



Image, Family, Text

The deconstruction of; the liminal space in mother and son, shared experience of mental illness, a phantasmatic reality.

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1 Summary

In this thesis work I as student of the C:art:media master programme, decided to try identify the methodology that I am using in my current project at Valand School of Fine Arts and also to research what means I use to express the central ideas in my work and to locate my work within a wider context. This investigation of methods and ways to communicate will start and connect throughout the text with the body of work created by me during the last two years, in dialogue with the work made and exhibited by me during the last semester. By doing this I try to identify what my practice “is all about”. This work takes off from my studies in Performance Studies and continues into a symbolic language shared by me and my mother in our experience of mental illness and delusions, distortion and alienation. This exploration of shared experience moves into a more universal discussion about the construct of reality itself.

Keywords:

Reality, Family, Photo documentary, Alien, Alienation, Fantasy, Phantasmatic, Green house, Nature, Mental Illness

On the other hand, this thesis is not staring itself blind on method. From an economical point of view, sincerely or as a political act I quote Roland Barthes in his essay “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers”:

Method

Some People talk avidly, demandingly of method; what they want in work is method, which can never be too rigorous or too formal for their taste. Method becomes a Law, but since that Law is devoid of any effect outside itself (nobody can say what a 'result' is in 'human sciences') it is infinitely disappointed; posing as a pure meta-language, it partakes of the vanity of all meta-language. The invariable fact is that a piece of work which ceaselessly proclaims its determination for method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing is left for writing; the researcher repeatedly asserts that his text will be methodological but the text never comes. No surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great waste of abandoned projects than Method.

The danger of Method (of fixation with Method) is to be grasped by considering the two

demands to which the work of research must reply. The first is a demand for responsibility: the work must increase lucidity, manage to reveal the implications of procedure, the alibis of a language, in short must constitute a critique (remember once again that to criticize means to call into crisis). Here Method is inevitable, irreplaceable, not for its 'results' but precisely – or on the contrary – because it realizes the highest degree of consciousness of a language which is not forgetful of itself. The second demand, however, is of a quite different order; it is that of writing, space of dispersion of desire, where Law is dismissed. At a certain moment, therefore, it is necessary to turn against Method, or at least to treat it without any founding privilege as one of the choices of plurality – as a view, a spectacle mounted in the text, the text which all in all is the only 'true' result of any research.[1] 200-201

2 Background

During my bachelor studies, I encountered a subject, Performance Studies, that has made a major impact on my body of work. The professor in the class was Aylin Kalem, DEA degree in Dance and New Technologies from the University Paris 8. She teaches courses on Performance Studies, Arts & New Media and Bodies & Technologies. First thing we did in class was to read Marvin Carlsons introduction in his book "Performance: A Critical Introduction" Sixteen rows down on the first page he cites Mary Hopkins and he writes: "... performance is essentially a contested concept"[2] 1. He suggests that performance, as well as other concepts such as art and democracy, inhibits essentially a conflict. There is a disagreement about the essence built into the concepts themselves. This makes it very useful for the user of the word since this state of politics enables the word to be used in many different concepts. Again from Carlsons first page in the book: "Recognition of a given concept as essentially contested implies recognition of rival uses of it (such as oneself repudiates) as not only logically possible and humanly 'likely,' but as of permanent potential critical value to one's own use or interpretation of the concept in question"[2] 1. This enables an open discussion onto the word performance where different people allow theoretical investigation on different concepts and problematizes the very categorization of performance and theatricalization.

Over two years ago, during my BA studies, I used knowledge from the Performance Studies class to analyse transitional periods of my own personal experience, these periods then becoming social and identity bound contextual performances. I used the contextual performances to identify these transitional periods of personal experience as a web of power relations. I showed that these relationships of power are not neutral, rather, they are put there by authority to ensure the structure of this web. This knowledge did put myself into a state of crisis. My personal experience, as I know it, was actually a web of power relations put there by authority to unsure its structure. An urge grew in me. I wanted to know what this web, this relationship of power, was doing to the work I was committed to in my professional life.

In my work within performing arts design and especially as a light designer I use different technology to support architecture, express emotions, point at performative structures or give birth to narrative structures in different kind of performance based work. I use my skills in events, installation, performance, performing arts and fine art. I work creatively with different symbolic languages together with other people within a theatre or a company to ensure or create space,

beauty, illusion, drama, horror or spectacle among many things. Two years ago, when I experienced this crisis I concluded that I couldn't explore these questions creatively as a light designer and technician in theatres and the performance companies that I was working with at that time. This due to the economical frameworks that always put limits on any kind of production, especially when involving so many people and so little money to start with as within the field of performing arts. But I was also doubting that I could explore this new found interest within the field of performing arts design unless I went into the field of choreography or stage direction. That is why I decided to continue my studies on a Fine Arts school, I wanted to develop my field of professionalism by focusing on my own practice. I chose to continue in Göteborg and at the C:art:media programme because of my experience with technology in the performing arts. The C:art:media programme aims to support its students in their exploration in cross-media, in interdisciplinary approaches, and in different art approaches. The focus towards digital media seemed as constructive approach on my work. This because most of my working experience came from analogues environments within the performing arts.

In this thesis I look at my body of work from the last two years and my development towards an artistic practice at the C:art:media programme. I want to stress the importance in my use of images in this thesis as well as the written text. I have the need to use images or other media which have other possibilities of abstraction as a tool for me as an artist, coming from a non-academic sociocultural background. My suspicion of written text have most probably aroused from a disdain, a remnant of the economical situation of today. In a capitalist society knowledge is dangerously close connected to resources. The fight over resources transcode the knowledge of written language into a web of power relations not accessible for everyone. Lately a shift in this power construction emerged, confirmed in Barthes essay "Death of an author"[1]. When he speaks of the death of the author and birth of the sriptor, this also of course implies the birth of alternatives and possibilities. In this world where we live in, described as a "world of images", "text" is created in images. The language of images is in these days, for many people, more accessible then the language of words. I am one of them. I come from a socio-economic background where resources were scars and troubles were many. My mother was diagnosed as mentally ill. I share her experience of mental illness, but for me it was never as severe. The language of words were used by bureaucracy and the institutions of society to control me and my family in several different ways. Quite often, it was used abusively. When used to abuse, language becomes a matter of truth. If mastered language can be used as an empowering structure, as something that can be used as a tool to change oneself and ones identity. There is a relief then in the language if images, because of the accessibility and the

way it can be learnt and used. Images is everywhere and the access to digital technology allows a shifts in the power relation of accessibility. Images are closely connected to this development due to the image producing technology of today, thus a language which is more useful for some when exploring matters of truth. Power and truth. This is true in my case.

What is truth? Who is the holder of truth? These questions was raised in Stockholm by Anna Odell in her BA work at Konstfack in Stockholm this spring term of 2009. She was found rambling around on a bridge with very little clothes on in the middle of the winter. People were walking past her for some time until finally some people engaged in her. After yet another period of time the police came and took control of her. They took her to the mental hospital where she was strapped down and stated as dangerous. In her journal it said, “when police are trying to bring pat. from the rack, pat. becomes rabid and starts fighting”[3]. This is not what Anna Odells video of the incident tells us when we look at it. But it was put into her file for the doctors to use as a tool of domination onto her body. Did this domination onto her body help her to become well, from a medical point of view? I don't think so. The mistrust of language can thus be a mode of survival. I wonder what Anna Odell was thinking in her despair fifteen years ago when she was only twenty-two and put under circumstances of the abusive institution. They used text as a tool, a technology, to support their choice of method in handling her within the psychiatric institution. I have during the semester helped Anna Odell in her project with interviews and discussion over the phone. What I in this project share with Anna Odells project is a something essentially related to the relationship to text and truth and the ambiguousness of text and truth. The critique would concern itself about method. In this thesis I will use images as my choice of method of delivering text, my message. I will use this method to identify the essential crisis of my work and put this in dialogue with itself. This crisis could be described as practical discussion about the fragility of reality and the human subjective experience, and the loss of identity connected to experience of mental disease. The background to my project lies in my experience within theatre and staged performances and my inability to use technology in those contexts to identify methodology and means to express my ideas. I did find something of a conceptual tool during my bachelor programme when I went on an exchange to Bilgi University in Istanbul, Turkey. I found out that I have been using identity as a technology to change myself. This tool was used in my work as an introductory idea of methodology in the very beginning of my studies at the C:art:media programme, but I think that somewhere during the months it got lost from my toolbox. My focus switched to a discourse where I was exploring reality and identity from a wide perspective through materiality and reality in a visual environment, using the human subject in an artificial experience of nature to explore the experience of the human

subject in reality. The visual and symbolic language itself developed into a tool where it actually became a way to communicate this methodology into a wider context. For the first time, by the construction of the text, I have used written text to empower myself, to change myself. I use this text (still in the form of luxury) as my tool, as my experience. Or as Barthes puts it again in his essay "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers":

Writing as Value

Evaluation precedes criticism. There is no putting into crisis without evaluation. Our value is writing, an obstinate reference which, apart from the fact it must often irritate, seems in the eyes of some to involve a risk – that of developing a certain *mystique*. The reproach has its malice, for it reverses point by point the importance we attach to writing, regarded, in this tiny intellectual region of our Western world, as *the materialist field par excellence*. Though issuing from Marxism and psychoanalysis, the theory of writing tries to displace – without breaking with – that place of origin: on the one hand, it rejects the temptation of the signified, that is the deafness to language, to the excessive return of its effects; on the other, it is opposed to speech in that it is not transferential and outplays – admittedly partially, in extremely narrow, particularist social limits even – the traps of 'dialogue'. There is in writing the beginnings of a mass gesture: against all discourses (modes of speech, instrumental writings, rituals, protocols, social symbolics), writing alone today, even if still in the form of luxury, makes of language something *atopical*, without place. It is dispersion, this unsituation, which is materialist. [1] 213

From an institutional point of view, mental illness create alteration, usually in cognition but it works also on behavioural and emotional levels. When experiencing mental illness, perception, reality, behaviour, and emotions "change". What I also found is that mental illness can change the family as a unit. Change occurs, something else appears. I wonder if I can find a language that can describe this otherness to me/us so we/I can know what we/I perceive, what we/I emote, and how we/I behave. I think we need to enact this otherness to avoid alienation. To fully know what language I am using in the work I am exhibiting at the moment I need to go back in a archaeological way into my own body of work to understand it somehow, and to see how it connects to the work at the exhibit. I want to think that I created my own body of language, my own identity, and my own technology. My/our own text.

3 Text

3.1 The creation of a body of documentary photography: A process of Alienation

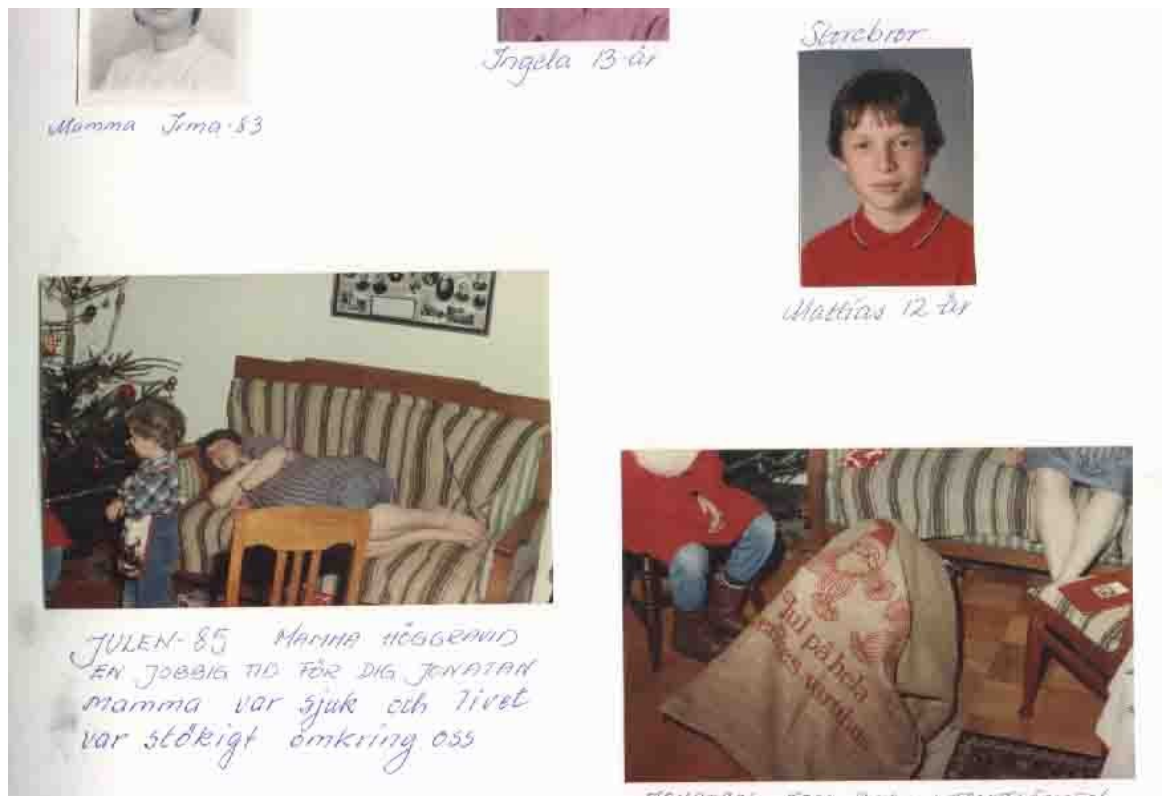


What is my agency in doing this kind of project? Well it started years ago. It is all in my memory now, but I remember it was about the time from when I started to have memories. I lived in a terraced house in Stenkullen, not very far from Göteborg. My mother had just presented a guy that was about to become my new father, even though I already had one, he just lived somewhere else. Soon my mother got pregnant and I was to have siblings and it was about this time when The War started. I did not know what a war was actually, probably I saw something on television sometimes about the Iraq-Iran war, but the concept of war was still very alien to me. The War did not establish so many memories in me, except that sometimes I was to hide in a special location, and I was under no circumstances allowed to ask where my siblings hiding places were located, or if I by accident got to know them I was to say so to my mother so they could find new ones that I again wouldn't know. This to ensure that if the intruders found one of us children, they couldn't kill the whole family at least. My hiding place was in the basement underneath a beech wardrobe, in a secret wooden box that was standing towards a wall with a forest tapestry, something that was very common in the 70s in Sweden.

Here is a picture of the wardrobe during my mothers wedding day with the new father. It's just behind the guy in the black cloths, which is performing the marriage ritual. On the picture on the next page there is me, my mother, the new father and some kind of religious important person from the local Mormon church. I was a member of that church at this time.



And again some months later in the same house:



The years went on, The War dissipated and I started to realize that there was something very special about my family. I was told that my mother was not totally well. She told me the same thing also many times. I noticed how we were different, in other peoples eyes. One summer the local social security unit in the city decided that our family needed to have some support to do something that would somehow help our family unit. We, the children needed to go away and experience something normal and relax a bit, and our mother really wanted to give her children some nice



memories and moments of that summer.

Unfortunately due the economical situation with the stepfather, who never really worked only got himself into more debt, this couldn't be done with our own money, the bailiff was knocking on the door. But the social security decided to help our family out so they sent us on vacation. It was also made possible by scholarships to help a family in need. In this picture to the left my mother is in the centre in a blue dress and a red stitched jacket, beautiful as always. In this middle-class paradise of Skara Forngård, our family were actually the real attraction.



SKARA FORNGÅRD MIDSOMMAR

OMMÄRKN 1991

These photographs that I am showing at the moment are pictures that my mother have taken herself with her camera or collected from others by trade. She made a photo essay like this for all her children, she also wrote individual diaries to be given to us when we grew up and moved away from home. Most of the pictures are displaying family activities. I think this is my mothers biggest concern and joy in life, her family. Whenever we meet and engage in rituals to strengthen the family bonds she takes pictures. Here is from the Christmas when I was ten.



The picture is taken in Trollhättan where we moved because the stepfather was about to get a job. Of course he never really had a chance of keeping it. Again it is a family event displayed and next to me is my grandfather and my grandmother sitting. They used to run a farm, where they still live to this date. Not very long after this picture was taken the family as it has been displayed so far, broke up. When this happened my older brother was a missionary for the Mormon church in London. My older sister had left the church and moved to Stockholm, maybe in an attempt to escape but also to conduct her university studies, the first one in our family to do so. In Sweden poor people with bad grades still have this opportunity. Anyway, one night I told my mother about a couple of incidents where the stepfather had abused me. I always trusted her and felt safe with her, and she trusted me. The climate in the family was very extreme at this time and I was meeting psychiatrists regularly because of different kinds of hallucinations that I experienced.

Eventually the stepfather was sent to prison for child abuse and molestation. I was twelve when that happened. Soon after this, my body and psyche collapsed utterly and totally and after a failed suicide attempt I was sent to a mental hospital for children.



JONATAN GÅR I SJUKHUSKOLA



YDE



RUTH o JONATAN

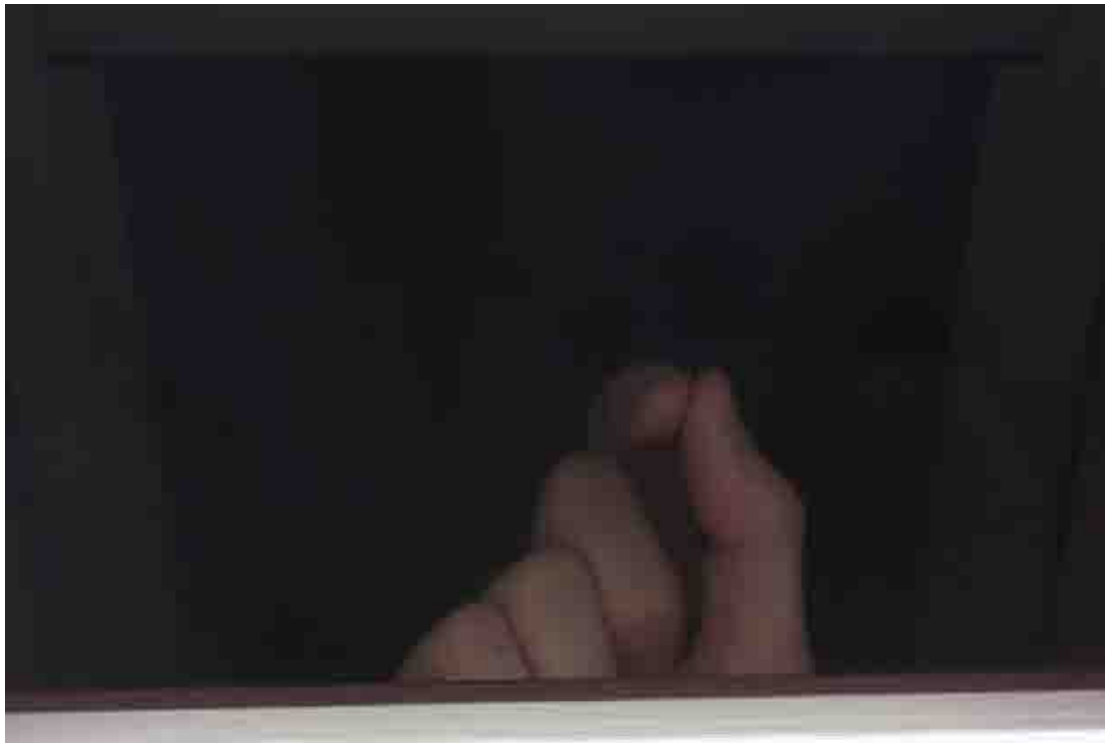
I stayed at the psychiatric ward for 8 months recovering. The decision was made to extract me from my family and put me in a new one, a foster family. This is where my mothers photo essays end, but she keeps taking pictures like the ones on the previous page. Those pictures are taken from inside the ward and at the hospital school with one of the nurses. Bellow, is the last page of my mothers documentary photo essay, again at Christmas.



JULEN 94. Julelo var tomten



Jonathan firar jul i vårt nya hem Anem i Sjuntorp.



At age thirteen, I was home on permission from the ward. My mother decided to give me her photo essays and the diaries that she had been writing especially for me. Bellow, it is summer again and the staff at the clinic decides that I am healthy enough and ready to leave to my new foster family, again the picture is taken by my mother. My mother stopped making documentary photo essays at this point, I left “home” you see. However she continued to send me pictures through the mailing system. I kept every single one of these photographs.



Okay, another jump cut. Years went on and I was about to leave my foster family since I graduated from high school and their responsibility deal with the social security then ended. I was looking forward so much to leaving them behind. I had just accepted that I was gay and I also just took the step to leave the Mormon church behind. My foster family resented me for my decision, we never really got so close to each other. I haven't met this part of my "family" in so many years now. The picture on the top left is actually my grandparents and their anniversary of their wedding. But this happened around the same time as my high school graduation, which the other pictures come from. To the bottom left is me and my sister in the foreground. In the background one can spot my mother, my father and my older brother. On the picture to the top right is grandmother and my father together with me and underneath that is the mother of the foster family and two of the brothers I had in that family. Weeks after this I moved to Göteborg again to start my university studies. Actually it was only a way of escaping my feeling of lost identity. On the matter of the family, I was very confused, and my mother had provided me the whole and very detailed photographic evidence of this confusion. For her though, I think the process of archiving is strongly connected to the process of having a family, and displaying it almost as a proof. And for me, nowadays, her pictures are the only thing that reminds me of this, that I actually had one. But after I was twelve and removed from it I never engaged in it any more actively, until now.

3.2 The short story of how I ended up trying to make works about reality: Identity as a Technology

One of the courses I had in Istanbul during my Erasmus Exchange 2006 to Istanbul was Conceptual Development which was a discussion based course where a teacher moderated the discussion into new topics as the course went on. The teacher was a middle aged photographer that had survived in the commercial industry but recently started to engage in helping younger photographers to extend their view on photography. Since the class was open for the whole faculty it was also filled with performers, animations designers and graphical designers. The course evolved into a discussion about much larger concepts than topics concerned purely about the image as such.

***”Statement/** In the presence of my mother’s madness, disillusion and the obscure picture of what also is reality, there is a fine and poetic line of thought of which might be very unimportant or even non-existent. She is extending herself, within me and including objects and people within her own identity. She doesn’t know where she ceases to exist. It’s eating my mind when I’m close to her. I would like to show this frame of thought. Or capture it. To know if it can exist.*

***Description/** I will move in to my mother’s house for a week in the end of winter, beginning of spring, when her mind is racing. I will have different cameras with me that I can use in different environments. The aim is to see if I can through the camera capture the structure of my mother’s persona as a mathematical structure in pictures, is there a system which there is to understand things from, her actual presence (illness?). It’s related to a crisis I had as a child; “Does she exist differently in my mind than in hers, what in my mind does not belong to me, are my reactions a reality of presence.” Is madness something we can touch?*

***Audience & Language/** I will address people that are interested in the insides of people.*

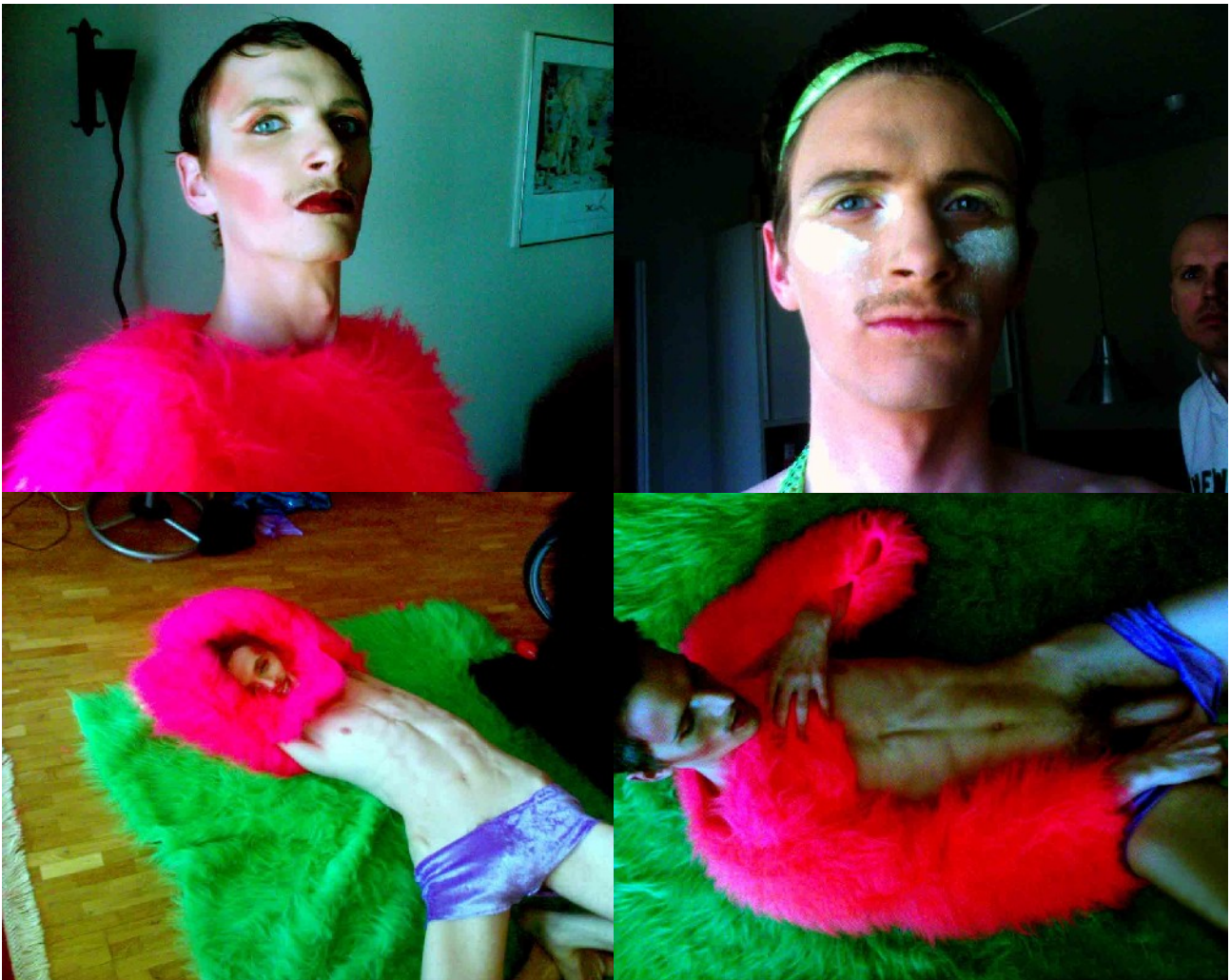
***Future projection/** In the future I would like to create an interactive machine, an excavation of my mother. A celebration of the space, of human being, she is.”*

I was considering how to engage further into this project for a couple of weeks. But when I returned to Sweden I felt that the idea didn't support itself any longer. It seemed very technical, almost determined, I couldn't put that method of choice into my family context and the description of my mother was filled with stigmatization. I could not see why I should put myself and my mother into

that position that we have to commence in those rituals. Instead my point of departure into my family and identity project took place at my grandmother 75year celebration party, some two or three years ago. I never used a camera before to catch something of interest or that I would think of using in an art context until that day. These pictures were used in the exhibit I had during my degree exhibition in Valand School of Fine Arts here in Göteborg. That day I turned the camera towards my mother who devoted herself and her parenthood on documenting her children and her family.



The original idea emerged from an art video I saw at the Goethe-Institute in Istanbul 2006. I don't remember any information about the work but the artist was a female, in my age, interviewing her mother which had lost control over her memory. The daughter was asking questions about her childhood and about different things they had experienced together. The mother mixed everything around, she couldn't even remember which of her daughters she was speaking to, I think she kept referring to another daughter long ago dead. The interview was changing from arguments, to small fights, silences, memories and to loving talks between mother and daughter. Something about that video triggered me to involve my own mother in my own work. I put myself on standby in doing something as soon as I returned to where my mother was.



These pictures are of course not from the previous event. But they were taken in a direct reaction to the birthday celebration pictures of my mother a month or two later. I was at that time renting a room from a friend of mine, Robert in Göteborg, you can see him in the background in the top right picture. He is a professional drag queen who has a career behind him, touring with his partner and performing and entertaining people at night clubs in Sweden, dressed as a woman. He enacts the ordinary club visitors sexual fantasies about the female persona and body and makes it into a stage show. I was at the time working on the creation of a stage character that would somehow work within the honour culture of Sweden. I wanted to create a character that would be liable to end up killed in a hate crime situation by some Nazi idiots. I wanted to explore why that character would end up dead by the haters. My curiosity was to explore a mixture of sexuality, femininity and masculinity that would somehow attract people to end up in emotions of dishonour. The model of femininity that I used was somehow something of traces of my mother in myself, twisted in myself, becoming myself. I used the pictures on my mother to start from, and then twisted them and put them into the context of myself to see myself somehow. One of the reasons for doing this was because I felt it was wrong somehow, to peep on my mother. It made me question my sincerity. It is

somehow a bit of a clownish behaviour to peep into your mother, isn't it? I felt shame and decided to turn the camera onto me. And to enact something of myself in this character. It is a character of reality but also of fantasy. Actually, what I wanted to investigate in these pictures was my mother in me and where the border to "the me" actually started. Where my mothers identity ended, and where I, myself took up. What is the difference between myself and my mother in my eyes? My mother is so much, everywhere, in my mind. I don't know where she ceases to exist. But where do I myself start? There is something utterly gay in these pictures but my opinion is that this is not because I have sparkling shiny colours on. Rather, it is the display of sexuality, eroticism that makes the character queer or gay looking. But this character does not display itself as a true self. It displays itself as a construct. Somehow I wanted to explore this idea of a construct. I use a symbolic language of fantasy, of the unreal and of the real. In this phantasmatic landscape or fantastic environment, my truth is hidden. In these pictures I look for a truth. I usually want to believe that there is no truth. I know this somehow, the character knows this.

"Clowns always speak of the same thing, they speak of hunger; hunger for food, hunger for sex, but also hunger for dignity, hunger for identity, hunger for power. In fact, they introduce questions about who commands, who protests." [4]

The I/Clown pictures on the previous page is actually the first time I try to do something within the arts which is not part of a stage design concept. I wanted to create a character to be used in a staged environment, yes, but the pictures themselves became more than that. They became something within themselves which is (I think) more important than the original intention I had with their creation. This "more" was very exciting for me. I wanted to continue to explore what I could do further within other areas than let say, light design. And off I went. This time I used the nature as a setting, as a framework to connect to the social context of the viewer. Everybody knows something of the nature. This something is connected to identity, at least in Sweden.

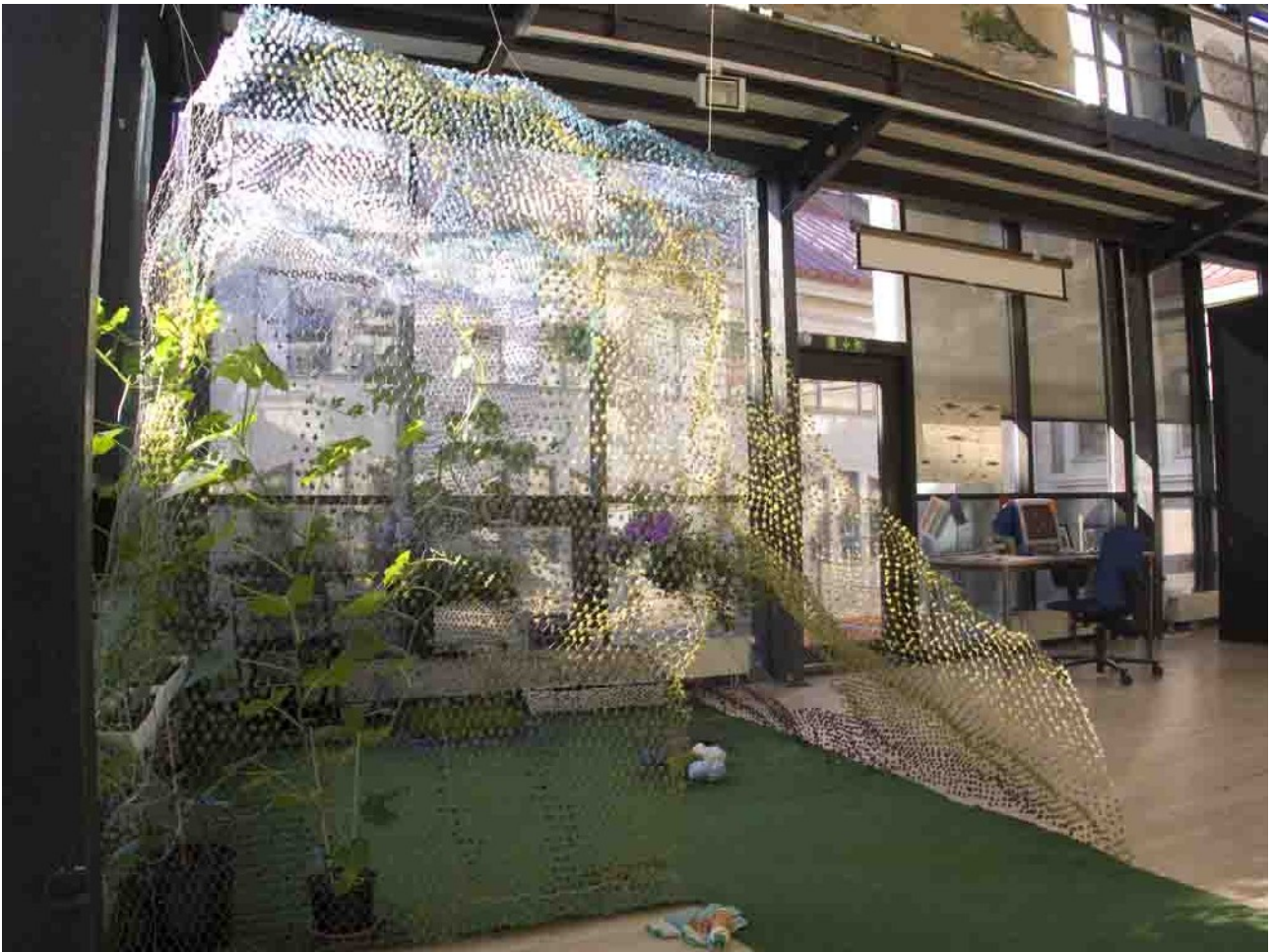




The body is something comical, something of a clown but still something serious. I wanted to use the body to express ideas. In these pictures I was testing the idea of the body entangled in a discourse of change that was dominating the body. Obviously the pictures have a cinematic touch in them. I should have made them in a video format. This was also the first thing I did when I went to Valand, the result was exhibited in Rotor 1 in December the first time, and later exhibited in Moscow, Stockholm, Göteborg and Istanbul over the next year.



Again I used the nature as a reference to the real, somehow. A human have to walk onto the stage into the projection screen and stand in the forest to watch the other character on the screen. Other people in the room have to watch that person commencing in that activity. The viewer had to step into that distortion, to feel and experience the difference. Turbulence descended onto you.



In the early spring or winter of 2009 I ended up in frustration about what I was doing and how I made things. To compensate this I made the decision to stop using bodies, or to stop using my own body. I felt that there was many problems in the use of my own body. I was thinking that it was difficult to know what kind of body I have. I decided to use something else instead of a body so I chose nature, or reality. I felt that I really wanted to do something grand for my spring exhibition but not to let myself be shown too much. That was when I decided to make an experience for people to enter. I wanted to make something beautiful that people would connect to easily and honestly, without having me as an artist disturbing their experience of the reality in my clownish characters. In the end I decided to make it a performative piece where in I was actually performing, building my own little world, coming to sense with reality. It is after all my perception about how I see my surrounding, and my issues of what I find in those observations. I have problems I guess with making my works neutral from me as an artist. Or maybe I should say that I have problems being objective. I can't be anything else then subjective in the context of how I perceive reality. This habitat space that I built is something I would like to explore more in the future to see if I can develop this way of imagining a space.

3.3 The liminal space of shared experience in mental illness: The mother and the son

This is the part of the text where I will focus on what I actually exhibited during the degree show of C:Art:Media master programme, Variables of Attraction. The title is Dinner, Exhibit, and Family. I present pictures from the two locations that was part of the piece, intertwined with a live feed camera. The last part is the family dinner, unfortunately due to many things, this was only attended by a limited section of my family.



Details; Bodies of documentary photography:



Section 1:1



Section 1:2

Details; The Glasshouse



Section 2:1



Section 2:2



Section 2:3



Section 2:4

Details; The Dinner



Section 3:1



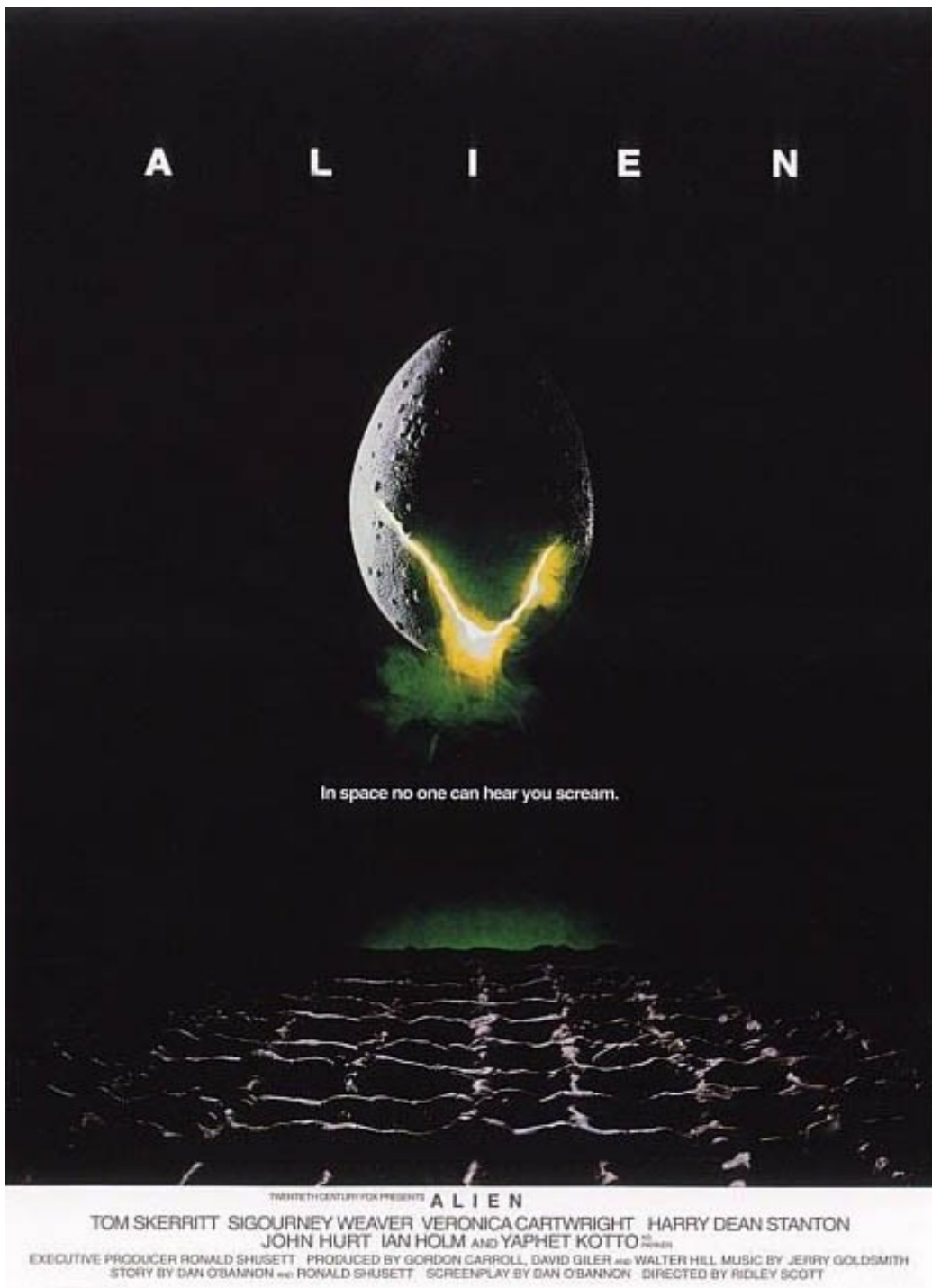
Section 3:2

3.4 ...and The Alien

About the time of early winter 2009, as earlier mentioned, I experienced some frustration that made an impact on what I was doing at school. I was back at “home”. Göteborg was the city I was born in. “Home” for me has never been a location of refuge and comfort or a place for rest. Through a process of Alienation I was made Alien to whatever “home” is. “There’s no place like home” and “Home is where the heart is” brings to me in mind a series of films that were very important to me as I grew up. I was maybe struggling with the concept of “home”, and in these films I found something that I could connect to as my home. *Alien*[5], *Aliens*[6], *Alien*³[7], and *Alien Resurrection*[8] are films that I have used as my own metaphor for “home” for many years now. It was in the *Alien* films that I saw and felt something of my reality written out and discussed around for the first time in films or anywhere actually. I saw my fear of my mother, I saw my fear of pregnancy, I saw my fear of having children, I saw my fear of myself, I saw my fear of mental illness, I saw my fear in my own body, I saw my fear of death, I saw my fear of life, and I saw my fear in reality. I got my hands on my first VHS copy of *Aliens* around the time I was ten and I started to collect them as I found the rest. Since then they have been with me and now I can see clearer on why I needed them before and why they are still valid to me. Through them I can see why I need to deconstruct the body of my mother, the body of reality, and my own body. I need to deconstruct my fears. Or as Ximena Gallardo-c and C. Jason Smith put it through the eyes of *Alien*³ in their *Alien woman: The making of Lt Ellen Ripley* on page 126:

“The autopsy is a contrived and violent study of depths. At first glance, Clemens is opening up Newt’s body, but what he is really interrogating is Ripley’s psyche—uncovering Ripley’s secret. Although we do not see the cutting up of the body, the bloody gloves Clemens cleans on his apron. At Ripley’s insistence, he takes a saw—“Careful,” she whispers, revealing to the audience that she fears an Alien will be set loose—and he breaks through the corpse’s chest while Ripley looks on in pure agony. The moment reminds the viewer of Ripley’s empathetic reaction to the female colonist who hatched a Chestbuster in *Aliens*. Once again, Ripley’s nightmare is being played out on another female body, only this time she is the one requesting that the body that stands in for her be opened. She must, in effect, deconstruct the text of the girl’s body to deconstruct her own fear.”[9] 126

The rest of this chapter in my thesis will be more citations from the same book and pictures from the *Alien* films to suggest for the reader further readings on the body of my work that I have presented in this thesis.



“As if the combination of science fiction, bug-eyed monster horror, and monstrous birth were not enough, *Alien*’s masterstroke is its invocation of the monstrous mother, for it is not Giger’s biomechanoid that we see in the poster but the evil, acidic womb. The womb, as have argued, is infinitely more dangerous than the solitary killer because the womb can produce more killers—after all, Victor Frankenstein’s fear and envy of the womb are what lead him to compete with Mother Nature”.^[9] 199



“The subject matter of Ripley’s nightmare further sets up the themes Cameron will explore in the film. First and foremost is the fear of biological motherhood. As Ripley is in the hospital, surrounded by hospital staff and instruments, her birthing scene is visually more closely tied to normal human labor than Kane’s, which happens over a meal. Prefiguring the monstrous Alien Queen, this image of monstrous birth equates the anatomy of the human female with that of the Alien female. . . .As her dream indicates, she hides a monstrous creature inside of her—which may be variously read as suggesting hysteria (she is subject to a womb illness and thereby dreams of birthing) or the phallic woman (she hides a lethal phallus inside). Lastly, the nightmare of monstrous birth suggests Ripley’s anxiety about the fate of her own biological child, as the next scene makes clear.

The next scene has Ripley waiting in an artificial arboretum. Burke enters with the news that her daughter, Amanda, died childless two years before. The effect of this information is complex, for while it adds depth to Ripley’s character and makes her a tragic figure, it also reinterprets the Ripley of *Alien* as a single (no husband is mentioned) working mother who left her child alone at home. . . .She dissolves into tears, the failed mother mourning the lost daughter. What this short scene does

for Ripley’s character is to rewrite her as a mother, and a bad one at that, an example of the “soft” Carter era woman misled by feminism and the idea of the New Woman into a career that led directly to her failure to keep her parental promise. To this we must add the fact that her nightmares have already established Ripley as severely traumatized. The strong, confident woman who

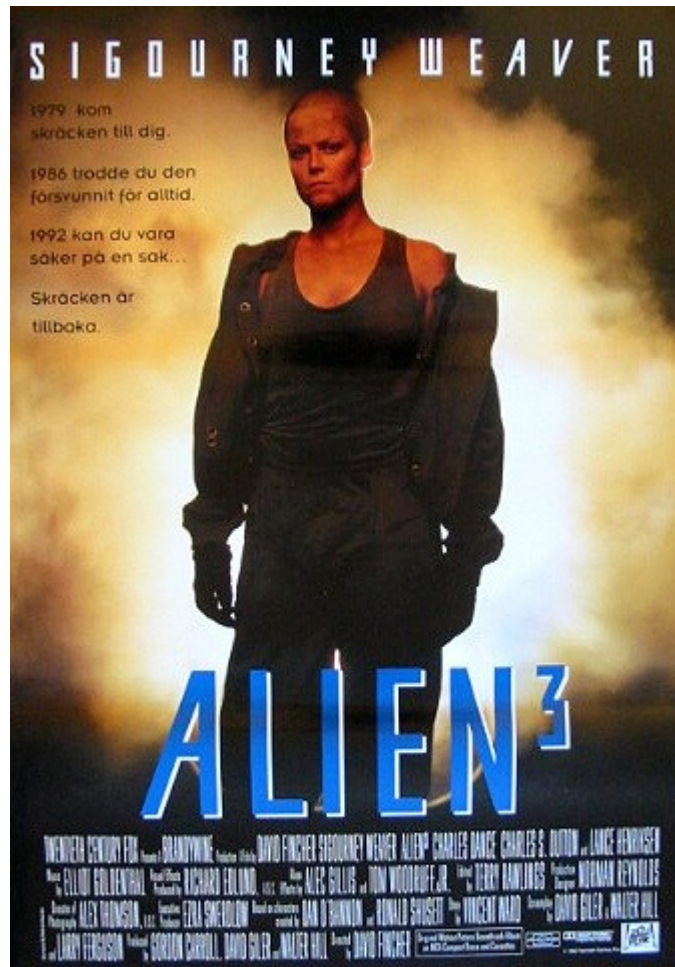


killed the Alien and saved herself is shown to be a victim of her choices. As punishment, she will be haunted by nightmarish images of rape, pregnancy, and death. This moment of personal failure is echoed in the next scene, when she is confronted with her professional failure.”[9] 75-76



“Reproduction, then, is shown as the real threat in *Aliens*: a common Reagan era fear that the control of reproduction and reproductive mechanisms (abortion, birth control, homosexuality, and even abstinence) could become a weapon, particularly against the traditional, nuclear family. Thus, the opposition of these two females has, as Amy Taubin has noted, “a historically specific, political meaning. If Ripley is the prototypical, upper-middle-class WASP, the alien queen bears a suspicious resemblance to a favourite scapegoat of the Reagan/Bush era—the black welfare mother—that parasite of the economy whose uncurbed reproductive drive reduce hard-working taxpayers to bankruptcy.” What in another time would have been the evil witch (Medea, for example) here becomes a crazed Welfare Queen, living off the state and producing hordes of illegitimate children, who rampage about destroying human (white) society. The worst conservative fears here come true: the womb as become a weapon wielded by a husbandless, inhuman “bitch.” Ripley acts on the behalf of the conservative interest, and within conservative rhetoric, when she attacks, not the Alien Queen, but her egg sac, in a gross sterilization. She exacts retribution on the womb for what it has done to her, to Newt, to the Marines, to the crew of the Nostromo, to humanity.”[9] 108





“By collapsing the dichotomy between Ripley and the Alien, *Alien³* is the first of the *Alien* films to openly address the abject status of women covertly posited in *Alien* and *Aliens*. As we have argued, Cameron’s film in particular portrays the female neatly categorized into two types of “bitches”: the bad bitches, as symbolized by the Alien Queen, emasculate men and bend them to their evil will. The good bitches and their broodish, subservient males, who are little more than pussy-whipped brutes. In *Alien³*, however, Ripley is constructed as a liminal body, both the whore-destroyer and the good woman saviour of humanity, and as such embodies abjection as Julia Kristeva describes it in *Powers of Horror*: “What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”” [9] 121



“Although the Judeo-Christian tradition and biological narratives evidence ample material for interpretation, *Alien*³ also presents a narrative seemingly independent of, and often at odds with, the Christian symbolism and biological determinism. This intersecting narrative draws upon the previous *Alien* films in its presentation of the human body as open, penetrable, and thereby feminized. In the *Alien*³ the fear shifts, however, from the penetration and specularization (an opening up for examination) of the body to a realization that the pristine body, on which we base so much of our individuality, never was. The doppel-ganger-contagion fear of *Alien* and *Aliens* shifts to a viral fear where the human body is the battleground of war with oneself. Thus, as if Ripley has not been through enough already, she now must confront both the literal creature without (the doglike Alien) and the literal creature within (the larva Alien Queen), as well as the social monster without (the misogynistic men) and the personal monster within (her own fear of death).”[9] 120

“*Alien*³ begins by deconstructing the triumphant music that accompanies the 20th Century Fox logo: its final chord is held, then built into a booming discord, which abruptly cuts. Eerie tones accompany the vastness of space. Images come in quick flashes, fading in and out, suggesting a drifting in and out of consciousness. We see Ripley’s and Newt’s faces in their cryo-tubes, the side of the ship *Sulaco*, and . . . an open Alien egg. A sweet voice sings in Latin: “*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi* (lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the earth). The fingers of the spidery Facehugger appear behind Newt’s cryo-tube. We hear the crack of glass and witness green Alien blood dripping onto the floor and burning. The iconic opening—the bodies displayed like heroic saints, backed by the angelic music of the Ordinary Mass—evokes the perfect, incorrupt body of Christ. Thus, Cameron’s Sleeping Beauty preserved in ice become Fincher’s saint in her glass reliquary. In fact, Fincher as remade the war vessel *Sulaco* into a holy site where the iconic bodies of a fetishistic religion lie in state: this is the Ripley who twice before faced the Alien and survived, these are the hands that saved the child Newt and killed the Alien Queen, this is the heart that cannot be defeated.



Evil, however, has erupted in the holy place. The acid blood has started a fire in the cryogenic compartment, causing the ship’s alarms to sound.. .the Facehugger attached to one of the sleepers.. ..The *Sulaco*’s computer forces the cryo-tubes to the emergency evacuation vehicle (EEV) and hurls it into outer space, where it is attracted by a nearby planet.”[9] 123



“As Ripley falls [into the furnace], her secret self, her Alien Shadow, her godsend and her escape, bursts out of her chest. Image eerily reminds the viewer of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Christ, with the Alien Queen-embryo taking the place of the symbolic, exposed heart. As a reproduction of the Virgin of the Immaculate Heart, Ripley’s body imperfectly represents the perfect feminine form: immaculate, virtuous, maternal, compassionate—perhaps what is left from her *Aliens* self. As a replication of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it points to Christ’s heart “overflowing with love for men,” but at the same time rejected and despised. Through the most complete abjection, Ripley has moved beyond evil into love, a love that can even encompass the being that has killed her. Ripley grabs the newborn Queen in a firm but loving embrace: her baby, herself. Her final throes echo those of the female warrior-saint Joan in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*: transfixed, transcendent. As Ripley falls into the purifying fire, her very body becomes the Immaculate Heart and Sacred Heart, with the Alien as the transfixing sword or the perennial crown of thorns. The sun rises in Fiorina as she is delivered into the flames, indicating the ever-revolving interaction between light and darkness... As a female hero, Ripley speaks the only way a woman can properly “speak,” through her body and the products of her body. This is her commentary, her last final statement to the Company, to us. She leaps both to save humanity and to tell the patriarchy *this body and its products are mine, not yours.*”[9] 151-153



“As the camera zooms in on her seemingly innocent child-body, we hear a voice-over in Weaver’s voice: “My mommy always told me there were no monsters. Not any real ones.” Since Newt had voiced those exact words in *Aliens*, the clone’s body partakes of her image: the unprotected girl child victimized by monsters that should exist only in nightmares. The clone’s face then morphs from young to mature, revealing that she has been “aged to perfection”—presumably the age Ripley died on Fiorina 161. The voice-over concludes: “But there are.” This assurance that monsters exist would seem to signal the mature clones as the monster, but because the voice-over is Weaver’s, the words simultaneously point out the other monster of this narrative: the gaping scientists admiring the cloned body. One of them, Dr. Gediman (Brad Dourif), whispers in an almost worshipful tone, “she’s perfect.” The utterance summarizes his position as the Naziesque scientist in the relentless pursuit of the perfect race and conflates Ash’s admiration of the Alien in *Alien* with Burke’s greedy gaze at the contained Facehuggers in *Aliens*. In one sentence, *Alien Resurrection* has fused woman and Alien, hero and monster.”[9]164





My thesis is about to end. I should as a good student describe what this work of mine will lead on to and how other people can benefit from it. I will try to do this with the following quote:

“Like any horror film, the four films of the *Alien* series sell us the manifestation of our own fear, and, like any science-fiction film, they give us a word of warning. We fear the loss of the primary of the rational-humanist subject symbolized by the closed male body. The warning: the monstrous bitch at the door may have already gotten in, and we somehow failed to notice.

But Like the best of both science fiction and horror, the series also sells hope: the transformative power of the monstrous feminine Other may lead us, not to death, but to something else, and maybe that something else will be the ticket to our future survival. Being something other than human (an android or hybrid or clone), something other than all those dichotomies we live with every single day just might not be so bad after all. That possibility of difference is what makes the *Alien* series truly remarkable.”[9] 203

I hope for nothing.

I fear nothing.

I am free.[10]



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