Subjectivity in the New Hollywood Cinema: Fathers, Sons and Other Ghosts

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Chapter 6

What Can She Know, Where Can She Go: Extraterritoriality and the Symbolic Universe
Exiled into a "Constitutive Outside"

Although the action-heroine is appearing more frequently in new Hollywood blockbusters, her presence on the screen is still overshadowed by her male counterpart. In the 1980s and 1990s the action-adventure trend was especially pronounced and it encompasses a range of genres – science fiction, thriller, war films or warrior films. The propensity of action is the main feature of these filmic narratives, but the male hero is the one who can execute all the spectacular tasks. So far I have argued that a prominent characteristic of the action-adventure films of the new Hollywood is their preoccupation with the crisis of masculinity, a renegotiation of paternity, and ultimately the reinstitution of patriarchy. The films bring about the sense of a troubled (family) history, of a symbolic order which no longer functions, implying that both the father and history need to be rescued. In narratological terms this is achieved through the intervention of the fabula into the story.¹

In the previous chapter I discussed the effect that the repairing of male subjectivity has on the female characters. The woman as the negative emblem of différance is posited in-between the intersubjective exchange, or in-between territories and, therefore, she can also be perceived as deterritorialized or extraterritorialized. She is the constitutive outside.¹¹ In Judith Butler’s terms the constitutive outside is the unspeakable, the nonnarrativizable. “It means that identity always requires precisely that which it cannot abide” (Butler, 1993: 188). The emergence of the constitutive outside is predicated on entrance into the symbolic order, but the loss effectuated in the process is structurally emblematized by the feminine. The impossibility of taking part in an intersubjective exchange is the effect of the symbolic order as it is dependent on the fabulas which perpetuate the representation of women as the negative emblem of différance or, to put it in Slavoj Zizek’s terms, as subjects par excellence.¹³ I am intentionally bringing into relation the two versions of what is, theoretically speaking, not at all the same “thing,” because I want to take issue with the notion of woman as subject par excellence. I want not only to contest an interpretation of woman as the “constitutive outside” of the Law of the Father or as the phantom of ideology which turns women into monsters, but also want to point to the discursive basis of such constructions as well as to their decomposition.
My aim here then is to explore the discursive potential of this “constitutive outside.” I am implying also that Lorraine Code’s question “what can she know?” will be related to alternative discursive and narrative spaces where women can act as knowing subjects (Code, 1991). To explore the new Hollywood cinema’s potential to thematize the “outside,” we need to go far away into the future, into the darkest corners of the universe. For it is there that the father-apparatus, or the central computer called “the Father,” will finally crash. On the basis of the films from the Alien series, Alien, Aliens, Alien III, and Alien Resurrection, I will suggest that woman as subject par excellence, and as constitutive outside of a specific ideology, can in itself, to put it in Butler’s terms, become open for contestation. I will argue that this is dependent on an alternative symbolic network based on alternative fabulas and world-views. In Alien, sergeant Ellen Ripley comes to figure as the alien creature, whereas in Alien Resurrection, she is elaborated as capable of reflecting on her status as a construct – as both a woman and an alien monster. This film is particularly important when it comes to redefining female existence, because here the fabula hinges on the cooperation between two female characters who join forces in order to resolve the crisis.

As my analyses will show, the specificity of the fabulas of the Alien series lies in their concern with that in-between space where the Law of the Father does not apply. By the same token, the reversal of the Oedipal trajectory involving the intersubjective exchange between the father and the son is not at work in these films. Once we take into account the vision represented on the level of the fabula, we can note that the resolution of the narrative in the Alien series does not include setting the patriarchal universe into place. As I have already mentioned, the reason for this is the fact that the diegetic world in these films is set outside the Law of the Father, outside of its symbolic reality. Ripley, as an action heroine is thus predicated on a type of universe where the Law of the Father is not only challenged and repaired, but is ultimately replaced by a new category.

Zizek’s theory of the sublime object of ideology as it is related to his theorizing of the Lacanian real is relevant for this study (Zizek, 1992). But I will consider this concept in light of Judith Butler’s rewriting of Zizek’s theory (Butler, 1993). While Zizek
is opposed to poststructuralist accounts of discursivity and proposes a rethinking of the Lacanian symbolic in terms of ideology, Butler argues that both discourse and the category of the real need a critical rethinking of the "feminine," and that along these lines the connection between Zizek's theory and poststructuralism is possible.

Of particular interest to my project is the possibility Zizek proposes for rethinking the Lacanian symbolic. Zizek interprets political signifiers in terms of the notion of phantasmatic investment and phantasmatic promise. The phantasmatic promise of identity is the crucial point within political discourse as well as the inevitability of disappointment. The political signifier is an empty term and as such it offers the possibility for various phantasmatic investments to occur. For Zizek, signification itself is bound up with the process of promise and return; for a signifier to remain a signifier it must break a promise to return. As Butler explains, within psychoanalytic terms, “the impossibility of an identity category to fulfill that promise is a consequence of a set of exclusions which found the very subjects whose identities such categories are supposed to phenomenalize and represent” (191). Her view concurs with Zizek's claim that there is an "outside" to the socially intelligible and that this "outside" will always be that which negatively defines the social. Butler is radically opposed, however, to Zizek's view that this outside can be delimited through a pre-ideological or prediscursive "law," because insistence on the pre-ideological status of the symbolic law has anti-feminist consequences. Butler objects to the idea that woman emerges as the "outside" itself, as the "stain" of the symbolic order. Under such conditions, she appears as that which cannot be symbolized and, therefore, she is not available as a political signifier.

What interests Butler is the move Zizek makes from the signifier as an always incompleted promise to return to the real, to the political signifier, hence to that point where phantasmatic investments can occur. In that sense, a political signifier acquires its power to define the political field through a two-way process, that is, through creating and sustaining its constituency. The signifier is thus capable of structuring and constituting the political field, of introducing new concerns and new subject positions. In that respect, the collapse of Ripley with the alien monster in *Alien* can be seen as both a political signifier and as the discursive occasion for hope.
In the *Alien* films, the space of the monstrous content, the space in which Zizek's phantom of ideology resides, the space reserved for femininity, is also a narrative space. This is where the process of (re)structuring the feminine will occur in the subsequent films. I would suggest then that it is precisely narrative itself that can play a central role in structuring the field of signification. It is along these lines that we will come to grasp Butler's contention that a (political) signifier can be made into a site that can provide for a future in which constituencies will form that have not yet had a site for such an articulation.

"Woman," according to Butler, can be taken as category, as a signifier, as a site of new articulations. Even though this term alludes to a false unity, an all-inclusiveness, the initial suspension of difference is the condition for the production of future signifiers:

It is necessary to learn a double movement: to invoke the category and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest. That the term is questionable does not mean that we ought not to use it, but neither does the necessity to use it mean that we ought not perpetually interrogate the exclusions by which it proceeds, and to do this precisely in order to learn how to live the contingency of the political signifier in a culture of democratic contestation. (Butler, 1993: 222)

Hence, Butler, just like Zizek, is advocating the necessity of acknowledging the universal term, ideology, as a site which is open to contest, but she is also insisting on the possibility of subverting the universal term through repetition. According to Butler, what one takes as a political signifier is itself a settling of prior signifiers. A political signifier implicitly cites the prior instances of itself, drawing on the phantasmatic promise of those prior signifiers. Repetition can have a subversive function because it presupposes a return. But I would add that, because signification occurs in time, repetition of the sign always implies spatial and temporal deferral, hence *différance*. As my analyses of the films will show, the structuring of female subjectivity is bound up with the narrative trajectory where Ripley's shortcomings as "Woman," will be "corrected" through an
intersubjective exchange with another female character. The (re)structuring of both Ripley’s and Call’s subjectivity will ultimately produce a new foreclosure, new constitutive outsiders, and future signifiers.

In the filmic texts that display a discursive interdependency between fathers and sons, or between male characters in general, what is contested, subverted and thereby reconstructed is the signifier of paternity. For Butler, the problem with Zizek’s view is that for him the site of contestation is pre-ideological and prediscursive whereby, paradoxically, woman emerges as the very condition of this prediscursive order. A way then, to change the status of the woman as the rock upon which the symbolic stumbles, is to work with the notion that what counts as the real, in the sense of unsymbolizable, is always relative to a linguistic domain that authorizes and produces this foreclosure.

In the case of the new Hollywood cinema, due to the overt preoccupation with the (re)structuring of the signifier of paternity, the woman emerges as the “unsymbolizable.” This foreclosure is authorized or “fathered” through fabulations based on ideological and cultural determinations. This is facilitated through the persistent investment in de/composing the father through the structure of différance, a privileged tool by means of which the new Hollywood cinema displays a preoccupation with re-affirming the father as both apparatus and ideology. It is my contention that narration is a crucial strategy for redefining the terms of the foreclosure. For it is through the process of telling that repetition (of the same as different) can occur whereby a new category can be introduced. This is an occurrence of the “new” then, that is itself only established “through recourse to those embedded conventions, past conventions, that have conventionally been invested with the political power to signify the future” (Butler 1993: 220). Narration, as I have demonstrated in chapter one through four, is a precondition for giving the apparatus a new face as a father. In a similar manner narration can yield the possibility of attaching an all-together different category to the apparatus. “Woman” is only one possibility in the range of cultural, intellectual, personal, and political concerns which the dominant ideology turns into the constitutive outside.

Just like the type of woman described as the negative emblem of Alice, Ripley can be seen as confined to an in-between
space. The crucial difference, however, is that in the case of Ripley, this negative mark announced in Alien, the first film of the series, will be taken as a point of departure for renegotiating female subjectivity in the films that follow, particularly Aliens and Alien Resurrection. Intervention implies here more than revising the film’s fabula; it requires envisioning fictional worlds which deal with uncertainty and therefore, as Code puts it, “one must learn to see all over again” (Code, 1991: 169).

**Stage 1: Ripley as the “Real at Its Purest”**

In the film Alien Ripley can herself be understood as the alien creature. In Aliens she combines the two paths that Freud and the new Hollywood cinema offer to women: motherhood and masculinity. One of the most prominent examples of this type of action-heroine is the combative mother from Terminator 2. In that film, the action-heroine is engaged in rescuing the future history of the father universe; she is the mother of the boy who orchestrates the entire operation from the future. To execute her historical role, this mother needs to possess supra strength and high combat skills. Although similar markers of gender construction can be traced on Ripley’s body, in Aliens these features have further implications. Because the fabula of Aliens precludes the paternal universe and deals instead with an “alien zone,” the de/composition implied in a “masculine mother” becomes a precondition for the structuring of (female) subjectivity.\(^{vii}\)

Alien III depicts Ripley in a cul-de-sac. She realizes that her long-term mission to fight off the monstrous creatures has become futile, for she herself has literally come to embody the alien organism. Her only option is self-destruction. Alien Resurrection is also Ripley’s resurrection. She is brought back to life in order to give birth to the agent of death. When the monster is removed from her body she is not the Ripley she was. She is both different and the same. The
evidence of Ripley’s decomposed subjectivity are her physical and emotional scars. Herein lies her strength as a subject of an alternative order. For what Ripley as an embodiment of both a woman and a monster is simultaneously affirming and contesting is the category called “woman as a subject par excellence.”

In Alien, the Alien was the eighth passenger. In Alien Resurrection Ripley is number eight, the first good clone after seven failed attempts. The special relationship between Ripley and the aliens which leads to her death and to her ultimate re-birth is elaborated very carefully and systematically throughout the series of films. In this section I will re-visit the space explored in the previous chapter where the female subject remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier, in order to underscore the discursive basis of its production. The starting point is the film Alien, where the monster is introduced as a “pure organism” which cannot be killed.

In his analysis of this film, Zizek describes the Alien as a “sprout of enjoyment” which threatens the crew of the spaceship and at the same time constitutes them as a closed group. He writes:

"It is the Real at its purest: a semblance, something which on a strictly symbolic level does not exist at all but at the same time the only thing in the whole film which actually exists, the thing against which the whole reality is utterly defenseless. One has to remember the spine-chilling scene when the liquid pouring from the polyp-like parasite after the doctor makes an incision with a scalpel dissolves the metal floor of the space ship [...]. (Zizek, 1989: 79)"

An equally horrific effect emerges from one particular feature of Alien’s head: there are teeth behind the teeth behind the teeth. But apart from its acid blood, the mise-en-abyme of teeth, and its raw, skinless flesh
in some stages of its development, the Alien has the tendency to latch onto people's faces. This is the way it first enters the spaceship in Alien, enveloping the face of officer Kane.

When the members of the crew ask the science officer Ash about the possibilities of destroying the Alien, he replies: "...it is pure organism - it can't be killed." It is interesting to compare this pure, indestructible organism with Lacan's description of the lamella:

Lamella is something extra-flat which moves like the amoeba. It is just a little more complicated. But it goes everywhere. And as it is something that is related to what the sexed being loses in sexuality, it is like the amoeba in relation to sexed beings, immortal - because it survives any division, any scissipitous intervention. And it can run around. [...] But suppose it comes and envelops your face while you are quietly asleep... [...] This lamella, this organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ [...] is the libido. (Lacan, 1994: 197-8)

When we take into account different versions of the alien organism and the ways these are elaborated in the film, it seems as if the fabula of Alien was based on Lacan's scenario. Because the actor who governs this fabula does not exist on a strictly symbolic level, as Zizek puts it, we need to (re)define the terms of its existence.

I have hitherto introduced the basic aspects of the two psychic fields, the imaginary and the symbolic as they are related not only to the effects of the apparatus but also in relation to the process of narration. To recapitulate briefly, whereas the imaginary can be understood as the threshold between the ego and the images of which the visual world consists, including the self-image, the symbolic produces the subject
through language, and it realizes its order by the Law of the Father. There is another field Lacan includes in his methodological distinction, the field which designates the space of the monstrous content - the real.

The real forms the residue of all articulation which escapes the mirror of the imaginary as well as the grids of the symbolic. It is neither symbolic nor imaginary and it can be understood as a foreclosed element. It stands for that which is lacking in the symbolic order (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988). The intersubjective exchange between male characters, for example, is based on such a foreclosure. The women who come to embody the Lacanian objet petit a, can also be understood as a residue, as the foreclosed element. The wiggling pieces of female bodies in the closing of the film *Death Becomes Her* have that lamella-like quality that characterizes that which escapes the symbolic reality. Just like the alien organism, these women are an example of "the real at its purest."

This collapse between the real and woman can also be seen in *Alien*. Towards the end of the film, when Ripley remains alone on board with the Alien, overt clues are emitted which enable us to establish a relation between the two. (scene 1, *Alien*) The relation is based on similarity. This is achieved through the framing, lighting, angle, shot duration and camera movement whereby the image of Ripley becomes graphically redefined. This intensely de-familiarizing effect can be traced in scene 1: in shot 1 Ripley’s face appears in extreme close-up, from an angle which dissociates the face from the rest of the body and produces displacement within the mise-en-scène. In shot 2, a detail of the Alien replaces the shot of Ripley, and in shots 3 through 8, as a result of the working of the cinematic signifiers, the action that follows cannot be clearly traced.

This blurred and highly subjective vision enhances the suspense, for it builds up the impression that the Alien could emerge from anywhere and at any
moment. At the end of shot 8, however, instead of the Alien we are offered another extreme close-up of Ripley filmed again from an angle which augments the defamiliarizing effect. In the shots that follow (9–16), three close-ups of Ripley (shots 10, 12 and 14) are inserted into the series of undefined images. In the last shot of this series, shot 16, a detail of the Alien re-appears. In all the shots of Ripley, her eyes are wide open. She is constantly on the look-out for the Alien, but because of her position within the *mise-en-scène* (she is also hiding from the monster), her vision is very limited. She produces a vision of the Alien on two occasions, shots 2 and 16: in both instances we are offered a detail of the alien creature. It is dismembered, disembodied and dislocated, just like Ripley herself.

This strategy is reconfirmed in scene 1a: shot 3, for example, evolves in five stages. Paradoxically enough, with each detail of Ripley’s body that is foregrounded in the shot, commencing with the fingers and ending with a detail of her face, a new distance from Ripley is effectuated. Ripley’s face ultimately appears as a piece of flesh, hence, she too, can be perceived as a sort of a pure organism, the only Thing that has a chance against the Alien.\textsuperscript{ix} The similarity implied between Ripley and this lamella-like organism suggests again the overlap of psychoanalytic and narrative discourse. Furthermore, Zizek’s assertion that the Alien can be perceived as the “real at its purest” suggests that the woman has come to occupy this realm of the Lacanian real. Hence, the space “in the middle,” the space of the monstrous content is again marked via the appropriation of the image of femininity. The problem that arises then - and this is related to Butler’s project discussed in the previous section - is how to invest the foreclosed element with the power to signify the future.

Zizek has extensively theorized the social-ideological topography of the phantom of ideology in terms of the monstrous content to which it yields. He
asserts that the crucial question is not what does the phantom signify, but how the very space is constituted where entities like the phantom can emerge. He argues that the fundamental gesture of a dialectical analysis must be “a step back from content to form, that suspension of content which renders form visible anew” (1992: 63-4). Zizek contends that the analysis that focuses on the ideological meaning of monsters overlooks the fact that, “before signifying something, before serving as a vessel of meaning, monsters embody enjoyment qua the limit of interpretation, that is to say, nonmeaning as such” (64).x

This is quite significant in terms of his overall philosophico-theoretical project which focuses on the ways the sublime can be rendered.xi Zizek asserts that a way the sublime is rendered is as an object, a piece of reality, into which the real of desire is inscribed by means of an anamorphic grimace. “The boundary that separates beauty from disgust is for that reason far more unstable than it may seem, since it is always contingent on a specific cultural space. [...] By means of anamorphic stains, the ‘reality’ indexes the presence of the subject” (Zizek, 1992: 64). Although it is necessary to keep in mind that in order to give meaning to that space in-between an act of exclusion has to be committed, it is nevertheless necessary to reexamine the symbolic network which traditionally constrains women into the position of its residue. Hence, the suspension of the “content” is not the problem, nor the fact that monsters embody “nonmeaning as such.” The issue is, rather, what do we do once this “nonmeaning” becomes attached to femininity.

Zizek rejects poststructuralism on - account of the subjectivation effect that, which according to him, remains oblivious to the “lack” produced in the process:

If we make an abstraction, if we subtract all the richness of the different modes of subjectivation,
all the fullness of experience present in the way the individuals are living their subject-positions, what remains is an empty place which was filled out with this richness; this original void, this lack of symbolic structure, is the subject, the subject of the signifier. The subject is to be strictly opposed to the effect of subjectivation: what the subjectivation masks is not a pre- or trans-subjective process of writing but a lack in the structure, a lack which is the subject. (Zizek 1989: 175)

If we can conceive of a symbolic structure, we can also conceive of different possibilities for its construction, and the process of subjectivation need not presume oblivion to the “lack which is the subject.” In chapters one through four I have demonstrated that the prominent features of the new Hollywood blockbuster films, such as the decomposition and doubling of the character-image, the deferral of subject positions or the suspension of the unification of subjectivity, is conditioned on the third mobility of the narrative. The third mobility is dependent on the fabula which promotes the relations between fathers and sons. Likewise, I have foregrounded the importance of the Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, logos, to the paternal position, which ultimately yields to the emerging play with the split of the paternal position. In chapter five, I focused on the examples in which the discursive dependency between fathers and sons is extended to the cases of discursive exchange between male characters in general. As a result of the intersubjective exchange between male characters, the production of female subjectivity is blocked. Female characters emerged as locked in the middle of the intersubjective exchange, as the “lack” produced through the process of subjectivation.

This “lack which is the subject,” Zizek elsewhere gives another definition - he calls it the subject par excellence, or woman. The view that woman is the subject par excellence needs to be understood, of course, in relation to Zizek’s contention that the subject en general is a lack. But as the analyses of (not only) filmic narratives repeatedly demonstrate, the space where women monsters are created, that space of objet petit a, is an effect of discourses predicated on a certain ideology. Hence, women as the negative emblem of différence remain outside the discursive exchange, or the process of subjectivation, which echoes their status as subjects par
excellence or as the real at its purest. In both instances they emerge as the constitutive outside, as the residue of the discourse and the symbolic. What interests me here, then, is not denouncing the ideology behind the monsters, but exploring the role of narrative in (re)structuring the space of the monstrous content; of turning this site into an alternative symbolic network.

**Stage 2: Ripley, a Character That Matters**

Ripley's alien status implied in the closing of *Alien* is reconfirmed in *Aliens*. While in the first film this is achieved through the physical similarity between Ripley and the Alien, the second film employs additional strategies. When Ripley's life-pod is finally found, she is still in cryo-sleep. We first see her face under the transparent capsule. She appears as a combination of Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, two fairy tale characters who needed to be rescued from sleep and death, respectively, by a handsome prince. Unlike Sleeping Beauty, however, who was asleep for a hundred years, woke up and lived happily ever, Ripley wakes up to a nightmare. After fifty-seven years of floating through the universe she wakes up in a world where she is literally out of space and out of time. Her sole contemporary is the cat Jonesy, the only co-survivor of the encounter with the Alien.

Unfortunately the cat cannot corroborate her story about the monstrous creatures who killed all the other members of the Nostromo crew. Since there is no one who believes her, Ripley becomes frustrated and asocial, hence, alienated from all the other characters in the film. Most importantly, there is no one who can help her to work through her traumatic experience. As a result of this, the horrific images of the Alien bursting out of her rib cage continue to haunt her. When she is invited to go on a mission which possibly involves confronting the Alien, Ripley refuses to go. Nevertheless, because the nightmares keep recurring, Ripley decides to go “back to the future” and revisit
the space of monstrous content.\textsuperscript{xiii}

She goes on this mission as an advisor but again, no one actually believes that these monsters are as deadly and uncontainable as she claims. In the company of mercenaries recruited from the marine corps, Ripley still feels out of place - "a fifth wheel," as she herself comments on one occasion. To prove that she is not just a surplus, Ripley offers to drive a loader. The execution of this task, where she displays extra-human strength, has a very specific narrative function. It announces Ripley's capacity to embody the Other, that is, to function as a de/composed subject. More concretely, a loader is conceived as a huge and powerful semi-robotic mechanism which becomes operative when it is "embodied" by the driver. Interestingly, although Ripley proves to be just as useful as other members of the mission, the episode with the loader reconfirms her status as the one who actually stands out.

On the one hand, the story works in such a way as to make Ripley fit into the group. On the other hand, when she appears to fit in, this is achieved through her ability to perform what no one else can. The extra (human) value invested in Ripley will undergo a series of displacements. Just like she is capable of "wearing" the loader, Ripley will demonstrate the same efficiency in operating a weapon and handling a child. In fact, at one point she is depicted as capable of performing both actions at the same time. The child is a little girl called Newt, the only person from the space colony who survived the alien invasion. The child reminds us of a "wild child," for she does not speak and clutches the head of a doll that has no body.

At a time of crisis, apart from Newt, Ripley forges a special bond with corporal Hicks, the officer who takes charge after the failure of the first operation. Hicks trusts Ripley's judgment and willingly shares his power with her. Elaborated as a "masculine mother," Ripley can be understood as a productive juxtaposition to the male characters elaborated as either male mothers or motherly men, as in the film \textit{Junior}, for example. The two active solutions to the crisis of femininity, masculinity and motherhood are directly related to the structuring of the narrative. Because the officers in charge are not up to the task, Ripley needs to step in and take charge. Similarly, she seems to be the only one who qualifies as a substitute mother to the orphaned child. Paradoxically again, the capacity to execute both tasks simultaneously will confirm her position as different, as
extra (human), as alien.

No matter how strong and capable she is, even Ripley cannot wipe out the evil creatures. While watching out for the alien organisms, she overlooks the actual monster in the group - Burke, the Company man. Burke's evil plan to smuggle the alien organism to Earth by impregnating Ripley and Newt is frustrated. This episode warns us, however, that monsters can never be erased or contained. Even though the remaining members of the group have literally turned an area of the space settlement into a container, the aliens have found a leak in its tightly sealed walls. All the characters except Hicks and the android science officer Bishop are killed, and Newt is lost on the way. Hicks is heavily wounded. After Ripley drags him to the platform where Bishop is waiting with the space vehicle, she decides to return to the alien nest and find Newt.

Equipped with the weapon Hicks taught her to use and with extra ammunition, Ripley is prepared to take action against the Alien Queen and to retrieve her child. She finds Newt trapped in a cocoon and rescues her. Then she notices that the entire space is filled with eggs and that the Alien Queen laying the eggs is standing right in front of her. This juxtaposition of the two implied mothers is quite disturbing. Before she leaves this scene Ripley sets the eggs and the Alien Queen on fire. But the crisis still is not over because once she reaches the platform she realizes that the Alien Queen is already there waiting to attack. Ripley lures the monster away from Newt. She emerges embodied in the semi-robotic mechanism which not only supplies her with extra-human strength, but as I mentioned earlier, makes her look and act extra-human. She appears non-human, a monster much like the Alien Queen. She challenges the monster with the exclamation - “Get away from her, you bitch!” - which in a perverted way “humanizes” the Alien Queen and reconfirms the implied similarity between the two female monsters (scene 1-Aliens).
In *Alien*, the similarity implied between Ripley and the Alien was achieved through the employment of cinematic signifiers which made Ripley look dismembered, disembodied and dislocated. In this film, cinematic signifiers are again at work to establish a visual similarity between Ripley and the Alien Queen. But here, the similarity is underscored through their respective functions in the film. They are both elaborated as mothers. The reason why Ripley engages in this duel is precisely to protect her child from being snatched and killed. The shot of the child’s frightened eyes (shot 3) inserted after the close-up of the angry beast (shot 2) confirms the urgency of Ripley’s action.

There is another important difference we have to note with respect to the previous film: the similarity implied between the two female monsters is achieved through “masquerade.”¹⁴ Ripley can be the same (as the alien monster) precisely through her capacity to transform, to be different. Embodied in the loader she is also putting on a performance. This is what ultimately yields a positive outcome to her duel with the beast.

As a result of the masquerade, Ripley’s entire appearance in this scene has a defamiliarizing effect: from the moment she raises her mechanical arms in shot 1, to the details of her heavy mechanical feet moving closer to the enemy (shot 6), it is clear that Ripley is harnessing her supra-strength from the mechanical body-suit. But the defamiliarizing of Ripley gives way to a series of correspondences with the beast. Her threatening appearance is especially pronounced in wider shots (shots 1, 8, 11). The monster reacting to her by moving its head in shot 7 echoes Ripley’s mechanical movement in shot 8 as she is getting ready to strike. The similarity of appearance as well as the even distribution of strength is mirrored in the intensity of rage. This can be seen in the close up of Ripley screaming at the beast (shot 20) that rhymes with the shot of the Alien Queen (shot 21). Remarkably,
when the duel is over and the monster is sucked out of the space station, the person left on the platform who prevents Newt from being pulled into the abyss is the android Bishop. As he is lying there, with his body cut in half he greets Ripley with the comment, “Not bad for a human.”

We can conclude that Ripley is most successful in dealing with the monster because she shares its attributes. In other words, Ripley also qualifies as a female monster. Within this new construct, Ripley is ultimately transformed into a monstrous m/other. The composition of woman and monster presupposes a decomposition of both the former and the latter term. The crucial point here is that the terms for (re)structuring the space of the monstrous content are defined through Ripley. The difference between the first and the second film of the series is that in the former Ripley is collapsed with the constitutive outsider - the eighth passenger.

In the latter film, the narrative trajectory is dependent on the structuring of Ripley’s subjectivity. In the first stage, she is elaborated as an alien or displaced person. In the next stage, she acquires the status of both a mother and a fighter. Once these two features are combined, she is ready to face her actual double in this narrative - the “alien m/other.” To conceive of this type of female character who can (at least provisionally) set the diegetic world into balance conflicts with our everyday reality and defies common sense of the patriarchal universe. Its fabula belongs to the genre of science-fiction; hence, it is dependent on our capacity to imagine a future existence in a world far removed from our own.

In a similar manner, I would suggest, the monsterly “being” need not a priori be seen as loaded with negativity. Instead, to put it in Butler’s terms, it can be interpreted in terms of its potentially positive ontological dimension. What is at stake here is an opening up of the possibility of redefining the (alien) space of the feminine. Ontology, as Butler comments, is not to be understood as a foundation, “but as a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground” (Butler, 1990). This process is closely related to Butler’s question:

How might the excluded return, not as a psychosis or the figure of the psychotic within politics, but as that which has been rendered mute, foreclosed from the domain of political
signification; how might such socially saturated domains of exclusion be recast from their status as "constitutive" to beings who might be said to matter? (Butler, 1993: 188)

We can pose a similar question regarding the structuring of subjectivity in the new Hollywood cinema: how can a female character foreclosed from the symbolic universe of the Father be recast into a character that matters? We are given a clue in the Alien series. A universe needs to be conceived where the Law of the Alien is at work. Thus, through the process of telling, popular Hollywood cinema is engaged in transforming the space of the monstrous content into a discursive occasion for future signifiers.

Butler asserts that the production of the unsymbolizable or the unspeakable is also always a strategy of social abjection. Just like Zizek, she emphasizes that every signifier is the site of a perpetual méconnaissance. It produces the expectation of a unity, of a full and final recognition that can never be achieved, thus implying that the universal laws on which the regulatory mechanism of subject-production are contingent cannot be exempted from discursive rearticulation. Butler adds that "to freeze the real as the impossible 'outside'" to discourse is to institute a permanently unsatisfiable desire for an ever-elusive referent: the sublime object of ideology. The fixity and universality of this relation between language and the real produces "a prepolitical pathos that precludes the kind of analysis that would take the real/reality distinction as the instrument and effect of contingent relations to power" (207). Butler proposes that the open-ended and performative function of the signifier be rethought through the Derridian notion of citationality. She adds, "the future of the signifier of identity can only be secured through a repetition that fails to repeat loyally, a reciting of the signifier that must commit a disloyalty against identity - a catachresis - in order to secure its future..." (220).

Butler argues for a site of political contestation which can be understood as a space of analysis where "woman" as a prescriptive model for female subjectivity becomes open for re-negotiation. This presupposes that woman's status as a "stain" of the symbolic, as the real at its purest, as the negative emblem of différence, as a state of constitutive exile, and especially as a monster needs to be considered in terms of a temporary linguistic unity. For this study,
this means that, for the moment, we need to put aside the "father apparatus" as a category, with all its repetitions and subversions of which Vader is just one case, and look at the alternative possibility of positing and subverting an entirely new normative injunction.

In *Aliens*, the episodes where Ripley is "dressed" in a loader can be taken as a masquerade, as a subversion of her status as a surplus element in the group. In a similar manner she emerges as a soldier and a mother. She "wears" her masculinity just as she carries and delivers Newt back to life. Accordingly, Ripley is not only a body that matters, but, just as importantly, also a character that matters. If the notion of woman as monster is considered as a product of the existential void, her destiny will be sealed as such. Unless, that is, a realization comes about that both woman and monster can be taken as a masquerade, as a subversion of both the former and the latter. In the case of the *Alien* series, this presupposes conceiving a fabula where the Law of the Alien is at work.

As we have learned from psychoanalytic discourse, for the Law of the Father to work, the Father must first be dead. This is exactly what happens in the subsequent film, *Alien 3*. As a result, in *Alien Resurrection* Ripley will emerge as a living dead, two in place of one.

**Stage 3: Crashing the Father-Universe**

In *Alien Resurrection* the Company brings Ripley back to life in order to condition the birth of the monster, which conversely implies that the monstrous mother, alias Alien Queen conditions the re-birth of Ripley. What the scientists do not consider, however, is that the symbiosis has affected both Ripley and the monster. In *Aliens*, Ripley's supra-human strength and motherly instincts are drawn from her passion to destroy the aliens and protect the child she has adopted. This is emblematized in the duel with the Alien Queen where Ripley herself appears as a semi-robot, that is, as a semi-monster. In *Alien Resurrection*, Ripley's extra-human strength is the result of a genetic mix, hence, she is "denaturalized" biologically. Her strength to fight her worst nightmare and a long-term enemy - the aliens - is harnessed precisely through the alien qualities she herself has acquired. As the "alien woman," Ripley is not strictly a parody of "woman," in Butler's sense, nor is her monsterly appearance a case of masquerade as in *Aliens*. Remarkably, in the last film,
the denaturalization of Ripley as an alternative possibility of female existence is taken further for, as I will explain, the biological split provides the basis for the impairment of female subjectivity.

To illuminate the ways the process of telling affects the real/reality relationship it is useful for the moment to consider the relationship between science and fiction. The discursive basis of ideology that governs a particular symbolic universe can also be observed in terms of the discursive basis of science. This is especially pronounced in the tendency in scientific discourses to associate the feminine with the secrets of nature. Evelyn Fox Keller has closely examined the relationship between science, language and gender. She focuses on two motifs in the language of modern science, one concerning the secrets of life and the other the secrets of death (Keller, 1992). Keller relates these motifs to two specific historical episodes: the discovery of the structure of the DNA and the making of the atomic bomb. In her view, the two episodes bring out the drama between visibility and invisibility, as well as female procreativity and male productivity - “a drama in need of constant reenactment at ever-receding recesses of nature's secrets” (41). She writes:

The story of the rise of molecular biology can be read as a particularly vivid reenactment of this drama - a drama that in the initial phases of this reenactment was in fact quite explicitly cast in the language of light and life, its goal equally, explicitly, as the quest for the secret of life. The drama ended once the secret was claimed to have been found, in the effective banishment of the very language of secrets, mystery, and darkness from biological discourse. (Keller, 1992: 41)

Hence, the story of the secret of life was replaced by a molecule. It was displaced onto the story of the double helix.

But the problem that the unveiling of nature's secrets led to is that new secrets were invented, or rather, as Keller points out, the naming or renaming of secrets took place. The new secrets became the secrets of death, which veiled the production and the testing of the atomic bomb, and later of the hydrogen bomb. Keller also indicates the significance of the appropriation of the metaphor of birth which surrounded these scientific projects:
A certain interweaving of fantasies of birth and death that, at least on a psychological level, can be seen to connect rather than distinguish the project of uncovering the secret of life with that of producing instruments of death. (Keller, 1992: 45)

The cultural function of secrets, as Keller asserts, is always to articulate a demarcation of a separate inviolable domain, invisible to outsiders, a sphere belonging to God. This sphere of secrecy, inherent in the production of the instruments of destruction is culturally staged in the stories of mad scientists, such as Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein, who is pursuing the secrets of life. Rather than finding the secret of life, however, he abuses the secret of life to produce a monstrous organism who will become an agent of death.

The discussion is pertinent for the film in question; here, Ripley is introduced as a secret of science. In this narrative, however, the secret of life hidden in her DNA conflates with the secret of death. By bringing Ripley (back) to life the scientists will at the same time produce the agent of death. The scientists from *Alien Resurrection* are not working below ground in a basement. Nevertheless, the project is guaranteed secrecy for it is being executed far away from Earth. Once they have surgically removed the foetus of the Alien Queen from Ripley’s chest, the second, even more horrific phase can begin. This phase entails experiments in eugenics, related to the overall aim of developing a bio-weapons industry. For this experimental phase, the Company has hired bounty hunters to snatch bodies floating in hyper-sleep which they will use for breeding with the aliens. Even though they have no practical use for Ripley any more, the scientists keep her alive out of curiosity.

It turns out that the secret of death was not tightly sealed after all. A young woman, Annalee Call, who arrives on the space station with the group of bounty hunters knows that Ripley has been brought back to life. Call is actually a terrorist who has infiltrated into the group of mercenaries; her mission is to kill Ripley and frustrate the Company’s plans to create an army of aliens. She is too late in reaching Ripley, the Alien Queen is already in the hands of the scientists. Call is not sure, though, whether Ripley should be kept alive because she does not know where Ripley’s loyalties lie. So, the scientists keep Ripley imprisoned because they suspect that she will do anything to destroy the aliens, while Call fears that Ripley
may side with the aliens and endanger the human race. In the first phase of their encounter Call is repulsed by Ripley, and even tries to insult her with remarks such as, “you are a thing, a construct…” Unlike Ripley who has become extremely pessimistic about the prospects of the human race, Call is very passionate about her cause, and reminds us of Ripley’s determination in earlier films.

The interaction between Call and Ripley is marked by mutual distrust; there is a mutual sense of superiority inferred in Ripley’s behavior toward Call as “too good to be a human,” and conversely, in Call’s matrix Ripley’s monsterly features do not fit the definition of human. The relationship between the two women, however, will be redefined through their joining forces in order to stop the aliens from reaching Earth. Moreover, the crisis in the narrative is dependent on the crisis of female subjectivity. The interaction between Call and Ripley, as I have already noted, will yield an improvement of both women as subjects.

This is possible, as we soon find out, because Call is a construct just like Ripley. After she is shot, dies and disappears in a pool of water, she too miraculously resurrects from the dead in one of the subsequent scenes. We learn that Call is not made of flesh and blood, but instead is a synthetic humanoid. In fact, she is an example of a scientific construct that has turned against its maker. The two androids from the previous films, Ash and Bishop were both constructed by the Company. Call on the other hand is an auton, a robot designed by robots. Autons were conceived as highly ethical and emotional with complex paradigmatic reasoning structures, but the government ordered a recall because these robots overrode their own behavioral inhibitors; that is, they did not like being told what to do. Call is one of the few that escaped the “massacre” and escaped intact.

According to Keller, it is in the space of invisibility and secrecy that social, psychological, and political expectations generally exert their influence. As a consequence, she contends, “what began as a socially constituted dream has been able to insinuate itself into material reality, inducing the objects of a nondiscursive regime to behave as reflections of our own purely discursive regime” (93). And conversely, I would suggest, if constitutive outsiders are to become beings that matter, this will necessarily be a product of a socially constituted dream. *Alien Resurrection* plays with the possi-
bility of introducing such a dream. As it happens, Call, the one who has dreamt it up is a product of science, an artificial person. But more importantly, although Call is the rejected product, in *Alien Resurrection* she is the personification of the highest narratorial authority. She is the one who is programmed to have a vision of an alternative world where the Law of the Father does not apply. Her mission as well as her dream in this film seems incredibly naïve and yet it is truly urgent - she wants to save Earth.

The robotic features Call tried to conceal prove to be the crucial means of resolving the crisis: as a robot she can access the mainframe of the computer. Since all the autons have burned their modems the only way Call can gain access to the central computer is to patch in manually. She is extremely reluctant to take recourse to her robotic mode but Ripley convinces her that it is the only way to stop the aliens from reaching Earth. Accessing the central computer called "the Father," is thus an important step Call has to take if her mission is to be accomplished.\textsuperscript{xvi}i Now, her task is to plug into "the Father" and crash it. In sample scenes 1, 1a, 1b and 1c, Call accompanied by Ripley is in the space station chapel engaged in the act of creating future history. Ripley has located an electronic device which displays a screen reading of the Holy Bible. She pulls out a cord from the Bible’s port and hands it to Call who plugs the cable into her arm.

The sequence of scenes where Ripley and Call are engaged in an intersubjective exchange stand in stark contrast to the rest of the film. While most of the problems are resolved through physical strength, ability to climb, move under water, or skillfully handle weapons, this sequence does not involve such strategies. Yet, it is here that the crucial step in saving the Earth will take place. One of the conclusions we can draw is that the resolution of the mission hinges on the intersubjective relationship between the two female characters. The (space station) chapel as the space where the central shift in the course of the future events will occur, is indicative of the type of task that awaits Call. The fact that she has to plug into the "Bible" to gain access to "Father" can be understood as a metaphor for plugging into the symbolic network traditionally governed by the Law of the Father. While this may seem self-evident, what needs to be underscored is that an alternative normative injunction is always dependent on replacing the signifier.
While she is surveying the data, Call's voice acquires a mechanical quality, yet when she interrupts the process of scanning to address Ripley, her voice changes back to normal. She retains this capacity to act in a dual mode while proceeding with her task; she locates the aliens and she also traces the presence of Wren, the last surviving military official. As he is rushing toward the mercenaries' space ship the door in front of him suddenly closes. He desperately calls Father but he receives a response given in Call's modulated voice, “Father's dead, you asshole!” Call's robotic voice replacing the voice of “the Father,” is an overt sign that the Law of the Father does not apply. In terms of this filmic narrative, it means that the space station and its deadly cargo will explode and will not reach Earth.

Call's dual mode of action can be traced in her alternate modes of focalization: in scene 1 for example when she is preparing to plug into the computer system, Call is focalized internally, whereas Ripley is focalized externally. In the exchange of shots between Call and Ripley, Call herself is present in the shots of Ripley (2, 6, 12), but once she is plugged into the system she focalizes internally. In shot 16 she is looking and in shot 17 she produces a subjective vision of Ripley. This is confirmed in sample scene 1a: in shots 2 and 4 Ripley is focalized internally, but when Call momentarily snaps out of the computer mode, her power as a focalizing agent is interrupted (shots 1, 2 and 3). The computer mode is reestablished in the last part of this segment when Call also temporarily resumes her capacity to focalize internally (shots 5 and 7). When she pulls the computer cord out of her body (scene 1c) Call returns to her previous mode. In the exchange of shots between her and Ripley, Call is consistently focalized internally (shots 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, 21, 23), while Ripley is focalized externally (shots 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 22, 24). This alludes to Ripley's higher authority as the subject of vision, but it also points to Call's depen-
dency on an external force.

When this most important part of Call's mission is accomplished the two women have a brief moment to reflect on the situation, particularly their own status as constructs. Ripley attends to Call's "wound," or rather, the synth-organic wiring hanging from the hole in her body. Call tells Ripley she is disgusted with herself and cannot stand being what she is. She wonders what gives Ripley the strength to go on living:

Call, "How can you stand what you are?"
Ripley, "I don't have a choice."
Call, "At least part of you is human. I'm just..."

Clearly, both women are materialized through science. Ripley, as she herself puts it, has been turned into the "monster's mother," Call springs from a generation of robots. Nevertheless, the discursive interaction between the two female characters is an example of how the space of the monstrous content can be restructured. The scene where these two female constructs reflect on their status as non-human, brings to mind Bal's discussion on Medusa, the mythological female monster.

In her theorizing of the possibility of decomposing the space of the monstrous content Bal engages in a deixic relationship with Caravaggio's Medusa's Head:

Medusa looks away in order to get you to look away with her, to escape the myth that binds her into an evasion from that frightening role. Medusa "speaks," visually in an exhortative mode, enticing "you" to look, with her, for the true source of fright, located in the ideology that turns women into monsters. She is an expository agent. (Bal, 1996: 60)

In scene 1c Call emerges as an expository agent. "Look at me," she says to Ripley, yet what she is also saying while looking away from her wound is, "look, I am not human." But Ripley does not just look at Call's wound; she patches it up. Thereby, the wound becomes that point around which the intersubjective exchange between the two women coheres. Due to the persistent exchange of points of vision, the wound, depicted in detail (shot 9) as Ripley's hand is
mending it, comes to signify the repairing of Call’s “wounded” subjectivity. The wound, the rupture that exposes Call’s otherness, can also be understood as a metaphor for setting the intersubjective exchange into balance.

The imbalance I have previously mentioned between Call’s and Ripley’s points of vision is reciprocated precisely through this synthetic wound which needs to be fixed. As a robot, Call’s focalization emerges as more mediated than Ripley’s. As a wounded robot, however, she has the capacity to provoke compassion, hence, human (re)action. What we are ultimately seeing is an example of how a (wounded) female character can be repaired through an intersubjective exchange with another female character. There is more to it, however, because we also come to realize that the intersubjective exchange is tied to mending the marker of difference. What is mended is that rupture which conditions the entrance into the symbolic order, the break between the self and the Other. As Alien Resurrection has it, this type of intersubjective exchange, where the female subject is repaired, precludes the father universe.

While in this scene Call is “fixed” with Ripley’s help, in the subsequent scene, this will be reversed. Call will help Ripley let go of her bond with the alien monster. The Newborn Alien, the offspring of the Alien Queen rejects his birth mother and follows Ripley to the mercenaries’ space ship. The beast has a lethal effect on everyone except her. In the closing scene when the group is ready to leave the space station, Ripley must again distract the monster to save the others. But in this interaction with the Alien (scene 2) Ripley for the first time displays ambivalence toward the monster. For, in shots 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 Ripley appears touched by its affection. In these shots she is elaborated as inseparable from the beast. At one moment, however, Ripley intentionally wounds herself while caressing the sharp features of the Alien’s face.
When her hand is cut she waves it toward the window in order to spill her acid-like blood on it. Her plan to vacuum-suck the beast out of the space ship is effective. The acid-blood produces a hole in the window and the creature is pulled out into space. Ripley’s disattachment from the monster is painful, tears roll down her face as the creature screams and reaches out to her. The difficulty of the separation is enhanced in the subsequent moment – Ripley too is on the verge of being sucked out by the pressure.

Call who is observing the scene straps her body, hooks herself to a wall, and grabs Ripley’s hand to keep her from slipping away into space (scene 3, shots 1-3). In terms of the metaphorical production of meaning in this scene, I suggest that with Call’s help Ripley has managed to survive the wound of separation. The two women hold on to each other during the moments of strong turbulence caused by the explosion of the space station (scene 3a, shots 1-5). A wider shot follows of a longer duration (shot 6). Ripley and Call emerge together, two bodies posing as one. Their eyes are wide open, they seem to be looking at something extraordinary, but in fact, their gaze is directed at the camera, at us.

A deictic relationship is thus opened up where we too are invited to look. The reverse shot is a window of the space ship, and as the camera moves closer to it, we see the clouds, the first trace that they are approaching Earth. Excited and overwhelmed, one of the two men in the cockpit, Joner, gets up from his seat, moves over to the co-pilot Vriess, grabs him and kisses him right on the lips (shot 11). This gesture needs to be seen in light of Joner’s sexist and bigoted behavior throughout the entire film. The accidental discovery which imposed Call’s coming out of the closet as a woman-robot, so to speak, provoked derogatory and even vicious comments especially from Joner. In that situation, Ripley had to stand up for Call and literally grab Joner’s tongue. Judging by the closing scene, in Joner’s case, the “alien experience” evidently brought about a settling of personal issues, perhaps even, his own coming out of the closet.

As a juxtaposition to the two men hugging, a shot follows where the logo of the space ship is depicted. We see “Betty,” a cliché image of a sexy girl posing on a phallic-shaped object, a typical label of WW II flight vehicles. It recalls Keller’s discussion on the naming and renaming of secrets, whereby a lethal bomb, for exam-
ple, came to be referred to as “baby.” As the camera tilts away from “Betty” it reveals a wide window and behind it Call and Ripley. The connection through the camera movement is also a dissociation from the exploitative image of femininity. Exploitative especially in the sense that it figured as a mask for the interaction between men, as *Alien Resurrection* also reminds us. As “Betty” is approaching the Earth’s atmosphere, Call and Ripley are ready to accept each other’s “imperfections.” Together they produce a spectacular subjective vision of Earth (shot 18), preceded by an exchange of close-ups with an equal distribution of authority (shots 13–17). Ripley gives the credit for this miraculous outcome to Call, “You did it, you saved the Earth.” Call asks Ripley what awaits them on Earth, Ripley replies that she doesn’t know for she is a stranger there herself. The Earth is ultimately that space of uncertainty where we must never stop learning to see all over again.

**The Law of the Alien**

With the example of the *Alien* series I have elaborated the trajectory of a female character from her status as a “stain” of the symbolic, hence as a constitutive outsider, to the character that matters. I have suggested that the features that confirm her state as an outsider in the symbolic universe of the father, such as “alien,” “monster,” or “synthetic humanoid,” if taken within a new normative injunction, can become the features that matter. These features matter precisely because they mark a deviance and a difference from “woman” as a universal category. The constitution of subjectivity through difference makes possible a discursive exchange. Ripley is far from perfect but she is repaired through her interaction with Call who possesses that which Ripley lacks, notably faith in humanity. In a reverse manner, Ripley helps Call to let go of her idealism about the human race. When she realizes that Ripley is “good enough,” that she is human in spite the fact that her blood sizzles, Call can also abolish self-hate and let go of the illusory self-image that she was desperately trying to approximate.

Therefore, a way to take control of the state of discursive extraterritoriality, or of exile from the symbolic universe of the father, is to acknowledge its status as a discursive construct. Constitution of identity is bound up with symbolization. The signifier of the excluded identity needs to be repeated via discourse; yet as But-
ler insists, it is not a loyal citation. Repetition of the signifier presumes a new linguistic unity, but it also alludes to all future possibilities of repetition/reconstruction of the signifier. The symbolization of the new unity turns it into a site of contestation. In the case of the *Alien* series, the Alien comes to symbolize that provisional unity. Within the Law of the Alien a constitutive outsider is approached as a signifier open for renegotiation and improvement just like the paternal signifier itself. Taking into account the concerns of this study, I have looked at departure and return in terms of the structuring of the narrative. As I have demonstrated particularly in chapter two, the structuring of the sign as a micro-unit is bound up with *différance*. I have argued that this type of structure can be traced also on the macro-level of the entire narrative. As we have seen in the *Alien* series, this is most evident in the structuring of characters’ subjectivity.

To problematize the de/composition of female subjectivity, with the example of the *Alien* series, I have argued that here the Law of the Alien is at work. When regarded within this alternative normative injunction, the space of exile reserved for female characters, offers the possibility for renegotiating and redefining female subjectivity. The recourse to the space of exile in relation to female characters is not completely new. The potential solution for the “discursive exile” is announced in the *Star Wars* trilogy, for example. Although *Star Wars* thematizes the space outside the galactic empire, far away from Earth, the structuring of the narrative is not dependent on the structuring of female subjectivity. Princess Leia is the custodian of the secret plans which can help to destroy the Death Star. She is elaborated as the most prominent rebel. She is courageous and has highly developed survival skills. Even when tortured by the sinister officers of the Empire, Leia does not reveal the location of the Rebel base. Most importantly, Leia is the head of the life in exile. She is the one who awards Luke and Han Solo
with medals of honor in the closing of the first film. Nevertheless, even though the first film has a happy ending, freedom is not restored to the galaxy and the state of things will necessarily have to change. Already in the second film, Luke takes charge as the leader of the Rebel forces, and it soon becomes clear that freedom in the galaxy is conditioned on Luke’s “following his destiny” which entails facing Vader. Leia’s engagement with the Rebellion will be complemented with her investment in Han Solo. In the closing of the trilogy, and thanks to the “return of the Jedi” in the guise of Luke, both of these aims will be realized. Leia thus is in charge only in the one episode where the rebels have a home base in exile.\textsuperscript{xxi}

Lucas’ \textit{Star Wars} can be compared to Akira Kurosawa’s \textit{The Hidden Fortress}, a combination of a traditional samurai tale and fairy tale, where a princess escapes an evil Empire. Even though Kurosawa’s princess Yuki, just as Lucas’s princess Leia, displays, to put it in Freudian terms, “a survival of the boyish nature,” she attains maturation outside of the prescribed options such as engaging in a heterosexual union. It is therefore Yuki’s life in exile, rather than Leia’s that can prove a more pertinent example of the productive value of in-between spaces. Quite similar to the fabula of \textit{Star Wars}, the father of Princess Yuki Akizuki was defeated, and she is herself hunted by the ruler of the expanding Yamana Country. The Princess must flee to Hayakawa Country where she will have the protection of Lord Hayakawa until a situation arises for the House of Akizuki to be restored. The journey is circular: Akizuki Country borders on Hayakawa Country and Yamana Country, but because Akizuki Country was defeated by Yamana Country, the border between Akizuki Country and Hayakawa Country is much more difficult to cross than the border from Yamana Country to Hayakawa Country. Therefore, to reach the safe territory, the Princess must cross the territory of the enemy. Paradoxically enough then, the Princess departs from Hayakawa Country to arrive at Hayakawa Country.

Yuki is stubborn and arrogant and never agrees with anyone. Her mother admits with remorse that her father reared her like a boy because he was denied a male heir. Princess Leia’s arrogant behavior toward Han Solo resembles Princess Yuki’s manner of acting toward Rokurota. Both Princesses’ harshness is attributable to their specific life circumstances. Yet there is a big difference in the
way this unattractive feature will be corrected by Lucas and Kurosawa respectively. Leia will be "tamed" through the formation of a heterosexual union with Solo, whereas Yuki will be transformed via the experiences of the journey; the trajectory through the land of exile yields self-reflection. Yuki's capacity to play a double role is introduced in the film's opening. Even though Yuki's mother tells Rokurota that the Princess has no feelings and no tears for anyone or anything, Kurosawa lets us in on the other, the hidden side of Yuki. When she is alone and far away from the observers, she cries bitterly and mourns the death of Rokurota's young sister who was willingly executed in her place.

Princess Leia does not go through a process of initiation. In contrast, while in the first film of the trilogy Luke and Han Solo are helping her cause, in the sequels that follow she is turned into Luke's helper and Vader's tool to provoke Luke into a duel. Nevertheless, Leia's brief period of leadership in the history of the universe clearly points to that territory where princesses, scary monsters and androids can be in charge - in the territory of exile, somewhere between Hayakawa and Hayakawa, in a universe far, far away. And in fact, when we look at the examples of the popular Hong Kong cinema, we can see that there, in the films of the Far East, fabulas are frequently conjured up where women can function as action heroines. Thanks to the martial-arts traditions all sorts of characters could be fighters, not only the major protagonists. This means that in these cinematic narratives women too could appear as subjects of action. Examples such as The Heroic Trio and Wing Chun go a step further, for they bring forward female characters who are capable of acting together. This type of action-heroine is still an exception in Hollywood cinema. In order for a greater variety of alternative heroines to emerge, however, a step needs to be made toward new possibilities of existence where prescribed laws cannot be so readily applied.

Code reminds us that breaking out of embedded categories and labeling practices is not easy:

The process involves facing uncertainty, approaching the world with blurred vision. Often one must learn to see all over again, an endeavor that requires training in imagination and sensitivity. A challenging aspect of this project is learning to
listen responsibly to stories people tell about their experiences, even though the stories may not be true. (Code, 169).

The suspension of truth, just as the suspension of the disunity of the signifier, is necessary for new alliances and new friendships to emerge. In terms of new Hollywood cinema, this involves a complex web of forces. The third mobility of the narrative, that is, vision expressed on the level of the fabula, is dependent on ideological and cultural fixations, but as I have suggested in chapter one, and also in chapter four, this vision is also aligned with social agency. When taking into consideration the fabulation in *Alien Resurrection*, and the emphasis it places on renegotiating the female character, we also have to take into account the agency interpellated into the vision of fabula. As it so happens, Sigourney Weaver was one of the producers of *Alien 3*, and a co-producer of *Alien Resurrection*. The director of *Alien Resurrection* is another “alien” in Hollywood, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the director of European “art-films” such as *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children*.

While in the *Alien* series the vast universe of the distant future offers a possibility for narrativizing the foreclosed (female) subjects, in the following chapter I will demonstrate that the reconstructive power of mythical discourse has just as productive an effect on the constitution of a specific identity. Although there is a shift from science fiction to history, I will suggest that the suspension of truth, or rather, the tension between belief and suspicion, is crucial for envisioning the possibility of existence on an in-between territory. With the example of *Schindler’s List* I will further explore the “futurity” of the signifier and I will specifically focus on the territoriality of the sign in relation to the structuring of subjectivity. The return of the signifier in this particular case complicates the relation between “promise” and “return,” for what the film in question stages is the arrival at the Promised Land, the end of wondering, the overcoming of diaspora, the end of ghettoization and deportation.
feetnotes

i I have addressed this issue in the introductory chapter.

ii This notion that women are “extraterritorial” is inspired by a number of texts by feminist critics and philosophers: Lucie Irigaray, “Women’s Exile, Ideology and Consciousness”; Sarah Kofman, “Ex: The Woman’s Enigma,” Julia Kristeva “Women’s Time.” I will explore the discourse of extraterritoriality further in the next chapter, where it will be connected to the structure of exile and return. Some of the texts which can be taken as a connection between the former and the latter concern are Julia Kristeva’s “A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident” in the Kristeva Reader; Anna Smith Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement; and particularly George Steiner’s “Cry Havoc” in Extra-Territorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution.

iii In his text “The Lamella of David Lynch” Zizek discusses the enigma of female depression in Lynch’s films and approaches it as the essence of female subjectivity: “The philosophical name for this depression is ‘absolute negativity,’ i.e., what Hegel called ‘the night of the world,’ the withdrawal of the subject into itself. In short, woman, not man, is the subject par excellence. And the link between depression and the bursting of the indestructible life-substance is also clear: depression and withdrawal-into-self is the primordial act of retreat, of acquiring a distance from the indestructible life-substance which makes it appear as a repulsive scintillation.” In, Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 215.

iv In Simians, Cyborgs, Women: The Reinvention of Nature, Donna Haraway discusses the possibility of the cyborg subjectivity as a productive alternative to the traditionally monstrous space to which women have been constrained.

v The woman as the stumbling block of the symbolic recalls Naomi Schor’s discussion on skandalon in Breaking the Chain: Feminism, Theory and French Realist Fiction. Skandalon insists […] “and leading us to make mention of the purely semantic function of the obstacle […] that is to reflect upon our own critical progress […] skandalon is the detail whose contour breaks the smooth surface of the text”(84).

vi In A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak engages in the production of counternarratives that can make visible the foreclosed subjects. She points to the “moment” rather than the position that must be acknowledged when it comes to the discursive mainstream - “the native informant.” In her view, the Northwestern European tradition (codename “West”) needs the native informant, but only as a foreclosed element. “I think of the ‘native informant’ as a name for the mark of expulsion from the name of Man - a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation.” (6).

vii “Alien-zone” alludes also to the title of the book which deals with the representation of women as dependent on the in-between spaces, Alien Zone, ed. A. Kuhn.

viii In “Horror and the Monstrous Feminine - an Imaginary Abjection,” Barbara Creed discusses the “monstrous feminine” in Hollywood horror and science fiction films drawing on Julia Kristeva’s Powers of Horror. Within this framework she establishes a similarity between the maternal figure and the
alien in the following way: “The science fiction horror film Alien is a complex representation of the monstrous-feminine in terms of the maternal figure as perceived within a patriarchal ideology. She is there in the text’s scenarios of the primal scene, of birth and death; she is there in her many guises as the treacherous mother, the oral sadistic mother, the mother as a primordial abyss; and she is there in the film’s images of blood, of the all-devouring vagina, the toothed vagina, the vagina as Pandora’s box; and finally she is there in the chameleon figure of the alien, the monster as fetish-object of and for the mother (258).

**Steven Spielberg employs this strategy in his film Amistad. In the opening of the film, before the mutiny takes place, the main character Sengbe appears in mega close ups, which creates the impression of an alien-like character and cancels the possibility of associating Sengbe with a human subject.**

*With respect to this, Zizek writes, “The subject is the nonsubstance; he exists only as a nonsubstantial self-relating subject that maintains its distance toward inner-worldly objects. Only in monsters does this subject encounter the Thing that is his impossible equivalent - the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing. The subject and the Thing are not two entities but rather the two sides, the two slopes, of one and the same entity. The subject is the same as the Thing; he is its negative, the trace of its absence within the symbolic network [...] the place where phantasmagorical monsters emerge is thus identified as the void of the pure self.” (Zizek 1992: 66-7)

**In Zizek’s view, the Phantom of the Opera, Kaspar Hauser, just as Munch’s Homunculus can be taken as examples of the “pure subject of Enlightenment”; each of them is a monster that gives body to the surplus that escapes the vicious circle of the mirror relationship. Zizek also mentions vampires in relation to the surplus that escapes the vicious circle of the mirror relationship: “Vampires are invisible in the mirror because they have read Lacan and know how to behave - they materialize object a which by definition cannot be mirrored.” (55). In “Grimaces of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears.”

**I will return to the issue of subjectivation in the following chapter in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of de/re-territorialization.**

**I am referring here to Zizek’s discussion on the symptom as related to the movement “back to the future.” In The Sublime Object of ideology.**

**The concept of masquerade has had an important impact on feminist film theory. It was first introduced by Claire Johnston in relation to female characters who cross-dressed as male pirates. Mary Ann Doane, for example, discusses masquerade as a mask of femininity. She draws on the work of Joan Rivière who noted a mask of femininity in cases of women who were in a position of authority generally reserved for men. See for example, Doane’s “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator.”

**In Excitable Speech, Butler asserts that “the speaker assumes responsibility precisely through the citational character of speech. The speaker renews the linguistic tokens of a community, reissuing and reinvigorating such speech. Responsibility is thus linked with speech as repetition, not as origination” (39).**

**In “Skinflick: Posthuman Gender in Jonathan Demme’s The Silence of the Lambs,” Judith Halbestram states, “Frankenstein sutures his monster’s ugly
flesh together by binding it in a yellow skin, too tight and too thick. When, in the modern horror movie, terror rises to the surface, the surface itself becomes a complex web of pleasure and danger [...]” (163).
xvii The highest in rank of the military officials on the space station, and the one closest to the Father is General Perez. His identification code is quite peculiar - to make the door open, he breathes into the intercom. The narratorial authority critiques Perez through this simulation of an “almighty” act of creation. He does not do it right the first time, and “the Father” tells him to do it again. This indicates that Perez is only a would-be creator, especially since there is an agency “above” making sure the act of creation is performed properly.
xviii I am referring to Keller’s discussion on “Oppenheimer’s baby,” and “Teller’s baby” (44).
xix This ultimate emergence of a “female doubling” can be noticed in Lucas’s *Phantom Menace* where Queen Amidala is “doubled.” This almost cliché device when it comes to the representation of male characters has only begun to take hold in relation to the female characters. Another example is a Samantha/Charley character from *The Long Kiss Goodnight*.
xx I am alluding to Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality*. Winnicott introduces the term “good enough” which can be understood as an intermediate area of experience essential for the development of an individual. According to Winnicott perfection belongs to machines “and the imperfections that are characteristic of human adaptation to need are an essential quality in the environment that facilitates” (139). Essential here is the idea of what he calls individual dependence. “By means of cross-identifications the sharp line between the me and the not-me is blurred” ibid. The basis for developing as an individual who is capable of being both dependent and independent is established at the earliest stage when the baby is dependent on the mother. Good-enough mothering is in Winnicott’s view of crucial importance for the development of a “good enough individual.”
xid In relation to the alternative versions of female existence, see also *Renegade Sisters: Girl Gangs on Film*, by Bev Zalcock.
xid I See for example Tasker’s chapter 1 “Women Warriors” in *Spectacular Bodies*.
xid Sigourney Weaver is not the only producer-actress. The mega star Meg Ryan, for example, is also taking on the role of producer. While Ryan has a central role in her films, this type of female character remains preoccupied with more general issues regarding heterosexual relationships. In contrast, an alternative view of the renegotiation of heterosexuality as it is related to the female character is represented in the film *Fargo*, for example. In “New Hollywood’s New Women” Hilary Radner discusses this film as governed by the law of the woman; the law at work is the law of the pregnant sheriff Margie. In Neale and Smith. It is useful to mention that the film *Antonia* by Marleen Gorris is a brilliant example of a universe governed by the “law of the mother.”
xidv As a way of underscoring the conflicting processes in the new Hollywood where cult directors become engaged in high budget productions, it is interesting to mention David Fincher who directed *Alien 3*. He also directed films such as *Se7en, Game* and *Fight Club*. 