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Between Friends and Enemies: Ridley Scott's *Alien*

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I. Introduction

Within an academic context, Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic *Alien* (1979) has largely been understood and discussed through feminist and psychoanalytic vocabularies—often with a specific focus on the relationship between the main character Ripley and the monster. That the film lends itself to these perspectives is underscored above all by the spaceship's peculiar architecture (e.g. narrow, dark ventilation shafts), which at times looks like a materialization of the unconscious. To Rebecca Bell-Mettreau, the film thus explores issues regarding "maternal attachment" (217), while James H. Kavanaugh focuses on the film's generally "strong feminist message" (99). This message is further elaborated by Janice Hocker Rushing, who reads *Alien* as "an archetypical view of the evolution of feminine consciousness" (2), whereas Jeffords critically argues that the feminist ideology in the film is "victorious only because it accepts the view of a corporate masculism at the expense of relations between women" (73). To Robert Torry, however, the film's ultimate purpose is "finally an exposure of the distressing aspects of the phallic ideal represented in the triumphant Ripley, an ideal initially embodied in the alien creature itself, the Imaginary Other whose position she ultimately assumes" (344). Other readings focus more narrowly on the birth motif. Thus, John L. Cobbs argues that "sexual symbolism and iconography of a singular kind are pervasive throughout the film and may actually be its *leitmotif*. What *Alien* is about is gestation and birth" (198, italics mine). Within a more historical perspective, albeit still with a strong emphasis on the feminist/psychoanalytic perspective, A. Robin Hoffman more recently has argued that *Alien* (and *Rosemary's Baby*) constitutes "social documents of the growing horror of pregnancy experienced by both women and sympathetic men from the 1960s up to the 1980s, as reproductive technology and legal actions colluded to empower the fetus at

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the expense of the previously sacrosanct pregnant woman" (241). Although differing on the assessment of the film's critical potential, the discussions seem to agree on reading *Alien* as — in Thomas Vaughn's words — "a template for tracing the cultural contest over the meaning of the feminine, especially in relation to gendered social practices such as motherhood" (424).[1]

In this article, however, I want to pursue an argument suggesting that such theoretical frameworks — powerful and compelling, no doubt — at the same

1. That the feminist/psychoanalytic perspectives dominate, to an overwhelming extent, the reception of the film seems in retrospect to say more about the theoretical climate of the last two decades of the 20th century—than the film itself. Examples of this theoretical dominance abound, including Bell-Mettreau's "Woman"; Ambrogio, Anthony. "*Alien*: In Space, No One Can Hear Your Primal Scream." *Eros in the Mind's Eye*, edited by Donald Palumbo, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 169–79; Barale, Michele Aina. "When Lambs and Aliens Meet: Girl-Faggots and Boy-Dykes Go to the Movies." *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*, edited by Dana Heller, Indiana UP, 1997, pp. 95–106; Carveth, Donald, and Naomi Gold. "The Pre-Oedipalizing of Klein in (North) America: Ridley Scott's *Alien* Re-Analyzed." *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, 1999, www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/l_carveth-the_pre_oedipalizing_of_klein_in_north_a. Accessed Aug. 2016; Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1993; Doherty, Thomas. "Gender, and the *Aliens* Trilogy." *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, U of Texas P, 1996, pp. 181–99; Goode, Tabitha. "Abstract Representational Space: Uncanny Aliens and Others (Pandora, or Prometheus's Return)." *Camera Obscura*, vol. 40, no. 41, 1997, pp. 245–74; Gallardo-C., Ximena, and Jason Smith. *Alien Woman: The Making of Lt. Ellen Ripley*. Continuum, 2004; Greenberg, Harvey R. "Reimagining the Gargoyle: Psychoanalytic Notes on *Alien*." *Camera Obscura*, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 86–109, and "Fembo: *Aliens*' Intentions." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1988, pp. 165–71; Herman, Chad. "Some Horrible Dream about (S)mothering': Sexuality, Gender, and Family in the *Alien* Trilogy." *Post-Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1997, pp. 36–50; Jennings, Ros. "Desire and Design: Ripley Undressed." *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, edited by Tamsin Wilton, Routledge, 1995, pp. 193–206; Melzer, Patricia. *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought.* U of Texas P, 2006; Penley, Constance, et al, editors. *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*. U of Minnesota P, 1991; Taubin, Amy. "The 'Alien' Trilogy: From Feminism to AIDS." *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, edited by Pam Cook and Philip Dodd, Temple UP, 1993, pp. 93–100; Weinstock, Jeffrey A. "Freaks in Space: 'Extraterrestrialism' and 'Deep-Space Multiculturalism'." *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, New York UP, 1996, pp. 327–37; and Wood, Robert E. "Cross Talk: The Implications of Generic Hybridization in the *Alien* Films." *Studies in the Humanities*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1988, pp. 1–12.

time deflect attention from the *literalness* of what is perhaps the film's most fundamental, albeit at the same time most latent, conflict, namely the one that touches upon the question which sets in motion the entire plot of the film: Why is it so crucial for The Company to bring back a specimen of this strange and dangerous life form to earth?

Initially, the film seems to suggest that the reason why this life form is so valuable to The Company—much more valuable than the 20,000,000 tons of mineral ore, not to speak of the lives of the crew—relates to business matters; a perfect biological weapon that would yield an enormous advantage in warfare. This premise remains, however, *literally* unspoken—even if it is hinted at by Science Officer Ash, who expresses uninhibited admiration for the creature. Ash's semi-erotic admiration for the creature, as well as MUTHR's brutal rejection of the crew's still more desperate requests for help to pacify this strange being, seems, however, to indicate that the real issue at stake here relates to something rather different than simply business matters; the 20,000,000 tons of mineral ore (that is, the commercial) simply means very little in relation to the real value the creature apparently represents. But what is this kind of value that exceeds commercial interests?[2] To answer this question, I want to argue that it is necessary to pursue the *literal* traces in the film; that is, not the film as a psychological allegory, but as a concrete articulation of a political problem. In the beginning of the film, as the crew wakes up from a long slumber, a remarkably radiant atmosphere of tranquility and edenic peace surrounds the place—as though we momentarily witness the dawn of the first people on earth. This slow-motion opening scenario transitions into a breakfast scene during which the mood is jovial, cosy, and cantankerous at times. The camera moves slowly around the breakfast table at which people—some still in bathrobes, others casually dressed (with the exception of Ash, who is wearing a uniform)—exchange jokes, high fives, plates, and jars while the cat sits comfortably on the table, in front of Ripley. Stylistically, the literalness of the film's opening is pivotal in terms of creating a contrasting background for what is about to happen (i.e. alien carnage). Thematically, however, it also plays a crucial role in the sense that it lays the seeds for the remaining plot line; this

2. And even if one accepts the premise that the alien life form is valuable in a commercial sense (e.g. as a valuable new weapon), it is a value that ironically is valuable only because it is so destructive that it threatens to destroy everything, including the realm of the commercial.

is, in other words, an overture that literally reveals *why* it is so important to establish a relation to the alien life form.

The breakfast scene; jovial, cosy, cantankerous at times. The crew members evidently feel safe and secure, even cheerful, as they expect to be back on earth soon. Some people grumble about banalities—like feeling cold and salary issues. The conflicts (e.g. between Captain Dallas and Engineer Parker) are everyday-like and trivial. In other words, the crew members find themselves in the midst of MUTHR's safe bosom. Parker and Brett want higher bonuses, which apparently everyone else gets, but Dallas firmly reminds them about what they initially signed up for: "You get what is agreed in your contract." When Dallas informs the crew that a strange transmission has been intercepted, Science Officer Ash reminds everyone that they have a duty to investigate it—again, by referring to their contractual obligations.[3] The scene ends with Parker sullenly observing that the only good thing onboard is the coffee. Banal, mundane, and seemingly irrelevant in terms of what follows, the breakfast scene is nevertheless absolutely central because it *literally* portrays a conflict between individual desire (Parker and Brett's desire for a higher bonus) on the one hand and collective duties (the contract) on the other. This conflict, I want to argue in the following, constitutes the entire raison d'être of what subsequently unfolds; what we witness here, in embryonic form, is nothing less than the subversion of social life, or, the weakening of the state—that is, citizens dissatisfied with the social contract because of their individual desires.[4]

The German legal philosopher Carl Schmitt feared the weak state above anything else;[5] far more dangerous than any alien monsters was in his view the *discontent citizen*—like Engineers Parker and Brett, who simply want more for themselves while deliberately disregarding, if not undermining, the

3. Quoting the contract verbatim, Ash says: "There is a clause in the contract which specifically states: any systematized transmission indicating a possible intelligent origin must be investigated […] at penalty of total forfeiture."
4. As I will later show, the film may be divided into four parts: Invagination (of Kane's body), scene of birth (the alien emerging from Kane's body), zone of exception (the fight against the alien monster), and finally victory (Ripley beating the monster). What this development reveals is a gradual escalation of the latent conflict during the breakfast scene—one that becomes increasingly uncontrollable, unpredictable and hostile.
5. This is the main theme in Schmitt's *Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, but it is a concern that runs through many of his other publications, including *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political.*

community.[6] The leader, Captain Dallas, insists on the contract's legal validity; the contract is legal, bureaucratic, and commercial—or one could say that it is *depoliticized*, that is, it contains no *political* values. Schmitt wanted to restore the concept of the political—which, I argue in this article, is precisely what the secret mission of the Nostromo spaceship is essentially about; to restore the political within the realm of a weakened political discourse, a weakened state in which individuals increasingly have become obsessed with narrow egotistic and commercial interests as well as individual rights.[7]

In this article, I want to present a reading of *Alien* that seeks to illuminate the film's latent political conflict. This is a conflict that in many ways approximates Schmitt's concept of the political, especially his reinterpretation of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. The article will focus in particular on Schmitt's notion of the state of exception, the sovereign, and the connections between these concepts and the notion of the damned, ostracized life, the *homo sacer*. In other words, this article will attempt to illuminate the political dynamic played out in *Alien*; a dynamic that—at least since Hobbes's *Leviathan*—has constituted one of the most acute (and as yet un-resolved) socio-political problems regarding the organisation of collective life.

Ⅱ. Leviathan and Behemoth

According to Schmitt, the depoliticized, weak state leads to discord, and eventually civil war and chaos; the most fundamental task of the state is to prevent this scenario. Hence, the state's ideological task, which at the same time becomes the film's ideological task, is to shift the focus from the real danger (the discontent citizen) to an external, perhaps imagined or random, danger—like the alien. One of the crucial sources behind Schmitt's concept of the political is his interpretation of Hobbes's political theory, more specifically Leviathan's struggle against Behemoth. At the core of this theory, we find the anecdotal

6. Actually, Brett and Parker jeopardize the entire mission (because of their discontent with the salary conditions) when they deliberately and unnecessarily extend the time it takes to fix the engine. Their antisocial behavior thus threatens the unity of the community.
7. It would be too simple here to read Parker and Brett as representatives of the working class only. What seems much more important is simply the fact that they are subordinates, employees, i.e. ordinary—and supposedly obedient—citizens.

narrative about a distant past during which individuals co-existed in a society ruled by no one — the so-called "state of nature."[8] In this state of nature, nothing of real value exists; there are no communal values, no justice, no prosperity or creativity. Even though each individual in principle possesses absolute rights, these rights are worthless insofar as there is no entity — except the individual him- or herself — to enforce the validity of these rights. Thus, no one can be satisfied with a situation in which everyone may be radically free, but at the same time must fear everyone else (who would equally be entitled to do whatever he or she likes, e.g. rob your house). Life in the state of nature is, as Hobbes formulates it in a famous sentence from *Leviathan*, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (78). The disorganized, bewildered, and hostile individuals of the state of nature eventually realize the benefits of abandoning their claim to absolute individual freedom — in order to attain peace, security, and prosperity. Precisely this rational impulse becomes the foundation of the state, the Leviathan: the state that miraculously transforms individuals into citizens.[9]

Subsequently, Hobbes's theory of the foundation of the modern political state has been interpreted in widely different ways. According to the liberal interpretation, the rational impulse of the individual, i.e. that which eventually leads to the forfeiture of absolute individual rights, eventually triumphs with the creation of the state.[10] The state creates the legal framework solely devoted to serving the promotion of individual prosperity and development. The relation between state and citizens thus essentially becomes a question about contractual justification, that is, the extent to which there is a legitimate *correspondence* between the actions of the state and the interests of the individuals; if this is not the case, the state according to the liberalists becomes illegitimate, unlawful.

Schmitt fiercely rejects this liberal interpretation of Hobbes, because such a reading ignores the presence of the figure of Behemoth, the creator of chaos

8. Cf. Hobbes, Thomas. "XIII: Of the Natural Conditions of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery." *Leviathan*, pp. 76–88.
9. In *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Schmitt writes that the leviathan is a mortal god "who transforms wolves into citizens and through this miracle proves himself to be a god" (31–32).
10. For liberal theorists of Hobbes, see in particular: Strauss, Leo. *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis.* U of Chicago P, 1952; and Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Thomas Hobbes. Leben und Lehre.* Bad Cannstatt, 1971.

and destruction.[11] In his political theory, Schmitt argues, Hobbes essentially outlines the coordinates of a strong government that requires the presence of a powerful sovereign authority. In Schmitt's version of Hobbes, the struggle between the Leviathan and the Behemoth is a permanent one; the horror of the state of nature remains as a latent possibility, even within the legal state. Indeed, this latent horror is the very foundation of the legal state. The state of nature is not merely a historical or geographical place, a place to be excluded, once and for all. Rather, the state of nature is part of ourselves, our psyche; as humans, we are at one and the same time driven by an intense (but destructive and irrational) egotistic lust for power, *and* a capacity for rational thinking, reason. As Schmitt writes:

> [Thomas Hobbes] had no great illusion about human nature. He understood that man is more "asocial" than an animal, full of anguish and worry about the future, driven not only by present but also by potential hunger, *fame futura famelicus*. Possessed by passion of prestige and rivalry, he is at all times determined and ready to trample on reason and logic in order to secure for himself immediate, momentary advantage. But the more dangerously this asocial "individualism" asserts itself, the stronger becomes the rational necessity for reaching peace. (*The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* 36)

The lawlessness of the state of nature entitles the individual with absolute rights (e.g. to plunder and enrich him- or herself through force or violence), but at the same time one's neighbor possesses the exact same rights, which thus makes life constantly insecure.[12] It is a situation that undermines the possibilities of

11. Behemoth is the monster referred to in Job 40:15–24. While Leviathan represents the social order, Behemoth stands for chaos and disorder.
12. As Hobbes in *Leviathan* writes, "Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself. And as to the faculties of the mind […] I find yet a greater equality amongst men than that of strength" (76).

development insofar as one constantly must be cautious of the other's actions and doings—instead of using one's energy on more productive activities.[13]

To Schmitt, the relation between nature and culture is thus never permanently resolved, and hence the Leviathan's role is most definitely not simply of a *historical* nature, but very much one that is needed in the present—if there was no sovereign, the chaos of individuals would reign, i.e. the state of nature. The implication here is that the sovereign should not simply be understood as the *expression* or *representative* of the individuals' wills (even if it is *produced* by them, their rationality); rather, Leviathan to some extent stands in *opposition* to these individual wills. Thus, in *Political Theology* Schmitt observes, "the necessity by which the people always will what is right is not identical with the rightness that emanated from the commands of the personal sovereign. […] The unity that a people represents does not possess this decisionist character" (48–49). Leviathan is the embodiment of this decisionist character and hence a figure ultimately more powerful—more ruthless, more hungry for power—than the individuals, in order to control them.[14]

Ⅲ. Friend or Enemy

It is Ash—as a representative figure of The Company, thereby in a further sense Schmitt's Leviathan—who insists on letting in Executive Officer Kane when the latter has been infected by, or rather *with*, a mystical alien life form. This may seem a bit ironic in the sense that Ash actually looks like he is doing something humane here—in contrast to Ripley, who refuses to open the

13. As Hobbes, in a remarkably ominous passage, observes: "Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death" (78).
14. Refer to page 33 of Schmitt's *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*.

gate (referring to standard quarantine procedures).[15] Soon after, however, Ash shows his real intentions; what he really cares about is not the survival of Kane, but rather the alien life form that has colonized his body. What is interesting here is that whereas Ripley insists on standard procedures, i.e. fixed laws, rules, and regulations (even if this means putting Kane's life at risk), Ash insists on the right to make an *exception*. But what is the nature of this exception, which initially looks like something derived from a humane motivation? Here we need to look more closely at Schmitt's definition of the specifically political—which, to put it simply, is the *ability to distinguish between friends and enemies*.[16] This ability implies that the enemy cannot be determined as an *essence* or *substance*, but only identified in a concrete situation.[17] Ash, one could argue, suspends the law—i.e. makes an exception—in order to establish a relation to the ambiguous, that is, the potential enemy.

In *The Concept of the Political* (henceforth *Concept*), Schmitt argues that liberalism (i.e. the rational-technological conception of politics) potentially leads to disaster, because it reduces and eventually eliminates the political—i.e. it transforms the state into a blind, bureaucratic, and technocratic institution utterly incapable of confronting the real political

15. Ash even plays on this humane motive a little later in the film, when he brushes aside Ripley's accusations that he broke the protocol, saying, "What would you have done with Kane […] His only chance at staying alive was to get into the infirmary." It is an odd argument coming from Ash, given the fact that he at the same time seems most eager to scientifically investigate the anatomy of the "tough little son of a bitch," as he calls it.
16. In *Concept*, Schmitt writes: "The specific political distinctions to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy […] The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation" (26).
17. As for the definition of friend and enemy, respectively, Schmitt writes in *Concept*, "This provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or one indicative of substantial content. Insofar as it is not derived from other criteria, the antithesis of friend and enemy corresponds to the relatively independent criteria of other antitheses: good and evil in the moral sphere, beautiful and ugly in the aesthetic sphere, and so on […] The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly […] *But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible*. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party" (26–27, italics mine).

challenges of government.[18] "Technology," Schmitt writes, "appeared to be a domain of peace, understanding, and reconciliation"—but because it is only an *instrument* and simply intensifies already-existing conflicts: "precisely because it serves all, it is not neutral. No single decision can be derived from the immanence of technology, least of all for neutrality" (*Concept* 91). And, a little later; "technology can do nothing more than intensify peace or war; it is equally available to both" (95). What makes the liberal-technocratic state fatally weak is that it is bound by a set of previously determined general norms, i.e. the constitution.[19] To Schmitt, however, the state—as the ultimate legislator and enforcer of the law—can never protect itself adequately insofar as it must act on the basis of a general, pre-legislated set of laws in relation to any possible situation. The future is profoundly unpredictable, and this is why Schmitt defines the sovereign as *the one who can declare the state of exception*.[20] He writes in *Political Theology*:

> It is precisely the exception that makes relevant the subject of sovereignty […] The precise details of an emergency cannot be anticipated, nor can one spell out what may take place in such a case, especially when it is truly a matter of an extreme emergency and of how it is to be eliminated […] [the sovereign] decides whether there is an extreme emergency as well as what must be done to eliminate it. Although he stands outside the normally valid legal system, he nevertheless belongs to it, for it is he who must decide whether the constitution needs to be suspended in its entirety. All tendencies of modern constitutional development point toward eliminating the sovereign in this sense. (6–7)

18. To Schmitt, this is a general characteristic of *modern* society: "Today," as he writes in *Political Theology*, "nothing is more modern than the onslaught against the political. American financiers, industrial technicians, Marxist socialists, and anarchic-syndicalist revolutionaries unite in demanding that the biased rule of politics over unbiased economic management be done away with. There must no longer be political problems, only organizational-technical and economic-sociological tasks. The kind of economic-technical thinking that prevails today is no longer capable of perceiving a political idea" (65).
19. Or, as Giorgio Agamben formulates it: "Every general rule demands a regular, everyday frame of life to which it can be factually applied and which is submitted to its regulations" (16).
20. This is the opening sentence of *Political Theology*: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (5).

In the concrete situation, when the critically ill Kane stands helplessly outside the spaceship's gate, desperately in need of medical help, this person constitutes an ambiguous being—half friend, half enemy; still recognizable as "Kane" but carrying an alien life form that has covered his face. Ash—as a representative figure of the state, or power as such—desperately wants to *investigate* it, *study* the ambiguity of a life form never observed before (even if he must suspend the rules in order to do so);[21] or, one could argue, *determine* whether it is a friend or enemy, by which—in the same gesture—he restores the *specifically political*.[22] Ripley refuses to open the gate for Kane, while Ash disobeys her order; here, the film provides a neat little exemplification of the difference between the geospatial concept of the state of nature, and what Schmitt calls the state of exception. In the geospatial notion, the state of nature is essentially that which is *outside* the city gate, the wilderness; to Schmitt, this wilderness has now moved *within* the city walls—as the state of exception.[23] In the state of exception, the sovereign—whose rule is premised on the assumption that the future is radically unpredictable—is raised above the general, constitutional law; the sovereign is no longer limited or bound by ordinary, legal norms. To Schmitt, this is essential; as the embodiment of the state, the powerful sovereign must at all times be prepared for the extreme situation, its possibility—the state of nature where rules become invalid, meaningless. Schmitt thus defines the specifically political as something that constitutes its own right, in need of no further justification or explanation, a *causa sui*. It is in this connection, one should understand Schmitt's comment in *Political Theology*, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (36). A little later in the same paragraph, he adds, "The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology" (36). In his book *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Schmitt observes, "In judging

21. When Ripley insists on getting rid of the small alien carcass, Ash responds, "For god's sake, Ripley, this is the first time we've encountered a species like this. It has to go back, all sorts of tests have to be made."
22. The cat Jones is precisely the other-as-friend, whereas the alien is the other-as-enemy. The state wants to distinguish clearly between friend and enemy, and this is why the film from time to time makes these juxtapositions of cat and alien. The state desperately wants the alien to be brought back to earth, but Ripley obstructs this plan and instead brings the cat.
23. See in particular the chapter of Agamben's book "The Paradox of Sovereignty" (15–29) for discussion of Schmitt's internalization of the external (the state of nature).

Hobbes'[s] theory of miracles, one should not forget that at that time that question had a concrete, direct political meaning" (54). What makes a miracle a *miracle* is essentially a political decision: *auctoritas non veritas facit legem*. Or, as Schmitt writes, "Nothing here is true: everything is command. A miracle is what the sovereign state authority commands its subjects to believe is a miracle […] Miracles cease when the state forbids them" (55). The political—political actions—cannot simply be justified or explained mechanically or logically; like God, the sovereign given the task of making political decisions is not bound or limited by scientific rationality, but rules as if guided by miracles. In that sense, Schmitt's sovereign is a kind of secularized god or a monster, a superman.[24]

"Who," asks Schmitt in *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, "is this god who brings peace and security to people tormented by anguish, who transforms wolves into citizens and through this miracle proves himself to be a god, obviously, a 'mortal god,' a *deus mortalis*, as Hobbes called him?" (31–32). Here, Schmitt discerns three different images of Hobbes's political authority, Leviathan; "a huge man, a huge animal, and a huge machine" (19). It is a confusing amalgam of images, with different connotations:

> In the forefront stands conspicuously the notorious mythical *leviathan*, that has assimilated god, man, animal, and machine. Next to it serves a juristically constructed covenant to explain the appearance of one sovereign *person* brought about by representation. In addition, Hobbes transfers […] the Cartesian conception of man as a mechanism with a soul onto the 'huge man,' the state, made by him into a machine animated by the sovereign-representative person. (32)

The machine is what political authority becomes in the liberal interpretation of Hobbes; power as a "gigantic mechanism" (35), a "technical state-administrative (*staatsverwaltungstechnischer*) rationalization" (44), which runs regularly and smoothly according to a set of mechanical procedures, all fixed into place.[25] In *Alien*, this mechanical conception is initially reflected in the crew's relation to the ship's control centre, "MUTHR," an entity that in the beginning

24. In *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Schmitt writes, "Sovereign power […] is God's highest representatives on earth" (55).
25. See in particular Chapter III of *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*.

seems neutral, functional, machine-like—but later in the film develops into a sovereign in the Schmittian sense, acting independently of the individuals' wills (or more specifically *against* the wills of the individuals). Likewise, the job contract (referred to in the beginning of the film when Brett and Parker express dissatisfaction with their salary) and the standard quarantine procedures (referred to when Ripley refuses to open the hatch for Kane) stem from this discourse of a bureaucratic, mechanistic version of Leviathan, the state. Schmitt, as we have seen, wants to move away from this bureaucratic, mechanical, and predictable concept of the state; Leviathan is not only a machine, or merely a representative person—but above all a mythical force: "In its mixture of huge animal and huge machine, the image of the leviathan attains the highest level of mythical force. It strikes at the foundation that is indestructible in the relations between great powers" (49). In order to carry out its sacred task, the state must possess a mythical force, an ability to instill fear; for it is by instilling fear in people that political order is most efficiently created.[26]

Consequently, when citizens once again are confronted with the terrible consequences of their selfishness and greed, they will seek the strong authority—the state as a mythical force—and thus (re-)sign the covenant with the Leviathan.[27] The Leviathan is the one, according to Schmitt, who will make the necessary political decision; to distinguish friends from enemies in a borderland of ambiguity, torn between peace and war, culture and nature. The clarity that the sovereign creates in this borderland of ambiguity, Schmitt believed, would definitively reduce the risk of civil war and state disintegration.[28]

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26. As Schmitt observes in *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*: "The starting point of Hobbes'[s] construction of the state is fear of the state of nature; the goal and terminus is security of the civil, the stately (*staatlichen*) condition" (31). Writing during the tumultuous times of the Weimar Republic's defeat and the rise of Nazism, Schmitt saw himself as a Twentieth-century Hobbes (who wrote *Leviathan* against the background of the English civil wars). See in particular Schmitt's *Ex Captivitate Salus: Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945/47.* 1950. Duncker & Humblot, 2002 for reflections on the similarities between the epoch of Hobbes (and more particularly Hobbes's fear of parliamentarism, which he thought would lead to chaos due to a lack of a strong authority) and Schmitt's own time. Regarding Hobbes's fear of parliamentarism, see his *Behemoth or the Long Parliament.* 1681. Clarendon Press, 2010.
27. Interestingly, a 2017-scheduled Alien-sequel is, according to *IMDb*, entitled *Alien: Covenant*. The few details about this upcoming film reveal that the colony ship is called "Covenant."
28. Some might argue that Schmitt's interpretation of Hobbes rather leads to war and

Ⅳ. Transgression and Power

The need to seek out the ambiguous in order to distinguish friends from enemies is most actively pursued by Science Officer Ash. More generally, however, this movement is reflected in the film's overall structure, which seems to fall into four overall sequences. The first sequence covers the beginning and ends when the alien is brought onboard; at this point, a limit is transgressed (caused by Ash, who ignores Ripley's order to keep Kane in quarantine). The second part begins with Kane's body being investigated, and lasts until the emergence of the alien, during which Kane dies. The third sequence — by far the longest — stretches from the lunch table scene to the point when everyone, except Ripley, is dead. Finally, the last sequence deals with the escape, the detonation of the ship, and Ripley's ultimate battle against the alien — after which she sends a message to earth and goes into stasis along with Jones, the cat. The first sequence could be called invagination (that is, Kane's body becomes a kind of surrogate or host). The second sequence would thus aptly be called the 'birth scene' during which the alien crawls out of Kane's stomach. The third sequence is essentially about the battle (at this point, everyone knows that the alien indeed is an enemy — the Behemoth — not a friend); and the final sequence is about the victory over the Behemoth.

What initiates this development — from a peaceful, scientific, or even humanitarian engagement with a mysterious, ambiguous life form to full-scale war, and eventually life-and-death struggle — is The Company's intention of bringing back a specimen to earth; that is, the secret mission of which initially only MUTHR and Ash are fully aware.[29] As mentioned, The

destruction. As John Locke puts it (with reference to Hobbes): "[M]en are so foolish, that they take care to avoid what mischiefs may be done them by *pole-cats*, or *foxes*; but are content, nay, think it safety, to be devoured by *lions*" (50). Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. 1690. Edited by C. B. Macpherson, Hackett Publishing Company, 1980. The theme — i.e. the difficulties of finding the right balance between human rights and security (or, the state as a guardian and as a demonic force) — is one that more recently has become popular in a number of Hollywood films, including the *Batman*-trilogy by Christopher Nolan and the *Avengers* series.

29. The Science Officer Ash is an ambiguous character, initially a friend but later revealing his true, hostile identity. Ash has been placed onboard the spaceship with the specific purpose of convincing the crew to bring back the alien life form (Dallas used to work with a different Science Officer, who was replaced with Ash a few days before the trip). The fact that he is an android further underscores his affinity with power (and distance

Company apparently wants the alien specimen for military purposes, despite the fact that MUTHR is a commercial ship—and no one among the crew seems particularly trained in military techniques, let alone equipped for a full-scale war or life-or-death struggle. Here, a question emerges; why would a company send a commercial ship on a hostile mission that involves terrible risks, and which actually ends up destroying the entire cargo, the spaceship, and killing all the crew members except Ripley? And, conversely: Why would The Company not simply send a specially trained military unit to capture the alien life form? Above all, why does all this have to be so *secret*?[30] One is tempted here to suggest that the alien form *in itself* seems less important; what *is* important is perhaps rather the *transgression*, the one that relates to the inner/outer distinction, or the state of nature vs. the legal state. As we observed previously, the film begins with a peaceful scene of tranquility and banality—all of which is replaced by an atmosphere of ambiguity as soon as the alien is onboard, and which quickly escalates into a climate of pure terror as the alien turns out to be extremely hostile. From this point, the entire spaceship becomes a zone of exception.

In *Alien*, the safe space is radically sabotaged, as the borderline separating the outside (the state of nature) and the inside (inside the gate) is eliminated when the alien is brought onboard. But what is this strange alien life form? The alien is not only a physical other, but literally emerges from the self, that is, body of the crew.[31] It is an *immaterial* being, an intangible, formless threat, one that constantly changes shape (e.g. it grows from an embryo to a huge monster in very short time), adapts to its surroundings, becomes invisible, disappears in the darkness. At one point the alien almost looks human-like, walking on two legs; at other times, it resembles a fantasy creature from the world of Hieronymus Bosch. The monster seems neither to possess any particular motive nor personality; no intention, no drive—except to destroy and kill. As Ash observes at one point—it is a "survivor without conscience, without guilt or a shadow of moral." The alien does not seem to have its own home, its own

to the crew members, the citizens).

30. One reason why The Company sends a *commercial* ship to fetch the alien life form is perhaps that it wants the monster alive, and thus offers the non-combat crew members as bait.

31. As the embodiment of the state of nature, the alien monster is at one and the same time something concrete, external—but also something inherent in the human psyche; the egotistic lust for power that threatens collective life.

planet; it seems capable of existing only by—literally—taking someone else's territory, a form of life that exists only by invading our home (i.e. Schmitt's definition of the enemy). In a political reading, the film uses the image of the spaceship as a figure of civilized, collective life, drifting and floating around in an endless cosmic state of nature (outside the gate)—which is transformed into a state of exception (the breakdown of the inner/outer distinction). In that sense, the film is to a lesser extent about Ripley's (in the end successful) attempt to eliminate the creature (thus restoring the safe zone), but rather about the fact that they both eventually, in this vast zone of exception, are reduced to homines sacri.[32] Here, one is never entirely clear about what is inside or outside, or who is friend or enemy. The place turns into a zone of indistinction,[33] where everything is confusing since there are no longer any clear boundaries; nothing is safe or stable in this zone—it is the ultimately dangerous place, a location of absolute fear. It is here, in this tormenting space of absolute fear and terror, that power as a mythical force once again finds its legitimacy. This is where we yet again yearn for Leviathan, the secular god powerful enough to take up the fight against the Behemoth, the monster that reduces collective life to terror and fear; ready to reaffirm our allegiance, to (re-)sign the covenant that lifts us out of the state of nature.

V. The Reaffirmation of the Original Social Contract

Within a political perspective, *Alien* basically articulates an attempt to restore fear in society, in order to revive the specifically political; the state as a mythical force rather than bureaucracy or machine (which, according to Schmitt, eventually produces discontent—and thereby irrational, selfish, and disobedient—individuals). By refusing to open the gate for the dying Kane—because of her allegiance to standard quarantine procedures, and in a further sense constitutional laws—Ripley thus refuses to participate in this restoration of fear. The state (or, in the film, euphemized as "The Company") wants to re-establish a relation between individuals and the fearful state of

32. And if we take into account the sequels—*Aliens* (1986), *Alien 3* (1992) and *Alien: Resurrection* (1997)—the attempt to eliminate the alien is evidently unsuccessful; that is to say, the Behemoth is potentially always present.
33. Cf. Agamben 6–7.

nature precisely because this would create the possibility of politics (or, the state as a mythical force, the sovereign who has the right to declare the state of exception). Thus, *Alien* basically tells the story of the state and citizens mutually reaffirming their allegiance to the original social contract; it is the fear of the monster—whatever it may be—that persuades the individuals to lay down their weapons, to abandon their demands for absolute rights, and to sign the contract with the sovereign, Leviathan, who in return promises security and protection. To Schmitt, as we observed earlier, this fight against the Behemoth never ends, it is a continued—potentially infinite—struggle; and because this struggle never really ends, we must continue to support the sovereign. Moreover, this is why Schmitt believes that we must continue to believe in the ultimate *benevolence* of the sovereign—that our fight is ethical, for the ultimate good, that we have the right on our side (and, conversely, that the monster—whatever is out there—constitutes radical evil, which at all times must be destroyed), regardless how arbitrary or bizarre the sovereign's decisions may seem.[34] In liberal society, Schmitt believes, individuals eventually forget why they initially agreed to sign the social contract; after a period of security and prosperity, citizens begin to believe that the barbarism of the past is—a thing of the past.[35] To Schmitt, this is a moment of the utmost danger; dangerous for the state, and dangerous for the individuals. *Alien* is essentially a film that plays through this—some would perhaps call it paranoid, fictitious, or deluded—original scenario at the heart of Hobbes's political theory, the reason why we have a social contract in the first place; and why, subsequently, power acts in the way it does, its raison d'être.[36]

34. In that sense, the state of nature paradoxically *survives in the sovereign* (see Agamben 104–11).
35. In *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Schmitt describes how the monstrous-demonic element of the image of Leviathan disappeared shortly before Hobbes felt compelled to restore it: "the essentially demonic content of the image vanishes between 1500 and 1600. The popular medieval belief in demons, which was still alive in Luther, disappears; the evil spirits change into grotesque or even humorous ghosts. The image of the leviathan experienced a similar fate in the literature of the sixteenth century, which can be seen in the rendition of the devil or the demons from the time of Hieronymus Bosch until the so-called hell of Bruegel" (24).
36. Ironic as these following lines from *The Concept of the Political* may seem in retrospect (written in 1929, a few years before Schmitt became heavily involved in the Nazi party), Schmitt was clearly aware of the difficulty of legitimizing a political cause: "the most terrible war is pursued only in the name of peace, the most terrible oppression only in

But in *Alien* the danger is not fictitious, imaginary—it is very real. The monster is ruthless, lethal, unreasonable in the extreme; apparently motivated by reasons beyond the rational or comprehensible, the alien is the ultimate killer. At the same time, the film asks the question whether this danger is in fact not actually a danger we ourselves are creating. *Alien* seems to indicate that in the biopolitical epoch, the state needs to renegotiate the original social contract because its subjects have become indifferent, self-satisfied, complacent—like Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's last men.[37] In other words, the state needs to restore the state of nature, in order to relocate and redefine itself as the sovereign, the one with absolute power, offering peace and protection in return for allegiance, support. The power to send citizens into their deaths, for example, if the state feels threatened; this was the original agreement—power as absolute.[38] Here, it is rather the state sending its citizens into their death so that they may remember why they would need the absolute sovereign in the first place.

VI. Power's Desire for Power

The alien is the ultimate other, impossible in every way; a life that cannot live, a death that cannot die. It is a figure of indifference (unreasonable, motivated by nothing, tempted only by the prospect of killing indiscriminately), a continual transition between human and animal, nature and culture. The alien is a perfect organism, as Ash observes; perhaps life in its purest form,[39]

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the name of freedom, the most terrible inhumanity only in the name of humanity" (95).

37. Nietzsche's last man is the antithesis of the overman, a despicable person with no desire or ambition apart from deriving as much material pleasure from existence as possible (Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Zarathustra's Prologue." 1883–1885. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge UP, 2006, pp. 254–63).
38. Cf. Foucault, Michel. "Right of Death and Power over Life." *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 258–72. In this essay, Foucault writes: "For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death" (258).
39. Within a biopolitical perspective, *Alien* can be read as a film about the fantasy of the destruction of human life. The Company wants to bring back alien life to earth. Biopolitics essentially involves the idea of optimizing life to its maximum potential. Once this life has reached or even exceeded its maximum potential, it turns into a monstrosity, and hence a biological danger; a life that knows no borders, limits, and

yet at the same time pure monstrosity—a life that is outlawed, but which also threatens the law that outlaws it. The state is aware that such a dangerous life form cannot simply be kept outside the city gate, excluded; it must be controlled in a different way. Ripley is in a sense the old-fashioned soldier who attempts to keep out the state of nature, protect the city gate in order to maintain a clear distinction between outer and inner. Thus, she attempts to defend and preserve the realm of blissful, communal ignorance, where people may peacefully interact and do business with each other (which is precisely the state's problem; this activity makes the state's absolute sovereignty superfluous).[40] The latent project in the film is thus a reorganization of power, one that is capable of dealing with the ambiguities of a new geospatial reality, an *exceptional* power. This also explains why the film operates with a covert plot; the secret mission of the Nostromo spaceship, unbeknownst to the crew, is the concrete expression of power's desire for the state of exception, the suspension of rules.[41] The spaceship's control centre, MUTHR, constitutes here the voice of the state—anonymous, yet omnipresent. It is MUTHR—as well as Ash, the physical embodiment of MUTHR—who covertly wants to bring alien life form back to earth. The state has one set of interests, the citizens have another. The citizens are interested in commercial, material aspects; the salary, the bonus, the room temperature, the food, and coffee. To Schmitt, all of this leads to a weakening of the state (i.e. the state as pure machine), gradually being undermined by discontent, selfish individuals. Only when the alien turns out to be a pure enemy will these individuals begin to understand the importance of collaboration, collectivity, sacrifice—and thus the raison d'être of the state—instead of blindly pursuing their individual, material concerns.

The film's actual theme is thus less related to the battle against the alien, even if most of the film consists of battle; that is to say, *when* the battle begins, very little actually happens in terms of plot development. At this point, the subjects yet again find themselves in the state of nature, and thereby positioned in a direct relation to a monstrous scenario, which thus legitimizes power's right

hence a life that must be eliminated.

40. In *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Schmitt observes that the state in the liberal epoch "was regarded as historically timebound, a transient affair, and at any rate it was expected that the state would make itself superfluous in time" (35).
41. This is a general theme in all the Alien films; power wants to become even more powerful. This ambition turns into a nightmare which ultimately threatens to destroy power.

to declare the state of exception. The more monstrous the anomaly—alien, or Behemoth—acts, the more the state is justified in acting monstrously. *Alien* illustrates how the sovereign—first and foremost represented through MUTHR and Ash, but subsequently through the citizens, the crew, and finally Ripley, the individual—and the state of nature (embodied by the alien) are united in an indissoluble alliance that forms the basis of the social contract. The alien is that which challenges the law, and the guardian of the law, the sovereign, and which thus necessitates that the law suspends itself in order to remain intact, that is, lawful; the law must operate in a vacuum, an empty space (or, literally, the outer space), in order to defend itself. It is thus to a lesser extent important as to whether the alien may eventually be defeated (and similarly, to Schmitt, it is less important whether the state of nature is a real, prehistoric stage—or simply a necessary fiction). What *is* important is the fact that it may always potentially be activated; and if the state of nature is potentially always present, the sovereign's right to declare the state of exception must equally be possible at all times. Conversely, if the anomaly, the state of nature, is no longer potentially present, one would no longer need the absolute sovereign—whose real manifestation of power is always in the end the right to declare the exception, suspend the constitution—in which case the social contract would be void, and the institution of the state as such would become superfluous.

In *Alien*, and the subsequent sequels, power constantly attempts to bring back the monster.[42] Power is the unarticulated position in the film, operating indirectly, through intermediaries, proxies, representatives, agents. In its immediate representation, it constitutes a kind of malign capitalism ("The Company"), which cares little for human lives[43] (and even less about the 20,000,000 tons of mineral ore) in its brutal pursuit of profit. But underneath this immediate representation, one finds a more purified version of power, whose interests go far beyond the commercial; it is power's desire for—power, pure and simple, absolute and sovereign. Power needs to reestablish itself, even in the remotest corners of the universe (again, literally, in outer space), which

42. In *Aliens*, Ripley is sent back into the state of nature with a division of the Elite Colonial Marines; in *Alien 3*, the authorities attempt to capture Ripley as she is about to give birth to an alien queen; and in *Alien: Resurrection*, some two hundred years later, Ripley has been cloned (partly with alien DNA), while the alien in her stomach—before she committed suicide—was captured and saved by the authorities.
43. MUTHR brutally informs Ripley that the crew is "expendable."

comes about through the figure of the alien. This is the reason why power cannot help itself from bringing back the alien, create contact, bait and provoke it into action—because without this monstrous anomaly, power would have no legitimacy, no substance. In a liberal interpretation of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the unwitting and unfortunate resurrection of the alien would constitute a horror scenario; a warning of what power's ruthless desire for power may turn into when things go wrong.[44] Within the Schmittian perspective, however, the point is rather that if one forgets the state's power, things will escalate into terror—with the victory of pure monstrosity, and consequently the defeat of civilization as such.

Ⅶ. Ripley, Citizen: Enemy of the State

The heroism of Ripley is underlined throughout the film; at every turn she opposes the sovereign's project. As the Warrant Officer onboard the spaceship, Ripley is the first to realize that the distress signal is in fact a warning signal, she rightly refuses to open the hatch for Kane, she has no interest in investigating the alien (and again Ash is her direct opponent here), and she finally destroys the monster, thus preventing it from being brought back to earth (which of course was the main objective of the secret mission). If The Company's ethos in large parts follows the Schmittian interpretation of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Ripley represents the liberal perspective. Ripley is the one who insists on the *literalness*—the *fixity*—of the social contract, the foundation of the idea of the state as a machine. Ash attempts to kill her, rather than the alien, precisely because she constitutes a greater threat to power. As a representative of the liberal tradition, Ripley insists on the constitution; to her, the negotiation of the social contract is over—there is nothing more to be negotiated. To Schmitt, as we have seen, this liberal interpretation weakens and ultimately undermines the state, its absolute power. The crew onboard the spaceship Nostromo is devoted to commercial mine harvesting, but unwittingly becomes part of a war mission—or, rather, a mission that is essentially about establishing a relation to the state of nature, whose possibility everyone in the beginning of the film

44. The alien form represents not only horror as such, but more specifically a horror that we (or, more precisely, our predecessors—as the prequel *Prometheus* reveals) ourselves have invented; a parasitic life created in an experiment that went horribly wrong.

seems to have forgotten. This is also the reason why no one onboard carries any weapons; because they believe that there is no longer anything to fear (a further indication of the—perceived—redundancy of the sovereign). When the monster finally reveals itself, the only weapons they can produce include a net, electric prods, an improvised flamethrower, a tracking device.[45] From peaceful citizens, unprepared for—and unwilling to engage in—combat, to soldiers fighting a war on behalf of the sovereign, the crew members are forced into the state of nature, forced to operate outside the law. Ripley, of all people, becomes a representative of the state. She wants to avoid the state of nature, but must go through it in order to get out of it. That Ripley actually in the end more or less single-handedly manages—against all odds—to defeat the monster, makes her, paradoxically, an enemy of the state (even if it is the state itself that has forced her into this position).

Giorgio Agamben observes at one point that the sovereign and the figure of homo sacer constitute the two extreme positions along the political axis; in relation to the sovereign, we are all potentially homines sacri; in relation to the figure of the homo sacer, we are all potentially sovereign.[46] *Alien* sets things into motion when the sovereign (represented by MUTHR and Ash) decides to sacrifice its citizens (thus turning them into homines sacri); eventually, Ripley emerges as a sovereign, slaying the Behemoth, the homo sacer. Ripley is the citizen who unwillingly becomes the provisional sovereign in the state of nature, and thus paradoxically a rival to the state, making it superfluous by eliminating the monster.[47] Incidentally, this is why—throughout the four *Alien* films—an increasingly sympathetic relationship is established between Ripley and Alien, which culminates with Ripley becoming the mother of an

45. One could make the argument that the crew is barred from using fire arms because it would involve a high risk of damaging the spaceship (especially considering the fact that the alien's blood is extremely corrosive). Even so, there is no indication that the spaceship contains any combat weapons, e.g. to be used outside the spaceship.
46. Agamben writes: "At the two extreme limits of the order, the sovereign and *homo sacer* present two symmetrical figures that have the same structures and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns" (84).
47. From the perspective of power, the best thing that could have happened would no doubt have been if the ship returned with only the alien onboard—as a pure, destructive machine.

alien, and finally an alien herself.[48] Power's real enemy is thus not the alien, but rather Ripley (whom the state — throughout the series — treats with increasing suspicion) in the sense that she elevates herself to the position of the sovereign (albeit in the liberal sense, the state as a machine).[49] With Ripley's defeat of the Behemoth, we return to the liberal social contract (and earth — not with the hostile alien but with the friendly cat), thus challenging and ultimately making the Schmittian sovereign superfluous.

Ⅷ. Conclusion

The ending of the film begins with the explosion of MUTHR and the spaceship, while Ripley escapes in a shuttle with Jones, the cat — and, as it turns out, the alien. That the alien secretly manages to crawl onboard the shuttle underlines how the film operates with a geospatial notion different from that of the logic of the old city gate; that is to say, there is no longer an "outside" in this epoch of space travel. The surprise appearance of the alien demonstrates the potential omnipresence of the anomaly — and thus the necessity of the sovereign's existence, even in the very moment we thought we were safe.

Overall, the film outlines two interpretations of state power; on the one hand, there is the bureaucratic-mechanistic power, that is, the liberal interpretation of Hobbes's political theory — Leviathan as a machine. On the other hand, we find the Schmittian sovereign who has the right to declare the state of exception. As for the latter, the creation, production, and legality of power is fuelled by the rational desire for security, whereas the former emphasizes the individual's rights in relation to the state as it governs collective life. When

48. In this light, Jacques Derrida — in his essay on Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction — makes the relevant point that the inherent instability of this axis eventually leads to a collapse, a breakdown. Cf. Derrida, Jacques. "On Absolute Hostility: The Cause of Philosophy and the Spectre of the Political." *The Politics of Friendship*, translated by George Collins, Verso, pp. 112–37.
49. During the scene when Kane is brought back to the spaceship, Ripley in fact acts as the provisional captain of the Nostromo (because Captain Dallas is outside the spaceship), that is, the sovereign ruling over a state of emergency (while Captain Dallas, outside, demands that she open the hatch to let them in). Noticeably, as a provisional sovereign Ripley insists on following protocol (i.e. the constitution), rather than making an absolute decision (i.e. a sovereign exception).

the objective of security has been procured, Schmitt argues, individuals have an unfortunate tendency to forget the reasons why they originally agreed to give up their absolute individual rights, and accept being ruled by an absolute sovereign; busy, as they are, with selfish concerns about money, food, and so on—as in the breakfast scene during the beginning of *Alien*. Such a trajectory essentially makes the state as a mythical force redundant. As I have argued in this article, this constitutes the main reason why The Company must go about its plan in secrecy; power must reestablish a relation to the anomaly, an ambition that goes directly against the interests of the citizens. In every little cranny and nook of this universe, power is obliged to reassert itself in relation to the state of nature, which constitutes its source of legitimization. The Nostromo crew is ordered to investigate the mysterious signal, not in order to *eliminate* any new life form, but rather to *establish a relation to it*—one that is dangerous, lethal, and which thus restores fear, and hence the legitimization of the absolute sovereign.

Ripley attempts to sever this relation, refusing to let power have its way. And in the subsequent films, power constantly attempts to re-establish this relation to the state of nature, the anomaly, while Ripley on every occasion is the fierce opponent, the citizen loyal to the principles of the liberal state. In fact, Ripley turns out to be such an extraordinary opponent of power that she herself eventually becomes the Behemoth. Thus, one could argue, Ripley ironically becomes a figure carrying out the secret project of the state as she turns into the monster that legitimizes power as a mythical force. Perhaps this is the reason why Ripley, in the third *Alien* film, commits suicide (but which is 'repealed' by the authorities through the resurrection of Ripley as a clone in the fourth instalment).

In this article, I have attempted to present a reading of *Alien* that concentrated on the film's latent political conflict. This conflict may be understood through the interpretation of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and more specifically Schmitt's critique of the liberal interpretation of Hobbes's political theory. To Schmitt, power is ultimately justified through its right to rule over the exception, which is precisely what the liberal interpretation of Hobbes's *Leviathan* prevents. Power must—in order to deal with the anomaly, the state of nature—paradoxically become a kind of an anomaly itself, or, in Schmittian terms, the state of exception.[50] During this period of emergency, the sovereign

50. Cf. Strauss, Leo. "Notes on Carl Schmitt. The Concept of the Political." *The Concept*

may legally suspend the social contract, or, the constitution — in order to protect, defend, and preserve it. In the absence of the anomaly, however, the state is constantly in danger of losing its power. Thus, it is essential for the authoritarian, anti-liberal state to establish a relation to the anomaly — i.e. Behemoth, or the state of nature — in order to reassert itself. *Alien* envisions such a scenario, and it shows Ripley, as a loyal citizen, fighting against power's sinister attempt to restore fear and terror — even if she thereby, simultaneously, comes to personify the sovereign, as well as the alien, that is, the outlawed, banned life; hero and enemy of the state — or friend and enemy — at one and the same time.

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Abstract

This article presents a reading of Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic *Alien* (1979), with a specific focus on the film's latent political conflict. The film has often been read through feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, but such approaches essentially deflect attention from the *literalness* of the film's political dimension. This political dimension is in many ways one that comes close to the problem Carl Schmitt discussed in connection with his concept of the state of exception, as well as his notorious reinterpretation of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. To Schmitt, power is ultimately justified through its right to rule over the exception. During the state of exception, the sovereign may legally suspend the social contract, or, the constitution—in order to protect, defend, and preserve it. In the absence of the anomaly, however, the state is in danger of losing its power. Thus, it is essential for the authoritarian, anti-liberal state to establish a relation to the anomaly—i.e. Behemoth, or the state of nature—in order to reassert itself. *Alien* envisions such a scenario, and it shows Ripley, as a loyal citizen, fighting against power's sinister attempt to restore fear and terror—even if she thereby, simultaneously, comes to personify the absolute, unlimited sovereign, as well as the alien, that is, the outlawed, banned life; hero and enemy of the state—or friend and enemy—at one and the same time.

Keywords: Ridley Scott's *Alien*, Carl Schmitt, homo sacer, state of exception

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