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'@legion #WeAreMany: Sorcery on the Internet'

Abstract

Day to day we are used to living in a world of beings with well-defined edges. This world is ruled by dialectical modes of engagement that reinforce the individual being in the context of other beings. Concepts like the Freudian Other serve to confirm the place and the boundaries of a subject. Congruently, reaching beyond the reality, myths negotiate the relationship of the individual with the sublime. However, the dialectically conceived world does not provide a sufficiently complex conceptualization of our existence today.

In searching for an alternative ontology, I am looking at structures that place human and informational multiplicity at their core. The type of individuation arising from a complex system does not form a subject but instead crystallizes as an entity akin to a demon. In order to interact with such forces, one turns to sorcerous methodologies, which facilitate the transgression into many. In exchanging the vertically conceived subject for a horizontally defined multiplicity, one enters into a pact with the demon. I am interested in artistic expressions of such alliance and the role of a network user as a sorcerer dealing with the demon.

I. Myth as a Dialectical Text

Roland Barthes gives the modern definition of myth, which is a type of discourse that produces meaning by equating one reality to another. In myth, the transcendence takes place through the use of a metaphor or an allegory. In that sense, mythology, having stakes in production of significations, is part of the study of semiology. Barthes elaborates on this point: '[...] any semiology postulates a relation between two terms a signifier and a signified. This relation concerns objects, which belong to different categories, and this is why it is not one of equality but one of equivalence.' (Barthes 1999, 112) This means that one order of reality has an equivalent counterpart in another reality, which is not the same but carries characteristics that are meaningfully passed on.

Such metaphoric structure aims at increasing the weight of a given subject. It defines the borders of the subject and emphasizes its content. For example, the characteristics of a lion that stands for a king are figuratively passed on to the king amplifying the monarch's statue. This mechanism serves in building vertical structures, which are based in a singular subject. In the context of a myth, the subject's mode of engagement is also conceived dialectically. It comes to play as an opposition between the hero and the enemy, where the Other serves in defining the original heroic subject. Thus, in a mythological system the operative concepts are: opposition and singularity of a subject. Under no circumstance though, relating an individual to a different reality can actually facilitate transcendence. The symbolic system maintains the separation of reality and metaphor.

II. Sorcery as Crossing Over

Sorcery, on the other hand, is concerned with transition from one reality to another. The crossing over is an act of becoming something else, moving from singularity to plurality. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* situate 'becomings' in opposition to myths, which are based in analogical representations. 'We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away [...] myth as a frame of calcification is quite incapable of registering these becomings.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 237) The latter statement is true because 'A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 237) The crossing over of a becoming is real.

The moment one starts to engage a becoming, the process dissolves and absorbs the singular subject. Thus produced dynamic is directional although it never reaches its goal. Further, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that 'Becoming produces nothing other than itself. [...] What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 238) The initial singularity traverses into a block of movement understood as a totality of its parts. Such transformation liberates and intensifies the original entity through the swarm.

The horizontal dissolving into plurality, which facilitates crossing over to a different reality is the aim of a sorcerer's work. The multiplicity implies a pack, to which an individual is drawn. Since both humans and animals act upon that instinct, pack behavior constitutes of our becoming-animal. Moreover, this tendency to form bands mirrors our internal structure, which on a closer inspection, does not appear to be homogenous. The authors elaborate on this point: 'We do not become animal without fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. A fascination for the outside? Or is the multiplicity that fascinates us already related to the multiplicity dwelling within us?' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 240) While it is unclear where the thresholds between realities exist: within, without or simultaneously in both locations, it is precisely this border that the sorcerer needs to navigate.

III. The Demonic Pact

In order for the dissolution into multiplicity to take place, the sorcerer first negotiates a pact with a demon. Just as much as the sorcerer is a special figure connected to but existing outside of the mainstream social structure, his counterpart occupies a space outside of the pack. '[...] wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with this individual that the alliance must be made in order to become-animal.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 243) The exceptionality is based on the individual's position in relation to a group. '[...] the demon sometimes appears as the head of the band, sometimes as the Loner on the sidelines of the pack, and sometimes as the higher Power (*Puissance*) of the band.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 243) The special figures, sorcerer and demon, meet on the edge of two realities to initiate becoming. Sorcery, therefore, is the art of making demonic pacts, which facilitate crossing over the threshold between dimensions.

The becoming-animal, initiated by the sorcerer, propagates itself through further alliances that incorporate heterogeneous elements. The structure of such pack is held together by

contingency rather than filiations. Deleuze and Guattari contrast familial genetic ties that presuppose a specific social structure, with alliance, which unites diverse agents. In a multiplicity, '[...] there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 242) This comprehensive approach liberates the process of propagation from sexual reproduction and opens it up to new territories. Further, alliances take place when the orthodox social contracts break down. 'Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields and catastrophes.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 241) The new mode of propagation through contagion is important to note since it suggests a possibility of transcending the old social forms and creating new types of collectivity.

IV. Apparent Consciousness of Becoming

One characteristic of a collectivity, viewed as the Deleuzeian becoming, is its ability to execute actions and movements of its own accord. Large systems, such as a flock of geese or a message board, behave in what appears to be spontaneous manner that implies consciousness. Further, understanding what the becoming is doing, gives one the ability to name the collective and perceive it as a unified field. The most basic activities of a becoming are propagation and formation of packs. As a result, this unity in action endows the collectivity with a sense of agency.

Moreover, becoming exhibits intelligence specific to systems, which are auto-corrective in a biological and cybernetic sense. A plant, whose roots and branches are shaped by its search for nutrients and light, can serve as a visual example. Similarly, a piece of software, operating within certain logic, has the capability of organizing content in what appears to be an intelligent manner. Another example is the intelligence of a pack or a hive driven by instinct in achieving a particular goal. The single mind, acting through the multiplicity, emerges as a function of the system's directionality. Theoretical biologist Ernst Mayr explains that the direction is inspired by a goal. 'This end point might be a structure, a physiological function, the attainment of a new geographical position, or a consummator act in behavior. Each particular program is the result of natural selection, constantly adjusted by the selective value of the achieved end point.' (Mayr 1997,390)

Mayr suggests that biological systems exhibiting apparently purposeful behavior can be viewed as teleonomic, which is a term derived from the Greek telos meaning goal or end point. 'All teleonomic behavior is characterized by two components. It is guided by a "program" and it depends on the existence of some end point, goal, or terminus that is foreseen in the program that regulates the behavior.' (Mayr 1997, 390) Considering this definition, becoming-animal is teleonomic. While packing or swarming behaves as a 'program,' the animal becomes the goal of the operation. Mayr goes on to say that teleonomic directionality towards an end '[...] in turn, implies a dynamic process rather than a static condition, as represented by a system.' (Mayr 1997, 389) This view parallels Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming as an active process involving multiplicities and movement.

Agency, intelligence and teleonomy characterizing a becoming suggest a possibility of the system's consciousness. This phenomenon forms a portal, which gives access to a

multiplicity organized by its movements, mind and purpose. One engages this opening when negotiating a pact. Thus manifested apparent consciousness floats on the edge of the system as the demon.

V. The Question of Subject

While a Deleuzian collective exhibits characteristics of consciousness, it does not produce a subject. Since packs and swarms do not exhibit a reflective subjectivity, they represent an irreducibly collective process. In the Deleuzian model, the individuation takes place as haecceity or event rather than subjectivity. 'It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 262)

Contrary to the Freudian understanding of a subject that comes to existence in opposition to the Other, the becoming arises as a multiplicity, which is inclusive. The becoming is larger than a single subject since it propagates through a number of different individuals. Conversely, the subject does not possess individuality since it is a sum of all the becomings passing through and therefore loses its status as a subject. 'We must avoid an oversimplified conciliation, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 262) In fact, haecceity is the only existing mode of individuation.

Additionally, the authors refer to the concept of self only as a vehicle for the multiplicities to pass through. The singularity exists as a sum of tensions between the inside and the outside. 'In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 249) The authors conceptualize the idea of self as an aperture rather than subjectivity. Self as an opening is malleable and porous providing conductivity. Therefore, subject as an inflexible structure is replaced by a collective becoming, an event, a haecceity.

VI. The Internet as a Sorcerous Space

In such system, the sorcerer holds the position of a gatekeeper vis a vis the demon enabling the flow of content. The pact opens the door to new territories letting in some particular becomings. This action parallels the way, in which users engage with the Internet through the protocols. Each time a person types an address into a browser, one opens the floodgate for different packs and swarms to cross over and infect the hardware and the mind. The Web is populated with multiplicities and becomings in the form of content and representations of other entities. Following the Deleuzian model, in using the Internet, one enters into pact with the software, which stands for the demon.

In order to initiate an alliance through a pact, the sorcerer needs to know the demon's name. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the importance of the name. 'The proper name fundamentally designates something that is of the order of the event, of becoming or of the haecceity. It is the military men and meteorologists who hold the secret of proper names, when they give them to a strategic operation or a hurricane.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 264)

By typing in the specific address, the user conjures up the demon. Further, by following a given protocol, which sometimes amounts to pressing a download button or simply hitting the 'enter' button on the keyboard, the sorcerer literarily enters into a pact.

The unleashed software exhibits all the characteristics of a Deleuzian becoming, such as intelligence, teleonomy and agency. Depending on its 'program,' the software proceeds towards a certain goal sweeping the human as part of its operations. In this process, the denomination 'user' acquires a new meaning as it becomes unclear whom or what is doing the using. Thus, the border between subject and object is blurred. United by a goal, the human and the software complement each other in a series of operations. They are both entangled in becoming one another, becoming-animal. 'A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a center of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension without changing its nature.' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 249) And thus the sorcerer initiates the multidimensional human-software-hardware becoming.

VII. 'I Am Legion' – The Demon and Becoming

The Internet is haunted by many orders of demons calcified by the degree of their autonomy. Some, such as personal websites, do not have a great appetite for propagation while others, such as viruses, will spread uncontrollably from host to host if given the opportunity. I am Legion is a demon designed to propagate itself through Twitter feeds grabbing posts according to its 'program.' The demon makes alliances with the Twitter software via a pact, the API and incorporates the human users, who in turn have pacts with Twitter and are part of the Twitter-becoming. The demonic collective appears as a feed generator selecting tweets based on common words. The initiator of the pact performs a function of an enabler. In this final gesture, the sorcerer-user becomes incorporated as a component in I am Legion-becoming.

I am Legion is not a myth since its relationship with other orders of reality is not that of equivalence, as defined by Barthes, but of contingency. The demon bypasses the dialectical mode of producing meaning via signified-signifier in favor of creating an alliance among its parts, where one and many are the same. In a transcendental gesture, the sorcerer reaches out towards that, which will obliterate him/her as a subject in order to join a subject-less entity, a becoming. A mythic story, on the other hand, reinforces the subject by serving as an explanation, which strengthens the order below. Conversely, the demon does not split the world in two and instead it seeks to include everything in its order of existence via pacts. The price one pays for entering into that alliance is letting go of the illusion of oneself as a subject.

VIII. Conclusion

Sorcery creates a mode of transcendence reaching beyond human limits, which are based in the 'other.' The multiplicity performs consciousness without the mediation of a subject. The apparent consciousness representing ever-shifting body appears super-natural when conceived from the perspective of a dialectically constructed reality. Thus, it takes on the role of a demon. Since the concept of pack or swarm sweeping up individuality escapes

human reason, we are dealing with the highest order of magnitude, the sublime. That which is terrifying is also fascinating and inspires experimentation via practical means. The Internet as a lab and a studio provides an environment with necessary dynamics as well as a frame to simulate and highlight the theoretical structures. Still, the work is done within certain parameters. The truly terrifying aspect of a demon is its capability to emancipate itself and proliferate through different media. The invocation of such entity may prove interesting for the future research.

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