green unitard exclaiming 'spank me!'".

Freya Johnson, in her article 'Holy Homosexuality Batman!' (1995), also

berates Wertham, calling *The Seduction of the Innocent* a "hilariously

paranoiac document of homophobic panic". Johnson asks how Schumacher

managed to "get away with turning loose so many queer signifiers" that they

"float freely about in Warner Brothers' biggest asset?" Considering the

considerable efforts made by Warner Brothers and Tim Burton to the

contrary, the return to the camp aesthetic associated with Batman seems

unusual in itself. Schumacher, she suggests, 'gets away' with returning to

the camp aesthetic by "turning the queer *sub*text hidden beneath the surface

of many Batman representations into an overtly queer *supra*text that goes

right over the head of the mainstream viewing audience". The film is so

steeped in Queer signification that it "would be inaccurate to call it a

subtext". Johnson pays particular attention to Dick Grayson/Robin's (Chris

O'Donnell) appearance (Figure 21): "with his earring, haircut and leather

jacket Chris O'Donnell looks like he's just come straight from an ACT UP

meeting". The signifiers of his costuming have led other commentators to deduce similar readings. Matthew Sweet commented too that he looked "like Wayne Manor's resident catamite". Although both Johnson and Sweet are responding to a stereotype of homosexual masculinity, they are united in assuming that the character may purposely function in this way.

The film does, however, employ a romantic interest for Wayne, in the form of Dr. Chase Meridian, a criminal psychologist employed by the Gotham Police Department because she is an expert in 'dual personalities'. She has been described by Roz Kaveney as a "vapid heroine" and "mildly depraved" as she displays a sexual interest in the Batman as a fetish (*Superheroes!* 245). Her role in the film is largely perfunctory: she first appears when she is introduced by Commissioner Gordon to Batman as he arrives at a bank that Two-Face is trying to rob. However, she is only seen in a professional setting once more, when Bruce Wayne visits her after he receives the second of Nygma/The Riddler's riddles. It is the latter meeting where Wayne asks her to accompany him on a date to the circus, and she is henceforth only seen in scenes as Wayne's romantic partner or when she is held captive by the Riddler and Two-Face.

The relationship between Wayne and Meridian is largely sterile. Unlike the relationship between Catwoman/Kyle and Batman/Wayne in *Returns*, there is little chemistry between Meridian and Batman/Wayne. Johnson raises two important points with regard to the use of Val Kilmer's body:

> Val Kilmer's body is exposed and eroticized only in the scenes with O'Donnell (as he wanders out of the shower bare-chested in [a]

towel, is treated for injuries, or puts on the new bat-suit while the
image of his butt-cleavage fills the screen). During the scenes with
Nicole Kidman he remains fully clothed as the camera coyly pans
down only as far as the top of his chest at most: her body entirely
escapes the emblematic 'male gaze' of cinema and her breasts or
legs never once fill the screen.

There is clearly a great difference in the imagining of Wayne's relationship

with Alfred in Burton's films and Schumacher's films. As Johnson notes,

Wayne is shown semi-naked with Alfred tending to his wounded torso

(Figure 22). In Burton's films, Wayne is shown to treat his own injuries, for

example, after an altercation with Catwoman in *Batman Returns*, he is sat

alone, and shown to contact Alfred only for some antiseptic.

Schumacher, like Burton before him, also chose to include sections of the

Batman's origin story in a light exploration of his psychology. Wayne

repeatedly flashes back to the day of his parents' funeral. Schumacher

zooms in to a close-up of Wayne and cuts to a collection of photographs of

the Wayne family. He then cuts to a flashback of the Wayne family in an

alleyway in Gotham. Schumacher does not show Thomas (Michael

Scranton) and Martha Wayne (Eileen Seeley) actually being shot, but cuts

between fragments of images that imply their demise. After a shadowy man

is shown backlit through smoke, we cut to the young Bruce Wayne (Ramsey

Ellis) walking through a chapel surveying his parents' coffins. In contrast to

Burton's flashbacks, this appears to be more dream-like. Wayne is awoken

from a trance by Alfred. Wayne is clearly befuddled, drawing comparison

between his own experience and that of Grayson, in declaring "it's

happening again ... Two-Face killed his parents".

Wayne explains to Meridian that he does not clearly remember the attack on his parents, but what he does remember comes in "dreams and flashes" that are now coming to him when he is awake. She explains to him that he is describing "repressed memories ... images of a forgotten pain that's trying to resurface". Her populist Freudian theorising of the mind overtly links Batman's origin story to psychoanalytic theories of the repressed. That this appears in conjunction with the death of his parents also links this to the Oedipus complex, and perhaps the 'forgotten pain' of castration. However, the Queer 'supratext' suggests that it is something else that is repressed, namely Wayne's potential desire for Robin.

Roz Kaveney notes that, "it is such a cliché of discussions of superhero films that *Batman and Robin* represents some kind of nadir, certainly for that franchise, and arguably for that genre" (245). This is certainly true, with critics such as Kim Newman claiming that it is "notable only for putting an end to the 1990s wave of the superhero franchise" ('Cape Fear' 20). Admittedly, the film was both a commercial and critical failure, drawing particular ire from the fan base (Brooker 294-307). This being the case, however, Kaveney searches for "arguments for its rehabilitation" as there is "floridity to its badness that makes it ... sheerly enjoyable" (246). But I argue that *Batman and Robin* is not without its graces and moments of complexity which lend it to critical analysis, not purely for its 'badness' but for its progressive acknowledgment of Queer desire and how this has been incorporated into mainstream film.

There are moments which have been overlooked almost entirely that make *Batman and Robin* not only critically interesting, but also transgressive and progressive. Through various means such as visual techniques, his mise-en-scene, and intertextual references, Schumacher anticipates and encourages a number of differing viewing positions and desires. He is clearly engaging in Queer discourse, offering the male body both as erotic object and spectacle through fragmented, fetishised display. It would be inaccurate to claim that this was purely for the gratification of a gay male audience.

If Johnson had correctly identified a Queer 'supratext' in *Batman Forever*, it was intensified in *Batman and Robin* with Schumacher even more overtly engaging in Queer. Like *Forever*, it also utilises the camp aesthetic of the ABC series. Kaveney, however, does not view this as a successful tactic, stating that "*Batman and Robin* tries to recapture the campy archness of the 1960s television show, but has a catchpenny nastiness that deprives it of the innocence that went with that camp" (246).

Schumacher opens the film in a similar manner to *Batman Forever* by showing Wayne and Grayson dressing in response to a distress call from Commissioner Gordon. Schumacher uses the same technique that he uses in *Batman Forever*, zooming in from medium shots to close-ups of various parts of their anatomies. However, here far more attention is encouraged to be paid to both Batman's and Robin's buttocks and crotches, with the camera settling on both areas for longer amounts of time than in the previous film. The Batman and Robin costumes are eroticised/fetishised to an even greater degree in this later film. Schumacher, inspired by Ancient

Greek sculptures of the male form, chose to adorn the Batman and Robin body armour with nipples (Figure 23) which further adds to the sexualisation of the costume and thus the Batman.

As noted earlier, Medhurst has claimed that the inclusion of Batwoman and Batgirl in the 1950s comics had been the result of the disavowal of homoerotic content due to Wertham's project ('Batman, Deviance and Camp' 28). *Batman and Robin* features three female characters that seem to seek to simultaneously assert and undermine the two protagonists' heterosexuality. These take the form of three love interests: Julie Madison (Elle MacPherson), who is romantically linked to Wayne; Barbara Wilson/Batgirl (Alicia Silverstone), in whom Grayson is shown to have a passing interest; and the villainess Pamela Isley/Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman). Both characters are not shown, akin to Chase Meridian before them, in any real depth. As Newman notes, Madison was introduced in the DC comic books as Batman's first love interest and fiancée and describes MacPherson's performance as "unmemorable" ('Cape Fear' 20).

The Madison character in particular has very little function in the narrative and remains, ultimately, completely passive. Despite their sometimes problematic presentation, Vicki Vale and Chase Meridian are at least supposed to be both professional women and respected in their fields, and have a role in the narrative trajectory of each film. Although both characters are eventually captured and used to lure Batman to potential peril, there is at least some purpose to their presence in the story. Selena Kyle is also a professional, albeit a somewhat inept one in the early stages of the film. Her

alter-ego Catwoman commands a significant amount of screen time and is

an incredibly powerful and memorable character. Madison's role is,

however, entirely superficial. She appears only three times in the film: on

Wayne's arm at two functions and once when they are having dinner.

During this dinner they have the following conversation:


Madison:      Bruce ... we've been going out for over a year now,
              and, okay, here goes ... I want to spend the rest of my
              life with you.
Wayne:        Julie, I'm not the marrying kind. There are things
              about me that you wouldn't understand.
Madison:      I know you're a dedicated bachelor. I know you've
              had your wild nights.
Wayne:        'Wild' doesn't ... doesn't quite cover it.


Throughout the exchange, Wayne appears wholly uncomfortable, staring at

the table rather than making eye contact and clearing his throat in order to

interrupt. Wayne is not presented as having any real interest in Madison

other than to have her appear with him in public and does not show her any

affection or declare any real romantic intentions towards her.


There is ample room during this exchange for a Queer reading. Madison

appears to function, both diegetically and extra-diegetically, as a tool purely

to affirm Wayne's heterosexuality and deny any homosexual connotations

previously associated with the characters. As Brooker has noted in fan

reactions, readings of the Batman's rumoured homosexuality are often

solely dismissed on "dating women" (241). This is a complex scenario

which is not solely explained by a reading of Madison as a character that is

included to disavow queer readings. I would argue that her superficiality as

a romantic interest deliberately encourages a Queer reading in this case. The

romantic interests provided for Wayne/Batman in the previous films have

all been a part of the narrative, albeit a passive part. Madison, in

comparison, is presented as superfluous, which brings into question

Wayne's and Schumacher's intention towards her. It is clear that Wayne

does not want to commit to Madison. Although this may be explained by his

commitment to the Batman figure and fighting crime on the streets of

Gotham, there may well be another reason, namely his homosexuality, as to

why he is 'not the marrying kind.' The things about him that she would not

understand could be read as his homosexual desires, his desire even for

Robin. His protestations are also suggestive; we wonder exactly what he has

been getting up to when he says that 'wild doesn't quite cover it'. However,

the script clearly also gives opportunity for the viewer to choose a more

'legitimate' interpretation. The reference to 'wild nights' associates Wayne

with wildlife, which may consequently lead the viewer to consider this as a

reference to the animalistic, and thus his dual role as the Batman.

There is, I think, a certain playfulness in Schumacher's inclusion of

Madison as a character and his decision not to cast her specifically as

Wayne's fiancée. She is offered on a superficial level as a character to

disavow the homoeroticism that abounds in both the Wayne household and

Schumacher's own filmic representation of Batman's world. There is

perhaps an element of wanting to be recognised as 'protesting too much'.

Schumacher is clearly engaging with the camp and Queer associations that

Batman has accrued throughout his history, and there is an extent to which

these unconvincing relationships can contribute to a Queer reading. Brooker

has also recognised this possibility when discussing the emergence of

Batwoman and Batgirl as heterosexual romances in the post-Code comics:
"the Dynamic Duo had simply been obliged to become more straight-acting,
but the genuine romance would still have been intact and obvious, for those
who wished to see it" (156).

Poison Ivy also functions similarly to characters that Medhurst notes in the
ABC series and the 1966 film as posing the 'threat of heterosexuality'. The
film features Catwoman (Lee Meriweather) in disguise as Kitka, the object
of Bruce Wayne's affections. Medhurst describes this as the "threat of
heterosexuality" which causes "all manner of problems" (31) for the
Dynamic Duo. In *Batman: The Movie*, Catwoman is working alongside the
Penguin, the Riddler and the Joker as part of a criminal syndicate attempting
to take over the world. In order to do so they plan to lure Batman into a trap
by kidnapping Bruce Wayne, unaware of his dual identity.

As a character, Ivy is also greatly indebted to the Selena Kyle/Catwoman
character of *Batman Returns*, but remains a "thin retread of the mousiness
and demented sexiness of Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman" (Kaveney
*Superheroes!* 246). Their origins are similar: they are both murdered by
their male superiors after discovering their dastardly plans and are
resurrected. In Isley's case, she discovers her boss, Jason Woodrue (John
Glover), is using the venoms that she is formulating to furnish plants with
their own natural defences in order to create a serum which when
administered to a human, creates the 'ultimate soldier'. Instead of being
resurrected by cats as in the case of Kyle, Isley is brought back because of
the venoms in the soil where she fell. Similarly to Kyle, she becomes more

sexually alluring and confident as Isley, with Woodrue attempting to seduce her.

It is both Batman's and Robin's infatuation with Ivy, caused not by their natural desires but by her drugging them with her 'pheromone dust', that is the cause of much of the action in the latter part of the film. However, Poison Ivy represents a considerably stronger 'threat of heterosexuality' than Kitka. The two characters become rivals for her affections, nearly causing them to part company. Indeed, the effects of this drug are shown to affect Wayne in her absence during the exchange with Madison above as he begins to hallucinate kissing Ivy instead of Madison. This also serves to undermine his relationship with Madison even further. Poison Ivy marks the threat of heterosexuality in multiple ways. Not only does she cause tension between the duo, but her sexual allure is, literally, deadly. As a result of her accident she has a poisonous kiss, which she uses initially uses to dispose of Woodrue (mimicking the scene in *Returns* where Catwoman/Kyle kills Shreck) and in attempting to kill Robin.

Ivy eventually targets the duo, and attends 'The Flower Ball' - the charity auction of the Wayne diamonds that is being used as bate to lure Freeze. There are direct comparisons to be made between Ivy's appearance here and Marlene Dietrich's performance of 'Hot Voodoo' in *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), and indeed the two scenes as a whole. Both scenes use a jazz soundtrack with screeching horns, and feature several similar aspects in their mise-en-scene. The Flower Ball sequence begins by focussing on a troupe of male tribal dancers, who although considerably

more dynamic, bear a striking resemblance to the female dancers from the Hot Voodoo sequence. This is an interesting point of departure as it is now the male body that is on display as spectacle. It is the female body that has traditionally been wrongly associated with spectacle, often being displayed in sequences that do not forward narrative progression. This is an obvious subversion for a film which is so clearly and playfully engaging with Queer discourse surrounding the Batman and his sidekick.

The female dancers in *Venus* dance around a gorilla which is eventually revealed to be Dietrich in a costume. The gorilla takes centre stage and begins to remove the costume, beginning with the hands and followed by the head (Figure 24). Dietrich then puts on a blonde wig and proceeds to remove the remainder of the costume. This reveals a mass of jewellery and a dress adorned with sequins and feathers. She then gives a rather static performance of 'Hot Voodoo', with arms akimbo before the gaze of Nick Townsend (Cary Grant).

As the auctioneers open bidding in the Flower Ball sequence of *Batman and Robin*, a gorilla moves to a prominent place in the mise-en-scene. The music changes tempo and the room of people turns to observe. In a manner directly mirroring Dietrich in *Blonde Venus*, we see Ivy remove the costume, beginning with the hands of the suit and followed by the head (Figure 25). As she removes the head, Schumacher cuts to Batman and Robin gazing up her, mirroring von Sternberg's cut to Townsend/Grant. This manoeuvre, I suggest, is not an innocent one when considering the mirroring Schumacher has included throughout the scene.

In *Blonde Venus*, Dietrich is the subject of the gaze of Cary Grant.

Schumacher places Batman and Robin literally in a similar position to Grant

in the Flower Ball sequence, gazing at the gorilla-suited Ivy, and with Ivy

directly corresponding to Dietrich. One then is encouraged to align Batman

and Robin with Townsend/Grant. After all, rumours surrounding the

Dynamic Duo's sexuality have also persisted for the last half-century. It is

clear that this scene is heavily referencing *Venus* and that Schumacher is

aligning Dietrich with Ivy and Grant with Batman and Robin. This is,

however, a far more obscure reference than many of Schumacher's other

allusions. Medhurst recognises these as being as wide ranging as *Nosferatu*

(1922) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*

(1997), which was *Batman and Robin*'s "main marketplace rival" ('Batman

and Robin' 40) in the summer of 1997. It is unlikely the pre-teen audience –

one large section of the projected audience – would be able to recognise or

understand this sequence to be referencing von Sternberg's film.

Batgirl/Barbara Pennyworth is also initially presented as an erotic object.

Her first appearance in the film presents her as such. She is ringing on the

doorbell at Wayne Manor and an ailing Alfred fails to attend to it. Barbara

becomes frustrated at waiting and climbs up to see if there is a key kept on

the doorframe. Grayson goes to answer the door in Alfred's place, and

opens it to be greeted by the sight of her bare legs. He cocks his head up,

perhaps looking up her short, black pleated skirt, and says "please be

looking for me". However, after opening relations between the two to

provide space for a romantic coupling, Schumacher chooses not to pursue a

romance between the pair. Again, this is a relationship that may simultaneously both confirm and deny homoerotic readings.

Schumacher deliberately seems to be acknowledging Wertham's comments regarding the Wayne household. To refer to Wertham's often quoted passage again, Schumacher seems to utilise his description of the homosexual 'wish dream', particularly in this film, though this is not to say that *Forever* does not engage with the text. One scene in this film shows Batman wearing a long, dark grey dressing gown. The gown has not only been a point of interest to Wertham, but has also been noted by Johnson and Medhurst. Although it is clearly ridiculous to equate gown-wearing with homosexuality, Schumacher may well be referencing the infamous paragraph from Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*. This scene shows Robin trying to leave Wayne Manor in response to Poison Ivy's Robin 'call' – she has seduced Commissioner Gordon and switched the Bat signal to a Robin signal. During their exchange Wayne makes some of the most suggestive comments of the film regarding their 'partnership'. The mise-en-scene of Wayne Manor also celebrates the male form, and there are statues of naked male torsos scattered randomly in the background in scenes featuring the mansion (Figure 26).

What is it like to be Batman?

In 1974 Thomas Nagel published his article 'What is it Like to be a Bat?' The article is essentially a rebuttal of reductivist philosophies of the mind that tended to overlook consciousness and oversimplify the mind/body

relation. Nagel argues that there is no escaping 'experience': our position as human beings and the physical construction of our own minds and bodies leads us to have a specific kind of experience which restricts our potential comprehension of alternative ways of being and kinds of subjectivity. He demonstrates this in his study using the bat as an example of a creature which, as a mammal, has certain biological links to humanity but, in other senses, is entirely "alien" (438).

Nagel uses the bat for empirical reasons, as opposed to mythic reasons, as he is not trying to relate his discussion to any wider cultural referents. He is not interested in the bat which has "long been a symbol of superstition and folklore" (Brody 174). He recognises that "conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon" that "no doubt occurs in countless forms totally unimaginable to us, on other planets in other solar systems throughout the universe" (436). His formulation of subjectivity itself, then, is dependent on this idea of the uniqueness of consciousness: "fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism – something it is like *for* the organism" (436). As David Pugmire explains, "Nagel offers to explain this condition of being host to conscious experience as the organism's having a point of view on the world, a point of view which is its own and nothing else's" (207).

However, the bat is not an entirely arbitrary choice of creature, although Nagel's argument pertains to all forms of consciousness. He explains that he chose "bats instead of wasps or flounders because if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is

any experience there at all" (438). Nagel is particularly interested in using the experience of the bat as an example because he considers the scientific evidence that human scientists had amassed regarding the physicality of the bat's experience and perception to be considerably different from our own:

> We know that most bats ... perceive the external world primarily by sonar, or echolocation, detecting the reflections, from object within range, of their own rapid, subtly modulated, high-frequency shrieks. Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing impulses with the subsequent echoes, and the information thus acquired enables bats to make precise discriminations of distance, size, shape, motion, and texture comparable to those we make by vision. (438)

One of the specificities of bats' experience for Nagel's argument is indeed bat sonar, which he describes as being "not similar in its operation to any sense we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectivity like anything *we can experience or imagine*" (438, my emphasis).

Nagel remains resolute that human consciousness is a barrier that prevents the subject from truly understanding the consciousness of another species, stating that "our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited" (439). Nothing can be done to alter this:

> It will not help to try and imagine that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected and high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic. (439)

For Nagel, this behaviour would reveal nothing to the human subject other than what it is like for the human subject to behave in a similar manner to the bat. It is the question of what the state of being a bat is like that is the issue in Nagel's article. Behaving like a bat in this manner does not in any way alter the "fundamental structure" (439) that Nagel considers to determine the nature of our conscious experience, and therefore our subjectivity.

David Pugmire does not disagree with Nagel's central thesis, but critiques Nagel's imagining of subjectivity and point-of-view. Quoting Rosie Wilkes, who would "deny what is like to be me, or human, or female" (Wilkes 240), Pugmire asserts that if, as Nagel claims, all experience is subjective, then one cannot truly know what it is like to be anything in itself. We cannot know what it is like to be human as opposed to a bat, precisely because we do not know what it is like to be a bat. We do not know the specificities of our own being.

It is necessary for me here to defend the Batman, as represented in film, as a figure of philosophical interest. The Batman surely adheres to Nagel's description of the human subject behaving like a bat. For example, during one scene in Burton's *Batman*, the protagonist (Michael Keaton) is shown to be hanging upside down in his bedroom with his arms crossed across his chest (Figure 27). During this scene Wayne's romantic partner, Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger), is shown to wake up, which implies that like the bat he leads a nocturnal existence. All of the films show the Batman using a black cape which has the appearance of wings. However, as will be discussed

later, the cape has begun to be used as wings in *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. These actions do not lead us in any way to believe the figure has any alternate experience other than that of a human behaving as a bat.

The character of Batman has had a long and complex history throughout a variety of popular media. Naturally, the character has evolved since its beginnings as a comic book character seventy years ago. What is of import for this study is how the filmic representation of the Batman has shifted throughout the Warner Brothers franchise. As we shall see, the figure has undergone several changes. I argue that as the technologies of both film-making and the diegetic world of the Batman have evolved, Wayne's interaction with technology as the Batman has become more complex. Nolan's films imagine the character of Wayne/Batman considerably differently to both Burton's and Schumacher's visions. As we shall see, Batman evolves from a character that behaves like a bat to one that, through his use of technology seen in the later films, is more adequately described as being in a state of becoming.

Nagel's arguments regarding subjectivity are firmly rooted in the Western ontological tradition. As the very title of his article implies, his concern is Being and how we can experience this being, and what we can experience of this being. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze offers a radically different view which would have ontology be creative rather than a matter of discovery. Whereas Todd May explains that, as a study of 'being', "traditional ontology would like to match its concepts to what there is" (20), Deleuze is concerned with what can become, and what we have the potential

to do. What Nagel succeeds in doing in his article is to give some basis to the idea that "there is something it is like to be a particular thing" (Brown 31). It is this idea that there is something that it is like to be a bat which is distinct from human perception and experience that roots the discussion of Nolan's Batman. Nolan has, I argue, delivered a presentation of the character which challenges these notions of being.

Nolan's Batman

Mark Fisher has stated that "Nolan's revisiting of Batman is not a re-invention but a reclaiming of the myth, a grand synthesis that draws on the whole history of the character". Although Fisher is correct in surmising that Nolan's Batman is greatly indebted to previous incarnations of the character, both thematically and to a lesser extent aesthetically, he is incorrect in claiming that Nolan's visualisation 'draws from the whole history'. Nolan quite explicitly does not engage with the camp Batman exemplified in the ABC series and the Schumacher films discussed above. This is largely due to the perceived failures of *Batman and Robin*, which the "studio itself realized it had taken the camp too far" (Duffy). But there is also less room provided for Queer readings as Batman again has undergone 'reheterosexualisation'.

In his two Batman films to date, Christopher Nolan clearly presents us with a Body without Organs (BwO). This BwO is, like the Batman, not fixed and static, but as Deleuze and Guattari explain, "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit"

(*A Thousand Plateaus* 150). This body is not constrained by what it does, it not reducible to the organs that it has and what functions they fulfil. Rather what is of interest to Deleuze and Guattari is what the body has potential to do. The BwO is not whole and complete, it is a collection of independent parts that interact with things in the world around it to create new connections and 'assemblages'.

Both Claire Colebrook and Todd May use as an example the machinic connection between the human body and the bicycle. Colebrook notes how the bicycle as an object is without "end or intention" and that "it only works when it is connected with another 'machine' such as the human body" (*Gilles Deleuze* 56). May continues, "the bicycle-body is another machine, formed from another set of connections: foot-to-pedal, hand-to-handlebar, rear-end-to-seat" (123). But it is also a BwO that is formed as the human body is transformed into a cyclist. Here the body experiences different strains on its parts, different speeds of movement and intensities as it travels through space in a different manner. It is in a state of becoming- something other than itself. The BwO is begun in this case by Wayne's becoming-animal, which Patricia Pisters acknowledges as being a "way of creating a Body without Organs" (144) Becoming initiates the BwO: "it is already underway the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 150).

I do not wish to imply the identity of Bruce Wayne is in any way less or more constructed than that of the Batman. Nolan's films create a much harsher juxtaposition between the public persona of Bruce Wayne and the

character of the Batman than the previous filmic incarnations. Wayne in the latter part of *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* is portrayed as having a very particular public identity. He acts as a spoilt, arrogant and vapid playboy. This is exemplified in his birthday party scene in *Batman Begins* where he insults his guests, accusing them of being freeloaders only there for the free champagne, in order to get them to leave because the Manor is under attack by the League of Shadows. But Wayne here, the white Western man, the majoritarian identity "par excellence" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291) is a performance. There is a third character also, that which is not Bruce Wayne and that which is not Batman, and it is this character that has begun the path of becoming-bat, eschewing the majoritarian identity for a life of potentials and becomings.

Christopher Nolan's first Batman film for Warner Brothers 'rebooted' the franchise after the perceived failures of Schumacher's *Batman and Robin*. Nolan's *Batman Begins* is considered by some reviewers to be a far more intelligent effort than the two films preceding it. This is somewhat supported by the publication of Mark D. White and Robert Arp's *Batman and Philosophy* (2008), a popular philosophy anthology akin to, and indeed part of the same series as, the Irwin *Matrix* anthologies discussed earlier. The front cover of the anthology is clearly referring to the promotional material for Nolan's film, using a close-up image of Batman's cowl in front of a sunset behind dark grey clouds. As the title suggests, the film returns to the character's very beginnings, retelling the origin story once again.

As Julian Darius (2005) has explored, *Batman Begins* is heavily indebted to the Batman of the Miller comic books. Indeed, after the critical failure that was *Batman and Robin*, Warner Brothers had considered making an adaptation solely of Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's *Batman: Year One*. *Batman: Year One* was released in four parts as part of DC's *Batman* title in 1987. As the title suggests, it explores the beginning of Wayne's career as Batman. *Batman: Year One* begins with an image of the young Bruce Wayne knelt on the floor between the bodies of his parents. His mother is lying on her back, with blood pouring from a gunshot wound in her chest. His father is lying face down in a pool of blood. The composition of this is echoed in *Batman Begins*, as we see the same configuration in the alleyway after Thomas and Martha Wayne are killed outside the theatre. There are other similarities, in that Lieutenant Gordon (Gary Oldman) is made to look extremely similar to his counterpart in the graphic novel.

Nolan's films were not the first to be heavily influenced by the comic books, either aesthetically or thematically. As Brooker acknowledges, the "graphic novels *The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Killing Joke* influenced ... [Burton's] *Batman* in both tone and some of its detail" (175). The comic books throughout the 1980s were considerably darker in tone and aesthetics, and it is this, rather than the high camp of the Adam West years, that bore influence on Burton, and indeed Warner Brothers' decision to produce a Batman film. These included *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Year One*, *The Killing Joke* (1988) and *Arkham Asylum* (1989). Indeed, Eileen Meehan throughout her article '"Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!"' (1991) argues that Warner Brothers, after acquiring DC Comics in 1969, used the comic

book medium to test the potential for a darker imagining of the Batman than seen in the ABC series. As the titles released in the early to mid-1980s were a critical and commercial success, Warner Brothers commissioned Burton to produce a more macabre vision of the character, in line with the graphic novels.

Unlike the previous films, *Batman Begins* concentrates more on the character of Bruce Wayne and the formation of his Batman alter ego. As with Nolan's previous film *Memento* (2000) and following film *The Prestige* (2006), *Batman Begins* utilises a number of flashbacks and shifts between various moments in the narrative trajectory. "Nolan's stamp," states Edward Lawrenson, "is detectable throughout" largely because the film has a "kaleidoscopic ordering of scenes" in the first third of the film. It opens with a dream sequence/flashback to Wayne's childhood, with Wayne as a young boy (Gus Lewis), playing around the Wayne estate with an equally young Rachel Dawes (Emma Lockhart). Wayne, attempting to hide from Dawes, climbs on to some planks that are blocking up a well, which collapse under him. In a moment drawn from a similar flashback in Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, he falls to the bottom of the well, revealing a cave. The camera focuses into the darkness from Wayne's point of view. The soundtrack of squeaking suggests there is something in the darkness, and we know this to be bats. The young Wayne is surrounded by vast numbers of the animals, and he begins to fight them off. This is the beginning of Wayne's becoming-bat, though he is yet to embrace these new relations as positive: the film then cuts to the present day of the narrative,

where the adult Wayne wakes in a Chinese prison. This locates the previous sequence as a nightmare, suggesting that this experience is vital to the formation of both the Batman and the adult Wayne.

Wayne's physical abilities are demonstrated within the first three minutes of the film. In the prison a gang of inmates intend to kill him, and they become embroiled in a brawl. Wayne disposes of a ringleader with relative ease. He shows remarkable resilience to their battering, and eventually overcomes the remainder. In a different scene, after Wayne's flight from the temple where he receives ninja training from R'as Al Ghul (Liam Neeson), he returns to Gotham and Wayne Manor. Whilst he is sat in the drawing room, as in the original comic strip, a single bat enters. Wayne then revisits the site of his childhood trauma. He climbs down the well and enters through the mouth of the cave, when we again hear the squeaking of the bats. He holds up his light to find his way, which attracts the colony of bats. Thousands of the creatures begin to fly and circulate around him. He then stands, legs and arms spread (Figure 28) with the bats surrounding him. Here again we see the becoming-bat of Bruce Wayne, one of the many becomings- of the Batman that we will see in Nolan's film.

Mark Fisher has referred to this moment as "Nolan's rendering of Batman's primal scene." That it occurs away from Wayne Manor is, he argues, significant as it "takes place outside the family home and beyond the realm of the Oedipal" and he notes the involvement "not with a single bat but with a whole (Deleuzian) pack". But Fisher argues that Nolan has made the origin story "both more Oedipal *and* more anti-Oedipal than it appeared in

*Detective Comics*". Although he recognises that there is a "Deleuzoguattarian resonance" as the very name 'Batman' suggests that Wayne is becoming-animal, Fisher notes that there is just as strong a significance to Freudian psychoanalysis, noting Freud's cases of 'Ratman' and 'Wolfman' in particular. Despite the Deleuzoguattarian themes that are evident in *Batman Begins,* Fisher argues that Batman "remains a thoroughly Oedipal figure" that "re-binds the becoming-animal with the Oedipal". This is due to the revelation that Bruce's fear of bats that resulted from his experience in the well was partly responsible for the death of his parents. In a variation of the origin story, the Waynes leave a theatre performance early as Bruce is frightened by the bat-like characters on stage. He later expresses to Alfred his belief that their death was his fault.

Fisher notes how *Batman Begins* is populated with fathers and father-like figures – there is Thomas Wayne, the butler Alfred, and R'as Al Ghul. With the untimely demise of Wayne Senior, Fisher argues that the Oedipal complex did not have chance to come to a resolution in Bruce Wayne. According to Fisher, the re-emergence of Al Ghul and the League of Shadows allows Wayne to resolve this complex, as he leaves Al Ghul to die in the final scenes. However, Fisher acknowledges that Wayne's transformation into Batman is an example of becoming-animal, in this case, becoming-bat. Becoming-animal is a philosophical concept that Deleuze and Guattari propose as being one manner in which binary human identities can be challenged and transformed. They state in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the "human being does not 'really' become an animal" (238): becoming-animal is a concept. Here, Wayne is not literally becoming a bat, he will not

be any closer to experiencing the sonic world of the bat described by Nagel. "Becoming," they state, "is a verb with a consistency all of its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing', 'being', 'equalling', or 'producing'" (239). Wayne's willingness to adapt and experiment is vital to his success as Batman, as he develops new strengths and relationships with technology.

In their formulation of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari note the importance of the pack, for multiplicity: "every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. That it has pack modes, rather than characteristics" (239). It is not a single bat that has affected Wayne in Nolan's *Begins*, unlike the original comic strip and Schumacher's *Forever*, it is the colony. It is the collective of bats living beneath Wayne Manor that has seemingly had such import to the formation of the Batman. As Deleuze and Guattari state, "we do not become-animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity" (239-40).

Much more is made of Wayne's transition into a man capable of the Batman's physical feats than in any of the previous films, and indeed the 1939 comic strip. This can lend the film to a Foucauldian reading, as we see him training and building his body for combat. But this body is not only a disciplined body, it is also a Body without Organs. The body of the Batman is presented by Nolan as being constantly susceptible to potentialities.

Nolan's second film *The Dark Knight* continues from the point that *Batman Begins* ended: with Gordon passing Batman a joker playing card. This is the

'calling card' of the main villain of *The Dark Knight*, the Joker. Nolan here

has no need to return to the Batman origin story, the narrative is very much

a logical continuation and result of the events in *Batman Begins*. The BwO

is extended even further here, as Wayne interacts with new technologies that

alter his perception and, in doing so, increase his capabilities.

*The Dark Knight* includes one of Batman's most notorious adversaries, also

seen in Burton's *Batman*, the Joker. Uricchio and Pearson explain that "both

the Batman and the Joker have their origins in cruel twists of fate" (198). In

most narratives concerning the Joker, his origins involve falling into a vat of

chemical waste.  Whereas Wayne chooses to live a life fighting crime after

witnessing the murder of his parents, the Joker responded to his trauma by

"dedicating himself to bizarre absurdist crime" (Uricchio and Pearson 198).

As Brooker has noted, the origin of Burton's Joker is "similar to that given

in *The Killing Joke*" (289). Ron Novy describes the Joker in *Joke* as:

> An unremarkable chemical engineer [who] has quit his job and
> failed at  his dream of being a stand up comedian; he loses his
> pregnant wife in a fluke accident, is forced into a bungled robbery of
> his former employer, and plummets into a tank of noxious waste
> while fleeing from the police. It is a baptism from which he emerges
> the Joker: green hair, pallid skin, and insane. (175)

However, the Joker in *The Dark Knight* is a more menacing character than

in Burton's *Batman*: he terrorises without a motive other than to cause

chaos. In great contrast to Nolan's lengthy exploration of Batman's

beginnings in his first film, and the origin story given in Burton's *Batman*

and Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke*, the Joker in *The Dark Knight* is not

given an origin story. Indeed, the very need for an origin story (in Burton's

*Batman* this is given in the narrative) is mocked by the Joker as he torments his victims. He explains first to Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) that his facial scars were inflicted upon him by his drunken father, because he showed distress at his mother's death, whom his father had murdered. He then explains to Gambol (Michael Jai White) that they were self-inflicted as an act of love toward his wife, who was purposefully disfigured by a loan shark. The wife then became repulsed by him and rejected him. As Alfred Pennyworth explains to Wayne, "some men aren't looking for anything logical. They can't be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn" and this is part of the Joker's menace. Uricchio and Pearson acknowledged in the early 1990s, "today, an increasingly out-of-control Joker is a raging madman" (1991), and it is clear that representations of this character have continued on this trajectory.

Prior to the finale, Batman unveils to Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman) the technology he will use to locate the Joker. Wayne has, as Fox explains, transformed every mobile phone in the city of Gotham into a microphone and a "high frequency generator receiver". This allows Batman to "image all of Gotham". This technology is based upon that which we have seen in one of the preceding scenes and works on the same principal as bat sonar. As Fox explains to Wayne, it creates this image by emitting a "high-frequency pulse for mapping an environment and records a response time".

The action of the final sequence surrounds two ferryboats leaving the island of Gotham. The Joker previously has warned the citizens of Gotham that the city will be under his control by nightfall and says anyone wanting to leave

may do so, but warns them that some of the bridges and subways are rigged with explosives. The Gotham police then close off these exits, leaving the waterways as the only remaining safe option. However, once on board the ferries, the Joker announces over the radio that two boats are also rigged, and that each one has the detonator for the opposite vessel. If one is not destroyed by midnight, the Joker will destroy both vessels.

This explanation and action is interspersed by cuts to Fox at the screens of the sonar machine. From the information received through this device he is able to give Batman the location of the Joker. Batman then relays this location to Gordon. As Batman glides into the building, he swoops onto one of the clowns, whom Gordon presumes are the kidnappers. Two white covers fall to cover his eyes, and we cut to more of the imaging that appears on the screens of the sonar machine (Figure 29). The Batman is shown to interact with this technology in a significantly different manner to Fox. Fox is kept at a distance from the machine, moving and repositioning his entire physical body from screen to screen in order to digest the information it gives him (Figure 30). However, the Batman is shown to work with the technology, in that it actively replaces his 'normal' sight. One particular example of this juxtaposition occurs when Fox is relaying the position of the Joker's various henchmen and Gordon's SWAT teams. At this stage we are given full screen shots of the sonar imaging inter-cut with the real events occurring in the building, rather than the images seen on the screens. As Fox relays to Batman that one team of thugs is on the roof, Batman cocks his

head in that direction. Batman is shown to be able to move between these two forms of perception with ease.

The manner in which the Batman is shown to use technology in Nolan's films is greatly different to previous imaginings. To demonstrate this I offer a comparison between the cape used in *Batman Begins* and a device used in the earlier film *Batman Returns*. In the closing stages of *Batman Begins*, Batman attempts to rescue Rachel Dawes from Arkham Asylum where she has been held captive and drugged by Dr. Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy). The Batman is surrounded by police and a SWAT team who are intent on capturing him. He needs to exit the building swiftly and preferably with some cover. He uses a device which emits a high-pitched sound and attracts hundreds of bats which begin to fill the main hallway. He is then able to glide down the stairwell of the building using his cape which contracts to form wings. As he drops the device down the central stairwell, he follows it as he descends (Figure 31). After he reaches the ground, we are shown the policemen and SWAT team disabled by the multitude of bats, unable to move around them. The Batman, however, moves freely amongst the creatures. This is a very different spectacle to that provided in a similar scenario in the closing stages of *Batman Returns*. Kyle/Catwoman has imprisoned Shreck in the sewers of Gotham and is about to kill him, when Batman enters the scene in order to stop her. However, he is only able to do this by sliding down a wire (Figure 32) which he shoots from one side of the sewer to the other. He is then able to attach himself to the wire and slide across to interrupt Catwoman.

Nolan presents the Batman as being integrated with the colony of bats, and moving with them and amongst them by utilising the technologies available to him. His movements are shown to mirror the speed and ease of the bats, as he glides through the air surrounded by the creatures. This integration is contrasted with the difficulties that the policemen have in confronting them. Nolan's imagining differs greatly from Burton's depiction which shows him utilise the wire to infiltrate the confrontation between Shreck and Catwoman. Although he moves with speed, his movements are not free and follow a set trajectory which Nolan's Batman does not. Burton also has not invited a comparison to the Batman's movements and capacities to those of the bat as has Nolan through his inclusion of the colony in this example.

The Becoming-Cat of Catwoman

As we have seen, the figure of the Batman has evolved throughout its history to correspond to a number of constituent features of becoming-animal and the Body-without-Organs. However, the process of becoming that the Batman undertakes is significantly different to that of the Catwoman and her becoming-cat. In both *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman*, the characters of Kyle and Phillips that will become Catwomen are resurrected and come into 'being' to avenge their murders. In has been argued that the Catwoman of *Batman Returns* is an example of the backlash phenomenon (Walton), and the Catwoman of *Catwoman* has been positioned as a postfeminist action hero (Stasia). Although the representation of both

women is, arguably, heavily mediated by the cultural climate in which they were produced and corresponds to a certain cultural convention, both characters' becoming-cat offers a means of eschewing the conventional gender roles and codes traditionally provided for women.

As Priscilla Walton has commented, *Batman Returns* "revolves around the theme of constructing identities and propagating power" (189) and is "notable for its dearth of female characters" (188). The four main characters, Bruce Wayne, Selena Kyle, Oswald Cobblepot/The Penguin and Max Shreck, are all engaged in duplicity to varying degrees. In Burton's *Batman Returns*, Selina Kyle's 'alter ego' Catwoman is created by her death at the hands of Shreck and her subsequent resurrection. Kyle is introduced in the early stages of the film, indeed before we see Wayne/Batman, as Shreck's personal assistant, which is a role that she does not excel at. She is presented as a career-minded woman, albeit a slightly inept one, trying, but failing, to further herself in her role by 'interfering' in Shreck's business. This ultimately leads to her downfall: while she is preparing for Shreck's meeting with Bruce Wayne regarding the proposed building of a new power plant, she uncovers Shreck's dastardly plan to build a capacitor to steal and horde Gotham's power supply. Upon discovery by Shreck, they have a short exchange which ends with Shreck pushing her out of the window of his office, which is situated at the top of a very tall building.

We first see Kyle whilst she is undertaking the menial 'domestic' task of preparing coffee in a meeting of Gotham's patriarchs, namely Shreck, a Gothamite businessman who appears to be revered by the people of

Gotham, and Gotham's Mayor (Michael Murphy). She interrupts the

meeting and attempts to make a contribution, which she does not even

manage to articulate. Shreck asks the grouping to forgive Kyle as she is not

properly "housebroken", in a reference that, to an extent, foreshadows her

transformation into Catwoman. Shreck's son Chip (Andrew Bryniarski)

interrupts the awkward silence in order to take his father to a ceremony in

which Shreck will light Gotham's Christmas tree. Kyle is left alone,

berating herself, referring to herself as a "stupid corn dog". Shortly after this

scene, she is again seen as incompetent, or at least unable to deal with the

tasks that Shreck assigns to her: as Shreck stands to deliver his speech, the

film cross-cuts to Kyle in the office, realising that she has neglected to

ensure that he has his script. He turns to Chip, asking him to remind him to

"take it out on what's-her-name", which indicates how little he is concerned

with her as an individual.


Burton goes to great lengths to present the pre-Catwoman Kyle as awkward,

meddlesome and inept. Her costuming is far from flattering. She is shown

wearing a brown two-piece suit, with her hair tied back with highly

unfashionable spectacles (Figure 33). The manner in which Pfeiffer holds

herself, with hunched shoulders, is also indicative of her unease and

contrasts greatly not only with the male characters in the boardroom and but

how she is seen later in the film after her transformation.


The mise-en-scène of the interior of Kyle's apartment has also been a point

of interest and analysis, as it is a parody of stereotypical femininity and

clichés feminine behaviour. It is painted pastel pink and adorned with decorations that are also pink and/or flowery soft furnishings. There is, however, notably a blue stuffed toy cat on her bed. This is perhaps problematic: if it is a precursor that indicates that the motif of the cat will transgress traditional notions of femininity, then this aligns the cat with traditional masculinity. It does not necessary follow that the transgression of this sort of femininity should be equated with masculinity. She has an unusual neon light which reads 'HELLO THERE', perhaps as a response to her meaningless "Hi Honey I'm home" which she habitually exclaims when she enters the apartment and proceeds to feed her cat. As Kaveney acknowledges, this indicates that Kyle is "almost a caricature of the good secretary with the hopeless life" (*Superheroes!* 242).

This representation is, as Priscilla L. Walton notes, "uncomfortably close to Susan Faludi's description of backlash encoding" (191) and this is perhaps the reason why Burton fails at making her a 'feminist' character. Kaveney agrees, stating that this representation of Kyle is part of a "reaction – not entirely positive reaction – to feminism" (*Superheroes!* 242). In her analysis, Walton refers to the following quote from the introduction of *Backlash*:

> Women are unhappy precisely *because* they are free. Women are enslaved by their own liberation. They have grabbed at the gold ring of independence, only to miss the one ring that really matters. They have gained control of their fertility, only to destroy it. They have pursued their own professional dreams – and lost out on the greatest female adventure. The women's movement, as we are told time and time again, has proved women's own worst enemy. (2, original emphasis)

The imaging of Kyle in these first moments adheres to Faludi's backlash thesis. Kyle is exhausted when she returns home and, after discovering a message on her answering machine from a boyfriend cancelling their liaison, is presented as being unable to sustain a romantic relationship. After listening to this message, she receives one from herself reminding her that she has to return to the office. As Walton explains, "the secretary's independence has won her personal paucity. She is unhappy. She can find solace only in her work – which itself is not rewarding" (192).

Kyle's first meeting with Batman is similarly awkward. It occurs after the Circus Gang, led by the Penguin, attacks the crowds of people at the tree-lighting ceremony. Her glasses are knocked off amidst the commotion and whilst she is grappling on the floor to find them, Batman arrives and she is grabbed by a clown, who threatens her with a taser and uses her as a human shield against the Batman. After he has rendered her assailant unconscious, she attempts to draw Batman into conversation, awkwardly asking him if he prefers being called "*the* Batman – or is it just 'Batman'?" (original emphasis). He does not respond and walks away without reply. This encounter greatly differs from Wayne's next meeting with Kyle which occurs after her transformation, where she appears confident, articulate and stereotypically more attractive, without her glasses and wearing her hair loose.

Kyle's transformation sequence is highly symbolic. After Shreck pushes Kyle out of his office window, Burton cuts to an overhead shot which shows

Kyle's descent from above. She crashes through several awnings, all

adorned with the Shreck logo, until she eventually reaches the snow-covered

ground where she lays crumpled and clearly dead. The film then cuts to a

number of cats in the alleyways surrounding her. They begin to show

interest in her body by sniffing her, climbing on her and circling around her.

As the scene progresses, more cats come and join this ritual. The film cuts

to her face, which slowly flickers back to life as the cats clamber over her,

biting her hands and face. As in *Batman Begins*, we see the pack, the

multiplicity.

The film immediately cuts back to the interior of Kyle's apartment. The

camera is positioned in exactly the same place as the previous sequence

discussed earlier, and she mimics her ritual behaviour shown.  She walks in

a ghostly manner through the doorway, and through to her kitchenette. She

takes a carton of milk from her refrigerator, pours some in a dish for her cat

as before, and gorges on the remainder in an animalistic manner. The milk

spills from her mouth and cascades down her clothes and body. She begins

to listen to her answering machine whilst continuing to drink the milk. She

receives the following message:

> We're just calling to make sure you've tried Gotham Lady Perfume.
> One whiff of this at the office and your boss'll be asking you to stay
> after work for a candlelight staff meeting for two. Gotham Lady
> Perfume: exclusively at Shreck's department store.

This message provokes a particularly violent reaction from Kyle. She

throws the carton at the telephone and begins to scream, tearing the machine

from the wall and destroying it. She takes her collection of soft toys and

forces them into the waste disposal unit with a wooden spoon with a look of determined glee. The level of destruction escalates when she takes a frying pan and begins to smash the surrounding pictures and ornaments whilst cats enter her apartment through an open window. She then takes a can of black spray paint and sprays over the pink paint on her walls, she opens her wardrobe and sprays over a cartoon picture of some kittens on a pink t-shirt. This in itself is poignant. Whereas the kittens on the t-shirt are stereotypically feminine, Kyle is erasing them and using the cat as a symbol in a far more transgressive manner.

In the wardrobe she finds a black PVC coat which she will use to make into her Catwoman 'costume'. She walks into her bedroom, smashing the neon tubular lights so they now read 'HELL HERE' and continues to deface objects with the spray can, destroying a doll's house in extreme close-up shots. The film then cuts to her cutting up the PVC coat and beginning to make her Catwoman outfit by stitching the pieces together. We then cut to an exterior shot showing her standing at her window, surrounded by cats, with the pink neon 'HELL HERE' shining behind her. Then, speaking to the horde of cats that have congregated around her and on the rooftops around her window, declares "I don't know about you Miss Kitty, but I feel so much yummier" whilst she runs her hands over her now (highly fetishised) PVC-clad figure (Figure 34) which has become considerably more emphasised than in her brown suit worn prior to this sequence.

We are reminded of Shreck's comment that Kyle has not been housebroken. Here she is literally 'breaking' the house that is symbolic of her containment, using the tools of domestic enslavement (the wooden spoon and frying pan) to wreak this destruction. This sequence abounds with symbolism and easily reads as Kyle shedding the codes, clichés and conformities of stereotypical femininity and feminine behaviour that have constrained her in her past. It is an attack on domesticity, a rebellion against a patriarchal order and culture that will not allow her respect and freedom or, at times, even acknowledge her. Burton has loaded this sequence and the mise-en-scène with such signifiers. Kyle uses kitchenware as weapons of destruction. This subverts their purpose, transforming them from items of the domestic realm associated with the traditionally feminine, to one of aggression. Burton also includes items such as the soft toys that are associated specifically with girlish/adolescent femininity, and Kyle is also shown to destroy these. This may well serve as a metaphor for her awakening. Kyle is 'growing up'; she has lost her 'innocent' perspective on the world she inhabits. She destroys these soft toys in the waste disposal unit, another subversion for destructive purposes, and her t-shirts adorned with kittens and her doll's house are painted over in black spray paint. After the long shot that shows her in the window of her apartment, we do not see the interior again. Because her character has previously been so heavily signified through the mise-en-scène, we now do not know quite what she is becoming.

Walton comments that while Catwoman "may forge a space for herself in the discourse of the film ... she denies that space to other women" (193). This is demonstrated in the next scene that features Catwoman. Burton cuts to an unnamed woman (Joan Giammarco) walking down a dark side-alley, where she is confronted by an assailant (Henry Kingi) who appears to attempt to rape her. He is interrupted by Catwoman, who disposes of him with relative ease, attacking with high kicks and scratching his face with her claws. As the female victim begins to thank her, Catwoman grabs her by the face and says "You make it so easy don't you? Always waiting for some Batman to come and save you". As Walton has also noted, Kyle's ambivalence toward her female companions is demonstrated when in conversation with Bruce Wayne. Talking of previous romantic engagements, he mentions "Vicki" to which Kyle snorts and asks "was she an ice skater or a stewardess?" It is interesting that Wayne shrugs this comment off and replies that she was a photojournalist, as it is the male character who accepts her professional status as unproblematic. The female character of Kyle is the one to make stereotypical, derisory comments regarding Vicki's occupation.

However, Walton's criticism of the character does not account for another backlash 'tactic' that Faludi identifies in *Backlash*. If Kyle's presentation is steeped in 'backlash encoding', Walton neglects to draw attention to Faludi's assertion that one manner of attempting to retrench feminist progress was effectively to 'divide and conquer'. Faludi has commented that the backlash 'culture' "pursues a divide-and-conquer strategy: single versus

married women, working women versus housewives, middle- versus

working-class" (17). I would argue then, that *Batman Returns* is not a

backlash 'text' as such, but rather is commenting on the unacceptable

situation of working women.


*Catwoman* is a 'stand alone' film which takes place entirely independently

of the Batman and Gotham City and, as the title suggests, features her as the

protagonist, here played by Halle Berry. Despite being a completely

separate character in a different diegetic world to the Batman, there are

many narrative and aesthetic similarities between the Catwoman of *Batman*

*Returns* and Pitof's imagining of her in *Catwoman*. She does not have the

same origins as the Catwoman of the *Batman* comics: she is neither a

professional jewel thief (though she does burgle a jewellery shop only to

return her bounty) nor the alter-ego of Selena Kyle. Mirroring Pfeiffer's

Catwoman, she comes into being after the death, and subsequent

resurrection of, Patience Phillips. Phillips is an artistic designer for a

cosmetics company called Hedare, whose owner will subject Phillips to a

similar ordeal to Kyle in *Batman Returns*.


Therefore the origin stories of the two Catwomen are roughly the same:

where Selina Kyle was murdered by Shreck, Phillips is murdered by

henchmen on Lauren Hedare's (Sharon Stone) orders. Phillips discovers that

Hedare is planning to release a poisonous and addictive beauty cream which

"reverses the effects of ageing" onto the market. She is chased through a

factory and seeks escape through some pipes at the bottom of the building.

They release a mass of water, and she is drowned and flushed into a river. She is washed ashore on an island, where she, like Kyle, attracts a pack of cats, one being an Egyptian Mau that has been following her. Again, the cats, here created using CGI, crawl over Phillips's body until she comes back to life. A CGI sequence zooms into an extreme close up of Phillips's eye, here with a human, round pupil, when it suddenly flickers and changes shape to an ellipse similar to the pupil of a cat.

Christina Lucia Stasia has located *Catwoman* as part of a set of films that she terms the postfeminist action film (237). One trait of this film is the "shift from fighting bad guys to fighting older women" (241). The contrast is evident in both *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman*. Whereas the Catwoman of *Returns* is pitted against Batman and the Penguin and is determined to take revenge on Shreck, the Catwoman of *Catwoman* eventually has to do battle with Lauren Hedare. Stasia recognises this as indicative of a "shift in cultural understanding of what oppresses women" (241), where it is no longer patriarchy, but rather "the women who paved these roads" (241) to women's empowerment that is regarded as the force to react against.

*Catwoman* makes more reference to the becoming-cat of Catwoman than either of the previous filmic incarnations. Although Pfeiffer's Catwoman adopts the myth of the nine lives, there is little included to suggest that her sensory experience has in any way altered. There are simple allusions to more clichéd 'cat-like' behaviour in *Batman Returns*, for example when Kyle devours the carton of milk and when she washes herself whilst sat on

the end of the Penguin's bed. *Catwoman* also includes moments such as these, for example Berry's character is shown to have an extreme fondness for tinned fish and sushi. Both women also develop an incredible acrobatic ability that they presumably did not possess before becoming-cat. Pfeiffer's character back-flips off screen when rescuing the woman in the sequence discussed above. Berry's Catwoman, when involved in a game of one-on-one basketball with her suitor Tom Lone (Benjamin Bratt), exhibits an extraordinary amount of dexterity and athleticism previously unseen in the Phillips character.

Although the Catwomen of *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman* have similarities in the way their bodies have altered since they have entered becoming-cat, *Catwoman* goes further in exploring her cat-like qualities as her sensory experience itself has altered. There are a number of sequences that are shown from Catwoman's point of view, and these clearly differ from what the audience would recognise as human perception. It is clear that the film is attempting to demonstrate that Phillips now knows what Nagel would describe as 'what it is like to be a cat'. The first of these sequences occurs shortly after she is resurrected. Time appears to slow and her perception of distance has changed. This is shown by cutting between the two modes of seeing: the film cuts to her point of view, where a gull seems to be in close proximity. When it then cuts to a shot of her, she grasps at the air where she believes the gull to be. We then cut to her look of confusion. She perceives the creatures' movements in a slower motion. She also sees the molecular movements surrounding the creatures: she can see

the movements of the air surrounding the gull as it flaps its wings (Figure 35). The Catwoman here appears to have quicker reflexes because her experience of time has altered, and the depth of her perception has altered as she experiences the world in a significantly different manner to how we assume Phillips would have.

This serves as a metaphor for Phillips's ability to see the world differently. But it also implies that Phillips has changed at a molecular level, she has been forced upon the threshold. Although Pfeiffer's Catwoman did inherit cat-like behaviours after the transformation scene, such as washing herself in a cat-like manner, Pitof depicts Berry's Catwoman as altered at the very level of her physicality, her molecular makeup. But this transformation, shown clearly through the image of the eye, suggests a separation from a human point of view. We are reminded of Claire Colebrook's comment that "the human may have its own tendencies of becoming ... but it can also expand its perception to encounter other becomings, such as becoming-animal" (*Gilles Deleuze* 133). Phillips's perception here has literally become expanded as she is no longer a human Being – she is a becoming-cat.

There are, however, many differences between the presentation of these two Catwomen. The Phillips character's representation prior to the transformation, although unflattering, is not so subject to the backlash encoding that Walton has identified. Phillips firstly is shown to have friends, relationships that are notably absent from Kyle's world. The only interaction

Kyle is shown to have outside of the office is via an answering machine. In *Catwoman*, the friends take the form of Sally (Alex Bornstein) and Lance (Berend McKenzie). Secondly, Lone is shown to be romantically interested in Phillips prior to her transformation. Walton draws particular attention to the moment in Burton's film where Kyle fails to receive any recognition from Batman. *Catwoman* does not encourage such a dramatic juxtaposition regarding her sexual allure pre- and post-transformation as does *Batman Returns*.

There are also similarities in the ways in which Kyle and Phillips are portrayed prior to their transformations. *Catwoman* begins with a voiceover monologue from Phillips. This tale, she explains, "all began on the day I died". She describes herself, rather unfortunately, as having been an "unremarkable woman" but, as she continues, "the day I died was also the day I began to live".  Like Kyle in *Batman Returns*, she is lacking in confidence, fails to complete her work to the requirements of her male superior, George Hedare (Lambert Wilson), and has an unfashionable wardrobe (Figure 36). She is told in a meeting with George Hedare that she should "get a manicure", which is hardly a professional comment from a male superior.

The way in which *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman* conclude is also similar. After Kyle/Catwoman kills Shreck in *Batman Returns*, Kyle absconds. The film closes with an image of Catwoman upon the rooftops in Gotham, in contrast to Wayne who is taken away in his chauffeur-driven car. Likewise,

after killing Lauren Hedare in *Catwoman*, Phillips/Catwoman is subject to a similar fate, shown walking along the rooftops with cat-like dexterity.

Because the Catwomen are both seeking revenge for their murders, they adhere to Lisa Coulthard's observation that the "action cinema heroine is in some ways like the stable masculine figures of classical western or action cinema: her violence is rationalized and redemptive, and her acts are solitary ones" (171). Coulthard uses as examples *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) and *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953) where "masculine violence is both needed and shunned by the community" (172). In both films there is a sense of exclusion at the conclusion for both Shane (Alan Ladd) and Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) in that both communities ultimately reject them. Their violence may be justified  - in the case of *The Searchers*, Edwards's slaughtering of a number of native Americans is undertaken in order to retrieve his missing niece Debbie (Natalie Wood); in the case of the gunslinger Shane, he is preventing the usurpation of the humble homestead of the Starrett family by cattle baron Ryker (Emile Meyer) – but they are shown to be unable to live in the communities they fought to protect. The wounded Shane is shown to ride away on his horse past the graveyard of Cemetery Hill, which implies he is riding away to die, and Edwards returns Debbie and walks away, alone, into the desert.

The endings of both *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman* imply that both Catwoman characters no longer wish to exist within normative society: they choose to spend their nights alone prowling the city as Catwomen rather

than return to their previous, somewhat inhibitive roles. There is a definite

sense of agency in both Kyle and Phillips: it is their choice. This sense of

agency is, perhaps, absent from the conclusions of *Shane* and *The*

*Searchers*.


The alignment of the Catwomen to the life style of the cat separates her

from a direct correlation with the male hero of the western genre. Although

it is a popular myth that cats are entirely solitary creatures (Milius 172), it is

clear that they can only exist as part of human society by regressing to the

role of Oedipal animal within the bourgeois family. It is recognised that cats

do not form a pack as such in scientific terms, as they do not hunt together,

but they can form colonies with other cats. It is here that the Catwomen will

find a new life apart from the conventional.


If we return to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between animal types in *A*

*Thousand Plateaus*, the conclusions of these films can be read in a more

positive manner than proposed by Walton. As I noted earlier, there are three

animals that Deleuze and Guattari identify. The first of these are "Oedipal

animals" (240), animals that have been co-opted into the bourgeois family

unit as a pet. They are "individuated animals" (240) that uphold notions of

individuated identity, those that have been separated from other animals and

therefore from the pack. It is this animal type that these Catwomen

endeavour to resist. Indeed, Kyle/Catwoman towards the conclusion of

*Batman Returns* suggests as much when addressing Wayne/Batman:

> Bruce ... I would – I would love to live with you in your castle ... forever, just like in a fairy tale ... but I just couldn't live with myself, so don't pretend this is a happy ending.

As we have seen in the case of the Kyle/Catwoman character, much had been made of her attempts to resist 'domesticity' after her transformation in the destruction of her apartment. But here she outwardly rejects the offer to live with Wayne in conjugal happiness. It is a sign of her becoming-woman, her becoming-animal, that she rejects the dominant code. Here reference to the fairy tale reminds us of myth and the constructedness of feminine identity.

We are presented with an example of the domestic, individuated cat early in the film: the cat that Kyle feeds and cares for. We do not see this cat alone again, it forms part of the pack that enters Kyle's apartment during her transformation. For Kyle/Catwoman to join Wayne/Batman at the close of the film would imply that she would agree to adhere to different set of constraints. This is reinforced when Wayne picks up a lone cat in an alleyway where he is searching for Kyle/Catwoman and takes it into his limousine, and presumably back to Wayne Manor. But it is with the pack that Catwoman's future may lie after rejecting Wayne and the adherence to societal (and filmic) convention that he symbolises.

Conclusions

In these cases it appears that Catwoman is the figure that adheres more to the Deleuzoguattarian notion of pure becoming. However, this is not to say that the Batman does not have moments of becoming. Both of the Catwomen and the Batman of Nolan's films go through a destabilising process, a deterritorialisation of their identities and subject positions which are synonymous with becoming-woman. As we have seen, the Batman's becoming-animal with the colony of bats and his becoming-machine suggest the making of a BwO. However, the Batman/Wayne is shown to be able to deterritorialise and reterritorialise without experiencing the same kind of risk as Catwoman. Her becoming is absolute, the shattering of her identity and subjectivity is not as easily reversible to the extent that she will not return to normative society.

This is perhaps symbolised by the Catwoman and Batman costumes in *Batman Returns*. Walton notes how:

> It is interesting that Catwoman's costume is obviously pieced and stitched together. Her costume poses a marked contrast to Batman's, therefore, since when Bruce Wayne rips a costume, he opens his closet to reveal a rack of identical Bat clothes, each perfect and whole. 193.

However, it is to be remembered that Walton's comments pertain to Burton's Batman and the same cannot be said of Nolan's Batman. The costume becomes symbolic of the process of transformation that Kyle/Catwoman is undergoing after embarking on the path of becoming.

Elizabeth Grosz has written that "one cannot become-animal at will and then cease and function normally. It is not something that can be put on or taken off like a cloak or an activity" (174). In this sense, the Batman does

not strictly adhere to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal. However, a comparison between the characters of the Batman and Catwoman demonstrates that there are certain benefits are of becoming-animal for women, and that this concept can be seen to work positively for women in that it offers an alternative way of living than that prescribed by a certain patriarchal society. Catwoman does, in both films, perhaps move more towards becoming-imperceptible than the Batman as he is shown to be able to reterritorialise, to return to living a 'normative' life. Catwoman is shown clearly to reject an opportunity to do the same. It is both the power afforded by Wayne's position as man and his position as billionaire that allows him to do this: "man, as the subject, has always functioned as that stable being or identity which somehow must come to know or perceive an outside world" (Colebrook *Gilles Deleuze* 139). This comparison may reveal the risk of becoming-imperceptible for real women, as there is perhaps a finer line between becoming-imperceptible and becoming-invisible than for the male subject.

**Chapter Four – The Consequences of Becoming and the *X-Men* Trilogy**

Patricia Pisters has noted in *The Matrix of Visual Culture* that Bryan

Singer's first film of the *X-Men* series has relevance to Deleuzian ideas

(141). This is largely because it concentrates on 'mutants' – a band of

(literally) 'post-human' characters that have, within the narrative, evolved

from homo sapiens. As Charles Xavier/Professor X (Patrick Stewart)

explains in the opening of *X-Men*:

> Mutation: it is the key to our evolution. It has enabled us to evolve
> from a single-celled organism into the dominant species on the
> planet. This process is slow, and normally taking thousands and
> thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution
> leaps forward.

There are many characters in the X-Men series inspired by Stan Lee's

original comic strip that have animal qualities: "Sabretooth [Tyler Mane]

has the teeth of a tiger, Mystique [Rebecca Romijn-Stamos] is a human

chameleon, Wolverine [Hugh Jackman] is a man with steel claws who can

heal himself" (141). Like Ripley in *Alien Resurrection*, they exhibit certain

qualities of Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal. Other characters in

this world are Magneto (Ian McKellen), who has the power to completely

manipulate the molecular elements of all metals, Xavier who can read and

manipulate peoples' minds, and Dr Jean Grey (Famke Janssen), who, in the

first film at least, is psychic and telekinetic. Pisters, however, does not

continue to explore the films in any depth, but rather uses the mutant

characters in order to demonstrate how "contemporary audiovisual culture is flooded with a teratologic imaginary" (141).

This chapter endeavours to expand upon Pister's comments, exploring how the characters and their powers in this world correspond to the subject in becoming and the types of becoming discussed earlier in this thesis. The narrative scenario clearly resonates with the creative philosophy proposed by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, and the bodies that the series presents are BwOs, all with different limits and capacities. This philosophy argues that we should challenge that "we think of difference and variation as grounded upon identity, rather than points of identity being abstracted from difference [and] we think of genetics as leading up to man, rather than man being an event within a flow of genetic variation" (Colebrook *Gilles Deleuze* 76). Deleuze challenges us to think beyond the bounds of human history and identity and the *X-Men*, to an extent, offers us such an imagining.

However, some of the becomings shown in the *X-Men* films demonstrate the limits of adopting Deleuzoguattarian theorising to provide a positive methodology for reading the action heroine and the risks that following Deleuzoguattarian philosophy may entail. As discussed earlier, these risks pose a serious concern which has led to feminism's uneasy relationship with Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari themselves clearly warn of the risks of becoming-woman, in that if the process of destratification it entails is not undertaken carefully, the result could end in chaos (*A Thousand Plateaus* 503). We are given an imaging of this chaos, this potential for this

annihilation, during the grand finale of the third film *The Last Stand* which is the result of Jean Grey's becoming-Phoenix. The final scene featuring Grey in *The Last Stand*, where she is violently killed by Wolverine, also demonstrates the extent to which feminism still needs to deal in molar politics.

These mutants are feared and hated by a significant proportion of the human community, and it is this premise that precipitates the majority of the action in all three films. There are two groups of mutants that are "deeply politically divided" (Kaveney *Superheroes!* 7), each with their own response to the discrimination that the mutants face. These groups are the X-Men, led by Charles Xavier/Professor X, and the Brotherhood, led by Erik Lensherr/Magneto. Magneto aligns the persecution of the mutants to that enacted by the Nazi Party towards the Jewish community: we are told that Magneto was imprisoned in a concentration camp through a flashback that opens the first film. Having faced this scenario previously because of his status as a Jew, Magneto believes the mutants should overthrow humanity and take power over civilisation as they "regard genocide ... as the only way of saving mutant lives" (Kaveney *Superheroes!* 7). Conversely, the X-Men strive to educate the human community about themselves, and fight for a community in which the human and mutant populations may live together harmoniously. The base of the X-Men is Xavier's school for 'gifted children', where he educates young mutants how to utilise their powers responsibly. To an extent this implies that Xavier's X-Men represent a reterritorialisation of the mutants' destratification because they continue to

uphold a conventional society dominated by white men. The Brotherhood offer a complete challenge to this way of life.

The principal enemies of the mutant communities are all examples of the 'molar identity par excellence' – they are all white, Western men and all wield a great deal of institutional power. The first film, the main adversary to the mutant community is Senator Kelly (Bruce Davison). He is vehemently 'anti-mutant' because he considers that the mutants will use their powers against the human community. As a Senator, his power is political. After the flashback to Auschwitz, the film cuts to a conference where Kelly is debating a proposed Mutant Registration Act, again relating the plight of the mutants to that of the Jewish community in Nazi Germany. The Act would necessitate every mutant declaring themselves, and the powers that they have, to the State. The speech Kelly delivers to the Senate in favour of this Act is extremely conservative and entirely anti-Deleuzoguattarian and he states "we must know who they are and above all what they can do". His comments typify precisely the focus on being and identity that Deleuze and Guattari challenge through their philosophy of becoming. Kelly is concerned with knowing the abilities of these entities as a method of controlling these capacities and becomings. As Rosi Braidotti has commented, "being allows for no mutation, no creative becoming ... it merely tends towards self-preservation" ('Nomadism with a Difference' 307). His speech continues to reveal that his concerns relate to the endurance of the capitalist bourgeois family, speaking of protecting people's children, homes and money from the threat of the mutants. The prominence

of, and restriction of desire to, the bourgeois family is another societal convention that Deleuze and Guattari seek to undo.

In *X-Men 2* the main adversary is Colonel William Stryker (Brian Cox). It is revealed that Stryker's son Jason (Michael Reid Mackay) is a telepathic mutant, and that Stryker has been siphoning a serum from his brain that can be injected and used to control other mutants. Stryker's plan is remarkably similar to the 'Final Solution'. He intends to capture Professor X and manipulate his power through a machine called Cerebro in order to kill all the mutants on the planet. His power is military: he is assisted throughout his endeavour by a squadron of paratroopers who enact a raid of Xavier's school and guard his base of operations at Alkali Lake.

*The Last Stand* sees the main threat to the mutant community through the work of scientist Warren Worthington II (Michael Murphy). Worthington has manipulated the DNA of a mutant called Jimmy/Leach (Cameron Bright). Leach's power is to transform mutant DNA back to human DNA if a mutant comes within close proximity to him. The threat to the community is, then, the Cure. This Cure causes a further rift within the mutant community as it encourages further reterritorialisation. Whereas the X-Men believe it is each individual's right to choose whether or not to take the Cure, The Brotherhood want to eradicate this treatment as they believe it will one day be utilised negatively against the mutant community's will. In the later stages of the film, the military are shown to have developed guns that shoot syringes of the serum in order to combat a mutant uprising by removing their power.

That the mutants are shown in opposition to these men increases their alliance to Deleuzoguattarian themes. As discussed previously, Deleuze and Guattari state that the identity of man is "majoritarian par excellence, where as becomings are Minoritarian" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291). As discussed, there can be no becoming-man akin to becoming-woman, becoming-animal, or any other becomings because it is the category of man against which everything else is Other. As Deleuze and Guattari state, "majority implies a state of domination" (291). The mutants are 'minoritarian' in that they are subordinated in this patriarchal power structure. The powers they are fighting that threaten their status and identity all come from masculinised zones: the political, the military and the scientific, areas in our society that continue to be dominated by white, middle-class men. The mutants are therefore constructed in opposition to this molar identity, and offer a critique of it. With the possible exception of Worthing in *The Last Stand*, these men are vilified and empathy is encouraged toward the mutants' predicament. Although the films do encourage a (non-Deleuzoguattarian) binary between the human and mutant characters, it is clear that at least the first two films act in a Deleuzoguattarian manner by critiquing the molar identity of the white, middle-class male and the misappropriation of his institutional power.

The films foreground the molecular quality of the mutants from their beginnings in a similar manner to the opening credits of *Alien Resurrection* discussed earlier. The opening of each film involves a CGI credit sequence where we are shown a mass of molecules, representative of mutant DNA. In

doing this the sequences accentuate the molecular nature and flow of life. However, in the third film of the trilogy, *The Last Stand*, we are shown, quite literally, a battle between the two types of DNA with the introduction of the Cure. If we characterise the mutants as deterritorialised in that they are at odds with the dominant culture, the Cure acts to reterritorialise these figures as it means that the dominant culture has found a way of negating this subculture in this narrative scenario.

Marie/Rogue

The character of Marie/Rogue (Anna Paquin) is the first mutant to be seen in the *X-Men* series. The first film opens with a scene where she, as an adolescent girl, is explaining her plans to travel around North America to her boyfriend. They share a kiss, and the boyfriend is shown to fall back because he begins to have some kind of fit. Marie/Rogue begins to scream as she does not know what is happening to him. We later learn that he fell into a coma. This is the scene in which Marie/Rogue traumatically discovers that she has mutant powers. It is no coincidence that this scene takes place in the family home, as the process of becoming she will now undertake is at odds with the convention that this home symbolises. The environment is shown to be somewhat stifling: it is a claustrophobic scene, with the sound of piano practice taking place in the background. It is this family home that she must now leave as she has entered into a state of becoming against the normative.

Directly after this scene, the film cuts to the Senate debate with Senator Kelly, and Dr. Jean Grey is speaking. She is explaining that the "mutations manifest at puberty, and are often triggered by periods of heightened emotional stress". This is the situation that Marie/Rogue had experienced in the previous scene, and therefore, in the process of literally becoming a woman, Marie/Rogue enters into a Deleuzoguattarian 'becoming-woman'. We are shown that she has run away from home and is undertaking a nomadic lifestyle, receiving lifts with truckers between towns in remote parts of America. It is on these travels that she encounters Wolverine, identifying with him as a fellow mutant. When talking to him she explains to him that when people touch her skin "something weird happens". It is clear that she does not know what sort of body she has, the capacities it has and what she can do with it.

Wolverine is presented as becoming-animal in a similar manner to the Clone Ripley of *Alien Resurrection*. Shortly after he meets Rogue, the two of them are attacked by Toad and Sabretooth, mutants of The Brotherhood, and Wolverine is shown to have certain animalistic qualities. He senses the danger before it is visually apparent, as he has heightened senses and is shown to sniff the air in the manner of a beast. This is also a benefit later in the film when he is able to detect that Mystique is posing as Storm, another member of the X-Men team. *X-Men 2* also contrasts Wolverine's becoming-animal with the bourgeois Oedipal animal of the family home when he is on the run from Stryker. However, unlike the Clone Ripley, Wolverine does not encounter the pack in the same way. Although he forms part of the X-Men, who are all becoming in their separate, rhizomatic ways, Wolverine

does not share the same speeds, slownesses, intensities and flows of the pack in the same way as the Clone Ripley is shown to in *Alien Resurrection*. His remains a becoming-animal, however, because his condition serves as a reminder and a challenge to the anthropocentrism of Western culture. The mutants encourage us to, literally, think beyond the human.

Rogue's mutant power is to absorb and replicate other entities' energies and life force through physical contact. As Xavier later explains to Wolverine, "she takes their energy, their life-force. In the case of mutants she absorbs their gifts for a short while".  It has potentially fatal effects for both human and mutant bodies. This is seen in the sequence with the boyfriend which was discussed above, but also in a scene involving Wolverine. Wolverine is shown in bed having a vivid and violent nightmare, and Rogue attempts to wake him up. When she succeeds, Wolverine presumes that he is under attack and pierces her torso with his adamantine claws. Rogue then touches him in order to borrow his healing power and so prevent herself from dying. This is a moment of becoming as the two bodies form an assemblage. But her powers make her an embodiment of becoming-woman. She is continually on the threshold as a connection making-entity. She alters and joins the intensities and flows of the other entity, forming links with other bodies that increase her capacities, experiencing life through them and altering her perception. She later explains to Wolverine that after this episode she can still feel him inside her mind, indicating that this becoming is a permanent alteration for her.

It is Rogue's ability that precipitates most of the action in *X-Men*. Having learnt of her specific power, Magneto kidnaps her in order to force her to operate a machine he has developed which turns human beings into mutants, altering them at a molecular level by mutating their DNA. The amount of energy the machine takes to operate would end up killing him, so Magneto wishes to sacrifice Rogue instead. He has situated the machine on Liberty Island, and there is a conference of world leaders taking place on the nearby Ellis Island. Magneto wishes to force these characters into becoming mutants and therefore to destratisfy. We are reminded, through the character of Rogue, of Anna Powell's comments regarding the Clone Ripley in *Alien Resurrection*, in that assemblages should always be consensual. Magneto forces Rogue to form an assemblage with him and the machine which would lead to her death. Here we are shown her body being overwritten by man. It is a becoming, but it is a becoming that would lead to her eradication. The implications of Rogue's powers are reminiscent of the critiques that have been levied at Deleuze and Guattari in relation to their concept of the girl. Rogue is, in a way, denied any specificity and this is partly why she is driven to reterritorialise in her adherence to heteronormative convention through receiving the Cure. Like the girl of *A Thousand Plateaus*, her sex is neutralised. Rogue's body is written over by the act becoming, here by a white, Western man, and clearly demonstrates the concerns raised by Sotirin and Grosz discussed earlier.

Towards the film's conclusion, Wolverine discovers Rogue who is by then nearly dead from the exertion of operating the machine. The scene in which he stabbed her is echoed here, because he touches her in order to transfer his

healing powers. In this act, the becoming is portrayed as quite different from the earlier Rogue/Wolverine assemblage. It has not been necessitated by an act of violence by either party. But it is also an experienced becoming.

In *X-Men 2*, Rogue's becomings continue to be presented in an ambivalent manner. It is clear that she and Bobby are now in a romantic relationship, and both exhibit some frustration at unable to engage in sustained physical contact. However, they decide to share a kiss when they have gone on the run after Stryker's attack on Xavier's school. The first kiss that is shown does not to do either of them any damage. After they part, Rogue exhales icy breath. The second kiss, which is more passionate, however, ends with Bobby struggling to release himself. This is one of the series' first indicators, perhaps, of the potential dangers of unmarked becomings, of deterritorialisation.

However, the kissing scene is followed shortly by another of Rogue's becomings. When Bobby's family return home, Bobby explains to them that he is a mutant. His little brother, who appears to be prejudiced against the mutants, calls the police on the pretence that the family are being attacked by strangers. The police arrive and treat the party in a hostile manner. After the police shoot Wolverine in the head, Pyro takes objection to their treatment and begins shooting huge bursts of flames at the police and their vehicles. In order to calm down the fires and protect the police from harm, Rogue grasps Pyro's bare ankle and she is then able to control the flames herself. Pyro is disabled through this becoming, but Rogue is able to prevent anymore destruction through the use of Pyro's powers.

*The Last Stand* offers Rogue a dilemma through the creation of the Cure.
Throughout the film she is shown to be concerned about her boyfriend
Bobby/Iceman's friendship with Kitty (Ellen Page). Although Kitty and
Bobby are not shown to be having a romantic relationship, they are shown
as having the kind of physical contact that Rogue and Bobby are unable to
have due to the damage her mutation would cause to him. This is most
powerfully demonstrated when Bobby takes Kitty ice-skating to cheer her
up after the death of Professor Xavier. Kitty falls into Bobby's arms while
Rogue watches on from a window of the school.

After this episode, Rogue absconds from the school in order to receive the
Cure. There were two versions of her decision filmed, but in the final
theatrical version of the film she has decided to receive the treatment. This
is demonstrated by her removing her glove and taking Bobby's hand on her
return to the school. This also implies her reasons for taking the Cure are
largely romantic. Although the film ends with the two reunited in the
school, Rogue's future is unsure. It is unclear whether or not she will be
able to stay at the school for the 'gifted' as she is no longer a mutant. But
perhaps she is now becoming-woman in a more fundamental way. Her
previous mutation has given her an affinity for the unconventional.

The process she undergoes is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's
discussion of the drug addict in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The addict, they say,
curtails becoming and the Body without Organs: "drug addicts erect a
vitrified or emptied body, or a cancerous one: the causal line, the creative

line, or line of flight immediately turns into a line of death and abolition" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 285). The body of the addict is one that inhibits life and channels desire and as such restricts becoming. This is a situation that Rogue has emulated by receiving the Cure – she has returned to a stable state of being, curtailed her lines of flight, primarily in order to continue a heteronormative relationship with Bobby. Although she explains to Wolverine that he "doesn't know what it's like to be afraid of [his] powers" and that she wants to "be able to touch people ... a hug, a handshake ... a kiss", she is only really shown in the film in relation to Bobby. She is either shown with him, watching him with Kitty, or in relation to the Cure, which implies that her major reason for undertaking the process is to engage in a heteronormative physical relationship with him.

Rogue's character raises many questions about what sort of life awaits the subject in becoming, and the reality of becoming-woman and becoming more generally. That her mutant ability restricts her from having elongated physical contact with another entity without doing that entity damage perhaps highlights the sacrifices that a life of becoming and destratifying may involve. In *X-Men*, the sacrifice she has to make is foregrounded when she runs away shortly before she is captured by Magneto. When sitting on a train she is shown in shot/reverse to be looking longingly at a woman (presumably a mother) stroking a child's cheek. However, this is the kind of 'conventional' familial relationship that Deleuze and Guattari wish to put into question. She has to make a choice between convention and becoming, and chooses the former.

Jean Grey

The *X-Men* films' representation of Jean Grey is equally complex from a
Deleuzoguattarian perspective because it offers both positive and negative
imaginings of becoming. As the trilogy expands it becomes 'her' series: her
use of the machine Cerebro in *X-Men* triggers a change in her telepathic
ability that manifests itself throughout *X-Men 2* and will result in her
complete domination of the narrative and screen space in *The Last Stand*. As
we will see, she begins as an especially useful character through which to
explore how analysis based on Deleuzoguattarian ideas of becoming and the
body can be beneficial to considerations of women on screen. As I shall
demonstrate, there are moments of action that are allowed by her 'mutation'
which make no sense to be read from a psychoanalytic perspective. In these
moments, I argue, the character breaks free from the psychoanalytic
paradigm, demanding to be read in an alternative fashion. However, if we
read her powers and actions as becomings, as her character becomes
increasingly unstable the Deleuzoguattarian model becomes harder to
successfully apply.

There are two occasions prior to the scene in which Grey sacrifices herself
in *X-Men 2* in which we are given glimpses of Grey's becoming-molecular
in her becoming the Phoenix. The first of these occurs in the X-Men's jet
after Grey and Storm have rescued Rogue, Iceman, Wolverine and Pyro
from the confrontation with the police noted earlier. They are being pursued
by a number of military jets attempting to force them to land. As they refuse
to do so, the military fire heat-seeking missiles at them. Storm manages to

divert and destroy the planes and most of the missiles by creating tornados.

One, however, remains. Grey begins to focus on the missile and we are

shown it exploding and then cut to a close-up of her face. Here her eyes

flicker to a fiery red which will become associated with the character of the

Phoenix, both later in the film, and in *The Last Stand*. The second of these

occurrences happens when Grey is defending herself from Cyclops, who

attacks her under the influence of Stryker's brain serum. She diverts his

optic blasts by creating a force field around herself. Eventually her power

grows and overcomes Cyclops's blast, diverting it to elsewhere in the

complex. Again, shortly before she manages this, her eyes flicker with

redness. As a consequence of the explosion resulting from their duel, we see

that the complex has undergone significant structural damage. It is

important to point out that, even at the early stages of Grey's becoming-

Phoenix, it is portrayed as a destructive force.

Jean Grey's death scene in *X-Men 2* has particular resonance with

Deleuzoguattarian theorising as it presents a becoming-woman in a heroic

capacity. Grey realises that the dam is rupturing when the X-Men are

attempting to leave the area, but their jet is unable to take off. To

demonstrate this, close-ups of Grey are cut next to shots of the rupturing

dam and the water spraying forth (Figures 37 and 38).

The molecular quality of things is emphasised continually throughout this

scene. As the dam ruptures, we see the stone of the dam breaking into

particles, and the water spraying through the wall in molecules. The power

of the flow of water is accentuated in close-up, slow motion shots that

emphasise the molecular quality of both the dam and the water. We are being shown a destructive becoming, where the water's potential has altered to become a threat. This is reminiscent of Sotirin's description of the 'plant-wall':

> The rhizomatic roots of mint plants may break through a seemingly impenetrable concrete retaining wall, one molecule at a time; the detachment of each concentrated particle by the collocation of a plant particle has its own singularity. The molar configurations of plant and wall are multiplicities that the molecular lines of becoming may move through and beyond, recomposing each into a plant-wall. (100)

Here the molar aggregates of the dam and the lake are revealed as a 'stable configuration of molecular elements'. The flow of the water that results from the breaking down of the molar aggregate of the dam could mean annihilation for the X-Men team. But this is contrasted with Jean Grey's becoming, which results in her becoming Phoenix. By way of her telepathy, she realises the dam is rupturing and therefore the peril that faces the band of X-Men. This enables her to take action in order to save them. She leaves the jet unnoticed, and positions herself in front of it. She uses her telekinetic powers to prevent the remaining X-Men from attempting to stop her essentially sacrificing herself for them (Figure 39). When a barrage of water flows towards her, and again using her telekinetic power, she parts the water to protect the jet and herself. Shortly before she 'dies' she is shown to undergo some sort of transformation which, on viewing the subsequent film, suggests that she is becoming-Phoenix.

The becoming that is undertaken in this scene demonstrates Elisabeth Hills's argument well when addressing the action heroine. It makes no sense

to contain Grey to the psychoanalytic paradigm – her becoming is clear, her powers cannot be said to 'masculine' her or be (easily) read as a phallic appropriation. This is aided by her mutation: her 'superpower' makes her independent from the use of phallic referents such as guns and harpoons that Ripley was dependent upon. This is a different body – a Body without Organs – that demands to be read differently. Lorraine comments that "constructing a BwO entails releasing molecular elements from stabilized patterns of organized breaks and flows" (166). This is seen because her becoming is accentuated by the editing. Close-up shots of her are continually juxtaposed with close-up shots of the dam rupturing and the spray of water and matter which accentuate the molecular elements. What is happening to the wall and the water is also happening to Grey. The presentation of the molecular nature of things is broadened to include her subjectivity as she breaks down traditional cinematic and social codes in becoming active, assertive and heroic. It is not Wolverine, Cyclops or Xavier that is able to save them, but the female-embodied Grey.

The characterisation of Grey/Phoenix in *The Last Stand* is vastly different from that of *X-Men* and *X-Men 2*. Grey is a considerably different character than we have been shown in the previous films. This is because she is now exhibiting her alter ego, the Phoenix, which is sharing the embodied entity we previously recognised as Grey. She returns after summoning Cyclops to Alkali Lake, the scene of her demise in *X-Men 2*. He partially enables her return as he unleashes an optic blast into the water which creates a whirlpool. As he falls to his feet, he is shrouded in a bright, white light, and looks up to see Grey standing at the water's edge. Visually, her appearance

is very similar to that in *X-Men* and *X-Men 2*, the only major difference

being that she has longer, red hair (Figure 40). After some conversation with

Cyclops in which she is decidedly aloof, they kiss and she undergoes a

transformation: her eyes turn black, her veins become visible beneath her

skin and she appears to in some way absorbing his energy in a similar way

to Rogue's powers. The film then immediately cuts to Xavier in his

mansion, gasping as if in pain, as he orders Storm and Wolverine to Alkali

Lake as he has in some way sensed her return.

It becomes apparent as the narrative progresses that Grey/Phoenix has killed

Cyclops. It is poignant that he is her first 'victim' because this symbolises a

major shift in her characterisation. In the first two films, Grey is presented

as loyal to Cyclops, her husband, despite an implied attraction to Wolverine.

Grey's relationship with her husband clearly functions to epitomise her

adherence to societal convention. This connection itself begins to break

down once Grey starts to show signs of becoming-Phoenix. After the flash

of becoming-Phoenix seen on the jet discussed earlier, the party encounter

Magneto and Mystique. They tell the X-Men that Stryker has captured

Xavier and Scott and is keeping them captive in order to hatch his evil plan.

Whilst preparing for bed, before heading to Alkali Lake to challenge

Stryker, Grey and Wolverine share an exchange. She explains to him that

"girls flirt with the dangerous guy, they don't bring him home; they marry

the good guy". They share a kiss precipitated by Wolverine which Grey

does not entirely resist. Eventually, however, she breaks away from him and

returns to the jet, symbolising her current preference for a more

conventional relationship through her marriage with the 'good guy'.

That Grey/Phoenix disposes of Cyclops in the early stages of *The Last Stand* is significant because it symbolises the beginning of Phoenix's disregard both for social convention and things that will contain her. At the beginning of *X-Men 2*, when she is discussing how she feels "something terrible is about to happen", Summers attempts to reassure her by telling her that he "would never let anything happen to her". It is telling that he adopts this attitude, that Grey needs to be cared for by him and that he, as a male, can protect her from harm. That she becomes more powerful than him and eventually kills him is a challenge to the dominant order of Man.

The reason for Grey's 'transformation' is given to Wolverine by Xavier on his return with Grey's unconscious body. In a conversation held over her still unconscious body, he explains that when he met her as a young girl her power was "practically limitless" and "seated in the unconscious part of her mind". He goes on to explain that he "created a series of psychic barriers to isolate her powers from her conscious mind and, as a result, Jean developed a dual personality". This dual personality is split between "the conscious Jean, whose powers were always in her control, and the dormant side, a personality that ... came to call itself the Phoenix". Xavier explains that this personality is "a purely instinctual creature, all desire and joy and rage". When Wolverine expresses his anger with Xavier for meddling with Grey's mind in this manner, Xavier responds by saying that "she has to be controlled" and that he owes Wolverine no explanation as to his actions. The film then cuts to a medium long-shot of Xavier leaning over Grey's head with his hands on her temples, attempting to restore his psychic blocks.

That Xavier undertook these processes in order to control Grey/Phoenix undoes much of his portrayal as benevolent patriarch. The image of him leaning over her attempting to place blocks in her mind is somewhat sinister. Indeed, towards the close of *X-Men 2*, Xavier comments how Grey was always "hesitant" about her powers and how she felt she was being "left behind" by the rest of Xavier's students. What finishes as a touching eulogy takes on more sinister meaning after the revelations of *The Last Stand*. If Grey was not confident in her powers, this was because Xavier made her so. He realised that she would become 'too powerful', more powerful than even himself, and took steps to prevent this. It is here that Xavier becomes an example of the molar Man. He wants to prevent Grey's becoming-Phoenix.

When Grey regains consciousness after being treated by Xavier, Wolverine is still watching over her. In the previous two films, Grey has rejected Wolverine's sexual advances due to her relationship with Cyclops. However, here she makes advances toward Wolverine which is a notable contrast to the scene discussed above. It is clear that she now feels compelled to pursue a non-heteronormative sexual activity with the 'dangerous guy'. But these advances are aggressive and even violent. After straddling him, they become embroiled in a passionate clinch. She begins to scratch deep gashes into his body and undress him using her telekinetic powers. Wolverine stops the liaison by declaring "Jean, this isn't you", to which she replies firmly "yes, it is me". This rather problematically seems to present female sexuality outside of heteronormative marriage scenarios in

a somewhat negative manner. This scene positions her sexual desire alongside danger and destruction as she literally tears open Wolverine's flesh. It may therefore continue to associate female sexuality with ideas of castration anxiety and the myth of the vagina dentata.

Xavier's death is an act of vengeance by the Phoenix for his interference with her evolution. Xavier has visited Grey at her childhood home accompanied by Wolverine and Storm at the same time as Magneto and his henchmen. Xavier enters the house with Magneto in an attempt to talk with Grey to convince her to let him try to continue to 'help' her control the Phoenix. Grey/Phoenix becomes increasingly agitated and challenges him about the steps he has taken to control her. Whilst this exchange takes place, Magneto is in the background encouraging Grey/Phoenix to reject Xavier's pleas. When Xavier mentions Cyclops's death as an example of her lack of control, the Phoenix becomes more enraged. Magneto is thrown across the house into a different room. Water begins to flow upwardly, and an increasing number of objects begin to rotate around them. She lifts Xavier from his wheelchair and suspends him in midair whilst the objects around them are reduced to particles and dust. Xavier then begins to be ripped apart, molecule by molecule. His suit threads become increasingly worn away and his flesh is torn from his body. The film cuts to the exterior of the house which is entirely suspended in the air. It then cuts back to the interior to a slow motion sequence in which Xavier explodes into dust and disappears.

This sequence again positions Grey alongside the molecular. However, it is a greatly different positioning to that of the sacrifice scene towards the conclusion of *X-Men 2*. In the latter scene, the becoming-molecular involved a movement of a destructive flow that allowed not only the survival of the troupe of X-Men but also precipitated Grey's becoming-Phoenix. Grey/Phoenix's becoming-molecular and the flows involved here are almost totally destructive. Grey cannot control the becoming-molecular of the Phoenix. This becoming has lead to the annihilation of two figures in her life that she had previously loved, albeit two characters that had, debatably, inhibited her personal progression and becoming-Phoenix.

After the sequence in which Grey/Phoenix disposes of Xavier, she is clearly exhausted and she is walked away by Magneto. Magneto here offers Grey more sympathy and facilitates and encourages her becoming-Phoenix. However, he undertakes this strategy for his own ends because he wishes her to use her powers to annihilate the scientists responsible for the Cure and any humankind that stand in their way. He also is shown to regret his involvement in her becoming. When she begins to destroy everything around her, he realises the destruction of which she is capable and begins to flee the area. He is shown in close up and asks himself "what have I done?" because she has reached a level of destruction which he had previously not imagined.

The finale takes place on Alcatraz, where the laboratory that has created the cure is based. It is a grand final battle fought between the Brotherhood and the X-Men, who are supporting the United States military in protecting the

Cure, the scientists and the laboratory. Phoenix stands alongside Magneto

with Pyro, Bobby's personal adversary. When the troops begin to fire

specially designed syringes filled with the Cure at her, the Phoenix becomes

enraged and starts upon a rampage. The nature of this destruction is again

relevant to Deleuzian theorising as she begins to reduce her surroundings to

pieces, so reducing everything to an indiscernible molecular flow (Figure

41). Soldiers, buildings and cars are reduced to particles which circulate

with the air and there is an upward current of water molecules as the flow

becomes uncontrollable and beyond even the force of gravity. This is

reminiscent of Grosz's comment that "Deleuze and Guattari describe a

process of blowing apart the fragments, elements, intensities at work in an

entity, then the explosion of the fragments into smaller fragments and so on

ad infinitum" (179). Although she is shown to be the cause of this

destruction, she is not shown to be able to, or want to, control the flow of

matter that surrounds her. This perhaps highlights the problems that may

arise in adopting a philosophy of becoming which aims to disrupt the notion

of being and identity and the risks of becoming-imperceptible.

It is in these stages of *The Last Stand* that it becomes an increasingly

complex task to successfully apply Deleuzoguattarian theorising in order to

assist in the creation of a methodology to read the action heroine more

positively and progressively. Elisabeth Hills has argued that

Deleuzoguattarian concepts such as the BwO and the assemblage may be of

use when addressing the action heroine in terms other than psychoanalysis.

But it is clear that her reading and use of Deleuzoguattarian theory is

mediated by the readings proposed by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies*.

As noted earlier, Grosz herself acknowledged that her reading of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophies were 'highly selective'. Grosz, however, offers a defence of this approach and does proceed to properly evaluate the use-value of Deleuzoguattarian theory for feminist philosophy. As discussed, Grosz offers a number of drawbacks to adopting Deleuze and Guattari as well as addressing the benefits she perceives. Hills, however, does not explore these drawbacks but rather concentrates on the positive aspects of the philosophy in order to break down the binary opposition which she feels has inhibited a complete reading of the action heroine. However, there are consequences to disabling this binary. The aspects of the theory that Hills uses are dependent upon undertaking the philosophy of becoming in its entirety, which runs the risk of undoing more than just the male/female binary, as the unstable representation of Jean Grey/Phoenix clearly demonstrates.

*The Last Stand* also demonstrates the need to continue questioning the cinematic treatment of the 'molar' category of woman and that we cannot abandon a molar identity politics. Grey's death scene in *The Last Stand* is extremely problematic from a feminist perspective. In conversation with Storm on Alcatraz and amidst the chaos, Wolverine declares that he is the "only one that can save her". As he approaches her, she continues her molecular destruction by tearing molecules of flesh from his body revealing his adamantine skeleton. Because of his unique healing power, he is able to regenerate before she kills him. He reaches Phoenix and declares that he would "die for her", and her angry countenance relaxes and she asks him to "save her". At this point he withdraws his adamantine claws and pierces her

through the stomach. The film cuts to a close-up of her face, which

transforms back to her appearance as Grey, and she smiles (Figure 42), and

then dies in his arms. Within the bounds of the narrative, and with the

creation of the Cure, Grey/Phoenix does not have to be disposed of in such a

violent manner. It needs to asked then why representations of this nature

continue to be perpetuated in popular film. The ideology that informs such

images still needs to be interrogated.

We have seen how the *X-Men* films offer both positive and negative

imaginings of becoming. Deleuzoguattarian theory is useful and

illuminating in these cases because it can offer a means of addressing

conceptually complex bodies such as Jean Grey's. It provides a manner of

discussing her body independent of psychoanalytic theories which have,

according to Hills, been restrictive as a method for addressing the action

heroine.  However, as the narrative of the trilogy progresses, the logical

consequences of this form of analysis become brutally apparent, implying

that a life of becoming is neither desirable nor tenable. The consequences

that this has for a feminist film theory which seeks a new model for positive

appraisals of active women on screen need to be taken into account. This is

because the benefits of breaking down the binary machine will, in certain

instances, be outweighed by the risks of the larger project of becoming.

**Conclusions**

Through a series of explorations of the changing figure of the action heroine in a number of contemporary science fiction franchises, this project has endeavoured to assess the use-value of Deleuzoguattarian theories of becoming and the body for feminist film theory. It has examined how feminist film theory has struggled to address this figure in a positive way which is, I argue, largely due to its reliance on psychoanalytic theory. I have proposed that Deleuzoguattarian theory can begin to promote a more positive and optimistic appraisal of the action heroine in certain instances. Although I have argued these benefits, I have also recognised that this form of 'interpretation' falls short of dealing with all of the complexities involved in the representation of women on screen.

In adopting Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming we are at risk of losing a platform from which to discuss and analyse sexist and ideologically unsound treatments of women on film. This is because in the Deleuzoguattarian method becoming-woman will always take precedent over 'woman' and the real political struggles and lived experience of women. It may be the case that feminism's interaction with Deleuze and Guattari is a "start of a series of explorations and possible alternatives" (Grosz 182). However, these explorations may lead us into unsafe territories where the subject and purpose of feminism becomes unclear.

My literature review introduced the features of becoming that are important to my analysis of these sets of films. In discussing the feminist responses to Deleuze and Guattari, I endeavoured to demonstrate that alongside the beneficial aspects of becoming as a means of deconstructing essentialism and exploring areas beyond the binary, there are a number of potential problems still to be overcome regarding the use of Deleuzoguattarian theory as a means of addressing both screen women and 'woman'. I highlighted the key concerns that feminist theory has identified with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy in line with Grosz's consideration in *Volatile Bodies*. Although Grosz is an advocate of Deleuze and Guattari, it is revealing that she is still apprehensive about adopting their work. This signals the uneasy relationship between feminism and Deleuze and Guattari.

What all of the franchises I have examined share is that they depict the development of characters over time. In the case of the *Alien* franchise, the character of Ripley began in 1979 and, it has been argued, her representation at this point in time is indebted to the successes of the feminist movement during the 1970s (Gallardo C and Smith). The subsequent instalments of the series in 1986, 1992 and 1997 are similarly dependent on the cultural and critical climate in which they were produced. Series of this nature that are produced over extended periods of time give a unique opportunity to view the ways in which cinema can be seen to respond to the socio-cultural status of women, and how in a given society cinematic representation more generally can be indicative of larger cultural and critical trends.

Chapter one examined the separate films of the *Alien* series chronologically in order to demonstrate how both the figure of Ripley and the Alien species have altered since the series' inception. Through my analysis, I identified how critical writing concerning Ripley has, at times, been as dependent on its context of production as the *Alien* films themselves. Readings of this nature, I argue, are examples of what Althusser terms 'guilty readings'. The evaluation they then give to the figure of Ripley can be limited. I therefore placed the films and their corresponding criticism in a larger cultural context, and argued they could be read together as a 'co-text'. 'Dislocating' readings from their context allows for alternate readings which can lead to more positive appropriations of the characters that I examine.

In order to circumvent these limitations, I offered a number of Deleuzoguattarian readings of Ripley's interactions with the world around her and the Alien species. Building on Elisabeth Hills's analysis of the series, I examined how Ripley's strengths and capacities are increased by her interactions with other 'objects' such as machinery, other characters and the Alien species. In Deleuzoguattarian terms, this is how she forms multiple assemblages. This led to a demonstration of how the series had become more Deleuzoguattarian with *Alien Resurrection*. *Alien Resurrection* is, I argue, the film that resonates most clearly with Deleuzoguattarian ideas of the *Alien* series. That this depiction of Ripley 'becoming-alien' and the Alien 'becoming-human' occurred whilst we approached a proliferation of Deleuzian discourse is perhaps further indicative of this 'co-text'. However, I expanded Hills's analysis of Ripley to suggest that *Alien Resurrection* offers a consideration of the risk involved

in becoming. The conclusion of *Alien Resurrection* is, I suggest, somewhat precarious: we are left with the Clone Ripley suspended over Earth having disposed of her 'grandchild' in a particularly gruesome way. If this detachment is a result of her becoming-animal, it remains to be seen what further transgressions and becomings, positive or negative, she may undertake. As Lorraine comments, becomings "cannot be captured ... they happen behind one's back" (129), and in this sense we should be prepared for Ripley's becomings to lead her to potentially dangerous spaces.

In chapter two I examined the *Matrix* franchise in order to explore how the representation of woman, in this case the character of Trinity, has been affected by the franchise's larger project. I argue that the *Matrix* franchise is comprised of a number of provocative texts and has deliberately sought to garner intellectual discussion. I situated the franchise as an especially 'playful' set of texts that encourage philosophical discussion. Its success is demonstrated by the sheer wealth of literature devoted to examining the *Matrix* franchise, in particular the large number of popular philosophy anthologies devoted to the subject. It has achieved this response through a number of tactics. First through the continual references to external texts such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Simulacra and Simulation* and secondly through the intertextual nature of many of the separate elements of the franchise.

In relation to the character of Trinity and the franchise's representation of the feminine, I examined how her representation has been compromised by the films' larger philosophical project. I argued that Trinity's character is

largely conservative, and also that she functions as a sign of 'woman'. This is shown by her correlation to the femme fatale, and her role of 'handmaiden' outside of the Matrix. In my consideration of the criticism relating to Trinity, I noted how her material body has been relatively unexplored. I suggested this neglect has occurred for a similar reason to the critical neglect of Ripley in *Alien 3* and *Resurrection*, because her representation is "problematic" (Church Gibson 46). The material Trinity does not have as much 'critical currency' as her digital self. I also aligned this neglect to another set of screen women: the 'other women' in film noir who are juxtaposed to the femme fatale. Like the femme fatale, the digital Trinity is exciting, subversive and powerful and attracts attention. I proposed a reading of Trinity as a Body without Organs as a potential avenue of enquiry that would integrate the two sides of Trinity's 'double body'.

In chapter three I addressed the difference in representation of becoming-animal for the male- and female- embodied subject as depicted in the *Batman* series and *Catwoman*. Having identified the Batman as a mobile signifier, I argued that the character has evolved to a condition of becoming-bat. The becoming-bat of the Batman is most strongly seen in the Christopher Nolan films *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. Nolan's imagining of the Batman can add credence to Patricia Pister's contention that Deleuzian figures are gaining increased visibility in popular culture in the current Deleuzian 'moment'.

I undertook this analysis in order to juxtapose this Deleuzoguattarian analysis with the figure of the Catwoman to explore how becoming may be experienced differently for the male- and female-embodied subject. The figure of Catwoman in *Batman Returns* and *Catwoman* is able to demonstrate the positive aspects of becoming-animal as a useful way of eschewing certain social conventions. For example, the Kyle/Catwoman character in *Batman Returns* actively rejects a heteronormative life with Wayne/Batman in favour of a radically different life as Catwoman. We are shown her silhouette on Gotham's rooftops and do not know quite what life this entails – she has moved further to becoming-imperceptible in that she is now 'unreadable'. However, Nolan's Batman is able to deterritorialise – to undertake experimentation with new assemblages increase his capacities – at the same time as retaining enough stability in order to reterritorialise when necessary. Although this reterritorialisation ultimately is rejected by Catwoman in both films, it perhaps indicates what is it stake for 'woman'. Once the 'journey of diminishment' has begun it is harder for the Catwoman to return to society than it is for Wayne and his Batman.

My chapter addressing the *X-Men* trilogy demonstrated both the advantages and disadvantages of using Deleuzoguattarian theories of the body and becoming for addressing the action heroine. The *X-Men* films seem to lend themselves to this kind of analysis, because of the nature of the mutant condition. The mutant bodies are Bodies without Organs that are constantly undertaking lines of flight. As Lorraine describes, "a line of flight is a flow of movement that breaks with conventional social codes in the creation of new forms of life" (116). The mutants are positioned outside of normative

society and pitted against white, American molar men representative of the institutions of politics, the military and science.

However, as my analysis of the characters of Rogue and Jean Grey/Phoenix demonstrates, the *X-Men* films present a narrative scenario which also serves to remind us of the dangers of becoming, both for the female-embodied subject and more generally. In Rogue we see the problematic formulation of the girl as her subjectivity is continually overridden. This is a risk continually in the foreground (Sotirin, Grosz, Lorraine). Jean Grey is an especially complex character because of her becoming Phoenix. In *X-Men* and *X-Men 2* we are shown a commanding female character whose powers are not reducible to phallic referents. This is discussed in relation to her scene of self-sacrifice in which she uses her telekinetic powers to divert the course of the flow of water resulting from the ruptured dam. This demonstration of power takes place without the use of weaponry or machinery which can be read in terms of phallic substitutes, which a psychoanalytically inclined reading such as Carol Clover's may tend to do. Grey is therefore open to interpretation in a different way. An analysis which assesses her in terms of what her body has the potential to do, such as Deleuze and Guattari's BwO, seems an apt method for reading this character.

The *X-Men* series continues in *The Last Stand* to explore Jean Grey's becoming to a destructive and chaotic end and it is here that Deleuzoguattarian theory ceases to be able to provide a basis for a methodology to address the action heroine in a more positive manner. This

is because *The Last Stand* offers an extreme imagining of becoming-woman with everything that surrounds Grey/Phoenix being reduced to a flow of indiscernible molecular matter. This serves to remind us that once we begin to break down what for Deleuze and Guattari constitutes the 'molar', we do not know what exactly will result and where, if anywhere, this fragmentation will stop.

The final scene featuring Grey/Phoenix is, I argue, an especially worrying one from a feminist perspective and indicates how molar identity-based politics remain an important area of enquiry. It is here, again, that the Deleuzoguattarian method fails to provide a solution because it is disinclined to discuss representations of this nature. As Claire Colebrook has written in regard to Deleuze's philosophy of cinema:

We should not look for the meaning or message conveyed by cinematic images ... we should look at cinematic images as representations. It is common to complain that cinema offers 'unrepresentative' images of women for example ... but cinema, for Deleuze, is not about representing a world we already have, it creates new worlds. We should not criticise the way cinema constructs stereotypes, reinforces everyday opinions or lulls us into a false sense of reality. *Gilles Deleuze* 47.

This being the case, it is difficult to advocate a complete turn to Deleuzoguattarian theory for feminist film theory. In her discussion of

Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz writes that adopting the Deleuzoguattarian method "may be simply the substitution of one inadequate account for another, equally problematic, which resolves or overcomes some problems but creates others" (182). In doing away with molar categories and problematising notions such as being and identity in favour of a plane of immanence, flows and becomings, we are left on an insecure footing to analyse and challenge potentially ideologically unsound treatments of women on film such as Grey's final death scene in *The Last Stand*.

In conclusion, Deleuzoguattarian theory may provide a starting point to providing the methodology that Hills advocates but cannot be said to offer a definite answer to the perceived problems facing feminist film theory. Deleuze and Guattari may be used to highlight the shortcomings of psychoanalysis and binaristic models of thought in addressing the figure of the action heroine but because of the risks involved in possibly achieving a utopian becoming-imperceptible cannot be seen as a definitive solution. Any analyses of the action heroine undertaken with Deleuze and Guattari should be done with sufficient caution. These experiments should highlight the risks that are involved both for woman as a concept and real embodied women. It is therefore important for feminist film theory to retain links to its (political) foundations. The nature of representation in these cases suggests we cannot afford to dislocate ourselves from discourse which seeks to address why women on screen are treated in this manner. Such discourse cannot be discarded in favour of a philosophy that would relegate the struggle of the women and the women's movement to a utopian philosophy of becoming.

**Figures**


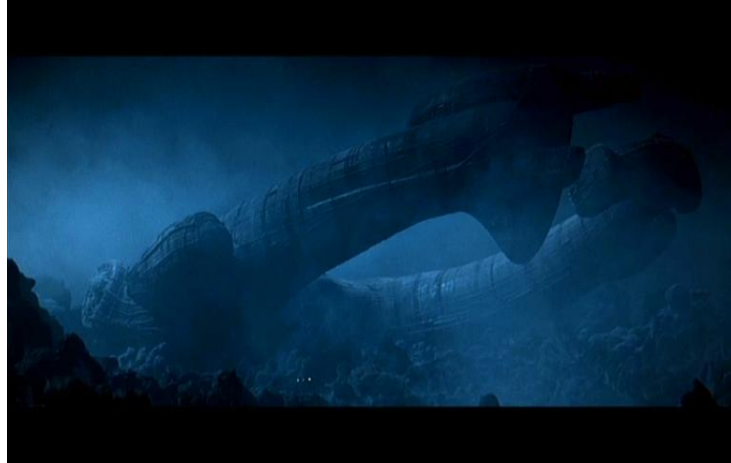
**Figure 1:** The wrecked ship in *Alien*



**Figure 2:** The 'chest-burster' of *Alien*

**Figure 3:** Ridley Scott's low-angle crotch-shot in the final scene of *Alien*



**Figure 4:** The 'stereotypically butch' character Vasquez of *Aliens*

**Figure 5:** Ripley 'becoming-machine' in *Aliens*



**Figure 6:** The canine Alien of *Alien 3*

**Figure 7:** Ripley in fatigues with shaved head in *Alien 3*
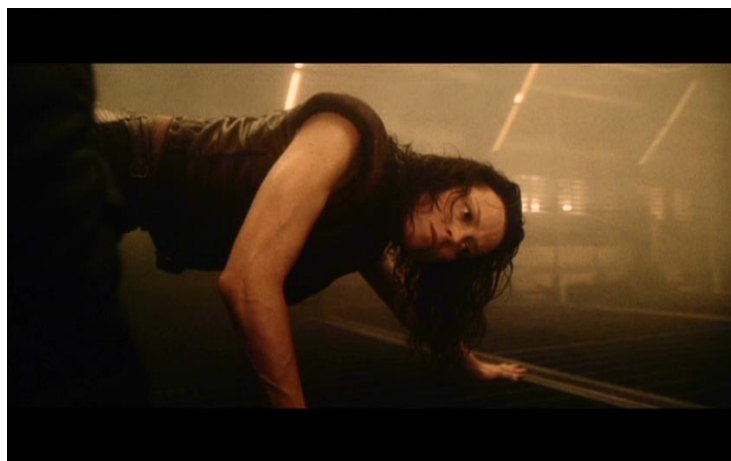


**Figure 8:** The Clone Ripley in *Alien Resurrection*

**Figure 9:** Call, the boyish android, in *Alien Resurrection*
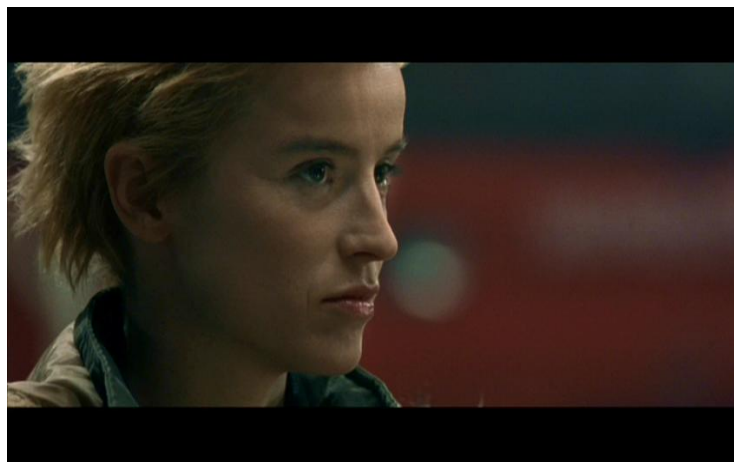


**Figure 10:** Rousseau in *Alien vs. Predator*

**Figure 11:** Room 101 in *The Matrix*



**Figure 12:** Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* in *The Matrix*

**Figure 13:** The body in the Matrix



**Figure 14:** The spoon in *The Matrix*

**Figure 15:** René Magritte's 'Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe'



**Figure 16:** Trinity in *The Matrix: Reloaded*

**Figure 17:** Noir tropes in 'A Detective Story'



**Figure 18:** Trinity's death in *The Matrix: Revolutions*

**Figure 19:** The 'slimy rebirth' of *The Matrix*



**Figure 20:** Robin in *Batman Forever*

**Figure 21:** Robin in *Batman Forever*



**Figure 22:** Alfred Pennyworth attending Bruce Wayne in *Batman Forever*

**Figure 23:** The bat-suit adorned with nipples in *Batman and Robin*



**Figure 24:** Marlene Dietrich dressed as a gorilla in *Blonde Venus*

**Figure 25:** Uma Thurman dressed as a gorilla in *Batman and Robin*



**Figure 26:** Wayne Manor with semi-nude male statues

**Figure 27:** Bruce Wayne exhibiting bat-like behaviour in *Batman*



**Figure 28:** The 'becoming-bat' of Bruce Wayne
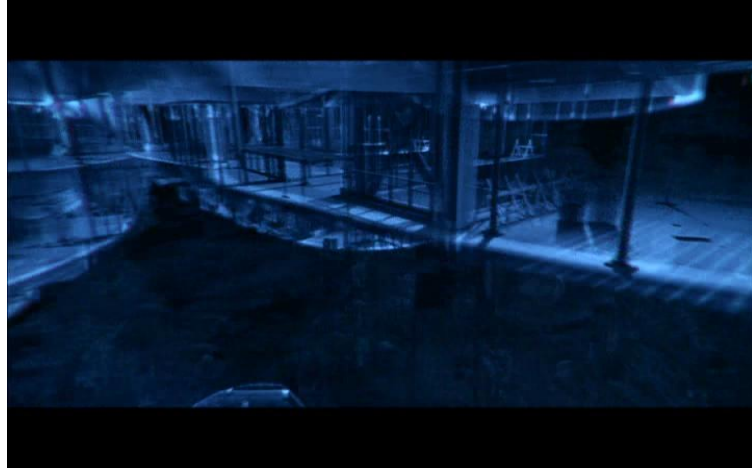
**Figure 29:** The sonar machine of *The Dark Knight*



**Figure 30:** Lucius Fox and the sonar machine in *The Dark Knight*
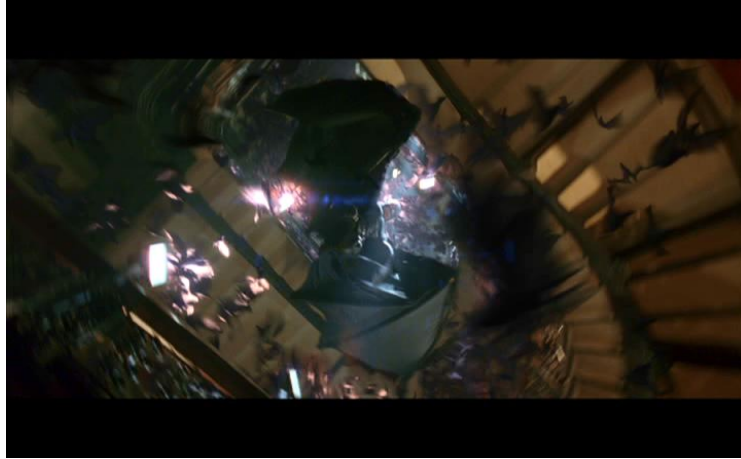
**Figure 31:** Batman descending the stairwell in *Batman Begins*



**Figure 32:** Batman's entrance on a wire in *Batman Returns*

**Figure 33:** Selena Kyle prior to becoming Catwoman in
*Batman Returns*



**Figure 34:** Catwoman in *Batman Returns*

**Figure 35:** Point of view shot from Patience Phillips in *Catwoman*



**Figure 36:** Patience Phillips in *Catwoman*

**Figure 37:** Close-up of Jean Grey in *X-Men 2* as she senses that the dam is rupturing.



**Figure 38:** Close-up of rupturing dam in *X-Men 2*

**Figure 39:** Jean Grey's sacrifice



**Figure 40:** Jean Grey's resurrection as the Phoenix in *The Last Stand*

**Figure 41:** Jean Grey as the Phoenix in the finale of *The Last Stand*



**Figure 42:** Jean Grey's death in *The Last Stand*

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