

## The *Arrival* of Yonic Sci Fi and its heretical-hysterical becomings

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### Introduction

The sci-fi mega text can be parsed as a historically white male cinematic genre, composed of films that are predominantly written and directed by men, about, and starring men, that chiefly hail male demographics. A structure that repeats itself at ever-smaller scalar levels; as evidenced by considerations of a fractalized subset of ‘first contact’ films where extra-terrestrials arrive on Earth, or else get discovered ‘out there’ by human explorers. Predictably, films where the alien contact is guided by a female lead constitute something of a minor trend – with the *Alien* series (1979, 1986, 1992, 1997) and Robert Zemeckis’ *Contact* (1997) formulating the best-known exceptions to this priapic regime. Notwithstanding, the significance of this hitherto marginal deviation from the dominant - inherently white phallogratic - Hollywood tradition, cannot be underestimated as the geological and ecological perils of the anthropocene threaten the unitary identity of the occidental subject, obsessively clinging to his Hu(man) subjectivity. Recent female-led films concerned with extra-terrestrial encounters, such as *Annihilation* (2018) and *Arrival* (2016), surface as attempts to unleash the molecular power of inhuman white femininity – otherwise trampled by the phallic demand for repeating sexual uniformity – in order to attain perception beyond the human condition. In this outing we turn our attention to how Denis Villeneuve’s *Arrival* utilises a material—or maternal—embodied encounter to explore and push thought beyond otherwise shuttered anthropocentric notions of identity. We suggest that as an immanent dynamic force *Arrival* begets the viewer to unleash impossible, feminine molecular intensities, linked to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2005) described as the threshold of becoming-woman, by entering into a carnal relationship with the ‘mucosal’ film qua film.

We argue that through the material film-philosophy register *Arrival* embodies a feminist project that orients thought towards the politics of becoming imperceptible. That is, beyond existing anthropocentric and phallogratic dualisms in order to embrace the perpetual flux that engenders the creation of pure Differences (see e.g. Grosz 2005: 167-169). As this derives from a place “beyond representation”, we aim to utilise the form and content of this experiment to illustrate how, pace Susan Sontag, good criticism might actively dissolve ‘considerations of content into those of form’ (1966: 8-9). By so doing we also align with the work of Luce Irigaray, who argues that the only way for women to affirm themselves as singularities is by acknowledging the feminine outside of its maternal dimension, conquered by the reign of the Phallus. As an artistic difference-engine *Arrival* shows that this is only possible through the absolute obliteration of the majoritarian ‘image of thought’ (Deleuze 2014: 175) grounded through blind faith in the Platonic regime of representation which precludes transcendentalisms of Forms and repudiates the issues of embodied sexual difference.

*Arrival's* composite form embodies a major (cerebral, cognitive, detached or conscious) and minor (embodied, nonconscious or sentient feeling) address, that each stimulate or inculcate very different forms of thought—which incessantly combine and recombine in an evolving dance. That is to say, alongside (or concomitant with) the dominant (narrative, representational) representational message of *Arrival* we also detect the film-body materially constellating intensive and qualitative forces such as lighting, sound, music, colour, aesthetics, pacing and atmosphere (the non-representational cinematic forces of film) to communicate in an ethico-stylistic minor key; with a view toward affectively stimulating a different kind of thought or feeling in the viewer. For the purposes of this experiment we opt to align these major and minor modalities with what the philosopher Michel Serres (2018a) identifies as the 'Order of Mars' and the 'Order of Venus' respectively. These otherworldly figures being more than ancient gods/planets selected from a pantheon/system to represent clichéd qualities made oppositional within a system of patriarchy—as per a popular culture best-seller such as John Gray's *Men are from Mars Women from Venus* (1992). Instead, we channel these conceptual personae to embody different qualities of potential, ultimately reducible to the project of rethinking relation to relativity and the artistic encounter. Significantly, we take the 'Order of Venus' - harbingered by the arrival of extra-terrestrials within the film – and the 'Order of Mars', expressed by the defensive territorialising forces embodied by the military and science subjugated to the State, as paralleling the domains of art and science respectively. In order to set up and outlay these two different enfolded modalities and structures as they find expression through the philosophical-film we employ a creative diagrammatic structure to help artificially separate out, or partition, the different Orders (as per Image 1). Our stylistic choice is driven by the desire to envision how the politics of the imperceptible articulated by *Arrival* can be actualised by grounding them in a field of struggle between affective forces of Venus (*potentia*) and territorialising powers of Mars (*potestas*). The diagram is thus composed of two overlapping dimensions affirming the territorialising – majoritarian - forces and deterritorialising, or minoritarian powers which meet in the middle; in the domain of the imperceptible that teems with novelty and creativity.

With its complex narrative, additionally supported by the intricate form, *Arrival* can be considered a cinematic 'puzzle' (Buckland 2009; 2014) or 'mind-game film' (Elsaesser 2009) that challenges the epistemological and ontological expectations of the viewer. Our diagrammatic structure, thus, aims to foreground this puzzlement evoked by the film and invite the reader to connect these seemingly scattered pieces into an unbroken totality and ultimately see the universe in a heptapodal mode of consciousness – as an undivided whole.

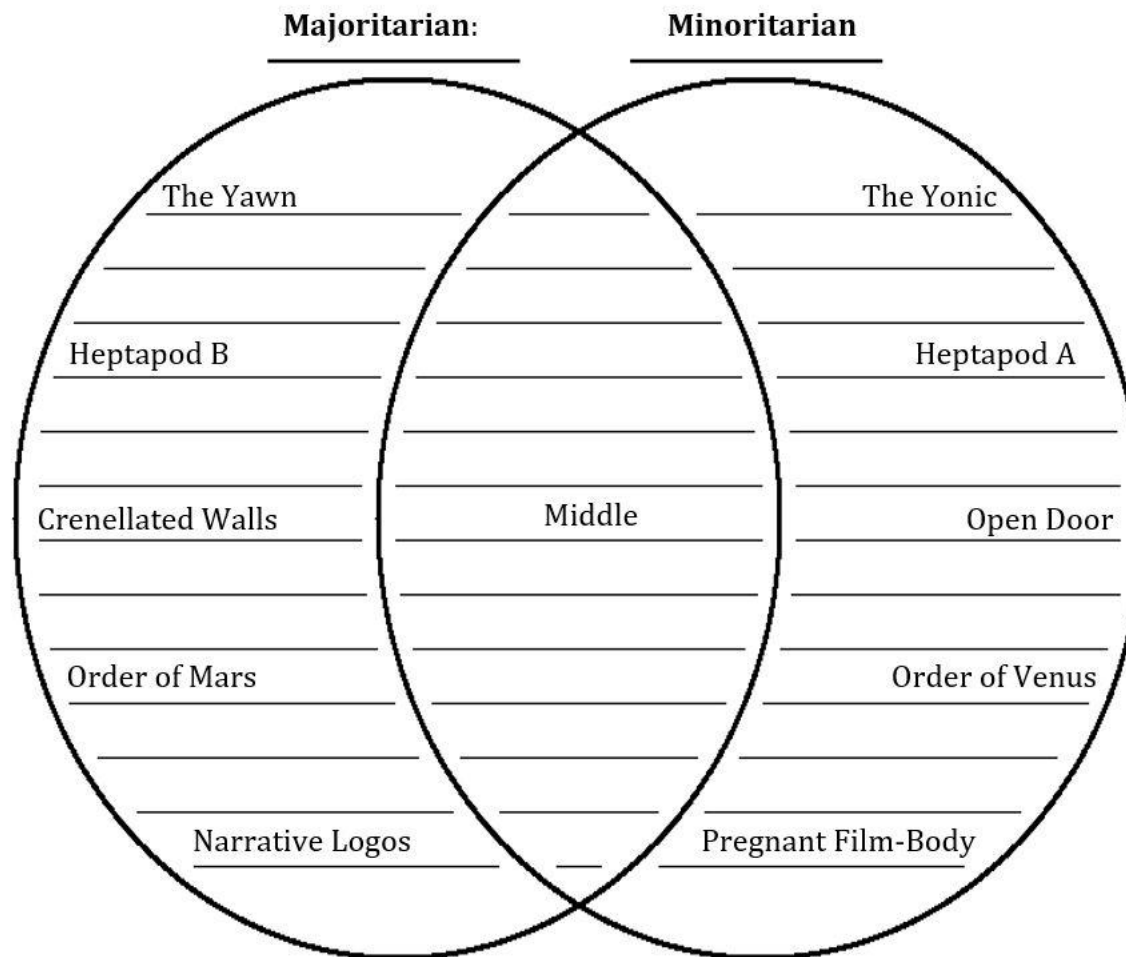


Image 1 (Project Diagram)

<p><b>The Yawn: Priapic, Phallic and Patriarchal First Contact (majoritarian)</b></p> <p><i>'The story of spaceflight omits women and people of colour in favour of a raced, gendered pseudo-utopia in which white men brave the wilderness to establish a pathway that others may (eventually) follow'</i></p> <p>Lorrie Palmer and Lisa Purse</p> <p>First contact films led or mediate by white male characters constitute the majoritarian mode in mainstream sci fi (see e.g. Bould 2007; Palmer &amp; Purse 2018). Cinematic depictions of male heroes saving humanity from malevolent extra-terrestrials have a long tradition in Hollywood. They successfully manifest the fear of any divergence from the transcendental ideal built on the Western, priapic image of thought consequently rendering difference as radically other and alien. Examples of this tendency are manifold and include films such as: <i>Independence Day</i> (1996), <i>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</i> (1977), <i>Star Trek: First Contact</i> (1996), <i>Edge of Tomorrow</i> (2014) <i>The War of the Worlds</i> (1953) and Steven Spielberg's 2005 remake featuring the archetypical "world-saver" Tom Cruise.</p> <p>In the Hollywood universe of American heroes, we cannot forget about cinematic sci-fi tales featuring heroines that nevertheless conform to the priapic (or after Deleuze and Guattari, Oedipal) ideal, such as the <i>Alien</i> series and Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley (see e.g. Steven Mulhall 2001, Teresa Rizzo 2012). We might also note how Robert Zemeckis' Jodie Foster vehicle, <i>Contact</i> (1997), pitches Dr. Ellie Arroway (Foster) into a patriarchal universe where she takes up a Hollywood-style journey into space in order to reconnect with her absent 'space dad' (an enduring Oedipal subtext undergirding many</p>	<p><b>The Yonic: Maternal &amp; Uterine Aesthetic (minoritarian)</b></p> <p><i>'Does the identity of humankind lie in women's wombs? Does human culture lie in feminine nature?'</i></p> <p>Michel Serres</p> <p>Contra a phallic narrative sci fi regime, <i>Arrival's</i> stylistic aesthetics, subtly combine to impart or unleash charged images of female morphology. Which is to say, the film's membranous brain-screen/film-form artistically congers an image of the female body which constitutes the non-unitary 'nomadic subject' (Braidotti 2011). Of relevance to our thinking of minoritarian yonic sci fi—which we will link to a material and maternal viewer encounter below—Dorothea Olkowski reminds us that Woman as becoming is 'anomic, against and outside the rule, the principle and the structure.' Woman's molecules, that are in perpetual flux, become 'a powerful contagion,' that is 'spread by symbiosis and mucosity' (2000:107). To such ends, <i>Arrival's</i> yonic order and mucosal aesthetics appear to depathologise 'everything associated with women,' while aesthetically embracing concepts that are otherwise 'distasteful because they express the body of woman – the uteral, the vulvar, the clitoral, the vaginal, the placental, or woman's luminous body itself' (107). By so doing, we claim, Woman is materially (and maternally) able to enter into knowledge and thought.</p> <p>To approach such issues we can harness notions of the specular (and indeed the speculum) to ground <i>Arrival's</i> more speculative science fictional aspects; which become associated with female embodiment and process of becoming-woman (read becoming-<i>different</i>). One</p>
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US interstellar narratives including, *Ad Astra* (2019), *Interstellar* (2014), *Solaris* (2002), etc.). Thus, although Arroway discusses becoming hooked on the search for alien intelligence after learning about Venus (a beautiful glowing star from the perspective of Earth, but a world in reality “filled with deadly gasses, sulphuric acid, and acid rain”), her passion is ultimately inherited from her father (her only parent). Her own ‘confrontational’ character would thus clearly align with (what Serres would refer to as) the ‘Order of Mars’ within this masculine universe. For, beyond her father’s family name recalling a classical weapon of war, it is telling that Arroway is in essence a ‘Daddy’s girl,’ whose later coupling with a Christian religious leader named Palmer Joss (Mathew McConaughey) might be read psychoanalytically as exposing her unconscious ‘Daddy issues.’ Ultimately, as a female action hero Arroway eventually pilots a space vehicle through a wormhole that allows her to contact and connect with ... a simulacral version of her dead father.

Returning to Earth, Arroway discovers that she travelled through a crack in time as well as space, leaving the military and scientific powers sceptical about the veracity of her first contact encounter. The suspicion is that she is delusional (read hysterical).

*Arrival* on the other hand follows the story of Professor Louise Banks (Amy Adams), a linguistic specialist who is commissioned to lead a team of US experts in an attempt to open up communications channels with a pair of alien visitors that have arrived over American airspace (another 11 ships being positioned around the globe). She is joined in her endeavours by the mathematician and physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner); both being selected, assisted and surveyed throughout by US military intelligence—here embodied by

reason for such is inspired by the saturated yonic atmosphere that egress from the aliens as aesthetic forces. The outside of the heptapod ‘shells’ (their ships) for example, are rendered as dark platelets whose contours become distantly reminiscent of labia; while their topsy-turvy interiors evoke mucosal uterine cavities and cervical ‘womb-like’ (see e.g. Slattery 2020: 122) spaces, wherefrom misty atmospheres egress. The wandering heptapod bodies, which appear tucked within these larger organic structures, also evoke (hysterical) visual rhymes with an abstract (and upturned) uterine or fallopian diagram (see image 2).



(Image 2)

In Ted Chaing’s source novella ‘Story of your Life’ (1998) what are called ‘looking glasses’ (which in turn draw associations in turn with Lewis Carroll’s character of Alice, whom Deleuze also reads as a character that ignites processes of becoming- woman) or mirrors are used as the alien communication system. In the film adaptation commentators often refer to the ships as dark mirrors or contact lenses, that allow thought and perception to connect with the as yet unthought (see Fleming and Brown 2018, Brown and Fleming 2020, Slattery 2020). Bolton reminds us that the mirror functions as an important element in Irigaray’s feminist philosophy, constituting a key image in a parliament of concepts mobilized for the active (2011: 40).

Colonel Webber (Forest Whitaker). As with Dr Arroway, Dr Banks also endures struggles against rigid military intelligence and hard scientific attitudes (mathematics as the secular God?), which demand that she constantly either compromise or bend the strict protocol in order to ethically and efficiently communicate with the aliens. Notably, the military spaces of *Arrival* are dark, highly gridded or partitioned spaces where a discipline and control logic predominates. Sketched crudely, Banks' struggle might be read as that of female intuition against masculine suspicion in the face of a radical confrontation with the new, and the as yet unthought (an event).

Saying this, Irigaray herself notes how female morphology cannot be properly observed and appreciated through a flat mirror – which is typically used by Man to uphold his kingdom of multiplied Sameness while contributing to the construction of distorted self-image: 'The mirror should support, not undermine my incarnation. All too often it sends back superficial, flat images. There are other images that generate volume better than the reflection in the glass...The mirror freezes our becoming breath, our becoming space' (1987: 65).

Towards *Arrival's* ending, the dark contact machines depart from Earth's atmosphere through a form of non-Euclidean curve in space-time. Here, the vehicles begin to resemble a concave mirror or (speculative) eye, which both Irigaray (1985) and Bataille (1985) maintain harbours a capacity to glimpse in-between woman's two lips; which otherwise are understood ceaselessly touching each other. In drawing associations, we move on to show how a specul(um)ative image of *Arrival's* darkly proffered image of thought—which cannot be seen or mastered by (the light of) Reason nor (the law of) representation—indexes a liberating and joyous becoming-woman of the sci fi film body; as the skin of the film (Marks 2000) enfolds and envelopes the skin of the viewer. Embracing and touching, stimulating and nurturing upward fresh becomings of thought. To such ends it is also worth considering how the spaceship itself also evokes the mucosal body unleashed from the grid of signification: the Body without Organs (BwO). Indeed, the egg-like shape of the spaceship here resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's declaration that 'BwO is the egg...the milieu of pure intensity, spatium not extension. Zero intensity as principle of production' (2005: 164). In this instance, it can also be related to the female egg cell, considered as passive in comparison to male sperm under the priapic regime (or Order of

	<p>Mars, but selective and welcoming from the perspective of Venus). From the Order of Venus, the female organs gain their singularity as they cease to be a mere envelope constructed to accommodate the Phallus. The spaceship as the deterritorialised female egg presages the new order, the ontology of change based on reciprocal recognition of embodied sexual difference.</p>
<p><b>Heptapod B</b></p> <p>Since its release, <i>Arrival</i> has stimulated ongoing popular (see e.g. Brower 2016, TCM 2017) and academic engagement (see e.g. Fleming &amp; Brown 2018, Brown &amp; Fleming 2020; Carruthers 2018; Sticchi 2018, Canavan 2018, Slattery 2020). However, while many of these acknowledge the existence of two parallel alien languages operating within the narrative (called Heptapod A and Heptapod B), most go on to focus solely on the latter: This being a symbolic-representational (read majoritarian) language – tellingly also translated throughout the film by the legislative and scientific powers that be as ‘weapon.’ The logogrammatic system of Heptapod B ultimately becomes associated with a fatalistic and teleological world view, which through a conceited Saphir-Whorf paradigm, gradually serves to transmute Banks’ all too human perspective upon the nature of reality.</p> <p>As a celebrated ‘cerebral sf’ (Canavan 2019) the film reveals how the military chose Banks and Donnelley to head up the team precisely because the former harbours a preoccupation with symbolic languages. Or at least Donnelley and Banks are chosen because they are experts in linguistics and mathematical theorems; which place death at the ‘very origin of language’ (95). However, as Banks learns</p>	<p><b>Heptapod A</b></p> <p>Heptapod A is the embodied communication system of the sentient alien duo. This is a body-to-body form of communication that also passes through a compressed gaseous atmosphere or media (body-gas-body), which the terrestrial visitors to the ship can also hear and feel beyond the communication screen. The two aliens use this vibrational communication system between themselves throughout the film. A system that appears to operate upon what we might call after Peirce, a level of <i>firstness</i>.</p> <p>Indeed, in the source novella the aliens are named Flapper &amp; Raspberry on account of the weird ‘unpronounceable’ noises that their alien physiognomy generate. On initially hearing these performative sounds on tape Banks describes them as being ‘vaguely like that of a wet dog shaking water out of its fur’; a fact that leads her to deduce that the heptapod ‘vocal tract is substantially different from a human vocal tract.’ When later observing the aliens through a looking glass, Louise describes hearing ‘a brief fluttering sound,’ then seeing ‘a puckered orifice at the top of its body vibrate’ (Chaing 2015: 6). This minoritarian communication stream is never decoded or</p>

to communicate and think in the symbolic alien language—a mucosal inky system which the abject aliens squirt into their environment—she begins to perceive time differently, and gradually gains access to an expanded alien perspective where the past, the present, and the future co-exist and overlap. For viewers, what had heretofore appeared to be flashbacks of Banks having a young daughter fated to die of a rare cancer as an adolescent therefore/thereafter become temporally reframed as deterministic flash forwards.

In this context, the mode of expression utilised by Heptapod B emerges as crucial for Banks/viewers to comprehend the purely qualitative mode of Heptapod A. For, through C.S. Peirce's semiotic framework the communication channel associated with Heptapod B properly belongs to the level of Secondness, which allows for the actualization of the phenomena that in the mode of Firstness remain virtual. According to Peirce, Secondness must subsequently be transcended through Thirdness, though. This being the reflective realm of 'interpretation and symbolization' (see e.g. Marks 2002: 194). As Banks acknowledges in Ted Chiang's (2015) novella, the heptapod mode of consciousness is *simultaneous*, endowing them with the ability to perceive reality as a unified, undivided whole, where singularities merge into one another. This cannot be comprehended by human minds that operate *sequentially* and must continuously "cut" reality into smaller fragments in order to grasp it. The assistance of Heptapod B is therefore a pre-requisite for Banks' anthropocentric mind to truly understand the alien language and consequently employ it for the benefit of the entire universe.

This total apprehension further gifts her with the dissipation of the neoliberal illusion of "free will" and quiet acceptance of the necessity

understood in either the novella or the cinematic adaptation, and is greatly overlooked in academic engagements with the film.

From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, it would be tempting to draw parallels between this body to body mode of communication and the notion of the *abject*: making this language Heptapod A(bject). The first maternal form of body to body contact and communication that psychoanalysis teaches us becomes overcoded after entry into the patriarchal symbolic. However, according to Kristeva, pure abjection is the height of life, making manifest 'the scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and out- side, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual' (1982: 155). Arguably, the heptapods embody the ultimate abjection, then, and become aesthetic figures associated with the feminine unleashed from the phallic image of thought, and whom deterritorialise any bounded differences between life and death (see e.g. Slattery 2020).

In order to challenge the phallic construction of maternal feminine as the ultimate abjection, Irigaray advocates the affirmation of mucosal membranes, the likes of which *Arrival's* mise-en-scene abounds. These being structured into an aesthetic code that summons female morphology through the frequent evocation and exploration of mucous as an intensive space – a threshold – for communication between embodied singularities inspiring a 'non-appropriative interaction' (Summers-Bremmer 1998: 191).

As a final point on this alien language and its convergences with the atmospheric film, we venture that the aliens also appear to employ other modalities of body-to-body communication that are not sensed



<p>that her daughter will die. However, her “decision” to give birth to a child destined to die young cannot be regarded through the lens of determinism, because the future is in the process of perpetual creation. Rather it is the effectuation of the highest level of <i>system thinking</i> that verges towards the Daoist concept of <i>non-action (wu-wei)</i> which does not imply a passive acceptance, but rather an active creation that stems from grasping reality as a unified field (see Liu 2006:131-181). The simultaneous mode of consciousness grants the perception of the universe as an undivided whole of which we all are only illusory parts; our anthropocentric egos must essentially dispel as they were never truly existent. This begets the drive to action that contributes to the well-being of all singularities, both organic and nonorganic, if they contradict the desire of egoic self.</p> <p>This selfless perspective, however, cannot be achieved without Secondness; the domain of Heptapod B capable of active of actualization of pure sensations. For the human organism that grasps reality in the sequential mode, the perpetual flow from Firstness to Thirdness – the semiotic strange loop – is possible only through Secondness with its descriptive properties.</p>	<p>by those who remain screened off from the aliens. For, while Heptapod B functions as a symbolic system resembling human writing, and the embodied sounds and movements of Heptapod A recall human speech and gesture, the film also invites us to speculate on other mucosal animalistic communications systems. For, the two submerged aliens also clearly boast the physiognomy of creatures resembling octopuses or squids (and squirt ink-like substances into their compressed environment). On account of this it is implied that they also communicate with each other through biochemical means. Which is to say, through glands and corresponding chemico-receptors as per terrestrial cephalopods: who often squirt toxic or intoxicating alchemical cocktails into seawater to directly impact the perception and actions of other animals (see e.g. Brown and Fleming 2020: 24-125). Late in the film, Louise’s immersion in this conspicuous (CGI) gaseous alien milieu suggests another embodied dimension of Heptapod A then, that here resonates with themes from another sci-fi classic, Frank Herbert’s <i>Dune</i> (1965, a novel which Villeneuve is also currently adapting to the big screen): A story in which an intoxicating organic substance excreted from an alien being—in <i>Dune</i> known as ‘spice Melange’—serves to alter the human body’s ability to perceive time and reality.</p>
<p><b>Crenellated walls: Orange Suit (majoritarian)</b></p> <p>Early in the film the military insist that the humans entering the alien communication chamber wear orange biohazard suits and receive regular immunization boosters to protect themselves against a micropredatory invasion of the body. When factored up, this attention to the defense of the individual body betrays the logic</p>	<p><b>Open Doors: White Flag (minoritarian)</b></p> <p>After a few alien communication sessions, Louise rejects wearing the military-issue orange biohazard suit; which forms an external barrier designed to protect her against suspected micropredatory alien threats; a detail worth taking pause to explore. Firstly, we concede that this suit reveals a mimetic logic linked to a directorial desire to</p>

adopted to the larger national/Leviathan (and planetary, by extension) body. That is, these militaristic forces are tasked with the Trojan defense of the body politic in accordance with the Order of Mars. Linked to which, it is significant for Serres that many point to the existence of the human immune system as a sign of the human body's enclosed-ness and separateness from that which is 'out there' (the world, others, the c(ha)osmos).

From this vantage, at the level of ideology, identity becomes conflated with defined territories, purity and belongingness; demanding that one should close off the borders wage 'an implacable battle against intruders' (Serres 2018: 77). In light of such, it is telling that many read *Arrival* as a zeitgeist film which channels the 'grim mood of horrified premeditation' prior to the 2016 Trump presidency, and whose campaigning famously promised a border wall with Mexico (see Canavan 2018: 497). Here, notions of rigidity, ossification, defense and the erection of national borders betray a priapic logic that find correlates in what Serres sees as masculine organs and systems such as the skeleton, liver, immune system, etc. (and more of which in the adjacent column).

ground the speculative story within an extrapolated verisimilar reality. However, the choice of the orange aesthetic strikes us as significant. For, to evoke commutation thinking, it might equally have been yellow or white. However, the orange serves double duty by also drawing associations with the infamous garb of incarcerated US prisoners; whether held domestically in the prison-industrial complex or in overseas military institutions such as Guantanamo Bay. This aesthetic choice implies that humanity (or its synecdoche in the ante-chamber) are quasi prisoners within a form of Platonic cave (the alien communication chamber also being a stone cavern with an illuminated screen at the front), albeit here turning the myth on its head by inverting the relations of light and shadows to posit new forms of 'dark enlightenment' (see e.g. Fleming and Brown 2018, Brown & Fleming 2020; Slattery 2020).

Louise's refusal to wear this constraining orange garb also gains fresh meaning if read through an additional feminist lens. Here, the presence of the caged canary brought into the communication shaft also gains significance. For, the bird appears more than just a living tool for indexing changes in the gaseous atmosphere, with its intensive affects and inhuman molecules moving into composition with Louise, and surfacing as a form of kin and catalyst for her future becomings.

In the story Louise removes this armor in order to better see and communicate with the heptapods. In her rejection of this propalactic (from Greek meaning before or advanced guard) suit, she also signals her rejection of the imprisoning Order of Mars. Her liberating gesture revealing that she alone is unafraid to breath the air that could be 'contaminated' by the aliens. Discarding her orange uniform of

phallogocentric subjugation and uniformity, she thus becomes the unshackled prisoner, opening herself up to the dark shadows of the real, rather than the false projections (light) of patriarchal order.

The heptapods, endowed with their a-temporal perception here arguably proffer the gift of alterity. Which is to say, the extra-terrestrial visitors offer humanity a chance to open onto unpredictability and difference, and the opportunity to embrace and make contact with all forms of cosmic becomings in the (eternal) present. Or, instead of maintaining solid-arity with the masculine and patriarchal orders of Earth's powers (the US, Australian, Pakistani, Chinese, Russian, Sudanese state-military contact teams indexed by the story) Louise chooses to embrace the science of liquids, flows and vortexes which communicates in the affective language of forgotten of feminine, silenced by the signifying speech of Mars.



Image 3

To return to Louise's removal of the suit (image 3), against the protests of disciplined military and scientific men, this gesture of rejecting a protective barrier also points towards a feminine *zoe*. A

form of female embodiment that, in difference to the man standard, can welcome molecular alterity. We might consider here Serres discussion of two biological regimes (or strategies) of what we might call masculine and feminine organs and systems. Here, the human immune system helps personify the logic and approaches of the former, and the uterus the logic and philosophy of the latter. Only the uterus provides something of 'an exception to this rule,' with this alone being a 'welcoming organ' that we must love, because it is defined by 'a partial lifting of immunity rules' in that it does not defend itself against spermatozoa, and allows for this alterity in order to produce children (2018b: 77-78).

We might thus diagrammatically map these differing logics (functions, attributes, intents, qualities) onto the Order of Mars and Order of Venus respectively. As Serres affirms:

'Our body puts together both solutions, combats and doesn't combat, closes and opens, forbids and allows passage. If you choose the solution of the intestines, the liver or the skeleton, you opt for individual life, the life that lasts for the time of mayflies and passes like the grass in the fields...should you prefer love, unfurl the white flag. The time of a new narrative occurs then' (2018b: 78).

Tying such back to the broader film, it is perhaps significant that in the final act Louise enters into the aliens' dense mucosal environment without the propalactic military suit. In this dense cloudy chemical stew Louise's altered post-human modes of perception become properly ignited. For, she here fully opens herself up to the embodied (intoxicating?) affect of heptapod biochemicals (Heptapod A(bject)? see above); appearing physically pained by the act of breathing, which

labors her lungs, as the alien chemicals saturate her blood, in turn leading to her perceptual apparatus becoming radically opened up to the future and the future life (as memory) of her as yet unborn daughter Hannah (Julia Scarlett Dan, Jacyn Malone, Abigail Pniowsky). Accordingly, Louise's Venusian openness to the alien encounter/alterity becomes enfolded with her awareness of the broader future of life beyond the singular ego. An opening that thus also expands Louise's singular life and specious perception up to a longer time-line associated with the durational order of Venus (read the cosmic becomings of the species and universe within time as Aeon). The wandering hysterical alien hereafter explains: 'Louise has weapon. Louise use weapon.' Its embodied sounds of its Heptapod A might here be described as pulsating contraction noises, which move into composition with Louise question about her future visions: 'Who is this child?' The elements suggesting in assemblage that the uterus is the weapon; which opens up time, and becomings. The Order of Venus, or the nature of universal becomings, reside within the body of woman.

At the end of the film, as war and Martian annihilation of the Venusian aliens threatens the future of the planet, Louise is able to recall forward to a future memory where she meets the 'big domino,' China's General Shang (Tzi Ma). There, in this future memory, where the Order of Mars is on the wane, it is noticeable that among all the national flags hung around the opulent embassy setting, there appears one new flag, that of the absent but *present* heptapods. As if speaking back to Serres, this is significantly a 'white flag' that offsets an inky heptapod logogram (Image 4).

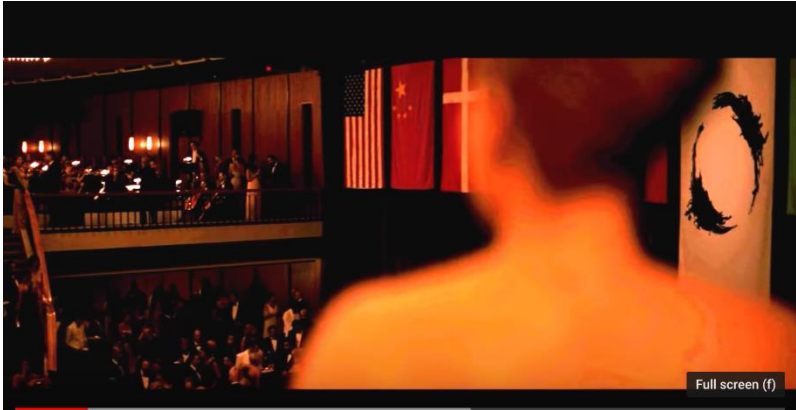
	
<p><b>Order of Mars (majoritarian)</b></p> <p><i>'Mars cannot help but destroy'</i>          (MacCormack 2015: 267).</p> <p>The Martian model of state science here precludes the cathexis of change or becoming on solidity and fixity. As Patricia MacCormack observes, as a violent human compulsion this order 'travels through human antagonism toward nature.' (2015: 267). In this context, both Donnelly as mathematician and Banks as linguist partake in what Deleuze and Guattari (2005: 269) label as the royal science, concerned with 'extracting constants from variables', striving towards order, measurement and homogenizing of heterogeneous space. This is a kind of science that attempts to arrest the flow of becoming; to tame affective vortex of multiplicity in order to assure that the language of femininity – the Venusian affective, asignifying logos – is silenced.</p>	<p><b>Order of Venus (minoritarian)</b></p> <p><i>'Venus is relation itself, she cannot help but produce.'</i>          (MacCormack 2015: 267).</p> <p>Venus is unequivocally feminine, but not only in opposition to Mars' masculinity. As an aesthetic figure Louise can be understood 'becoming Venus'; especially after she enters into embodied and entangled contact with the heptapods in the film's final act. This is also the first and only time that viewers see the alien creature in its full uterine form (Image 2). As a final attempt to understand the alien language, and stop an imminent military escalation, Louise immerses herself within that gaseous milky atmosphere, which recalls the white foam from which Aphrodite emerged,<sup>i</sup> suggesting the heptapods are bestowing her with an ability to submit herself to the Order of Venus.</p> <p>Tellingly the image of Louise immersed in this gaseous uterine environ is brought to animated life by a conspicuous moment of</p>

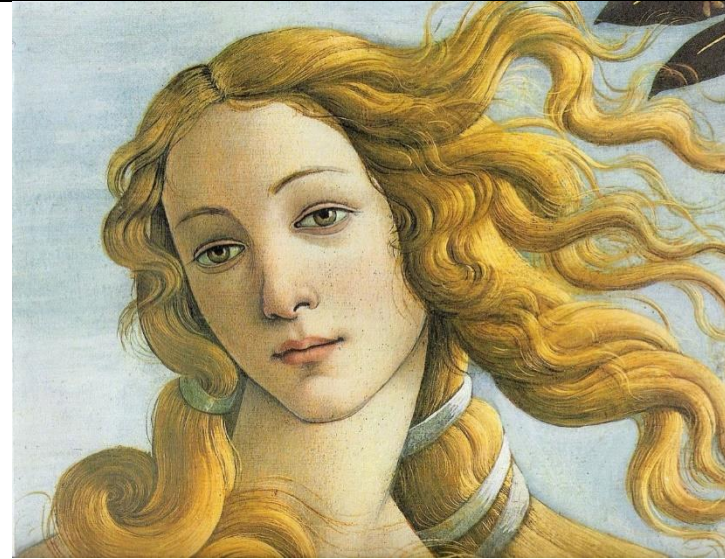
Image 4 (*White Flag*)

Seeing an uncomfortable reflection of themselves (the Order of Mars) within the alien Other, it is of little surprise that US military factions (as with the China-Russia-Sudan axis), escalate aggression against the aliens (read alterity), ultimately pushing the planet to the edge of a nuclear catastrophe. From such a vantage, the human conflict with the heptapods amounts to little more than a hegemonic patriarchal attempt to destroy the possibility of change by ensuring the return of the Same.

additive CGI, or what we might call after Lev Manovich 'cinematic 'painting in time' (2001: 308). Indeed, Louise's hair noticeably begins to writhe and squirm in a manner at once invocative of a mythical gorgon (she who petrifies men) and the birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli (see Image 5 & 6).



*(Image 5, Banks inside alien gaseous environment)*



(Image 6 detail from Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1486))

During these moments of submersion in the alien gas chamber, Ann Carruthers notes how Louise also 'appears as if she is underwater with her eyes barely open and her hair flailing slowly around her head,' with this embodied experience becoming suggestive of an 'embryonic' state (Carruthers 2018: 337). Resonating with our arguments about the film here, Carruthers also perceives the material film-body harnessing its aesthetics and affects to express the nature of pregnant embodiment: through which the film stimulates new life, becomings or thought in the spectator. That is, the film itself operates through the Order of Venus which allows for an infinity of options, 'especially those which exceed or defy language or signification' (MacCormack 2015: 267).



	<p>From such vantage, the arrival of the heptapods can be reframed as a harbinger of vengeful release that ignite the fluidity of becomings. Or again, a nomadic Venusian science that corresponds with Irigaray’s cry for development of mechanics of liquid that would account for flows and multiplicities associated with the femininity based on ethics of sexual difference.</p>
<p><b>Narrative Logos (majoritarian History)</b></p> <p>After an initial viewing, the twisted narrative of <i>Arrival</i> can be retroactively unfurled and reconfigured as a straight liner story. Which is to say, it can be read as a Mobius strip narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end (even if this overlaps and co-constitutes its beginning). In Deleuzian action-image language it constitutes something like an incurved [S’]SAS’ ([transformed concluding situation S’], original situation S, disruption [arrival of aliens] that demands action A leading to transformed situation, S’) story.</p> <p>From the human perspective this remains a chronological tale that is only delivered out of its natural order by the sentient film - or filmmind to use Daniel Frampton’s (2006) language. Linked to this, the language of Heptapod B is a teleological logocentric system that corresponds with a fatalist view of time-reality. From this perspective, the logocentric discourse is inherently imbued with a power imbalance between sexes, insofar as patriarchy can only accept the existence of one, masculine, sex. Does this account for the fact that Bank’s grants the alien duo white masculine names: ‘Abbot and Costello’? (for more on the naming of the aliens in the film see Fleming 2020: 257, 261)</p>	<p><b>Pregnant Film Body (minoritarian History)</b></p> <p>The ‘Order of Venus’ in <i>Arrival</i> is parallel with the time-image and thus Deleuzian ‘second synthesis of time’ wherein the future and the present become the dimensions of the ‘pure past’ which is linked to the Stoic time Aeon; associated with the feminine forces of cyclical returns (Deleuze 2015). The spectator is confronted with the time-image in the first half of the film as she is lead to think that Louise is stricken with the recollection-images of her dead daughter and thus, her femininity is irrevocably conjoined with the maternal by presenting her as Mater Dolorosa, simultaneously linking her to the Virgin Mary whose figure was corrupted by the patriarchal regime. This is, however, the threshold of becoming-woman for both Louise and the viewer, who - through the empathetic bond she forms with the protagonist - is lead to the hysterical state that enables a negation of the connection to her maternal origin, that the regime of Phallus has robbed her of. As we are devoured by the ‘pure past’, we are simultaneously forced to negotiate our relationship with the maternal origin and thus, the time-image of <i>Arrival</i> ignites a hysterical response that allows for the repudiation of Oedipal structures. Approached this way, we can affirm Aeon as the time of becoming-woman.</p>

The film posits a new era emerging though, which expands human perception to suggest that the true (read posthuman) nature of time is to perceive order without change (that is, events have an definite order but no temporality or correct direction, see e.g. Fleming & Brown 2018, 2020). For, over and above the story of Banks having a daughter called Hannah (with Donnelley), the human race also is destined to become united as one thanks to this encounter with a radically alien Other, with the aliens also fated to return to Earth in 3000 odd years time when the transformed human species will be able to help them in some way.

From this reading we might postulate that the Order of Mars is expressed in *Arrival* by the movement-image, anchored in the ‘first synthesis of time’ where past and future become the dimension of the present (Deleuze 20014: 104-107). *Arrival* thus refers to the linear, narrative-driven action of the film that constructs the figure of Banks as the hero (or vanishing heptapod mediator) whose predestined acts prompt the story to its apparent resolution (although as time is fated nothing is truly ‘resolved’). Here, the protagonist is presented as a Molar woman, and thus the atrophied man compliant with the majoritarian, phallus-oriented ‘image of thought’ (Deleuze 2014: 175).

The film additionally brings our attention to maternity experienced in its own right through the intimate images of Louise holding her newborn daughter, feeding her and embracing their encounter while the figure of Donnelly (the father) is aesthetically unfocused, seeming decentred and backgrounded. These are the aspects of maternal femininity that have been disavowed by the Order of Mars and which are crucial for the ethics of sexual difference to be effectuated. The unacknowledged debt that western culture owe to maternal feminine must be paid by recognizing independent from the patriarchal teleology of reproduction.

**Middle**

‘A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one or two, nor the relation between the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight’

Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 293.

*Arrival's* pre-contact world invokes the impossibility of woman achieving full subjecthood in the Phallogocentric reign of (Hu)man. As woman has never been constituted as a subject, neither can the present. The arrival of the heptapods heralds the annihilation of signification; the dawn of phallic usurpation of minoritarian bodies. On these ruins of representation humanity has a chance to create an ethics of difference. And here, sexual difference returns, transformed and polymorphous, courtesy of a cosmic encounter between the Orders of Mars and Venus. Of course, our experimental essay reveals how rather than being binary opposites, Mars and Venus should be seen in on-going exchange of intensities, co-composing each other like Daoist forces of *yin* and *yang*, or the actual and virtual, while causing 'an augmentation of powers' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 157) associated with driving life as becoming.

The heptapods essentially constitute this in-between; this threshold of perception. They can thus be regarded as divine mediators that reconcile the phallic division between the transcendental reason and subordinated flesh. Irigaray proposes the figure of angel to account for these wondrous messengers that herald the apocalypse of representation and advent of the tactile, corporeal Order of Venus. According to Irigaray, angels stand for the harbinger 'of what has not yet taken place, or what is heralded [circulating] between God, who is the perfectly immobile act, man, who is enclosed within the horizons of his world of work, and woman, whose job is to look after nature and procreation' (1991: 173). These angels therefore open up the closed nature of the world, identity, action and history. Seeing heptapods as angels corresponds to their function as muses, messengers of the divine announcing of the extraordinary events. The angels unify the sexes in their singularity, conceiving the inter-kingdoms that engender the condition for an encounter between male and female.

### After-images

Through its sophisticated temporal structure, *Arrival* endows us with a form of perception that allows the ethics of sexual difference to emerge and grow outwards in unpredictable directions. The film's form and content combine to allow us to discern a struggle between three types of images, accompanied by the three types of associated temporal syntheses. It is, however, the third synthesis of time - where past and present become the dimensions of the future - that opens along with the comprehension of heptapod language. The complex temporal architecture of *Arrival* unleashes the processes of becomings that essentially point the way toward becoming- imperceptible; which involves the dissolution of anthropocentric subjectivity. The viewer here is encouraged to incessantly travel in time and discern between dimensions of past, present and future. In Villeneuve's film this occurs in the domain of pure past and is expressed through time-image, but it is becoming-imperceptible, anchored in the future, which allows for the ethics of sexual difference to be effectuated. This new type of image, allowing for a truly novel encounter with the film by stimulating the spectator's synapses and simultaneously traversing her body, affords an ahuman temporal perspective. This is where the mythical time associated with the Greek god Kairos reigns, allowing for the generative powers of Venus to be fully

actualised in its ceaseless dance with the territorialising forces of Mars, and providing fertile ground for the politics of the imperceptible to flourish.

As the extra-terrestrials assist humanity by endowing it with the ability to perceive future events, *Arrival* demonstrates that in order to unleash the absolute potential of feminism, it must be situated - similarly to sci fi - in the world that is yet-to come, in the dimension of the future, in the politics of becoming imperceptible as such. The a-temporal perception which viewers are gifted with courtesy of the heptapod/*Arrival* encounter provides the ethical itinerary for a future that becomes increasingly difficult to envision. Today, in the face of geo-ecological apocalypse, the heptapods prompt us to submit ourselves to Venus. The necessary sacrifice is by repudiation of what we cherish the most, our anthropocentric ego, our human identity which can only be catalysed by shedding of the mask of phallogocentric sameness forcefully stitched to the plethora of bodies – silenced and immobilized by the unsuited veil of the organised organism. In other words, we need to affirm the free-flowing science of fluids. *Arrival* seems to point to cinema as the intensive science of anomalous becomings. The ecstatic, cinesexual encounter with filmic images deterritorializes our bodies (of which the mind is an idea), and affirms the transversal inhumanity of ‘meteōra’ (Serres 2018a: 89); the unpredictable meteorological forces in which humans also partake.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the birth of Aphrodite was only possible through Uranus’ castration by Cronos which evokes the need of the radical destabilisation of thought, effectuating the kingdom of pure affects, intensities and anomalous becomings.

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