



THE DAY WHEN EVERYBODY GOT ON THE NOSTROMO

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Alien by Ridley Scott was released on 25 May 1979, changing the paradigm of science fiction and horror. Based on a simple premise, Scott and his screenwriter, Dan O'Bannon, presented an alien which threatened the crew's survival and the success of the mission. *Alien*, despite being produced on a low budget, had an original concept. Its influences include elements from classic science fiction movies like *Planet of the Vampires* (Mario Bava, 1965) and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954) mixed with H. R. Giger's style in *Necronomicon's* (1977) to create this new horrific story (Biodrowski, 2008).

The cinematic horror genre presents monstrosity as an abnormal disturbance that threatens normal stability, causing fear and repulsion in protagonists when they confront these new realities. The ubiquity of the 1970s US productions introduced horror into mainstream culture as proven by *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975). In the midst of this surge in Horror, *Alien* emerged and helped transcend the genre boundaries, combining the unstoppable slasher monster able to slay those who confront it and the harassment by haunted houses (Kendrick 2014, 312).

In the 1970s the United States underwent a diverse crisis that challenged the traditional status quo. The patriarchal and white supremacist hierarchy was challenged by countercultural movement and the second feminist wave. Rebel attitudes by female youths in music (Patti Smith), social activism (Michele Wallace, Gloria Steinem) or art (Mary Beth Edelson) struggled against the feminine ideal of the obedient housewife whose only purpose was to satisfy men.

The rupture with traditional feminine submission had a special role in *Alien* because the protagonist, the Lieutenant Ripley, embodied these new attributes that shaped young women. She is undoubtedly connected to these self-sufficient models who overcame male control. Her successful determination to defeat the alien and her



independence had a huge impact on other heroines featured in subsequent sci-fi action films like Sarah Connor (*Terminator*, James Cameron, 1984). Nevertheless, Ripley's active participation in her survival broke with chance as explanation and put her on a par with her male counterparts such as Dallas, the captain of *Nostromo*. Broadly, the female survivor became an archetype explored by horror films in contemporary titles like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) or *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Indeed, not only did this gender role reversal force the audience to identify with a non-normative woman but she also represented the refusal of the idea that powerful corporations could erode democracies and social improvements in order to obtain profitable results (Faithful 2017, 352). Furthermore, the producers crucially decided to transform the masculine version of Ripley into a woman, played by Sigourney Weaver (Biodrowski, 2008), which changed the sci-fi cinematic paradigm forever.

The new action heroine originated in a new kind of Horror cinema that, unlike the previous movies, broke with the paranoid Cold War fear of invasion and *Alien* updated it to symbolise the othering of male anxieties. In this sense, the phallic penetration of Kane, one of the workers, by the creature piercing his body, symbolises the masculine fear of being objectified and removed from the place of hegemonic success. Secondly, his body is discarded after fulfilling its use; applying a capitalist reading to this exploitation of the body fuels the anxiety of being consumed by capitalism. Kane's rape and his subsequent killing by an alien striving to survive, "evoke[s] male fear towards their human body and its crisis of masculinity" (Martyn Bogira 2017, 6).

Finally, *Alien's* legacy continues to the present in various ways. Firstly, the popularity of this title brought about the production of six subsequent titles, including its sequels: *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992) and *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997); and its prequels, both produced by Ridley Scott, *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien Covenant* (2017). Secondly, his reputation has transcended the cinematic frontier into a transmedia universe, whose stories are cultivated in video games (for instance, *Alien: the Computer Games* in 1986, or *Alien: Isolation* in 2014) or in comic books (*Alien: the illustrated story* in 1979). Indeed, this universe extended to another transmedia crossover, entitled *Alien vs. Predator*. Ultimately, *Alien* can be understood as a landmark popular film that changed not only science fiction and horror, fostering genre hybridization, and how it also shaped the conception of extraterrestrial places and the new roles that women would perform.



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