

MONSTROUS ONTOLOGIES

POLITICS ETHICS
MATERIALITY

Edited by

Caterina Nirta

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and

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Series in Philosophy



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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| List of Figures | vii |
| Acknowledgements | ix |
| Contributors | xi |
| Introduction | xv |
| Caterina Nirta <i>University of Roehampton, UK</i> | |
| Andrea Pavoni <i>University Institute of Lisbon, Portugal</i> | |
| Chapter 1 | |
| Monster-Measures and Monstrous Values. A Short Reflection on the Foundations of Individual-Environmental Theory | 1 |
| Andrea Mubi Brighenti <i>University of Trento, Italy</i> | |
| Chapter 2 | |
| Learning to Live and Die in the Cthulhucene | 15 |
| Paul Reid-Bowen <i>Bath Spa University, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 3 | |
| Relating (To) Monstrosity and Hybridity: Translation and Interconnectedness in the Age of Hyperobjects | 31 |
| Lucile Desblache <i>University of Roehampton, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 4 | |
| Uranium as Monster in Swakopmund | 45 |
| Jack Boulton <i>KU Leuven's IARA, Belgium</i> | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 5 Monster as a Tool for Thinking. Learning from Spatial Practices in Abnormal Territories | 61 |
| Ramón Córdova González <i>TU-Delft, Netherlands</i> | |
| Signe Pørkone <i>TU-Delft, Netherlands</i> | |
| Chapter 6 Revisiting Deleuze's Bestiary: What Difference Do Monsters Make? | 77 |
| Carl Olsson <i>Newcastle University, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 7 Do Revolutions Need Monsters? Ethnographic Fragments on Toxic Fish, Monstrosity and Social Justice | 95 |
| Panos Kompatsiaris <i>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia</i> | |
| Chapter 8 Beyond Scientific Racism: Monstrous Ontologies and Hostile Environments | 111 |
| Sweta Rajan-Rankin <i>University of Kent, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 9 The Slender Man's Ontology: Playing with Reality and Belief Online | 129 |
| Vivian Asimos <i>Durham University, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 10 Collective Voices and the Materialisation of Ideas: The Monster as Methods | 143 |
| The Monster Network | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 11 Fleeing from Categories: Monstrous Artefacts and Style in Archaeology | 169 |
| Emanuele Prezioso <i>University of Oxford, UK</i> | |
| Chapter 12 The Unbearable Monstrosity of Being. On the Narrative Provincialization of Ontologies | 193 |
| Riccardo Baldissoni <i>University of Westminster, UK</i> | |
| Index | 219 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 5.1: Unmediated territorial rhythms. | 63 |
| Figure 5.2: Becoming monstrous – coding material flows. | 67 |
| Figure 5.3: An immanent spatial structure in relation to other territorial actors. | 72 |
| Figure 7.1.: Alexander Apsit, 1918. <i>To Our Deceived Brothers</i> . | 98 |
| Figure 11.1: Bronze girdle-hook from Weisskirchen (left) and Chinese sword-hilt (after Jacobsthal 1942, Pl. 5a,b). | 171 |
| Figure 11.2: Selection of Group III sword scabbards of the Hunsbury Type (Piggott 1950, Fig. 3). | 172 |
| Figure 11.3 : Drawing of the Wandsworth shield boss (Courtesy of the British Museum). | 177 |
| Figure 11.4: Table of the Maori meeting houses painting traditions by Neich (after Gell 1998). | 186 |
| Figure 11.5: Stylistic relationships of Central European fibulae (after Megaw 2012, Fig. 3). | 187 |

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Introduction

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Whether explicitly or implicitly, monsters have always inhabited collective imagination. A rich cosmology of godly and demonical entities populated ancient mythologies, animistic cults, and religions. A monstrous bestiary of narrations and representations has proliferated in literary, political and popular culture, surreptitiously orienting efforts to define man, culture, law, society, and community. Biological taxonomies, legal discourses and moral panics have framed the presence of the monster in popular culture. Especially in the last decades, a vast imaginary of zombies, vampires, aliens, superheroes, ghosts, cyborgs and other creatures have appeared in a host of films, tv shows, sci-fi novels, crowding an imaginary wherein the self is against the other, the normal against the abnormal, the inside against the outside.

Global warming and the beginning of a new geological era have brought about an uncanny sense of fragility. With this, a novel awareness that the end of our existence, the end of *our* world, is no longer an unlikely scenario but a realistic possibility. It is not surprising, then, that in the bleak landscape of the Anthropocene, monsters proliferate (Tsing et al. 2017; Giuliani 2020). They are the “harbinger of category crisis,” writes Jeffrey Cohen (1996:6): they embody the crisis of categorisation, while also offering a disturbingly convenient social and political tool to stigmatise and demonise the presence of the other – to *monsterise*, that is. At the same time, the advance and at times dystopian premises of contemporary science and technology provide fertile ground for more or less fantastic speculations around all kind of monstrous futures.

By definition un-definable and unstable, monsters have a liminal quality that seemingly troubles the fundamental principles of Western thought. They sit between visible and thinkable, reality and imagination, norm and its deviation: their hybrid quality denies the principle of non-contradiction; their multiple

¹ Andrea Pavoni's research is funded by FCT/MCTES under CEEC Individual contract [CEEINST/00066/2018/CP1496/CT0001].

constitution falsifies that of identity. Reason, language, law, science and other conceptual systems are engaged in the generation of monsters to utilise as dialectical counterparts to their boundary-producing mechanisms. To do so, however, they must operate in complicity with the monstrous, and this is not an easy task: monsters are indomitable, and ambiguous. They may provoke feelings of disgust and repulsion and yet agglomerate desire around an unknown or unfathomable alterity. They create curiosity towards their embodied transgression.

While ethical and cultural investigations into what constitutes the monstrous have long existed, the *invention* of the concept of normality in the 19th century (see Foucault 2004; Cryle and Stephens 2017) and the centrality that notions of ‘difference,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘marginality,’ ‘transgression’ etc. gained in the 20th century, especially in post-structuralist and post-modern thought, have gradually generated a new interest in monstrosity. Michel Foucault’s analysis traces back at least three moments in history where different monstrous figures became part of a collective imaginary capturing a key societal and cultural shift in the moral of their time. These are the bestial human in the Middle Age, the conjoined twins in the Renaissance and the hermaphrodite in the Classical Age. It is interesting to notice the level of visibility and disclosure of monstrosity in these figures: From “both man and beast,” to the “one who is two and two who are one” (2004[1975]:66), both distinctively physical representations of monstrosity (the monstrosity of the body), we get to a point where what was once physical deformation becomes in the modern era the symptom of moral deviance. In the split between morphological deformation and interior abnormality, the shift from body to soul, is the beginning of a regime of normalisation which from the 13th century has gradually produced the idea of monstrosity as transgression and deviance we have today, the *abnormal*. Foucault’s mentor, and inspiration, Georges Canguilhem (1966), explained that the normal is just an attenuated form of – secondary to – the pathological, a sort of line of consistency that for a series of reasons has emerged out of the pathological by means of attenuating the latter’s multiplicity into a series, a repetition, a routine. The norm always comes second, out of a process of reduction, just like the one is only a congelation of the multiple. “Faced with a monster,” writes Jacques Derrida, “one may become aware of what the norm is when this norm has a history” (1995:386). But this also means that, as Canguilhem hinted, the sleep of reason does not produce monsters, as Francisco Goya famously painted: it *liberates* them (1962:35).

The consequences have not been fully grasped by contemporary critical thought, which has done much to frame abnormality as a reflection of social anxieties. This is evident in the recent fascination with the monstrous cultivated by a certain branch of cultural studies (for some useful anthologies, see Cohen 1996; Picart and Browning 2012; Compagna and Steinhart 2020),

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Collective Voices and the Materialisation of Ideas: The Monster as Methods

The Monster Network



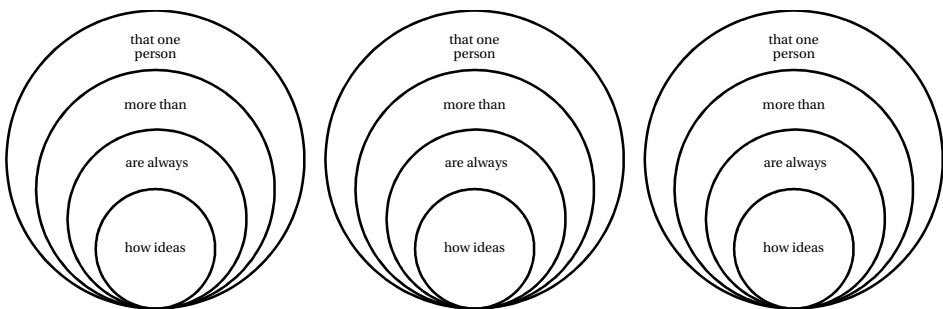
Keywords: Monstrosity, Monster Network, Speculative Fiction, Collectivities, Collaborative practices, Storytelling, Blood, Kinship, Method, Methodology, Ethics, Feminist theory, Queer theory, Postcolonialism, Poetry, Science Fiction

1. The monster is methods

Where do ideas come from? How are certain ideas and stories reproduced and maintained, whereas others end up marginalised, untold or unheard? And how can the monster lend itself as a thinking tool for grappling with unruly origins, entangled thinking and haunting concepts? In this chapter we explore the monster as methods, that is, as a means for rethinking and reimagining how the tools we use to know and communicate the world also actively shape it. We are of course not the first to suggest that methods make worlds (Haraway 1997; Smith 1999; Law 2004; Braidotti 2019; TallBear 2019), but by thinking the performativity of methods through the figure of the monster, we hope to practise a creative as well as critical methodological tool that incorporates the boundary-crossing and disruptive characteristics of the monster as well as its relationship with

marginalised knowledges. We are inspired by feminist, queer and decolonial politics of knowledge production, where questions of power, voice and visibility are at the foreground (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Spivak 1988; Crenshaw 1991; Harding 1991; Mohanty 1984; Haraway 1988; hooks 1989; Muñoz 1999; Ahmed 2004, 2010 & 2017; Butler 2004a & b; Puar 2007). Marginalised voices and bodies are often relegated to the realm of the monstrous, in the sense that they are deemed untruthful, ‘abnormal’ or unreliable, and therefore these legacies are important to our thinking about the monster and methods. By engaging with and questioning conventions of and practices for knowledge production, our monster methods engage with what it means to write, produce and think collectively while acknowledging multiplicity and difference.

This is not the first time we have explored the collective practices involved in knowledge creation and academic labour through the figure of the monster. In our editors’ introduction to the *Somatechnics* journal special issue “Promises of Monsters” (Hellstrand, Henriksen, Koistinen, McCormack and Orning 2018: 143), we suggested a Frankenstein text, which was to “make visible the patchworks and the sutures between our thinking, experiences, passions and embodied knowledges. In practice, we want[ed] to show that academic productions are labour, and in so doing we aim[ed] to use our disparate and converging voices to capture this labour, showing how ideas may start with one person but are always more than that person.” We echo this here as we attempt to show how ideas may start with one person but are always more than that person. In addition, we bring this disruption to our use of language, using potentially non-flowing phrasing such as ‘monster as methods’ to draw attention to the monster’s always already more than one state and to the potential and important failure of language to catch this multiplicity in the one. The figures we employ throughout the chapter are other ways of showing such disruption. As part of our monster methods, they break up the text by constituting visual representations of multiplicity, repetition, interruption or making-apparent; they embody the excess of the monster in the text.



Since the monster methods we suggest use collective, multiple voices in order to perform and investigate difference and multiplicity, they are an experiment in engaging with and challenging academic conventions on several levels: in how we do not work towards a homogenous text by erasing our different ways of writing, and in that we incorporate both poetry and academic writing; in the formatting of the text itself (we use figures of varying shapes and textual repetitions); and in our discussion of how to represent individual and collective efforts in ways that are intelligible in our current academic system. We undertake such an endeavour not simply for pleasure, although pleasure is important to any monstrous experience/experiment, but also to address ongoing injustices that result in certain histories, stories and ideas disappearing, or that refuse to *see* the very experiences that exist. That is, we explore ways of writing that engage the monster not only in its supposed ontological existence, but to experiment with its elusive, evasive and interrogative forms. The text is therefore an ethico-political experiment in the formation of worlds through poetic-academic, collective writing, as well as an attempt to grapple with the ethical risks involved in getting close to monsters (Shildrick 2002; McCormack 2014).

Multiplicity emerges here through the use of what might be called ‘interruptions’ – such as figures, text boxes, repetition, and poetry. Through interruptions “the reader (perhaps confused, perhaps delighted) becomes a stakeholder in their meaning” (Bonnaffons 2016:n.p.). Emphasising the materiality of the page by disrupting the reading experience, we also remind the reader of the “the necessary separations between nodes of a network, or as intervals between distinct voices that together form a chord” (Bonnaffons 2016). Our interruptions aim to draw attention to the multiplicity of meanings and the collaborative work behind the monstrous attempt of knowledge production that is this text, as well as the reader’s role in the production of such knowledge through analyses, guess-work and (dis)agreements. Moreover, interruptions call for a slower pace of research, as they invite the reader to pause and think with them. It is this slowness that is also an interruption of the normalising impulse to rush through a text to quickly ‘glean its meaning’ in our ever-demanding, time-consuming world. Monster methods may be one way of slowing down, contemplating ideas, digesting across time and sitting with that which does not flow as expected.

As a textual creature, our experimentation and the meanings it conveys are bound by the textual form and the conventions of academic writing. We therefore present our methods through several sections, which engage with and demonstrate our thinking. We have organised the sections in a certain

manifesto-like fashion¹ in order to underscore how entangled the idea of the monster is with ontological questions of being and doing. We link monster methods to storytelling, worldings, alternative worlds and (untraditional) kinships. Each section explores a dimension of the monster, whilst the whole points to how it is impossible to pin monstrosity to a single thing, existence or action. As such, we do not define a monstrous ontology (which would be impossible), but explore how the multiplicity inherent in the monstrous may open up academic writing to the contradictions, the divergences, as well as the overlaps, in collective writing, being and doing.

This is one of our challenges: not only writing the text collectively – which is challenging in its own ways as we are each accustomed to our own voice and to our own individual ways of writing (although even here some of us disagree as some of us are not so familiar with our individual ways of writing and still find one's 'own voice' a strange concept, as if 'I' am coherent or cohesive) – but also figuring out how to reconcile our monster methods of multiplicity and difference with existing academic demands to attribute credit in a way that does justice to the kind of work we are attempting to do. Academic conventions require a listing of all authors in the bibliographical entry of the text, and our field determines how our names are weighted, and, in turn, made visible as a contributor and part of the text. Yet what happens to this name ordering as an expression of an academic system that is built on hierarchy, grounded in the assumption of unequal contributions both in terms of amount and content, when we write as a collective that seeks to question the process of how worlds materialise? What ways are there to disrupt this tradition, to acknowledge other (monstrous) forms of collaboration, which subvert conventions of how we think of the materialisation and working through of ideas as collectives, and which also make the results legible to a wider academic community? All of us are embroiled in the general concerns of making a life in academia, which at this point in history involves being measured according to our 'production' of knowledge in textual form, measured in the number of publications. Even as we seek to make inroads into academic conventions by monsterising methods and the conception of ideas, our work is dependent on the very structures that we question.

Each of us has worked on the text in varying ways with differing demands. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has brought new challenges where those of us with acute and chronic illnesses, with caring responsibilities and with uncertain futures would like a system that acknowledges that we all worked on this text equally according to our situations. Perhaps more importantly, even if some of us worked on this text slightly less than others we agree that this should

¹ This can also be read as following on from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" (1996) and Donna Haraway's "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" (1992).

not affect our job security, access to longer-term employment or the precarity of our futures. Monster methods is an attempt to question this forcing of collectivities into individuals who are supposedly at odds with each other in a late-capitalist model. If we settle with 'The Monster Network' as author, does this mean our institutions will not acknowledge our individual work and is this something that should concern us? How to assess one's priorities in knowledge production is entangled not only with one's institutional demands, which includes economic viability, but also one's ambitions, one's politics, one's sense of being entangled with others, one's health and so much more. We acknowledge that what is at stake for each of us in this question depends on all of these circumstances, which makes us dependent on academia's rules in different ways. Here, we commit to The Monster Network as a collective that is disparate and who wants to draw attention to the collective production of knowledge as a feminist, queer and decolonial project. We fail in this attempt because while we list ourselves as The Monster Network in order to avoid hierarchy, we also give into the fact that as authors, we have no option but to list our names. Here, we visually represent our names in a way that refuses to follow the logic of academic convention, but nevertheless highlights creative expressions of collaboration. We see this failure as a monstrous disruption in that we reject the very logic, and attempt to reach out to change this practice.

Our attempt at developing – and practising – monster methods requires that we challenge the way we write by inviting the unpredictable, the out-of-place and the potentially strange. As Sara Ahmed (2017:13) writes: "Not eliminating the effort of labour from academic work becomes an aim, because we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere." Here, we are trying to unlearn or undo some of this tidying, as well as showing that we are always already untidy. Drawing on the legacy of feminist critiques of science and knowledge production, we deploy our monster methods as a catalyst for acknowledging partial perspectives rather than all-encompassing and governing ideas and truths (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Mohanty 1984; Haraway 1988; Spivak 1988; hooks 1989; Harding 1991; Braidotti 2019). These situated knowledges are about lived realities and locations, and the challenge of allowing diverse voices and perspectives to chime in. In this chapter, there is something about the monster in our very doing and writing: the practice of writing as an I that is also a We. It is about "the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere" (Haraway 1988:590). In keeping with monster methods, we open this textual and collaborative space to discussing the tensions in this process and bringing out its implications for knowledge production. In this sense, our 'monster as methods' refers not only to the form or contents of this chapter, but to the

practice of collaborative writing as monstrous knowledge production – as our practice of worlding.

2. The monster is storytelling

Q: So what are we doing?

A: In order to bring out our distinct voices as well as their convergences, we address the materialisation of ideas through storytelling.

Q: But what kind of stories?

A: Some of the stories we tell here are seeds of ideas planted and relations formed with ways of thinking that set us on different paths that intersect and intertwine tentacularly in this Monster Network. We thus do not lay claim to one universal origin story, but take seriously the positionality of knowledge-formation.

To further illustrate this, let us answer the above questions with a poem:

there is no universal
in writings about bodies
histories written by women
and others

but who are the bodiless
that stole my language
with all its spare parts
before birth before
the entanglement

of time

listen

the cries of the snow-sky
are jackdaw-shaped

Q: But what about Proven Knowledge and Definitive Truth?

A: Origin stories matter here not as fixed trajectories of Proven Knowledge and Definitive Truth but rather as points of interruption or monstrous reminders of the impossibility of establishing a set-in-stone beginning of any idea, since they are always multiple, relational and in formation.

Storytelling, as Haraway (1989) tells us, is fundamental to how knowledge, norms, imaginaries and beliefs are produced and (re)inscribed. In turn, exploring storytelling practices is a way of making worlding practices visible, and showing how they are instrumental for re-thinking or re-imagining the world otherwise. Worlding, in short, describes processes for making sense of, or producing and accepting knowledge about, the world we live in and are surrounded by. In this sense, worlding is a monstrous practice precisely because it is about how ideas materialise, whose stories are heard and how other stories may be questioned. Haraway (2016) makes use of the notion of worlding in connection with her well-established concept of 'situated knowledges' (1988): our ways of relating to the world depend on our world-view, state-of-mind and/or experience, and knowledge production about the world is always already located and locatable in histories, culture, bodies, ethics, ideologies and, of course, our relations.

Stories, then, are not innocent: certain stories and imaginaries haunt us or intrude on our thinking as unpredictable agents. Some stories become viral with the help of algorithms, spreading political ideologies behind them. Some stories, and some politics and knowledges, remain silenced. Whether your story is believed, acted upon, or even accepted as a valid story depends on your particular embodiment and positionality in terms of sexuality, dis/ability, race, class, health, gender, and other configurations of selves in the world. But, as we have shown in the introduction, it also matters how stories are written, and by whom. As one of us once put it (note the use of language here: we know one of us said it, maybe it was 'my' thought, but the origin remains unclear and it has become a collective or shared idea, something we want to explore in our work together): the very idea that how we write, not only what we write about, is a feminist subject. For us, "the monster highlights the supposed divisions between the acceptable and conventional and their assumed opposites, drawing attention to the production of knowledge, including how knowledge comes to be embodied" (Hellstrand, Henriksen, Koistinen, McCormack and Orning 2018:143). We purposely quote ourselves to acknowledge the labour that has gone into our thinking. Yet, although the reference is orderly and alphabetically structured, we do not assign this to any individual, not to erase the origins of the ideas, but instead to show how our ideas have evolved in dialogue with each other. To be attentive to how knowledge – stories-as-knowledge – emerges is to render visible the tracks of whose knowledge comes to be read as valid, and to disrupt the assumption that ideas emerge from one individually isolated genius or from a neo-liberal economy of pulling one's own weight. We approach the monster as a potential to see, hear and feel how storytelling comes into being in entangled ways, and thereby how knowledge is produced. Monster methods is the interruption in the creation of ideas, as well as in the reading of supposedly coherent and tidy/tidied narratives. Importantly, this interruption is not a given, just as the outcome is not already defined or certain,

writing of the text, while simultaneously highlighting how our individual voices and contributions may be obscured. As such, monster methods is an example of how such haunting voices sometimes make their presence known through their silence, through the absence of the speaker as we are indeed at the very least five (as we are indeed at the very least five). Furthermore, we do not become a collective in isolation; we become a collective writing group through separate and sometimes intertwined origins. All of us are indebted to feminist research, particularly queer feminists and feminists of colour, and especially feminists who remain open to changing definitions of feminism as we build solidarity and communities across genders, sexualities, ethnicities and abilities. We are particularly indebted to Donna Haraway, Sara Ahmed, Margrit Shildrick, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Sami Schalk. As much as we want to write an exhaustive list, we acknowledge that this is not possible and yet we aim to cite as many of our origins as possible. As Ahmed (2017) explains, citations are themselves the production of history, of acknowledging the work done for us so we can think, and so we acknowledge how we remember. The monster here is therefore not only the very constitutive bond that binds us together, but also the weaving through a text of what might be considered out of place (or in the wrong place) and of showing that we produce this work because others have helped us think, create and practise, as well as the fact that our bodies permit this process. Indeed, bodies are endless interruptions, disrupting not only our lives and our writing, but also how we think, where our focus is and may be, and what we are able to do. For many, Covid-19 will bring embodiment to the fore, particularly the body as interruption, as well as how we exist through relationality, but for many of us, Covid-19 is a reminder of how our bodies are inseparable from how we think and do in the world. Storytelling is what we are doing: we are suggesting monsters may be a method, a reflection on our citation practices and indebtedness to these cited scholars, as well as a collective endeavour to tell this story differently.

3. The monster as poem (an interruption)

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.

Far safer, of a midnight meeting
External ghost,
Than an interior confronting
That whiter host.

[...]

Ourself, behind ourself concealed,
 Should startle most;
 Assassin, hid in our apartment,
 Be horror's least.
 [...]

(Emily Dickinson, "Ghosts," 1896)

The monster comes out in interruption and incoherence – when this joining of perspectives does not always add up. Our lives are filled with interruptions, in good, bad and unidentifiable ways. Interruptions by loved-ones, colleagues, companion species, the technological glitches the time of writing, by interruptions are Some interruptions must against, yet some must be fought for. In interruptions in thinking would never have interruption.

Poetry is a literary genre thrive. One could argue interruption from our poetry, specifically, is an interruption between perception and representation. Poetic language defamiliarises our mundane and automatic perceptions and interpretations of the world (Shklovsky 1917; de Lauretis 1980). By constantly creating novel ways to express and describe the world and experiences of it, poetry uses language to make sense of the world, yet also challenges the limits of human perception and the dominance of language as a tool for the creation of coherent stories. For Audre Lorde, "it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt" (2007:36). In this sense, writing poetry is a monster method, attempting to find (and create) words for embodied knowledges. We see poetry as one mode of interrupting and refocusing knowledge production that highlights how the monster may operate to materialise ideas, and to ensure that materialisation is not simply a hegemonic and dominant undertaking. Rather, the monster as poem offers a chance – and a risk – for the voice of the unknown, the untidy, the nameless to disagree, intrude and burst the form from within in order to spark new forms, new borders and boundaries, and new worldings. In this sense, our collective chapter resembles a collage or a found poem, where material from elsewhere and ourselves, individually and

Academic careers are interrupted time and again by the precarity of work-life, and our very lives can be interrupted with illness and loss, the breaking down of bodily boundaries, the leakiness of surfaces.

weather, the law, and, as is most obvious at viruses. Not all liberating. Covid-19 be fought interruptions academic life, may lead to ideas that surfaced without the where interruptions that art is always an everyday lives, and

collectively, is brought together to try to make sense of what it means to be embodied in a shared and living space. We take form as monster methods, and use poetic interruptions as a means to combine artistic and academic practices of knowledge production.

In the poem “Sci-Fi,” Tracy K. Smith (2011:7) illustrates how poetry is a practice of worlding:

There will be no edges, but curves.
Clean lines pointing only forward.

History, with its hard spine & dog-eared
Corners, will be replaced with nuance,

Just like the dinosaurs gave way
To mounds and mounds of ice.
[...]

These verses speak of monstrous knowledge production and storytelling that re-imagines both the past and the future. For Ahmed (2017:1), being a queer feminist of colour is “coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become solid as walls.” In the future imagined by the poem, edges are replaced with curves, and history’s ‘hard spine’ with nuance, which reminds us that in order to imagine other futures we need to also pay attention to the past, and to ghosts and other haunting knowledges, as also Dickinson reminds us. The practice of imagining differently can thus be said to bind together the monster, poetry, feminist politics and speculation as forms of worlding. In so doing, it does not dismiss that these walls block other histories from being present, but rather explores how we restructure what we see and disrupt the very form to allow other knowledges to emerge.

In the poem “Declaration,” Jacob Polley (2003:5) writes:

and as borders were closed and streets were blocked
our black kettles sang on our blue gas hobs
and if names were listed and names ticked off
there was no cause for alarm, no hiding in lofts;
couples strolled, waiters snapped white tablecloths
and neither cries for help nor the pistol shots
lifted the starlings from our rooftops

This poem makes visible how very different realities exist at the same time, how the conditions for living in a world can make one see and experience the world very differently. This poem is one I, or this we (and yet not me), have returned to for over a decade, but never addressed in an academic text. Somehow, the idea of how ideas materialise instantly made me/us/not me

think of this poem: a lot of my/our thinking comes from here but it has never been acknowledged as part of that genealogy, even though it is very much about worlding. The contrasting worlds are described as a threat of uncertainty, violence and death in the poem, and it speaks to how easy it is to forget about those things as something that somehow always is placed 'elsewhere' and happening to 'someone else.' An interruption – but one that one tries not to notice. A haunting, without specific boundaries, or walls, this resonates with what Alyson Cole (2016) calls blurred boundaries between those who are injurable and those already injured – a division that illustrates how questions of vulnerability – of feeling vulnerable and being considered vulnerable – also are questions of monsters, worlding, of vantage point, justice, power structures and situated knowledges. It also shows that when we speak, we do not share the same origin stories and therefore we speak as a changing I and we and not me to acknowledge our shared stories and that our lives are very different. We cannot cohere into one, and monstrous methods should allow these overlaps and divergences to be visible, not as divisions, but as the labour of collectivities.

However, Polley's poem does not necessarily bring out the potential hope or change of worlding otherwise, but rather brings to the fore how, in Gayatri Spivak's (1988) words, storying the world also maintains structures of domination and oppression. For Spivak (1985; 1999), questions of worlding are interconnected with storytelling about histories and colonial legacies in a way that affects geopolitics and international relations. Just the idea that we have a First World and a Third World, for example, and that 'everybody' immediately 'knows' what these categories entail, is for Spivak an example of how knowledge and identification are caught in global market forces, racism, west-east dichotomies and class relations as forms of worlding. Worlding, then, is very much about storying the monster – as difference, as uncertainty, as deciding whose vulnerability matters. Poetry, perhaps particularly in its contemporary expressions, spread via online platforms like social media as well as open stage performances, can serve as a method for these vulnerabilities to be communicated and heard: a way of inviting the monster in, while knowing – as Dickinson does – that to some extent it is already inside. Indeed, it is the internal host that the narrator of Dickinson's poem fears the most. Etymologically, a host can be both the receiver of guests and a strange guest itself, which – as in the case of the monstrous *arrivant* – points to the impossibility of establishing the boundary between the arrived and the yet to arrive. The host and the guest take shape through their relation, and both invite and are invited (Shildrick 2002; Derrida 2011), undoing and redoing the subject's threshold, making it vulnerable in its openness, in the changing of form. Poetry (and art more broadly) may thus raise the monster, or the monster – both guest and host – may emerge through poetry, as it potentially disrupts the hegemony of representation and meaning-making over other experiences

of being in the world, and challenges us to see monstrous cracks in our everyday knowledge and perceptions. What is at stake for the monster as a poem are the very conditions for making meaning: it matters how we conceptualise the world, what boundaries we (attempt to) draw, and how we identify and bear witness to people, actions and the myriad of things in it.

4. The monster is speculation

We have argued that *storying* – and *worlding* – otherwise is a way of hosting and making host of the monster. As such, the monster is also speculation, in that it creates an unpredictable – and potentially risky – distance from the ordinary and the known. This distance or defamiliarisation does not just happen in poetic language, but also in thinking and worlding differently, as well as in the re-imagining of ‘otherness’ and what counts as culturally monstrous (Graham 2002). Feminist researchers have long been interested in the speculative as a resource for grappling with the (un)imaginable, be it monsters, realities or worlds (Braidotti 2011; Haraway 2011; Allan 2013; Koistinen 2015; Hellstrand 2016; Schalk 2018; Wälivaara 2018; Kortekallio 2020). Drawing on this legacy, we make use of Haraway’s (1989; 2016) attention to the speculative as a generator of possible change. Even though we mostly use SF here to refer to speculative fiction, for Haraway, and for us/me/not me, SF serves as an umbrella term that encompasses speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, string figures, speculative futures and speculative feminism.

In the speculative, monster as methods make worlds, and SF as a tool or method for monstrous knowledge production very concretely imagines and builds fictional worlds that resonate with, or challenge, so-called reality. From a feminist perspective, social change may come through experiments with kinship, power and justice as forms of SF. Here, SF is a medium that challenges how we view the contemporary world, what we may imagine as possible, as well as how we may approach the analysis of various dimensions of our collective life on a living planet, as the attention to climate change, AI, unknown viruses, racism and speciesism in contemporary speculative fiction demonstrates. Our starting point is that SF could be described as monster methods. We therefore delve into SF here as a monstrous diversion, at the same time a pleasurable undertaking and an ethico-political demand to seek justice through storytelling, through worlding.

While poetry and SF could be considered very different genres, the two overlap in their engagement with defamiliarisation or estrangement (de Lauretis 1980; Hellstrand 2015), often destabilising the borders between metaphorical and ‘concrete’ expressions. As Samuel R. Delany noted, SF stories destabilise the meanings of sentences that would be read differently in ‘mundane’/realist texts. He gives the sentence “Her world exploded” as an

example (1987:n.p.), where we might see the metaphorical tenacity of this in a realist text, but the literal possibility in an SF one, although even such distinctions do not hold. SF nevertheless calls for readers (or viewers or players) to accept a different kind of reality within the story and, by doing so, it often also invites them to question the way they perceive their lived reality. We suggest that SF has the potential to imagine monstrous worldings that bring to the fore the limits of our knowledge production, such as linguistic expression and, like in this experiment, poetic-academic article design. Like poetry, SF is a sort of interruption that, again, is at play – an interruption between the reader/viewer/player and their everyday perceptions of their world. Such uncertainty around language, around context, as well as the potentiality of other imaginings in SF, is central to how monstrous methods seek to grapple with the workings of knowledge and our worldings.

Although SF strives to imagine differently, oftentimes the productions of the genre bring forth the very limits of cultural imaginations, in essence invoking, perhaps, the very monsters they are trying to reimagine (Allan 2013). For scholarly engagements with SF, it is equally important to bring to the fore the potential of its genres to highlight the instability of knowledge production as well as critically analyse its tendency to reinforce norms (Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020). As Kortekallio's (2020) work demonstrates, it is not only SF as a mode of storytelling but also the ways of engaging with the speculative that open up ethical and political practices in and beyond fiction. As SF (re)imagines different worlds, bodies, societies and futures, from a monster perspective it is important to ask who or what inhabits these places and spaces? We need to ask, what does it mean to imagine other worlds, and who or what gets to imagine these? What kinds of bodies are imagined as livable and prospering in our futures? Who does the famous remark by Spock in Star Trek, 'Live long and prosper,' really refer to?

In what follows, we will highlight how SF plays with the boundaries of imaginations (Yuval-Davis and Stoeltzer 2002). Following on from SF in a feminist tradition, we want to explore how SF invites the monster as speculation. For example, Nnedi Okorafor calls for "mov[ing] the default' away from 'whiteness as the center" in SF (Twitter, 5 Feb 2020) – changing the point around which the world revolves, including its acceptable values, knowledges and faiths, bodies and practices. This speculative estrangement or shifting of established perspectives propels a rethinking about what kinds of ethical relations are at stake (Henriksen 2016; Hellstrand 2017) not just between human beings, but also in relation to humans' often monsterised others, such as animals, technology, ghosts, viruses and the planet. Here, the monster as speculation points to the importance of positionality and embodied location, as well as – like the monstrous host/ghost of poetry – the impossibility of

drawing any certain lines between self and other, human and monster, host and guest (Orning 2012).

Nalo Hopkinson writes,

Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and as I've said elsewhere, for many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of colour writing science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one's colonization. I knew I'd have to fight this battle at some point in my career [...] (2004:7-8).

Hopkinson, along with many other writers of colour, including Nisi Shawl, NK Jemisin, Tananarive Due and Jewelle Gomez, shows the racism of SF where colonisation is romanticised as a neutral encounter and where white people imagine discovering other so-called unoccupied worlds. By encouraging us to consider the position of the writer and the reader, Hopkinson draws attention

to how imagining otherwise can never be neutral. This is not simply because SF has often been colonial, white and restricted to cis-gendered men, although this is certainly how it

“All the writer's noise is finally an attempt to shape a silence in which something can go on.” (Delany 1987: n.p.)

may look in the SF canon where the monstrous and alien Other is so readily racialised, sexualised, and made non-normative in various ways (Sardar & Cubitt 2002; Melzer 2006; Allan 2013; Hellstrand 2015; Koistinen 2015). On the contrary, as we hear in the podcast “Imagine a Better Future,” indigenous science fiction has been imagining other worlds since at least as long as SF itself has existed. Indeed, the tropes of SF are often the reality of many colonised peoples' lives. Similarly, as many scholars have noted, SF has been used to point out how structural inequalities serve as a specific kind of worlding (Creed 2000; Hollinger 2000 & 2003; Merrick 2003; Nama 2008; Allan 2013; Wälivaara 2018).

When deployed as a (monster) method for imagining otherwise, SF, and scholarly engagements with the works of the genre, can thus be about showing how the world perspective is not always shared. It can also be about challenging racist, sexist, trans- and homophobic, and ableist assumptions, and of imagining futures that may have been denied to oppressed and/or marginalised peoples. As Minister Faust states, “Because if you can't imagine it you can't make it. But once you can imagine it, like Dr. Mae Jemison, who saw Nichelle Nichols playing Lieutenant Uhura on the bridge of the Enterprise. Well, she was a little girl at the time. She went on to become an M.D. and then she became an astronaut. It starts with the imagination” (Minister Faust, Podcast: “Imagine a Better Future”). Minister Faust captures how the representation of a Black woman in SF is directly

linked to the first Black woman astronaut and in so doing ties fiction to reality. Even though the division between these categories is, of course, less solid than this sentence may suggest, the monster as speculation pushes at the binary structures between fact and fiction, between speculation and possibility, and between stories and realities. Storytelling is worlding; worlds are opened up through storytelling and structural exclusions and violence challenged.

The last decade has seen a turn to the speculative in mainstream media (Hellstrand, Koistinen and Orning 2019). Importantly, mainstreaming SF creates new possibilities for transforming the ableist, racist and sexist structures of society. In other words, the monster as speculation, such as discussions of what counts as culturally 'monstrous' or 'other,' are also leaking into the mainstream. The many contemporary Black, Indigenous and people of colour SF writers are a hopeful reminder that the speculative is an ethico-political arena where often marginalised and silenced perspectives and stories can be told and negotiated from a range of perspectives. This fiction opens up for lifesaving, necessary new worlds that can tell us something about our imaginations of livable lives, livable bodies (Butler 2004a; Koistinen 2015). The monster as speculation demonstrates how situated knowledges are not simply about stating one's position, but also about how context might make us question, rethink and reimagine the assumptions inherent in fiction and reality, while also questioning this assumed divide between the two.

Importantly, however, as the speculative allows for imagining differently, it also points to the limit of our imaginability, and demands that we confront the monstrous as the unruly edges of storytelling and knowledge production. This is challenging, and untidy, but also hopeful (McCormack 2015). Indeed, if the representation of Uhura makes possible the reality of women of colour becoming astronauts, then this distinction should be interrogated, and we, therefore, need to continue exploring how poetics and/or fiction may be activism. Walidah Imarisha (Brown and Imarisha 2015:3) argues that all "organizing is science fiction" precisely because activism is a dedication "to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds." This kind of activism is not just about imaginability, but also about creating possibilities for living lives otherwise, with alternative conditions and significations than those structures of differentiation to which we might be accustomed. As such, monster methods is simultaneously about stories and storytelling, speculations and interruptions, and about the interconnections between the monster and livability. It is about seeing lives that already exist, demanding space for these beings (and not only of the human kind), and taking up the space that has long been dominated by limited perspectives and systemic hierarchies.

5. The monster is blood

What makes for a livable life? Judith Butler (2004a; 2004b; 2009) has turned to this question repeatedly, trying to find space for those whose bodies do not and cannot conform to the demands of normative institutional structures. Along with Butler (2004a; 2004b; 2009), Kim TallBear (2019), Adele E. Clarke and Haraway (2018) show how kinship – and how it is imagined – is central to de-colonising – anti-colonial, anti-sexist, anti-ableist and anti-racist – community formation. Kinship is assumed to be a narrative of origins, where belonging is formed through blood ties, considered as that which is passed on through heteronormative reproduction as if these are natural biological processes. This understanding – or storytelling – about kinship leaves little room for the monster, as the boundaries for what can belong and what constitutes an ‘outside(r),’ an ‘other,’ are constantly policed. Indeed, TallBear (2019) shows the historical and contemporary links between compulsory heterosexual monogamy and settler-colonial occupation, mass incarcerations and genocides, and Robert McRuer (2006) shows how compulsory heterosexuality is inseparable from compulsory able-bodiedness. For many of us that live queer lives where our bodies are not considered the norm – or increasingly where doctors and governments are considering not saving the lives of us with multiple co-morbidities (to use the medical and media term for the fact that our health is complicated and requires multiple and constant interventions to carry on living; see, for example, Campbell, Topping and Barr 2020) – kinship is forged through less traditional means than blood. Or, kinship may be conceived through a reimagining of the meaning of blood ties.

As we have argued thus far, grappling with the monster as methods invites critical interrogations about origins and origin stories as forms of knowledge production. As such, we ask: What are blood ties; what is relationality and how are these tied to the monstrous? To begin to answer these questions, we turn to Jewelle Gomez reflecting on why she wrote *The Gilda Stories* (1991):

The archetype of the vampire story is so deeply imbedded in culture it was difficult for a new vision to replace it, or so we thought. [...] Rereading Octavia Butler's work convinced me there was a place for women of color in speculative fiction. [I knew] that lesbian feminism was a legitimate lens through which to develop an adventure story. Women's stories, long considered to reign only in the realm of the domestic, had been stepping out into the larger world for years. Yet few were grounded in such a traditional horror genre as vampires because that would require a complete reframing of mythology itself. (Foreword to *The Gilda Stories*:XIII)

Here, Gomez insists that the impossible is possible and that the lenses through which we want to frame narratives may serve to question whole mythologies/traditions even if, on some level, it is the desire to tell a simple story about a Black, lesbian vampire. Vampire stories are SF, and *The Gilda Stories* is about monstrous speculation and the power of defamiliarisation. Vampires are a traditional way of imagining blood ties: that blood is used to feed on, as an essential source of life to the already dead, and that the living may then be turned and also become the living dead. As is obvious by my/our/not my use of language here, not only do vampires reimagine blood ties as forged through a violent act of killing the living, but life and death are also no longer familiar categories, instead becoming blurred, uncertain and weirdly overlapping. Family, here, may be forged through unconventional (though traditional within the horror genre) means.

If family is that which is forged through blood, then vampires create families. Kinship, however, might be that which does not simply accept the violence of familiar familial belonging but instead addresses what it means to co-exist with each other on a living planet. As such, kinship considers not only the human but also the many living beings on this planet. In addition, we turn to kinship and vampiric kinship in this chapter on monster methods to address what we are to each other, as a collective of differing and yet connected beings. We want to ask what it means to support each other in academic kinship, during difficult and pleasurable times. We are in each other's worlds and while our worlds overlap, they also diverge. Blood may create obvious ties, but thoughts and practices, including writing, also tie us to each other. We are entangled. We are more than one. To return to *The Gilda Stories*: "Either in each other's company, as we are now, or separate and in each other's world. One takes on others as family and continually reshapes that meaning – family – but you do not break blood ties. We may not wish to live together at all times, but we will always be with each other" (Gomez 1991:69). We are tied through our writing as kin; our ties are monstrous, our links are written and spoken language. We are not necessarily blood, but as queer knowingly tells us, blood is not necessarily family. Our words bind us, even if our experiences simultaneously bring us together and diverge from each other. Monster as methods is an attempt at kinship through writing and being together in all its untidy forms.

I/we/not me take a close reading of SF as the possibility of exploring what the representation of monsters offers to how we write, how we are entangled in each other's lives and how our worlds may be reimaged. Gomez creates a narrative about a lesbian woman of colour in order to queer family ties and to show how blood ties may be reimaged. She imagines a different type of life where people focus on living, even when they are the living dead. Indeed, she brings the idea of living to the fore by addressing how the dead may live,

encouraging a reflection on the violent denigration of certain lives and the unlivability of certain existences (e.g. the violence of white slaveholders). Vampires become a means of asking how we support each other, and of exploring how other types of narratives may emerge. One example is when the oldest living vampire advises the following to Gilda: “I think the most important thing for you to do in the meantime is live. It is a very involving job, which takes much concentration and practice” (Gomez 1991:80). The living dead point to the difficulty of living on and encourage Gilda to focus on this difficult task. Vampires return us to the violence of living as a woman of colour and to how life may become livable. Gomez does this by creating a novel that carves out space for a Black lesbian in a genre that is dominated by the representation of white characters (and often lesbian titillation). More specifically, it imagines non-monogamy as the foundation of kinship, as a way of tackling ongoing structurally racist and sexist violence, and thereby gives spaces to other worlds, bodies, collectives and entanglements.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida writes about “learning to live, finally” (2011:xvii), and how it is only the ghosts who can teach us how to live. Ghosts are many things, but I/we/not me also think of them as (partly) materialised ideas, or maybe ideas as apparitions – there and then gone again, sometimes taking physical form, sometimes remaining traces within other ideas and other forms. Voices within voices, as already mentioned. There are no pure ideas and no voices that are not also ghosts. That, to me/us/not me, is at the core of learning how to live, finally – it is learning how to speak to and with ghosts. This echoes a claim that Haraway makes in *When Species Meet* (2008): that when thinking of ethics, we should not only be thinking of how we owe it to the future generations to keep our Earth livable, but also how we owe it to past generations. Therefore, we owe our present to the ghosts of past generations, and we should act in our present wisely to honour these ghosts. Yet, as Haraway later argues in *Staying With the Trouble* (2016), echoing much queer theory (Muñoz 1999), ethical living is also living *in the now*. It is, thus, living with/as the voices within voices and bodies within bodies, which is what we are trying to do in this text.

Vampiric ties, as Gilda and her communities teach us, are not necessarily deadly or simply draining of life. With this in mind, we suggest writing in an academic context may not necessarily or only be draining, but may instead give space to the uncertain, the still-in-progress, the contradictory, the monstrous and more. Importantly, we want to live with our ghosts, not as distinct different others, and with vampires, also not simply deadly horrific monsters, but instead as those that open up how we write, think and are together. Monsters are a way of engaging with difference, not as otherness, but as the very thing that allows us to create the categories of self and other, even when we recognise

the difference within (be this in the form of bacteria, or organs from others, or viruses). Difference is not the foundation of hierarchical power or of separation. On the contrary, it is central to category formations that help us understand the world, even while we need to question the potential violence of such divisions. The ghost, as well as other monsters, shows us that these categories are not a given and need not divide us. Instead, they may help us practise ethico-political relationalities that are less violent, exclusionary and normative.

6. The monster is not a conclusion

Let us rephrase:

in our pockets stars divide like restless cells

between our teeth the landscape
fluctuates words
in gravitational waves

from our forehead thick-fingered grief
spreads into space all petals open

In this way, questions of method can never be separated from questions of ethics. If methods make worlds, these become our creations, our monsters, which we open to publics beyond our own writing collective to generate feedback, rethinking, dialogue and more. Monsters are impossible to control – that is what makes them monstrous. Perhaps the ethical urgency is not to attempt such control, but to explore storytelling, poetry, speculative fiction and the queer kinships which we may follow unknown in the hope horizons of possibility, fail and that what something we did plan for. A poem. An According to Margrit imperative is to stay monstrous, that is, to the arrival of the She says: “Openness interpreted as indecision, but rather

they invoke as a way in the monster into the of pushing the knowing that we may materialises is neither expect nor interruption. A story. Shildrick, the ethical open to the welcome – as a host – undecidable guest. should not be weakness, nor as as the courage to refuse the comforting refuge of broad categories and fixed unidirectional vision” (2015:3). Therefore, this openness is about living with vulnerability, and

importantly about resistance. We have let the monster lead us to this exploration of monster as methods as a critical reflection on writing and citational indebtedness, as well as an experiment in collective doing.

Our indebtedness to feminist, queer and decolonial thinkers and activists has taught us that there is a lot of risk involved in speaking from the margins, from the place of the non-conforming, the non-normative or even monstrous. Our insistence on the collective and the collaborative is therefore a method also in the sense of community building and worlding. Collective voices are potentially ways of be(com)ing less alone and/or marginalised for thinking and doing something otherwise. As Haraway reminds us, “situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals” (1988:590). Exposing vulnerability invites the monster, and we live with the monstrous as the constitutive tie that exposes our vulnerability in a shared world. As such, it reveals our ethical bond with others, the impossibility of discerning between host and guest.

In academia, this sense of vulnerability not only applies to our writing and research, but also to our classrooms (Henriksen, Kvistad and Orning 2017). bell hooks writes: “by making ourselves vulnerable we show our students that they can take risks, that they can be vulnerable, that they can have confidence that their thoughts, their ideas will be given appropriate consideration and respect” (2010:57). For hooks, and for us, ideas matter. Monster methods offer both risk and resistance to how ideas are paid attention to and given the opportunity to be voiced, and to the storytelling practices made possible or not. As such, the monster can never be conclusive, or a conclusion: it is constantly on the move in unpredictable and escaping ways. Vulnerability is both a way of being in the world that potentially opens up spaces for sharing uncertainties, for new worldings, and the very way in which we come into being with others on this shared planet. Vulnerability is thus practice and a mode of thinking and being collectively, monstrously.

Keeping with the risks and hopes of opening up towards the arrival of the unknown, we want to end this chapter with an invitation to you to write down an idea and a story of your own. We will leave you with three sentences, that is our invitation. You might think it a summary, or a conclusion, because it, albeit haltingly, reiterates our thinking in this chapter. However, it might also be a manifesto, an opening, a crack in which to create a monster from the premise of ‘I am collective.’

Monster as methods explores the I in the collective.

Monster as ethics risks the I in multiplicity.

I am collective, I am collective, I am collective.

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PAGES MISSING
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

Index

A

affect, 65, 74
affection. *See* affect
agency, 67, 68, 69
Ahmed, 117, 120, 125
anti-Black, 120
arborescent model, 115
archetypal animal, 115
Architecture, 76
assemblage, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68,
69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75
Autochthony, 120

B

becoming-animal, 114, 115
Bestiary, 114
biologically essentialist, 111, 119
bio-political, 114
border, 63, 64, 66, 68, 76
bordering, 119, 121, 125, 128

C

cartographic device, 111
Cartographies of Difference, 115
complexity, 63, 74
corporeal, 117
Covid pandemic, 122

D

Darwin, 114, 127
Deleuze, 65, 68, 75, 76, 114, 115,
126, 127

Deleuzian ontology of difference,
114
demonic animal, 115
Derrida, 113, 119, 125, 126, 127,
128
design process, 74
difference and otherness, 114
differential racialization, 112

E

ethico-political framework, 112
experimentation, 74

F

Fanon, 117, 118, 126

G

genuine encounter with the
unfamiliar, 65, 68
governmentality, 116
Guattari, 65, 72, 75, 76

H

Hostile Environments, 119, 126
human-animal-object, 124

I

immanent, 65, 69, 71, 73, 75
Inter-mixing, 116
inter-species disruption, 122
intervention, 67, 69, 72, 73, 74, 75

L

Leviathan, 217

M

machinic geography of race, 118
 matter out of place, 116
 methodological whiteness, 122,
 125
 monstrosity, xxix, 111, 112, 113,
 114, 115, 117, 119, 123, 124, 127
 Monstrous Ontologies, 111, 112,
 119
 monstrous races, 125
 moral panics, 112, 126
 morphogenesis, 65
 morphogenetic, 73, *See*
 morphogenesis

N

nationalism, 120
 nature/culture divide, 114
 non-human, 63, 65, 73

O

Oedipal animal, 115
 Other, 112, 113, 125

P

pandemic as portal, 123
 parameter, 74
 pathogenic period, 123
 phenomenological accounts of
 blackness, 118
 planetary humanism, 118
 post-racial, 112, 122, 126

R

race and racism, 112, 117, 124
 race science, 120
 racial engineering, 116
 racialised geographies, 116
 racialised visual regime', 118
 rhizomatic assemblages of affect,
 115
 rupture, 113

S

Saldanah, 117, 118, 119, 127
 scientific racism, 111, 115
 shadowy figure, 115, 116
 signs and signifiers, 113, 118
 situated. *See* situated knowledge
 situated knowledge, 70, 75
 spatial, 65, 70, 71, 72, 75
 Stengers, 68, 69, 76
 subject and the object, 112
 subjectivity, 65

T

technologies of horror, 112, 117
 territory, 65, 66, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73,
 75
 theory of deconstruction, 113
 thousand tiny races, 119
 transcendental idealism, 114

V

viscosity, 118

W

white supremacy, 121, 125

