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**THE HYBRID MONSTER AS A FIGURE OF LIBERATION
IN SELECTED ARTWORKS OF
MINNETTE VÁRI**

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The premise of this study is that through the depictions of the monstrous, with its qualities of the abject, the artists who are discussed in the study have recreated, metaphorically, an experience in which the viewer and the artist are engaged in a complex process of apprehending the 'embodied mind'. An apprehension of the fact that the mind is 'embodied' is something new in the history of cognition.¹ The active experience of the realisation that the mind arises out of the body as an emerging property has beneficial consequences for the person realising this. It liberates the artist and thence the viewer from the old categories of subjective and objective. These categories, which entrap our thinking in an old Cartesian,² scientific position in which mind and body are totally separate elements, allow a subject to have no sympathy with an 'other' as object. From such a position many inhumane acts arise. It is also possible to use the fact of the separation of subject and object as a pointed commentary on 'man's inhumanity to man'. The choice to show the other as monstrous is a pictorial device which emphasises the split between consciousness and body. It can be exploited to make a viewer alert to his/her unsympathetic stance. But when subject and object are the same, the depiction of the other as abject, monstrous or hybrid, serves a different purpose. This purpose can be spelled out as one of the ways of positing an identity which, although it is actually part of the neurological processes of the brain, can be "hugely productive", to use Eakin's³ (2004:129) words.

In a post-apartheid South Africa, where issues of otherness are still being debated, the problem of abjection remains a provocative topic. An empathetic immersion in the experience of becoming-something-else is not only good for raising the

¹ Rohrer (2007:1-26) gives a comprehensive overview of 'embodied cognitive science'.

² Descartes' clear distinction between mind and body, famously enunciated as "I think therefore I am", has come to stand for all the philosophers who have that strong Western/Christian standpoint about the separation of mind from body. This thinking is foundational for empirical science. Ironically, the study of the brain in brain science has revealed the brain and body as an entity and mind as a property of the organism brain-body. This development in cognitive science is clearly laid out in Varela, Thomson and Rosch (1992:xv-xx).

³ Paul Eakin is Ruth N Halls Professor Emeritus of English at Indiana University and he writes extensively on autobiography and identity.

consciousness of persons but it also useful for the person whose identity is involved in that narrative. When cognitive maps⁴ are merged there is a liberating sensibility of ceasing to be only a mind with a body somehow attached, a *rational* human being. There is rather a consequent empathy with those things which are profoundly other than ourselves. This is true whether the other is also human or not. This is a very different experience from that of artist and onlooker settling into the conventional Cartesian position in which body and mind are separate entities. Once this happens, it is possible to aver that the minds of certain kinds of humans are more rational, more moral, more intelligent, have more feeling than others and the *other* is objectified, made monstrous or ceases to be worthy of empathy. The plight of animals in this kind of split is even more extreme.

The abject produces fear and desire, just as a monster in literature or art does. The onlooker finds it simultaneously terrible and wonderful. Julia Kristeva⁵ argues that the abject is a powerful concept in terms of embodied subjectivity and is critically linked to women. In the works which are central to this study the abject and the monstrification of the abject are examined. Selected artworks by two contemporary South African artists are examined: Minnette Vári (b 1968) and Rina Stutzer (b 1976). The parameters of this mini-dissertation are confined to the investigation of the visual and conceptual manifestation of the hybrid/monstrous figure purposely presented as having human and animal qualities, within a South African context.

The depiction of human-animal hybrids in contemporary art seems to be in a process of resurgence. Two exhibitions, *Becoming Animal: Art in the Animal Kingdom*⁶ and *Animals as Metaphor*⁷ took place in Europe and South Africa at

⁴ Sandra Blakeslee and Matthew Blakeslee, science writers, in their engaging book called, *The body has a mind of its own. How body maps in your brain do (almost) everything better* (2007), make the latest findings in cognitive science available for the lay public.

⁵ Kristeva is an important feminist writer whose wide ranging publications from 1982 onwards have proved to be valuable in alerting readers to the many sided views of feminism.

⁶ The art exhibition *Becoming Animal* (May 2005 to February 2006) took place at MassMoCA, the largest centre for contemporary visual and performing arts in Massachusetts, United States. This major exhibition comprised twelve artists: Jane Alexander, Patricia Piccinnini, Rachel Berwich, Brain Conley, Mark Dion, Sam Easterson, Kathy High, Natalie Jeremijenko, Phil Taylor, Nicolas Lampert, Michael Oatman and Ann-Sofi Siden from America, Australia and South Africa.

⁷ *Animals as Metaphors* (February to May 2005) showed at the UNISA Art Gallery, in Pretoria, South Africa.

about the same time. *Becoming Animal* explored the lessening gap between human and animal existence, while *Animals as Metaphor* demonstrated that it is fruitful to use the representation of the animal as an investigation of identity in relation to social structures – politics, morality, racial politics and sexuality as experienced in the South African milieu (Lebeko 2005:2). The Spring edition of *Art South Africa* (O’Toole 2007:48-77) contains several essays on art and animal issues. This study and the artworks it describes for interpretation contribute to the arguments in this study.

The choice to make the monster, especially a hybrid monster, human-animal, a *teras*,⁸ a portent, to focus a protest against categorisations of normal-abnormal, natural-unnatural, subject-object, civilised-uncivilised, the endless opposites, is not random. Humans are part animal. We are partly animal and yet we have minds and the sense of self. Animals are the apparent opposite, having awareness and perception but no sense of self, and yet they are so similar in their bodies to humans.

People have been representing otherness-from-themselves through the animal or hybrids in cultures from antiquity to the present. Paleolithic representation of the so-called sorcerer of Les Trois Frères Cave in France (Lewis-Williams 2002:12) is one of the earliest hybrid figures in Western history. Lewis-Williams states the time of that representation is between 13,000 and 14,000 years ago. As a Paleolithic art specialist (based in Johannesburg at the Rock Art Research Centre) he suggests that the artists who depicted the figure were engaged in a pursuit of the sacred. In the shamanistic practices of many cultures, such as the Bushmen in South Africa, man and animal are hybridised in depictions of the healing or trance dances. The continuous tradition into the twentieth century (Dowson 2000) of such depictions shows how vigorous the idea is. Early depictions of the Gods as other than humans in the Mesopotamian pantheon reveal extraordinary creatures with the rich vitality of a society which lives in close contact with the natural world. That society, despite its urbanisation, chose to present the hegemony of the gods, the immortals in the form of hybridisations of animal and human (Ruane 1999:sp).

⁸ *Teras teratos*, Greek. Sign, wonder, marvel, portent; in its concrete sense, a monster; figurative sense, a monstrosity (Liddell & Scott 1973:1776).

Humanity's fascination with the monster is deep-seated. The description of the monster is used by each culture for its own purposes and the same is true of the two artists discussed in this study. The monster was defined in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment, by Geoffroy de Saint Hilaire as excess, lack or displacement of a human's organs (Braidotti 1996:138). Gradually scientific objectivity required that monsters should be defined pathologically (Ruane 1999:sp) in line with the search for scientific norms. Monsters provide science with the 'other' by which to define 'healthy', 'normal', animals, and most significantly, normal human beings. The identification of certain animal forms as deviant was important to the activities of rational scientific discourses which sought to describe the norm in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Braidotti 1995:75-106).

The monster can be prodigy and demon, producing horror and fascination, aberration and adoration (Braidotti 1996:136). The ambivalence of the monster points to the fact that we remain fascinated by horror and fear. As Marina Warner (1998:4) expresses it: "... the bogeys who materialize fear in some kind of living shape ...", give us a great thrill. This quality Cohen⁹ (1996:7) describes as a fragmented mixed category, which resists hierarchical binary oppositions. It embodies simultaneous difference and sameness, repulsion and attraction, resistance and integration. The monster is an extreme version of marginalisation, an abject epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation (Cohen 1996:7). Thus, the monster can embody difference, for example racial and gender difference. Not only does the monster govern the production of difference, it also offers categories of 'otherness',¹⁰ such as sexual difference (deviation); race and ethnicity; and the non-human (Braidotti 1996:141). The monstrification of cultures, ethnic groups or gender by a society is an old *topos* from antiquity. The study of territories and special lands where monstrous races lived is exemplified by Herodotus's anthropological investigations in the fifth century

⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is assistant professor of English at George Washington University. He published articles on the cultural construction of monstrosity and gender theory.

¹⁰ Racial, ethnic and sexual difference is represented through 'the other' and this essentialising of difference often takes place through stereotyping (Hall 1997:8) The ideology of 'otherness' is a symptom of the inability to gain self-worth except by differentiating oneself from others unreservedly viewed as inferior.

BC. Distant lands, such as India and Ethiopia, were supposed to be populated by cannibals and monstrously deformed people, according to him (Braidotti 1996:142).

Scientific discourse, such as that of the natural sciences (particularly biology and medicine) has connoted femininity negatively since the earliest times, but particularly in the Western Church tradition by making it monstrous. The connection between the monster and female through biology, rationalism and aesthetics, goes back to Aristotle's description of the development of the female fetus as deviant (Braidotti 1995:79). Abnormal births and abortions can then be attributed to the mother's transgressions in the prevailing male order of things. In a hegemony which is male, the female stands as the other and is consequently monstrified.

However, it is with the monster as a deictic tool that this mini-dissertation is concerned. In the sense that monsters are and have been taken as portents of good and evil (mostly evil) as well as signs of cultural indiscretion and punishment, the monster is 'that which reveals' or 'that which warns', or is an object of display (Braidotti 1996:135; Cohen 1996:4).

The monster points to two essential issues. One of these is revealed in Minnette Vári's work, and is to protest the overwhelming of the female self as individual in a highly charged male dominated society. By making herself the monster the artist uses the rhetorical device of dramatising her understanding of the monstrous and the abject in the person of the vital and creative artist. Such an oxymoron emphasises the tension. In the second place, depicting monsters as metaphors for the body-mind experience when faced with examples of fleshliness and its decay, our own mortality acts as a meditative device for awareness of the state of things as they are. This is liberating in the sense that one has faced up to the question of death, in a society which avoids that question. The animals depicted in Stutzer's work are the domestic ones which have been co-habiting with man for millennia.

1.2 Literature review

This study relies on two streams of literature, one in postmodern philosophy and one literary - about monsters. The necessity of illuminating the discussion of the artworks, comparing and contrasting them, through a review of the literature on the key topics is a useful development of the ideas informing the artworks.

To support a view of what the separation of the abject and the monstrous from the presenting subject might be, from a new perspective, the works of Gilles Deleuze¹¹ and Pierre Félix Guattari,¹² were the starting point. Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about 'becoming-animal' seemed to promise release from the position which gives rise to the split body-versus-mind attitude. Posthuman philosophy and its sub-category nomadic philosophy as expanded by Guattari and Deleuze in their chapters, *One or several wolves?* and *Becoming-intense, becoming-animal*, from *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (1988) suggest a way to flatten out the opposites. Rosi Braidotti's¹³ book *Metamorphoses. Towards a materialist theory of becoming* (2002) and the article *Between monsters, goddesses and cyborgs. Feminist confrontations with science, medicine and cyberspace* (1996) also seems to offer a different view. In Deleuze and Guattari's theory of trans-species nomadism, or in other words, morphological hybridity (Braidotti 2002:128), 'becoming' is an act which itself is proper or improper. So the proper way of becoming as a nomad, is a position in which the subject (nomad) engages with his or her external others in a *constructive, symbiotic* way, and it stands in opposition to steady identities (Braidotti 2002:119). The metaphor of the nomad for a description of being in the world and becoming as an act of simple existence is drawn from some cultural utopia in which people act decently.

However, the device of using metaphors of plurality or utopian societies to remove the habit of thinking about opposites, is not as useful as it promised on first reading of

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995) is a French postmodernist and post-structuralist in the canon of continental philosophy.

¹² Pierre Félix Guattari (1930 – 1992), a psychoanalyst, is a French pioneer of institutional psychology as well as the founder of Schizoanalysis and Escosophy.

¹³ Rosi Braidotti is a Professor in the Arts faculty and the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Braidotti is a contemporary theoretician specialising in postmodern feminism.

Deleuze, Guattari and Braidotti. The basic Cartesian split between mind and body remains at the heart of that thinking. The emphasis on descriptions of being in the world in ways in which we describe animals, such as ‘flights’, ‘teeming’ and so on, drew attention to the very real qualities which animals and humans share, but they are still deemed other.

The other key element of the nomadic philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1988:261) is *haecceity*, or *this-ness*. The theory of ‘becoming’ includes the potency of expression, more specifically, a non-linguistic influence, such as speed, degree, extension and intensity which is expressed by the term *haecceity*. According to this theory, only two dimensions define the body - longitude and latitude. Longitude involves the “sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness” and latitude implies the “sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential” (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:260). Seasons, wind, an hour, a degree of heat are *haecceity* because they are defined as relations of movement and rest between particles and capacities to affect or be affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:261).¹⁴

Nevertheless, the position of the largest number of analytical Western philosophers, including Deleuze and Guattari and their interpreters seems to posit reason and morality as disembodied faculties of mind (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:513). That act enables humans to adopt a subject-object response to other humans, animals and nature. The most extreme form of dehumanisation is a daily event in wars throughout the world. And it is not only humans who are objectified, but particularly animals. To find a compassionate middle path, retain one’s empathy and give up the monstrification of what is not the same as oneself remained a question in this study.

With the need to contrast the varieties of possible analyses of the artworks under discussion, the theoretical framework for discussion using postmodern, feminist and Deleuzian theories did not answer the question my own work posed.

¹⁴ “You have the individuation of a day, a season, a year, a life (regardless of its duration), a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). A clout of locusts carried by the wind at five in the evening; a vampire who goes at night, werewolf at full moon ... It’s the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a *haecceity*” (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:262).

The idea of a posthuman philosophy seems to be better described as an ‘inhuman’ philosophy as the human becomes a boundary figure which entails potentially contradictory discourses and signifies potentially contradictory meanings (Braidotti 1996:135). Posthuman configurations contest the separation of the organic and the man-made, the human and non-human in favour of a symbiotic and contaminated interaction in which interiorities and exteriorities, self and other, no longer exist. Although this promises to move towards a collapse of the subject-object opposition it has no firm basis for the argument.

Subjects-in-becoming develop alongside the discourses of the ‘other’ in postmodernity (Braidotti 2002:118). Although becomings are minoritarian, they displace and re-territorialise ‘others’ of classical dualism on a temporal basis:

The patterns of becoming can be visualised alternatively as sequential modes of affirmative deconstruction of the dominant subject-position (masculine/white/heterosexual/speaking a standard language/property-owning/urbanised), or else, as stepping stones to the complex and open-ended process of de-personalisation of the subject (Braidotti 2002:119).

Although this sounds convincing, the researcher is left with the old position of analytical philosophy in which the mind-body split is the producer of further dualisms.

The personal experience of embodiment, the mind’s awareness when faced with death, decay and distortion in the context of scientific research encouraged the researcher of this study to question the works of the cognitive scientists/philosophers who explain how the body and mind interact. The scientists who work on cognition are currently bringing about a quiet revolution in philosophical thinking because they maintain that body and mind are so closely interwoven that we cannot separate them. They are the key figures working in a range of disciplines (linguistics, artificial intelligence, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and psychology)¹⁵ and publishing in

¹⁵ Varela (1992:7) provides a resumé of the writers in the various fields of cognitive science dividing them into those such as Noam Chomsky the linguistics expert, Daniel Dennett on cognitivism, Douglas Hofstadter in mathematics, and a range of other less well known names in the Humanities.

them. Some of the most important follow. In 1984 Churchland published *Matter and consciousness: a contemporary introduction to the philosophy of mind*. This was followed by the 1986 publication *Neurophilosophy*.

The summary provided by Varela *et al* (1992:7-14) of the history and current discourses in cognitive science provide a valuable introduction for the layman to the discipline in its complexity. It covers fields of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, linguistics and philosophy, with each group of researchers emphasising different elements of the discipline. These elements are *cognitivism*: ideas that suggest cognition is 'mental representation' in the style of digital computers. A second development is termed *emergence* or *connectionism*, namely, "... a representation consists in the correspondence between such an emergent global state and properties of the world; it is not a function of particular symbols". The third approach is named by Varela (1992:9) and his colleagues *enactivism*. In their own words:

... cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs. The enactive approach takes seriously, then, the philosophical critique of the idea that the mind is a mirror of nature but goes further by addressing this issue from within the heartland of science (Varela 1992:9).

The enactive approach in which the researcher seeks to analyse a topic from the point of view of what it means to be a subject and an object simultaneously is the method of analysis used to look at my own works.

During the 1990s Lakoff published his work on *Cognitive semantics* in the collection *Meaning and mental representations* (1988). By the time George Lakoff and Mark Johnson¹⁶ (1999) subtitled their large opus *Philosophy in the Flesh* with the provocative gauntlet – 'the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought'. In their study of the 'embodied mind', cognitive science was being viewed as a new

¹⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are cognitive scientists working at Berkeley and Oregon Universities in the USA.

discipline freed of its robotic background. They take on western analytical philosophy in its Cartesian form and make many claims from the fact that the mind arises from our physicality, our embodiment.

One of the most useful discussions in Lakoff and Johnson (1999:541) about metaphors and their relation to cognition and analytical philosophy, gave impetus to the questions my work raised: I do not feel so very different from the animals I paint; I feel empathy for them; what is the basis for this empathy? When we see others as 'different' to ourselves we experience a metaphorical idea about ourselves and the other - that 'he is normal' and 'I am not', for instance, and so forth. Often the other is reified, objectified or monstrified and we feel deeply as though we were telling a real truth about them when we describe them as such. Such deeply held convictions, which are metaphorical, seem to be intuitive for reasons which are difficult to grasp at first. But, Lakoff and Johnson (1999:118-129) show that they are only conceptual metaphors and their truth value is not high. The conceptual metaphors which humans use are deeply embedded in our cognitive unconscious but they are still metaphors. They arise out of the bodily experience. That there are differences from culture to culture must be taken for granted, and so the way metaphors are linguistically constructed is different from culture to culture. But there are shared human conceptual metaphors which arise out of our shared embodiment (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:267-289).

The idea of the 'embodied' mind in the sense used by Varela, Thomson and Rosch¹⁷ (1992:11) that, "... we are *here*, living embodied beings ...", raises the question for the researcher about the means by which the scientific community reaches many of its conclusions. Conclusions which are based on a separation of body and mind, making the subject un-empathetic to the object observed and used in science raises difficulties for the researcher. In the light of the experiences of painting visual reference gained from the Veterinary Science Department at Onderstepoort in Pretoria, the horror,

¹⁷ Francisco Varela (1946-2001), Evan Thomson and Eleanor Rosch are researchers in cognitive science. Varela was based at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in France, Thomson is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto and Rosch Professor of Psychology at Berkeley, California.

disgust and shock at the dissected corpses of the animals, some decaying, some preserved, brought home the reality of embodiment.

1.3. Theoretical framework and methodology

The method which is used in this study to approach the theoretical issues of analysis of the work of the two artists under discussion, is through a close reading of the literature deemed significant and a close visual analysis of the artworks. Several key questions arise out of the work I painted for the exhibition of my Masters' *oeuvre* which I attempted to answer from reading in cognitivist science publications. Vári's works were analysed in terms of her own pronouncements at public meetings as well as her published material on her site on the Internet.

The theoretical framework is sited in postmodern theory, as indicated in the previous section. Selected works by theorists are used to substantiate my own observations.

1.4 Overview of chapters

Chapter Two, entitled *Protesting the metaphor of the female monster*, investigates the monster as female and abject but with the possibilities of becoming something else. A brief review of categories of 'otherness', such as those marked by sexuality, racial differences and the idea of the non-human as part of the monstification through the art, are pursued. The works of Vári, *Oracle* (1999) and *Chimera* (2001) and *Mirage* (1999), which are video animations, are closely analysed.

Three theorists contribute to the discussion: Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed and Rosi Braidotti. Braidotti provides a definition of the concept of the monster, its historical origin, structure and evolution of its nature. Creed's re-interpretation of the female monster in horror films is supportive as she identifies specific types and roles of what she terms, the 'monstrous-feminine'. She also incorporates the notions of abject as part of her definition of these issues. Kristeva's thorough analysis of the notion of abjection, provides depth and focus to analysis of the abovementioned artworks. This chapter also deals with the becoming-animal theory of Rosi Braidotti,

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This theory proposes a deconstruction of fixed notions of identity. An investigation of metonymic and metaphoric strategies of representation evident in *Mirage* provides further possible meaning and an understanding of the disruptive intent of the artwork.

In Chapter Three, the practical body of my work is discussed. The theoretical focus on embodiment forms the foundation of the artworks. The theory of becoming-animal and –monster is illustrated in the visual manifestation of hybrid animal figures. These notions of the hybrid monster constitute the point of departure of the study. The implementation of these notions of the monster in the selected visual artworks aims to disrupt and redefine the marginalised subject and reconnect body with mind in the artist. Subject and object are collapsed.

Chapter Four ends the study and offers concluding remarks. This section makes the point that monsters serve a variety of purposes in art, being in the two cases studied a pointer to the issues each artist covers. For Vári a protest at the political situation is the purpose of her monstrification. For myself I make the monster serve two purposes, one, to show my empathy with what has been monstrified, abused, set at nought and used as a commodity of science. The second point I make in the depiction of the hybrid figures is that the relationship between body and mind is intimately connected. The mind is not the possession of an *Identity* who gives *Meaning* to all that it experiences, but is an emerging property whose metaphors arise directly out of the body's experience. As such they are even more alarming in their provenance than if they were simply manufactured by a disembodied mind.

CHAPTER TWO: PROTESTING THE METAPHOR OF FEMALE AS MONSTER

2.1 Introduction

In the work of one of the earliest of the Greek novelists of antiquity¹, there is the story of the queen giving birth to a baby who was a different colour to herself because she had gazed on a picture of a person who was different to herself at the time of the baby's conception. This story encapsulates the perceived power of the mother to produce a *monstrum*, a portentous being. Indeed the princess of the story does do incredible things. A more sober tale comes to mind in the disgraceful story of Saartjie Baartman's monstrification. Her physiological self seemed to the colonists in South Africa to be an example of what Pliny, the ancient Roman historian, had reported about the monstrous races on the periphery of the civilised world. So females can themselves be monstrous and their capacity to conceive and bring to birth monsters is part of a very deep seated idea about the mysteries of conception and birth and women.

Vári's work is concerned with both the metaphor of the woman artist's work as a monstrous offspring and herself as a monster. This chapter discusses the female monster and her abject qualities as they are revealed in the fusion of human and animal elements. Human and animal boundaries are merged in the artworks *Oracle*, *Chimera* and *Mirage* by Vári. In the animal guise the female becomes a monstrous creature who is an active aggressor, while being abject. In *Oracle* and *Chimera*, gender and racial identity is the theme of the monstrification. In *Mirage*, becoming animal/ or becoming monstrous also focuses on race and gender monstrifications, but in their connection to cultural, national and ideological identity. The video animations display the female form in a continuously changing state of distortion and transition between human and animal, whether through physical appearance or behavior. Against a South African backdrop, the metaphor of the monstrous female is wide-ranging in its possibilities for interpretation.

¹ Reardon (1989:353-588) tells Heliodorus' romance about Charakleia whose mother suffered the misfortune of gazing at the picture during her conception.

In the nomadic philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari the monstrous female, because she is always 'becoming' and does not have a fixed identity, is liberated from the implied vilification of her gender. Always 'becoming' allows the woman artist to remain poised on the borders which define female subjectivity negatively in terms of male subjectivity. It permits a space to open which is neither one nor the other, but always participating in both.

By the literal figuring of the metaphor of woman as monster, Vári also frees herself from the confines of anyone's attempt to trap her in any *one* guise. The circularity of the argument is repeated in the endlessly looping animations. The argument runs something like this – 'as a South African trapped in a particular culture, time, and body of an artist, I can free myself by *enacting the metaphor* with all its negative connotations. As I become animal-monster-mythical being-allusion to other masculine monsters, I point out the wrongheaded thinking which monstrifies me'.

2.2 The abject female monster

It is a way of situating the monstrous-feminine in the visual arts to refer to the horror film writer Barbara Creed's term 'monstrous-feminine'. She uses the term to identify the opposite of the male monster and to emphasise gender difference and female sexuality (Creed 1993:2-3). The female monster horrifies differently from the male monster. In cinematic terms the male is seen as a monstrous aggressor, whereas the female (or female monster) is victimised. Creed rereads the female monster and interprets her as an aggressor instead of a victim. Creed deals with various monstrous-feminine types, for example the nonhuman animal type, whose bodies by signifying the collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, are made portentous and enable catharsis for the society which abjects the monster.

According to Julia Kristeva² (1982:4), abjection is that which does not respect borders, positions or rules, as well as that which disrupts identity, system and order. She argues that the construction of the self is bound up with the constitution of the sense of stable

² Julia Kristeva is a French philosopher and linguist whose work is based on Marxist principles.

subjectivity, coherent speech, and a clean and proper body (Kristeva 1982:113-115). Everything that threatens the subject's identity as human is defined as abject. Within a society, the abject functions as a tool of separation, between the human and non-human; and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject (Creed 1993:8).³

The abject can be experienced as bodily functions or symbolically, as in the religious economy. The notion of the abject in religious terms includes abominations such as sexual perversion, corporeal alteration, decay, death, corpses, and body wastes and often the feminine body. Abjection is tied to want, desire and fear. Abjection shows recognition of *want* in the sense of that which is lacking and so is needed, on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded (Kristeva 1982:5). Finally, abjection points to the most fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal. Primitive societies removed or excluded specific threatening aspects of their cultures from the world of animals and animalism, which were imagined as representative of sex and murder. Thus the abject becomes the object of primal repression (Kristeva 1982:12) and remains an ambiguous term.

But, as the society or community casts out the abject, its own catharsis is achieved. This event is described by Creed as the restoration of the 'clean and proper body' (1993:11) of the society. Then the abject body can lose its form and integrity. The nature of the border changes, but the monster maintains its function to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability. The symbolic order is based on that which is normal, religiously constructed and influenced by patriarchal rule. The exclusion of the abject guarantees the subject a position in its proper place in relation to the symbolic. The metonymy implied by the scapegoating of an abject figure, in which that figure itself stands in place of whatever disturbs the society, is one of Vári's prominent themes.

³ In her focused study in which the boundary between the human and the animal has collapsed, Creed (1993:9) states that the body's symbolism is in a changing form of representation within postmodern horror film.

2.3 Vári's video animations

Vári's video animations *Oracle* (1999), *Chimera* (2001) and *Mirage* (1999) incorporate aspects of the hybrid animal-human body and notions of otherness in terms of femininity and race. In her work, the distortion and manipulation of bodies becomes a visual metaphor for mutability, which is reflected in her argumentation surrounding the uncertain nature of historical narratives which are constantly being rewritten and often erased (Murinik 1999: sp).

2.3.1 *Oracle* (1999)

Vári's video animation *Oracle* (1999) (Figures 1, 2 & 4) is exhibited as a large-scale projection. By this method of display the monstrous feminine is rendered as a frightening, overpowering, gigantic and excessive figure to an observer. The animation *Oracle* represents an attempt to bring about a confrontation with the abject (suggested by bodily deformation, meat, food, wastes and the monstrous-feminine) and finally eject the abject and redraw boundaries between human and nonhuman, to restore the order of society.

The female body in the *Oracle* uses gestures reminiscent of animal movements and characteristics: the body is crouched and tears voraciously at an object with its mouth, similar to a carnivore devouring a piece of meat. The figure consumes, tears, swallows and gags on the piece. The monster does not change form from human to nonhuman, but embodies a human who enacts an animal or vice versa.

The metaphor of woman as animal uses the old cliché of women as nature as the opposite of civilised men, the bearers of rationality and morality in a patriarchal dispensation. Women are seen as less human than men, since they are commonly thought of as more biological, hence natural, than cultural - and are therefore taken to be closer to animals than men (Baker 1993:80).

The possessed bestial female subject is the one who refuses to take up her place in the symbolic order. The represented body symbolises dark desires which specifically threaten the symbolic patriarchal order. The body is digitally distorted to become deformed and disfigured. Constructing the monstrous female body, as an ideological project, points to a failure of paternal order to ensure the separation from the male dominated power structures (Creed 1993: 38). The failure and refusal to recognise the paternal order is that which produces the monstrous and the incapacity to take her proper place in the pecking order is a sign of abjection.

An example of such thinking is encountered in dogmatic Christianity, which views the animal as an inferior and unhygienic being, making it abject. The immodesty of animals that defecate, urinate and couple in public without any sense of self is one of the ways that God's creatures are inferior and unhygienic compared to humans. Vári's body in the video is naked, uncultured, uncivilised, deviant and even perverse. Horror assails the onlooker because the woman has broken from her proper female role as she has made a spectacle of herself and put her unsocialised body on display in the artwork.



Figure 1: Minnette Vári, *Oracle* (detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration: video 2 minutes, audio 6 minutes. Looped indefinitely. Source: Vári: 2006.

The figure's mouth is relevant to the focus on the abject, because it is interpreted as a zone of entry and emission of meat, the male penis and vomit, and most importantly language. The mouth of the monstrous body points to a connection between the oppositions of the inside and the outside planes of the female body, the body as fleshy body and the signifier of mind, namely language. The meat that is the 'other' (or outside) of the body enters into the body's inner recesses and links the female body with the 'other' and the abject. The eating and gagging shown by the open mouth

violate the body's boundaries. The mouth also opens in the gesture of unspeakable terror. The monster is speechless and animal-like. Language has betrayed it. The lack of language, which marks the rational, aware human being, strengthens the idea of the hybrid monster. Boundaries between the human and animal are blurred in the absence of language.

Meat eating is often used as a metaphor for masculine acts of sexual intercourse or rape (Adams 1991:42). Vári takes on the role of the meat eater normally associated with maleness, but it also seems as if she is being devoured by the action of eating, therefore resulting in an ambiguous act. The meat object is amorphic and phallic, according to Du Preez (2000:5). The open mouth and lips (as points of entrance and exit) parallel the woman's other lips and mouth, which again violates the integrity of the body on this level of interpretation. The mouth is also interpreted as traitor of the body; it is used as a displaced vagina. This mouth is an opening through which a woman is raped and inseminated by others (Creed 1995:52). It is often stated by rape victims or battered women that they felt 'like a piece of meat' after being raped. In this case, the meat does not refer to itself but to how a woman victimised by male violence feels. Women and animal others are absent referents of meat, both victims of violence, being butchered eaten or raped. This experience of a woman of being eaten or raped becomes a vehicle for describing other oppressions (Adams 1991:42).

As mentioned previously, the object that is being consumed suggests a piece of flesh or meat in its outlined form. Food becomes abject when it suggests a border between two distinct entities and territories (Kristeva 1982:2). These entities are signified by the human animal gesture of the figure, a human figure with anthropomorphic qualities. The animated figure tears and devours the object only to gag or vomit the substance up. The conflict between the animal hunger in the devouring gestures and the woman's vomiting it up, is ambivalent. The monster itself is repelled and desirous to eat. The meat is the site of abjection. According to Kristeva (1982:4), the abject simultaneously attracts and horrifies, and is therefore ambiguous in its nature.



Figure 2: Minnette Vári, *Oracle* (detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration: video 2 minutes, audio 6 minutes. Looped indefinitely. Source: Vári: 2006.

According to Vári (2001:sp), in *Oracle* she recasts herself as Saturn (or Spain in its horrifying civil war) after Francisco de Goya's black painting, *Saturn devouring his children* (Figure 4),⁴ and like Goya comments on war and its related brutality. The reference to *Saturn devouring his children* connotes the idea that the object in Vári's *Oracle* is human flesh (corpse and progeny). The meat corpse is the most abject, it is the body that has become waste (Creed 1995:146).



Figure 3: Francisco de Goya, *Saturn devouring his children* (1819 – 23). Oil on Canvas, 146 x 83 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Source: Milner 1995:101.

The reference to the mythical figure of Saturn, he who obeys the Oracle at Delphi's advice to devour his son, Chronos or Time, suggests how he devours history. The artist can also devour or destroy history. But if that history has been abjected by a society as the piece of meat is, in the animation of the monster, by metonymy, so that the 'proper' order of society can be restored, the new order of South African history is up to the same tricks as any regime which seeks to wipe out its history.

⁴ It was painted between 1819 and 1823.

On closer inspection the piece of meat in the video has been cropped and inscribed with moving media footage. The footage portrays South African historical events documented through the media. The idea is repeated in the background in a fluid haze which reflects the same imagery. The devoured meat object may be interpreted as an embodied society, in the context of conflicting and mediated histories of present day Africa. The absorption of pieces of contradictory information into one hybrid body is, according to Vári, a model for postcolonial identity (Peffer 2003b:sp).

On a metaphorical level, Vári expresses her position in the socio-political environment of South Africa. She simultaneously desires and rejects the social media footage.⁵



Figure 4: Minnette Vári, *Oracle* (Detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration: video 2 minutes, audio 6 minutes. Looped indefinitely. Source: Vári: 2006.

Vári finds herself in an ambiguous position, as a white female, a spectator and also a participant within the making of South Africa's histories. She expresses her uncomfortable relationship to these matters in this work. She questions the media-portrayed realities and truths partial to the portrayal of a violent and corrupt society of which she is a part. Creed (1993:10) makes the observation that abjection highlights the fragility of the law, and exists on the other side of the border, which separates the living subject from that which threatens its extinction. Hypocrisy and lies are also abject (Kristeva 1982:16). Vári suggests her relation to misconceptions and lies induced through media representations of South African historical events, by devouring and vomiting the media corpse in the *Oracle*. This clearly embodies the contradictive abject

⁵ At a seminar held during the Arts and Reconciliation week at the University of Pretoria in 2005, Vári (2005) emphasised that one must constantly question and be critical of media representations, since they reflect (mirror) the self. One must read through the messages of this (our) time. As an artist one must ingest, or incorporate disparate truths for any possible comprehension of meaning, within this time-period. Through her consumption of the media, Vári comments on the specific local South African situation.

characteristics of repulsion, attraction and desire. Creed (1993:8) suggests that while there is a desire for understanding and meaning, the abject collapses meaning. The subject is constantly plagued by abjection which fascinates and provokes desire, which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation (Creed 1993:9).

In the *Oracle*, the deictic role of the monster is to alert the onlooker to meaning and truth, and it 'warns' against hypocrisy, corruption and misconception in socio-political representations of South African media.

2.3.2 *Chimera* (2001)

In the video animation *Chimera*⁶ (2001) (Figures 5 – 11), Vári addresses the Voortrekker Monument, a symbol of Afrikaner nationalism and a partial account of South African history. In the animation digitally manipulated frieze figures from the Hero Hall in the monument 'act' out scenes of conflict and defeat. *Chimera* has a double rendition, a black and inverted white version of the same narrative. It is a multi-channel video animation. On exhibition, the video is split into multiple large-scale projections. Different stages of the video are projected simultaneously.



Figure 5: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (black edition) (detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

The female monster is marked by a metamorphosing, transforming, and the ghostly body, held in a state of limbo, a shape-shifter, defies the laws of gravity and resists attack (Creed 1995:140). Notions of abjection are evident in the figure's deformity, hybrid nature and instability.

⁶ The chimera in Greek mythology refers to the fire-breathing she-monster represented as a composite of a lion's head, a goat's body (or head), and a dragon or serpent's tail (Mode 1973:169).

In this work, the artist renders the female body monstrous (Creed 1995:148), by allowing it to be in constant flux, a body of becoming, metamorphosing from human to animal, from living to dead – the monstrous body is always in a process of change. It is a hybrid of different animal parts, as its mythical namesake was and it is able to multiply. More or less six different hybrid forms can be identified: firstly, a composite of Zulu warrior head, animal body and female lower body, intertwined and distorted; secondly, a female dressed in Voortrekker attire with an ox head; thirdly, a naked female (Vári's) body with a goat's head; fourthly, a naked female body with goat legs, horns and staff; fifth; a semi-naked black female with horns. The sixth type is a naked female body with a lion's head who changes actions according to context. These different monstrous bodies shift through different scenes and figures represented on the frieze.



Figure 6: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (black edition) (detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

The lion-female either floats playfully, tauntingly or seductively across the monstrous female Voortrekker scene and mimics female Voortrekkers pointing towards the heavens, or re-enacting gestures of a victim or enacting Christ-like poses amongst the male Zulu warriors. Boundaries between animal and human, and between racial stereotypes are broken. Bodies that change shape, particularly if they adopt animal forms, also conjure up the notions of degeneration, decentralisation, deformity, loss of control and witchcraft (Creed 1995:137). The bestial and monstrous characteristics of the chimera are obvious.

The goat or 'boerbok' throughout the composite animal series may be seen as a symbol of fertility, a sexually deviant identity (Vári 2005) or as a scapegoat, which embodies the random victim of violence in a society. The lion symbolises a voracious predator and aggressor, while the serpent's tail is twisting and threatening, according to Vári (2005). She asks what would happen if all of these characteristics are placed into one composite body. The fusion of disparate parts in one body engages with the idea of conflict and disruption within a union, which could be interpreted as specifically referring to the monstrous hybrid body of the South African society. This relation is based on the fact that South Africa is a social body consisting of a multitude of ethnic and racial groups, often in conflict and with a history tainted by conflict. The monstrous body is an embodiment of difference and conflict. The evanescent quality of the figures which can never reanimate the stone of the frieze however much the virtual reality of the video might make it appear to be so, is closely related in the artist's work to her sense of the infinite mutability of historical narrative.

To 'chase the chimera' has in recent times become the metaphor for all imaginary notions, fruitless daydreams or unattainable plans (Mode 1973:169).⁷ According to Vári (2005), historical events have an angle or agenda. The she-monster points to corruption and abuse of power by the State. The body is never fully human or fully animal, rather the State is a monstrosity in the other sense of *monstrum*, that which flies in the face of what it pretends to be.

The bestial nature of the chimera is used to attest to man's inhuman self. The inhuman self refers to the abuse and violence committed by humans in totalitarian states, or those convulsed by war in the name of ideology, religion or any other cause.

⁷ According to myth the legendary heroic figure Bellerophon, on his horse Pegasus, killed the chimera.



Figure 7: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (white edition) (Detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

Violence, crime and corruption could be viewed as abject in the sense that they disorder society. Kristeva (1982:4) suggests that the traitor, the liar, and the killer who claims he is a saviour and even hypocritical avengers are abject. This draws attention to the fragility of law. To be perverse is abject, because it never assumes prohibition, a rule, or law, but misleads and corrupts (Kristeva 1982:15).



Figure 8: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (black edition) (detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

The female figure, a metonym of the State, is represented as an unstable, shifting form, threatening to disturb the order of things by its unfixed identity. Thus, the monstrous female body disrupts the symbolic notion of the proper, full and stable body, through the constant metamorphosis of the hybrid figure,

The hybrid body is not only Vári's naked body, but also black male warriors, female Zulu and female Voortrekker fragments. But, Vari also refers to all minorities and

victimised 'others' as monstrous or heroic, victimised or empowered. Her female body is used as a marker for all oppressed and erased people and histories. Vári (1999:sp) states the following:

To acknowledge the gaps in our memories and to reconstruct the missing parts of history is almost as frightening as staring an apparition in the face, daring to show itself while knowing that one couldn't stand the sight. My new work constitutes a kind of ghost-hunt, tilling over the soil of public and private recollection to find the phantoms that could help to form a composite portrait of an itinerant 'self'.



Figure 9: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (black edition) (detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

The relation of the metaphoric chimera, the pioneer tale and Afrikaans ideology, is layered with possible meaning. If it poses the question of who Bellerophon and who the chimera is, amongst the fighting Boers and Zulus represented in the frieze (Bosch 2002). Another question follows: who does the grotesque monster represent and how is the righteous hero justified? The artist leaves these questions as ambiguous in their answers. The ideological justification of actions taken by cultures, as well as the one-sided nature of any account of history remains the main thrust of the critique.



Figure 10: Minnette Vári, *Chimera* (black edition) (detail) (2001). Video animation; multiple channel projection. Dimensions variable. Duration 3 minutes, audio 5 minutes, looped indefinitely. Source: Vári 2006.

The artwork strives to destabilise the myth of the hero and the other by representing a dystopia. Idolising the hero and the victim (on the frieze), and elevating them to a sacred level, proves to be problematic, and the chimera reduces the sacred to profane and abject. The use of iconic symbols related to the sacred refer to the mix of politics and religion so prominent in South Africa.

Creed's (1995:137) views on the symbolism of the proper body in opposition to the abject body are relevant here. The proper body is trustworthy since it is recognisable and may not metamorphise. The proper body, made in God's image, is apparent in the relief representations of the Voortrekker event. The frieze stands symbolically for the proper body of the State, a sacred vessel, a divine temple. The Voortrekker Monument itself is seen as sacred and holy. The male body is seen as the norm and the female body as inferior, in dogmatic Christianity. Bodies which are female are therefore inferior and other. The female monster associates herself with all other monstrifications; racial, sexual, logistical and cultural.

The limestone frieze is literally animated, or made alive, into a living narrative, where the rock surface becomes a skin, transforming itself as the beast erupts from within (Creed 1995:151). Vári feminises, monstrifies and abjectifies the sacred space of the Monument by enacting the narrative metaphor. The abject monstrous figure disrupts the 'sacred' zone and subsequent patriarchal, ideological and religious beliefs tied to this historical event.

Woman is made to bear, through the processes of representation, mankind's debt to nature precisely because of the association of the feminine with the monstrous. Vári's works attack the State and its repressive institutions which deny the autonomy and validity of the abject subject within this order. The attack is focused on the body and its boundaries, which normally work to confirm the validity of the ideal self within the symbolic.

2.3.3 *Mirage* (1999) - *becoming animal*

The video animation *Mirage* (1999) (Figures 12 – 14) is analysed according to the theory of becoming-animal, as understood from the theorists Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the visual representation strategies researched by Steve Baker. In the animation the constant switching between the animal symbols on the coats of arms, the female body, the human animal hybrid and the real animal exemplify the integration of both metonymic and metaphoric representation.

The posthuman, similar to the monster, is a boundary figure (Braidotti 1996:135). Posthuman configurations are a *mélange* of organic and man-made, but the same dualities as have been encountered before are there - a symbiotic and contaminated interaction in which interiorities and exteriorities, self and other, are said no longer to exist but paradoxically they do by default in denying them. Subjects-in-becoming are supposed to develop *alongside*, not *instead of* the discourses of the 'other' in postmodernity (Braidotti 2002:118).

In *Mirage*, the female and the animal representations of minority identities are subject to 'becoming' which displaces and alters the position of the 'other', through the deconstruction of a patriarchal order symbolised by the coats of arms. The initial heraldic animals morph into fragments of Vári's deformed naked figure. Body parts extracted from the local media are also inserted into the body. The figures are in constant motion and are subject to change and distortion. Gesturing figures seem to struggle and perform obscure acts - the figures suggest discomfort and pain. Finally the human figures solidify into metallic animals as part of a new coat of arms (Vári 2001:sp). The animals are subjected to therianthropism and the humans to theriomorphism. Human bodies have been transformed; they are 'becoming-animal', antelope, elephant, monkey, even dragon.

The metonymy in which the heraldic animals stand for the whole State apparatus, lineage, status among other nations, historical consciousness and long term aims summarised in its motto is a powerful statement of identity. The disruption of that

identity through the means of a woman's monstrous and shameless naked figure being inserted into the form is a transgressive act.



Figure 11: Minnette Vári, *Mirage* (detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration, video 100 seconds, no audio. Looped indefinitely. Source: Museum Bochum 2004: 97.

Theriomorphic forms are typically found in metonymic representations of selfhood when the hybrid stands for the whole Self. A metonymic relationship between humans and animals is found, for example, in the way that the image of the springbok stands for the South African national rugby team. At this level the animal has a positive connotation with the identity of a group, family or nation.

On the other hand, a therianthrope image “combines the form of a beast and that of a man” (Baker 1993:108). Therianthrope forms are often regarded as metaphoric representations of ‘otherness’ (Baker 1993:108), not as positive images. The cultural load that therianthrope representations carry is dependent on what the subtext the illustrator emphasises in the representation.

This is of course true of the illustrations which the real nomads of Southern Africa, the Bushmen, make of their trance dances. Those theriomorphic and therianthrope representations in their rock paintings bear a subtext about the sacred. It was a feature misunderstood by the white colonists who sought to exterminate the Bushmen because their art was considered a sign of their being the ‘other’, sub-human or monstrous.

In *Mirage*, the animals change into hybrids, characterised by fragments of human and animal, pulsating and distorting constantly.



Figure 12: Minnette Vári, *Mirage* (detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration, video 100 seconds, no audio. Looped indefinitely. Source: Museum Bochum 2004: 97.

A coat of arms is a facade representing the ‘unified’ origin, history and ideals of a family, government or institution. It upholds a solid and one-directional visual statement of order, purpose and identity, but Vári correctly reminds us that political transitions affect individuals’ perspectives differently (Vári 2001:sp) and the State and the individual are always in contrary positions. Firstly, the beliefs contained and represented by the emblem are necessarily monolithic, whereas, individuals’ ideologies, hopes and fears are many. An additional conflict is always inherent in South Africa. As Marion Arnold (1996:131) states, “... race consistently trumps gender in the discourse on human relations, and patriarchal ideology remains a powerful force in black and white communities alike”. In other words, Vári questions and challenges the inflexible and domineering ideologies and associated governing strategies, suggested by the coat of arms. Vári disrupts fixed symbolic ideological belief systems whose perpetrators are unwilling to change, to respect or adapt to change. *Mirage* uses the visual conventions of heraldry to impart a sense of ritualised and artificial order, an order that is constantly mutating and is therefore really hazardous and unstable: on the brink of a meltdown (Vári 2001:sp).

The animation starts with the motto: “The heat of history is in our breath”, inscribed on the coat of arms. Both the inscription and the coat of arms seem to melt and change consistency from a solid form to a fluid substance, up to a point where it resets into a different solid form. At the end of the video it reads, “The fever of memory is in our veins”. The first message points to the fleeting nature of our existence, where the second suggests a more intense heat, the fever of memory that sustains history in the future (Vári 2001:sp). As the title suggests, *Mirage* deals with heat, vision, distance, time and space (Vári 2001:sp). A real desert road mirage promises a sanctuary, relief

or paradise from a distance, but when one moves closer the illusion or lie becomes clear. The strength and refuge of the State are mirages. Vári associates the ideologies and beliefs of a South African body with a phenomenon in which light rays are bent to produce a displaced image of distant objects insinuating misconception, delusion and misdirection of a nation. Like a mirror, mirage shows images of things which are elsewhere. Similar to the mirage, the monster figure shows, warns and mirrors a society's fears and beliefs.

Nomadic philosophy states that the subject in 'becoming' must be non-unitary, multi-layered and dynamic. The becoming-animal takes place through the position or proximity of the subject in relation to the animal-multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:29). In other words, 'becoming' involves the distance and relation of a subject in its connection to a group or mass of entities. This definition also strips the body of its organs, in order to have an empty body upon which that which serves as organs, such as animal eyes or jaws, may be distributed (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:30). Multiplicity and repetition of a non-dominant subject such as the animal, monster or 'other', anything which does not have the privileged status which humans habitually adopt, is an important characteristic of becoming-animal.



Figure 13: Minnette Vári, *Mirage* (Detail) (1999). Video animation. Dimensions variable. Duration, video 100 seconds, no audio. Looped indefinitely. Source: Museum Bochum 2004:97.

'Haecceity' prevails in *Mirage* as the implied degree of heat affects and changes the body through the merging and melting human and animal particles. The intensity of speed and movement of the distorted figures fluctuates accordingly. The hybrid splits into multiple figures that distort the scene. The female body morphs into various states

of hybrid elements, as well as different animal forms. The bodies become plural, a group, and do not stay singular or uniform. At certain stages of the animation, the female bodies seem contaminated by a multiplicity of fragmented media footage.

The abject is also prevalent in the animation *Mirage*. Firstly, the hybrid body is interpreted as unholy and unclean in the style of the Biblical abominations. But it is in this animation that the power of the abject becomes most obvious. Once the abject is ejected from the order of things, it becomes powerful by being beyond the pale, a figure to haunt the consciousness of the dominant in the society or order which discarded it. The most famous example of such a monstrous, abjected but terribly powerful figure is that of the Mesopotamian Humbaba, who the hero Gilgamesh has to overcome to confirm his kingship. Humbaba is beyond the boundaries of the urban order among the sacred cedars of Lebanon. He and all abjected figures have a power which is in contrast to their previous status of that against which the violence of abjection can be committed.

In conclusion, the relation between the abject female monster and the 'other', the becoming-animal hybrid figure and the theriomorphic and therioanthropic figures used by Vári enable her to make a powerful critique of South African history, culture and politics. From being a victim in a State which deludes its citizens, a reader of the media which manipulates events and history, she liberates herself through her scathing invective. The blast delivered against the State, those who are mindless and unaware and commit their atrocities against liminal beings is sophisticated, multivalent and relies on the rhetorical device of parody. When the artist parodies the scream of unspeakable terror, or mocks the biased history inscribed in stone with shape shifting figures, or turns the icon of the State's immutability into a visual delusion, she has the power of protest. Her liberation from muteness is ensured. However, to position one's identity always in the place of the opposite to something else, requires an endless vigilance. At any moment the protester has to protest again.

The strategy of the monster enables Vári to transgress. Her emphasis on mutability and instability through visual metaphor achieves what Arnold (1996:131) highlights,

namely that post-apartheid South African society reveals an increasing consciousness, that to be a woman and to be an artist, is to understand womanhood in new terms, and to use opportunities to transcend enforced limitations.

Vári's works speak directly to the issue of being a woman in a particular place at a particular time. My own work is concerned both with smaller and larger themes – the business of consciousness, or mind, and the issues of death, preceded by decay and dereliction, and the next chapter discusses these issues.

CHAPTER THREE: STUTZER'S PAINTINGS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter constitutes the discussion of the practical component of my mini-dissertation. The body of twenty paintings is titled *Medium re-pulse*.¹ Central to the work is the depiction of monstrous hybrid figures.² They are hybrid monsters – animal and human forms which are abject in Kristeva's sense of disruptive. By this is understood that their subject matter disrupts the prevailing order of what is acceptable to view in paintings. The paintings depict corpses of domestic animals. They transgress the boundaries. Paintings showing decay and decrepitude are shocking. The titles of the paintings reflect the becoming-animal ideas of Deleuze and Guattari. However, the burden of the meaning of these simultaneous evocations of real objects and their metaphorical content, owes more to the readings about cognition, how the body and mind interact, than to a reworking of the mannered philosophy of Deleuze, Guattari and their interpreters.

3.2 Neural maps and mental events

The painted monsters in my exhibition are the metaphors for the variety of physiological events of my body as I convert observed objects into mental images. It is a self-reflexive activity which is first described. The neural mapping of my body states, as those maps are converted in my mind into mental images, is something which cannot be brought to consciousness. Emotions and feelings are available to the consciousness, but not the bodily business of the sensori-motor or neural or circulatory systems. But the primal emotions of disgust and nausea which arise upon beholding

¹ The play on the words 'medium' and 're-pulse' as the title for the exhibition refer to the medium as a go between from one world to another, the world of the lost, dead, ghostly, 'spiritual', the things that are being transformed. The metaphor also calls up the state of the animals under observation, their 'in between' state of change and transformation which takes place when fleshly, decaying bodies are skinned, dissected, amalgamated. The emotion of disgust, nausea and repulsion are summoned up by the coined word, 're-pulse'. The second pulse or alternative existence which is given to the hybrid figures in the paintings is the other obvious play on the word.

² The visual research for the exhibition was conducted at the Veterinary Science laboratory at the University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort. The animals selected for representation often had shared abnormalities, for example conjoined twins joined at the head, throat or back. Other animal heads were in the process of dissection, revealing underlying veins and muscle tissue.

the awful sights of death and decay, remind the onlooker that humans and animals share an animal body and the fact of death. The emotions in their turn give rise to feelings. As the emotions are turned into neural maps in the remarkable choreography of the body and the mind, and feelings arise, the mind makes its mental images. By representing only the mental images, I use them as metonymies for my understanding of manifold bodily events. Through representing them I strive to alert the onlooker, as well as inform about what is happening within my own understanding.

3.2.1 Seeing

Meditating on the visual research which had to be translated onto canvas for this study, raised questions about seeing and representation. Jay (Brennan & Jay 1996:4) reminds us that “ ... the pictorial turn is only now beginning to produce work that complicates and adds nuance to the conclusions reached by pioneering efforts in this area”.³ The influential collection of essays entitled *Vision in context. Historical and contemporary perspectives on sight*, remains as important for situating scopic activity in art discourse as it was ten years ago. Geyer-Ryan⁴ in the same publication (Brennan & Jay 1996) takes up the issue of the male gaze, abjection and deterritorialised space in relation to female identity. She says, “ ... I want to look at the connection between borders, power, identity and the imaginary and their inscription in the field of vision”(Geyer-Ryan 1996: 119). This she does and concludes in nomadic terms that for women particularly, keeping the imaginary self viable means “... developing a capacity for mobility, transitory states, nomadism and voyaging ...” (Geyer-Ryan 1996:123). The imaginary self, conceived as my identity in this dissertation, does make a voyage into a new territory – that of cognitive science. The paradoxical representation of what has been understood about the newest findings on cognition is represented through one of the most ancient means humans have used to mark their imaginary selves - painting.

³ Teresa Brennan is visiting Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Martin Jay is Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley.

⁴ Helga Geyer-Ryan is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

3.2.2 From seeing to representation

The mechanism of seeing is one which has been studied in detail for centuries and can be explained adequately by science. But there is not yet enough evidence available for Western science to explain what the real process is when what we see gets to the back of the retina – from there to the mental image in the mind is a mysterious conversion. Neural mapping has to do with it, but is not the complete tale. Damasio (2004:198) qualifies his seminal work on Spinoza with a reminder about this most enigmatic part of visuality in the relationship between body and mind: “There is a major gap in our current understanding of how neural patterns become mental images”.

Medium re-pulse's corpus of paintings, so full of unexpected revelations refers to the mysterious moments of my own body-mind networking as I behold the real objects in the laboratory. The emotional impact of what I see (and the viewer will share) is embodied and enacted through the stylistic techniques I use to seduce the onlooker and then reveal what the shocking image really is once s/he has been fascinated. My original disgust and nausea give way to another feeling as I engage with my imagination, recollections, plans and memories, as I am “becoming-animal”, and seemingly simultaneously represent the animals. Because I am painting corpses my abjection is real. The monsters I paint are abject and many of the actual fetuses were physically abjected from the womb. The conceptual metaphors which ground abstract thought, as for instance those questions of abjection, identity and liberation, arise out of our embodied experience. Because metaphors are a rich and resourceful tool for linking our lived and embodied experience to abstract things (Lakoff & Johnson 1999:543), they form the largest part of our linguistic descriptions of the abstract. By making the monsters metaphors for the human body engaged in being animal, living and dying, performing primal acts and yet communicating with the onlooker, I have pinned down a great number of difficult abstractions.

There is a liberating sense which I experience in recreating, metaphorically and sensuously through the medium of paint, the very richest apprehension of my own ‘being’ (both animal and human consciousness) and ‘becoming’ in the world.

3.2.3 Identity and the embodied mind

At the same time that the paintings are painstaking executions of real objects, they are also “brain constructions prompted by an object” as Damasio (2004:200) expresses it. The peculiar sense I experience, as I interpret the correspondences between the external objects and my own brain’s selection of pre-existing contents to represent them, is a shifting and uncertain ground; this uncertainty, together with the monstrous deformities of some of the specimens is represented in the hybrids. Because the “emotions-proper, appetites and the simpler regulatory reactions – occur in the theater of the body under the guidance of a congenitally wise brain designed by evolution to help manage the body” (Damasio 2004:79), the consciousness is left to construct an identity in conventional thinking.

But the possibility of investigating what the identity of the self is, does not need to be a disembodied act. When there is a split between mind and body with an abstract mind dominant, *Identity* becomes something like *Reason* or *Morality*, a construct of a disembodied mind. That powerful sense of the self as a conscious identity, capable of reflection both on the matter of its own consciousness as well as the body’s activities, gives rise in most humans to an unassailable identity. This is in stark contrast to the neurological truth of the matter. Eakin (2004:126) explains the two kinds of consciousness of self which Damasio discusses: “(1) a simple level of *core consciousness* and *core self*, and (2) developing from it, a more complex level of *extended consciousness* and *autobiographical self*”. Neither consciousness of the self exactly describes what the observer of all that is going on in the consciousness nor is strictly extant. Yet we feel we have a coherent identity which does not need to be limited to the abstract psyche or the mind, or the imagination. It seems to arise from the lived, embodied being in the world, enacting a being and becoming. From this stance, it still remains possible to launch a critique against a hegemony, political, social or cultural, which makes her feel abject. But there is no need to establish an identity through opposites. Establishing a new identity from the position of a mind-body split is to be trapped forever in an ‘either/or’ situation. If we are to read Deleuze and Guattari’s call to nomad philosophy or rhizomatic identity seriously (Goodley 2007:149-150), some other kind of coherent identity needs to be established.

An identity which is firmly grounded in parallel and simultaneous networks of mind and body, in which reason arises out of the body and is not separate from it, seems to be one which would be ideal. But an identity, or sense of self, the 'I' which can be overwhelmed by emotion, feeling, ideas, memories, recollections, plans (Varela *et al.* 1992:60), which feels as if it comes from a coherent centre, remains contradictory. The self is difficult to pin down.

3.3 What does domestic mean?

All the animals selected that represent aspects of the monster are domestic. The sheep, the dog, the pig, the calf and the bird are all animals which are not by nature threatening or grotesque. On the contrary, they are animals which can be encountered on a local farm or within our homes or places of residence. The process of joining, merging or morphing already individual bodies, enables me to fashion new beings. I engage in the becoming of new animals. At the same time the paintings offer the viewer that which is disquieting, abject, monstrous and in most cases, repulsive. Although the animals seem to be domestic, the final fusion of animal and animal or animal and human, in various states of dissection and change, calls to mind a domestic animal not experienced in everyday reality, one which is a threatening, disturbing monstrous creature. These new malleable creatures are in a state of becoming without a fixed identifiable name or category to which they belong – in other words, in their final form, their existence is ambivalent. Within this state of transition it is not clear whether the final state will be one of aggressor or victim, attractor or repulsor, live thing or dead thing. Within the paintings the domestic has been transformed into the disturbed, the familiar has been exposed as unfamiliar, and uncanny. As one of the abjected, the "... monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar; s/he exists in an in-between zone," according to Braidotti (1996:141).

3.3.1 The questions Stutzer's hybrids pose

There are several questions posed by the monster hybrid, not only in my work but also by other monsters depending on the cultural, political or social context in which they have their meaning. Domestic animals have such a richly nuanced relationship to

humans that they can bear many metaphorical meanings. In the *Medium re-pulse* series the ‘domestic foreignness’ of the hybrids is emphasised. It is unsettling because it recreates the world of ordinary nightmare, the reversal of the bounds of normality and emphasises the fears we as humans have about the animal-ness of ourselves. ‘Can we humans also turn into such ghastly creatures when our domesticity, our comfort and convenience are all sheltered in a domestic setting?’ is the question they pose. This is simply a disguise for the bigger question about our own death. ‘Will our sickness and death be like this?’ As a metaphor for how we behold the workings, the frailty and the imminent decay of our own bodies, this series tells the story of the mind’s awareness of the body, and the mind’s awareness of its mortality.

3.3.2 Relationship of Stutzer’s hybrids to other monsters

The application and depiction of the animal/human/monster relation in other artists’ work differs from mine, but can be placed in the same milieu as that of female South African artists Minnette Vári, Jane Alexander and Diane Victor. The emphasis on the animal in the hybrid monster is comparable to the work of the contemporary British artist Jenny Saville. Saville’s paintings *Host* (2002) and *Torso* (2004), although more expressively painted, encapsulate similar painting methodologies and concepts as my own. The rendition of animal skin, and specifically the use of colour, suggests violence or painful bruising. The animal embodies a metaphor for human conditions: the pig, for example, refers to a liberated libido or sexual readiness (Saville 2006:sp). Saville’s paintings are not, in a formal sense, as rich in colour variation, or refined in detail, when compared to the technique and style that I apply to my paintings.

3.3.3 Style in Stutzer’s paintings

The style⁵ of my work is defined by various factors; such as formal elements, material, size, colour, subject and content, which is in no way similar to that of Vári. The style was chosen to display my technical skill, which tends towards Realism.⁶ The paintings give evidence of attention to detail and intimacy, and it is the aim to give a highly sensual impression of various skin surfaces in each individual work. The detail and

⁵ Style is a distinctive visual characteristic of an artwork (Atkins 1990:155).

⁶ Realism is an accurate depiction of subject matter, usually grounded in nature (Atkins 1990:140).

richness of texture, in general, and the refined quality of the craftsmanship used to portray the monster, is used to draw the viewer closer to the monster. It is disrupting for the onlooker's expectations to experience the contradiction between the sensuous formal painterly qualities and the abject monstrous subject material. Although the subject material is portrayed realistically, certain objects are cropped, thereby defamiliarising the original form or figure.

The hybrids are depicted in a figurative painting style, which falls in the category of representational art. The painting method constitutes layering of brushstrokes from broad and expressive to refined and controlled mark making. Colour is systematically built from rich dark even undercoats, such as burnt sepia and alizarin crimson, to light monotonous of the relevant skin hues. Each layer is dealt with in more detailed and smaller brushstrokes. The hybrid monster becomes revealed or illuminated within the darker surroundings of the remaining canvas through chiaroscuro.⁷

The subject is intentionally isolated without a pictorial background context. It offers various interpretations to the painting, which does not tie the creature to a place or time. It promotes the feeling of alienation and isolation. The bold, singular bodies create a stronger visual impact, and this is appropriate as the hybrid body is essentially the focus of the visual research. This has proved to be a successful technique.

Furthermore, stylistic approaches to the monster differ from those of Vári, for instances, the colour of the detailed, rendered textures of animal fur, skin and meat are the elements that suggest the abject nature and the grotesque quality of the body's workings and of the animals, dead or alive. Vári uses animated or moving bodily gesture and morphing tools to communicate the abject qualities and animals in her work. The use of colour in Vári's animations is mainly limited to grey monotonous.

⁷ Chiaroscuro is an element in art, defined as a very high contrast between light and dark. The technique defines objects without a contouring line, but through the contrast between the colours of the object and the background. The technique requires an in-depth understanding of effects of light on surfaces, as well as shadows (Encyclopedian 2007:sp).

The style of painting I use makes reference to the capacity of humans to make a seemingly real representation through the medium of paint of what is a real object in the world. This requires imagination and technical skill, all the higher order activities which animals do not possess. By making monsters a metaphor of the body-mind collaboration, while at the same time rendering them through the most technically skilled means possible, reminds the viewer that the body seems to have a mind of its own. The viewer experiences no visual shock on encountering the form and representation of the monster – there is no adjustment necessary to read what the figurative representation is, although the particular details are shocking. We have, as viewers, a depiction of something we recognise as another body, as our own is a body.

3.4 Their abjection ensures the hybrids haunt us

The abject, 'becoming-animal' and the 'embodied' mind ideas underpin *Medium repulse*. But this section focuses first on the figuration of the abject through the relevant qualities identifiable as; the animal, deformity, corpse, corporeal alteration, erasure of internal and external boundaries and sexual deviancy and desire. Kristeva (1982:12) states, "The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *anima*". The animal is abject in the sense of being beyond culture and civilisation - it is associated with primal acts of sex and murder if that world is viewed from the point of human rationalism and awareness. According to Kristeva (1982:13), primitive societies identified the threat of animalism and abjected it from their culture. What is separated out of the body's system, while the rest remains in the body, is abject. This idea, transferred to the human realm, enables humans to despise and abject those qualities, animal aspects of themselves, such as primal and instinctive behavior. The consequence of such a view is repression, disgust and many of negative responses fuelled by culture concerning the body and the body image. On the other hand the primal acts and instinctive behaviour, such as that enacted by humans whose awareness and mind are reduced in function, are objectionable and unacceptable in civil society under the rule of law. The paradoxical nature of man whose body is animal and who has mind is immemorial.

The abject monstrosities which the hybrids appear to be are powerful in their capacity to wait always in the liminal space beyond the periphery of the proper order. In the way that my awful images capture the imagination, they lie in wait for the unwary recollector. It is a feature of the human body that it also seems to operate in a way that often is inconsistent with the demands of awareness and consciousness. Illness arises apparently from nowhere often. The human body is at the mercy of its physicality which manifests in a thousand ways through its eructations, diarrhoea, vomiting, defecating, urinating and menstruating. The monstrousness of the physical always waylays the unwary.

The way that animals and groups which are subjugated or exiled to the periphery of society - the dominated, controlled, abused, oppressed and marginalized - is also contained in the iconography of my paintings. Society at large has a dominating attitude towards animals in which the latter are regarded as being of less importance than humans (Baker 1993:77), so the wretched animals of the paintings are in an excellent position to represent those exiles. This notion can be traced back to Aristotle's set of rhetorical oppositions, namely human and animal, as well as the Cartesian dualisms in which man and animal, heaven and earth, soul and body, and culture and nature are opposed (Baker 1993:78). The Greeks triumphed in their birthing of rationality. It has taken some two thousand years for their legacy to be recast by cognitive scientists.

When Western society emphasises the 'otherness' of the non-human, great suffering arises for animals. When we perceive ourselves as belonging to a totally different order: the realm of *culture*, while all other beings and inanimate things are only *nature*, the endless rape of nature by greed and unawareness happens (Noske 1989:vii). This is exemplified in a society giving derogative animal names to a neighboring group, given that the human/animal contrast serves as an analogy for the relationship between a society and those regarded as outsiders (Thomas 1983:40-41). The culture/nature opposition is also part of gender inequality.

To analyse the hybrid monster is to take on the ‘negative subjectivity’ aimed at a minority identity in this creative project. The floating bodies in the paintings are de-humanised - stripped of human elements and context (background); bodies which do not belong to anything or any moment in time. They serve as vessels which could be appropriated to enable temporary ‘becomings’. This strategy aims to deconstruct the power structures responsible for setting up the feminine or minority identity as monstrous. The anomalous body is identified as being abject, no longer the “clean and proper body” (Creed 1993:11).



Figure 14: Rina Stutzer, *Cowed and cower* (2004/06), from the *Herding* series. Oil on canvas, two paintings, 2 m x 1 m in total. Collection of the artist

In my paintings, a more direct and literal correlation is drawn between that which is cast out, abjected from the body, such as the things which are rejected, aborted or expelled, such as deformed fetuses. Deformity is rejected and aborted by both corporeal bodies and societies, pushed out of the center to the periphery. The formaldehyde fetuses in the archive of the Veterinary Science laboratory, are eloquent testimony to this. The notion of the aborted, abject monster manifests in the series, the *Herding: cowed and cower* (2004/06) (Figure 14), which portrays a deformed calf fetus, at close range. Human elements appear on the animal figure, in skin tone and texture, gesture and mannerism. The series *Teeming litter series: pack, crush, press and squash* (2004/05) (Figure 15) is also relevant here.



Figure 15: Rina Stutzer, *Jam, pack, crush, press*, (2004/06), from the *Teeming litter* series. Oil on canvas, four paintings, 2 m x 2 m in total. Collection of the artist.

The content of the paintings shows how asymmetry in nature, the very opposite of the orderly and proper, is normally not viable. Through the representation of the malformed, these works attempt to subvert the onlooker's concepts of normality and beauty. *Pure contagion* (Figure 16) (2004/06), measures 2 m x 1.4 and depicts conjoined sheep heads. The conjoined hybrid is suspended in the centre of the format. The double form of the hybrid body becomes monstrous.



Figure 16: Rina Stutzer, *Pure contagion*, (2004/2006). Oil on canvas, 2 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

Similarly *Pure Contagion, Splicing the host* (2005) (Figure 17), deals with asymmetry. The painting is a close-up image of a conjoined pig head. The represented body is oversized in scale and placed right upfront of the picture plane in such a way that the flesh threatens to engulf the canvas. Human qualities again in skin tone and facial features suggest both human and animal parts in a hybrid state. Darkness envelops the head, rendering the hybrid figure more unfamiliar and unreal. The abject as well as the grotesque manifest through the mutated anomalous form and excess of flesh tone.



Figure 17: Rina Stutzer, *Splicing the host*, (2005/06). Oil on canvas, 2 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

In the *Swarming series: fever, fowl, flight and yoke* (2006) (Figure 18), detailed sections of birds reveal a dysfunctionality and deformity in that additional legs are evident, heads are missing and death seems imminent.

The corpse, because it is impure, unclean or polluted signifies the body without a soul (Creed 1993:10), and is therefore abject. “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life”, Kristeva says (1982:4). The corpse is interpreted as waste because it exists outside of the religious symbology in opposition to that which is spiritual (Creed 1993:10). Related to the corpse are the ideas of decay, meat, flesh and blood.



Figure 18: Rina Stutzer, *Fever, fowl, yoke and flight*, (detail) (2004/06), from the *Swarming series*. Oil on canvas 1.5 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

Although all references in the body of work in *Medium re-pulse* are to corpses and the subjects allude to the processes of death, by showing the corpse and its decay, the transition into paint and transformation into hybrids revives the creatures to a new level of existence. They are truly monstrosities, portents to fill the onlooker with awe. This contradictory state of existence is both abject and powerfully vigorous. It is not unlike

the awe we feel as our own body supplies us with thoughts, abstractions, answers to problems, creative skills through its innumerable networks or fights to maintain its homeostasis, or resists dying.



Figure 19: Rina Stutzer, *Tearing the Guise*, (2005). Oil on canvas, 2 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

Tearing the guise (2004/05) (Figure 19), depicts a dissected dog head. The act of dissecting metaphorically refers to the process of research, investigation, analysis and discovery. Peeling the layers of viscera in a scientific pursuit, from the animal monster, reveals different layers of meaning. The dissected animal is reminiscent of medical investigations and the exhibitions in earlier centuries of human and animal abnormalities.

The corpse also appears in the *Flocking* series: *Splintered I and II* (2006) (Figure 20), a diptych, 0.8 m x 1.6 m, depicting a skinned sheep's head that reveals shaved rotting flesh and severed meat. The depictions are abject in nature, since they incorporate the concept of death and decomposition; the paintings are dull and lifeless in colour.



Figure 20: Rina Stutzer, *Splintered I and II* (2006), from the *Flocking* series. Oil on canvas, two paintings, 0.8 m x 1.6 m in total. Collection of the artist.

The *Pack* series (2004/06) (Figure 25), comprises five paintings: *embark*, *unleash*, *leap*, *befall* and *chase*. Although each severed or decapitated dog head presents a

different state of decay, the open, glaring eyes of the dogs in *Befall* (Figure 21) and *Embark* (Figure 25) connote the idea of life.

The abject is found in corporeal alteration, more specifically, creatures that signify a collapse of boundaries between beings (Creed 1993:10). Kristeva (1982:4) reminds us that, “It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”.



Figure 21: Rina Stutzer, *Befall* (2004/05), from the *Pack* series. Oil on canvas, 2 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

The amalgamation of human and animal bodies is signified through physical body parts and similarities in skin tone in the *Teeming litter* series: *pack, crush, press and squash* (2004/05), (Figures 15, 22). Human-like hands and feet are subtly integrated into the pig fetuses. The *Swarming: fever, fowl and flight and yoke* (2006) (Figure 18) present composites of different bird parts and human body parts intertwined in unified avian bodies.

The notion of the abject is found in the collapse of boundaries between internal (that is, that which is contained within the body) and the external. The blurring of internal and external (that which is proper and that which is improper) is linked to the blurring and merging of that which is centre and that which is cast to the periphery.



Figure 22: Rina Stutzer, detail from *Crush*, (detail) (2004/06), from the *Teeming Litter* series. Oil on canvas, 2 m x 0.5m in total. Collection of the artist.

3.5 Skin

Within contemporary images of the monster, representations of skin function to confuse boundaries such as interior and exterior, consumption and being consumed, and male and female (Halberstam 1995:176-177). Skin further signifies a state of transcendence, a limbo state where boundaries between aggressor and victim, attractor and repulsor, and living and dead collapses. Through the representation of the skinned 'specimens' these works attempt to subvert the onlooker's concept of normality and beauty. I point metaphorically to what we cannot see under our own skins either. Are we at the mercy of our animal selves or our own mental images of things?

As the largest organ of the body, skin is folded and manipulated into painted landscapes of soft tissue that construct new variations of beast or brute. The flesh of the hybrids painted has been meticulously handled, blurring the line between what is human and what is animal and dissolves flesh texture into paint. Therefore the skin signals a point of transformation where the self becomes 'other'. Halberstam (1995:163) remarks that skin is "the most fragile of boundaries and the most stable of signifiers; it is the site of entry for the vampire, the signifier of race for the nineteenth-century monster. Skin is precisely what does not fit". Skin is a superficial surface by means of which classification of identification, such as race, may occur. The aim of removing the identifiable outer layer, which differentiates the self and the other, might subvert and disrupt these narrow systems of thought.



Figure 23: Rina Stutzer, *Unleash*, (2004/06), from *The Pack* series. Oil on canvas, 2 m x 1.4 m. Collection of the artist.

3.5.1 Wounds

In my paintings, wounds, removed skin and exposure of internal tissue are evident in *Tearing the Guise* (Figure 19), *Unleash* (Figure 23) and *Befall* (Figure 21) from the *Pack* series, *Splintered I & II* (Figure 20) from the *Flocking* series, and *Press* (Figure 24) from the *Teeming litter* series. The flesh organ is a layered mass of epidermis, endodermis, muscle tissue, fat tissue, sinew and tendon. Once the outer layer is removed and inner layers of the flesh are exposed, onlookers become squeamish and disconcerted. It is not the norm or commonplace to experience the sight of raw flesh and therefore this fact alone creates uneasiness in the paintings.



Figure 24: Rina Stutzer, detail from *Press* (2004/06), from the *Teeming Litter* series. Oil on canvas, 2 m x 0.5m in total. Collection of the artist.

As mentioned previously, a transformation takes place when the animal monsters are represented in a painterly form. The layering process of the painting process (painting technique) enables revealing and concealing layers of texture and viscera.

3.5.2 Skin and paint

In my paintings, paint is a metaphor for skin, given the similarities between qualities of human skin and the outer layer/skin of oil paint. Paint, in the process of drying, forms surface wrinkles similar to the qualities of dried, aging, textured animal/human skin. The viscosity of paint changes in a similar way to the viscosity of skin and flesh. Both paint and skin in the process of aging and wrinkling present the idea of human mortality and decay. This is especially apparent in the *Flocking series: Splintered I* (Figure 25) in which the paint is applied in a denser, thick, impasto-like layered method.



Figure 25: Rina Stutzer, *Splintered I*, (detail) (2006), from *The Flocking series*. Oil on canvas, 0.8 m x 0.8 m. Collection of the artist.

3.6 Sexuality

The abject entails sexual perversion and desire. Erasure and transgression of bodily boundaries results in loaded sexuality. “The explosion of the civilized confines of the ‘self’ re-asserts some raw corporeality of the subject, which is often rendered in the mode of an orgasm, of the ecstatic erotic encounter with radical otherness” (Braidotti 2002:128).

The *Teeming litter* series (Figure 15) consists of four boxed-in, closely cropped conjoined and overlapping pigs, reminiscent of human form. The pigs’ floating figures are intimately interwoven and overlapped, arms and legs wrapped around each other and at first glance suggesting copulating figures. The close proximity between bodies and their nakedness suggest uncivilised behaviour or perversion such as in the act of bestiality. At second glance, however, one realises they are conjoined piglet corpses,

distorted and defamiliarised, merged in awkward and uncomfortable positions. The ambiguity first encountered is imminent since large naked bodies wrapped in intimate rapture are immediately conceived as inappropriate or abnormal in a public space and therefore lustful, carnal, filthy and inappropriate.

As a metaphor of the artist's body-awareness networking, cognition is another metaphor for sexuality. The most intimate, closely woven circuitry with its own relations, orgasmic moments and separations continues unceasingly in the body-mind. The rawness of its exposure as when operations, scans, X-rays and dissections happens provides the same shudder of embarrassment, disgust, fascination and repulsion as is experienced when witnessing a sexual act.

3.7 Becoming - animal

Deleuze and Guattari describe the subject in 'becoming' as part of a non-unitary, multi-layered and dynamic group. 'Becoming-animal' takes place through the position or proximity of the subject in relation to animal-multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:29). This is understood to refer to the multiplicity of positions it is possible to adopt in philosophical discourse. 'Becoming' also involves the distance and relation of a subject in connection with a group or mass of entities, such as a werewolf running with a pack of wolves (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 262).

The *Pack* series (Figures 26), 2004-06, comprises five paintings: *embark*, *unleash*, *leap*, *befall* and *chase*. In the series, a multitude of monstrous animals haunt the canvases. The canine bodies become plural, a group, and do not stay singular or uniform. Each dog part renders a different proximity to a hybrid animal human body. Furthermore, proximity between human and animal is investigated through the varying distance between onlooker and the hybrids. Suggestion of movement is created through various ways by means of a variation between close-up fragmented images which are passive and quiet in relation to the isolated, full profile heads that point away or towards the viewer.



Figure 26: Rina Stutzer, *Befall, embark, leap, unleash and chase* (2004/06), from the *Pack* series. Oil on canvas, five paintings, 10 m x 1.4 m in total. Collection of the artist.

In this series dismembered bastard dog heads have been skinned, dissected and scrutinised in their portrayal. The exposure of what lies beneath the outer layer of skin has been a simple method to expose the abject in even the friendliest of creatures. The pack series not only relies on 'becoming' through multiplicity, but also promotes the erasing and recomposing of the boundaries between the self and the other, relevant to the theory of 'becoming-animal' (Braidotti 2002:119).

Multiplicity and repetition of the subject in various stages of decomposition also appears, for example, in the *Swarming* series (Figure 18), the *Teeming litter* (Figure 15) series and the *Herding* series (Figure 14). The concept of becoming-animal through multiplicity is literally implemented in the titles of the artworks in the *Medium re-pulse* collection, for example, the *Pack* series, *Swarming* series, *Teeming litter* series, *Herding* series, and the *Flocking* series. The teeming multiplicity of the body-mind networks, cells, chemical reactions is recalled by these metaphorical representations.

In my body of work, hybrid monsters are transgressive, painterly, metaphorical and realistic in content and points to the mind-body network that is constructed to shock, inform and remind.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

To summarise, the monsters in the work of both artists in this study have been used as deictic mechanisms. They each in their own context point out to the viewer the ideas with which they take issue. Their mediums are different although each uses the motif of the hybrid monster. Whereas in the video animations, Vári establishes her identity through protest and in a historical and political context, my identity is established according to the most basic elements of existence and being, namely life and death. Through the contemplation of what is the opposite of life, namely death, decay and the corpse, a coherent identity emerges for the artist which includes the lived understanding of the relation of body to mind.

Chapter One defined the characteristics of the monster concept as that which is different and abnormal, contradictory or opposing. It linked the monster to the 'other' in racial and gender categories. The chapter provided a brief historical contextualising of the monster in a social context. The overview of the cognitive scientists' contribution to discourses supporting philosophy, psychology and their relation to biology laid the ground for the discussion in Chapter Three of Stutzer's transgressive images.

The critique of analytical philosophy as embedded in binary opposing conceptions which do not take account of the last thirty years' research into cognition was used to shift the focus of Deleuze and Guattari's popular ideas of 'nomadism'. Kristeva's ideas of the abject continue to hold good in the case of the monster.

In Chapter Two the monster was analysed according to the definition of the abject as well as the theory of becoming-animal. Vári's protest at the anomalies of government, State, media reporting and the position of women and minorities, was embodied in the way the hybrids she used metamorphosed from her into other things repeatedly. The sense of spurious reality which the animations give was shown as a device she exploits to embolden her critiques. As a boundary figure who resists classification

within the natural order of things, Vári inserts herself into her animations to bring home to the viewer the position of women as liminal.

In Chapter Three, Stutzer's hybrids were discussed as metaphors and metonymies for her understanding of the disgust and nausea which the idea of death and decay arouses. The domestic animals in all their stages of abjection lead, through refashioning by the human skill of painting, to a second existence and re-incorporation into the symbolic order of fine art. A second existence different but representing the first one is iconic for the mysterious workings of mind and body. The complex choreography of flesh, perpetually moving to decay, interacts through chemical impulse with brain matter to produce awareness, a property of being human which is impossible to believe will disappear. The animal self does not seem to fit the high qualities of awareness and consciousness, reason and creativity. But science shows that it does. The animal body is the producer of the faculties of reason and morality. The question remains, 'How can life, so extraordinary a thing, come to death, decay and corruption?'

Vári's monsters prove to be a productive project of liberation, through the process of reclaiming the monstrous hybrid's identity in order to disrupt the rational order. It is my wish that my representations of the monster may accomplish a similar change in perception of identity and offer a space of liberation for the other.

These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression. They ask us why we have created them (Cohen 1996:20).

The monster's depicted existence is crucial to how we recognise ourselves (Ruane 1999:sp). If we allowed ourselves to temporarily become the other it could create new definitions of ourselves.

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