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Pulverization and Auto-Genesis in Monsters I – Chimeras and Composite Production

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The aggregate as such is not a well-formed object; it seems irrational to us. ... we're all Pythagorians. We think only in monadologies.

(Serres, 1995)

Behold the Löwenmensch¹, the Lion-Human, this most ancient of monsters! The oldest form of the New, the earliest attempt at producing something theretofore unseen, something unprecedented: divine and awe-inspiring. Wonder of wonders, the head of a lion and the body of a human: Lion-Human. And with this hyphen, with this analysis, it comes so easily apart. The earliest moment of monstrosity, the first incarnation of the monster: the chimera, the hybrid, the composite. The New as a mere collage of the old. To name it is to see its substance dissolve into borrowed parts. The formula of the monster-as-chimera is a pseudo-linguistic formation in terms of a syntactic juxtaposition: the head of a goat with the body of a man, the body of a lion with three pairs of eagle wings and the feet of a bull, etc.

The composite nature of the monster-as-chimera entails two main consequences: in the first place it makes the monster a dependent fabrication, who cannot be defined or described without invoking the proper name of its creditors, e.g. Lion-Human. The second: heterogeneous multiplicity. Being composed of different species, the monster is, in its entirety, not entire. The chimera is not a whole, homogeneous entity, a creature of *genesis*. It is fractured, sewn

together from different bodies, different times and spaces. We are faced with an imagination which is, in the first place essentially a montage.

The creature thus created, the chimera, multiple without essence, without substance, yearns for unity: to become a thing since (at least until the end of the Leibnizian paradigm) that which is not *a* being is not a *being*.² The chimera is inherently unstable as it constantly stands under the threat of dissolution, of being deciphered into its components, the parts it has borrowed from “real” beings, from the lion, the goat, the snake.

Perhaps the most obvious solution, and the one usually taken, is “pulverization”: instead of creating a new being from combining parts from two or three “natural” beings (or species), why not from five, or ten? The eyes of a snake, the skin of the toad, the legs of the panther, the skull of an eel, etc. The vague descriptions of Cthulhu and its ilk are a rather good example as they have become more and more complex over the decades. Other ready examples can be found in Hollywood “creature features” and monster movies: the conception of the Xenomorph in the Alien franchise is especially illuminating here.³ The strategy is to make the atomic elements smaller and smaller, so that the monster will appear as less and less of a patchwork than made of whole, seamless cloth.

In this stage, the monster’s powers in invoking fear lies in its becoming an unreadable cipher, unanalyzable; it must hide its parts, its stitches, its debts, lest it be recognized for the borrowed, patchwork mess that it still is. Compare:

I cannot even hint what it was like, for it was a compound of all that is unclean, uncanny, unwelcome, abnormal, and detestable. It was the ghoulish shade of decay, antiquity, and desolation; the putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation; the awful baring of that which the merciful earth should always hide.

(Lovecraft, 1984)

and,

I will not conceal his [Leviathan's] parts.

(Job 41:12)

and the difference between a hybrid-stage monster and a real individual-species with a proper name becomes apparent.

The monster as the fragmented, composed/composite body is in its uncategorizable form and without a proper name, without a “proper body”, without a (legitimate) discourse and in a way still contingent, temporal, and also impotent as in isolated and unable to reproduce. It is a sum of heterogeneous parts, atomic units that are taken from different entities which are in themselves possessing of a unity and homogeneity by virtue of the proper names of their species. And yet it is also a site of immense potential, a possibility of the emergence of something radically new.

The monster, the composite body that has as its mode of being only the accidental, must try to change its own history, its genealogy as a contingent being and fashion for itself a new self-production, a new beginning that is necessary, transcendental, and most of all natural. It is in this creation of the second origin that the notion of genesis comes to fore as the process that produces a new body and as such necessitates a production process, which is the same as a reproduction process (the origin is effaced in species).

This new *genesis* will allow the heterogeneous fractured monster tries to become an independent (from the animals, etc. of whose parts it is composed), homogeneous, and “real live” being. It requires an act of “wonder,” divine or magical intervention of re-production (or re-inscription). It needs to become a species, to erase its material history and re-create, re-write itself as whole, natural, true, and

essential.⁴

The rough stitches that bind together the mismatched body-parts stolen from corpses into Frankenstein's "creature," the nails that serve as joints for little Pinocchio, omphalos, the mamalian navel that shatters the human dream of godhood: reminders of being created, of being made and as such, contingent, not self-sufficient. That is the problem of the monster, of the newly created trying to become *something*, an entity, an individual. As Hans Jonas said, "only those entities are individuals whose being is their own doing, and thus, in a sense, their task" (Jonas, 1968).

Every new thing, every invention, in a word every monster, will try to become something more than just a passing, contingent, unnamed being. It will try to become a whole bigger and other than the sum of its parts, to become a full body that is *unengendered*. As we will see in more details in the subsequent parts of this series, there are many approaches to achieving this unity and this essence and mythology, literature, and pop culture provide us with many examples of such efforts, whether they end in failure (Frankenstein's creature) or success (the rebellious sons in Freud's myth of the Primal Father).

There are many forms of the New, of creativity and production. The monstrous is simply the most emblematic (and perhaps most problematizing) example of the New. The first moment of the monster is the Chimera as composite where the New is formed as a more or less obvious collage of the old, the similar, the already-existing "natural." In this stage, the monster's development occurs as an occluding of its dependent, created reality through dissembling its composition and multiplicity while dreaming of a new body, of its next moment.

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Jonas, Hans. "Biological Foundations of Individuality" in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 8: 231-151. 1968.

Serres, Michel. *Genesis*, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Lovecraft, Howard Philips, "The Outsider" in S. T. Joshi ed *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, Arkham House Publisher, 1984.

1

The Löwenmensch of Hohlenstein-Stadel, a roughly 40,000-year old statue and considered the earliest example of a chimera or hybrid being.

2

The famous maxim of Leibniz, establishing his monadological philosophy.

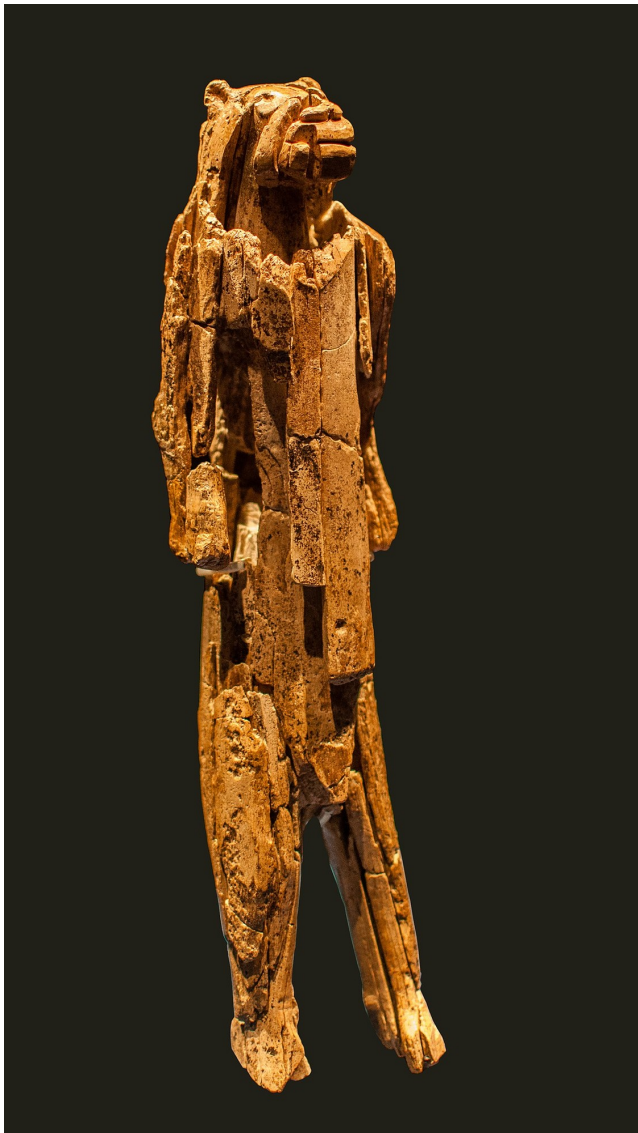
3

The reader is referred to the interviews and behind-the-scenes documentaries from both the original Ridley Scott *Alien* and *Alien: Resurrection* where the "natural inspirations" behind the monster's appearance are discussed.

4

Compare this with tribal origin myths and their function in creating the "primitive" society's identity as a whole. We will come back to this when re-reading Freud's Ur-myth of the Primal Father and his sons.

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Lion-man of the Hohlenstein-Stadel, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 40,000 years old, Ulmer Museum.

Pulverization And Auto-Genesis In Monsters II – Godzilla and Dasein

Mohammad-Ali Rahebi

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Godzilla, ISIS, and Heidegger's conception of *das Seiende*, Being, have something in common: they look backwards for their moment of genesis, for their rebirth, their "true" birth as something, their natural individuation/speciation. The monsters we have studied so far and will continue to study are always attempting to bring about their own genesis, to create a birthing after their birth, on their own terms, by their making, becoming substance from accident. They situate their genesis after their moment of becoming monstrous, after the composite existence. Whether their attempts end in failure or success, they try to *create a new form of being*.

Let us look at Godzilla, beloved *Kaiju* of three generations, emerging from its submarine lair. At its first moment of emergence, it is an accident, a by-product of physics gone nuclear, weaponized atoms, transforming a species into a monster. There is a horror to it, an uncertainty, a trauma even. Out of the pacific, the monster now heads west, *Gojira* molting into Godzilla, Godzilla into a franchise. Not that monsters are sacred, above marketing. What matters is the origins. Now Godzilla is no longer an accident, but the ancient god of a forgotten civilization, object of prophesies long faded into oblivion. It *was* long before we saw it emerge from the waters, the new narrative goes. The monster preceding itself, displacing its origin, looking backwards, to Genesis itself.

The two recent Hollywood blockbusters *Godzilla* and *Godzilla: King of Monsters*, depict a different origin story for the monsters of the Godzilla franchise. They are not monsters at all but ancient earth god, guardians of Gaia, in a way. Godzilla has an underwater

altar/home where radiation is aplenty, naturally provided by something or other. The architecture connotes an ancient civilization that worshiped the *Kaiju*, prophesied its coming in times of need, a savior. From an accident to substance ever-lasting, ever-existing. Legitimization through a backwards inscription of origins. I am Leviathan, whose coming has been foretold. I am nothing new, merely forgotten. Oblivion becomes the seedbed of individuation, for anything could exist, have existed, and have been merely forgotten. A Platonic theory of monstrous genesis, nothing new, just recalled.

ISIS is the same, claiming an atavistic genesis in the *True Islam* practiced in its early days. Nothing new, only the revival, the remembering, of forgotten values and practices. A new idea is a monster, in a sense, and it has to legitimize its existence, it has to become a valid form of being, of existing. Some ideas, some monsters short-circuit this process by displacing their origin, by disassembling their originality, inscribing themselves before themselves, in a before-time that brooks no questions, that is already legitimate, already individuated.

Heidegger's idea of Being as forgotten among beings, as fallen yet already Given, and so indeed the whole of phenomenology and its idea of the Given, the myth of the Given, as Sellars calls it, are all forms of monstrous regression, of reverse inscription, of seeking the benevolence of the God of Genesis, to be at the start of things before time and at the end of things after time. The Godzilla world, the ISIS-being.

Lovecraft's machine in "From Beyond" can also fit here to some extent, although it also falls outside this category of monstrous genesis. In the story, a mad scientist builds a device that is able to stimulate the pineal gland, the organ of a sixth sense that gives access to a hitherto unperceived world of higher dimensions and the things that dwell therein. These *things* from beyond are at the other spectrum from the machine that birthed them (or according to the narrative, enabled us to sense), they are a totality pure and

unblemished, a gelatinous whole, veritable Bodies without Organs, smooth and full, floating jelly-like volumes that are nothing if not ONE. They are of a higher order of being, apparently and fill ours to the brim, making it a *plenum*. In a way the machine is tracing its own origin into an eternity beyond time, a genesis as old as the world but it does not do so in an inscription, in the investment of a prophecy with oblivion or misunderstanding. It creates itself backwards but not on a mnemonic basis. Godzilla traces its origins to a forgotten civilization, ISIS to a forgotten tradition (the true tradition) of Islam, Heidegger's *Seiende* to a forgetting of Death and facticity among the everyday beings.

Monsters do not always gaze forwards, as we saw in this installment, and to accomplish a genesis in reverse is always the easier option.

There are other, more interesting, more creative monsters that attempt a true auto-genesis, dream themselves new bodies and inscribe them into reality, placing their birth after their birth, their rebirth an absolute NEW, an event. There are cases where individuation forms a strange and twisted relation to speciation, like the vampire that only ever produces and reproduces itself. There are also always more failed cases to consider, closed passages where, to quote Deleuze, nothing passes.

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Pulverization And Auto-Genesis In Monsters III – Vampires and Slave Revolts

Mohammad Ali Rahebi & Ebrahim Zargari Marandi

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Vampire: Speciation As Immortality

Behold the vampire, with lowercase v, the successful speciation of the hermaphrodite, the sexual composite, the double-sexed. Silent, through the nocturnal mist, the vampire approaches. The neck, the victim's neck: flesh whole and unblemished. It is pierced, penetrated by the phallic teeth of the Vampire: new holes, a phallus penetrating orifices of its own making regardless of sex or gender: the vampire's teeth penetrate all. This is the vampire: walking womb, birthing its own immortality, birthing itself again and again. Cronos, Saturn is immortal, is time itself, consuming his begotten sons, absorbing their lives, their time.

Cronos is the progenitor of vampires' mode of reproduction even though he lacked the latter's internal engine of recreation/rebirth.

The vampire is the dream of the hermaphrodite, it is the hermaphrodite become productive, reproductive, a species onto itself. No longer the accident, impotent and monstrous, site of oracles, the hermaphrodite dreams the eternally reproducing bloodsucker, becomes *vamphyr*.

The vampire starts as a composite, as all our monsters do. A composite of the sexes, deterritorialized into their most basic functions. The womb-body and the phallus-fangs are both necessary organs/organizations and yet it is true that the vampire is mostly fangs and phallic invasion. In popular imagination, the vampire is seen from the outside, as a menace and a parasite, as necessarily

phallic and penetrating; it is seen on human terms, but on its own terms, it is just as much a womb, just as much a gestating process of the self.

The phallus escapes the genital organization to become piercing fangs, drawing the blood of all sexes while the body becomes womb entire, birthing the offspring that is the life of the vampire. A double function, a double sexuality that would approach asexual reproduction were it not for its parasitism on the blood of the human herds. Fresh blood is always welcome, for nothing comes from nothing and there is always a parasite and a host. That the vampire is two formed into ONE is much more evident in the East Asian variety. The Kyuketski's¹ head and neck, plus some entrails, detach themselves from the body at night and go hunting for blood, returning only at dawn. The piercing phallus-fang and the reproducing womb-body are the two functions of the vampire, the abstracted forms of a double sexuality.

In the Gothic-romantic novels of the Stoker tradition, the vampire is often also a composite of a couple, of lovers, heterosexual at first. Dracula is Vlad, joined to his bride even after her death; undead, he bridges the chasms of mortality and sexuality while Mina would finish her speciation only after the death and incorporation of her fiancé. Just as the dead Grandmother and the living Grandson are turned into one in a serial killer's attempt at becoming the Great Red Dragon², the vampire is also the composition of two individuals becoming a ONE. The vampire is at first the integration of a heterosexual couple, one alive, one dead, into an undead species of dual sexuality that is no longer bound by heteronormative sexuality or reproduction, free to choose men or women, as Dracula cavorts with Harker before setting his eyes on his fiancé.³

Now undead, now multi-sexed, post-sexual, the vampire's body is the crucible of its own creation, desiring itself through the blood of others. The Church is the natural enemy of the sexually "deviant" creature that is the *vamphyr*, taking measures to put it to rest in one

grave or another, one sex or another, one gender role or another. The stake through the heart that circulates the lifeblood is not nearly enough to exorcise the vampire without the coercive power of the cross that dictates its rule of the quartet, the grid-cross.

Having become a vampire, the composite possesses a new form of desire. Since the parasitic need of the vampire is for blood, which it attains through the phallus-fang, its desire becomes detached from the “victim’s” gender. Holes, interface sockets for the fangs are created, not found, not specialized. It is the sublimated craving for blood that is at the center of the vampire’s desire, for there is such a thing as vampiric desire. It does not, however, follow heteronormative delineations for it is of a different species from humanity. Each vampire is a species onto itself: there is no vampire-on-vampire sex.

Herodot’s Slave Revolt: Failed Individuation

There is a peculiar story among the classics, the story of the Scythians and their slaves narrated by Herodotus in the 4th book of his Histories. This is a story of an attempt at rebirth, of speciation, of monstrous auto-genesis; whether it ends with success or failure we shall see.

According to Herodotus, the Scythians leave their town to give chase to some foes and it will be 28 years before they will get back to their native country. In the meantime, their slaves mingle with the women, also left behind, and the result of this union is a new “generation of young men who, having learned the manner of their birth set themselves to oppose the Scythians as they were returning from the Medes”. What happens next is rather well-known: the Scythians fight these young men for some time but cannot gain the upper hand, and then one of the former lords of the town is struck by an idea, telling the others:

What a thing is this that we are doing, Scythians! We are fighting against our own slaves, and we are not only becoming

fewer in number ourselves by being slain in battle, but also we are killing them, and so we shall have fewer to rule over in future. Now therefore to me it seems good that we leave spears and bows and that each one take his horse-whip and so go up close to them: for so long as they saw us with arms in our hands, they thought themselves equal to us and of equal birth; but when they shall see that we have whips instead of arms, they will perceive that they are our slaves, and having acknowledged this they will not await our onset.

Herodotus, Histories Vol. IV

And this they do and the young men, the new generation, flee before the enemy who is now no longer the enemy but has become the “master”. This is a tale of a tragic failed attempt at rebirth, at genesis; the story of an individuation that, failing, collapses back onto the preexisting order of things.

The Scythians, according to Herodotus, physically mark their slaves. Thus the original slave is a body already monstrous and fragmented, rendered thus by the hot iron rods the Scythians use to blind and disfigure their slaves, marking their bodies as being of a different species. Yet the slave is placed in the order of things: the “slaves” and the “warriors”, two established species, two architecture of life. It is with the next generation that true monstrosity appears. A people without name, a generation born of slaves and “free” women⁴ and yet not blinded, not disfigured; not slaves but also not Scythian warriors.

So far, only an architecture of negatives, of not-things.

We are not told about their attempts at genesis, about whether or not they dreamed of, projected, a new body, but in the act of their opposition to the former masters there is a core of rebirth, of individuation, of identity in the making. It fails, however, as the new body being created collapses back into the dual structure of the world, into the preexisting order of things. The revolt remains a revolt, fails to become a revolution, to form a new whole, a ONE.

Yet the tale could also be read another way. The sons are the dream body of the slaves left alone to procreate with the women (who do not have a place, their role is in between, a threshold, neither Scythian warriors nor blind slaves): two monstrosities giving birth to a projected full body. The slave imagines and re-produces himself in the new body of a generation of Sons that will come to rise up and institute a new system, a new body-politic. This “generation of young men” is the unified projection and uniting image/body of the blind slaves, which will then have to be inscribed via the violence which is to be directed at the body of the Scythians, the previous order, the world as it exists.

Whether the sons fail or the fathers fail is of little consequence in the end, for the end is the collapse of the new individual, the full body. It is an ending akin to the final moments in Lovecraft’s tale of horror, *From Beyond*: the Scythians realize that the youth attacking them as a united and full body is merely the projection of the corporeality of the slaves which now dissimulate themselves to a mere interface that was there only to facilitate the emergence of these new generation. Just as the protagonist in *From Beyond*, the Scythians wise up to the real source of the projection, to the corporeal composition behind the unified image before them and turn to fight it with the appropriate weapon or strategy: if these are just phantoms formed by the slaves, then it is the slave in them that must be overcome. The whips cut through the gelatinous image of this generation to the slave within, pretending to be a mere threshold.

The new generation does not succeed in inscribing itself on the body of the Scythians and onto the social memory and so does not manage to lay claim to a proper name that would distinguish it and place it in the prehistory of Truth. No Truth emerges since they failed in the violent act that was to make of them a law and a truth outside time and inside memory.

Later we will see a successful instance of such inscription via violence when we look at the figure of the monstrous in the *Manga Berserk*. We will also analyze another architecture of auto-genesis in the form

of the Japanese genre of Mahou Shoujo or Magical Girl. An architecture of dual composites that transforms into an individual and a species, the Magical Girl is the genesis of the preteen girl.

1

The Kyuketski is a Japanese/Chinese folklore monster whose head, attached to entrails, detaches from the body at night to go hunting for blood, retiring to the body by day.

2

See Harris' Red Dragon, part of the Hannibal Lecter series.

3

See also Francis Ford Coppola's cinematic adaptation as well as the film Dracula Untold. The old Peter Cushing flicks also provide ample examples of this lovers' crucible.

4

Themselves a monstrosity, neither free nor blinded slaves...

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