

# MELUSINE MACHINE

## The Metal Mermaids of Jung, Deleuze and Guattari

[Received January 28th 2018; accepted July 28th 2018 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.12.2.07]

Cecilia Inkol

York University, Toronto <cecilia.inkol@ryerson.ca>

**ABSTRACT:** This article takes the image of the feminine water spirit or mermaid as the focus of its philosophical contemplation, using her image as a map to traverse the thought-realms of Jung, Deleuze and Guattari. The feminine, watery symbol in this elaboration acts as the glue that enjoins the ideas of Jung with Deleuze and Guattari and reveals the imbrication of their ideas. Through their streams of thought, the mermaid is formulated as an emblem of technology, as a metaphor that makes reference to the unconscious and its technological involutions, her humanoid-fish form providing an image of thought or way of talking about the transformation of form, and the flitting, swimming valences at work in the unconscious.

**KEYWORDS:** Jung, Deleuze, Guattari, mermaid, nixie, unconscious, technology

### Introduction

This article pivots around a particular image — the feminine water spirit, embodied in her forms of mermaid, nixie<sup>1</sup> or water sprite — through the thought-architectures of the philosophers Jung, Deleuze and Guattari; it traces the filaments that connect these philosophers to this feminine image, as well as to one another, unfurling the imbrication and lineage of their ideas. Within the thought-structures of Deleuze, Guattari and Jung, her fluid figure is elucidated as an emblem of technology, as a metaphor that refers to the unconscious and its technological involutions; her humanoid-fish form providing an image of thought or way of talking about the transformation of form, and the flitting, swimming valences at work in the unconscious. Through this impartation, I am intimating a secret world, suffused with magic and myth, a philosophical vision of reality in terms of an aesthetic sensibility in the vein of Magical Realism. Using the thought-architectures of Jung, Deleuze and Guattari, as well as with some inspiration from Nietzsche, I will also render an original interpretation of the figure of the mermaid as a liberatory emblem.

What is presented herein is an ontology of the mermaid or nixie, a creative, even whimsical epistemology, and an inquiry that delves into the primordial nature of technology, the feminine, as well as the structure of the unconscious. This endeavour is grounded in an experimental praxis in the employment of an image as an axle to orient epistemological inquiry: the mermaid or nixie. Such an inquiry is premised on the notion that images can be employed as a mode of thinking to glean epistemological insight, that images can be conceived as forms of thought, thought crystallised as form; not superfluous, merely

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<sup>1</sup> “Nixie” is an alternative spelling of *nix*, the German language term for a water spirit. The term includes the fish-tailed mermaid as one prominent version of the entity.

decorative or superficial, but emblems of meaning, encoded within a larger structure of meaning, leading into the realm of *understanding*. This article is an excerpt from a larger project that elucidates the magical feminine, of which the mermaid or nixie is an aspect, through the folds of ontology.<sup>2</sup>

This article elaborates the mermaid or nixie as a nexus connecting the thought-realms of Jung, Deleuze and Guattari in the manner that follows. For Carl Jung, the mermaid<sup>3</sup> embodies an archetype that makes reference to the unconscious. The most prominent archetype that corresponds to the unconscious in Jungian thought is the sea. Based on the notion of the unconscious as the sea, Jung develops several interpretations of the mermaid archetype: he interprets the mermaid as an *anima* and as an alchemical metaphor that refers to the transformative structure of the unconscious and the process of coming to consciousness, known as individuation.

Playing on the notion of the mermaid as emblem of the transformative structure of the unconscious and figure of individuation, I suggest that the mermaid can be interpreted as the figure that traverses the oceanic realm of the unconscious. She is not stuck within in, as a neurotic is: her body, a hybrid of fish and human, has adapted to its watery conditions. She is part human, part *Overhuman*, in Nietzschean terms: she has overcome herself. In Jungian language, she has overcome the challenges and obstacles posed by the unconscious. In this sense, the process of navigating, and therefore overcoming the personal unconscious will be elucidated as a process of *becoming-mermaid*.

Transposing the interpretation of the archetype of the mermaid as the figure that navigates the realm of the unconscious into the philosophical architecture of Deleuze and Guattari acts as a transformation, unfolding her meaning in a new way, through the crystal facet of a different domain; yet her identity is maintained, despite the vector that transforms her. Deleuze and Guattari espouse a vision of the unconscious as a machinic realm: the unconscious formulates a machine comprising a matrix of clandestine networks, processes and flows. The process of navigating the machinic unconscious for Deleuze and Guattari is a process of merging with it, while simultaneously maintaining a system of personal boundaries. Deleuze and Guattari's vision of navigating the machinic unconscious will thusly be elucidated not only a process of *becoming-mermaid*, but also as *becoming-machine*: it is a process of *becoming machinic-mermaid*.

### Jung's Watery Underworld

Having articulated a path for the travels ahead, the point of departure for this endeavour is Jung. For Jung, the unconscious is embedded with/populated by primordial images known as archetypes. Archetypes are encoded with a meaning that is manifold and infinite, irreducible to a single interpretation, but exist within a shared mythological structure (1969:

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<sup>2</sup> This article is a modified excerpt from a Master's thesis entitled 'The Monstrous Feminine and the Structure of Transformation: Art, Language, Technology, Magic' completed in 2015 at Ryerson University in Toronto. The topic is an ongoing one and I am currently continuing research on it for my PhD thesis at York University in Toronto.

<sup>3</sup> Jung's vision of the watery feminine archetype is not limited to the mermaid, also encompassing various types of water sprite and nixies. From hereon, references to mermaid will be imbued with the connotation that mermaids are just one manifestation of the watery feminine archetype, as she also embodies other forms.

38). Mythology acts as a grammar or logic for the articulation of archetypes, evincing the story that architects the primal images of the unconscious; mythology enfolds the primal archetypal motifs into a dramaturgical narrative, formulating a network of images.

This network of images that exists as the grammatical content of the unconscious does not appertain to an isolated individual: it is the mythic drama of all humanity, a shared, unconscious realm of meaning that all are immersed and inscribed within. The archetypal realm is universal, a shared, collective, and unconscious structure: the universal formation that orients the psychic life of each individual. Beneath the layer of the personal unconscious, which is the repository of content collected by the individual, exists a shared unconscious realm, a “collective unconscious,” an accreted collection of memories pertaining to all humanity.

The way the unconscious elicits its manifestation in archetypal form most prominently is through the image of water. The sea as the symbol of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969: 18) refers to a vast expanse that lurks beneath conscious awareness, a watery abyss. Water also refers to a principle of generation, (Jung, 1956: 218) the generative element that underlies life. Water is the primary constituent of the human form, and the most basic human necessity for life. Jung also interprets water as a maternal symbol, in the sense that it is the unconscious that engenders consciousness (ibid: 219). The unconscious is thus conceived by Jung, in an archetypal or metaphorical sense, primarily as a feminine, watery underworld. She is the generatrix of all, the womb from which all consciousness emerges. Jung also sees water as connected with the *Tao*, as symbol of the *Tao*, making reference to the “water dragon” of *Tao* (1969: 18); Jung sees the transformative, vitalist principle of the *Tao* as connected with the collective unconscious. Jung’s conceptions of the unconscious, as vitalist energy and maternal generatrix, all indicate a principle of creative generation, gestation and transformation.

### Jung’s *Anima* Mermaid

Based on the notion of the unconscious as an abyssal sea, Jung develops a few different conceptions of mermaids:

*Whoever looks into the water sees his own image, but behind it living creatures soon loom up; fishes, presumably, harmless dwellers of the deep — harmless, if only the lake were not haunted. They are water-beings of a peculiar sort. Sometimes a mermaid or nixie gets ensnared in the fisherman’s net (1969: 24).*

A female human-fish hybrid: she is “an even more instinctive version of a magical feminine being I call the *anima*” (ibid).

In Jung’s theories, the *anima* is a *formative archetype of the unconscious*, alongside the *ego*, the *shadow* and the *self*. The *anima* (for men) and *animus* (for women) embodies the qualities of the opposite sex that dwell within the unconscious of the individual. Every man has an internal feminine archetype that mediates his relation with women, and this same dynamic is at work with women and their animus, acting as an interface for their interactions with the male form. This *anima* is conceived of as the unconscious, feminine aspect of the man, his *secret feminine personality*, or stated in another way, the *feminine personification* of his unconscious, her character forged from the bank or repository of all of his relations with

woman. She is a mode of the unconscious, a *shape* that the unconscious assumes: an internal, autonomous *gridwork* that *orders perception*, imposed and projected upon the feminine forms that he encounters in the external world (ibid: 60). The autonomous nature of the *anima* is a function of her capacity to invoke irrational emotional affect and instinct in the man. She generates the subject's moods and reactions, exists as the source of spontaneity and impulse. Her character is the harbinger of fate for her hapless subject, moored to her unconscious influence. Under her sway, the subject encounters conflict, both from within and in the external world, but the source of his conflict stems from *within*, as that which conditions all of the subject's experiences with women. She is the "life behind consciousness," in one of its forms. She can be a source of danger or inspiration, and needs to be integrated, as an aspect of the unconscious personality, into conscious life (ibid: 27).

The *anima* exists in the realm of the divine. All that she touches is rendered numinous: sparkling with danger, the taboo, and magic. She wants life, in both its good and bad aspects. She is immortal and daemonic, a personal angel or demon. She can appear as angel that indicates towards the highest meaning, imparting profound wisdom, or can manifest as a chaotic irrationality characteristic of the elfin realm from whence she derives. The more that the deeper meaning underlying her chaotic manifestation is realised, the more that the tethers enforced on her subject lose their hold and the *anima's* character of impetuosity and compulsivity recede to reveal the vista of a "new cosmos". The *anima* and *animus* stem from the collective unconscious, and lead towards it. Such a localisation accounts for their "strangeness." Jung asserts that the archetypes bring to conscious awareness something buried deep in the psychic past, the ancestral mind and its form of perception (1969: 286). The *anima* is our psychic inheritance from ancestral time, containing within itself the history of religion and language (ibid: 27). Jung's mermaid call lures one towards integration, and to the realm of the collective unconscious.

### Jung's Alchemical Melusine

Jung also elaborates the mermaid *anima* as an alchemical figure. Inspired by alchemy, Jung develops a psychological interpretation of the alchemists' doctrines. Alchemy represents to an ancient science and philosophy that endeavoured to transmute 'base' metals such as lead into gold. Jung shows that the alchemists sought an all-pervading *essence* or *quality* that exists within the human, symbolised by sea water: in Jung's interpretation, their sought-after elixir was the *collective unconscious*:

*For the alchemists it was wisdom and knowledge, truth and spirit, and its source was in the inner man, though its symbol was common water or sea-water. What they evidently had in mind was a ubiquitous and all-pervading essence, an anima mundi and the 'greatest treasure,' the innermost and most secret numinosum of man. There is probably no more suitable psychological concept for this than the collective unconscious" (1970: 278).*

Alongside his alchemical interpretation of sea-water, Jung develops an alchemical interpretation of the mermaid. The alchemists unfurled an esoteric interpretation of *Melusina*, the aquatic and mysterious fish-hybrid woman from European folklore. For Jung, Melusina lives in the unconscious, existing in the paradisiacal state prior to the fall of the human into consciousness. Thus, she dwells "in the blood" of the human (1967: 143). The blood as the primal symbol that refers to the soul. She is the in-dwelling mermaid spirit of the human and a "psychic phenomenon", a "vision appearing in the mind," (ibid: 144). She is

an *anima* figure, a variation of the “mercurial serpent” of alchemy known as Mercurius. Sometimes Melusina is interpreted as a snake-woman, her twofold nature evincing the “monstrous” aspect of the alchemical figure of Mercurius (ibid).

Mercurius, in the alchemical lexicon, is a personification of *mercury/quicksilver*: not in its common or crude chemical form but as the “mercurius philosophicus”, the philosophical mercury or “living silver” that exists as the goal of the alchemical project, matter elevated to quintessence and apotheosis. Mercurius is the transformative substance of transmutation, the “spiritual” water that does not make something wet. When the alchemist refers to quicksilver, its molten fluidity and volatility (ibid: 207), she also makes reference to a deeper principle of spirit and soul, life-giving power: “the world-creating spirit concealed or imprisoned in matter,” (Jung, 1968: 293). Mercurius appears as a *dragon*, the tail-eating Ouroboros, most ancient pictorial symbol of the alchemical arts. The self-devouring dragon Mercurius is the alpha and omega of the alchemical project, its beginning and end, forming a *wheel* or a cycle. The alchemical dragon devours itself then is reborn as the primal matter that undergoes constant transformation and permutation (ibid 293).

Mercurius is *liquid-metal*, an entity defined by its paradoxical elements: “He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison and yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all the opposites” (ibid: 295). Mercurius in Jung’s psychological alchemy refers in this aspect to a unifying and generative principle of *transformation*, guised in paradox, the *moulting*, *molten* and *motivating force* of the collective unconscious that perforates all things: its elusive elixir a magical, mellifluous and mutating bath of transformation. Its transformative bath, as we have previously seen, is connected with the feminine waters: the maternal womb of gestation and transformation, the guiding force that underlies consciousness. She is the spirit that underlies matter, and the task of alchemy is to usher her to redemption.

### The Archetypal Riddles of the Personal Unconscious

As a psychic symbol that solicits redemption, Mercurius is also a symbol of individuation or coming to consciousness, intimated by the aspect of his character that acts to resolve opposites, and reconcile paradox. In Jung’s thought, coming to consciousness is a journey fraught with danger and peril, a mythic journey. For individuation to take place, one must surmount the obstacles and challenges posed by the personal unconscious, the monsters, demons and dragons that lurk within; they are archetypal *riddles* that lead one from the personal unconscious to the structure of the collective unconscious, resolving the disassociation between them, setting up a confrontation between the two registers of meaning. The unconscious as transformative, amorphous structure shows itself via not only the formation of the *anima* or *animus*, but also as a dark, foreboding figure: the *shadow* aspect of the personality that must be encountered and overcome, reconciled. The shadow is the unacknowledged or dark side of the personality that represents the qualities one is most repulsed by in others: it is the refused and unacknowledged content of the personality that, like the *anima*, is projected onto others. The fear of the other stems from within: it is the fear of the unacknowledged self (1969: 285).

Casting the gaze upon the transformative guises of the formative archetypes of the personal unconscious is a confrontation with a magic, watery mirror:

*True, whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face.  
Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does*

*not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face... But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious. The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form. It cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness (ibid: 20).*

Confrontation with the personal unconscious leads to the collective realm of meaning and the hierogamy of individuation, a *discernment* and *integration* of the *alien* that exists within:

*confrontation with the unconscious usually begins in the realm of the personal unconscious, that is, of personally acquired contents which constitute the shadow, and from there leads to archetypal symbols which represent the collective unconscious. The aim of the confrontation is to abolish the disassociation. In order to reach this goal, either nature herself or medical intervention precipitates the conflict of opposites without which no union is possible. This means not only bringing the conflict to consciousness; it also involves an experience of a special kind, namely, the recognition of an alien "other" in oneself, or the objective presence of another will. The alchemists, with astonishing accuracy, called this barely understandable thing Mercurius, in which concept they included all the statements which mythology and natural philosophy had ever made about him: he is God, daemon, person, thing, and the innermost secret in man; psychic as well as somatic. He is himself the source of all opposites, since he is duplex and utriusque capax ('capable of both'). This elusive entity symbolizes the unconscious in every particular, and a correct assessment of symbols leads to direct confrontation with it. (1967: 348)*

The process of Jungian psychic integration is the confrontation and realisation of the unconscious will reconciled to consciousness and is a project of *transmutation*, the redemption and consummation of the unconscious principle. This is the work of what Jung calls the *transcendent function*: "the union of conscious and unconscious contents," (1971: 273). The unconscious is rendered to conscious awareness, submitted to the awareness of consciousness. Both registers of meaning are reconciled and fused in collaborative harmony. The neurotic, in contrast, is the subject who exists at the wiles of the unconscious. As *figure* of the principle of *individuation* and the transformative structure of the unconscious, I argue that Jung's archetype of the mermaid can be interpreted as the vehicle for the transformation engendered by navigating the personal unconscious, leading to a vaster sea: she is the *psychopomp* that ferries the human from neurosis to integration, and ultimately leads onto a new realm of meaning, the collective unconscious. The mermaid can be understood as the figure that navigates the mirroring, watery *maze* of the personal unconscious, overcoming the obstacles and relays posed by the shadow and the other indwelling archetypes of the personal unconscious; in this sense, the process of *navigating* and *deciphering* the *maze* of the personal unconscious can be understood as a process of *becoming-mermaid*: to emerge from the traps and challenges of the personal unconscious, fins are required to swim through its dark, reflective waters.

## Nietzschean Overflow

The landscape of the personal unconscious is a foreboding one, filled with traps, projections and decoys: but once its abyss is crossed, and its monstrous inhabitants harmoniously integrated, the shadow can be gazed upon, psychological projections withdrawn and human neurosis surmounted. Whereas the neurotic is defined by her capture by her own unconscious indwelling archetypes, stuck within its relays and ensnared by its deceptions; the mermaid as the being that navigates the labyrinthine unconscious, overcomes herself, overcoming the neurotic delusions that typify the human condition: she evolves. Part human, part fish, as the vehicle that overcomes and navigates the mirror-maze of the personal unconscious, the mermaid can be elucidated as the *Overhuman*, setting into effect the Nietzschean bid of the will-to-power as *self-overcoming*.

"Behold, I teach you the overman," Nietzsche's mouthpiece Zarathustra proclaims:

*Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?*

*All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? (1982: 124)*

*Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea to be able to receive a polluted stream without becoming unclean. Behold, I teach you the overman; he is this sea; in him your greatest contempt can go under. (ibid: 125)*

The human is just a transitory rite of passage, a vehicle for something that overflows and overfills herself, the flower of her bloom cast beyond herself.

The human "is a rope," imparts Nietzsche:

*stretched between the animal and the overman: a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous wayfaring. A dangerous looking back: a dangerous trembling and halting.*

*What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and going under. (ibid: 127)*

The human is suspended at a threshold, between falling prey to animal instincts and the surmounting of those impulses as the *Overhuman*. In her compulsive regress, the human is more animal than the animal (ibid: 124) but endowed with the capacity to overcome herself, supersede her animal impasse: in Jungian terms, to surmount her neurosis and the indwelling archetypes of the unconscious. When she resolves to navigate the maze she is confined within, she must cross an *abyss*. It is a *mirroring* abyss that returns one's gaze: "He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you" (1989: 89:). Fending off monsters involves coming face-to-face with the abyss that returns one's gaze, a careful execution of *war* as *self-overcoming* that sidesteps *succumbing to* or *becoming* one's nemeses and demons, like Jung's self-confrontation with a magic mirror. For Jung, the hidden formations of the self, including the scaly *anima* and foreboding shadow, need to be gazed upon, a confrontation that acts as simultaneous reconciliation and self-acknowledgement without

reducing oneself to its forms. The subject that can acknowledge and integrate her darkness without allowing it to overtake her, overcomes it; this is how she navigates what stultifies her, reaching beyond herself, surpassing her human predilection of regression and repression.

*Becoming-mermaid* has been elucidated in the preceding pages as a navigation of the mirror-maze of the unconscious. In Nietzschean terms, becoming-mermaid is a practice of exceeding the human frame, becoming more than human, *becoming-Overhuman*: as the figure that swims across the abyss, the mermaid is likewise a superseding, overflowing figure: *Overmermaid*. She Overflows. She is the sea that Overflows herself, has learned to navigate her own waters, deciphered the riddles of her being, developed the *technology* to achieve self-understanding. She has sprouted fins: the *technologised unconscious*.

## Deleuze, Guattari and Jung

Using the notion of becoming-mermaid as an axle, I want to now transpose this elaboration to a new domain, and suggest this discussion can be broadened to the thought-world of Deleuze and Guattari. The elucidation of the mermaid as the figure that navigates and overcomes the personal unconscious acquires a new valence within Deleuze's architecture, yet one that shares strong continuities and contiguities with Jung's project of individuation.<sup>4</sup>

The connection between Deleuze, Guattari and Jung runs deeply: Deleuze is profoundly influenced by Jung, a philosophical lineage unearthed by scholar Christian Kerslake in his 2017 work *Deleuze and the Unconscious*. The relation between Jung, Deleuze and Guattari is complex and multifaceted, beyond the scope of this present work, but there is a strong case for drawing a line of flight between the thinkers and their thought-architectures. Deleuze and Guattari retool Jung's archetypal structure of meaning into a hidden matrix that underlies the material world, and develops a theoretical framework to account for how such an underlying system of meaning produces material effects. In tandem with Jung, Deleuze and Guattari elucidate the unconscious as a *collective structure* comprised of *metal*, unfurling the molten, metallic underworld of Jung's psychological interpretation of alchemy in terms of a related metaphor. Not only is the collective unconscious made of *metal*, it formulates a *machine*. Deleuze and Guattari's collective unconscious comprises a *self-organising machine*, its *veins* perforating all things in its machinic network.

## The Metallic Unconscious Network

The collective unconscious for Deleuze and Guattari comprises a topographical structure that *underlies* the material world, its secret tunnels comprising clandestine networks, a hidden lining that enfolds all things into its matrix. This hidden matrix acts as a steering

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari wants to differentiate his own project from Jung in the following way. They interpret Jung to employ metaphor to defer meaning, to reterritorialise meaning where it already exists, in a prefigured structure; their strategy is deterritorialisation, to create new zones of meaning through the deployment of asignification. They want to detonate meaning as referential, deploying asignifying particles to reshape the structure of meaning in the machinic unconscious (1987: 19). (One can question, however, whether or not Jung's metaphorical deferral does not create new zones of interchange and meaning, or a revised structure.)



principle; underneath the material surface of things, the circulation and movement of energy in the world is guided by a hidden source: the flow of *desire*.

Desire courses through the veins of the machinic unconscious: desire acts as a secret motivating force at work in the world, provoking the movements of the machinic unconscious, and acts as the composition material for its machinic structure. Desire is *metallic* in its constitution, the construction material of the machinic unconscious and the means whereby the unconscious reformulates itself. Desire forms the molten metal architecture of the machinic unconscious, dictating its movements and comprising its structure. Desire is a machine: a *desiring-machine*, the structural formation of the collective unconscious, its network of flows, the *metal skeleton* that underlies the material world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). Desiring-machines move like keys that open and close domains, instituting and rupturing connections that previously existed, dictating the course of movement of the flow of desire, its ingress and egress between things. Desire as *force* and *structure*, is constantly shifting, reforming itself through its connections and disruptions of connection, creating circuits of energy (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 334).

Tapping into this structured metallic stream of desire that comprises the machinic unconscious is a process of building architecture, the construction of what Deleuze and Guattari call the *body without organs* (BwO). The construction of the BwO is a building project whereby what is being constructed is *oneself*. We are always in the process of constructing our bodies—our body as it exists *outside ourselves*: beyond the flesh, bereft of organs, metal (ibid: 153). Strewn up with the world, the physical organism is just a superficial delimitation. We always exist *outside* of ourselves; our body is always strewn up in the world, a negotiated, and symbiotic subjectivity; the construction of the body without organs is the construction of this negotiated subjectivity. In the construction of a BwO, the self re-engineers herself, reaching beyond the domain of the personal for fresh material, forging *new subjectivities*. Interior and exterior are welded into a new embryonic subjectivity, a new structural formation: “like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves” (ibid: 156).

Architecting the BwO is the constitution of a framework that dictates how we relate to the world and ourselves which takes place through the medium of *desire*. The primary construction material of the BwO is desire: desire is what it’s made of, and the means whereby it is reconstructed. To create the BwO is a process of retooling desire, reorienting it in more productive, liberating ways (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The BwO is fundamentally desire, the system it engenders and the means whereby one desires. Its system of relays and circulation contains the possibility and renewal and reformulation of desire. In its primal form, it is pure energy, undifferentiated and total possibility, a primal state that can always be tapped back into, a primal openness that can never be completed closed off (ibid: 160).

The organless body is a harnessing of the primordial energy that exists prior to the institution of form, a liberatory openness that precedes and underlies the organism, where all of its possibilities still reside, accessible. Reaching into the wellspring of the primal energy of the BwO, Deleuze and Guattari’s subject taps into to its pure potentiality, enabling her to expand, transform, reconfigure herself, re-constitute the forces and intensities that comprise her. Ensnared by the system that restricts its movement, the primordial energy of the BwO is trapped, suffocated, stultified by stagnation when it wants to be liberated. Thus, to access this primal energy requires a dismantling of the organism: it has to be taken apart, to release the energies that underlie it, to open the sluices that have restrained it. Construction takes place via dismantling, taking the organism apart to reconstruct it. The *demolition* of the organism is simultaneously a re-construction: retooling the parts that once constituted its

form: reformulating it, to create a new system where the flow of desire can traverse and circulate unimpeded (ibid: 160).

Engineering a body without organs is a process of constructing a new system of desire, allowing desire to circulate where it was previously stultified. We do this by *opening onto* the metallic system that exists outside of ourselves, *merging with it*, and recalibrating how we connect onto it: instituting new boundaries and overriding the boundaries we previously held. It is a paradoxical architectural project: eliciting transformation and enforcing definition. We transform ourselves by extending beyond ourselves, opening ourselves to liberatory possibilities we were closed off to previously, and we overcome ourselves by recreating ourselves, the work of upholding new boundaries of delineation.

The construction of the BwO is not haphazard but intentional, its construction guided by a blueprint or diagram, its *abstract machine*. The abstract machine dictates the formation of the BwO, decides what to incorporate within its membrane and what to reject. The abstract machine acts as a guide, a navigational centre that architects the construction of the BwO system. It is an intelligence centre: abstract machines exist alongside all BwOs (ibid: 165). BwOs exist at various levels of organisation. The highest level, the sum of all bodies without organs, constitutes the *plane of consistency* (ibid: 165). The abstract machine that steers its composition is the intersection of all assemblages, the highest level intelligence centre, its map dictating the real to come, designing the plan for the future (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 143). By launching a body without organs that can encompass this organisational centre, the ultimate abstract machine becomes accessible, and the subject becomes a co-creator in the world at large, tapping into its architectural plan for the real to come.

### Magic and Becoming-Animal

Deleuze and Guattari also elucidate the process of opening onto the network of the machinic unconscious and plugging into plane of consistency, the organised system of powers that exists outside oneself, as *becoming-animal*: overcoming the stultifying delineations of the personal is an *animal* endeavour. “Animal” in this context does not refer to literal animals: it is a cipher that refers to powers and affects (ibid: 239); *becoming-animal* thus entails becoming receptive to alien affects and powers. Attaining such receptivity involves opening thresholds between oneself and the world. This is a mode of receptivity that Deleuze and Guattari call *sorcery*, the hidden process behind nature, the veiled, true face of nature, precipitating becomings that defy the laws of heredity, genetics and ancestry. *Sorcery* is transformation that can only be accounted for as magic, an effectuation at odds with the representational, scientific-materialist imaginary. The agency behind nature, “true nature” (ibid: 251) is sorcery: magic.

Deleuze and Guattari’s vision of *sorcery* is as the transformation of subjectivity, a process of inter-subjectivity: affects and powers leach from their source of origination, funnelled and siphoned into a disparate term in an infecting, transversal motion. The notion of *becoming-animal* as the transversal path of affects of powers as they are siphoned into new subjectivities is fitting as an interpretation of the mermaid. Half-fish, half human, the mermaid can be understood in terms of *becoming-animal*, as the human who has opened herself onto the threshold of the unknown, a *metal threshold*, and bequeathed alien affects and powers. *Becoming-animal* is an operation of the body without organs; becoming-animal is simultaneously *becoming-machine*: machinic sorcery, a *becoming-machinic-mermaid*. The

mermaid is a body of dislocated organs, a hybrid disorganisation of flesh and scales; she can be understood as an *emblem* of the transversal processes of the machinic unconscious, its influx of alien affects and powers, its movements of conjugation and contagion that precipitate the crystallisation of new subjectivities.

### Machinic Mermaid

For Deleuze and Guattari, the process of navigating the personal unconscious is a process of merging with the broader machinic network, a topography of clandestine networks, shifting and reforming, hidden within the folds of the material world. This process of navigation is also a process of redefining the delimitations of the personal, to open onto new thresholds of possibility, extending the reaches of one's body by fusing with the metal phylum. Retaining the notion of the mermaid as the figure that navigates the maze of the unconscious, Deleuze and Guattari's mode of navigation is *fusion and delineation*: Deleuze and Guattari's subject fuses with the broader network, yet must configure and *delineate* a system of desire such that the forces of desire can circulate in a liberatory manner, without becoming trapped or stultified. Self-delineation involves configuring a system of boundaries that directs the movement of desire and the creation of an interface that orients self-expansion. The figurative mermaid that navigates the unconscious in Deleuze and Guattari's thought-world is the *machinic mermaid*. The overcoming of the systems of organisation that confine the energies of the unconscious via the invocation of the primal energy of the BwO can be understood as a process of *becoming-machinic-mermaid*. As a figure of sorcery and *becoming-animal*, emblem of the transversal, infecting motion of the sorcery and magic, its roaming intersubjectivity and disembodied affect searching for a new host, she can also be understood as the *structure of the machinic unconscious*; it is a structure architected by pure transformative possibility, a primal efflorescence of overflowing and restructuration.

What is the unconscious if not technological? The unconscious is the ultimate, primordial technology: an interface mediating the relation between self and world, configuring perception and assigning signification. The transformation of the structure of unconscious exists as the transformation of meaning, effective for Deleuze and Guattari at both material and ontological levels. The mermaid has been elucidated here as the *technologised unconscious*, the unconscious as *technological structure*: the formation of the unconscious that overcomes itself, reorganises.

### Mermaid-Matrix

Drawing an image of thought using the figuration of the mermaid as emblem of the technological structure of the formation of the unconscious, the unconscious that overcomes itself through reorganisation, Deleuze and Guattari's machinic unconscious can be envisaged as a *mermaid-matrix*, its flows of transport a metallic finned structure, the unconscious architecture of the *machinic mermaid*. A moving nexus of mermaid-tails that formulate a web or maze, a mermaid-rhizome-machine comprised of swimming *metal mermaids*, the transposing motion of her transformation: the metal tubes of the machinic phylum have *fins*— an interspecies and mineral hybrid. Her mermaid fins are like *tentacles*, a knot of tentacles terminating in fins: each tail comprising a *tentacle* of Medusa's serpentine crown. A crown of fin-tentacles. This is the structure envisaged by the processes of becoming-machine and becoming-mermaid: becoming machinic-mermaid.

## The Alien Feminine

The mermaid is foreign and alien in her form, and seductive as she beckons one towards oblivion: as with Homer's siren songstresses, the mermaid that lures unwitting sailors to their watery doom as she creates new profusions of subjectivity. It is telling that in Jung's alchemical imaginary, the Melusine character that embodies the stirring metallic moulting of the unconscious is twofold and two-faced: her alternate visage wearing Medusa's serpentine-tentacled crown. These are images of a humanoid feminine *monster*; she is what is most unknown since she is denied: the alien true identity, harbinger of destruction that imparts new life and growth, death as revivification, the openness of rebirth. She is the moving gears and motion of a mobile matrix of meaning, the emblem of the reshaping propensity of the deepest watery reaches of the unconscious. The mobile matrix or womb-web she exists within is a maze of meaning, a reformulating architecture and clearing that opens and closes, the jaws of a devouring serpent bestowing the richness of life's possibilities and its very possibility to be.

The ancient Greek myth of the minotaur helps to elucidate these themes. In the ancient Greek myth of the minotaur, king Mino is punished by Poseidon when he doesn't keep his end of the bargain that resulted in his kingship. His punishment is that his wife, Pasiphae, her name literally meaning "wide-shining", must bear a monstrous progeny: part human, part bull: the minotaur. The Greek hero Theseus, whose name indicates *reason*, is tasked to defeat the minotaur, who lives at the centre of the maze of Knossos. Theseus navigates the maze with the help of Ariadne, Mino's daughter, her name evincing her connection with the spider. She offers Theseus string or thread, to help him retrace his steps in the labyrinth (Ovid, 2014). In the mythology that I have elucidated over the course of this article using the conceptual architecture of Jung, Deleuze and Guattari, the minotaur at the heart of the maze of meaning and the unconscious is a feminine, tentacled, serpentine-crowned mermaid, monster, alien.

The confrontation with the unknown monster situated at the crux of the maze of meaning is a confrontation with death, a meeting with what is most repressed. But she need not be conquered by reason and suppressed; she can be assimilated, a lost aspect of the self that can be re-membered, merged with in a twofold motion of integrating the unknown, yet maintaining the thread of meaning and subjectivity: the self is *delineated* but also in the *flux* of transformation. Deleuze, Guattari and Jung impart that the way to traverse the maze of meaning of the unconscious is via following the thread that leads onto its network, connecting to an unknown territory, opening oneself to the monstrous or unassimilated alien within with the aid of an evolving system of personal boundaries that can sustain the incorporation of the unknown.

This article has comprised an epistemological exercise exploring the meaning of metaphorical or archetypal images, the poetry of the unconscious, playing with the figure of the mermaid as an axle to orient its investigation. It is an endeavour that can be framed as Magical-Realist in the sense that it seeks a philosophical foundation and groundwork rooted in reality to extend life and grant legitimacy to aesthetic images that are denied reality in the climate of scientific-positivist materialism but exist as unconscious formations of meaning, the shape-shifting nebulous clouds that reconcile meaning to life, a constellation that indicates towards a primordial truth. Mermaids are real: they comprise the architecture of the unconscious, a denied and repressed Originarios reality, the mellifluous call of the

unknown that prefigures perception and understanding. Mermaids are made of metal: metal, machinic mermaids, robotic, technological unconscious.

## Conclusion

To conclude and summarise, Jung understands the collective unconscious as inscribed with primal archetypes. The archetype most strongly correlated with the unconscious is the sea, an abyss of water, its murky depths. He interprets the mermaid archetype as an *anima*, the internalised other that mediates one's relations with the opposite sex. He also develops his own notion of the metallic mermaid, Melusine, a central figure of alchemy and avatar of Mercurius, the mercurial and polymorphous archetype in alchemy, interpreting her as the molten fluid of the collective unconscious and figure of individuation process. Transposed into Deleuze and Guattari's domain, Jung's *metallic* mermaid that lives in the blood of the human becomes a *machinic* mermaid.

I have developed in these pages the conception of the mermaid archetype as the psychopomp that traverses the metallic sea of the unconscious realm, navigating the obstacles of its maze, ushering the subject to its integration. It's a maze out there, inside the unconscious. For Deleuze and Guattari, the only way out of the maze is by designing a new maze. A feat of re-engineering. Bodies without organs are always guided by an abstract machine, or blueprint or plan that steers its movements. Change the blueprint and the whole maze changes. Opens. Reveals a new path of movement for desire.

One's machinic body needs to be actively constructed using the construction material of the unconscious, its machinic connections and flows. In Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the subject, the subject is only bound by the confines she imposes on herself. She becomes a co-creator in the world by entering into communion with the broader network that exists in the world. This is how she constructs her machinic body, a prosthesis to extend beyond herself. Overcoming the confines of the personal unconscious, its system of loops and relays can thus be articulated as a process of *becoming-machine*. Coalescing my Jungian interpretation of overcoming the obstacles posed by the unconscious as a process of becoming-mermaid with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of surmounting the structures of the personal unconscious as becoming-machine; self-overcoming can be understood as a process of becoming *machinic-mermaid*.

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