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A study of female aggression as represented in Patty Jenkins' fiction film Monster

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CHAPTER II:

"Ideology and the representation of women".

In the previous chapter, I discussed the paradigmatic structure of dominant cinema. The major theoretical questions that have arisen are related to the inadequacy of attempts to represent the 'woman' as an autonomous figure, as she can only function in subordination to men's desires[19]. Therefore, feminist film critics express the necessity to deconstruct the patriarchal images and representation of women in cinema. Feminist theorists like Mulvey (1989) and Doane (1984) argue that the representation of women in film arises in relation to the patriarchal logic of the gaze and the specularity of the woman as an object of visual desire. As the primary 'spectacle' within the classical narrative is the eroticized 'female', the main focus of the Counter cinema should be to deconstruct the voyeuristic pleasure of looking at the woman as an 'object'. Since the 'pleasure of looking' is essential for the cinema, the feminist movement in the cinema expresses the necessity to construct the women as a 'subject', rather than an 'object' (Mulvey, 1989: 17). Mulvey suggests that the feminist cinema should assume radical (avant-garde) measures in pursuing this aim, which would "free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment" (Mulvey, 1989: 26). Similarly, in "The Woman's film", Doane (1984) evokes the notion of the 'de-specularization' that takes place in the 'woman's film' and "a deflection of

[19] I acknowledge that there is a certain period within the cinematic history, where women were represented from a different point of view. Films made during the 40s portrayed the female heroines as highly intelligent and ambitious, who even adopt male characteristics. Actresses like Katharine Hepburn, Joan Crawford and Vivien Leigh are emblematic for their performances of the 'superwoman' and 'superfemale' (Haskell, 1999: 566). However, this particular representation of women was a problem because they asserted their own desires. This trend was only present in Hollywood during the 40's and beginning of the 50's. I don't intend to repress the film tradition, but I am analyzing the representation of women after this particular period.

scopophiliac energy in other directions, away from the female body" (Doane, 1984: 80). In terms of narrative structure and representation of women, *Monster* challenges the heterosexual male gaze and the erotic, scopophiliac[20] look. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the female characters in the film and specifically the main protagonist Lee are lacking the ideal characteristics of the 'woman' typical for the stereotypical eroticized 'image' of women. However, her masculine representation raises further questions about the essence of her characterization. At this point, I need to clarify the ambiguous and contradictory employment in this thesis when referring to the 'masculine representation' of Lee in *Monster*. As Karen Horney suggests in "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and by Women": "Like all sciences and all valuations, the psychology of women has hitherto been considered only from the point of view of men" (Horney, 2000: 36).

When I refer to Lee's representation as masculine, I imply, as Horney suggests, a man's point of view, because while I am a woman, I am a product of a patriarchal and male-dominated society. Horney specifies that women "unconsciously yielded to the suggestion of a masculine thought" (Horney, 2000: 37). However, the masculine representation that I refer to, is physical rather than psychological. I recognize that Lee, the woman who becomes self-empowered and takes control of her destiny, should not be and is not read as masculine. It is rather the physical image of Lee created by Jenkins that points to such a characterization: rough gestures, stiff walk, vulgar language and other features that are considered to be typically male.

[20] Pleasure of looking at another person as object.

An additional controversial aspect of Lee's representation is that she is played by the beautiful actress Charlize Theron, a former model/dancer. The fact that the spectator is aware that the unattractive, ugly and aggressive character in the film is in reality an attractive heterosexual woman, heightens Theron`s status as an actress and serves as a marketing strategy for the film itself[21]. Therefore, I will argue that while *Monster* functions within a feminist context, it simultaneously makes uses of heteronormative and patriarchal principles and reshuffles them in order to create new trans-gendered possibilities. The film rather plays into these principles than challenges them. I will analyze these contradictory aspects by discussing the construction of the 'woman' in *Monster* from a psychoanalytic perspective, as well as in relation to spectatorship. Consequently, I will examine 'femininity' in the film in relation to 'castration anxiety', 'masquerade', 'female subjectivity' and 'female desire'. Furthermore, I will explore how the female identity of the characters influences their particular representation and the construction of the 'look' and 'female voice' in the film. Finally, I will establish the position of the spectator in relation to the film, which seems to be an alternative one of 'identification' and of 'voyeurism'. Focusing on different aspects involving the representation of women, will enable me to provide an in-depth analysis from a ideological point of view. This chapter aims to clarify the issue of 'female' representation within *Monster*, as well as to identify the reasons why Patty Jenkins is reluctant to label the film as a 'feminist film'.

Psychoanalysis has been used as a tool by feminist film theorists in their quest to analyse the classical cinema, although its use has been challenged by some of them, because it employs patriarchal language and concepts (Johnston, 1990: 71). For many

[21] It also feeds male fantasies that women are inherently deceptive and unreliable in their representations.

film theorists (Rose, Baudry, Mertz), incorporating psychoanalysis in their works, the cinematic apparatus and traditional narrative form as such are ideological. Deriving from the arguments of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Mertz, Jacquline Rose suggests that a certain ideology is 'latent' in the system of 'cinematic specularity' itself (Smith, 1995). As the term 'ideology' has been and will be used sporadically within the thesis, it is necessary to clarify its meaning. I will adhere to the definition of Althusser (1971) who states that: "ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (Althusser, 1971: 149). Before analyzing how the different ideologies function, it is necessary to identify how a society is structured, as ideology is part of its structure. The full understanding of the structure of a society is an essential component of the analysis of female aggression in the film *Monster* as the film tackles questions of the ways in which the ideology of patriarchy and the bourgeoisie is operative in American society. Althusser (1971) uses Karl Marx's s concept of the structure of every society that is constituted by two levels:

> the *infrastructure*, or the economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relation of production) and the *superstructure*, which in itself contains two 'levels' or 'instances': the politico-legal (law and State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political) (Althusser, 1971: 129).

Althusser (1971) takes further Marx's definition of the State Apparatus by dividing it into Repressive State Apparatus (the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons …) and Ideological State Apparatus (religious, educational, family, legal, political, cultural, communication…) (Althusser, 1971: 136). Both State Apparatuses function by violence and by ideology. The distinction is made only with regards to the emphasis: the Repressive State Apparatus uses predominantly repression and then ideology, whereas the Ideological State Apparatus

uses first ideology and secondarily repression. The State Apparatuses secure the 'ideology of the ruling class' and the conditions of the "reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. relations of exploitation" (Althusser, 1971: 142). According to Althusser, the superstructure (Law, State and Ideology) can only be characterized from the point of view of the reproduction (infrastructure) (Althusser: 1971: 131). As "the reproduction of labour power, is placed essentially outside the firm", it uses the dominant Ideological State Apparatus: the Schools, to assure a "reproduction of the skills" and "reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser, 1971: 127). In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1970) follows similar principles, to convey the idea that ideology promotes the values and interests of dominant groups of society (Brown, 1992: 24-38). Although Barthes talks about 'myth', it is possible to argue that Barthes uses this term in *Mythologies* as a synonym of ideology (Brown, 1992: 24-38). What links the concepts of Barthes and Althusser is the conviction that what people accept as being 'natural' is in fact an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power obtaining in society. 'La petite bourgeoisie' (Barthes, 1970) or the 'private domain' (Althusser, 1971) encourages conformity to its own values. Ideology works in a complex way. Although "an ideology always exists in apparatuses, and its practice, or practices", it is not dogmatically legislated or imposed on individuals without their own free consent (Althusser, 1971: 156). On the contrary, the individuals freely accept to live within a particular ideology, even though "their relation to the conditions of existence is an imaginary relation to real relations" (Althusser: 1971: 156). Ideology works on the principle of 'interpellation', as the socially constructed reality is passed as 'natural', even though it's a subjective distortion of the reality and the world (Althusser, 1971: 163).

The theoretical framework of the structure of society and ideology is particularly useful for the analysis of the class position of Lee. The film portrays her struggle and inability to fit into society, as a result produced by the 'rules' established by the same society. Lee's attempt to challenge her present social status and class is received with mockery and disregard. In her desire to humanize the monstrous, aggressive nature and actions of Lee, Patty Jenkins incorporates in the narrative the social context of the character's existence. She does this by including various scenes and whole sequences that portray Lee's way of life. By doing so, Patty Jenkins creates a cinematic reality that critiques American society, which rejects all 'bad individuals' that do not follow the 'naturalization' and 'the rules of the established order' (Althusser, 1971: 127). Jenkins expresses her critique of the structure of society in two aspects: first by attacking the Ideological State Apparatuses, i.e. the private domain and then taking it further by attacking the Repressive State Apparatus. In the sequence where Lee looks for a job in a firm, the film orientates its critique of the vicious circle produced by the social structures in the private domain. Lee is represented as a victim of a bourgeois system that does not allow individuals from a lower class of society to pass over freely to a new class without successfully acquiring the 'know-how' and the 'rules of good behaviour' within the educational system. The comically constructed sequences in which Lee goes from interview to interview, naively believing in the chimera that she can become a secretary of a lawyer or a veterinarian, and the respective rejections that she gets, confirm the idea that an individual can't escape the 'law' of 'reproduction of labour power'. The hostile reaction that Lee gets from the 'agents of the ruling class' provokes in her frustration and aggression, as she sees herself unable to change her position, the position that the society put her in. It might be 'natural' for

the spectator to react with irony and laughter[22] to her struggle, as the viewer him/herself is part of this system and follows the rules of the established order. Lee bravely neglects these rules, possibly because of lack of knowledge and prejudices:

> the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect of the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by the ruling class. (Althusser, 1971: 127)

The film exposes the weakness of western capitalist bourgeois society by portraying the stigmatization, humiliation and violation of the human rights of the individuals that live in it. In the scene where Lee attempts to ask for a job in a recruitment agency, she receives the cold reply that they could only give her factory work, but "currently we are out of vacancies". The scene explicitly shows how the system works. Lee is 'destined' to perform a job that is appropriate to her class level. In her desperation to find help and understanding, Lee confesses to the woman who stands behind the desk of her struggle to change her life. Naively, Lee believes that by sharing that she used to be a prostitute and wants to change her occupation, she would get sympathy and human response. Inevitably, the response of the woman is just professional and bureaucratic. The scene shows how class discrimination is stronger than gender identification. The film suggests that the female solidarity fails when it comes to social integration and institutions. After each failure to obtain a job, Lee reacts with aggression. The frustration and aggression are gradually built up in the narrative structure. Each scene holds the key to the consequent burst of aggression in Lee. Just

[22] The comical structure that Jenkins creates in some sequences is similar to the narrative structures that Chaplin creates in his films. The structures of repetition give some kind of pleasure to the viewer who recognizes and anticipates correctly. Like Chaplin, Lee is caught in this sequence in an endless cycle of repetition from which she can't escape. The viewer laughs because s/he recognizes the structure, even while s/he mourns for her.

after the disappointment of Lee with the bureaucratic institutions and their inability to give her a chance, she is confronted with a representative of the Repressive State Apparatus- the policeman. The short scene exposes how individuals from the public domain (in this case the Police), abuse their power and positions in order to obtain personal satisfaction. As I have demonstrated earlier, the Repressive State Apparatus function predominantly through violence. Since Lee is a person who is used to being persecuted, as she is considered a 'bad subject', her accumulated fear of the Police results in her constant submission to its repressive forces. Through the construction of the character of the policeman, the scene exemplifies how a man can abuse all powers given him by the bourgeois and patriarchal society and its correspondent ideologies. The construction of the narrative in *Monster* suggests that Patty Jenkins intentionally implicates society as a liable party in the formation of the aggressive and vengeful attitude in Lee. Jenkins is making the viewer complicit with those who oppress Lee. Because we understand the genre of comedy, we give ourselves a superiority in this matter, and so become Lee's enemies. In this way, ideology disperses power across the larger system of humanity.

The above analysis of how the socio-economic interests and structures are transformed into ideologies is significant for the proposed analysis of the female aggression in the film *Monster*. One of the creative decisions in the construction of the narrative in *Monster* is dictated by the filmmaker's desire to investigate and portray how ideologies shape and influence human thoughts and behavior. The film exposes the outcomes of bourgeois ideologies, produced by the capitalist-bourgeois structure in contemporary American society. Jenkins creates the impression that Lee is a victim of the oppressive rules of this same society and at the same time a hero

who refuses to submit to the required social authority and expectations. Furthermore, the filmmaker implies that patriarchal principles still dominate social logics. Moreover, Jenkins insinuates that patriarchy still exists as a formal socio-cultural system in America. Hence, while women have made some political gains, they still live under patriarchy. The cinematic reality created in *Monster* offers numerous examples of patriarchal structures still existing in the American society. Through Lee's character and her daily experience with men, Jenkins portrays a sketch of a specific type of American man who has been raised within patriarchal assumptions and the social worldview in which the man is the dominant being. These men, let's call them the 'target group', have incorporated their patriarchal presumptions into their psychological experience and eventually become victims of Lee's revenge and aggression. Although the ideology of patriarchy and psychology of men have different connotations, in this case their meanings interweave. As ideology works through "interpellation", an identity is constructed through a range of signs and codes (Althusser, 1971: 163). These cultural codes become a part of the subjective psychology, as the individual believes that s/he is their 'owner'. In this sense, psychology is the environment of ideology: ideology comes from the larger cultural message and it inhabits the individual psychology. So when an individual responds in an ideological way, s/he thinks that the opinions s/he is expressing are wholly her/his own, and ceases to recognize that they have come from outside. As ideology "has no outside (for itself)", an individual never realizes that s/he is in an ideology (Althusser, 1971: 164). Following this set of thoughts, by portraying Lee's 'target group' as dominant, unfaithful and aggressive men, Jenkins insinuates a link between their behaviour and the cultural codes within the American society.

As we have seen, film as a medium disguises its own ideological purposes (Kuhn, 1982: 86). As everything is set around men and their perspectives on the surrounding world, the psychological drives and fears inherent in men are imbedded within the narrative structure of the classic film. Freud's own hypothesis that the woman is read as castrated[23] contributes to the general idea of patriarchy that women are dependent upon men. *Monster* destabilizes this hypothesis and subverts the classical resolution of the castrating threat for men. I will use Barbara Creed's (1993) analysis of the 'Femme Castratrice' to demonstrate how *Monster* represents Lee as a hybrid of 'castrated', 'phallic' and 'castrating woman'. Creed's differentiation between the conventional representation of the castrated woman, on one hand, and her own concept of the castrating woman, on the other, is particularly important for this analysis.

In her analysis of the representation of women in the horror film genre, Creed (1993) acknowledges that "woman is represented as castrated literally or symbolically" (Creed, 1993: 122). Within these films the woman assumes the role of the victim[24]. However, in some horror films, she is represented as a psychotic monster: "In these films, woman's violent destructive urges arise from her failure to lead a 'normal' life in possession of friends and family." (Creed, 1993: 122). In the opening sequence of *Monster*, Patty Jenkins portrays Lee as an example of the castrated woman. She is striving for attention and male adoration. The construction of the opening sequence resembles a prelude to a fairy tale with its enchanting and peacefully narrating voice-over. The opening line of the movie, "I always wanted to be in the movies", is given

[23]Freud analyzes women from a male's perspective. The concept that the woman is castrated by nature derives from his understanding of how the boy reads the female body. Although this has generated substantial debate, it complements Freud's parallel analysis on the Victorian society that constructs a contradictory image of women as 'mother'/'prostitute'.

[24] Films, in which the woman is being physically attacked, tortured, stabbed or killed.

as a voice-over against a black screen, and it introduces the spectator to the familiar Hollywood dream of a little girl wanting to become a star. The three stages of Lee's childhood that the opening sequence presents correspond to the fundamental stages of a girl's development. The first stage that the sequence presents is when Lee is around three years old. The first image that we see is a close-up of the little girl's face that innocently looks directly into camera. When the camera pulls back to reveal the setting, the spectator discovers a naïve little girl dressed-up as royalty, staring at her image in the mirror. The voice-over overlaps the images as the camera shares the dreams and thoughts of the girl, looking forward to become 'beautiful and rich, like the women on TV'. When a man's hand aggressively takes the little girl by the shoulder and spins her around, the fairy tale setting is shown to be misleading. Within the following shots of the opening sequence, there is a misbalance between voice-over and images. The voice-over keeps its innocence, while the images reveal the frightening reality. The second stage of the girl's development, where she is around 7, exposes the face of the man whose hand we have seen, and it is obviously that of her father. His aggressive and furious face, juxtaposed with the innocent look of the girl, suggests the hostile environment that she was living in. The only way to escape the reality was for the little girl to dream: "So, whenever I was down, I would just escape into my mind, to my other life, where I was someone else". The images are cinematically presented with the predominant use of close-ups on faces and hands. The claustrophobic and subjective effect that these scenes create is reinforced by the progressively growing image on the screen, starting from a screen size of around 20% that gradually increases to a full screen. Furthermore, the increase of the image size coincides with the physical development of the little girl, as well as with the information that the spectator receives about her up-bringing. Within the third stage of

Lee's development, there is already evidence of her isolation and delinquent behavior. She is shown smoking apart from a group of girls, while living with illusions for a better future: "It made me happy to think that all these people just didn't know yet who I was gonna be". Isolated from the other girls, Lee started "secretly to look to be discovered". By showing her stripping in front of a group of boys, Jenkins emphasizes that the reason that Lee becomes a prostitute is not financial, but emotional. It is a result of her desire to be appreciated and 'discovered'. The last scene in this opening sequence further exposes the lack of correspondence between voice-over and visuals. The voice-over is gentle, optimistic and enchanting. Lee says:

> Who is gonna discover me? Was it this guy or may be this one? But even if they couldn't take me all the way, like Marilyn, they will somehow believe in me. They will see me for what I could be and think I was beautiful. Like a diamond in a rock. They will take me away to my new life and my new world, where everything will be different. (Fuchs, 2004)

The dark setting of the scene provokes a depressive feeling in the spectator. The two characters within the scene, Lee and a young man, are sitting in a car, after just having sex. The camera is predominantly set outside the car, as a voyeuristic device that is guiding the spectator in the unfolding events. The visuals captured by the camera are the only means for the spectator to follow the action, as he is excluded from hearing what the characters are saying. However, the clear reactions of the characters serve as perfect guide for understanding the situation. Lee wants to stay with the man, but he is reluctant for her to do so. The friendly discussion leads to an argument that comes to an end when the man aggressively throws Lee out of the car. Although the scene is shot predominantly from the outside of the car, by the use of an establishing shot of the car, as the argument progresses, the editing pace of the scene is increased and the camera takes different angles and points of view in order to emphasize the impact of the argument on Lee. The camera enters the closed space of the car only to capture

reaction shots of Lee and her disappointment. The close-ups on her face serve as a means to encourage the spectator's compassion. The last shot of the scene is filmed in an art-cinema style, as if it aims to portray the surreal experience of the character. The camera is set on the wind-screen of the leaving car, and focuses on Lee, standing alone on the dirt road. From the long shot of Lee the camera slightly gets closer to her, as the wind-screen disappears from the shot. The spectator is aware of the unrealistic setting; Lee is wrapped in artificial smoke.

In this sequence, Lee is represented as the fetishized woman, the comforting and sensual image which distracts the castration anxiety of men. Through the final voice-over narration of these childhood memories, Lee confesses that this position led to the continuous sexual and emotional exploitation that she had to suffer by men: "Yeah, I lived that way for a long, long time, dreaming like that in my head. It was nice, but one day it just stopped." By portraying the early image of Lee as striving for 'adoration' and 'salvation', Jenkins presumes that the patriarchal necessity to fetishize and objectify the woman makes the latter believe she is the one who wants to assume this position. In her essay, "Psychodynamics of the family", Nancy Chodorow (2000) attributes women's unreal relations to men to the early idealization of the father. Chodorow suggests that the psychological position that women elaborate for themselves in the family triangle[25] is accountable for the fact that women are willing to put up with limitations and violent relationships with men in exchange for evidence of caring and love. However, Lee's idealization of men can be ascribed to how ideology functions: through interpellation (Althusser, 1971: 163). The "mirror-duplication structure of all ideologies" entails that individuals submit themselves

[25] 'Female' masochism in early childhood implies desire for the father and identification with the mother.

freely to the ideology (Althusser, 1971: 168). In this case, Lee internalizes her self-representation and becomes agent of the patriarchal ideology herself. Her striving to be 'beautiful' and 'discovered' is a reflection of men's desire to objectify women. Men reward behaviors that reinforce their power and authority. They prefer submissive, beautiful women whom they can control. Therefore, following the 'interpellation' and the 'mirror structure' of the patriarchal ideology, women concentrate their energies in achieving this 'ideal'. As a consequence, women want to be beautiful, attractive and wanted by men. In fact, with this opening sequence, Patty Jenkins sets the parameters in which the film will function. She positions the 'woman' within the patriarchal discourse in order to define the gaps of the dominant ideology.

The sharp cut[26] that Patty Jenkins uses to emphasize the ironic inadequacy of such a traditional sexist image shows her meticulous handling of the binary castrated/ castrating woman. Jenkins` creative decision to position the attempted suicide of Lee as the first scene of the narrative action, suggests the idea that Lee's desire to be objectified and fetishized, can only lead to the elimination of the woman, or her own desire to be eliminated. However, the fact that the heroine does not commit eventual suicide demonstrates the first psychological shift or step in the evolution of the character. Nevertheless, one could argue that her whole murderous saga is an extended attempt for Lee to get herself killed, and is thus a suicide by another means. Therefore, Jenkins establishes from the beginning that the heroine makes a decision (even though irrationally), to break her passivity and the inadequate idea to serve as an object of desire which only leads to exploitation. The notion of 'exploitation' is an essential device that Jenkins uses in the construction of the psychological

[26] The next scene shows Lee under a bridge attempting a suicide.

development and mutation of Lee's character. In the second scene, where Lee meets Selby, the spectator learns the reason for Lee's not committing suicide. As Lee confesses in the voice-over following her meeting with Selby: "I had $5 left and the fact that I`m not gonna spend them before I die made me feel sick, as I know that I've probably sucked someone's dirty dick for them." This revelation suggests that Lee's subconscious desire to assume the patriarchal vision of a woman was also used pragmatically as a mean of survival. In this instance, Lee's self-destructive instinct has been overpowered by her preservation instinct. On the other hand, the 'exploitation' theme raises further debates around the economics implicated in the act of prostitution, as in its essence it is an exchange of services, where, on one side the woman gets remuneration for a 'certain' service that she provides to a 'certain' client, on the other. From this perspective, the 'exploitation' could be seen as mutual. Although the economical and social aspects of prostitution are relevant to my analysis of the representation of Lee in *Monster*, the main focus is the emotional impact on Lee, as a consequence of the intentional subordination of women within patriarchy[27].

The interpretation of the representation of Lee becomes ambiguous after the rape scene. From a psychological point of view the rape scene is constructed as a reenactment of the castration anxiety of men. The rapist wants to punish the 'guilty' woman who does not obey him and whom he in fact fears. His furious desire to punish her is a reaction at his inability to 'save' her. There is no evidence in the film that this particular man has any intentions or desires to 'save' her[28]. However, the

[27] I will discuss later that the film is accentuating not only woman's inferiority within society, but also uses the woman Lee to contract a larger image of the marginalized subjects of society, such as Vietnam veterans and 'negroes', as they are called in the film.

[28] Jenkins is interested in the reciprocal desire of men to 'save' and women to be 'saved'. Her point of view on the subject, in the film is somehow ambiguous. Even though, men in *Monster* seem to be only johns, Jenkins creates two male parts that escape this stereotype: the veteran drunkard (Bruce Dern),

scene insinuates that part of his attraction to prostitutes (in this case Lee), is due to his own insecurities about power relations and sexual identity. He realizes that he cannot rescue her from her sinful actions; his only resolution is to punish her. Jenkins constructs the character of the rapist as an example of men's monstrosity. In the portrayal of the typical aggressive and violent men, she incorporates the psychological dilemma for men between the power they have over women and the constant fear of losing this power. However, the rapist's exasperation could be read from different psychological perspectives. On the one hand, from a Freudian perspective, Lee's refusal to execute his sadistic oral desire to be 'sucked', arouses his sexual frustration and his fear that she 'lacks' the penis. Following Freud's (1949) analysis of the psycho-sexual development of a human subject, I would argue that the rapist has not fully accomplished his libidinal development. His aggressiveness could be attributed to a fixation in the second (anal) and third (phallic) phase of his sexual development (Freud, 1949). Therefore, the forceful insertion of a mechanic tool in her vagina is his attempt to fill her 'lack' or to penetrate her without threatening his own intactness. Lee's refusal to have oral sex, reminded him of his psychological failure and sexual insecurity, which provoked his psychotic nature to perform pathological sexual actions. As Lacan describes it:

> Sexual intercourse is both the affirmation of his possession of the phallus and a reminder of the possibility of castration. For a moment at least, he fills the woman's 'lack' and at that moment becomes the site of lack himself (Lacan in Grosz, 1990: 134-135)

Following this set of thoughts, the reason for the rapist to use an external object instead of his penis for the rape is due to his fear of being weakened by the woman.

Lee's only friend and the old religious man (Scott Wilson) who wants to help her. Within the closing scenes of the film, Jenkins exposes Lee's rejections to be 'saved'. Jenkins goes even further by constructing the scenes in such a way that the spectator ceases to feel empathy with Lee and starts to resent her. The scene, where she executes her last victim (Scott Wilson), exemplifies how her mistrust and lifetime abuse have pushed her to avenge for it on an innocent man, whose intentions were Samaritan.

With his sadistic behavior he confirms men's fear of castration, which is in a way a fear of becoming inferior themselves. This hypothesis leads to the concept that by inserting the phallic object, hence transforming her into a phallic woman, he will escape the tormenting idea that she is castrated. Another possible interpretation of the scene will be from Barbara Creed's challenging concept of the nature of the castrating anxiety for men. She argues that men fear women not because they see them as castrated, but rather because they are castrating. She makes uses of the myth of the 'vagina dentata' to suggest that the boy fears not to be castrated by the father, but rather by the mother (Creed, 1983: 109). She uses Freud's concept that the child identifies the "anal cavity with the mouth" (Creed, 1983:113) to take further the fear of the 'vagina dentata' that will devour the penis. From this perspective, the insertion of the tool could be seen as an attempt to demolish the castrating object. However, if the man had feared the 'vagina dentata', why would he strive for sexual satisfaction by allowing the mouth with the threatening teeth of the woman to suck his penis? Is it not his masochistic desire to 'be beaten' or is it his death instinct? The explanation for men's desire for fellatio could lie in the Master/Slave relationship (Frye, 1983: 103-105). The Master (the man) makes the Slave (the woman) 'work', while he is enjoying himself. The relationship of domination in fellatio is tainted with ambiguities, as it is problematic to define exactly who are in this case the Master and Slave. However, is it not the Master, who demands to his Slave to play the role of Master? Therefore, I would conclude that the aggressive reaction of the rapist in this scene is due to his desire to get a quick sexual release, and his rage at the denial of his 'right' (as he is paying for it), provokes his need to exercise punishment. The interpretation of the aggressive impulses will be discussed further within the next

chapter, where the main focus will be to discover how the film understands and represents aggression.

The narrative structure of *Monster* makes use of a set of codes that suggest an emphasis on issues such as sexual differentiation and gender identification. After the rape scene, Lee puts on the clothes of her rapists. At this moment the representation of the character takes on new dimensions. By attributing masculine characteristics to Lee, through the means of masquerade or cross-dressing, Jenkins substitutes the fetishized woman with the phallic image. The concept of masquerade was first introduced into feminist film theory by Claire Johnston[29] (1990) in her analysis of Jacques Tourneur's *Anne of the Indies* (1951). The notion of 'masquerade' was inspired by the role of the female character who cross-dressed as a male pirate. Johnston treats the use of 'masquerade' as "designed to disavow the fact of absence, of the lack" (Johnston, 1990: 67). Furthermore, she evokes the idea that the 'phallic' woman is being used to symbolize the threat of castration. For Johnston the female masquerade signified not only a masking but also an 'unmasking' in the deconstructionist sense of exposing and criticising. Hence, by representing Lee as the stereotypical phallic woman, Jenkins aims to criticize a certain macho behavior adopted by men, characterized by roughness, intransigence and dominance. The misconception of the phallic woman comes from the fact that patriarchy has attributed aggressiveness and violence to be essentially masculine characteristics. As Creed remarks:

> The feminine imagination is seen as essentially non-violent, peaceful, unaggressive. This is the very argument patriarchal ideology has used for the past 2000 years to control women - it is precisely because women by definition

[29] Following Terry Castle's important work on cross-dressing in *Masquerade and Civilization* (1986).

> are ‘pure’ creatures that they need ‘men’ to ‘guide’ them…”.(Creed, 1983: 156)

Therefore, Lee’s physical characterization has elements of the Freudian ‘phallic’ mother that is imagined by the child in the pre-Oedipal phase to have a penis (Creed, 1983: 157). The idea that the representation of Lee’s aggressiveness is portrayed as ‘masculine’ and that we as viewers read it as such, confirms the idea that language, psychoanalysis and film are in their structure essentially patriarchal.

In her desire to humanize Lee and to portray her as an assertive, independent and active figure, Jenkins uses the stereotype of the phallic woman in order to mock the use of such representation within classical cinema. In the scenes where the character functions as a butch woman, the spectator is aware of the ironic use of the stereotype. Lee’s behavior functions as a caricature of male’s behavior. There are two major scenes that exemplify this approach. In the bar scene, where Lee possessively puts her arm over Selby’s shoulder and declares in a macho manner: “This is my girlfriend”, articulates the patriarchal desire to dominate the woman or more ambiguously expresses Lee’s desire to read as a man, while at the same time removing Selby from circulation amongst men. In the restaurant scene, Lee` s behavior is a satirical portrayal of men’s need to please women in order to demonstrate their own authority and power. Within the scene, Lee promises Selby that she can have whatever she wants. The conversation reveals that what Selby wants is the materialistic realization of the American dream: a nice car and a house on the beach. This also shows Selby as imposing gendered roles on both of them, and casts Lee as the provider, setting herself up as the consumer.

The portrayal of the female characters in *Monster* suggests an ironic metaphor of patriarchy. By confirming the idea that woman is repressed in the cinematic text and can only assume the active position when taking a male role, Jenkins uses *Monster* to create a critique of the dominant narrative and the sexist construction of society. She achieves this by using the patriarchal codes and ideology in the structure of the narrative. The construction of the relationship between Selby and Lee is central to the narrative structure of the film. Jenkins uses the patriarchal model of a heteronormative relationship in the representation of the dynamics between Selby and Lee. Although this approach could be viewed as sexist and anti-feminist, it serves in my view as a critique of the patriarchal construction of society by making it more understandable and accessible for the mass viewer. It also shows how Lee and Selby are both performing roles and assume certain 'positions' that can be detached form their sexual identities.

The film portrays three stereotypical representations of women. First of all, it represents the woman/mother that functions as a defending agent of patriarchy. Through the image of Selby's relative, Jenkins condemns women who accept their subordinate and passive roles and see their role in protecting the Law of the Father. The character represents an accumulative image of the American conservatism, racism and rejection of the Other, the marginalized outsider that fails to integrate into the social norms. Similarly, Selby is a prototype of the passive, innocent, but also demanding and manipulative nature of women used so often in the classical portrayal of women. She is fascinated by the Other, the Outlaw figure of Lee, but is unable to deal with the social rejection of her lesbianism. She desires to escape the Law of the Father, her own dominant father, but is divided between conservatism (to obey the

paternal Law) and liberalism (desire for the mother). Therefore, the representation of Lee is ambiguous. On the one hand Lee is Barbara Creed's 'castrated/phallic' woman that threatens to castrate, but on the other hand she is the 'castrating' woman who acts on desire for revenge (Creed, 1983: 156-157).

The central focus of the narrative of *Monster* is the relationship between Selby and Lee. Jenkins constructs this relationship as a butch-femme role play. It could be interpreted as a mimicking and perpetuating of the heterosexual relations of power. The film obviously states its angle towards lesbianism from the beginning. Lee's first repulsed reaction towards Selby's lesbianism suggests her homophobic attitude. By introducing Lee as a straight woman, that resents lesbians, Jenkins plays with the conventional heterosexual perception of lesbianism. In the mainstream thinking there is an elision of gender and sexual orientation. Judith Butler ascribes this overlapping of gender and sexuality as follows:

> Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abjected gender to homosexuals, that is, calling gay men' feminine' or calling lesbians 'masculine', and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender ('no longer being a real or proper man' or 'no longer being a real or proper woman'). (Butler, 1993: 27. IN: Wilton, 1995: 3)

Monster questions gender and sexual identity, by representing their ambiguous interweaving and division. The use of the dichotomy butch/femme in the film reaffirms class hierarchy. In her analysis of the film *Salmonberries* (1991), Louise Allen (1995) refers to theorists such as Walker and Butler, to affirm the idea that the butch/femme positions are used to reinvest the 'social reality' in relation of hierarchy. She uses Walker's theory where the butch woman is seen as a symbol of the working class lesbian that is represented with much more authenticity than the femme,

representative of the middle class (Allen, 1995: 75). Allen combines Walker's theory of 'authenticity' with Butler's notion of the 'performative' function of the gendered body to enhance the idea that the visibility or non-visibility of gender identification does not determine sexual identification (Allen, 1995: 70-83). In *Monster*, the representation of butch/femme is not set up to be straight forward and involves complicated interpretations. In the beginning of the film Jenkins uses 'visible codes' to suggest the idea that Selby is the butch woman, as she is physically characterized with butch haircut, masculine suit, and strictly queer sexuality. Lee, on the other hand is symbolically represented as the femme (heterosexual) woman, with her blond hair and flabby body. The scenes of the first meeting between the two women represent the initial positioning of the characters. When the bar where they were drinking closes, Selby invites Lee to sleep over. Lee agrees, but not without reservations. This may be considered as the most obvious moment in the film, where the more timid and tender side of Lee is revealed and where Selby is displayed as direct, assertive and courageous. As the narrative develops, there is a subversion of the roles that becomes more and more transparent within the evolution of the narrative. Progressively, Lee assumes the butch role and Selby becomes the femme. It was Jenkins' creative decision to build the characters using contrasting psychological and physical features. This approach not only contributed to a specific reading of the film, but also helped Jenkins to create her own fictional version of Aileen Wuornos' story:

> The film accentuates the distance between the Selby Wall character and Tyria Moore by taking narrative liberties (Moore was more popular and less isolated than she is portrayed, and often worked as a maid in hotels when money was short. She was also blonde and athletic). The decision to cast Christina Ricci is most probably designed to draw attention to her fictional autonomy in the film and distance her from the original person. As with many of her films, Ricci refers back to her own position as an actress (something that has led some critics to label her performance as lazy). As an actress, she is iconic as an insecure figure at the heart of the middle class, which is brought into play here. She is at once the naïve and superficial manipulator of *The Opposite of Sex* and

> the bourgeoisie trapped by conformity of *The Ice Storm*. By bringing herself into the role, Ricci sets up an antithesis to Theron's character (Bull, 2003).

By setting diverse dynamics to the two female characters, Jenkins explores the notion of power within a relationship. The film investigates whether the apparent dominant and independent person in a couple is the one that has control. Jenkins constructs Lee and Selby's relationship to prove the opposite. The narrative of the film establishes that it is the masochistic, dependent, nagging and innocent Selby that is in control of Lee's emotions and actions. Jenkins' interest to portray the power dynamics within a relationship without implying gender differentiation leads her to the decision to create Selby's character as an opposite to Lee's:

> As Charleze was my number one choice so was Christina. I knew that what I needed out of the girlfriend¹s role was to be someone who instantly was understandably young, naïve, innocent but also incredibly wilful. Both of these characters had these wild extremes which had to be put together. The reason that I finally ended up saying that we have to cast the two best actresses and hope that this dynamic works is that Charleze and I met with several other actresses and so many of the women who were able to read the naïve part their energy just disappeared next to Charleze and I would look at them and I would say that I would never believe that that woman could make this woman do anything. Christina can look like a child but you don¹t want to fuck with her. (Murphy, 2004)

However, Jenkins incorporates an additional level of homophobia into the text. In the roller-skating scene, Selby's fearful hesitations to dance closely with Lee shows her internalized homophobia and desire to leave a double life. She is afraid to be stigmatized by society in expressing her lesbianism publicly. This moment of uncertainty, represents the dual perception of her identity, which is not fixed. By performing a feminine role in society, she strives for social acceptance. In fact, throughout the evolution of the narrative, the image of Selby is used as a critical representation of lesbian (homophobic) identity of particular women. Jenkins

constructs her as an immature figure that is torn between her sexual orientation and the social (family) expectation, although later in the film, Selby confronts her aunt and states her assertive position of lesbian identity. Nevertheless, at the end of the film she is the one who fears the patriarchal order and betraying Lee.

The beginning of the actual relationship between Lee and Selby marks the apparent stereotypical representation of the butch Lee and the femme, submissive Selby. However, the film is juggling with these images as there are moments where Lee is clearly not masculine in her behavior, but rather vulnerable and feminine. One of these moments is the scene at the bus-stop where she sees Selby for the last time. Lee has an emotional outburst when she realizes that she is losing her beloved. She is represented as the classical heroine who by the closure of the film "suffers pain, loss, denial, self-sacrificed and punishment" (Stacey, 1995: 97). This classical Hollywood narrative closure suggests that the narrative follows the lesbian romance formula in the construction of their relationship. Jackie Stacey points out that the lesbian romance films share the narrative structure of the heterosexual romance films (Stacey, 1995: 97). In the classical-formula fashion, *Monster* is concerned with a love relationship that is threatened by obstacles in fulfillment of the 'true love'. By mimicking the heterosexual model of romance, Jenkins constructs lesbianism from a social perspective, psychologically reaffirming the conventional model. As I have argued in the beginning of this chapter, Jenkins creates in *Monster* a representation that follows the classical model, but just as a starting point, which enables her to construct a 'non-normative' representation. Although the desire between the two women is mimicking the heterosexual model, the film is explicitly using it just to expose the false myth created by the patriarchal ideology that misunderstandings and

power relations in relationships are due to gender differences. The film clearly shows that Lee is not interested in the lesbian Selby. She is interested in her own projections of Selby; her fantasies of affection and Love. The Lesbian community in the film is represented as a close, isolated group that is as much intolerant towards the Other (Lee, the bisexual, or rather asexual woman) as the conservative, dominant patriarchal order. In the scene, where Selby goes out with her lesbian friends to an entertainment park, Jenkins positions Lee as an outsider from the group. The attitude of the lesbian group towards Lee resembles that of the group of girls in the opening sequence. Lee stays apart from the group as she feels excluded and unwelcome. In this scene, Lee is filmed from a lower angle, which emphasizes her size, but also reflects on the way she looks at the group. Her eye-line is from an upper angle which means that she has outgrown her desire to please and to be 'discovered'. As the scene is almost at the end of the film, the spectator notices the changes that have occurred in her personality. The camera goes back and forth, cutting between the group of girls and Lee. In the scene, the two parties are never in the same shot, in comparison with the opening sequence where Lee and the teenage girls were in the same shot. The filmmaker's decision to construct the two scenes in such a different way expresses her desire to emphasize that Lee wants to give freedom to Selby, without putting restraints on her. Furthermore, the shots of Lee standing alone and observing the group highlight her loneliness. The lesbian community in this film acts as a social group, which as any other group, part of the bourgeois society will not accept individuals that do not conform to their expectations and ideology. Therefore in terms of lesbian representation in *Monster*, the spectator should use the exemplary paradigm which Wilton proposes, where sociology should be used rather than psychology (Wilton, 1995: 16).

I will now interpret the lesbian desire displayed in *Monster* from a psychoanalytical point of view. By using Silverman's (1988) reinterpretation of Freud regarding the psychological development of the little girl[30], I will imply an additional layer in the construction of lesbian desire and identity in *Monster*. Silverman argues that the entry into language means the end of the unity between mother and child as well as of an unmediated access to reality (Silverman, 1988: 152). The loss and separation entailed by the acquisition of language leads the child to desire the mother. The girl redirects her desire to the mother in what is called the negative Oedipus complex. This can only happen after the pre-oedipal stage, because distance from the mother is necessary for her to be constructed as an erotic object for the daughter. Silverman thus recuperates female desire for the mother as fully oedipal that is to say within the symbolic order, within language and signification (Silverman, 1988: 150-155). In the negative Oedipus complex the girl both identifies with and desires the mother, while the father figures neither as an object of desire nor of identification: for the girl he is merely "a troublesome rival" (Freud quoted in Silverman: 153). In this stage of development the girl forms her identity through the incorporation of the mother's image; she both wishes to possess and to be the mother.

The mother figure is obviously missing in the cinematic reality created in *Monster*. Therefore the question arises if this lack of the maternal image is intentional. Following Silverman's concept that the female subject remains split between the desire for the mother and for the father, Lee's obsession with caring for Selby is a desire to recuperate her missing mother by identifying with the mother figure.

[30] Silverman puts great emphasis on the signifying role of the mother in early childhood.

Jenkins' intentional exclusion of any mother figure in the film suggests her desire to emphasise the mother's guilt of absence. The ideological implications of this issue are ambiguous. On the one hand, Jenkins adheres to the patriarchal ideology that condemns mothers who don't adhere to the ideal image of motherhood. On the other hand, by eliminating the mother figure in the film, as a filmmaker, she is making an ironic insinuation that this perspective on parenting is absurd, as the mother shouldn't always be the one to blame when children misbehave. Selby represents the innocent child that Lee was once, and that still has hope to escape the monstrosity of the paternal aggressive order.

> But to identify the missing maternal element in the film is, already, to assume an empty space that may be repressed by the film, but is also created by it. Put another way, such a feminist reading falls into the trap of what Luce Irigaray calls the 'old dream of symmetry', for it assumes-rather than challenges- the patriarchal logic of the film, whereby if men together replicate father-son relationships, then relationships between women must fall into the symmetrical other half. But then again - the cycle continues - empty spaces may be spaces created by the text, but they are still empty, and an insistence on 'filling them up' can have the effect of upsetting the logocentric hierarchy of presence and absence. (Mayne, 1990: 26)

The empty mother space in *Monster* is there to reinforce the phallocentric idea of the woman's lack. Jenkins intentionally denies the images of either Lee's or Selby's mothers. Lee only mentions that her mother left them when she was a child, implying in the subtext a certain blame.

The film might imply an emphasis on the missing figure of the mother. However, by alluding to a link between the female (maternal) lack and the degradation of femininity in the dominant male (patriarchal) order, the cinematic representation suggests its aspirations to stress a cultural critique, instead of an individual problem. In her desire to create a critique of this patriarchal order that generates certain cultural

values and perceptions, Jenkins portrays the images of violence and lesbianism from a phallocentric cultural position that implies a negative connotation. In her PhD dissertation, Jacqueline Nielson (2004) confirms my position by arguing that the "subtext of the film not only links lesbianism and violence, but implies that lesbian desire produces violence" (Nielson, 2004: 120). Nielson uses *Monster* as an example of how media sources and therapists view lesbianism and violence categorically, without focusing on the individual experience. Although her major focus is the lesbian relationship violence, she briefly discusses *Monster* in her chapter conceptualizing the image of the 'lesbian abuser' (Nielson, 2004: 116). The key argument that she raises in this chapter is that the images of violence and lesbianism are viewed to be unacceptable by the society and only reaffirm the conservative idea that women involved with such actions are dangerous, devious and sinful (Nielson, 2004: 88-123). She supports her analysis by referring to two case studies of lesbians who perpetrated violence, written from the perspective of two therapists, Farley (1992) and Klinger (1991). Although this thesis does not aim to focus on psychotherapy and its specific implications, it is relevant to this study of representation of female aggression to notice some of the findings that these therapists had on the image of a 'lesbian perpetrator', as it coincides with the representation and analysis of Lee.

> Therapists viewed lesbians who perpetrated violence as angry, controlling, jealous, avoidant, manipulative disrespectful and unable to take responsibilities for their actions. They documented a link between their patients 'violence and childhood and adulthood abuse, drug and alcohol use, depression and anxiety, separation-individualization issues, and self-esteem issues. (Nielson, 2004: 117)

Nielson (2004) critiques this approach of categorizing and labeling the patient, as the therapist's analysis of the perpetrator's behavior does not always correspond to the inner experience of the latter. She interprets their behavior intervention as a mean to

"erase the lesbian desire as a legitimate passion" (Nielson, 2004: 118). Neilson reads *Monster* as following such a paradigm. In fact, the film evokes the notion of 'lesbian desire', but it involves tragedy throughout the film. The narrative structure of the film suggests the idea that the violent behavior of Lee is linked to her rising lesbian desire. In a way, the first murder seems as a function of hope for an ultimate relationship with Selby. The link between providing and caring for Selby and the following killings/robberies is represented from a very patriarchal and prejudicial perspective. As Nielson suggests:

> There is no happy ending for lesbian desire in this story. Although the film's director Patty Jenkins wanted to portray the 'lesbian serial killer' and the 'feminist hero', what remains in the foreground is that Aileen is a 'monster' and that her lesbian desire is inevitably linked. The projection of Aileen as 'the first lesbian killer', conjures up images of irrational, brutal, psychotic murders, which shows that violence and lesbianism can only be portrayed as bad and evil (Nielson, 2004: 121)

Monster functions in the conventional patriarchal discourse in order to portray the inadequacy of the ideology. Simultaneously, Jenkins interweaves feminist approach in her representation of the characters. However she declares that the film should not be viewed as a feminist film:

> You know my mother is a feminist and I grew up in an extremely feminist household and the eternal argument that I have with my mother when she says 'Why don't you call yourself a feminist?' I think the ultimate victory is to be a universal artist and to be a universal human being. And when Scorsese makes *Raging Bull* or someone makes the *Sopranos* we don't say it's a very male film. It's a film. (Murphy, 2004)

In his essay "Women and Film", Jill Nelmes (1999) discusses how female filmmakers are reluctant to admit officially that they or their films are feminists. Nelmes refers to research, conducted by Pilcher, where female filmmakers confessed to be "sympathetic to feminism but did not want to be associated with extremism" (Nelmes, 1999: 289). As a female filmmaker Jenkins is confronted with the dilemma of "I'm

not a feminist, but…" (Nelmes, 1999: 289). This contradiction is present in her film as well as in her interviews:

> … The victory of feminism is when there is a world that I got to come into where it never occurred to me that I couldn't be a filmmaker, where you don't have to fight the battle any more. Where you are actually presenting yourself as equal. And so it is a matter of semantics. Obviously it is a woman film and that it is told tremendously differently but it's only to legitimise that this is a story that reaches beyond the boundary of a 'woman's story'. (Murphy, 2004)

Jenkins is inevitably caught in the 'rules' and expectations of the mainstream Hollywood film industry where "funding for both men and women is so difficult to obtain" (Nelmes, 1999: 289). Like other female filmmakers, Jenkins is cautious about being too radical for fear of being rejected. Nelmes suggests that a new term should be applied to female filmmakers: 'feminist realism' (Nelmes, 1999: 289).

Conceptually, *Monster* follows the progressively changing universal tendency and ideology that emerged out of the feminist movement which started in the 1960`s. The film locates the problems to 'outside', instead of 'inside' and therefore the blame is shifted from the individual to the cultural. In this instance, *Monster* is a feminist film, as it represents the problematic and monstrous Lee to be the product of an ideologically unstable society. Jenkins` cinematic approach, although ambiguous and conflicting, aims to discern the weeds that inhabit the narrow-minded and conservative patriarchal society. To reach this goal, she assumes to work with the principles and doctrines that are inherent to the dominant mode of production and social conduct, just to subvert them with irony and the grotesque.