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TITLE – ΤΙΤΛΟΣ

Monster: A Journey beyond humanity.

This paper will attempt to work *with* (and not *on*) the film *Monster* (by Patty Jenkins, 2003), as a philosophical terrain, an event, which manages to *queer* feminist ideas on the relation of monstrosity, femininity, and desire, mainly through the Deleuzian notion of 'becoming', defined by D. Olkowski (1999), as:

"Becoming for Deleuze and Guattari is not a metaphor, not a matter of acting like something or imitating something; it is a deterritorialization, which involves more than simply undermining or doing away with hierarchy. To deterritorialize is to run towards 'lines of flight' so as to dismantle the subject, disorganize the body, or even to destabilize the state".

The film *Monster* is precisely this: a battlefield, a war-machine that brings about deterritorializations, not through counter-representations and negation, but through: "vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps, which directly touch the mind" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*) Hence, film's power does not reside on a double negation (a negation of the negation, that is, a negation of monstrosity), but on positivity, by presenting the productive force monstrosity carries within it. Starting thus from the affirmation: **"Yes, indeed SHE IS A MONSTER"**, the film manages to delineate new 'lines of flight' that take us away from the status of being-human, being-subject, being a being, and instead invites us to follow the risky and very often fatal lines of becoming-animal, becoming-intense, becoming-monster, becoming-imperceptible.

Consequently, my paper will focus on the figure/personae of Lee/Monster, as affectivity, or the power to affect our thinking body. More specifically, it will follow Monster's risky path of becomings: a forward-backward dance towards love, with the hope that through love she will discover her other becomings; only to find out later, the 'impossibility' of her impossible and thus to reach death. A fatal flight then, which rather than being a direct, non-stop flight, it is full of ruptures, breakages, halts and movement of intensities.

1st stop: becoming-woman through a becoming- child.

Innocence, cleanness, positivity, youth, life connected with experience, violence, dirt, dark, death. Selby and Lee: two different worlds that connect through a desire for escape, becoming something other, discovering a new life, transgressing the limits and the imposed boundaries. Their first encounter occurs after death, after coming close to death and suicide: "...the day I met Selby I' d spent the afternoon sitting in the rain, about to kill myself". The picture: a highway and a dark figure sitting on the one side of the road, on the grass, under a bridge. The noise of cars and the sound of rain are very loud, and thus provide the picture with a disturbing realism. A very close shot to the subject shows a hand, which is holding a gun. Another close shot shows a face bathed into rain...or is it tears? Grey is the color that dominates: grey, cloudy sky, the grey asphalt of the highway... highway, avenue: the paths of escape, as well as, the deserts of existence. This image contrasts to what has just preceded: a sequence of closed shots that focuses on childhood and adolescence, whose, size, rhythm and pace, give you a sense of looking at family photos or watching a family tape, with the music reinforcing the sense of innocence and hope, and the colours (warm colours of the earth) to create a sense of security and trust.

This transition from childhood to adulthood, from dream to 'reality', through contrasting scenes of innocence-violence and life-death, implies the subject's becoming into time; a becoming from child to woman in the molar, or else, organic sense, which, however, longs for a reverse movement; not on the level of the molar any more, but that of the molecular. Therefore, Lee's attraction to Selby derives from the desire for transition, movement, for a becoming-child, through which she will become-woman, in a molecular sense. Contrary to the molar woman, defined as the fixed state of 'being a feminine identity', the molecular woman is not a being but a movement, a becoming, a nomadic subject that moves endlessly, as she refuses to acquire a definite status/identity, and instead claims back from the organism the stolen body that cannot fit into ready-made capsules of embodiment and subjectivity. "The question is fundamentally that of the body – the body they *steal* from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms"(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2003, 276).

Therefore, the molecular woman aims at the erasure of the notion of a fixed sexualized body –the organism- and the consequent notion of subjectivity; which means that she also aims at the erasure of herself, so as to become-imperceptible, faceless, a body without organs, which means a body free from the hierarchization of organs, the latter imposed by processes of subjectification, representation and signification. This transition takes place through the child and especially the girl (in this case the filmic character of Selby), mainly because as Deleuze and Guattari argue: "This body is stolen first from the girl: Stop behaving like that you are not a little girl anymore..." (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2003, 276). However, the becoming-girl is not a going back, a regression, a nostalgia for a non-symbolic, non-discursive state; neither does it address to the future (a *will* become-something), but it is a present 'going beyond' the known; a reach to the unknown, the unpredictable, the virtual that will come about as the result of new connections between surfaces, elements, particles, that are found within the

molar woman, as well as outside her, in the girl, since the latter has not yet been fully incorporated into and absorbed by the construction of a fixed feminine identity.

Thus, Selby constitutes such a surface of connections: a landscape for a new experience of love, which works as Lee's last resort:

"I mean everybody's gotta have faith in something. For me? For me all I had left was love. And I was pretty sure I was never gonna love a man again, so I was gonna do it".

2nd stop: becoming-animal, becoming-monster

However, connections do not always lead to a 'happy end', or to what Spinoza calls 'joyful passions', which mean the expansion of bodies' forces; it may also lead to 'sad passions' in which bodies become weak as they are appropriated, even devoured and thus destroyed by the other body with whom they connect.

Such a 'sad' connection occurs in the forest, where we witness the first and most violent scene of murder. All the elements of this scene - the explicit violence that takes place, the setting of the murder (in the forest/in nature), the darkness which is disrupted by an alien light that illuminates the blood on the face and on body, and which emphasises the micro-movements of the facial expression during the crime scene, the screams of the Monster after the murder that resemble to an animal's groans - lead us to a sense of a loss of humanity, by the intensification of the nonhuman, of alien forces that burst out at the moment of confronting death. The crime scene is simultaneously realistic and fake, mainly because of the excess of its reality: which means, it is too real to be 'true', too powerful to be absorbed rationally by the spectator; its excessive character renders it unintelligible, inhuman, monstrous.

Consequently, this scene becomes autonomous, singular and confronts the viewer directly, extracting thus from him/her a visceral, rather than a rational response. Its immense violence assaults the viewer, who, in turn, loses the power over what s/he sees, loses the control of his/her body-parts and his/her senses, which, in turn, respond independently to the shock and to the intense stimulation, produced by this cinematic event. Confronted by feelings of pain, anguish and horror at the moment of the possible death, the viewer also witnesses the moment of Lee's entering into a chaotic state of flux, which, as Bataille argues, only violence can bring about. And this violence is the one carried within the transition from the everyday world to the unfamiliar and ungraspable region of Death: the Impossible. In this first murder scene, love and death meet and in their encounter they produce horror. As Lee confesses later on to Selby:

"I was raped and beat to fuck and was gonna get killed. But...I didn't want to lose you ...And I didn't want to die thinking that maybe... Maybe you could have loved me. So I killed him".

It is thus the intensification of horror and despair that leads Lee to sense within her the existence of, what Nietzsche calls, the 'blond beast' (the wilderness inside man), and thus to enter into a relation with the monster through becoming. After this moment, there is no turning-back: all violence, energies, instincts, elements of excess, that elude molar organization and stratification, burst out and violate taboos, social codes, all social positioning in terms of class, gender etc. But if molar organization defines our humanity and subjectivity, and if it constitutes the condition of our visibility, then Lee by violating it, enters into another plane: into the non-human, the monstrous, the imperceptible. Then a vicious circle of killings begins...

The 'end' of the flight: becoming-immoral, becoming-master, being condemned to death.

Good is the passive that obeys Reason; Evil is the active springing from energy.
(Blake)

But something has changed within her, and Lee cannot simply go on as a prostitute. Her encounter with Death as the impossible experience, her reaching of 'the extreme limit of possible', where 'everything gives way' like moral values, stabilities, ideals, truths, and the consequent loss of the body and the face, bring her close to the Bataillean 'inner experience': the abyss of the un-known. Lee has entered the process of becoming-monster, since she discovered within her alien, immanent forces (of fear, anger, disdain, love, desire) that can no longer be confined into the modes of the existing subjectivities, but require instead the formation of rhizomatic becomings. It is at this moment -the moment of total negation- that the subject escapes what Nietzsche calls the state of servility and becomes sovereign / master, and thus acts "insubordinately and consumes with regard only to the moment of consumption, prepared to risk death if only to affirm a human status beyond that of a thing" (Bataille, *On Nietzsche*).

Hence, Monster by violating the code seeks to determine the conditions of her own existence, or better of her own becoming; she thus creates her own ethics based on the total negation of the existing morality, which imprisons individual becomings (and especially minoritarian ones) under universal 'truths' and the notion of 'Good'; her ethics is an ethics of love together with horror that transforms her into the anomalous, the threshold and the border¹ between good and evil, morality-immorality humanity and monstrosity. Not a subject anymore with a fixed position, but a space in-between, a movement-image, a force, an energy that deviates from the clearly defined, molar, line, with the consequence to lose her way towards the overused and tired notion 'love', creating, however, at the same time, a sense that another kind of love exists, outside romantic/sexual, self/other relations. Monster produces a sense of love as the belief in an unknown heterogeneous body, a plane, which cannot be grasped mentally, or be discursively expressed, but it can only be felt and communicated through affects, passions, vibrations, movement. In other words, love is the attempt to connect with "the body before discourse, before words, before things that are named..." (Deleuze, *Cinema 2*).

As the film comes to its end we notice two transitions/movements taking place: Selby's molar/organic one into a 'complete', rational and mature subject, and Lee's escape from subjectivity towards the nonsubjective, the nonhuman, the monstrous.

However, such an escape is unwanted by the society of identities and of molar organization, and consequently, within the molar, the monstrous molecular is condemned to death. However, death should not be seen as the victory of normality over abnormality, or of the ethical over the unethical, but as the disclosure of the limits of the real, which cannot respond to the excessive other than with annihilation and death, that in turn gives birth to something new. "The hero dies, but (s)he transmits from the future an energy source that permits a ruined society to prolong itself, although with uncertain consequences" (Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's time- machine*).

¹ For more information on the monstrous as a 'borderline figure' see Rosi Braidotti , 'Teratologies' in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (eds), Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Conclusion: from a politics of identity to a 'pragmatics of becoming'

Consequently, I believe that the aesthetic persona of Monster, as movement and energy and not as a figure of representation, manages to provide us with new creative tracings, and less probable and thinkable "links" between monstrosity and femininity: rather than seeing monstrosity as being negative, shameful, a taboo, a mark of 'female degeneration', it suggests an alternative and subversive thinking: to see monstrosity as a becoming-monster, which means the creative/transgressive force of desire, that breaks away from the established framework of a pre-determined and imposing (masculine) 'humanity', through connections that lead to a becoming-child, -intense, -monster. Moreover, it is the courage to experiment and take up a risky flight, which may lead to creative lines of love, but also to abandonment and death.

Becoming-monster then is not a matter of attaining another fixed identity, a certain position - that of Monster - since in this case Monster would be tamed, would be deprived of its force for deterritorialization, and would thus be transformed into a domestic animal, a pet. On the contrary, 'becoming' has no term/object other than itself; thus, becoming-monster, rather than reaching monstrosity, means monster(-ing) the human and humanizing the monster, so that both - human and monster- are transformed, through connections, attractions and repulsions of various elements, states, events, organs, feelings, energies. Such a process then dismantles dichotomies that constitute the ground of our society, like human-nonhuman, organic-inorganic, and thus renders obsolete categories such as subject, woman, lesbian; Lee escapes all these categories and thus becomes-imperceptible, through a becoming-monster. Therefore, it is through this becoming that Lee manages to enter into the becoming-woman, and thus to escape the state of molar subjectivity, by re-linking concepts of femaleness and gender with material forces, states of mind, energies, images and affects that so far have been marginalized or neglected by our representational thinking. This becoming-woman then constitutes a journey beyond humanity, a 'beyond', which may not necessarily be translated as transgression or transcendence, but as the process of queering the illusion of the 'human', as the only possible bodily identity, through productive desire.

Becoming-monster then leads to an ethics of love together with an ethics of horror, which address to suffocating individuals, to bodies that asphyxiate, to becomings that demand to be actualised, to desires that can no longer be constrained, since they have already created their own paths to circulate and surroundings to embrace. Consequently, it is from these suffocating, minoritarian positions that the experimental "pragmatics of becoming"² will emerge: a 'going beyond' of identity politics and representational thought, initiated not by a subjective consciousness, but by immanent desire, which, as E.Grosz argues, "need not culminate in sexual intercourse, but may end in production. Not the production of a child or a relationship, but the production of sensations never felt, alignments never thought, energies never tapped, regions never known" (Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, 1995, 205).

² Kennedy B., *Deleuze and Cinema - the Aesthetics of Sensation*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

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