



## Venom: A Desiring Machine

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the protagonist in *Venom* (2018). The debate is based on the double character of Eddie-Venom and traces the Deleuzian desire of this folded identity. How Eddie's dark desires are suppressed and united by Venom, a symbiote? Schizoanalysis, a counter-method of psychoanalysis, assumes a dual identity for dealing with the rational space surrounding us. Psychoanalysis however, establishes a family-based representational system. For Deleuze and Guattari, free associations during schizophrenic life are to be preferred instead of the representational approach in psychoanalysis. schizo-aesthetics, a network of desiring machines, is the liberty of the subject to remain in the world non-hierarchically and the abandonment of the order of symbols.

**Keywords:** Venom, Deleuze, desiring machines, psychoanalysis, Deleuzian desire



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### Volkan Yucel

#### Introduction

Many contemporary films feature mutants, cyborgs, monsters, and other alien life forms that do not conform to our traditional and fixed notions of identity and gender (Pisters, 2003). Dominated by superheroes, science fiction, and fantasy movies are leading genres representing this non-conformity. *Venom* (R. Fleischer, 2018) is one of the recent movies that depict the non-conformity (Figure 2). “Venom” is a fictional character published by Marvel-Comics, in association with Spiderman. The character is an alien Symbiote, a liquid-like form, surviving by bonding with a human. This dual life form takes on advanced powers and calls itself “Venom”. The symbiote is first introduced as an alien costume in *The Amazing Spiderman #252* (May 1984), and in *The Amazing Spiderman #300* (May 1988).<sup>1</sup> Symbiote continues to merge with other hosts. With its second host, it becomes Venom, one of Spiderman's archenemies.

Venom represents how uncontrollable power can distort the simplicity of the “good versus evil” narrative structure (Koulish, 2012: 5). In 2018, a *Venom* movie was shot made some Marvel Comics fans a little confused. The film features ‘the longtime Spiderman villain’ in a lead role, and yet Spiderman is nowhere to be seen. It seems that the creators opt to put Venom in an alternate universe (Brayson, 2018). Venom is actually a villain and “the new Marvel universe” looks like a place of villains.

## Deleuzean Desiring Machines

In Deleuze's thought, schizophrenia is the only way to get out of a system. In Deleuze's desire scheme, instead of pursuing a lost past, the man produces a creative desire. There isn't any hierarchical order in the Deleuzean approach. The way to demolish the system is to remove its social roles. The path to a decentralized society is first to become a decentralized person like Eddie-Venom. Deleuze's theories offer various interesting and useful ways of demystifying movies (Martin-Jones, 2009: 231):

Film scholars not persuaded by psychoanalytic or Marxist film theory, but equally dissatisfied with the scientism of cognitive film theory and analytic philosophy, have in recent years turned to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. ... Deleuze is not a film theorist in the commonly accepted sense, for he theorizes with rather than about the cinema. What seems to have drawn him to the cinema is the relation of bodies, matter, and perception, seen as a traditional philosophical problem, and in the twentieth century most vigorously explored by phenomenology (Buckland, 2009: 10)<sup>2</sup>.

Deleuze experienced a problem in the standard statement regarding the desire in psychoanalysis. The desire is always characterized by the trauma of abandoning the mother and the longing for a lost object, which is defined as an archetype. According to Deleuze, the desire is

not always characterized by a kind of a lack, but rather a positive action. Deleuze and Guattari borrow some ideas from Marx to develop an alternative 'desiring production' model in which it is a creative machine. In this way the desire becomes an autonomous power:

There are no desiring-machines that exist outside the social machines that they form on a large scale; and no social machines without the desiring machines that inhabit them on a small scale (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 340).

Deleuze and Guattari oppose Freud's definition of the unconscious. They favor a productive desiring factory model. The desire is actually a productive force and its nature is machinic. It is not based on a “real” lack. The desiring-machines are always producing a flow to one another in a universe where they are all connected to each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Desiring-production is an allocation of Nietzsche’s “Power of Will”. It is a tasteful appropriation of what exists outside of itself. The basic process of all life is ‘forgetting’ in Nietzsche and “the body without organs” in Deleuze. Both ideas, the Will to Power and desiring-production, attempt to realize the ideal of a subject.

The free association of the desire production in Freud has been made to obey the requirements of a single representation by closing it down to a single meaningful dilemma, rather than opening it to polygamous connections. This is the idealistic turning point of Oedipus for Deleuze and Guattari. They prefer free associations during schizophrenic processes instead of the

representational approach (Say, 2017). Oedipus justifies the production of desire as if all the productive powers were spreading from itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). In this context, it is a structure that eliminates freedom and forms a representative system, which strengthens its place with idealism in the history, provides the suppression of the desire rather than the free existence of it. In this sense, schizoanalysis collects the subject from the outside. That Venom adhered to Eddie (T. Hardy) is a schizophrenic situation that comes from the outside but lives with him.

The hierarchy between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic (Lacan) actually suppress the desire. Desire in psychoanalysis, as Deleuze and Guattari indicate, is the desire to acquire the mother and kill the father. The desire is suppressed by acting on this view. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious in schizoanalysis itself does not make any sense. It is the manufacturer, not a statement or representation. The unconscious is neither personal nor structural, so it chooses neither to envision nor to depict something. It is just a machinist and turns the wheels. In this regard, the unconscious has problems of use, not a problem of meaning.

### Costume as Character

Some superhero characters are used to do politics. Superman symbolizes the power of US and wears a costume like the national flag. Captain America or Spiderman also wear in the same fashion. Batman has a more human character than other superheroes, which makes the audience

feel closer to the story. And Gotham City is an example of the early American city, a messed-up Western town.

For Deleuze, fabric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body it covers. In every instance, folds of clothing acquire autonomy and fullness that are not simply decorative effects (Deleuze, 1993: 122). Heroes costumes are just not decoration but are the source of their powers. The uniform of superheroes is capable of shape-shifting and providing them with supernatural strength:

The costume is, in fact, autonomous: a semi-sentient being with a will of its own. Spawn had become aware that his costume was not merely clothing, but a living symbiote with a life of its own. He was able to control it to an extent, but it often acted without his will (Solomon, 2012).

The costume-power relationship is more meaningful in *Venom* from a Deleuzian perspective. The costume of *Venom* has an inhuman power and a personality. *Venom* is a poignant example of the autonomy of “the fold” in the comic world of McFarlane, a schizophrenic identity. It is an archenemy of Spiderman and a costume character with its unique personality. It is a parasite from another planet that cannot live on its own. It seeks out hosts to combine, retrieve and enhance properties. In the *Venom* movie, there isn’t Spiderman. The creators put *Venom* on another man, trying to be an independent antihero.

Venom outfit literally encompasses Eddie, yet creates an interiority for itself. Venom is outside of the host, an outer soul that Eddie's inner soul must fight to resist. Eddie resists to assert himself and free himself from the parasite. Yet they desire each other. There are many folds or monads to consider: Spiderman, Venom, Spiderman-Venom, Venom-Spider-Costume, Eddie-Venom, Eddie-Venom-Costume. This obsession with the living costume is maybe expressing a monadology. Individuals are pleated souls expressed in their own world. The story of Venom folds all of this into another, an alien from other planets or other dimensions:

Costumes with their own individuated interiority that they then enfold around our protagonists. The heroes draw their power by being selected and enwrapped in this way, by becoming enfolded into a second higher world. But where have we seen this before? Aren't nearly all superheroes already pleated in this way? Spiderman is actually Peter Parker, Superman is Clark Kent. Perhaps the most common trope in the comic book universe is that the hero is the alternate identity – the caped avenger and the mild-mannered regular guy – the superhero already stands in for this pleat in the individual (Huver, 2014).

The Venom story is simply repeating it. This is a kind of repetition of the order, suggesting that the monadological folding is repeated to infinity. Eddie gets a super soul and forms a schizophrenic aesthetics that inner and outer side are united like desiring machines. Eddie-Venom,

double characters, do not feel a failure. Both resemble the Deleuze machine. When Eddie Brock acquires the powers of the symbiote, he has to release his alter-ego, Venom, to save his whole life. There is a double identity, a schizo-esthetical one, in the same body.

### The Machinic Symbiote

Eddie is a complex Marvel character and the mansion of the alien symbiotic. He is a journalist and works at the Life Foundation. His opponent is Carlton Drake (R. Ahmed). To this end, his girlfriend Anne (M. Williams) breaks down and his career worsens. As Eddie investigates an experiment, Venom merges with his body. Eddie has great powers and the ability to do what they want. Venom is dark, unpredictable and full of anger. Eddie tries to control these dangerous abilities.

There are a dual body and a machinic union. Eddie and Venom integrate to find what they are looking for and explore “where Venom begins and where Eddie ends”. The desire is actually a productive force and its nature is machinic. Spiderman is like Venom’s mother, but there is no Spiderman in the movie. In this story version, The Sony company doesn’t put an intrinsically worse character in the center of the plot. Scriptwriters eliminate Eddie’s marginality and turn him into an antihero.

In terms of ‘the machinic side’, Eddie Brock is a self-righteous, pretentious, rude and ignorant man. However, when he meets with Venom, the dual character is in a proper identity not

clear. Venom without Spiderman is just an action character. If the film used this animosity, Venom couldn't walk in the streets and help people. Instead of looking for an enemy in a rage, Venom uses his power in the face of injustice. Venom survives his psychoanalytic fury, a schizophrenic condition.

The character of Venom has dark intelligence, but he likes to show it with the severity of violence. Its appearance fits its character. It is like a machine that Deleuze describes. He has giant eyes, sharp teeth, and a long tongue. This machine combines with Eddie, who makes them a super-antihero. They come together in a two-person manner and show a common behavior.

According to psychoanalysis, the unconscious is full of suppressed feelings. However, Eddie-Venom character comes together like two Deleuzean machines that deserve each other. The dark side of the personality, as in the psychoanalytic desire, doesn't remain in the dark. But in this symbiote, the unconscious side is just like a body (Venom) and it has its own identity. Venom does not establish a hierarchy, pretending to be a symbolic entity. It fulfills the requests of Eddie directly.

In Deleuze and Guattari's approach, psychoanalysis has both explored the production of desire and chose to see it as a noisy unconscious activity. In Eddie-Venom character, however, the Venom side of the union is really noisy. Venom is a dark side of the power, which brings an

unconscious noisy to diegesis. Freud identifies Oedipus as a criterion by soldering sexuality and family complex. However, the psychological discrepancy in *Venom* arises not from the family background, but from an external adherent entity. This stems from the Deleuzean combination of two machines that desire and need each other.

Eddie is a stiff and high-ego character. The alien symbiote *Venom* is incredibly dangerous. The dual character's behavior is unpredictable. *Venom* is fed by anger. Eddie wants to take care of poor people, but he is in a hurry. Eddie pulls *Venom* on the good side. These two opposite sides are both optimistic and chilling. Because the schizophrenic duality has no common target. It looks that their aims are to touch each other.

## Conclusion

We can see the Marvel Cinema Universe as posthumanist on the level of production and on the level of form. *Venom* seems to be a cult classic. The director (R. Fleischer) says "... the aesthetic and the character himself all combine to make something that just feels different ... I got really lucky because *Venom* is, I think truly one of the coolest of the characters, and it's the opportunity to launch a whole new world as opposed to just being plugged into a pre-existing one" (Fleischer, 2018).

The symbiotes are extremely intelligent life forms. And new characters for movies. They can endure different temperatures and are fully adaptable. When the symbiotes capture a host, they circulate in the skin layers to effectively penetrate the central nervous system. They spread to the host's spinal cord and the main nerve nodes and then they sneak back under the skin to form a shell around the human body. Each symbiote can only be combined with certain people just like the compatibility conditions in organ transplants. One must desire and find the correct match.

Eddie-Venom symbiote is a nasty antihero. There is an ongoing fight of the dual protagonist. If they are separated, they cannot survive. If they are united, their mutual aim is achieved and their own faults are eliminated. This experimental character is a new universe for Marvel identities, schizophrenic ones. The symbiote gives a lot of virtual information about a psychological case. For Eddie-Venom character, there isn't a fixed unconscious. They don't symbolize anything. They need each other to realize themselves. And their machinic joint produces a creative desire.

The dual protagonist has several different iterations. The nature of both identities' desire is machinic and fixed in each other by merging together. They constitute a supreme creature and a schizo-esthetical identity. In this way, we appreciate the badness of antihero. If Deleuze had lived long enough, *Venom* would be his favorite movie. Let "bad" characters win sometimes.

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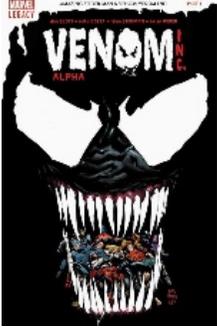
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## FIGURE LIST



*Figure 1 Venom Inc Alpha 1<sup>3</sup>*



*Figure 2 Spiderman Villain<sup>4</sup>*



*Figure 3 Venom<sup>5</sup>*

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Venom (Marvel Comics character), Wikizeroo,

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze's cinematic concept of desire has long been subject of film theory with a multiplicity of unique applications since its first inception in the early 1980s till today; see Studlar (1985), O'Connor (2005), Viegas (2014) and Yücel (2016) [Editor's Note].

<sup>3</sup> "Venom Inc Alpha 1", [http://sm.ign.com/t/ign\\_zscreenshot/v/venom-inc-/venom-inc-alpha-1-cover-by-ryan-stegman\\_fjk3.640.jpg](http://sm.ign.com/t/ign_zscreenshot/v/venom-inc-/venom-inc-alpha-1-cover-by-ryan-stegman_fjk3.640.jpg)

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