

## **Perversion: Transgressive Sexuality and Becoming-Monster**

**Patricia MacCormack, 2004**

### **Abstract:**

Perversion is traditionally thought as acts that depart from traditional heterosexuality through object, aim or performance. This article excavates the ways in which thinking desire through perversion can renegotiate how we think the body and subjectivity. By actively repudiating dominant paradigms of sexuality it is possible to understand subjectivity as flux, perversion as political and the body defined by its capacity to dissipate and refigure socio-sexual limits. Perversion is not simply against the normal but comes to present a means by which subjectivity may become-otherwise according to Deleuze and Guattari. Considering woman's historical definition as the 'perverted' version of the male (be it castrated, maternal or otherwise), actively engaging in becoming-perverse calls for all subjects to negotiate the political potentials and risks of defining sexual habituation. Occupying the non-dominant position does not necessarily align one with being pervert, however this article will suggest perversion can be used as a means by which those in othered positions, and indeed all subjects, can volitionally explore the position of the other. Perversion is not that which one is named but can be a sexual-political project one undertakes.

### **Biography:**

Patricia MacCormack is lecturer in Communication at Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge. She recently received her PhD from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, which won the Mollie Holman doctoral medal for best thesis. She has published mainly on Italian Horror, sexuality, feminism and the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

## **Perversion: Transgressive Sexuality and Becoming-Monster**

No healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim. (Freud, 74)

In this article perversion will be posited as a tactic towards transformation of ways of thinking sexuality and subjectivity. This article introduces traditional definitions of perversion and the dominant paradigms by which they are named. Perversion challenges 'the subject' as a defined and reified entity which reflects rather than creates the personal and social expression of self. The article foregrounds the temporal aspects of subjectivity as continually transforming. The work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) will be used to discuss the relationship between the temporal subject, desire and perversion – a relationship they term 'becoming'. The aim of reiterating subjectivity as fixed, reliable and easily defined through frequently binarised established subject positions such as male, female, straight, gay, black and white allows only for either/or options. These binaries most often reflect a dominant and non-dominant position. Perversion in this article will call for the reconfiguration of binarily defined and fixed subjectivity, so that all subjects are acknowledged as unstable and metamorphic. Thus any one position cannot be privileged. There are implications in celebrating both non-dominant subjects and subject positions, such as 'woman', which have been subject to oppression and are yet to achieve equal recognition. The burgeoning feminist work on becoming-monster as a potentially subversive subject position – what I have termed 'feminist teratology' – is introduced in order to acknowledge the problems and powers implicit in utilising formerly marginalised subject positions to challenge established ideas regarding perversion and the desirability of the 'normal'. The role of discourse in relation to teratology concludes the article, emphasises the difficulties in rethinking paradigms of being, becoming, and naming oneself differently without falling into established ontological patterns.

### **Perversion and Becoming**

In its clinical definition perversion simply means any non-procreative sexual act or heterosexual act which mimics the procreative act.

The elements of a comprehensive definition of sexual perversion should include sexual activity or fantasy directed towards orgasm other than genital intercourse with a willing partner of the opposite sex and of similar maturity, persistently recurrent, not merely a substitute for preferred behaviour made difficult by the immediate environment and contrary to the generally accepted norm of sexual behaviour in the community. (Scott 88)

Recent definitions are more liberal, however the basic paradigm of Scott's definition remains. Perversion relies, for its definition, not on what it is or includes, but what it is not. In its most rudimentary definition culture defines perversion as primarily whatever is not traditional heterosexuality. Although traditional heterosexuality is no longer primarily procreative it continues to mimic the reproductive act where subjectivity is defined through the reproductive capacity of the opposed genders performing the act, rather than exploit the infinite potentials of the body thought through unbound desire where the gender of the other may or may not be the most important aspect of thinking the act. Thus heterosexuality refers less to acts of sex which occur between two people of the opposite sex as to the phantasy of heterosexual

intercourse that is automatically presumed as inevitable if someone is 'normal'. Perversion is more the perversion of presumptions of subjects conforming to established subject positions, genders and sexualities rather than simply a deviation from heterosexual intercourse. Perversion is not a repudiation or celebration of certain acts but ways of thinking such acts.

Perversion is also beyond homosexuality. Traditionally studies of perversion have taken, as their first departure point, any desire beyond socially sanctioned forms of heterosexuality, but as homosexuality is increasingly accepted in both society and biology it is important to move beyond the binary of hetero and homo. Perversion encompasses a particular space in what Deleuze and Guattari call 'becoming minoritarian'. Becoming-minoritarian "implies two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, another by which the term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority" (Deleuze and Guattari 291). Perversion is the minority of normal sexuality because it exploits minority ways of thinking desire, not because it is necessarily different (and it may not be) to common sexual practice. Subject positions, particularly gender, are withdrawn from the configuration as the only important terms by which to define sexuality. Defining desire through the term 'desire' rather than through 'male' and/or 'female' destabilises the reduction of desire to heterosexual or homosexual. Desire is an amorphous term and all moments of desire are unique, not necessarily repeatable and hence a series of minor sexualities. If we utilise perversion as an agent toward becoming-minoritarian we withdraw from acknowledging paradigms of majority as the only, compulsory or most attractive positions available. This withdrawal is an active withdrawal. Perversion combats the normative force of dominant paradigms with the force of deliberate resistance through thinking and doing desire differently. Desire configured within a heterosexual matrix affirms gender as oppositional. Subjectivity which is defined as an object rather than a series of acts is always defined not simply as what it is but through the value given it within social hierarchies. The power of situating certain positions within that hierarchy can be resisted through perversion. Perverse acts challenge subjectivity as spatially fixed, thus the capacity to fix the subject within a larger social hierarchy becomes difficult. This also challenges the notion that the value of certain subjects is always undesirable because it is named as such by dominant discourse. Actively naming one's project as perverse acknowledges that within all relations of power – here the power to name and value – there is the potential for resistance through changing the meaning and hence value of terms. More than just altering the meaning of 'pervert', temporal subjectivity elucidates the primary paradigm of the spatial fixing of terms which dominant discourse relies on in order to define and value those terms.

### **Alterity and the Power of Discourse**

The noun 'perversion' is frequently taken as a means to making the noun 'pervert' rather than as a verb. Because bodies are seen as finished once they exhibit adult sexual drives, the rigidity of the term pervert is affirmed upon intervention from other discourses: medicine, psychoanalysis, genetics. Theorising the body as existing not purely as a spatial subject, but in time as a series of open reconfigurations and constant change suggests other ways of understanding the self and the subject as being in permanent flux. Normalised subjectivity is itself a constant re-enactment of the constellation of what one wants to be, believes oneself to be, and societal expectation. For this reason all subjects are open to the potential of perverting themselves and each other through act, the force of relation, and affect, but none are pervert in an ontologically static sense. To actively seek to pervert the predictable pattern of subjective enactment, here beginning with the paradigm of sexuality, is to challenge the enactment of subjectivity as necessarily a *re*-enactment, but a possible place for transgression.

Culture most often defines sexuality through the presence, absence and place of the penis. Feminine sexuality is, by its existence in relation to the isomorphic signifier of the phallus, perverse if it is independent of or configured differently against the phallus. Masturbation is often considered a substitute for 'real' sex, foreplay considered preclusion to the 'real' act, and lesbianism remains an enigma in terms of sexual representation. Woman, according to Luce Irigaray, is relegated

the hole, the lack, the 'fault', the castration that greets the little girl as she enters as a subject into representative systems. This is the indispensable assumption governing her appearance on the scene of 'presence', where neither her libido nor her sex/organs have any right to 'truth' except the truth that casts her as 'less than', other side, back side, of the representation thereby perpetuated. (Irigaray 83)

Woman's flesh can act as metaphor for discursive holes in representations of perversion. This metaphor is ambiguous however. The discursive hole as absence of representation or independent desire is also the hermeneutic hole in which woman is enclosed and named as other. The hole is empty and yet terminates the need to think woman further by relegating and defining lack of representation to representation of other as unknown or enigmatic. The enigma itself becomes the representation rather than signifier of something yet to be represented. Her genitals, defined as holes, and labial 'fault' lines, are not empty spaces but spaces empty only in reference to sexuality defined through phallic sexuality. Both woman and perversion are 'less-than' or 'the other side' of the neutral sexual (male hetero) subject. Both constitute a lack or hole in sexual discourse. Thinking this hole refuses it as being defined as absence alone. Exploring this place creates a volitional tactic of positive perversion, rather than an externally enforced definition or lack of definition. This hole becomes, literally, an entrance point for feminists and all minorities interested to challenge ways in which discourse constitutes gender and pleasure.

Similar to the idea that for something to be feminist, it must be 'different' to culture's dominant homogenised and homogenising structure, perversion is something different; reading a different way, comprehending a different way, and also, rendering the subject as different with each affect. It would be unethical to use perversion tactically without acknowledging issues of power, control and oppression in relation to sexuality clinically or socially defined as perverse. Power as mentioned earlier, resides in the power to name, and to define that name through its value and place in striated society. The power of discourse both constitutes bodies and desires and reflects their position in relation to the dominant. However, resistance does not need to oppose the dominant with one alternative. Perversion does not define itself, it simply resists the discursive power of the dominant to denigrate it. This project reflects the resistance feminism has expressed toward dominant patriarchal culture. Feminism is constituted as a political continuum rather than a static methodology, and feminist subjects are not a certain kind of subject, rather multiple subjects who resist the dominant as a refusal to being discursively 'known' or adamantly denied recognition. This seeming contradiction of refusing recognition but not wishing to be recognised as anything confuses binaries of presence/absence and knowledge/silence. Like feminism, perversion exploits such ambivalences and ambiguities, highlighting the anxiety any form of ambiguity arouses in projects of power which involve naming, knowing and valuing.

The histories of various 'perverse' subjects locate them as objects of scientific research, their status of abnormal sexuality given them by scientific and social ontology. By making

perversion a tactic of becoming otherwise - a line of flight from established sexual paradigms - those bodies, and all bodies, claim the power to enact and define their own perversion. Perversion is an ethical tactic towards transformation as much as it is a subversive one, because it refutes the desirability of being accepted within dominant discourse, without refuting its own history or forgetting the accountability of the dominant. Becoming minoritarian does not know its own end; it does not become fixated with the rigid romanticism of marginals within a social system. Deleuze explains the difference between becoming pervert and romanticising marginality. He states,

I share Michel's [Foucault's] distaste for those who consider themselves marginals; the romanticism of madness, delinquency, perversion, and drugs is less bearable for me. But for me lines of flight... are not created by marginals. On the contrary, they are objective lines that cut across a society, and on which marginals install themselves here and there in order to create a buckle, a whirl, a recoding. (Deleuze 189)

Deleuze emphasises perversion is not an aim or a final product of subversion. In this article perversion refers to a tactic, not a subjective mode of existence. To pervert one's static self is the aim, not to become pervert. Perversion is found in the way a subject functions rather than what a subject is. Perversion describes the open circuit of the flow of desire (existence *as* desire not with desire). This is contrary to desire defined through lack which demands object choice. Perversion thinks existence as a series of processes rather than a spatial position (*a* or *the* subject, available for clinicians as an object).

Becoming is an aspiration for change in thinking the material self. Becoming deterritorialises subjectivity, mobilising rather than reifying the way we think self. The familiar territory of subjectivity resonates with sexual territory but more importantly with the familiar territory of how we think our subjectivity. Deterritorialising subjectivity embraces the risks and powers of leaving familiar territories of thought and act. Becoming has a lot in common with my use of the term pervert because both are a setting off of the subject without a final aim (but with an idea toward what one becomes, which in turn insinuates that from which one is perverted). However, it is also more than thinking the self through what the subject does rather than is. Acting is not performed in order to achieve attainable goals. Becoming is thinking the enacting body through the connections it makes which reassemble it. Traditional sexuality is defined by object choice – same object = homosexual, different object = heterosexual. This demands that the primary subject/object terms are immobilised in order to define them in proximity to one another. But sexuality is defined through the relation of movement (intensities, transformations, affects) between subject and act, and the affects produced from this relationship. Deleuze and Guattari state that “natural history can think only in terms of relationships (between a and b) not in terms of production (from A to x)” (234) and that “perception will no longer reside in the relation between a subject and an object, but rather in the movement serving as the limit of that relation in the period associated with that subject and object” (282). Hence utilising a perverse object or act to become otherwise is not about the essential perversion of object or act but the limits the relationship pushes. Perversion cannot be subsumed under prescriptions of ‘how to be perverse’. Perverse sexuality can be found in the quietest onanistic moment or during intercourse as much as outrageous acts or objects. Perversion is found in *how* the constellation of sexuality, desire and the flesh are thought, not the way this constellation fits into established sexual definitions and meanings. Perversion is contingent on the extent to which limits of paradigms of affect, subjectivity and power are renegotiated.

## Feminist Transformations

Becoming resonates around the multiplicity of proximities that effectuate and transform any individual at any point in existence. Becoming is not a metaphor of being or thinking differently, it is not a linear activity whereby one simply turns into an identifiable something else. Deleuze and Guattari assert that “becoming is certainly not imitating or identifying with something; neither is it regressing nor progressing... becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, ‘appearing’, ‘being’, ‘equalling’” (238-239). Elizabeth Grosz discusses the points of contention and the points of usefulness where feminism intersects with Deleuzio-Guattarian thought. Grosz advocates Deleuze and Guattari’s explication of desire because it departs so violently from the traditional psychoanalytic definition of lack or idealisation of the Other as a motivation for desire. Grosz, following on from Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza, posits desire differently,

Instead of understanding desire as a lack or a hole in being, desire is understood by Deleuze - again following Spinoza and Nietzsche - as immanent, as positive and productive, a fundamental, full and creative relation. (Grosz *A Thousand Tiny Sexes* 195)

Grosz goes on to quote Colin Gordon as saying “desire is a relation of effectuation, not of satisfaction” (Grosz *A Thousand* 195). Rather than a body affected by desire, desire is effectuated through the flesh. Desire roams about the flesh, reorganising the stratification of the hermeneutic body. Grosz quotes Deleuze and Parnet to further her insistence that the body is to be

analysed and assessed more in terms of what it can do, the things it can perform, the linkages it establishes, *the transformations it undergoes*, (my italics) the machinic connections it forms with other bodies, what it can link with, and how it can proliferate its capacities - a rare affirmative understanding of the body: (quotes Deleuze and Parnet) ‘Spinoza’s question: *what is a body capable of?* What affects is it capable of? Affects are becomings’ ... (Grosz *Space, Time and Perversion* 74)

Rosi Braidotti makes an important distinction between Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming and the Bataillan concept of figuring desire as a radical change hence sacrifice of the subject. She states

Deleuze’s becoming is rather the humble apprenticeship to not being anything/where more/other than what one is capable of sustaining and tolerating. It is life on the edge, but not over it; [or against its perpetuation, as Deleuze and Guattari point out in their discussion of becoming in the drug-addicted or suicidal mode] it is excessive but not in the sacrificial sense (exit Bataille). (Braidotti *Meta(l)morphoses* 68, my parenthesis)

Because my discussion of perversion privileges its capacity to transform the subject, notions of an integrated subject are challenged. Through the destabilising effects of pleasure and perversion subjectivity shifts away from being defined through what it is (key to integration is the notion the borders and boundaries of the integrated self remain intact) and is more appropriately addressed through what it does and what is done to it. Choosing to use the body differently not only welcomes the transformations of pleasure and perversion but also acknowledges the instability of the integrity of the subject. Through challenging integrity perversion asks why integrity is such a mandatory quality of subjectivity. Transgression can

suggest the assertion that post-rupture will be followed by nothing (complete annihilation or sacrifice) or by a return of integrity, the subject changed but intact. What I think Deleuze and Guattari wish to emphasise is that becoming is about a different form/kind/articulation and species of subject. Nothing is killed off in favour of non-existence. (Deleuze and Guattari specifically point out that the becoming-annihilation is almost antithetical to the reasons why becoming is *good for you*.) In becoming there is no death, it is “life on the edge”, but with the emphasis on life, not edge. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise the temporal subject becoming in time (‘life’) rather than the annihilative spatial subject in the location of annihilation (‘edge’, also Deleuze and Guattari stating it is not movement - neither regressing nor progressing).

No matter what the deterritorialising affect of perversion, if reterritorialisation – the reestablishment of a subject as fixed – is the aim, perversion is not a line of flight but a reaffirmation of acceptable axes of society. Subjectivity conventionally reiterates itself as stable. Even perverse subjects risk using perverse acts to signal their *being* pervert, thus although they deterritorialise from traditional sexual positions, wishing to belong to a new territory reterritorialises the subject. The subject may be different from others, but it is different in a fixed way. Because pleasure deterritorialises us, alters us from the moment before, the object we choose to be involved with during that change (the object of desire, or of sexual or any other interaction) is often used to assure continuity of our being when, after the pleasure has ceased and we ‘return’ to our known version of self, it is able to reaffirm who we are. The body-in-pleasure is repressed after the act, and the object choice is seen as the cause of pleasure. The cause of the pleasure *is* the body, is *in* the body and is experienced *as* the body. After a transformative affect has occurred, the object choice becomes stand-in for the body – ‘S/he caused me pleasure’ rather than ‘my body was/is pleasure’. So, even to utilise a perverse object choice as the only subversive element in a theorisation of different bodies limits the presence of corporeality implicit in and extricable from immanent self.

The body is itself more potential than articulate-able. There are more things a body can do than we can ever suggest, and certainly more than we are able to linguistically describe. Beyond this is what culture sees the body as able (and sanctioned) to do. Grosz states: “There is an instability at the very heart of sex and bodies, the fact that the body is what it is capable of doing, and what any body is capable of doing is well beyond the tolerance of any given culture” (Grosz 214). The body is capable of doing much more than it is theorised as capable of, in medicine, in cultural and sexual theory, in all discursive fields. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise how one can tactically define the sexual body: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects...” (257). They are not asking the body to perform super-human feats of transformation but only to attempt an encroachment on the limits of the body to push the body further out into its potentials. This means pushing the body away from being defined through *correspondence* with established ideas of what our subjectivity is/means/does. When thinking the body through the relations it makes the body itself must be continually defined otherwise. We do not need to become extraordinary monsters to become. Only to traverse, rearrange, exceed and decrease the rigid limits culture allows us to exist within and as our bodies. That is all, but at the same time that is mind-blowing enough. Becoming is harnessing the instability of the body, so whatever causes instability could be a useful moment of entry into becoming. Desire causes instability. Perversion destabilises the social mores that help check the instability implicit in desire. These suggestions have many problems, not the least of which is the fear that privileging the experiencing of one’s own body in new and different ways is another form of limit and not entirely estranged from biological essentialism. This is neither clearly bad nor good as yet, but it highlights

boundaries and limits which themselves are against the point of becoming as limit-less and boundary free.

## Monsters

I have already pointed out that perverse desire is positive only in so far as it resists the formation of the noun 'pervert' adhering one form of perversion onto the subject as the being and essence of its desire. Here I will use the term monster to describe the perverse subject. From hysterical women to homosexuals, perversion has a strong relationship with the naming of social-sexual monsters. Perversion can be described as monstrous sexuality, hence those becoming-perverse clearly risk being named monsters. What is politically liberating, and what is risked, by embracing the monstrous?

Braidotti defines monsters as: "human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily organism. They also represent the *in between*, *the mixed*, *the ambivalent* as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word monsters, *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration" (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 77; my italics). Modern scientists, those who assist in the social naming of monsters, can themselves be seen as monsters in their determined drive to see further, pathologise more rigidly and adhere normality to the integrity of an organism, they are themselves enough of an object of wonder for Braidotti to include them in her argument. The Frankenstein story is reversed. Axes of wonder/horror is integral to monstrosity as a, if not the, primary site of ambiguity. At the primary level of monstrosity, the very first departure from the white integrated subject is the woman. In this way, any woman is a monster to begin with, and has been for as long as can be historically traced. A body of difference, while being (especially in a compulsory hetero normative culture) an object of fascination, is simultaneously that of disgust. Inherent in fascination for something is distance from it, so that if the monster is object of fascination or even desire, the fascinated must oppose rather than align himself or herself to the monster.

The monster is that which abjectly pushes us outside symbolic integrity, either back, in psychoanalytic terms to the primary monster, the mother, or in a more Deleuzio-Guattarian sense that which pushes us away from what we think we are. In order to accept Braidotti's suggestion to become monster we must desire monsters. One cannot want to become what one does not desire. This kind of desire positions the self differently to heterosexual (i.e. implicitly oppositional) desire where one can only desire what is other to and othered from self. If we read desire as abundance, the desire for a monster *changes* both the subject desiring and the monster of desire. In a Lacanian frame, in order to desire a monster one cannot be monster. One is fulfilling the monstrous lack in the hitherto normal subject. That is why woman is the primary monster because man is the primary non-monster and desires only what he lacks. If we read desire for monstrosity without or after Lacan it is clear that there is less of an enforcement of otherness in the desire for monsters. The monster is not necessarily any longer the antithesis of self; rather monster simply becomes a category that wilfully refuses desire within a system of normal versus monster. To become monster is necessarily to begin at a point in repudiation of any anxiety about a loss through monstrosity (loss of subject, loss of power aligned with subjectivity).

Vital in thinking monstrosity is to contextualise that if women are the first monsters, what do we lose by becoming (or embracing our already existent) monstrosity? Two problems arise here. The first is that by naming ourselves monsters women are in a way accepting the terms of their bodies given to them by phallogocentric culture. It may be mimetic; it may be to

utilise phallogocentrism's weapons against itself. But it is still affirming a condition for women (and all subsequent monsters) that was not chosen by women. The second problem is the glamorisation of conditions of subjugation in society. If glamorisation involves defining one position from another (dominant) position, the best of intentions risks reaffirming traditional discursive paradigms, both because it spatialises what the monster is, and invests a certain value in the definition.

It is well to claim that becoming-monster is a positive way to radicalise the place to which the term monster commits such monsters. Gail Weiss takes Braidotti up on this by firmly planting her contrary arguments within the context of Braidotti's anxieties about reproductive technology and the teratology – the formation of cultural or sexual 'monsters' as objects of ontological analysis – of genetically defined homosexuality and perversion. Desire is here not configured as dissipating the subject through which it ranges toward becoming-minoritarian, but "desire, which takes knowledge as its object" (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 90). This risks being a desire that dissipates the subject into a reformulation, or reiteration, of majoritarian subjectivity. The formulation of a becoming body is not without negative implications, especially from a feminist perspective where a re-negotiation of subjectivity is occurring in post-structuralism before the subjectivity to be negotiated has been sanctioned for subjects of difference, such as women, non-white races and others. This flaw only emphasises the importance of feminist intervention in new ideas about being and becoming in order that post-subjects, perverse subjects and other subjects of post-modern difference will be ethical as well as culturally transformative. What is transformed here are issues around a singular ability to define subjects (including one's own ability as the only valid one) and subjects as defined only through what they are, which is both nostalgic of their history and establishes their future (spatialising subjects contracts the temporal aspect of subjectivity into a single moment). Seyla Benhabib defines ethics as interaction rather than legislation, and temporalised subjectivity demands continual interaction because a moving, changing entity cannot be defined and thus legislated against. Feminism's interventions are not exchanges of one mode of thinking for another, but an interaction with the legislative thought that reifies subject positions.

Weiss asks "is this mixture of horror and fascination advantageous for those who are its objects, that is, is this a mixture of passions we want to privilege?" (Weiss 108) In order for old monsters to be replaced by new monsters there will always be a form of monstrosity devalued beyond all others. This makes the demand for 'advantage' impossible; for those advantaged others must be disadvantaged through their alterity. Weiss' emphasis on 'those' rather than 'we' is telling. The call to become minoritarian through monstrosity first challenges primary differentiations between 'we' (non-monster) and 'those' (monsters). Becoming-monster is a challenge to the bifurcation between monster and not-monster, and the discursive act of defining these separately not to the definition of monster.

But then, what exactly constitutes a 'real' monster that appropriating the term monster will harm and make light its pain? Are not women already monster enough that to call themselves the new monsters will constitute an ownership of the derogatory term given them? What would Weiss define as a real monster? Is the act of defining an incitement to the reification of another 'other' or type of minoritarian subject? Both Jennifer Terry and Rosi Braidotti state we are only monsters in reference to those who call us monsters. Braidotti juxtaposes the self-proclaimed monsters, be they culturally evident as monsters, *against* the monsters technology creates and names precisely because monstrosity is devalued in terms of that who names the monster 'monsters'. The political nature of monsters seems to come directly from the acts of

naming and defining (and the reasons for the acts), not the nature of the object named. There is no essential non-contingent thing named monster. Weiss discusses the use of the word monster as metaphor and the way in which metaphor devalues the meaning of terms. Monster then loses its necessary subversive potential. I do not think Braidotti is advocating using 'monster' as metaphor. I think she means it as a literal becoming, in the same way Deleuze and Guattari do not want us to act 'like' in becoming.

All acts of naming, metaphoric or not, have the capacity to compel the corporeal performance of the name given, so even metaphor is not incapable of material effect. Sexuality, corporeal de- and mal-formations, skin colour, female and hermaphroditic genitals and even tattoos and piercings are all material conditions of the human body that are far more than metaphor both in their inability to be cast off and also their definition within culture. They also somewhat resist any singular definition of subjectivity, reflecting the 'holes' of discourse enclosed simply as 'other' which I discussed above in relation to Irigaray. If they were metaphor experienced suffering and real triumph would be irrelevant when thinking monstrosity. Weiss asks "does this fascination and horror in Braidotti's corresponding reification of these passions, serve to intensify, in oppressive ways, the monstrosity of the monstrous? (Weiss 108) She emphasises the intensification of the term monster through the passions of fascination and horror. By intensification I think she means some form of othering, the thing we call monster and the desire for it. This intensification is not of visibility or equality but precisely of *discourse*. Monsters 'appear' only when discourse about them appears, which is why discourse and speech are as urgent issues as the bodies and acts of those addressed. If Braidotti is advocating a becoming-monster, or a proclamation of monster then the first desire we must have for monsters is for our own 'monster-isation', claiming (or stealing) the immanent discourse that threatens to define and other us. Weiss' point is an important and valid one which comes from the anxiety I think Braidotti exhibits herself in her theorisation of monsters, that becoming monster is fraught with the threat of being *named* monster by someone else in the wrong terms, as the wrong kind of monster within the wrong discursive episteme. But what becoming monster does successfully achieve is the emphatic refusal of phallogocentrism's categories and boundaries that have been set up for monsters, semi-monsters and the rare normal subject. Braidotti emphasises that "we need to learn to think of the anomalous, the monstrously different not as a sign of pejoration but as the unfolding of virtual possibilities that point to positive alternatives for us all" (*Teratologies* 172). The virtual here refers to the instability in thinking possibility without establishing a limited and limiting series of pre-set possibilities. Braidotti's explicit refusal of 'the sign' is a refusal of signification within systems of knowledge and discourse. Even monsters as signs of celebration use signification as a stabilising act, rather than the infinite potential of thinking the monster as continual 'unfolding'.

There is, it seems, no 'safe' concept of monster that does not threaten to slide back into more traditional exercises of naming as power. Discourse reifies through analysis and affirmation of (hierarchical) place, of function, form and nature. Monsters challenge all of these categories by being both resistant to and ambiguous within them. Whatever the joys of becoming-monster, the risks are great, both towards our expectations of what becoming-monster will mean in a 'real' sociological context and also the risks we take by appropriating a concept that, like woman, is dangerously linked with degrading and power-embedded practices. The seeming contradiction in becoming something that by its very nature, cannot be described as any one 'thing' enhances the risks. This reflects a similar argument that Braidotti, among other feminists, poses to Deleuze and Guattari's theories of becoming as always having to first become-woman. There is, perhaps, an issue with two white men advocating "becoming-

woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming” (276). In the same way that to become-monster means an appropriation of the lives of ‘monsters’ which reduces the pain of being monster to a momentary transition in order to be subversive or transformative, Deleuze and Guattari have been accused of reducing and ignoring the material lived reality of women in posing a becoming-woman as a transitory practice towards becoming a presumably better something-else. Also that woman, like monster, is a level easier to attain than higher levels of subjectivity, any man can ‘become-woman’ but no woman can become a man, “because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becoming are minoritarian” (291). A conundrum occurs when the minoritarian is denied access to majoritarian social power, including the power to negotiate and formulate discourse, while men are becoming-women, potentially ablating this denial of access. Deleuze and Guattari’s urgent ethical devaluation of majoritarianism however, remains convincingly resonant in addressing trajectories of active divergence and rehabilitation from majoritarianism beyond the hermeneutics of immobile subjectivity.

To become monster implies something to lose by becoming monster (in the same way that becoming-woman is something to lose for man). But what is lost? How valuable is it? Within a Deleuzio-Guattarian frame what is lost in becoming is that which anchors the subject indefinitely to the very world from which becoming is a line of flight. Wanting to become is in this instance desiring and exploiting the excesses of that which culture values. They state “there is no subject of the becoming except as deterritorialised variable of the majority” (292). Thus the parameters of majoritarianism are affected by becoming-minoritarian and possibilities of becoming-minoritarian shift through alterations in axes of majoritarianism. The restraint culture imposes on normal subjectivity is the very thing becoming disavows. By shedding these restraints, or ‘taking flight’ from them, becoming expresses a deep suspicion of them. Someone who wants to become monster could already be seen to disavow the system that has pushed monster outside of normal subjectivity. Becoming here is a means to get ‘outside’, which is perhaps what Deleuze and Guattari meant in their insistence of becoming-woman. Monster and woman are specific groups but intersectional specific groups that refuse, or are denied, discourse to a certain extent, in opposition to the definition of, and defining by man. The terms themselves *are* ambivalence, in the same way as Braidotti’s passions of wonder and horror are ambivalence. Normal subjectivity is *not* ambivalence nor ambivalent, and its very existence is through its separation from everything it is *not*. The compulsion to name is a compulsion to know, and ambivalence excavates the endless nature of knowledge rather than focussing on what is known. It is difficult to vindicate silencing those who have yet to speak. This could suggest that, at worst, feminism is just another discourse. However, as feminists know, each discourse of feminism is a multiple proliferation of a variety of discourses. Most of these aim to open discussion, investigating the gaps and holes in the discourse of ‘humanity’, essentially ‘manity’ or more correctly ‘majoritarianity’. Monster theory may be a silencing of monster defined through dominant discourse, and, like perversion, as fluid and temporal, should acknowledge the silences or unspoken within all speech, or the desire to not speak as a refusal to define.

### **Toward Feminist Becomings**

All becoming is becoming monster; even the desire to want to become is monstrous, because all becoming is about becoming an ambiguity between, but never attaining either of, two points. Becoming is about negotiating the discursive constitution of bodily limitations seen in the stratified, signified body, the values attached to those significations and the sources of the

constituting discourses. Discourse is corporeal because we are enfolded versions of the speech that constitutes us from culture without and from self-regulation or identification within. We can, of course, only live the body to which we have access. In order for there to ever be a potential for actual becoming, the potential of the body we are now must be recognised. Our bodies present enough of a potential for change and transformation. The limitations our cultural and biological body represents, the so-called already perfect subject body, or scientifically described and hence 'finished' body, is a body that is experienced or lived through being discursively situated. The body as a material discourse or discursive materiality, is a site where flesh and speech or knowledge fold within and through each other as an expression of self. The body as continuum is important as the primary vehicle to change and of change, and desire as the current through which the body is regulated and transformed is an essential aspect of thinking this vehicle. For feminism, desire is problematic as having been either denied or annexed to masculine desire, and thus it is a key axis by which to rethink the body, also victim to this lack or annexation. From here the potential is limitless. The line of flight does not fly off into the distance but rather flies inside our own bodies in transformation and redistribution of fleshly intensities, spatially static we fly from what we were before and become something otherwise.

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