

<https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v16i3.3>

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Alien* and Storytelling in the Anthropocene: Evolutionism, Creationism and Pseudoarchaeology in Science Fiction

Abstract: This paper analyses the change in the metanarrative of the *Alien* franchise initiated by the movie *Alien* (1979), directed by Ridley Scott, and continued with a series of three sequels. The franchise was revived in 2012 with the prequel *Prometheus*. The story of the first four movies is set at the end of the anthropocene, and it deals with the horror of alien life forms, offering an evolutionist approach to the development of the human species. However, the revival of the franchise with the movie *Prometheus* changed the metanarrative from evolutionism to a creationist and pseudo-archaeological metanarrative with Biblical motifs. This paper points to the dangers of popularizing creationist and pseudo-archaeological narratives in science fiction. Responsibility for life on Earth and in outer space, lacking evidence to the contrary, remains in the hands of humans collectively and not alien Others.

Key words: *Alien*, science fiction, anthropocene, storytelling, evolutionism, creationism, pseudoarchaeology

“The anthropologists got it wrong when they named our species *Homo sapiens* (‘wise man’). In any case it’s an arrogant and bigheaded thing to say, wisdom being one of our least evident features. In reality, we are Pan narrans, the storytelling chimpanzee.”

— Terry Pratchett, *The Globe*

* Rad je nastao kao rezultat rada Sonje Žakule u Etnografskom institutu SANU koji finansira Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja RS na osnovu Ugovora o realizaciji i finansiranju naučnoistraživačkog rada NIO u 2021. godini broj: 451-03-9/2021-14/200173.od 05.02.2021.

Introduction

This paper deals with the question of appropriate storytelling for earthly survival as described by Donna Haraway (Chachkiani et al. 2019, 458). In the words of Slavoj Žižek, we are living in the end times (Žižek 2010), or on a dying planet as argued by Anna Tsing (Tsing et al. 2017).

In these end times we live in, global warming, greenhouse gasses, carbon footprints and climate change are everyday topics (Edgeworth 2014, 73–74). Different scholars increasingly point to a connection between these and a new geological epoch, *the anthropocene*, a term which gained traction in science and the humanities since it was introduced by biologist Eugene F. Stoermer and chemist Paul J. Crutzen (2000). The impact of humans on the environment, beginning with the industrial revolution in Europe in the 18th century, does not only have local or regional consequences as in previous periods of human history and as argued by other authors in this volume of this journal. With the industrial revolution, this impact started having truly global consequences (Graves-Brown 2014, 78; Edgeworth 2014, 73; Lane 2015, 486–487). According to Claire Colebrook, the anthropocene is also closely related to species extinction (Colebrook 2019, 263). In the words of Slavoj Žižek, today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, which is seen as the economic system shaping, if not causing, the anthropocene (Žižek 2010, 334; Kelly 2014, 93; Žakula 2021, 110). There is also the opinion that the notion of anthropocene is anthropocentric or Eurocentric because it places humans as the primary agents of this epoch (Edgeworth 2014, 76; Kelly 2014, 93). Indeed, the agency of other forms of life on Earth should not be neglected and should be considered symmetrically (Latour 2005, 76). However, merely labeling the anthropocene as anthropocentric misses the mark; in this sense, anthropocentrism should come with notions of awareness and responsibility (Domanska 2014, 97), as the main drivers of climate change, humans are responsible for the planet, whether we like it or not.

In order to better illustrate the problems behind the choice of storytelling appropriate for the survival of Earth in the anthropocene, we will focus on the *Alien* franchise, specifically, the main movies in this franchise (*Alien* 1979; *Aliens* 1986; *Alien 3* 1992, *Alien Resurrection* 1997, *Prometheus* 2012 and *Alien: Covenant* 2017) and the change in the metanarrative which can be found in them. We are referring to the change from an evolutionist to a creationist and pseudoscientific metanarrative. When we speak of evolution, we are speaking of the process through which living beings change over generations by adapting to their environment through the process of natural selection. Some inherited characteristics prove to be advantageous to various organisms

and are, therefore, passed onto their offspring. These changes occur on a genetic level¹. Creationism, on the other hand, is the belief that the universe, and therefore Earth and everything in it, were created through divine intervention: in short, it is the belief that the Universe was created by God, or, as we will demonstrate in this paper, by all-powerful aliens².

Although we do acknowledge the presence and importance of socio-cultural evolution in science fiction, as argued by Ana Banić Grubišić (2018, 23), our focus is on the evolution of the living world. We note a marked difference in the metanarrative before and after the movie *Prometheus* (2012), when the new creationist and pseudoscientific narrative takes the place of the previously present evolutionist narrative. The *Alien* franchise is in no way an exception in the Sci-Fi genre. Indications of creationism are also found in other franchises at the end of the last and the beginning of this century, such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *Stargate*, but also in some pseudo-documentary shows such as *Ancient Aliens* on the History Channel.

Evolution and Science Fiction

As argued by many anthropologists throughout the discipline's fraught history (starting with Bronislaw Malinowsky (1954, 96)), *origin stories are important*. They tell the story of where we came from, where we're going, and most importantly, *who we are*. Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995, 1–6) emphasize this by underlining the implicit "sacredness" of scientific evolutionary narratives in modern society, and point to a marked similarity between the social clout such narratives are given and the clout afforded to the Christian story of *Genesis* in Western societies. This is especially pertinent in this case, as the Euro-West is the main producer of mainstream pop-

¹ While the authors are aware of sexual selection, genetic drift and other findings in evolutionary theory, we are emphasizing the parts of evolutionary theory that are most commonly known and (mis)understood by the public in relevant discourses (for more on public (mis)understandings of Darwin and evolution, see Žakula 2013).

² While the idea of an all-powerful God creating the Universe is by no means a new one, in this paper we focus on creationism as, primarily, a political and ideological alternative to evolutionism, and a story that thrived in opposition to science and scientific endeavour in the US especially since the 1970's, and has since spread worldwide. That is to say, the trouble isn't with the idea of divine creation, it's with the political implications of science denial, climate "scepticism" and the host of other problematic stances that are part and parcel of the conservative creationist ideological assemblage, and all of which, either explicitly or implicitly, serve to diminish or outright negate the responsibility of people toward other species and the environment.

ular culture. Furthermore, the social significance of the concept of evolution, and especially the idea that origin stories are important and politically powerful, is elaborated by Donna Haraway in her seminal paper “Primates is politics by other means” (1984), where the author argues that the focus on reproduction (sexual practices) and production (the division of labour) in studies of non-human primate groups is a direct consequence of “evolutionary thinking” and the idea that the social practices of non-human primates can offer a glimpse into the primordial, “culture-free” and therefore “natural” behaviour of *homo sapiens*, or, as we prefer to call us, *pan narrans*.

We have established that origin stories are important. But what of science fiction? Serbian anthropologist Ljiljana Gavrilović noted in 1986 that *Science fiction is the mythology of technological society*. While the author herself somewhat revised her claim in subsequent works (Gavrilović 2008, 2011), many other Serbian anthropologists were emboldened by her paper and began studying science fiction as a legitimate artifact of modern society (Žikić 2010, 17), and as a genre of stories modern (Euro-Western) society tells itself about *itself* (Đorđević 2009). As Đorđević (2006, 110) says (notably referring to written texts), science fiction in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s became a way to critique one’s own society by writing stories about (basically, and more often than not) aliens – a practice not unlike that of certain 20th century ethnographies (as noted by, among others, Gavrilović 2008). On the other hand, Ana Banić Grubišić (2013, 143 and further) writes about the importance of pop-culture, and especially cinematic films, for the shaping of human worldviews on a previously unmatched scale. In that sense, we find that popular culture espousing pseudoscience and propagating creationist mythologies in the current global political *climate* (pun intended), is dangerous and ultimately detrimental to any attempts at mitigating the damage of the anthropocene. To paraphrase the great Jedi general Obi-Wan Kenobi, *these are not the stories you are looking for*.

As, sadly, neither of the authors are capable of Jedi mind tricks, we will have to settle for offering a critique of the shift in storytelling within the *Alien* franchise through this paper, and pointing out the role science fiction narratives can play in socially responsible *storytelling for Earthly survival* in the anthropocene. Furthermore, we follow Alice Gorman who argued that “the anthropocene cannot be understood without reference to space” (2014, 90).

Before *Prometheus*

The movie *Alien* (1979) was directed by Ridley Scott and written by Dan O’Bannon. The storyline follows the fight for survival of the crew of the commercial spaceship *Nostromo*, travelling back to Earth with seven passengers. At the beginning of the movie, the crew is awoken from cryosleep by an SOS mes-

sage received by the spaceship's main computer named Mother. The message comes from a nearby celestial body, exomoon LV-426. According to protocol, the crew is obligated to investigate and they organize a party to land on LV-426 and locate the origin of the SOS signal. The landing party discovers an alien spaceship, and in one of the scenes we see a giant alien body, that is, in the later film *Prometheus* (2012), explained as the space suit of the alien ship's pilot. We will return to this pilot later in this paper. One of the landing party members discovers a room with numerous egg-like objects. They look organic and are covered in mucus. Curiosity brings the landing party member closer to one of the eggs. It opens and out of it a white spider-like creature jumps up and attaches itself to the face of the man (these creatures are known as "facehuggers" in fandom). The rest of the landing party transport him back to the ship where a higher ranking officer, a woman named Ellen Ripley, portrayed by the actress Sigourney Weaver, tries to put them in quarantine according to protocol. The crew does not follow protocol and lets the landing party members mingle with the man to whom the alien spider-like creature attached itself. They try to remove it, but it bleeds highly porotious acid and they decide to leave it be, as the man to which the creature is attached is still alive. Later in the movie the creature detaches itself from the body of the man and dies. He wakes up and feels fine. The crew celebrates by eating together. All of a sudden the man starts feeling ill. A small alien creature, different from the spider-like one, bursts out of his chest, shows its small sharp teeth and runs away. Some authors have described this new creature as phalliform (Ahrens 2007, 442). This and other elements, such as the fact that the facehugger parasite comes out of a vulva-like opening made several authors consider that the xenomorphs – as this species of alien is named in the franchise fandom – are creatures beyond the binary gender dichotomy (Creed 2005, 57–63; Hurley 1995, 210; for gender in *Alien* (1979) see Noonan 2015, 154–155). The crew organizes a search and one by one they are killed by the xenomorph. Ripley discovers that one of the crew members called Ash is an android who worked towards keeping the xenomorph alive in the interest of the Weyland-Yutani company the crew works for. In order to keep this secret he even attempts to kill Ripley, but she is saved by two crew members. Ash admires the xenomorph calling it a perfect organism whose structural perfection is matched only by its hostility, unclouded by consciousness, remorse or delusions of morality. In the end, Ripley manages to defeat the xenomorph and leave the ship. The first sequel *Aliens* from 1986 follows the new adventures of Ripley who was in cryosleep before she was found by the company. They send her back to exomoon LV-426 with a group of soldiers to investigate the loss of contact with a human terraforming colony which had been living there for decades while she was in cryosleep. They find out that the colony has been destroyed by the xenomorphs and at the very end Ripley battles a xenomorph queen, an ant-like giant xenomorph who lays the

xenomorph eggs. She defeats the queen and puts herself in cryosleep again. This time she is accompanied by two more survivors, corporal Hicks and a 10 year old girl nicknamed Newt. In the second sequel, *Alien 3* from 1992, Ripley is the sole survivor of the escape party. Her escape pod crashes on Fiorina "Fury" 161, a foundry and maximum security double-Y chromosome work correctional facility inhabited by male inmates with a genetic mutation which gives the afflicted individual a predisposition for antisocial behavior. She is saved by the inmates. During the course of the movie we find out that not only was a queen xenomorph facehugger onboard too and had escaped, taking a dog and an ox as hosts, but that Ripley herself is infected with a xenomorph growing inside her. At the end of the movie the company sends a crew to extract Ripley or the xenomorph, but she beats them by killing herself and the xenomorph by throwing herself into a kiln.

As already noticed by Kelly Hurley, parasitism allows the xenomorph to selectively or randomly adopt the characteristics of its host. Humanoid morphology is only one in the rich spectrum of possibilities in a potentially endless repertoire (Hurley 1995, 218). This is indicated by the fact that in the first and the second movie, the xenomorph is bipedal, and in the third movie quadrupedal, since its hosts are a dog and an ox. In the fourth movie, or the third sequel *Alien Resurrection* from 1997, the Weyland-Yutani corporation clones the now dead Ripley, using her blood. The clone of the xenomorph queen produced out of the infected blood of Ripley keeps its xenomorph body but it gets a human reproductive system from Ripley, whereas one of Ripley's clones (the protagonist of the film) keeps the human body but gains a range of alien features, such as superhuman strength, acidic blood, and a telepathic connection with the xenomorph queen.

Therefore, it can be said that the first four movies in the franchise have an evolutionist metanarrative. Karin Littau even compared the spaceship *Nostramo* with the *Beagle* (2011, 19). At the end of the fourth movie, a space mercenary called Joner says to Ripley's clone, two centuries after the events of the first movie, that the Earth is now a shithole. In the extended version of the movie, we even see the clone of Ripley and the android Anali, who accompanies her during the fourth movie, sitting in a barren landscape overlooking Paris. The Eiffel tower is destroyed and the rest of the city is in ruins. The sky and the air are a yellowish and brownish colour. The Earth is dying.

Prometheus and After

The great change in the metanarrative of the *Alien* franchise began with the movie *Prometheus* (2012) directed by Ridley Scott. The story is placed in the timeline before the first of the previous four *Alien* movies. The director returns

to the question of who or what the species we encounter when the *Nostramo* crew lands on the exomoon LV-426 in the first *Alien* movie is. In order to answer this question, Scott takes us back in time and, in a scene at the beginning of *Prometheus*, gives a pseudoscientific explanation of the origin of life on Earth. Viewers see a landscape without humans and animals. Several anthropomorphic aliens are shown leaving behind one of their companions and flying away in their spaceship. The alien left on Earth drinks the contents of a vessel and his body starts disintegrating into the smallest particles, and in one scene we see that this is the DNA chain. Although Scott does not give the exact date of this event, the movie continues with one of the usual motifs in science fiction: an important archaeological discovery.

In 2089 CE, in a cave on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, archaeologists discovered 35000 year old cave paintings. In one of these paintings an anthropomorphic figure is pointing with its finger to a group of six circles. We see representations of humans and animals elsewhere in these paintings too. Over the course of the movie, we find out that Peter Weyland, founder of the Weyland-Yutani company, introduced to us as a greedy corporation in the first four movies, invited a group of scientists to a meeting. We see a hologram of Weyland informing us that he is dead by now, but that does not stop him from forming a team of biologists, geologists and archaeologists who are then tasked with answering the question of “Who created us?”. Archaeologists present their findings at the meeting and, in a typical pseudo-archaeological manner, they connect the representation from the cave on the Isle of Skye in Scotland with later representations from different cultures all over the world. They supposedly found the same representation of six circles on an Egyptian papyrus from 2470 BCE, a Mayan stela from 620 CE and on a Sumerian monument from the beginning of the third millennium BCE (the order here is based on the scene from the movie, not chronology). We feel (and hope!) that there is no need to explain in detail that these objects, their dating and the representations are entirely fictional, invented for the purposes of the film by the script writers and the art department of the production.

For us, one being an archaeologist/Egyptologist and the other an anthropologist, it is far more important to recognize and emphasize the presence of a very specific pseudo-archaeological idea in the narrative: namely, the idea that there is (somehow) a connection between these societies which are distant from each other in both time and space.

The late 19th and early 20th century histories of both archaeology and anthropology were populated by scholars such as Grafton Elliott Smith, Fritz Graebner and Wilhelm Schmidt (even Franz Boas, to an extent), who noticed similarities in the art, architecture, material culture and even kinship systems, mythology and religion of different societies throughout the globe, and interpreted these

similarities through the diffusion of ideas and/or the migration of peoples. In early European ethnology, for instance, this led to the concept of *kulturkreise* or “culture circles”, wherein different elements of culture were thought to disperse in time and space from a single archaic source (Palavestra 2011, 107–139; Poarije 1999, 80–88; Rebay-Salisbury 2011). This supposed source was usually interpreted as “more developed”, and as one went from the center toward the periphery, the societies one encountered tended to get “more primitive”. Some of the wilder interpretations of diffusionism, for example, postulated the lost civilization of Atlantis as the cradle of all human civilization (Palavestra 2011, 122). Although thoroughly criticized and mostly abandoned in anthropological circles today, it is easy to comprehend how such racist, colonialist ideas might lend themselves to pseudoscientific elaboration, and, maybe paradoxically, how they can still inspire (bad) science (fiction). Modern archaeology, although often haunted by the spectres of diffusionism, does not function according to diffusionist methodology based on superficial formal analogies.

Contemporary pseudo-archaeologists tend to see similarities in different architectural forms and/or representations from cultures all over the world, but they are uninterested in explaining the mechanisms of their dispersal in a scientifically valid manner, and tend to focus solely on the common origin of these supposedly similar cultures, because, as we have previously noted, *origin stories are important*. This origin is more often than not extraterrestrial, leading to the infamous *Ancient Aliens* pseudoscientific explanation of various phenomena, and especially complex ancient architecture (for an overview see Nielsen 2020, 127–155). As the pseudoscientific argument goes, aliens possessing advanced knowledge and technology supposedly showed up on Earth at some point in the distant past and – not unlike the titular Prometheus of Greek mythology who gave humans fire³ – simply gave the humans they encountered complex knowledge that is thought to have been outside the capability of *pan narrans* (humans) at the time. Such narratives completely disregard, on the one hand, the labor of actual scientists and scholars working to understand human cultures in the past and present, and human ingenuity, curiosity and intelligence on the other. All this in favor of a problematic, sensationalist origin story, deeply rooted in racist, colonialist narratives of the Great civiliziers, bringing knowledge and technology to the unenlightened savages. It is no coincidence, after all, that barring Stonehenge, almost none of the structures on the *ancient aliens* roster were built

³ The cheesy, on the nose metaphor is not lost on the authors. Neither is the fact that many mythologies throughout the world possess similar ideas about teacher and giver figures that aren’t as whitewashed or essentially European as the Greek Prometheus. The racist subtext of the ancient aliens coprophagy is excellently pointed out in a popular internet meme: “Just because white people didn’t know how to build it doesn’t mean it was aliens”.

by (what are **today, popularly**, considered to have been) white people⁴. The fact that the civilizers are now green (or, in the case of *Prometheus*, even *whiter*) and come from outer space is the logical adaptation of a narrative marketed to a global, human audience. However, it is also an important distinction, as we will argue further, because it shifts responsibility, as well as *blame* for making the world a “shithole” away from humans and onto a superior race (pun, again, intended) of alien beings. If we are to survive the anthropocene, we need a different kind of storytelling.

In a manner very similar to – if not directly modeled after – popular pseudoscientific arguments of the *ancient aliens* variety, the two archaeologists in the movie *Prometheus* argue that in all of the monuments they presented at the meeting, a figure is pointing to the same circles which they interpret as a constellation of celestial bodies which they proceed to identify. In fact, this is the same constellation in which the exomoon LV-426 from the first and second *Alien* movies is located. On one of the celestial bodies in the constellation identified by the archaeologists based on the representations in different cultures (not LV-426), there is another alien spaceship. The crew of the *Prometheus*, the Weyland expedition ship, lands on this other celestial body. This time they discover remains of several members of the alien species that operated the ship. They are anthropomorphic and significantly larger built than humans. We as viewers realize that these are the same aliens we saw at the beginning of the movie when one of them was left by the others to, for whatever reason, disintegrate his body and thus create life on Earth. We also realize that this is the same species whose member was the pilot of the ship containing xenomorph eggs found by the *Nostromo* team on the exomoon LV-426 in the first *Alien* movie. The *Prometheus* team discovers a room filled with metallic vessels containing a mysterious black liquid. An android named David takes one of these vessels on board the *Prometheus* and uses it on an archaeologist Charlie Holloway who then sleeps with his wife, archaeologist Elizabeth Shaw. It turns out that this liquid changes the DNA. Holloway starts to experience bodily changes and Shaw finds out that she is pregnant, which the couple considers strange due to the fact that Shaw could not get pregnant earlier. The fetus in Shaw’s body is developing faster than usual and she discovers that it is an alien organism⁵. Shaw manages to remove the

⁴ While racism is a systemic problem that cannot be reduced simply to skin color, it is interesting to note that recent ancient DNA research (Brace et al. 2019) suggests that the builders of Stonehenge would have been dark skinned.

⁵ The utilization of the so-called “mystical pregnancy” trope is a hallmark of genre fiction, and – we would add – lazy, sexist storytelling in the Euro-West (and has been ever since the whole “immaculate conception” thing gained traction). The fact that this trope keeps popping up in Scott’s recent work is indicative of the wider issues connected to, if not directly caused by, the narrative paradigm shift from evolutionism to creationism.

organism from her body. Furthermore, we find out that Weyland himself is still alive and that he was onboard the ship all along. With the help of crewmembers who were also hidden on the ship and his android David, he attempts to revive one of the dead alien spaceship pilots, whom he calls *the engineers*. As we find out, these engineers were actually on their way to planet Earth with their DNA changing cargo and we find out that they had made their way to Earth in 34 CE, but were derailed by an accident on their ship. This date is certainly not random, as in fact, according to New Testament tradition, 33 CE is the year when Jesus Christ was crucified. According to an earlier text for *Prometheus*, the engineers had decided to destroy humans because they crucified Christ, the last hope that humans will stop being violent. Through introducing this motif to the story, the creationist metanarrative of *Prometheus* which entails the extraterrestrial origin of life on Earth, even gets a Biblical background.

Raised by Wolves

The first season of the television series *Raised by Wolves* (2020) produced by Ridley Scott and (seemingly) set in the same universe as the *Alien* franchise, follows the intertwining stories of two groups of survivors – Earthlings who managed to flee the no longer habitable Earth after a horrifying war – and settle on a new earthlike planet – (the real) Kepler-22b. One group of survivors is composed of two androids – Mother and Father – tasked with saving the human race by populating the new planet by raising twelve human children (embryos developed and artificially carried to term by Mother), six boys and six girls. By the time the second group of survivors makes it to Kepler 22-b, all of the human children, save for one (white) boy, Champion, have died. The androids and the human children discover the skeletal remains of giant snake-like creatures, and that the current inhabitants of Kepler 22-b are four-legged creatures that feed on fungi, but seem to be violent towards the children and the androids. In the course of the series, the androids realize that the children cannot eat the crops they have cultivated on Kepler 22-b and that radiation was the reason all of their children except Champion died. Father suggests that they should hunt and kill the four legged creatures and use them as a source of food.

The second group of survivors is much larger, comprised of a fleet of spaceships carrying the elite of the Mithraic faithful (an, again, *very on the nose*, allegory for Christians): religious and political officials (that are one and the same on the show), high ranking military officials, and their families. The inspiration certainly came from the actual cult of Mithras, a mystery cult very popular in the ancient Roman army. Furthermore, the Mithraic pray to Sol, a personification of the Sun, who was worshiped as Sol Invictus during the late Roman Empire.

Over the course of the series it is revealed that the Earth was rendered uninhabitable by a brutal planet-wide religious war between the Mithraic and the atheists. While the Mithraic survivors are passengers on a kind of Noah's Ark (or a couple of them), chosen by the religious government based on perceived merit, the androids Mother and Father (Mithraic robots refurbished by an atheist engineer they refer to as *the creator*) and their doomed children are a last ditch effort to save atheist humanity.

Although the narrative of the first season is complex and many of the questions raised by the first season remain unanswered, several points are important to stress. At one point in the series, the android Mother destroys the Ark of the Mithraic and takes a number of Mithraic children with her to replace the children she and Father lost intending to raise them as atheists. Later on in the series, Mother uses the crashed remains of one of the Ark spaceships to enter a virtual world the Mithraic were using in cryosleep during their journey. In this virtual reality she encounters whom she interprets as her creator, an atheist mechanic born into a family of the Mithraic. He is the one who refurbished Mother from a so-called necromancer robot and a weapon of mass destruction (of atheists), into a caring motherly figure who is supposed to save humanity. In the virtual reality mother falls in love with the figure she interprets as her creator and has sex with him. Later in the series we find out that she is pregnant and that she is carrying an organic fetus. She realizes that she needs human plasma to sustain the fetus, and uses a Mithraic convict who had been accused of raping several women and girls while they were in cryosleep for this purpose. Mother uses the convict as a plasma donor and accumulates the plasma in her body in order to allow the fetus to develop without interruption.

Parallel to this, the story follows the Mithraic military officer Marcus, who is in fact an atheist in disguise, who starts hearing voices and slowly but surely turns into a believer. His wife Sue, also an atheist in disguise, keeps her atheism and doubts the sanity of Marcus due to his uncontrolled and violent behaviour he justifies by Sol communicating with him. At the same time, the android Father doubts the proper functioning of Mother whom he accuses of developing behaviour typical for faith, which contradicts not only their programming but the entire atheist creed.

In the final episode, Sue, the atheist boy Champion, the Mithraic children and the android Father help the android Mother deliver her child, which, just like the organism in the body of archaeologist Elizabeth Shaw in *Prometheus* (2012), had developed rapidly⁶. Mother realizes her fetus is not human and the organism in her body violently bursts out of her mouth, very much resembling the classic xenomorph bursting out of the chest of the host. However, the organism that comes out of the body of Mother is a flying snakelike creature, and it

⁶ Another mystical pregnancy.

violently bites into her and starts suckling on the blood deposited in her android body. Mother realizes that she needs to destroy the creature because it will grow fast and endanger everyone. The androids also discover that the four legged creatures they have hunted and fed to the children represent forms of life which “de-evolved” from hominins. They decide not to inform the children about this discovery, since they have been eating the meat of these creatures, although the atheist boy Campion was very vocal against this and he tried to find alternate food sources.

Much is to be revealed in future seasons of the series – at least one additional season has been confirmed. However, based on the narrative from the first season we can already see that Scott kept the creationist narrative with biblical motifs. Furthermore, he added the motif of “de-evolution” and hominins such *homo neanderthalensis* as underdeveloped humans. This strongly parallels the social evolutionist narrative of the 19th century in which *homo neanderthalensis* was seen as a brutish cave dweller, unintelligent and uncivilized (Peeters and Zwart 2020). Paired with monocentric hyperdiffusionism we find in *Prometheus* (2012), the narrative in *Raised by Wolves* (2020) seems to strongly rely on 19th century science and not on the state of the art understanding of culture and evolution.

We are not Things! Towards Responsible Storytelling in the Anthropocene

The question we should be asking is do we need pseudoscientific, creationist fantasies while we are living through the end times on a dying planet? Shifting the focus from evolutionism to creationism and alien engineering is, in the *Alien* franchise and series *Raised by Wolves*, veiled by posthumanism. Humans are nothing more than a creation of the alien engineers, just as androids are nothing more than the creation of humans or the xenomorphs the creation of the android David. We can draw a parallel between the engineers and humans, but also between humans and androids. From the posthumanist point of view there is indeed not much difference and we can even speak of a sort of a flat ontology in the story starting with *Prometheus*. Humans lose their primary status, which we find less problematic, but they also lose responsibility for life on Earth, which we find more problematic. Unlike the worlds of science fiction, in our world there is so far still no easily accessible, habitable planet B, there is no other world (Colebrook 2019, 280).

Pseudoarchaeological, creationist and narratives with Biblical allegories shift responsibility. However, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, humans are responsible for the consequences of the anthropocene: air, land and water

pollution, climate change, global warming and species extinction. Humans have to start thinking and acting differently. Haraway pointed to the importance of storytelling for earthly survival (Chachkiani et al. 2019, 458). According to her, science fiction is a risky creation of worlds and stories (Haraway 2016, 13). It is both storytelling and presentation of facts, shaping of possible worlds and times, those which are gone, those which are present and those which are coming (Haraway 2016, 31). That is why it is important which thoughts think thoughts and which stories tell stories (Haraway 2016, 39). Narratives that are at the roots of storytelling are important. They can communicate dangerous ideologies rooted in colonialism, orientalism and 19th century theories of socio-cultural evolution, as is the case with the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels by George R. R. Martin (Matić 2015). Science fiction and its storytelling reflects our thoughts and stories. We have to think of other thoughts and stories we find worthy of reflecting. If we want to decolonize thoughts we should also decolonize those thoughts outside the academic space. According to Haraway, we need to change our stories, and they have to change the world (Haraway 2016, 40).

Careful analysis of science fiction can provide us with an opportunity to compare narratives and to criticise the science fiction of the lives we live. Just as our reality has gradually become hyperreality in the space between the virtual and the real (Žakula 2012), what Slavoj Žižek would call the reality of the virtual (Žižek 2004, 3), so are we gradually moving towards the fictional futuristic worlds which are increasingly becoming our reality. Therefore, we can ask the question: is the plan of a private company for terraforming Mars indeed a carefully thought out plan and a solution for the serious problems we face today or just the caprice of the Peter Weyland of our reality, Elon Musk? Is it enough to argue in favor of terraforming Mars by stating that being a multiplanetary species beats the hell out of being a single planetary species (Musk 2018, 8)? Shouldn't we first seriously consider if there is life on Mars and if terraforming it raises serious questions of environmental ethics? Can Earth life, including humans, adapt to the Martian gravity of 0.38g and how life on Mars would shape humans into a different species? Is there even enough carbon, nitrogen and water on Mars to create a global habitable environment? (McKay 2019). Isn't it clear that human activity in outer space changes the fabric of near space making the anthropocene a cosmological phenomenon? (Gorman 2014, 91). Furthermore, isn't it obvious that living in the facilities for terraforming on Mars would mean living in a limited space, both spatially and socially? If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us how we took for granted the possibility of social contacts with our loved ones and others. It also taught us that *other animals* and interactions with them can be essential for our, human, well-being. What, then, would a world without any other animals look like? Or would we, again, subject animals to our colonial exploits? Would we take cattle to Mars, or

would it be a purely human endeavour? Would we take dogs?⁷ How would we even transport them? What about the whales and the elephants and the mice? The cats? Or would we just leave them behind on the planet we destroyed? Who would choose what animals we bring? Elon Musk? That is a terrifying thought. The terraforming idea as an escape route is a pipe dream inherently built upon an exploitative, anthropocentric ideology of rugged individualism. The same kind of ideology that got us into this mess in the first place. We need better stories and better dreams of the future.

It is also important to stress that the universe is increasingly becoming American imperial space which is not science fiction anymore (Marshall 1995; Ribić 2020). In relation to pseudo-archaeological narratives on the origin of life on Earth, isn't it reckless to post on Twitter that ancient Egyptian pyramids in Giza were built by aliens, even if this is cynicism or sarcasm? Fuelling the "what if" and ancient aliens pseudoscientific ideas on the origin of ancient Egyptian culture (for an overview see Nielsen 2020, 127–155) is reckless and irresponsible, not to mention, inherently racist. We have seen that Scott has turned towards such ideas starting from *Prometheus* (2012).

The main point of our criticism here is that we have to choose more carefully which stories we tell and that, archaeology as a discipline with a deep knowledge of the human past, and anthropology as a discipline with bright knowledge of the human present need to be part not only of socially responsible, but also ecologically responsible storytelling. Indeed some of the papers in this volume do exactly this by focusing on human agency in environmental change. However, in order to make further moves in this direction, we need to agree on one thing, on which more and more philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and archaeologists are starting to disagree, and this is that although humans and animals are equally important, humans and animals are not things (Babić 2019; Žakula 2017).

One recent science fiction movie with the theme of living on a dying planet is *Mad Max: Fury Road*. However, instead of pseudoarchaeology, creationism, Biblical allegories and terraforming other worlds, this movie uses the metaphor of toxic masculinity to criticize the toxic *climate* (pun, yet again, intended) of late stage capitalism.⁸ Although the issue of gender, gender systems and the anthro-

⁷ Who in their right mind would even *want* to live on a *planet without dogs?! – SŽ.*

⁸ In *Mad Max: Fury Road* the logic of extractive, exploitative capitalism is brought to its absurd extreme: the three enclaves of survivors on the scorched planet are all run by old, white men. One is called the Bullet Farm and produces and exchanges weapons, the second, named Gas Town produces and exchanges oil, and the third, The Citadel, produces and exchanges drinking water and mothers' milk harvested from enslaved women. The metaphor is succinct and to the point, and while the film's treatment of

ocene is one of the key questions we should address, we would like to stress the danger of simplification and polarization. In the movie *Mad Max: Fury Road* it is narrated that the seed of life is in the hands of elderly women who live in a purely female community called the *Vuvalini* or *Many Mothers*. One letter L more and this community embodies the idea of gender as biologically given genital sex (*Vulvalini*, Latin word *vulva*, *vulvae*). Nature becomes female in gender and only cis-women are those who can restore it. Meanwhile, men wage wars and exploit all women and some men. Archaeologists and anthropologists will recognize the old socio-cultural evolutionary notion of matriarchy here, revived in the works of Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas who argued that patriarchy was brought to Europe by violent horseback riding Indo-European Bronze Age pastoral nomads from the Asian steppes (Gimbutas 1974, 1989; for criticism see the overview by Chapman 1998). It is interesting to mention in this context that the engineers in *Prometheus* (2012) speak proto Indo-European reconstructed by the android David, and that there are no obviously female pilots among them. Warriors from the steppes became warriors from outer space.

Based on historical, archaeological and anthropological knowledge of gender in different societies we know that such a simplified view of gender systems is erroneous (Gilchrist 1999; Matic 2021; Sørensen 2000). Men are not inherently more violent than women, and just as for various reasons some men do not take part in wars and violence, some women do (Matic and Jensen 2017; Matic 2021). This certainly does not mean that we should neglect social relations, including those based on asymmetrical power relations of gender, which brought us where we are today. According to Paul Lane, although archaeologists have knowledge of power relations and social and economic differences in the past, most of the archaeological studies of the anthropocene deal more with climate change and changes in the environment, than with the question of who was

gender is by no means ideal, it does a great job in telling a dystopian story rooted in the economic inequalities and issues of late stage capitalism. In that sense, one could also claim that the *Vuvalini* stand in opposition to the destructive white men of the other enclaves, not only as biological women, but as an overarching female principal that need not necessarily be limited to biological sex, as evidenced by the women's accepting and working with both the titular Max Rockatansky (played by Tom Hardy) and the deserter War Boy, Nux (Nicholas Hoult). It might also be interesting to note that George Miller, the filmmaker behind the *Mad Max* franchise, when not directing action films about insane, violent survivors of an undefined apocalypse riding around in hand-made cars and trucks, spent his time producing and directing films such as *Babe* (1995), and *Babe: pig in the city* (1998), family films following the adventures of a talented piglet and his owner; films widely credited for turning an entire generation of people vegan, and turning the lead actor, James Cromwell, into a lifelong animal rights advocate and activist. These, we would argue, might be the stories we are looking for.

affected by these the most (Lane 2015, 495). Anthropocene research addresses global inequalities, no matter the theoretical grounding of this research in different traditions be they neo-liberal, postcolonial or neo-Marxist (Kelly 2014, 93). Archaeologists also need to consider them.

Conclusion

In keeping with the honorable tradition of science fiction, one of our goals in this paper was to critique the world we live in through telling a story. As we are scholars and not SF authors, we chose a roundabout way to do so: we focused on a widely popular SF narrative we both love and find fascinating (full disclosure: SŽ has a dog named Ripley, after Ellen Ripley from *Alien*), and were both, ultimately, disappointed in/by since 2012. Utilizing theoretical frameworks pioneered by authors such as Donna Haraway, and focusing on the importance of stories humans tell each other, especially through popular culture, we attempted to show how the structure of such stories can change. More importantly, we wanted to underline how the changes in the fundamental nature of these stories can come at the whim of rich white men who own and control them within the wider framework of capitalism.

Our main goal, however, was to call attention to more general issues of storytelling in the anthropocene. The way(s) in which the narrative of the *Alien* franchise shifted from evolutionism to creationism are telling: there is a (cultural) need to shift responsibility (and blame) for the horrors of the anthropocene over to someone else. Be that god or alien engineers (or both), this is a story with a global audience in an age of decline. We are living through a Great Extinction (otherwise known as the holocene or anthropocene extinction)⁹ and we need to do better. More specifically, stories like what the *Alien* franchise ultimately morphed into relativize notions of responsibility and blame: if our origins are not our own, then neither is our destiny nor the choices we make!

This, we would argue, is the greatest sin of the newly revamped franchise: we humans are responsible for the Earth, not some alien engineers.

Translated by the authors

⁹ For further information on the topic, see for example: <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/12/1026/4605229>; <https://www.sciencealert.com/here-s-how-biodiversity-experts-recognise-that-we-re-midst-a-mass-extinction>; <https://www.national-geographic.com/adventure/article/150623-sixth-extinction-kolbert-animals-conservation-science-world>

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*„Osmi putnik“ i pripovedanje u antropocenu:
evolucionizam, kreacionizam i pseudoarheologija u naučnoj fantastici*

U radu je analizirana promena metanarativa u franšizi *Osmi putnik* (1979) koju je istoimenim filmom pokrenuo režiser Ridley Skot, a koja je nastavljena nizom od tri nastavka u režijama Džejmsa Kameron (1986), Dejvida Finčera (1992) i Žan-Pjera Ženea (1997). Franšiza je oživljena 2012. filmom *Prometej* u režiji Ridlija Skota. Radnja prva četiri filma smeštena je na kraj antropocena i bavi se užasom vanzemaljskog života, nudeći evolucionistički pristup razvoju ljudske vrste. U svetu u kom je planeta Zemlja „usrana rupa“, kako tvrdi jedan od protagonista trećeg nastavka filma *Osmi putnik*, ljudi teraformiraju druga nebeska tela i kolonizuju svemir. Međutim, obnovom franšize filmom *Prometej* došlo je do promene metanarativa sa evolucionizma na kreacionizam i pseudoarheologiju sa biblijskim motivima. Ljudi prestaju da budu primarni aktanti i njihovo stvaranje i uništenje pripisuje se vanzemaljskim inženjerima. Imajući u vidu ideju koju je predložila Dona Haravej, da je pripovedanje ključno za opstanak planete Zemlje, ovaj rad ukazuje na opasnost popularizacije kreacionizma i pseudoarheologije u naučnofantastičnim narativima, koju vidimo i u novijim radovima Ridlija Skota (*Vučje vaspitanje*, 2020). Ljudi nisu stvari i ne mogu se staviti u istu ontološku ravan sa androidima. Odgovornost za život na planeti Zemlji i u svemiru, u nedostatku dokaza za suprotno, ostaje kolektivno u rukama ljudi, a ne vanzemaljskih Drugih. Kao rešenje, rad predlaže promenu narativa u naučnoj fantastici u skladu sa savremenim antropološkim i arheološkim znanjima o antropocenu i njegovim posledicama. Pripovedanje koje insistira na kolektivnoj ali i pojedinačnoj krivici (pojedinci; korporacije) i odgovornosti za razvoj i posledice antropocena je pripovedanje za opstanak planete Zemlje.

Ključne reči: „Osmi putnik“, naučna fantastika, antropocen, pripovedanje, evolucionizam, kreacionizam, pseudoarheologija

*« Alien » et narration dans l'anthropocène: évolutionnisme, créationnisme
et pseudo-archéologie dans la science-fiction*

Ce travail analyse le changement du métarécit dans la franchise *Alien* (1979) lancé par le réalisateur Ridley Scott dans le film homonyme et suivie de la série de trois films réalisés par James Cameron (1986), David Fincher (1992) et Jean-

Pierre Jeunet (1997). La franchise a été relancée en 2012 par le film *Prometheus* réalisé par Ridley Scott. L'intrigue des quatre premiers films est située à la fin de l'anthropocène et traite de l'horreur de la vie extraterrestre offrant l'approche évolutionniste au développement de la race humaine. Dans le monde où la planète Terre est « un trou de merde », comme le prétend un des protagonistes de la troisième suite du film *Alien*, les humains terraforment les autres corps célestes et colonisent l'univers. Pourtant, le renouveau de la franchise par le film *Prometheus* apporte le changement du métarécit qui passe de l'évolutionnisme au créationnisme et à la pseudo-archéologie aux motifs bibliques. Les humains cessent d'être les actants primaires et leur création et leur destruction sont attribuées aux ingénieurs extraterrestres. Ayant en vue l'idée proposée par Donna Haraway que la narration est essentielle pour la survie de la planète Terre, ce travail démontre le danger de la popularisation du créationnisme et de la pseudo-archéologie dans les récits de science-fiction, observée aussi dans les travaux récents de Ridley Scott (*Raised by Wolves*, 2020). Les humains ne sont pas les objets et ne peuvent pas être mis au même rang ontologique que les androïdes. La responsabilité pour la vie sur la planète Terre et dans l'univers, faute de preuve du contraire, reste collectivement entre les mains des humains et non pas entre celles des Autres extraterrestres. Le travail propose comme solution le changement du récit dans la science-fiction conformément aux connaissances contemporaines anthropologiques et archéologiques sur l'anthropocène et ses conséquences. La narration insistant sur la culpabilité collective mais aussi individuelle (individus; corporations) et sur la responsabilité pour le développement et pour les conséquences de l'anthropocène c'est la narration pour la survie de la planète Terre.

Mots-clés: « *Alien* », science-fiction, anthropocène, narration, évolutionnisme, créationnisme, pseudo-archéologie

Primljeno / Received: 31. 05. 2021.

Prihvaćeno / Accepted for publication: 04. 07. 2021.