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Editorial

From the monstrous to the human

Du monstrueux à l'humain

"No monsters here." With these words, an Argentinian girl named Noelia Garella was turned away from a nursery school. Years later, Garella became a teacher, defying those who believed that a person with Down syndrome could neither study nor teach. Garella now says that the nursery school principal who called her a monster "is like a story that I read to the children. . . She is a sad monster, who knows nothing and gets things wrong. I am the happy monster" (Agence France Presse, 2016).

Heart-warming stories like Garella's can sometimes serve to obscure all the life tales that follow a less exceptional path. All the same, Garella's story shows how the story of the monster can be rewritten, the tale retold in a new way.

The story of the monster speaks of difference – of the Other relegated to a category outside of the human through a process of "monstrification" or "enfreakment" (Garland-Thomson, 2004: 8; Hevey, 1992, 1997). Excluded, the monster cannot speak. Yet Noelia Garella takes over the narration, and changes the moral of the story.

This special issue looks at the telling and retelling of the stories of the monstrous – stories taking place on the borders of the human. The project arose out of a day-long conference which took place on July 7, 2012, thanks to a collaboration between the *Institut des Humanités de Paris* at the *Université Paris Diderot* (Paris 7), the Townsend Center for the Humanities of the University of California at Berkeley, and the Paris Center for Critical Studies (CIEE Paris).[2] On that occasion, Timothy Hampton, chair of the French department at U.C. Berkeley and specialist in Early Modern Literature, analyzed the references to "non-normal bodies" in writings of Montaigne and Cyrano de Bergerac. The disability studies scholar Susan Schweik, professor in the English department at U.C. Berkeley, analyzed the work of a disabled artists collective known as the *Yelling Clinic* with whom Schweik had traveled to Vietnam to meet Vietnamese artists in the context of an exploration of the representation of the effects of dioxin.[3] Simone Korff-Sausse, psychoanalyst and professor at the *Université Paris Diderot*, linked her

[2] We would like to thank all of these three institutions for their support for the interdisciplinary workshop, which launched the reflection that led to this special issue. I would also like to thank Anne-Lyse Chabert, Natalie Zemon Davis, Pierre Dufour, Timothy Hampton, Simone Korff-Sausse, Alison McRae, Eric Plaisance and Sofia Szamosi for their comments on earlier versions of this introduction. All errors are mine.

[3] Dioxin, known as "Agent Orange", is an herbicide used as a chemical weapon by the American military during the Vietnam War. Dioxin is responsible for numerous serious illnesses that have touched those exposed to it, and has also led to birth defects arising even many years afterwards.

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therapeutic work with children with disabilities and their families to mythic images of monsters. Caroline Demeule, psychoanalyst and professor at the same university, discussed her clinical work with people with serious facial malformation, focusing on the importance of their appropriating the "monstrous" images assigned to them. Anne-Lyse Chabert, whose PhD thesis at Paris Diderot focuses on a critical approach to the notion of disability (Chabert, 2014), discussed the monster/human divide as a violent demarcation that can be compared to the demarcation able-bodied/disabled.

Articles based on the talks of Timothy Hampton, Susan Schweik, Caroline Demeule and Simone Korff-Sausse make up this special issue, and the reflections of Anne-Lyse Chabert have contributed to this introduction. To these elements arising from the 2012 conference, we have added an article by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, author of seminal works in disability studies concerning representations of "extraordinary bodies" (Garland-Thomson, 1996a), "freakery" (Garland-Thomson, 1996b), and staring (Garland-Thomson, 2009). Here Garland-Thomson proposes an article about Julia Pastrana, a 19th-century Mexican woman displayed as an "apewoman", examined as a specimen, and finally, after her death, buried in her home country.

This special issue thus brings together a wide range of perspectives – French and American, historical and cultural and psychoanalytic and philosophical, clinical and scholarly – to explore questions evoked by the notion of monstrosity. Each author here, for different reasons and in different ways, sees the figure of the monster as a source of meaning – a story taking place at the boundaries of what is considered to be human. But a story about whom? For whom? Told by whom?

The study of the monstrous is the bringing of the challengingly different body into the realm of meaning, wonder, fantasy and art. In this collection of articles, we look at the clinical context – how can these fantasies be transformative for people? – and the historical context – how can these fictions and images reveal the complex categories and dichotomies of an epoch? And, what fictions and images come from shifting the subject position, shifting the point of view?

Our interdisciplinary perspective shows how closely the field of disability studies is linked to other fields in the humanities. For just as "the disabled" can be marginalized, so the domain of disability studies itself can be marginalized, as if the subject itself were uncanny or fearsome. But in fact, as Catherine Kudlick writes in her seminal article, "Why We Need Another 'Other'," the disability studies perspective illuminates new approaches in the humanities, by focusing on the key questions at the heart of our disciplines: "What does it mean to be human? How can we respond ethically to difference? What is the value of a human life? Who decides these questions, and what do the answers reveal?" (Kudlick, 2003: 764).

Historically, the trope of the monster has been used to interpret human variation. Unusual births, conjoined twins, people with traits of both sexes – all were signs, omens. As Timothy Hampton puts it, there is a tendency to deflect or avoid the presence of 'abnormal' bodies by turning them into "rhetorical figures for something else" (Hampton, in this issue: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2016.12.003); "saturated with signification, the extraordinary body is never considered for itself" (Garland-Thomson, 2004: 40, my translation). The word 'monster' comes from the Latin '*monere*', to advise – the variations in the human condition had to be interpreted, storied, in one way or another. Later through a false but persistent etymology the word came to be associated with '*monstrare*', which corresponds to another aspect of the monster – that which draws the gaze, which is displayed, exhibited, shown.

The Renaissance in Europe was accompanied by a "veritable epidemic of monsters" (Hampton, in this issue: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2016.12.003) – a fascination for extraordinary bodies, fantastic animals, conjoined twins, and also images of the Other – the "Indian", the African (Céard, 1977; Daston & Park, 1981, 2001; Moreau, 2014). The 19th century saw the emergence of the exhibition, the Freak Show proposing that audiences see the wonders of all kinds, including, in Europe, people from the colonies (Bancel, Blanchard, Boetsch, Deroo, & Lemaire, 2004; Garland-Thomson, 2004). In parallel came the rise of the scientific discourse about difference: "in the 19th century, the crazy person is in the asylum where he serves to teach reason, and the monster is in the test-tube where he serves to teach the norm" (Canguilhem, 1962, cited by Stiker, 2008: 240, my translation). In all cases – as an omen to be interpreted, as a freak to be displayed, or a problem to be treated or analyzed scientifically – the "monster" is placed outside of the discussion. The person defined as "monstrous", as "abnormal", *has* meaning but all too often does not *make* meaning, *is* a text, not the *writer* of a text. Yet, Noelia Garella reminds us, people also tell stories about themselves.