

Abstract

Science fiction cinema is often used as a platform for projecting contemporary anxieties to their extremity in a manner that is not possible through other, more realist genres. This contributes to what can be seen as the genre's inherently subversive quality because the fantastical diegesis lends itself to a covert and metaphorical critique of the accepted social order. Given the subversive possibility of the genre, this thesis seeks to establish the relationship between science fiction and feminism, as a movement which also endeavours to interrogate the structures of the social order and in particular the position of women within this order. As science fiction cinema demonstrates a sympathy towards the discourses of the marginalised in its depictions of encounters with alterity it provides an appropriate terrain from which to articulate the concerns of feminism.

As contemporary anxieties develop through successive generations, so too does the subject matter dealt with by science fiction. Historically, an integral theme of the genre has been the anxiety surrounding man's inability to control the technology that he has created. Modern films reflect these anxieties as pertaining to technologies that are more biological in nature, such as reproductive technologies and genetic engineering. It is regarding these issues that the concerns of feminism particularly intersect with science fiction. In the latter decades of the twentieth century the feminist agenda sought to free women from the belief that having children is an expected and natural part of a woman's life cycle. Attaining this freedom meant a recognition of the reproductive process as an individual choice. However, in recent years the rapid pace of biotechnological innovation has served to scientifically distance women from the reproductive role. It is in response to this that feminist theorists now see the importance of reaffirming the position of the mother in contemporary culture.

The role of the mother has often been overlooked or repressed by the strand of psychoanalytic theory which underpins the dominant Western ideology. It is my contention that it is precisely because this role has not been over determined that it presents feminism with an invaluable point from which to reassess the position of women within Western society. In this thesis I will begin by exploring the way in which the role of the mother has been repressed or according to Julia Kristeva, made 'abject.' In my second chapter I will then go on to examine how biotechnologies have vested control of the maternal body in the hands of the scientist and the implications of this for women. Finally I will analyse the maternal identity and in the context of this the dangers of essentialism. In order to illustrate my argument in the framework of the science fiction genre I have chose to focus particularly on a selected group of films, *Code 46*, *Children of Men* and the *Alien* trilogy. As they are set in the near future the first two films facilitate a more direct engagement with the fears surrounding the imminent outcome of reproductive technologies. To balance this the *Alien* trilogy, which is set in the indeterminate future provides the means for a more metaphorical exploration of the role of the mother.