Monstrosity and Global Crisis in Transnational Film, Media and Literature

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Edited by

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Steven Rawle and Martin Hall

For many, the past few years have been marked by a succession of crises. 2022 even ended with "permacrisis" becoming Collins Dictionary's word of the year (Turnbull, 2022). In 2021, in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an EU policy centre determined that permacrisis was the best term through which to understand a period in which citizens were being asked to "live with" crisis, to embrace the altered social conditions as countries emerged from the pandemic. Increasingly fatigued, people were "living in an age of permacrisis, with one challenge seamlessly followed by the next" (Zuleeg, Emmanouilidis and Borges de Castro, 2021).

The pandemic has left an indelible mark on our world, causing widespread devastation and triggering a myriad of challenges that extend beyond mere health concerns. The global impact has been staggering, with significant mortality rates and a surge in morbidity as countless individuals faced the brunt of the virus's effects. The consequences have rippled through societies and economies alike, giving rise to a state of socioeconomic instability. Much as Maggu, Sharma, Jaishy, and Jangid (2021) have made plain in the *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, COVID-19 "devastated the world causing significant mortality and morbidity along with socioeconomic instability". In essence, they encapsulate the gravity of the situation, illustrating how the pandemic, with its profound health implications, has also ushered in a period of upheaval, leaving communities grappling with the aftermath and struggling to restore balance in the face of this unprecedented global crisis.

Over twenty years earlier, the term polycrisis had been introduced, largely attributed to philosopher Edgar Morin's *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium* (1999), to describe the complex and overlapping crises coming to define the approaching twenty-first century. Likewise, the notion of meta-crisis describes a series of existential and philosophical crises that threaten systemic stability. Crisis itself is in crisis (Azmanova, 2020). Monsters thus start to appear everywhere through

multiple crises, marking individuals, family units, regional areas, national structures, even supranational organisations. Visions of crisis repeatedly implicate the monstrous: microbes invade bodies and create global instability; climate colonialism displaces vulnerable groups subsequently portrayed as monsters on the shores of Europe; social media gives platform to monstrous public discourse; all while neoliberal economics reduces living standards, resulting in increasingly monstrous inequality. Of course, each of these monstrous crises are connected.

However we define the complexities of the current state of crisis, waves of crisis since the turn of the twenty-first century have challenged society's understanding of itself, its Others and the limits of "normality". This permanent state of crisis largely implicates the Global North, especially as capitalism must always, as Marx defined, follow boom with crisis (Potts, 2011). The financial crisis of the 2000s precipitated widening inequality, precarious labour, the gig economy and led to growing crises of truth and the entrenchment of fake news within polarised political discourse. Borders became contentious places of crisis, not just for those trying to cross them, but for those wishing to remain nostalgically within the perceived security of old borders. The politics behind Brexit and Trump's "great, great" border wall contributed to discussions around invasion and those seeking to penetrate the borders of the West. For those risking their lives to flee conflict and repression, across the waters around Europe, the crisis was materially different, for security and safety. Meanwhile, the representation of refugee crises is just one more example of the ways in which monstrosity and Otherness are culturally fused, with many media outlets contributing to the repeated representation of refugees as a "swarm" moving across European and North American borders and seas toward former colonial Metropoles. Wars in the Middle East and Europe have only further fuelled the crisis, leading to crises of energy security and economies that are fundamentally fused with the crises experienced by refugees.

The global COVID-19 pandemic further illuminated the threats of cross-border monstrosity, in the form of the microscopic viral invader, but also more insidiously in racism and the ways with which the virus has illuminated inequalities relating to gender, disability, ethnicity and nationality. The pandemic has reinforced themes relating to transnational monstrosity on multiple levels. Ecologically, the pandemic has prompted a re-evaluation of our relationship with the environment, as disruptions in human activities have led to both positive and negative effects on ecosystems. Socially, the pandemic crisis has unveiled disparities in healthcare access, education, and social support structures, exposing vulnerabilities that demand attention and equitable solutions. Politically, the response to the pandemic has laid bare

the complexities of global cooperation and the need for cohesive strategies to tackle transboundary threats effectively. Economically, the pandemic has had profound consequences, revealing vulnerabilities in global supply chains and economic systems. It has underscored the importance of resilience and adaptability in the face of unforeseen challenges. Culturally, the shared experience of a global crisis has offered opportunities for solidarity and empathy, while also highlighting cultural differences in coping mechanisms and responses.

It has delivered harsh lessons about the impacts of these vulnerabilities. The pandemic continues to have a palpable impact on the lives of many, often those already disenfranchised by global capitalism, including young people whose education and mental health were impacted by lockdowns and the short-term planning of politicians in response to the crisis. Likewise, immunocompromised and disabled people are impacted by the "return to normal", as discussed in chapter one, that has seen accessibility rolled back to pre-pandemic norms. This is before we consider the impact of the looming climate emergency that potentially spells doom for the existence of humanity, as weather noticeably changes before our eyes, and motivates climate anxiety in many young people.

The global pandemic has served as a stark reminder of the far-reaching implications of transnational challenges, revealing their profound influence on various facets of our existence, ranging from ecological and social dimensions to political, economic, and cultural realms. This period of clear crisis has brought to the forefront the interconnectedness of our world and underscored the magnitude of transnational monstrosities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. In addition to shedding light on these interconnected aspects, the pandemic has delivered harsh lessons about the consequences of neglecting these vulnerabilities. It has emphasised the need for proactive measures, international collaboration, and a comprehensive understanding of transnational monstrosities to build a more resilient and sustainable global society. As we navigate the complexities of a post-pandemic world, the lessons learned during this crisis serve as valuable guides for shaping a more resilient and interconnected future.

For those experiencing the impacts of climate colonialism, the growing crisis leads to further waves of displacement and misery. Political instability, and the impact of intersecting crises, slows action. Inaction to move away from dependence on fossil fuels is frustrated by the bickering amongst leaders with vested interests: COP28, the 28th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, failed to reach agreement on "phasing out" fossil fuels, instead agreeing to "transition away," during the conference held in oil-rich Dubai.

Crisis Monsters

Polycrisis activates processes of "monsterisation" in the ways in which media narrates crisis. Monsters are central to our imagination of crisis. They evoke fear, anxiety, hate and disgust through their very existence and/or actions which blur, shift, trespass, or violate moral, social, political and aesthetic borders and boundaries (Giuliani, 2022; Godin, 2022) and, thus, disrupt or threaten to disturb hegemonic discourses. Theories of monstrosity are intersectional, and envelope gender, race, sexuality, disability, nationality and socio-economic structures of power. As Jack Halberstam (1995) asserts, "[m]onsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body" (21-2). Monsters represent not only abjection but also struggles for recognition of previously excluded groups (Halberstam, 1995; Sedgwick, 1993). Monsterisation also draws further attention to the "dialectics of inclusion and exclusion" from constructed orders of power (Compagna and Steinhart, 2020). Studies of monstrosity are well established (see also Cohen, 1996; Cohen, 1999; Mittman and Dendle, 2017; Weinstock, 2020), therefore this volume examines how monster narratives, both real and imagined, have drawn on crisis to understand how various discourses of power are intensified in periods of crisis. Whether as figurative metaphors for crisis-inspired anxiety (Rawle, 2022) or the "monstering" of alleged adversaries (Giuliani, 2021), crisis can present monsters right across the media arena, from primetime news, to genre cinema, high-end television drama as well as across social media platforms.

Monsters are recurring responses to deformations of a period of multiple crises, and crisis can become a "monstrous practice" of "worlding" that helps make sense of structures of power through storytelling (The Monster Network, 2021). Such configurations of power are visible in Foucault's (1984) notion of "crisis heterotopias", the "elsewheres" of forbidden activities, spaces designated for those living in states of crisis, that are significantly transformed in this modern period. Although Foucault saw those places as being in decline as societies shifted to hold different conceptions of "normality" or deviance, heterotopias are the mirror image of utopia, "unreal, virtual spaces", "real counter-sites". But, as we persist in a space of perma-, poly- or meta-crisis, those counter-sites are everywhere, no more are they elsewhere, but here and now. Crisis is "abjecting" and does "monstrous work" (Cohen, 1996: ix) through a range of different methods of discourse. Thus, crisis is fused with concepts of monstrosity. As the chapters in this book show, monsters are created throughout a range of

media, from major Hollywood blockbusters to global art cinema, literature and political discourse.

Gothic texts have always dealt with questions of difference and Otherness in aspects of crisis. While not all of the chapters in this volume deal with Gothic texts, monsters comprise a key element of the Gothic, largely from Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) onwards. As Fred Botting argues, Gothic "texts operate ambivalently: the dynamic inter-relation of limit and transgression, prohibition and desire suggests that norms, limits, boundaries and foundations are neither natural nor absolutely fixed or stable despite the fears they engender" (2014, 9). They question the boundaries through which the modern world is defined: "freedoms, anxieties, monstrosities associated with otherness, power, bodies, sexuality" (172). In a classic sense, monstrification transforms Others into powerless, or sometimes powerful, bodies for their transgression, yet in a period of unending crises, it has the potential to turn 99% of the population into monsters through their shared abjection. In "Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black holes" (2002) however, Botting discusses a sense of exhaustion and fragmentation associated with postmodern cultures that nullifies the threat of the Gothic and its monsters. He describes this as "the consuming void," that Gothic figures now "seem unable to envisage a future that is not fully cloaked in darkness" (298). Catherine Spooner's conception of Post-Millennial Gothic detaches from this gloomy prognosis, that Gothic narratives have only a trauma or anxiety-influenced story to tell, a thread that is not "remotely anxious or traumatized" (2017, 17). This "counter-narrative" is compelling in its widening of its scope for positive Gothic narratives. However, the chapters in this book are often concerned with ways in which monsterisation tends to explore the gloomy void of Gothic narratives (and, even if not all of the texts discussed in the book are Gothic in its most evident sense, many share a sensibility).

Transnational Monsters

Aihwa Ong (1999) refers to "the *trans*versal, the *trans*actional, the *trans*lational, and the *trans*gressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism" in *trans*national "human practices and cultural logics" (4), each of which can encompass the scope of exploration around the *trans*formations of monstrosity. Monsters have always been rampant border crossers, from Dracula's journey from Romania to Whitby, to the rampaging monsters of Godzilla movies across global cities, and this volume examines how their transnationality reflects an era of global crisis.

In folklore, such narratives have long been subject to specific local and national cultures, such as the shape shifting Aswang of Filipino folklore or the Norwegian forest Huldra, yet global mediacapes (Appadurai, 1990) now circulate mediatised representations of national and regional folklore (including fictional ones) across borders, producing a transnational genre that spans multiple media.

There has been significant interest in the ways in which transnationality, particularly in popular culture and screen studies, has depicted flows of people (Appadurai's notion of ethnoscapes) and demonstrated lines of cultural flow (mediascapes). While this collection explores aspects of cultural flow as it relates to the construction of transnational meanings (by producers and audiences, and for many social groups), it also explores the ramifications of representations of monstrosity in socio-political terms. The malleability and resilience of monstrous figures as embodiments of real and imagined threats is amplified and exploited in times of crisis, contagion, along with calls for containment, and this resilience is intensified given recent global events. The collection therefore explores the ways in which monsters metaphorically represent forms of social and political Otherness as they relate to cross-cultural or transnational forms, either directly or indirectly.

In drawing attention to transnational lines of flow and the ways in which national meanings intersect, this volume understands the notion of transnationalism in a way that "*transcend*[s…] national cultures" (Berghahn and Sternberg, 2010, 22). Such cross-border dynamics comprise "both globalization[…] and the counterhegemonic responses" of those in former colonial countries (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 1). Modernity is a fundamentally unequal process and lines of influence, those Mary Louise Pratt defined as "contact zones" (1991), are often marked by their relationship with former colonial relationships and determined through their violence and lasting legacies of enslavement and domination. Many of the global crises experienced in recent years have highlighted deep rooted systemic inequality and thinly veiled racism, especially with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and violent attacks on members of East Asian diasporas in the West. The COVID-19 pandemic also coincided with the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis in May 2020, an event that led to lockdown-defying protests and renewed focus on colonial legacies, especially around public heritage (Carruthers 2019; Lonetree 2021; Fryer, Belle, Galanin, Upton, *et al*, 2021).

Monster theory and transnationalism intersect in the ways that they interrogate the ways in which both draw attention to lines of conflict and

imbalances in power. Monster theory, often a lens through which societies examine the Other or the unfamiliar, dovetails with transnationalism in scrutinising how these monstrous entities become symbolic of deeper societal tensions and power dynamics that extend across borders. Here, the monstrous are not simply fantastical creatures but are cultural constructs, reflecting societal fears, anxieties, and prejudices. This framework provides a means to dissect the Othering of groups often at the margins of society. As the monstrous is analysed through this theoretical lens, it unveils the lines of conflict that exist within the fabric of a given culture or society, highlighting the power structures that perpetuate marginalisation. Transnationalism, on the other hand, explores the interconnectedness and fluidity of socio-cultural, economic, and political boundaries. Together, these frameworks illuminate the ways in which monsters, both literal and metaphorical, draw attention to the fault lines in societal structures and power dynamics that extend beyond national borders. The monstrous becomes a powerful metaphor for the tensions and imbalances inherent in transnational interactions. Whether exploring the fear of the unknown within a culture or grappling with the consequences of global interconnectedness, this intersection underscores the importance of critically examining the narratives we construct around monsters to comprehend the deeper socio-political currents at play in our interconnected world.

As John Hess and Patricia R. Zimmerman have argued regarding transnational documentary cinema, corporate transnationalism tends toward homogenisation, while what they determine as adversarial transnationalism "wrenches" control away from a fluid cross-border capital that demands that "racial, gender, and sexual identities are to be dematerialized, depoliticized, declawed and decorporalized into new, further segmented markets for the new accelerated capital growth. The conflicts that mark and define these… are neutralized within commodity fetishism" (2006, 99). Where globalisation demands sameness, adversarial transnationalisms, like monster theory, demands difference, "refusing […] fragmentation, isolation and nationalism [in] acts of refusal and hope" (105). Polycentrist approaches (Shohat and Stam, 1994) thus enable and promote hybridity and the refusal of uniformity, as demanded by a global capitalist system that enables cycles of boom and crisis. Transnational globalisation and monsterisation both revel in processes that Other and marginalise those it sees as monsters. However, the flip side of that system are the means through which monsters are celebrated for their difference, and abjection is countered with agency.

Of course, the primary way in which monstrosity intersects with the global is through the growing climate emergency. The exploitation and exhaustion of natural resources conducted by global capitalism and neo-

colonialism has exacerbated human-driven climate change. Many of the authors in this book engage with the most contemporary period of Earth's existence in which human activity has begun, markedly, to have affected the climate and ecological status of the planet. We are now in a novel period in time which is characterised by humanity's dominance of ecological systems and many of the texts addressed within this book engage with the outcomes thereof, or, as Keith Moser has characterised it in *The Metaphor of the Monster* (2020), the "disquieting ecological anxiety related to the dawn of the Anthropocene" (63). The disputed naming of the Anthropocene, an epoch determined by human activity (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen, and McNeill, 2011), highlights scenarios that threaten to transform everyone into abject monsters, but also casts the planet as *becoming-monstrous*: as Moser argues, technology has offered humanity greater and greater mastery over the planet's eco-systems, but such control may only lead to "ultimate defeat". Ecocidal forgetting, humanity's blind spot for the nonhuman monsters on whom survival depends, may lead to "the predictable end game" (73).

Thus, while the study of monsters in fiction is nothing new, the examination of the figure of the monster from a transnational perspective offers the opportunity to better understand issues of cultural production and influence, the relationship between national cultures and transnational formations, hierarchies of cultural production, the ethics of transnationalism, as well as the possibility to explore how shifting cultural and political boundaries have been represented through tropes of monstrosity. Hence, this collection explores the nature of transnational cultures to help us understand how one of the oldest fictional metaphors has been transformed during an age of globalisation and crisis.

Reframing Monstrosity

In the collection's opening chapter, the members of The Monster Network explore the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent calls for "returning to normal" following waves of vaccination. They argue how these calls highlighted the power of "the normal" to marginalise and disenfranchise. Responses to the pandemic, through lockdowns, increasingly focussed on accessibility and the means through which disabled people could engage with work, education and leisure. However, in the push to "live with the virus" such measures dwindled and disabled communities became less visible: they became "(disregarded) bodies" who often refused "the crumbs" offered by normative strategies. The Monster Network offer a powerful demand for a feminist monster studies, drawing on intersectional feminism

and gender studies, queer, crip and decolonial theory and activism, that can challenge "stickiness" (following Sara Ahmed) and unruliness to ultimately see how structures of difference can be imagined in different ways. The stickiness and unruliness of monster bodies are central themes of several chapters in the collection.

In chapter two, Sony Jalarajan Raj and Adith K. Suresh extend this look at norm-instigated crisis and investigate "the gender monster" and transnational Other in Indian cinema. Their chapter is rooted in mythical approaches to classical Indian texts, such as *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, that have highlighted multiple cultural negotiations in their interactions between the human and nonhuman. They look in particular at the figure of the *nagin*, the "snake woman" whose shape-shifting power allows them to manipulate those around them and take revenge on the ones who wronged her. Like The Monster Network, Raj and Suresh consider how the figure of the monster disturbs and destabilises constructions of "the normal" and the ways in which monstrous bodies are determined through performance, exploring the texts of several popular films in which female stars sing and dance as *nagini*. The gender monster switches categories to invoke cultural anxieties in ways that disrupt normative representations of female bodies, enabling readings of identity as fluid and hybrid.

Colette Balmain continues the examination of snake women and the trope of "the gender monster" in chapter three. Her discussion focusses on the figure of the succubus in East Asian Gothic cinema. Across several case studies of films from Hong Kong and Japan, she considers how these succubi reflect a "world out of balance." Resisting the more conventional reading of the succubus in terms familiar from Creed's monstrous-feminine, these figures, Balmain argues, destabilise heteronormativity and resist former narratives of patriarchal privilege. The films that Balmain examines all represent figures of "phantom feminism" charged with an erotic bisexual gaze that rewrites traditional narratives that flow across trans-regional boundaries in East Asia. In so doing, Balmain contends, a series of monstrous figures re-write the rules that constrain and limit femininity in national and regional contexts. Where state-sanctioned familial conventions exist, these monsters re-interpret the limits of gender-based power.

In chapter four, Diego Hoefel extends this consideration of monstered female identity. Here, Hoefel considers how *Ghost Killers vs. Bloody Mary* (*Exterminadores do Além Contra a Loira do Banheiro*, Fabrício Bittar, 2018), dubbed the "Brazilian *Ghostbusters*", transgresses the limits of "politically incorrect humour" to become what Hoefel calls "sickening and derogatory" misogynist and transphobic comedy. Hoefel investigates the film through its putative *auteur*, the Jair Bolsonaro-supporting comedian

Danilo Gentili. This relationship, Hoefel contends, determines the film's conservative rhetoric around gender in the film, referencing classic horror, amateur digital production and invoking the language of culture wars. The film mobilises a number of discourses from the political polarisation of Brazil during Bolsonaro's presidency, violence targeted at critics and the conspiracy theories and fake news that marked not just this period in Brazil, but in other nations, especially the US. Ultimately, Hoefel sees the film's take on monstrosity as being fully in sway of the ultraconservative discourses of Brazil at the time of its production, something Hoefel links with the reception of a number of Hollywood blockbusters with female casts, especially remakes that gender swapped or cast women of colour.

In her chapter, Lauren Stephenson extends this investigation of the horror film to consider how two films produced in the 2010s, *You're Next* (Adam Wingard, 2011) and *Ready or Not* (Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett, 2019), focussed on narratives around wealth and economic elites. As she notes, horror films tended to provide a monstrous picture of working-class monsters, but these two films made after the global financial crisis, turn this lens onto wealthy elites as transnational monsters. Following Siddique and Raphael's Bakhtian reading of transnational bodies of excess and Creed's definition of the "rape revolt" film, Stephenson contends that the infected bodies familial of the "eat-the-rich" horror film lifts the lid on the monstrosity of the super wealthy to expose the "privatopia" of their palatial mansions as corrupted and excessive. The entrance of liminal Others, both final girls, in the two films destabilises the security of the American Dream to disrupt the existing social order (temporarily, given the films' status as products of transnational capitalism) and offer illusory succour to those dispossessed by the crises of the 2000s and 2010s.

Gaia Giuliani turns the collection's attention toward those who are monstered through their mobility. Giuliani's postcolonial approach considers how rhetoric around the migrant "crises" in Europe and the US articulate how those arriving from the Global South are being monstered through the identification of a normative "we" that dehumanises "the enemy" arriving across the seas or deserts from the "Out-there". Guiliani returns once again to the collection's questions of power and how Other spaces are evoked as being for "extreme extractivism, exploitation and wars" in contrast with the seeming security of Western capitalism. She draws attention to the power of borders as a means of "alien-ing" migrant bodies and the ways in which borders are exploited as ways to promote theories of racial separateness, or, in their most extreme right-wing variant, of racial replacement. Her three case studies, Swedish film *Border* (2018), directed by Ali Abbasi, Jordan Peele's US film *Nope* (2022), and the Italian *Europa* (2021) by Haider

Rashid, allow her to show how different forms of bordering and alien-ing are either represented in their normative symbolic violence or resisted through a gaze that highlights the material process through which bodies are Othered and subjected to violence.

Gareth Edward's film *Monsters* (2010) is the subject of Andrew M. Butler's chapter. He discusses how the film also reflects on migrant flows. However, he takes a look in hindsight through the ways in which the film pre-empted the rhetoric of Trump's "great, great wall". Like Stephenson, Butler considers how border walls challenge the viability and meaning of the American Dream. In its most obvious reading, the aliens in *Monsters* are read as migrants, as accidental, non-threatening visitors, but it is only in their own crossing of the US-Mexico border that the film's protagonists understand the violence and Othering of border spaces. Through its sublime photographic gaze, Butler argues, the film develops a strategy of "cognitive estrangement" that problematises the border crossing journey undertaken by the "monstered" central characters in the film that echoes those taken by many thousands every year.

Throughout chapter eight, Léna Remy-Kovach analyses one of the earliest episodes of the long-running conservative American television show *Supernatural* (2005-2020). She looks at the appropriation of Native American mythology in its "Wendigo [sic]" episode. The Windigo is an Algonquian myth, a monster that can only be killed with fire, and preys on human bodies. Remy-Kovach charts the episode's lack of regard for the specificity of the Native creature and demonstrates how the absence of Native bodies and disregard for tribal specificity fits with a longer narrative of settler colonialism and the cultural appropriation of Native American mythology. Likewise, she argues, the episode presents a reductive version of the creature that ignores how Native storytellers developed the figure of the Windigo into a metaphor for the violence, greed and savagery of the settler-state.

Marco Pinfari's chapter also examines the ways in which colonial anxieties relate to the ways in which monstrous images have been deployed by terrorists in transnational political violence. He locates the Othering of political enemies as early at the nineteenth century, as media sought to create monstrous images of terror groups through references to Gothic texts. However, throughout the twentieth century, Pinfari argues, left-wing and later Islamic terrorists have engaged in monstrous performance as a means of spreading terror throughout their intended audiences. Performative monstrosity thus becomes a way through which terrorists have co-opted cultural imagery to shape their address to a range of media, from photography to video, and to wider audiences. He focusses in particular on

how the vampire has become a common metaphor through which to perform, despite the lack of cultural specificity for a number of organisations.

The next chapter continues to look at vampiric imagery and problematic dimensions of colonial genocide and structural violence. Michael Dunn explores the vampire as an ecologically uncanny metaphor and transgressive literary figure for our often "unnatural", extractivist, and obscure relationship with nature. He considers how vampire literature focuses on those that have been Othered, a tendency that stems not only from the trappings of colonial European dominance and the genocidal destructive forces of empire, but also our understanding of mortality and, by extension, critiques of immortality. Vampire literature, Dunn argues, can be seen as a triptych in that it helps us to experience mortality through a cathartic and poetic medium as well as exploring the inhumane savagery of colonial genocide, its logics, and continued structural violence and finally, in more recent works of fiction, how to live through larger scale apocalyptic, environmental ends, as seen in Kristoff's epic *Empire of the Vampire* (2021).

Chapter eleven turns toward giant monsters and how they reflect the growing anxiety of the Anthropocene and the approaching horror of the climate emergency. Rawle looks at recent *kaijū* cinema. Licensed from a Japanese company (Tōhō Studios), produced by a Chinese-owned American production company (Legendary Entertainment) and financed by Hollywood studios (a combination of Universal and Warner Bros.), these films produce a global vision of ecologically-influenced crisis. They depict global capitalism repeatedly imagining its own destruction while simultaneously revelling in its own successes. The monsters themselves transcend borders and territories. But recent times have thus shifted understanding of *kaijū*. Drawing on Jonas Andreasen Lysgaard, Stefan Bengtsson and Martin Hauberg-Lund Laugesen's book *Dark Pedagogy: Education, Horror and the Anthropocene* (2019), Rawle explores how *kaijū* films present a narrative in which human actions turn nature monstrous in a way that spells doom as it transforms our landscape.

Martin Hall's discussion of Puenzo's critically and financially unsuccessful, straight-to-VHS, Argentinian film, *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1992), examines it as a piece of work that, whilst clearly transnational in both theme and production, deals inherently with the complicated notion of a lack of clarity, a failure to achieve, an inability to act quickly enough and an experience of the absurd. Hall considers the significance of Puenzo's film, and the source novel by Albert Camus, for a world in the grasp of the COVID-19 pandemic. The monster here is viral, and unstoppable, but by the same token, Puenzo, by transposing Camus'sCamus' anti-Fascist Nazi-

critique from the 1940s into the 1990s, suggests that the enemy is a timeless failure to communicate and the helplessness that people experience in the face of it. In this chapter, Hall reconsiders the film through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rhetoric of resistance and denial at the heart of government responses to the virus.

In the collection's final chapter, Gustavo Racy returns the focus to Brazil to address the meaning of monstrosity under the Bolsonaro administration. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, and the efforts to halt the global climate emergency, Racy discusses how Bolsonaro's negationist agenda has introduced a "monstrosity factor" in Brazilian reality that has not been disputed effectively. Racy explores how this "factor" has become impingent to Brazilian reality. Working as a "border patrol," as an alert for things to come, as well as a danger to challenge the institution of an interstice, a sign of rupture, Racy shows how the monstrosity of Bolsonaro's administration related to climate change and the COVID-19 pandemics, instating hubris as a norm, as well as putting itself besides any norm: a monster that "shows," but also one that "escapes" any fixed form.

In combining these dual approaches of both monster theory and the transnational, this book explores how transnationalism accentuates how these monstrous constructs transcend geographical borders. Monsters become symbolic carriers of transnational issues, embodying global concerns such as migration, displacement, and the clash of diverse cultural identities. The monstrous then, for our authors, has served as a tangible representation of the challenges arising from the movement of people, ideas, and resources across borders. This period of polycrisis has simply accelerated such flows.

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Chapter One

We Can't Settle for Normality: Towards Feminist Monster Studies

Ingvil Hellstrand, Sara E. S. Orning, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Donna McCormack

"One cannot reasonably expect sameness out of so much difference" (Jemisin, 2015, 193)

The present, global moment arguably requires a shift in addressing issues concerning the "normal". We understand the normal not only as the general, the common, and the standard, but also as that which embodies social and cultural legitimacy, carrying the underhanded, invisible power that tells you that "what is normal is also right" (Hacking, 1990, 160). The COVID-19 pandemic propelled important debates about how a persistent rhetoric of "returning to normal" effectively shifts heightened awareness of different types and degrees of vulnerability and marginalisation to calls for "normality", belonging and familiarity, for example relating to social reproduction (Stevano, Ali and Jamieson, 2020) and accessibility (Cole, 2016; Goggin and Ellis, 2020; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). In this chapter, we want to draw attention to how the very notion of normality always operates according to a perceived majority. As monster studies teaches us, the monster is historically and culturally positioned as opposite, outskirt, abnormal (Haraway, 1992; Cohen, 1996; Shildrick, 2022; Davies, 2016). But can the figure of the monster also help us to move beyond this established dichotomy between the familiar and the unknown? What is at stake for the relationality between normality and the monster as they are currently being imagined?

The aim of this chapter is to highlight how normality constitutes as well as trails/tails/ghosts/haunts the figure of the monster and the monstrous, and how it is connected to transnational structures of differentiation. Importantly,

however, the monster also represents change, as it potentially moves and shifts boundaries for belonging. Here, we draw on feminist, queer and decolonial perspectives to suggest that the monster is a moving, yet also "sticky", surface (Ahmed, 2004), that continuously both challenges and reinstates boundaries for the normal. In other words, what or who is considered monster/monstrous is not based on ontologically fixed categorisations but rather something that shifts between objects and bodies, between imaginaries and politics, as part of cultural circulation, and is therefore also open to change (Shildrick, 2022; Ahmed, 2004; Hellstrand, Koistinen and Orning, 2019). We introduce feminist monster studies as an analytical tool for exploring how questions of normality and difference, attachment and recognition are central to both feminist and monster studies and discuss how the monster is useful for reimagining collaboration and collectivity across transnational differences and divergences.

As has become our practice in the Monster Network, we also want to highlight the structures of citation that render invisible the labour that goes into thinking (Ahmed 2012; McCormack 2022). We learn from the work of many decolonial, anti-racist, queer, feminist and disabled thinkers, whose work is referenced throughout this piece. We also acknowledge that the act of writing is not an even process. This article stems from our ongoing discussions as a network on accessibility, inclusion, and exclusion, yet it was written largely by Hellstrand, whose intense labour resulted in this finished piece. McCormack brought us into the writing and informed the anger and upset about the ableist exclusions as governments, feminists and many others returned to "normal" as if the pandemic was over. However, McCormack remained absent in much of the writing due to ongoing, serious ill health. Orning, inspired by McCormack's attention to the ableism of this historical moment, but also being tied up in care work during the writing period, participated intermittently with forays into disability and crip theory, and especially what it can tell us about the normal and the transnational. Due to the precarious conditions of working in academia, such as the pressures related to temporary positions, Koistinen contributed to the process of writing and editing with a varying intensity. As an article about feminist monster studies we are trying to highlight how finished work is made possible, the varying ways in which labour is distributed unevenly, how lives are disrupted, as well as how collectives work as complex organisms.

Background: entanglements of the normal and the monstrous

Many things lock the monster into place – also normality. Normality is, indeed, a touchstone when we study how the monstrous operates on a social, cultural and historical level: it provides assumptions (silent, violent) about how boundaries operate and structure lives, bodies and aspirations. As such, it constitutes a powerful mechanism to define who gets to be seen as vulnerable, human and, as an extension, "saveable", while others become dispensable, monsterised. This notion of normality is arguably derived from the division of bodies into categories of being more or less useful after the rise of industrialisation, and closely tied to the rise of statistics as a tool for biopolitics and social governance (Davis, 1995; Cryle and Stephens, 2017). It also connects to notions of grievability and precarity as discussed by Judith Butler, who writes:

> The differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (Butler, 2004, xiv-xv)

Inevitably, normality continues to be an unwieldy idea that wields very concrete power: it is a question of life and death.

Contrasted with normality, the monster is precisely an unruly entity that disturbs these mechanisms because it simultaneously escapes definition (Cohen, 1996, 6) *and* defines the boundaries for what constitutes a community (Haraway, 1992, 180), a liveable life and a grievable death (Butler, 2004). However, from feminist, queer, crip and decolonial perspectives, the monster does not necessarily secure escape "because it refuses easy categorization" (Cohen, 1996, 6). On the contrary, the monster has a long history of activating certain typologies and characteristics that are linked to xenophobia, racism, ableism, homo- and transphobia and sexism. Marginalised bodies, identities and voices are often relegated to the realm of the monstrous, in the sense that they are deemed 'abnormal', untruthful, or unreliable (Davies, 2016; Shildrick, 2022).

For us, the genealogies of the monster and making-monstrous are being reactualised by the present, global moment of "returning to the normal". The 'we' writing this chapter are an interdisciplinary group of researchers who have come to monster studies from feminist, queer, anticolonial, and disability and crip-related fields of study, where normality is a contested term and concept because of its ties to the idea of Universal Man: the white,

male, able-bodied, heterosexual norm that all are defined in relation to (de Beauvoir, 1983; Young, 1980; Lorde, 1984; Butler, 1990). These feminist critiques are also connected to decolonial analyses of the Eurocentric and imperial legacies of imposed normality through forced assimilation, (settler) colonialism and epistemic violence (Mohanty, 1984; McClintock, 1995; Smith, 1999; Wynter, 2003; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Finbog, 2021).

Feminist and critical race theorists have challenged the "normality" of anthropocentrism (Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2018), as a way of acknowledging the troublesome categories of Man and Mankind (Braidotti, 2013), foregrounding posthuman and ecofeminist relations between human and nonhuman beings rather than speciesist concerns that reiterate the supremacy of a specific kind of human (Adams and Gruen, 2014). Tensions between the allegedly normal and the monstrous are also linked intimately to (experiences of) exclusion and inclusion in disability theory (Davis, 1995; Garland-Thomson, 1996; Kafer, 2013; Eli, 2017). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2005) connects this to a broader feminist and critical race analysis of uneven power relations: "Disability – similar to race and gender – is a system of representation that marks bodies as subordinate, rather than an essential property of bodies that supposedly have something wrong with them" (1557-1558).

Although there are important differences between feminist, queer, decolonial and disability studies, our starting point here is that they all have the monster in common. Through challenging the "normal", these theoretical perspectives in different ways acknowledge and critique marginalisation as part of the infrastructure of culture, society and embodiment. In addition, they focus on how socio-historical-cultural processes of meaning-making – and monster-making – relegate certain people, and nonhuman beings, to the bottom of the hierarchy. For us, tying together these critical perspectives on "normality" also serves to ground monster studies in transnational analyses of power and differences. Importantly, the monster is also a figure of storytelling, of cultural imageries and imaginations. For feminists, the long-term goal is, in fact, to change the world – i.e. to contest and undo harmful ways of exclusion and power asymmetries. This suggests that we need to be able to imagine the world – and the monster – otherwise (The Monster Network, 2021). As scholars with backgrounds in literary studies, cultural studies, and film and media studies, we are drawn to and moved by stories and imaginaries of the monster as a form of worlding (Haraway, 2016): a way to understand, challenge and, potentially change concepts and meanings that shape our world. In this, the monster can also be a hopeful figuration (Haraway, 1992; McCormack, 2015; Hellstrand, Henriksen, Koistinen, McCormack, and Orning, 2018).