

“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”:
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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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Table of Contents

List of Figures	6
Introduction	8
Literature Review	28
Chapter One	53
The Talented Lieutenant Ripley: The Changing Sign of Ripley and the Alien in the <i>Alien</i> Series	
Chapter Two	117
Matriculating the <i>Matrix</i> Franchise: Popular Philosophy and Polysemy	
Chapter Three	178
Becoming-Bat and Becoming-Cat: Differences in the Representation of Becoming-Animal in the Male- and Female-Embodied Subject in the <i>Batman</i> Series	
Chapter Four	238
The Consequences of Becoming and the <i>X-Men</i> Trilogy	
Conclusions	263
Figures	272
Bibliography	293
Filmography	315