The Emergence of Feminine Humanity
from a Technologised Masculinity
in the Films of James Cameron

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"Fucking men like you built the hydrogen bomb. Men like you thought it up."

Sarah Connor, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

The films of James Cameron consistently portray an opposition between natural femininity and

technologised masculinity, from the body politics of the *Terminator* series (1984, 1991) to the

environmental message of *Avatar* (2009). The technologised form is prominent throughout Cameron's oeuvre, explicitly coded masculine, and repeatedly shown to fail. In place of this technologised masculine body, a feminine form emerges as a worthy and, within the film's semiotic coding, preferable successor. This pattern is not unproblematic, but it is consistent across a range of texts with a variety of concerns and themes. Through a focused analysis of Cameron's science fiction films, this essay argues that Cameron's films valorise natural femininity over technologised masculinity. A robust engagement with a number of Cameron's films will demonstrate that the consistent occurrence of feminine emergence from technologised masculinity constitutes a criticism of the military-industrial complex and a utopian desire for an egalitarian, pre-industrial society of equality and humanity.

Being-in-the-World of Science Fiction, Feminism, Nature and Utopia

The essay is informed by a number of different theories including Marxism, feminism and existentialism, as well as studies of the science fiction genre. It is not strictly a Marxist-feminist interpretation of Cameron's oeuvre, however, because the primary goal of this essay is to draw interpretation from the films themselves rather than to impose a theoretical model upon them. However, there is much productive work to be done on Cameron's films in relation to Marxist feminism, and this is an area to which I will return in a more comprehensive study of Cameron as a filmmaker.

Annette Kuhn and Vivian Sobchack both identify a recurring concern within the genre of science fiction – social organisation. Kuhn identifies that the genre is concerned with "modes of

societal organisation"[1] and Sobchack describes science fiction as depicting a "poetic mapping of social relations as they are created and changed by new technological modes of 'being-in-the-world."[2] Martin Heidegger's being-in-the-world is instructive in this regard, as the concept identifies a form of societal organisation.[3] Briefly, Heidegger argues that for an individual to exist within the world of their existence, they must acknowledge and engage with the expectations and conventions of their society. Such interaction with societal organisation is defined as being "fallen." However, Heidegger also stresses the importance of distinctiveness: in order to truly exist within the world of one's existence, it is necessary to declare one's individuality against the fallen state that one shares with all others. Furthermore, this distinctiveness must include acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of others, an awareness, understanding and engagement with those who are both like oneself and also different. With awareness of being fallen, maintenance of one's distinctiveness and a knowing engagement with others with whom the world is shared, one is authentically being-in-the-world.

Within the world of Cameron's science fiction worlds, characters are presented as "fallen" against technology, technology that is the manifestation of the military-industrial complex, which Cameron consistently presents as the enemy that must be overcome. The military-industrial complex though is hard to escape, as it is the framework of the society in which the films take place, such as the military contractors responsible for the building of the super-computer Skynet

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1 Annette Kuhn, "Introduction," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1999), 3.

2 Vivian Sobchack, "Science Fiction," in *Handbook of American Film Genres*, ed. Wes D. Gehring (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 229.

3 See Martin Heidegger, *Being & Time* (London: The Camelot Press, 1962, translation).

in the *Terminator* series, the malevolent Weyland-Yutani Company in *Aliens* (1986) and the

RDA in *Avatar*. James Kendrick identifies the class wars that occur in three Cameron films,

demonstrating that Cameron's allegiance is always on the side of the working class.[4] The

capitalists are the enemy, and although Kendrick identifies that the military and the capitalists

"exist in a symbiotic relationship ... and can be viewed as two heads of the same creature,"[5] I

argue that it is more than a creature and rather a framework within which Cameron's characters

must demonstrate their distinctiveness. These demonstrations are figured through the

representation of cinematic worlds that feature the common science fiction trope of presenting

"new symbolic maps of our social relationship to others in what has become … a totally

technologised world."[6] Cameron's films include highly detailed representations of this world

that express its dangers, and over the course of his oeuvre, there is a progression toward an

alternative.

     This alternative is achievable through the feminine, an alternative to the military-

industrial complex, which is consistently coded as masculine. Feminist studies have identified

the male and masculine as intrinsic to existing power structures,[7] and in Cameron's oeuvre the

major power structure is the military-industrial complex, corporations rather than governments,

and corporations that are run by men. Significant male corporate figures in Cameron's films

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4   James Kendrick, "Marxist Overtones in Three Films by James Cameron," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 27:3 (September 1999): 36-44.

5   Ibid., 40.

6   Sobchack, "Science Fiction," 237.

7   See for example, Jean Grimshaw, *Luce Irigary: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991); Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1988); Margaret Whitford, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

include Carter Burke (Paul Reiser) and Van Lewin (Paul Maxwell) in *Aliens*, Miles Dyson (Joe

Morton) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and Parker Selfridge (Giovanni Ribisi) in *Avatar*. As

my analyses will show, masculinity is articulated throughout Cameron's oeuvre to be

technologised. Mechanical enhancements and replacements of the male body appear repeatedly

and consistently, making the male body more powerful and better able to serve the needs of the

military-industrial complex.

Cameron's exploration of bodies, both masculine and feminine, employs a common trope

in science fiction. Mary Ann Doane identifies that the genre "frequently envisages a new,

revised body as the direct outcome of the advance of science."[8] This idea has been prevalent

throughout the history of science fiction at least as far back as *Frankenstein*,[9] in which dead body

parts are revised into a new living form through the machinations of science. These revised

bodies problematise our understanding of what it means to be human; indeed, the terminators

represent "unsettled and unsettling speculations on the borders that separate the human and the

non-human."[10] Even within an understanding of the human, technological bodies can threaten

the distinction between the male and the female. Doane notes that there is a "history of

representations of technology that work to fortify – sometimes desperately – conventional

understandings of the feminine."[11] These understandings work to maintain masculine-based

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8   Mary Ann Doane, "Technology, Representation, and the Feminine," in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. Mary Jacobus et al (London: Routledge, 1990), 163.

9   Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, 1818 Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

10 Forest Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans: Of terminators and blade runners," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 124.

11 Doane, "Technology, Representation, and the Feminine," 163.

power structures, which consign women to particular roles. These power structures express a

conservative ideology of "nature," discussed by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, who state

that science fiction cinema presents technology as a threat to "'natural' social arrangements,"[12]

arrangements that are in fact conservative social organisations. Science fiction cinema therefore

manifests the conservative goal of establishing "a ground of authority that will make inequalities

that are in fact socially constructed seem natural."[13] The "natural" organisations under threat by

technology in science fiction cinema include democracy, capitalist free enterprise, and, most

frequently, "the family and the individual."[14] The socially constructed family of man, woman

and children, each with their particular roles, expresses conventional and conservative

understandings of gender roles, roles that the march of technological development threatens.

Doane's discussion of conventional understandings of the feminine correlates with Ryan

and Kellner's argument, as these understandings largely revolve around ideas of motherhood,

with the major issue "at stake"[15] being the conservative view of woman as the site of

reproduction. Anxiety over the technological is displaced "onto the figure of the woman or the

idea of the feminine,"[16] which must remain "natural" in order to maintain the conservative role

of women within male power structures. Doane discusses the alien creature in *Alien* (Ridley

Scott, 1979) and *Aliens* as instances of science fiction cinema re-emphasising the difference

between male and female bodies, lest the distinction be lost and the male be incorporated into the

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12 Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, "Technophobia," in *Alien Zone*, 58.

13 Ibid, 61.

14 Ibid.

15 Doane, "Technology, Representation, and the Feminine," 164.

16 Ibid., 163.

non-gender specific form, a form represented by the alien itself.[17] This distinction ensures that women remain maternal and therefore maintains distance between genders through the act of biological reproduction, the "proper place" for women within conservative understanding.

Arguably, Cameron's cinema demonstrates the arguments of Doane, and of Ryan and Kellner, as his films feature anxieties over bodies and reinforce "natural" ideas of femininity. However, there is an interesting *valorisation* of the feminine as something opposed to the conservative structures of capitalism and the military-industrial complex, which are presented as dangerous and damaging to more than social constructions. Technologised masculinity advances the military-industrial complex but at the expense of humanity. This may be actual human life in the case of *Terminator*, or it may be more ideological costs such as the alienation caused by the loss of empathy and understanding as demonstrated in *The Abyss* (1989) and *Aliens*. Ultimately, what is at stake in Cameron's oeuvre is a surprisingly Marxist view of freedom. Kendrick details the Marxist ideology present in Cameron's cinema, noting that emancipation occurs when property is transcended.[18] Cameron's characters free themselves from property, escaping the military-industrial complex and capitalism, but they are not released from engagement with others. Indeed, they remain in-the-world, but a world dramatically different from that governed by the capitalists.

This world is achievable through the emergence of natural femininity. There is an established parallel within Western thought between nature and the feminine, most obviously

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17 Ibid., 169-170.

18 See Kendrick, "Marxist Overtones in Three Films by James Cameron," 42. See also Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Literature and Art*, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (New York: International General, 1974), 69.

demonstrated by the term "Mother Nature." Feminist theory has discussed and interrogated this assumption,[19] but for the purposes of this essay it is important that both natural femininity and technologised masculinity are understood as power structures. While technologised masculinity of the military-industrial complex pursues the alienating endeavours of manufacturing and exploitation, natural femininity maintains distinctiveness by advocating and embodying non-indenture and engagement with others. The terms are important here – masculinity has *become* technologised whereas femininity remains, or attempts to re-acquire, a natural, original state, free from the demands of capitalism, which are ultimately indenture. The masculine goal is to "transcend nature – biology, mortality – by allotting nature to the side of women,"[20] and also to further masculine domination over the environment through the military-industrial complex. The feminine, I will argue, is more engaged with the natural environment and the people with whom the environment is shared – the feminine is free humanity in contrast to the indentured masculinity of technology.

Engagement with the environment and others within it is the goal that Cameron's cinema reaches toward, though it is not immediately apparent. Over the course of his oeuvre, the director develops the emergence of feminine humanity from technologised masculinity, and this emergent humanity is a form of being-in-the-world that moves away from the alienation of capitalism and toward a pre-industrial egalitarian utopia. This development is elucidated by a chronological analysis of Cameron's science fiction films, in which the emergence of the feminine from the military-industrial complex becomes more apparent and the egalitarian society

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19 See, for example, Grimshaw, Nye, and Whitford in footnote 7.

20 Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigary: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 93.

takes shape.

The Terminator

Probably the most blatant example of technologised masculinity in Cameron's oeuvre is the

figure of the Terminator, specifically the Cyberdyne Systems 800 series, model 101, played by

Arnold Schwarzenegger. Casting Schwarzenegger, with his huge muscles and massive shoulders

and chest, as the now iconic cyborg creates an extreme form of masculinity. Yet the proportions

of Schwarzenegger's body are so precise that they appear calculated, mechanical and "resonate

historically as 'man-machine'."[21] This resonance reflects a tension in the bodybuilder star as

"both natural and unnatural, biological and constructed."[22] The form of the cyborg has been read

as overtly and obviously artificial, as Doran Larson comments in the nightclub sequence of *The

Terminator*:

> In a slow-motion sequence, Arnold walks through the room, stiff
> and linear as though on tracks, surrounded by the wonderfully
> fluid movement of young men and women dancing.
> Hyperrational directedness ... cuts through and identifies itself as
> distinct from fluid, organic, human motion.[23]

The Terminator's movements distinctively mark him as a machine, a semblance of a human but

an incomplete one. Yet his form is an ideal representation/representative of the military-

industrial complex's technologised masculinity: the masculine form taken to a technological

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21 Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans," 128.

22 Linda Mizejewski, "Action Bodies in Futurist Spaces: Bodybuilder Stardom as Special Effect," in *Alien Zone II*, 154.

23 Doran Larson, "Machine as Messiah: Cyborgs, Morphs, and the American Body Politic," *Cinema Journal* 36, No 4 (1997): 60.

extreme beyond nature, a transcendence of biological weakness to the near-indestructibility of an

armoured metal chassis.

The film takes time to emphasise the imperviousness of the Terminator, partly through his

ability to absorb multiple gunshots and fly through a window only to then get up as though

nothing happened, and also through his scene of self-repair. Whereas a biological man would

need to visit a hospital, get help, rest and recuperate, the Terminator slices into his own skin and

corrects his servos, then cuts out his purely cosmetic eye without so much as a wince. From one

perspective, this is ideal masculinity, untroubled by injuries and as repairable as a car. The

Terminator's single-mindedness is more problematic though: on the one hand, it can be seen as

desirable to have such commitment and resolve; on the other hand, the Terminator has no free

will and operates purely on the basis of his programming. In this respect, the Terminator

illustrates the unremitting logic of capitalism – continue to capitalise, exploit, manufacture and

do not stop, ever. As an ideal man, the Terminator is also the ideal capitalist, doing his job no

matter what the obstacle. He is a slave to his programming and therefore indentured: despite his

ability to do anything he has no freedom at all. His slave status marks him as non-human in

Marx's terms,[24] as the Terminator owes his very existence to his controller, Skynet, which is the

military-industrial complex *par excellence*. Therefore, the ideal capitalist, the ideal *man*, is a

slave to ongoing industrial production and corporate policy, which produced and controls him.

The human opponents of the Terminator provide stark contrasts to the body of the cyborg:

"the simplest of negative markings, relative physical weakness, identifies [them] as human."[25]

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24 See Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art*, 69.

25 Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans," 128.

Behaviour is another contrast, as humans are shown to have the ability to "improvise,"[26] and it is their inventiveness that ultimately allows the humans to triumph over the machine. The final body which emerges from the conflict in *The Terminator* is Sarah's, for whose life Kyle sacrifices his own. Therefore, the feminine body is presented as worth dying for; what she represents is a goal in opposition to the military-industrial goal of the Terminator.

Sarah and her body represent various ideas. Choice, in contrast to the Terminator's programming, is significant, emphasised by the positive ability of humans to improvise. Empathy and engagement are also significant, as Sarah and Kyle are able to form a loving bond. And of course there is biological reproduction, apparent in the final scene in which Sarah is pregnant with John, the future leader of the human resistance in the war against the machines. What she carries represents the freedom of humanity, in contrast to the technologised masculine form, which, for all its physical superiority, is an indentured form. This freedom is achieved through her pregnancy, which indicates her organic, biological, natural state, in contrast to the mechanical production which led to the Terminator.

However, as noted by Ryan and Kellner, the concept of "natural" is itself problematic, and in Sarah's case may simply confirm her status as a mother, a role within a social institution that is just as constructed as a terminator. Her status as the precious thing to be protected could remove her subjectivity – she is only the object, regardless of whether the object is the cyborg's mission of termination or Kyle's mission of protection. Yet Sarah's identity is not solely tied to her role as mother, as she also carries the tools of resistance herself – a powerful jeep, a watchful

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26 Ibid.

guard dog and a heavy pistol. The anxiety over gender distinction is not resolved in Sarah's

body, as despite being pregnant, Sarah possesses tools of masculinity, including the phallic

handgun. And as a single mother preparing her unborn son for a future war, she is hardly a

traditional figure of motherhood. Sarah's final appearance is a complex combination of

contradictory ideas, as she is both subject of her own endeavour, and object of a much larger

force over which she (at this stage) has no control. By default, she is different from the

Terminator and what it represents; so through her opposition to Skynet and its military-industrial

logic, she represents feminine humanity.

The freedom of this humanity, however, is only conspicuous by its absence in this film.

For a science fiction action movie, *The Terminator* is remarkably bleak, presenting Sarah and

Kyle as minor exceptions within a framework of technological determinism. This is

demonstrated by the omnipresence of technology throughout the film, in the contemporary world

of 1984 as much as the future of 2029. Pyle and Larson both comment on the film's "motif of a

pervasive – and invasive – penetration of technology"[27] with various machines cluttering the

spaces of the film and expressing "the potential deadliness of machines"[28] due to the

"interference these technologies pose to human communication and human agency."[29] When the

Terminator kills Matt (Rick Rossovich), Ginger's (Bess Motta) Walkman deafens her to the

sounds of danger, while police radios allow the Terminator to locate Sarah and Kyle. Telephones

have particular significance: when Sarah attempts to call the police from a pizza restaurant the

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27 Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans," 128.

28 Larson, "Machine as Messiah," 60.

29 Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans," 128.

instrument is out of order; when she finds one that does work, she is put on hold and repeatedly

transferred; when Sarah telephones her mother from the Tiki Motel, where she and Kyle are

hiding, she is actually speaking to the Terminator impersonating her mother's voice, who obtains

the motel number and by that the address. Most significantly, after he has killed Ginger the

Terminator believes he has killed Sarah, but at that precise moment Sarah herself phones the

apartment and the answering machine responds to her call, informing the Terminator of Sarah's

whereabouts. The warning that he will pursue her is shown by the red dot of his gun's laser sight

resting on the phone, the device which will lead him to her, showing how one machine is aided

in its mission by another.

Even if not necessarily dangerous, technology is still very much in control. When Kyle is

attempting to explain the future to the police, a machine interrupts him:

> **DR. SILBERMAN**
>
> Who was the enemy again?
>
>
> **KYLE**
>
> A computer defence system, built for...
>
> *[SILBERMAN's pager beeps, cutting KYLE off.]*

Even when a person is simply trying to talk, the omnipresent technology will not allow it.

Silberman's pager is given a more direct association with the Terminator and the technological

threat: as Silberman is leaving the police station, his pager goes off and he turns to check it. As

he does so, the Terminator walks into the station behind him.

The pager acts as a warning for what is about to happen, because at the exact moment the pager beeps, the "Terminator Theme" begins. This is a recurring musical motif that pervades the film and underscores the cyborg's relentless pursuit. It is first heard over the opening credits and again when the Terminator first arrives in the Los Angeles of 1984. In the police station scene, the musical cue precedes the Terminator's murderous rampage. In the film's final shot it is used again, as Sarah drives toward the coming storm, visible in the frame, which represents the impending nuclear holocaust. Even though the Terminator has been destroyed, the military-industrial complex remains dominant and dominating. Sarah's adventure has prepared her for what is to come; and, as an instance of 80s individualism against the world, she is well equipped with her jeep, dog and gun. Further, she is becoming more worldly through her use of Spanish. Her strength and preparedness are unusual for a female character; indeed, she is reminiscent of lone male action heroes in post-apocalyptic films such as *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) and *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981). She is coded feminine by her swollen belly and billowing maternal clothes, a solitary and independent woman in a desolate and hostile land. But this vision is strikingly pessimistic, suggesting that nuclear war is inevitable. The freedom that Sarah represents is only the freedom to fight, and fighting must be done when the military-industrial complex of capitalism remains active. A better world is not suggested at this point, only the bleakness of humanist defiance to the cold, alienated advance of technologised, masculine capitalism.

Aliens

A polysemic representation of femininity also appears in *Aliens*. The film's protagonist Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) appears, both in the film and in promotional material, in a defiant pose, holding both her surrogate daughter Newt (Carrie Henn) and a chunky rifle. If weapons are regarded as conventionally symbolic of masculinity, and the presence of children is coded as feminine, then the image of Ripley does not resolve gender distinction in a conservative construction of family. Indeed, the family that Ripley assembles over the course of *Aliens* is hardly traditional. She acquires a partner of sorts in Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn), but he is not present for her mission to rescue Newt – Ripley must take on the alien nest and ultimately the Queen by herself. Femininity in this context is not determined by a single signifier, suggesting that the conservative understanding of "feminine" as linked specifically to motherhood is not applicable.

It is also significant that Ripley's role as a mother is not determined purely by biological reproductive impulse. Constance Penley notes that in *Aliens*, "Ripley 'develops' a maternal instinct," leading to an eventual "conservative moral lesson about maternity … mothers will be mothers, and they will always be women."[30] At the time of writing, Penley experienced *Aliens* (1990) in its theatrical cut, whereas the extended director's cut, released in 1993, gives Ripley more background. This version of the film includes a scene in which Ripley learns that her biological daughter died during her deep space mission, so her maternal instinct does not spontaneously "develop" at the sight of a little girl. Nonetheless, the mourning scene does

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30 Constance Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," in *Alien Zone*, 125.

establish Ripley as a mother, long before she encountered the alien. Her maternal status can be read either way – as a woman, she must be a mother; if she has actually had a child of her own, her immediate concern for Newt is more probable and logical.

As with Sarah though, Ripley's identity is not solely determined by her maternal status. She is one of the most written about characters in film studies, and has been discussed in terms of race,[31] physicality[32] and class:

> [A] traditional laborer ... Earthy, natural, strong, and motherly, she is both an attractive and a powerful woman who can fight and labor alongside the tough marines…[33]

She is strongly associated with the Marines, who despite their military rank are presented as distinct from the military-industrial *complex*, which is represented by the character of Burke. The term "complex" is important here, because it is the capitalist ideology of profiteering, a single-mindedness like that of the Terminator, which is the enemy in *Aliens* – the alien creatures themselves serve as a manifestation of the dehumanisation and *alien*ation at the heart of the military-industrial complex.

The criticism of technology is not apparent in *Aliens*, as of all Cameron's films, it appears to have the most faith in technology and an apparent fear of biology and the natural. Steven Mulhall observes that the alien creature itself is the epitome of reproductive biology, a force of nature so utterly primal and basic that it must be unequivocally opposed by humans.[34] Humans

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31 See Amy Taubin, "The *Alien* Trilogy from Feminism to AIDS," in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed Pam Cook et al (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

32 See Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).

33 Kendrick, "Marxist Overtones in Three Films by James Cameron," 40.

34 See Stephen Mulhall, *On Film* (London: Routledge, 2002).

oppose the aliens with technology, modern weaponry such as pulse rifles, grenades and flame-throwers, but their technology proves ineffective and dangerous, as the aliens overwhelm the Marines and a damaged nuclear reactor overloads and explodes. Computers are also unreliable: Lieutenant Gorman's (William Hope) ineptitude becomes apparent when the Marines are attacked by the aliens and his various monitors convey to him nothing but chaos – without clear images he is helpless. Nonetheless, it is technology that enables Ripley ultimately to triumph over the aliens, as she masters use of the weapons and follows a tracking beacon to find Newt. Ripley and Newt are saved from the final explosion by the android Bishop (Lance Henriksen), and at the film's climax, Ripley employs a mechanical loader to defeat the Alien Queen.

Aliens' understanding of technology is "instrumental and anthropological,"[35] which is to say that the film regards technology as a means to an end and an activity humans undertake. The two aspects of this understanding are interrelated: humans undertake the activity of technology so as to achieve a goal. In *Aliens*, technology is undertaken and utilised to facilitate human survival. It would be incorrect to regard the weapons as useless, as many aliens are killed in the film's gory and thrilling action sequences. The film's criticism of technology is more precisely a criticism of *over-reliance* on technology, epitomised by Private Hudson (Bill Paxton) who lists the various weapons of the Marines with an unassailable confidence (or so he thinks). When the Marines actually encounter the aliens, Hudson is the first to admit that "We just got our asses kicked!" – tellingly, neither Ripley nor Newt are surprised as they have dealt with the aliens before. Indeed, Ripley points out after the Marines have been trounced that Newt survived "with

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35 Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 307.

no weapons and no training." In the final assault, Hudson, Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein) and Gorman stand and fight to the death, while Newt, Ripley and Hicks retreat and ultimately survive. Along the way, weapons and equipment are discarded by the survivors: Hicks' rifle saves him and Ripley from the alien that pursues them, but his shots splatter him with the alien's acidic blood. Part of the escape includes Hicks pulling off his armour, which is no protection anyway. By contrast, Hudson is pulled to his death while still shooting, and Vasquez and Gorman kill themselves with their hands clasped around a grenade.

This *discarding* of weaponry is significant, especially for Ripley. Logically, she can only enter the alien nest to rescue Newt with weapons, and she uses them effectively. But her use is very different from that of the Marines. Rather than being weighed down with equipment, Ripley wears no armour and indeed removes her jacket before descending into the hot nest. Much like Sarah and Kyle, Ripley improvises weaponry by taping the rifle and flame-thrower together, and the sequences of her firing at the aliens include shots of the cartridge meter, a constant reminder that however much she blasts away, she cannot do so indefinitely. Once Ripley's weapons are spent, she discards them. She is still dependent upon technology though, as an elevator must lift her and Newt to safety while Bishop must pilot the ship that will fly them away from the explosion.

Not that this technology is entirely trustworthy, as the film employs a plot convenience by having the Queen somehow manage to use the elevator. Once again though, this shows that technology is only as beneficial as its user. Overuse of the Marines' weaponry damaged the reactor to the point of overload, and the Queen can use the elevator as easily as Ripley. For a

moment, Bishop seems to have betrayed Ripley as the ship is not on the platform, but at the last minute he returns and saves the day, even making a point of apologising.

The largest objection to the critical treatment of technology in *Aliens* is the power loader; indeed, Penley reads *Aliens*' gender politics as being reduced to phallic motherhood: "Ripley in the robot-expediter is simply the Terminator turned inside out."[36] This superficial reading however fails to account for Ripley's consistent use of machines. Clearly, the loader enables Ripley to defeat the Queen and it is one of the film's most prominent pleasures – Ripley kicking alien ass with resolve and purpose. She can only do so through the use of technology, since alien biology is superior to that of the human. But crucially, and almost uniquely among the characters, *Ripley knows when to discard it*. Her use of the loader is improvised as the Queen has stowed away to the *Sulaco* unexpectedly and Ripley has no access to firearms. While Ripley's body is leanly muscular, the loader suggests a greater musculature as an *enhancement* of her own rather than a *replacement*. This is the crucial difference between the loader and the Terminator – the latter is a replacement of the human body with a mechanical one, the former simply increases the ability of the human. And like all of Ripley's devices, it must be discarded – she achieves victory by blowing the Queen and the loader into space. The loader is the tool for her victory and a source of delight for the viewer, but like all technology, it is only retained for a specific purpose and then can and *should* be discarded. As Ripley clambers out of the loader and up the ladder, femininity literally emerges from technology, to embrace the child who affirms the maternal *aspect* of Ripley with the word "Mommy!" But Newt's platitude is not the only one

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36 Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," 125.

Ripley receives, as the dismembered Bishop comments that her performance was "Not bad for a *human*" (emphasis added). The android proved no use in this instance; it was human ingenuity that triumphed.

Throughout *Aliens*, Ripley is the one who can utilise technology rather than be subsumed by it, as over-reliance and overconfidence in machines leads to one's demise. This over-reliance is technologised masculinity. The attitude of the Marines is one of stereotypical machismo, their confidence based upon their equipment, from the atmospheric condensers which make habitation on alien planets possible to the computers which monitor the Marines and their surroundings. These devices represent extensions of confidence in the superiority of technologised masculinity.

As in *The Terminator* however, this superiority leads to a disregard for the working class and human life in general, as James Kendrick identifies:

> [T]he film makes clear that the rescue mission at the center of the narrative is hardly about saving the colonists; instead, it is about saving the "multimillion dollar installation."[37]

The men who represent the military-industrial complex show more concern for their capital than for human lives. The Marines receive the same lack of regard as the colonists from the Company, their class effectively separating them from the military-industrial complex despite their enlistment – for Burke, the "bio-weapons division" is a larger concern than the lives of the soldiers who serve the Company. The Marines have been following company orders, and their dependence on company technology led to the deaths of most of them.

Were the military-industrial complex to continue its profiteering unrestrained, its

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37 Kendrick, "Marxist Overtones in Three Films by James Cameron," 41.

disregard for humanity would eventually lead to an overwhelming alienation. This is represented

by the aliens themselves who form the logical conclusion to replicating capitalist production,

new life forms themselves grown on a production line. The nightmarish reproduction of the

aliens suggests a possible future for humans, being produced as mechanically as the aliens. This

can be read as an instance of fear over gender distinction being manifested against and through

the female body: Doane notes that the Queen "incessantly [manufactures] eggs in an awesome

excess of reproduction," and sees this as a "horrifying otherness [that] evokes the maternal."[38]

This correlates with Barbara Creed's reading of Ripley in relation to the alien as Ripley's form

"signifies the 'acceptable' form and shape of woman"[39] (Creed is discussing *Alien*, but the

comparison still holds). The Alien Queen may be monstrous because she takes an indiscriminate

approach to procreation, laying thousands of eggs and breeding a ravenous brood that seeks only

to destroy. *Aliens* has also been read in racial terms, the Queen representing a "bad" single black

mother that absorbs state benefits while Ripley is the "good" white middle class mother,

protecting her child as well as her injured "husband" Hicks against the spectre of black invasion

into white space.[40]

Within the framework of capitalist production however, the Queen and her incessant egg-

laying can also be read as unremitting industrial mass production – the excess has gone beyond

questions of gender and led to de-naturalised procreation, resulting in creatures that have no

distinctiveness. Eggs and subsequent alien drones roll off a production line just like terminators

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38 Doane, "Science Fiction," 169.

39 Barbara Creed, "Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine," in *Alien Zone*, 140.

40 See Amy Taubin, "The *Alien* Trilogy from Feminism to AIDS," in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*,
     ed. Pam Cook et al (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 96.

and the various military vehicles used in *Avatar*. The Queen is perhaps a mother protecting her

brood, but she could equally be a corporate executive protecting her stock, as executives such as

Burke are shown to be murderously invested in their products. This investment puts humans in

the position of being worse than the aliens, as Ripley points out "you don't see them fucking each

other over for a goddamn percentage." Burke has as much feeling for the colonists, Ripley,

Newt and the Marines as the Queen does; the alienating effect of capitalist technologised

masculinity has isolated him from empathy and engagement with others. It also indentures him,

making him as much a slave to the demands of profiteering and production as the Terminator. If

humanity continues in this direction, it will likely end up like the aliens.

Ripley's femininity is more than an indication of gender difference and she is more than

an "acceptable form and shape of woman"[41] because she demonstrates *humanity* through her

engagement with others such as Newt and Hicks, and through her creative thinking rather than

the procedures of the Company and, initially, the Marines. She is distinct from the capitalists

because she simply *utilises* technological tools for her human endeavours, rather than becoming

indentured to capitalism like Burke, and therefore her being-in-the-world is distinctive.

However, pessimism still underscores the film, since although Ripley and Newt can now dream,

the Earth that they will return to is still largely run by the Company. Much like Sarah and the

unborn John, Ripley and Newt are not heading to a bright future (the grim events of *Alien 3*

[David Fincher, 1992] notwithstanding), because the capitalist military-industrial complex still

governs, and as long as it does, there is no brighter future, as capitalism continues to ignore

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41 Creed, "Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine," 140.

empathy and alienate people from each other.

The Abyss

A more problematic version of the emergence of feminine humanity appears in *The Abyss*. Lindsey Brigman (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) is immediately presented in the film in unflattering terms. Upon her introduction, she is described as "queen bitch of the world," and after her first conversation with her estranged husband Bud (Ed Harris), he comments "I hate that bitch." Indeed, "bitch" is the general description of Lindsey throughout the film, even used by herself. She is a skilled engineer, able to manage the rig and work with the rest of the drilling team without any concerns over her competence, but her "bitch" personality suggests that in order to be successful in the technologised masculinity of capitalism, a woman must be a bitch.

Not that Lindsey does not undergo a change in the film. She and Bud are reconciled through their mutual confrontation with the deranged Navy SEAL Lieutenant Coffey (Michael Biehn), which results in Lindsey drowning but being revived. Even at the moment of death, desperate to save her, Bud still addresses her as "bitch," suggesting that a strong woman who will fight to live is by default a bitch. It is after her near-death experience that Lindsey mellows and, more overtly than Ripley, becomes an "acceptable woman," as she cries and pleas for Bud not to die and abandon her. Rather than being a bitch, or being strong at all, Lindsey is reduced to a weakened state by her almost-drowning. Against her heroic husband, she becomes a submissive, obedient wife, who cannot handle the prospect of being without him now that she has changed into a more appropriate, "natural" form. Ryan and Kellner's assessment of "natural"

being a term for social constructions seems applicable here – Lindsey the capable bitch was unnatural, Lindsey the weeping (almost) widow is natural. Cameron's normal interest in strong women is lost to an extent in this film, as the capable male goes through little change and the woman becomes a much weaker figure, there to welcome the hero when he (literally) emerges from the deep-sea city of non-terrestrial intelligence.

Kendrick's Marxist reading of the film offers a partial resolution for Lindsey's opposed roles of bitch and wife. Lindsey's first appearance is in a business suit as part of the oil company which owns the Deep Core deep-sea rig on and around which the action of the film takes place. She is presented as an executive like Burke or Gerard Kirkhill (Ken Jenkins), who represents Benthic Petroleum, and she barks at Bud about what is being done with "her" rig. Upon her descent to Deep Core, she quickly assumes the garb of the other rig workers and becomes more aligned with these "lovable roughnecks who are the perfect embodiment of the virtuous working class."[42] Nonetheless, capitalist aspects remain about her, demonstrated by the derogatory way Bud refers to Lindsey's boyfriend: "'what's-his-name,' 'the Suit,' 'Mr. Brooks Brothers,' and 'Mr. BMW' – all unapproving names that suggest the boyfriend is defined by his money."[43] Her eventual reunion with Bud is a reclamation of her class as much as it is a reassertion of an "appropriate" female role. Lindsey's weakened, weeping state solicited by Bud's perceived death can be read as her consignment to a "natural," i.e. conservative role, but is also part of her being embraced by the working class, a class of empathy and engagement. She can weep for Bud because she has re-engaged with the people around her, who also mourn Bud, though with less

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42 Kendrick, "Marxist Overtones in Three Films by James Cameron," 40.

43 Ibid.

emotional displays. Lindsey therefore displays an empathetic humanity as much as an emotional

femininity (it may be worth considering if a person weeping for the death of a loved one is

necessarily a conservative female role or simply a realistic reaction), an emergence from the

bitch persona she used in the technologised masculine environment. Her reincorporation into the

working class is the emergence of an empathetic, feminine humanity, out of the technologised

masculinity in which she had been operating.

In common with Cameron's general ideology, technologised masculinity in *The Abyss* is

problematic and dangerous. *The Abyss* explicitly links this concern to the military-industrial

complex and the threat of global annihilation. Studies of science fiction have explained the

relation between the preoccupations of science fiction films and the social events and concerns at

the time of production;[44] and *The Abyss* as well as *Aliens* and *Terminator* are preoccupied by the

possibility of nuclear war, *The Abyss* making direct reference to the SALT talks of the 1980s.

Coffey aims to detonate a nuclear weapon at the site of the settlement of the non-terrestrial (NT)

intelligence, and Bud and the rest of his team must avert this disaster. However, the oil-drilling

endeavour is itself problematic, as an instance of technology being used by humans in an attempt

to dominate the environment. The endeavour is coded as masculine, since the people in charge

such as Kirkhill and the Navy commanders are all male, as well as the masculinised Lindsey.

The problems become apparent when the rig is damaged, parts of it are flooded and several

people die, indicating the fallibility of the technology needed for this endeavour. Nuclear

weaponry is a great threat, the criticism of this technological terror apparent as the increasingly

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44 See Kuhn, *Alien Zone II*, 3.

psychotic Coffey aims to attack the non-terrestrial intelligence that he believes to be hostile, against the advice of his fellow SEALs.

As in *Aliens* though, technology is needed to remove this threat. In order to defuse the bomb, Bud descends in a diving suit that enables him to breath liquid oxygen. But like the loader in *Aliens*, the suit is a tool to enable Bud to complete his task, but nothing more – indeed, it provides only enough oxygen to make the descent, not the return journey. Technology does not guarantee humans the ability to do anything; it only facilitates certain endeavours and once the endeavour is complete, the device must be discarded. Bud only survives because the NTs save him, creating an air pocket within their complex where he can breathe.

Bud's encounter with the NTs is strongly indicative of re-birth, a re-birth of the feminine in place of technologised masculinity. When Bud first dons the suit, he is advised by Ensign Monk (Adam Nelson) that his body will remember how to breathe liquid oxygen as that is how a fetus breathes. When the NTs rescue Bud and take him to their submerged city, the image of the city resembles female genitalia, the hero in an embryonic state being taken back into the female body so as to be re-born. The scene between Bud and the NTs explicitly suggests re-birth as he emerges from his liquid oxygen environment into the air pocket, just as a child is born from liquid into air.

Bud's re-birth suggests a re-birth for all humanity, as the NTs threaten to engulf the land with massive tidal waves, but relent because of Bud's sacrifice. Their message to the human race is to "put away childish things," which certainly refers to weapons of mass destruction but perhaps also industrial tools like the rig, as the NTs raise Deep Core to the ocean surface on top

of their complex. Unlike the human technique of creating a self-contained environment to exist

below the sea, the NTs integrate with water, working with their environment rather than in

opposition to it. This integration between body and environment creates a clear contrast between

the presentation of the NTs and the humans, as Lindsey describes:

> I saw these things. I touched one of them. And, it wasn't
> some clunky steel can, like we would build. It glided. It was
> the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Oh, God, I wish you'd
> been there. It was a machine. It was a machine, but it was
> alive. It was like a, like a dance of light.

The NTs are fluid, like their environment, lithe, graceful and integrated – natural in a way that is

different from the social institutions identified by Ryan and Kellner. These institutions pose as

natural for the purposes of control; institutions like marriage and the family, as well as

capitalism, are components of a hegemony used to support a ruling elite. The philosophy of

integration, rather than construction, is the approach and the form of the NTs, contrasted with the

"clunky" machinery of the humans. Rather than the "horrifying otherness"[45] of the creatures in

Aliens, the NTs represent a state better than that of humanity, or perhaps a better state *for*

humanity than the technologised masculinity of the military-industrial complex. The masculine-

coded human machinery is contrasted with the fluid and graceful, i.e. *feminine* NTs, which

literally (once again) emerge from the ocean depths, previously believed to only be accessible

through technologised masculinity.

  While Lindsey and Bud's reunion can suggest a re-establishment of the "natural" social

institution of marriage (anything but natural) it also suggests the potential future for humanity.

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45 Doane, "Science Fiction," 169.

Lindsey and Bud have fought and clashed for much of the film, both with each other and against

Coffey. The reconciliation between them, as well as the reincorporation of Lindsey into the

working-class oil-rig workers, expresses an empathetic engagement and unity that the NTs

promote for all humanity. The aquatic non-terrestrials represent a unified and peaceful society

integrated with their environment, a society that is coded as feminine through their harmonious

relationship with their environment, which contrasts with the technologised masculinity of the

military-industrial complex. Their message to the human nations is to cease their conflicts, i.e.

end the military-industrial complex and "grow out of our infancy." The more mature society is

not something that *The Abyss* shows, but the unity between Bud, Lindsey and the other core

workers may be a starting point – an egalitarian community of feminine empathy and

engagement rather than technologised masculinity. The final shot of Bud and Lindsey reunited

in a loving embrace, on the bright flat surface of the NT complex, is a clean slate. A brave new

world is implied by this image, one in which the concerns of the Cold War can be put aside and

humanity can become something new and better. What this may be is left open, but the

possibility of something better is apparent.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

The potential of a new human society is again desired in *Terminator 2*, though it is only

suggested after a disturbing shift in both the feminine and technological forms. In the film,

Sarah Connor displays a worrisome over-engagement with technology. Previously she

triumphed over technology in order to survive by crushing the Terminator in a hydraulic press –

an autonomous machine destroyed by a device controlled by manual button-pushing. But

Terminator 2 presents a very different Sarah. She is well muscled, her body transformed into a

weapon that is further supplemented by the various firearms she sports during the film. She

therefore embodies the same tension as Schwarzenegger's form,[46] seemingly both biological and

artificial. Unlike Ripley, Sarah (initially) rejects maternity, scolding her son John (Edward

Furlong) for trying to save her and earning his resentment. Finally, she embarks on a mission to

kill (terminate) the creator of Skynet, Miles Dyson.

It is instructive to examine the sequence of Sarah's attempted act of termination. Her

military shirt exposes her muscular arms and shoulders, black sunglasses obscure her eyes and,

in a direct re-working of the original film, she aims at Dyson with a laser sight. By all

appearances, she has become a terminator, technologised through the transformation of her body

into a masculine form, the association emphasised by the extra-textual contrast between Linda

Hamilton and her co-star Schwarzenegger, whose character, paradoxically, becomes more

maternal. While the future Governor of California's role correlates with his more family-friendly

image in 1991 rather than 1984,[47] Hamilton/Sarah's transformation is equally informative.

Sarah's failure to terminate Dyson and her tearful reconciliation with John can be seen as

an instance of Ryan and Kellner's argument about the re-establishment of a conservative social

organisation posing as "natural" that constructs the woman as mother: "the literal truth of nature,

things as they are and should always be."[48] But this would be an overly simplistic reading, since

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46 See Mizejewski, "Action Bodies in Futurist Spaces: Bodybuilder Stardom as Special Effect," 154.

47 See French, *The Terminator*, 69.

48 Ryan and Kellner, "Technophobia," 61.

Sarah remains the leader of her guerrilla force, giving orders to John, the Terminator and Dyson. Like Ripley she becomes a warrior mother, able to integrate these two personae without contradiction or tension. Her initial coldness toward John is part of her dehumanisation; much like Burke who had no empathy, she treats her son only as an object, "too important" to risk himself. Her attempt at being a terminator fails because of empathy: when she sees the wounded and terrified Dyson and his screaming and sobbing family; she experiences empathetic engagement, the film suggesting that if one empathises, one will not kill. It is a recognition of distinctive being-in-the-world, Sarah unable and unwilling to become an inhuman killing machine like that which hunts her son.

Rather than being consigned to a conservative female role of "just a mother," Sarah's acceptance of her maternal role is a rejection of her technologisation, which, with the masculinity associated with muscles and guns, is also a masculinisation. As established, technologised masculinity leads to alienation and dehumanisation. Appropriately, and perhaps ironically, the way to prevent this future is not by killing, which is Skynet's solution as it sends its terminators back in time, but empathetic engagement with others and a transcendence of technology. But while Sarah develops into a more technologised form and then back again, the Terminators have undergone a parallel humanisation.

The problem (for Skynet) that the T-800 had of imitating human behaviour is seemingly resolved in *Terminator 2* with the figure of the T-1000 (Robert Patrick), which unlike the T-800 is "flexible and seemingly more human … slender, has no Austrian accent, and seems a clean cut

American boy."[49] But the T-1000's fluid grace extends beyond its movement, as its form

expresses:

> [T]he very amorphousness of the body in ... the 'postbiological'
> age ... and thus a menace implicit in having no clear shape, no
> definite form.[50]

A further menace in the T-1000 is that it combines human fluidity with mechanical

relentlessness, and therefore expresses technology truly replacing humanity, which makes

humans obsolete. Its ability to imitate anything it touches constitutes a technological fantasy of

"creation without the mother";[51] masculinised technology has superseded humanity. The two

terminators, both representations of the male within the diegesis and as part of the films'

respective spectacles, express different technophobias – the first an ambiguous state between

organic and artificial, the second a loss of definition, distinctiveness and identity. These

machines represent the creative drive of Skynet, "self-moving, self-designing, autonomous,"[52]

technology replacing the organic and being "disturbingly lively."[53] The artificial intelligence

portrayed in *Terminator* presents humanity as obsolete, this obsolescence our own termination.

Despite its physical adaptability, the T-1000 can still be considered inhuman because of

its lack of empathy. But the T-800, the body of Schwarzenegger now revised from its

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49 Larson, "Machine as Messiah," 62.

50 J. P. Telotte, *Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1990), 177.

51 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 70.

52 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *The Cybercultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 293.

53 Ibid., 294.

presentation in the original film, develops beyond its programming. Once the T-1000 is

defeated, the T-800 must also be destroyed – his purpose was to protect John from the T-1000.

With that threat removed, the Terminator's task is complete, so the device must be discarded.

Pyle argues that the film undermines the distinction between human and cyborg: "the triumph of

humans and humanism is made dependent on the humanising of cyborgs."[54] But the triumph of

(feminine) humanity over technology (masculinity) has not only necessitated that the T-1000 be

vanquished – there has also been an ideological battle between empathetic, natural, feminine

humanity and the disregard of the technological, masculine military-industrial complex, of which

Skynet is the ultimate manifestation. For the Terminator, a technologised masculine mechanical

form, to learn empathy and ethics is for it to supersede humanity altogether. As always,

technology is to be discarded – the Terminator declares that the chip in his head "must be

destroyed also." There is double meaning here – not only must he be destroyed to ensure that

Skynet is never built, but he must also be destroyed because his very existence, his physical

superiority combined with what he has learned – "nothing less than genuine human

subjectivity"[55] – makes him the nightmare of human obsolescence. Here is the nightmare that

Pyle does not mention: if the distinction between human and cyborg is lost, what place is there

for humanity? The Terminator's final act of a thumbs-up may be a corny cliché, but it is also an

expression of good luck, the cyborg suggesting that there is potential in that of which he cannot

be part.

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54 Pyle, "Making Cyborgs, Making Humans," 134.

55 Ibid.

The final shot of *Terminator 2* is far more ambiguous than that of the original. Sarah's voiceover mentions "the unknown future" that she faces with "a sense of hope." Rather than the determinism seen previously, what humans will make of their world remains to be seen. Sarah's redemption through the emergence of her feminine humanity from her technologised masculinity, combined with the rejection of technology that would supersede humanity, demonstrates that there is an alternative to the military-industrial complex. With his next two films, Cameron explores different genres including action comedy and historical romance. But his next science fiction film, released eighteen years after *Terminator 2*, presents the egalitarian community to which all his films had been leading.

Avatar

Concerns present in both *Terminator* and *The Abyss* receive full expression in *Avatar*. The better society into which humanity can develop takes shape in the society of the Na'Vi, a race that is alien, but, within the film's ideology, in possession of more humanity than the human characters. The Na'Vi are a pre-industrial, egalitarian community, engaged with its environment and its members with each other in a way that the Earthlings cannot be because of the alienation of the technologised masculinity of the military-industrial complex. The Na'Vi use the term "see" to denote an understanding of one's place within the environment and within society, and are scornful of humans' inability to see. The journey of Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) over the course of *Avatar* is to learn to see with new eyes, and in doing so he undergoes a re-birth into a more integrated and therefore natural state of being, a state that is coded as feminine.

As in Cameron's previous films, the heroes are working class, but with a greater contrast than those discussed by Kendrick. In *Avatar*, the working class heroes are aligned with the pre-industrial Na'Vi, and the capitalists are so alienated that they work entirely in abstracts. The company executive Parker Selfridge explains the reason for the human presence on Pandora, that the mineral unobtanium "sells for 40 million a kilo." Exactly why unobtanium is so valuable is never explained – the value is an abstract concept as are the driving forces behind the mining operation: shareholders hate "a bad quarterly statement." These exploitative forces have ravaged Earth to such an extent that Jake explains "there's no green there"; capitalist forces are so divorced from their environment that it has been completely destroyed. This alienation is more apparent on Pandora, as humans cannot breathe the atmosphere of the planet at all and so are dependent on breathing masks to survive. Combined with the machines used to move through the forest, Earthlings are presented as physically alienated from their surrounding environment by a carapace of technology, technology which, as always, is masculine due to its burly, stocky shape and aggressive, dominating purpose. The technologised masculinity of the military-industrial complex receives its most blatant display in *Avatar*: a rapacious, ruthless exploitation of the natural environment for the purposes of high numbers on quarterly statements. This is the logical conclusion of the technologised masculinity of the military-industrial complex.

Avatar has received criticism for its depiction of disability,[56] but the significance of Jake's crippled body is not that it is disabled, rather that it is a product of the military-industrial complex. Jake's paralysis is caused by his military service; he moves with the aid of a machine,

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56 See Michael Petersen, Laurie Beth Clark, and Lisa Nakamura, "I See You?: Gender and Disability in *Avatar*," (flowtv.com, February 2010), http://flowtv.org/2010/02/i-see-you-gender-and-disability-in-avatarmichael-peterson-laurie-beth-clark-and-lisa-nakamura/ (accessed 31st October 2010).

other Marines disparage him as "meals on wheels," and Quaritch promises him that further

technological procedures will repair his spine. Technology does have its benefits in *Avatar*

though, as it is through the biotechnology of the avatar programme that Jake is able to experience

Pandora and eventually transcend the alienated human condition. The irony is that the avatar

body is *more* human than the human form, because the human body has become dependent upon

technology to survive, but the avatar body can live in the natural environment, and live in a way

that is more visceral, more alive and more natural than the human form – as Jake explains in his

video diary: "It's like out there is the true world, and in here is the dream."

Jake's awakening is similar to Bud's re-birth in the alien complex in *The Abyss*. Both men

emerge into a natural feminine state in contrast to technologised masculinity. Partly this is by

default – the machinery of the humans on Pandora is similar to the "clunky steel can" described

by Lindsey, including space craft, gyrocopters and mechanical suits, the last being very similar to

the loader in *Aliens* (Sigourney Weaver's presence echoes the earlier film as well). By contrast

and like the NTs of *The Abyss*, the Na'Vi are graceful, lithe and integrated with their

environment. Although the Na'Vi are not human, they represent humanity in a more naturally

attuned form, likened by some to indigenous people such as the Native Americas who were

decimated by European colonisation.[57] Therefore, the Na'Vi represent humanity in tune with

nature, rather than the humans who encase themselves in technological shells. Shells such as

these appear to correlate with a notion of augmentation noted by Joshua Clover as appearing

throughout Cameron's oeuvre: "In Cameron's worlds, humans need an augmented hero or they

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57 See Joshua Clover, "The Struggle for Space," *Film Quarterly* 63:3 (March 2010): 6.

simply cannot proceed."[58]   However, as noted above, these devices must be discarded in order to

maintain humanity, as dependence upon them is isolating and ultimately de-humanising.

The Na'Vi's engagement with nature is coded as feminine, especially because of the

cultural connection between nature and the female.[59] The Na'Vi's grace and engagement with

their environment may be a stereotypical version of femininity but it is not restricted to "New

Age-y, hippy-dippy language,"[60] as they are also fierce warriors, skilled hunters and creative

healers, who display genuine insight toward the humans. More explicitly, the principle

representatives of the Na'Vi are Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) and Moat (CCH Pounder), and the

principle human advocate for the Na'Vi is Weaver's Grace Augustine (her name forming a link

with the lithe movements of the Na'Vi) who opposes the male representatives of the mining

operation on Pandora, Colonel Quaritch (Stephen Lang) and Parker Selfridge. Trudy Chacon

(Michelle Rodriguez) is also significant, a female Marine pilot who opposes Quaritch purely on

the basis of her own conscience. Jake has to learn what is human(e) through his experience with

the Na'Vi, but Grace and Trudy know it already.

Most prominent in the natural femininity v. the technologised masculinity battle is Eywa,

the explicitly *maternal* deity of the Na'Vi. Nor does Eywa occupy a purely conceptual space

within the film, as she intervenes in the final battle by sending the animals of Pandora to fight

against the Earthlings. Once again, maternity can be seen as a traditional role of the female, but

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58 Ibid., 7.

59 See, for example, Whitford, *Luce Irigary, 93*.

60 Chris Hewitt, "Review of *Avatar*," *Empire* (December 2009), http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/
reviewcomplete.asp?FID=133552 (accessed 12th February 2011).

on a planetary scale Eywa's role as mother can be read as part of *Avatar*'s reverse anthropology[61]:

the world brings forth life, as does the female, so the female can be read as performing the same

role as the world rather than reading the world in relation to the female. Like Ripley and Sarah,

Eywa is a warrior mother, calling on all resources to defend her children. This natural femininity

is the form and state that Jake, and by extension, all of humanity, must emerge into, a form that is

integrated and engaged with its environment and its people. It is a world and society that also

has "the possibility of certitude in historical knowledge."[62] Neytiri tells Jake stories known to all

Na'Vi people, a shared history that gives them certainty and reinforces their engagement with

their environment, past and present. The mother's presence, in this case Eywa, provides stability

and identity, rather than the indistinct industrial production that threatens to replace humanity.

With an assured history and mutual support, the Na'Vi community is a pre-industrial, egalitarian

society engaged with its environment and its inhabitants with each other, a healthy and viable

alternative to our capitalist, fragmented, isolated and (according to the Na'Vi) "insane" society.

Conclusion

Over the course of his career, James Cameron has built a series of cinematic worlds, worlds that

required the development of new cinematic technologies and that broke new ground in cinematic

budgets, box office success and spectacle. Yet the concerns of these films have remained

traditional stories of archetypal characters facing and triumphing over adversity for the sake of

distinctiveness and engaged being-in-the-world. In addition, the sources of adversity and the

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61 See Rupert Read, "*Avatar*: A Call to Save the Future," *Radical Anthropology* 4 (November 2010): 38.

62 Doane, "Technology, Representation, and the Feminine," 175.

types of triumph have shown remarkable consistency across a range of genres. Cameron

demonstrates many of the typical concerns of science fiction, but while arguments have been

made about the conservative conclusions in regards to gender roles, individual supremacy and

the transparent display of capital, I have suggested here that a more radical ideology is present in

Cameron's films. The worlds created by Cameron are not unfamiliar, as they all represent a

"*mundane* logic of technological modernity,"[63] a military-industrial complex that removes

humanity and alienates us from each other. As our world becomes ever more technologised and

masculinity remains a depressingly dominant force in government, business and the military,

maybe there is something to be learned from representations that advocate a more egalitarian,

natural and feminine society.

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63 Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," 126.

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