

## POSTHUMAN TERATOLOGY

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THIS CHAPTER WILL EXPLORE ways of thinking posthuman teratology. Teratology has referred to the study of monsters and monstrosity in all epistemic incarnations, though most often in medicine and physiology. Two inclinations resonate with two effects encountered in relations with monsters. Irrefutable and irresistible wonder and terror have led, in the life sciences, to a compulsion to cure or redeem through fetishization, making sacred or simply sympathetic. The effect that monstrosity has upon the "nonmonstrous" is an inherently ambiguous one, just as monsters themselves are defined, most basically, as ambiguities. The hybrid and the ambiguous hold fascination for the "nonmonster" because they show the excesses, potentialities, and infinite protean configurations of form and flesh available in nature even while human sciences see them as unnatural. Human sciences' study of and quest for cures for monstrosity are less about monstrosity and more about preserving the myth and integrity of the base level zero, normal human.

Monsters are only ever defined contingent with their time and place; they are never unto themselves. It could be argued that monstrosity is only a failure of or catalyst to affirm the human. Can we even ask what a monster *is*? Configured as "subjects" who fail to fulfill the criteria of human subjects, monstrosity points out the human as the icon of what is normal, and thus the monster as what is not human. For this reason, the monster has an ideal and intimate relationship with the concept of the posthuman. Posthuman theory developed as a result of the

deconstruction of meta-discourses such as science, history, and transcendental philosophy that had worked to attain and maintain the meaning, truth, and status of what defines the human.<sup>1</sup> It does not come after humanism but interrogates the conditions of possibility of being and knowing the human while offering examples from all discourses of how there is always something more in the human that delimits its parameters and possibilities. In this sense the posthuman emphasizes that we are all, and *must* be, monsters because none are template humans. The human is an ideal that exists only as a referent to define what deviates from it. Just as the monster is predicated on a judgment based upon what defines a normal human, so too, the human is a conceptualized idea that can be figured as a referent defined only through that which deviates from it. Through teratology we discover in the posthuman what can be thought as ethical, material, experimental, creative, and yet which escapes definition—the inhuman, the a-human, the nonhuman. In the most reduced sense, then, through concepts of adaptability and evolution itself, all organisms are unlike—we are all, and must be, monsters because nothing is ever like another thing, nor like itself from one moment to the next.

While immediately associated with human sciences, teratological studies frequently glean their names from both animality and myth—the Elephant Man/Protean syndrome being one example that includes both animal and ancient monstrous-man figure. Myth, symbolic use of animals, fiction, and fable coalesce in hypertrichotic "werewolf" syndrome. These are two of many examples that show that the monster unifies disparate fields of study and the residue of myth, fantasy, fear, and hybrid aberration that is maintained in science. This chapter will explore ways in which monstrosity works alongside and inflects with the posthuman, and will also inflect science with myth and the actual with the fictive to emphasize the established relationship between these different orders of knowledge that seem to already form a hybrid—even monstrous—foundation of studies in monstrosity.

I consistently use the term *the monster*. This tactical use should be qualified in two ways. First, it is clear that there is no single taxonomical category of monster; second, I use this term not to describe a thing but more to name a catalyst toward an encounter. *The monster* refers to the element outside the observer that sparks and creates an event of perception that necessitates the participation of two unlike entities. The monster can simultaneously refer to anything that refuses being *the human* and that which makes the person who encounters it posthuman. There are a number of ways by which we can conceive this kind of monster. Importantly, it emphasizes that referring to a monster only ever refers to an encounter with alterity. This is so even if both entities could be described (or describe themselves) as monsters because monsters are as unlike each other as they are the nonmonstrous.

### Why a Posthuman Teratology?

Posthumanism has become a field of investigation that incites excitement due to its unapologetic refusal to quicken to a hermeneutic epistemology or an ontological project: inherent in this play with the basic parameters and goals of discovery and analysis is the subject of the posthuman itself. Where humanism has sought to empirically and philosophically reduce the concept of being to a transcendental essence, so posthumanism seeks to open out the field of study of its "object" as an infinite refolding and metamorphic mobilization of its subject and thus its nature of enquiry. In spite of its name, the posthuman must not be understood as coming after the human. Inherent in posthumanism is the very notion of narrative time or causality as being arbitrary—both are taken as expressions of power rather than necessary elements of logic. The question for the posthuman becomes not "what is the posthuman?" but "why is it necessary?" and analyses ask "how does it emerge?" Before any exemplifications of the posthuman emerge, posthuman philosophy has taken as its task the ethical and creative need to rethink the category of human, both as an object of study and as a discursive technique of categorization where it is not so much what one is but *where* one is in the taxonomical hierarchy that matters and, indeed, where one's matter is created. Humanism allows investigation to collapse all differing systems of knowledge into an essentially unified consistency of value. The elements that measure value are deferred to an isomorphic system where alterity comes more from what one is not than what one is. Alterity is thus conceived as failure. The paradigmatic nature of philosophy, science, and other epistemologies means that certain qualities are consistently desired over others on the objects of analysis of each, but more so certain tendencies of modes of conception underpin the way that these objects are able to emerge at all.

The posthuman challenges not only qualities that make up the human—as an organism and a cultural, reflective, knowing subject (including knowledge of self)—but qualities that compel the paradigms by which things are perceived to be able to be known. These include organism or object discretion, the possibility of essence, the promise of investigation being exhausted when the object is known absolutely, belief in the myth of objectivity or the possibility of the observer being entirely extricated from the observed, and adherence to established, agreed modes of perception constituted by maintaining traditionally accepted techniques of experimentation and study. The posthuman does not therefore depose the human, nor come after it, but allows access to and celebrates the excesses, conundrums, jubilant failures, and disruptive events which are already inherent in any possibility of contemplation. Shifting possibility to potentiality, the posthuman spatially encourages an address to the multiple within a divided organism and the organism as part of a teeming series of relations with its inextricable environment, both

conceptual and material (but of course no longer bifurcated). Temporally, the posthuman is past, present, and future contracted into immanent entity, emergent without arrival and fled before it is complete. We can invoke certain words that persist in encounters with the posthuman—the multiple, the transformative, the space between, the manifold, the other—but one term that is particularly resonant with the posthuman, sharing its tentative qualities, its failure to be majoritarian and most importantly, its ethical urgency, is *the monster*.

*Majoritarian* does not refer to the majority of people, nor the majority of beliefs, truths and such. Majoritarianism is a compulsion to reiterate certain modes of thinking rather than thoughts themselves. Majoritarian thinking is knowledge as absolute (or the possibility of it being such). Majoritarian knowledge anchors on a master discourse where it is not so much that things are monsters but certain traits, forms, and ways of negotiating the world are considered the only ways, based on the privileging of concepts such as objectivity and logic. Historically, then, majoritarians have been white, able-bodied, heterosexual, educated males, but all people who participate in these ways of thinking are majoritarian in spite of their corporeal status.

*Teras* means both monster and marvel. Immediately one is struck with an inherent contradiction. The aberrant as marvelous points to the crucial role that desire plays in thinking both the posthuman and monsters. Where the posthuman is scary because it eviscerates absolute knowledge as an impossible goal, monsters are scary because they do not fit into the classifications we create in order for something to exist at all.<sup>2</sup> The monster is not a being unto itself; it is a failure to be a proper being. In 1831, Cambridge University professor of medicine W. Clark wrote a treatise based on transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society. Clark commented on the fascination that monsters elicit: "Of late years no subject has more incessantly occupied the labours of learned continental Anatomists than the investigation of the steps by which the rudimentary organs of embryos advance to their perfect form."<sup>3</sup> Here temporality is configured in an early heralding of evolution where the form at which one arrives, as well as the comparative place that form will occupy in relation to others, are "results" of stages toward perfection. Being a being is a finite goal in this configuration, creating resonances of the organic with the increments of knowledge one must take to arrive at a concept of one's self philosophically and the ultimate arrival where man attains God, through access to truth, absolutism, and, most importantly, likeness to God. The human template, the micro-God, is both that which nature seeks in order to create proper healthy, normal human life, and that which science seeks to know in order to match it elegantly with more esoteric or philosophical notions of what it means to be a living human. This template is seemingly basic and straightforward but actually an impossible concept of singularity, showing that any organism only ever exists as a version of an ideal that, by its very nature, is immaterial

and fantasmatic. The focus on elements of disambiguation and temporal transformation is key in theories of the posthuman, where *plethora* replaces *persona* and being becomes becoming.

The monster reminds us of the ethical importance inherent in thinking about posthuman aberration. A key factor in posthumanism in relation to teratology is that teratology brings us back to history as a remembered present while it seeks the future-now upon which much posthuman theory focuses. Exchanging history for individual memories means that the past does not affirm the present and guarantee a future, as *posthumanism opens up potentialities rather than repeating forms*. However, it acknowledges the suffering, objectification, and effects of being named monster that cannot be denied. A remembered present asks "how does experience of the past effect present modes of being"? For the monster it validates experience as other; for the objectifier it demands accountability.

My positing posthuman teratology will not focus on the more obvious examples of the posthuman, the primary one of which is the *techno-posthumanism*. Perhaps the most famous theorist of the cyborg, Donna Haraway, created a connection between woman as the first step away from the "human"—correctly the Man masquerading gender specificity with all its associated powers of signification as neutrality—and technology. What she emphasized was that technology persists in the compulsion of majoritarian paradigms, which operate primarily through the production of meaning as "binary dichotomisation."<sup>4</sup> If the pre-human was nature to culture, the posthuman in the context of techno-biopolitics is culture to future while simultaneously a collapse between the most basic biology and the most refined technology. The persistence of the binary system is the issue here, as it shows that the quality of an event of the human cannot be posthuman if it stands in opposition to a less attractive, oppressed, or suppressed other who both threatens to reemerge in order to subsume it and also reminds it of the irrefutable necessity for dominance in the quest for liberation from the flesh. It is the very flesh of the other that is usually subjugated (this is especially so for *xeno-biology* in animal organ harvest experiments for transplantation). A system of equivalence sits side by side with that of accumulation. As animal is to human, and woman is to man, so man is to cyborg. The first term in each dyad is one from which the majoritarian flees but also which it needs in order to operate a structure of proportion—definition based on difference as only success or failure at resemblance. In a seeming contradiction, the cyborg as a posthuman future reminds us that the "natural" flesh, particularly the animal and woman, is the most monstrous. A troubling appendix to this series of proportion is the current tendency to equate brains with computers, yet it is most often the computer system that is seen to offer an insight into the brain, while the brain's complexity finds its greatest power in its capacity to be synthetically constructed in cyborg consciousness. But neurophysiologist Rodney Cotterill emphasizes that it is

rather unlikely that computers as such could be given consciousness merely through the use of a specific type of software. There would have to be something that is likened to a body, equipped with counterparts of our muscle-moving apparatus. . . . Given that thought is essentially stimulation of the body's interactions with the environment, as I have said, this would mean that the computer would be simulating simulation . . . we humans appear to be mesmerised by the prospect of artificially producing copies of ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

Cyborg and simulated consciousness technology has come a long way since Cotterill's text; however, what remains the same is the desire to reactivate qualities associated with human-yet-transcendental subjectivity.

Is simulation empty copying, an elliptical compulsive return to the human, or is it a virtualization of potentiality that goes beyond the paradigms that allow traditional coveted qualities of idealized humanity to operate?<sup>6</sup> Two intriguing issues arise in Cotterill's lament—the first is the inextricability of identity from environment, the second the necessity of flesh or something akin to it. Consciousness is flesh, and vice versa. A Cartesian extrication of consciousness from flesh compels many cyborg theories, while a more Spinozan understanding of expressions, relations, and affects between entities, environment, subject, thought, and (inter) act(ion) haunts its as yet impossibility. Spinoza states that "matter is everywhere the same, parts are distinguished in it only insofar as we conceive matter to be affected in different ways, so that its parts are distinguished only modally."<sup>7</sup> Robert Pepperell's seminal posthuman manifesto states, "The idealists think that the only things that exist are ideas, the materialists think that the only thing that exists is matter. It must be remembered that ideas are not independent of matter and that matter is just an idea."<sup>8</sup>

Pepperell emphasizes that posthumanity is liberated from binary dichotomization, an anchoring of ideas into virtualities that must be actualized in order to be (that is, they are neither transcendental nor independent from other ideas from all fields, particularly the inextricability of science and philosophy). Yet there still resonates a fear of matter because, as will be explored below, through posthuman ethical philosophy, matter may be emergent as a negotiated concept through being an idea, but there is nonetheless matter beyond and independent of (because always within) simply being "just" an idea. Pain, actual suffering, experiments on nonconsenting flesh, or the results of technologies of combat show us not an "idea" of matter but matter's ubiquitous all. I am not suggesting here that matter creates ideas, per se, or lurks beneath them, waiting to pounce out to destroy us by reminding us that we cannot be without a body, but in order to think an ethics of biopolitics, the future-now needs to acknowledge what we cannot get rid of, either through technology or through signification. Knowledge of matter is just matter as an idea, but matter for itself is not.

### Dysfunctional Cyborg Dreams

While the cyborg body is constituted by defining qualities of monstrosity—hybridity, negotiating binaries such as flesh–technology, nature–future and experimentation, on which an enormous amount has been written—I would argue this has been to the detriment of certain ways in which we can, or *should*, think post-humanism as now and as a field that should not place itself in a future without a past or residue. Critically, cyborgism can tend to a hyperevolutionary obsession where the only way to be posthuman is to collapse the technology created by man to manipulate life with the organism, lamentably for cyborgs, as which we still persist to exist, with all our frailties and failures. Cyborgism has promises of enhancement toward immortality and a God-scientist who can create and extend life and become the ultimate self-authorizing identity, no longer in need of the physiology alienated from his will that threatens to destroy him through age and disease. Cyborgism can be experimental, playful, and hold much promise, but teratology reminds us that the negotiation of volition and self-expression that underpins cyborgism has too frequently been denied monsters, be they anatomical congenital aberrations, transgressives, or bodies at the most basic level of alterity from the majoritarian understanding of the human. Additionally, perhaps contentiously, should not monsters in their posthuman incarnations, by their very aberrant definition, ethically and politically challenge the structures that underpin dominant powers? C. Ben Mitchell et al. write:

Some individuals even call themselves “transhumanist,” explicitly promoting the re-engineering of humankind into some form or forms of “post-human” being. Even the US government has invested in a controversial project to reengineer human beings.<sup>9</sup> Yet even if not adopting such an extreme view or goal it would seem a large number of individuals in the United States and around the world are enticed by all the potential technologies of “enhancement.” The desires for modification may be rooted in wishes for fashioning oneself into a more socially acceptable image, attempting to improve self-esteem through reengineering, or making oneself more competitive in business, the professions, academia, or athletics. Unfortunately the motivations behind these desires are usually socially driven fears, experiences of rejection or failure, or just plain greed, and they may reflect a social rather than biological pathology.<sup>10</sup>

While vaguely theological, this criticism elucidates the point that we cannot find the posthuman as a liberating concept in what it is but in what it does to majoritarian systems of control, social hierarchies, and the obsessions with an extension or enhancement of the same old power enforcements taken to their longed-for eternity. The question with cyborgism is “enhancing what?” Artistic and conceptual-performance cyborgism, such as the work of Stelarc, which makes

up a considerable component of cyborg incarnations and biotechnological experiments, may find itself aligned more with traditional teratology than with cyborg theory, per se. Stelarc's third arm project formed a disambiguation of the binarization of two arms (and even the healthy human baby as two arms, two legs) and the conceptualization of limb movement as volitional and organic, as the arm was manipulated by interface users. His third ear transplanted onto his forearm exhibited an organ with no use and redefined through its proximity with a non-compatible organ (itself relatively rudimentary, the forearm apprehended as a vista of skin rather than an organ with a function per se).

### Relationality as Hybridity

Covertly, I could make the same argument against the fetishization of animality in certain becomings, where the posthuman collapses animality with human form brought out in experiments with body modification—the implantation of certain animal elements such as stripes, whiskers, fangs, and horns. Here, alterity has become oversignified as a liberatory regression or devolution. Such examples include Dennis Avner the Stalking Cat and Eric Sprague the Lizard Man.<sup>11</sup> Rather than entering into their own becomings, however, both have rented themselves out, in that Sprague is a “freak show” performer and Avner performs personal narrativizations in public appearances, which suggests seeking to reify his being rather than explore his becomings. For this reason, while I invoke these figures, I use them as illustrative risks setting down a template as to what does or does not constitute a becoming-animal.<sup>12</sup> Where the cyborg is the future-human-now, the becoming-animal of certain posthumans is the past-reclaimed.<sup>13</sup> Many teratological conditions have been named such because aberrant traits are perceived as animal qualities—elephant men, wolf children, mermaid (thus fish) syndrome. Becomings-animal in certain body modifications directly refuse being named as a failure by presenting as a volitional way to rename oneself via qualities which are considered liberating rather than devolutionary. The power of naming and the myth of compulsory humanness are taken from majoritarian systems, and so is the belief that being human is the most desirable state of subjectivity. Although offering fascinating examples of the inherent hybridity of any attempt to become something else, in a sense, some of these animal-humans want to become, not animals, but irreducibly human perceptions of animals. An animal—and what is (or is not) an animal—is no less nor more “natural” than a human. The animal-human's seeking origin positions itself in a parabolic configuration with the cyborg's seeking eternity. Thinking the animal ethically—which may confess to not thinking it at all beyond thinking through grace as the pure allowance of the other to be, without intervention—gives way to idealizing and fetishizing.

More problematic than the animal aims of modifiers is the increasing collapse of possible resonances of biology, from testing to transplantation, where the subjugated element is not technically apprehended as living being but as living material. Theories of the posthuman are increasingly questioning the meaning of "life." The multiple in the singular may seem all-too posthuman—the pig's heart transplanted into the human body, the animal used for performances as some symbiotic claim (such as Monika Oeschler's Eagle Project)<sup>14</sup>—but these fail to encounter an animal as a consistency of (its own owned) life, let alone animality. It is fine for the human to question his own human status through experiments with hybridity, multiplicity, and symbiosis with alterity, but the seeking of these forms of the posthuman involves another element, and that element, when animal, even in the most seemingly benevolent circumstances, but certainly not those involving pain or death, is incapable of consent, is simply a return to the absolute power that the concept of being human perpetuates and vindicates. Beyond thinking that the impossibility of animal consent is something that comes solely from a linguistic system, the very notion of the right to "use" fantasizes that there is an appropriate field of operations where the human has both the right to intervene (including the symbolic or the performative) in animal life and the opposing view that they do not. While the latter does acknowledge that the incapacity to consent should mean a refusal to compel, both impose an assimilating regime upon the animal nonetheless. The radical and uncomfortable issue is that we exist within purely human discourse, with all its ambiguities, temporal and spatial contingencies, and to attempt to operate outside these is itself a human project. The question is not one of purely linguistic or structural questioning of animal-human relations, though this is perhaps whence it begins, but the right to consider difference at all if it is irreducible difference without negotiation.

Cary Wolfe states two factors that have made theories of animality become so prevalent in recent years. The first is the crisis in humanism in philosophy; the second, which inflects animality as a primal form of life toward the futures that techno-biopolitics promise, is that the animal has found its presence most in nonhumanities epistemes.<sup>15</sup> Both are human-to-human tendencies, whatever that means beyond meaning incapable of encountering the extra-human. The question of who we are now that we are no longer human is counteracted by the question, What can we do with animals to make us live longer? Both uses of animals, however, persist in binary dichotomization, as they necessitate animals as nothing more than not human. Resemblance through metaphor and arrogant use through biological harvesting affirm that "it was as a comment on human nature that the concept of 'animality' [and so too monster] was devised."<sup>16</sup>

Cyborgism can facilitate our escape from just being animals, while using animals insinuates that we are not animals but a somehow higher form of life.

Where, in poststructuralism, epistemes collide, these two claims cannot coexist. Giorgio Agamben calls this the ironic anthropomorphic machine of humanism: "You can degenerate into the lower things, which are brutes; you can regenerate, in accordance with your soul's decision, into the higher things which are divine.... The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself."<sup>17</sup> Posthumanism, neither a before nor an after, is the crisis of the end of the myth of man. Questions such as what can we do to extend the human, or what the animal means, essentially ask one single question, which is the "what now?" of the human.

While, once again, I am adamantly not claiming that cyborg and animal posthumans are always resonating with humanistic tendencies, what teratology reminds us is that the monster as aberration is that which is traditionally and historically denied volition or any sense of self-authorization. Defined through this word *marvel*, teratology describes a study of relation more than of an object. Rather than I "am" a cyborg project or becoming-animal, monstrosity is an encounter. The subject in proximity with the monster must be accountable for subjects' mode of perception; the monster is nothing unto itself except aberrant to the other. The other is just as easily able to be monstrous to the monster. What is emphasized is the space between. Monstrosity is the event; thus, teratologically speaking, posthumanism is neither a natural object nor a volitional refusal of the human but the creation of a multiple through the desire to marvel at that which cannot be perceived via traditional modes of signification and apprehension. There is no resolution, no finality, no knowledge of, just the consistency of being as a being in relation with, and the incited thoughts, creative perceptions, and imagined potentiality that comes from this marvelous encounter where both and thus neither are aberrations except to one another, beyond scientific or philosophical humanist reduction or deferral to the already established categories of the human. "I find the other in me (it is always concerned with showing how the other, the distant, is always the near and the same). It resembles exactly the invagination of a tissue in embryology, or the act of doubling in sewing: twist, fold, stop and so on."<sup>18</sup> Shifting the earlier critique of the manipulated posthuman, we can find in our most humble and ordinary bodies radical possibilities when we are liberated from taxonomy.

### Monstrous Metamorphoses

The primary element that defines monsters is that they are not not-monsters, not us, not normal. They have no category of their own by which they may be recognized and thus removed. To have an object (monsters are objectified, never subjects unto themselves) that cannot be described and placed into a category alongside other like objects is the primary concept that structures all other elements of monstrosity—that is the ambiguous, the neither-neither—neither this, nor that, but not "not" these things. Monsters when they are formed from human

matter are never entirely independent from the human form. The very problem comes from their uncanny redistribution of human elements into aberrant configurations. It is the part we recognize as made strange, or in proximity with a part with which it should not sit side by side, that makes monsters monstrous. Like the posthuman, the monster is neither before nor beyond the human but an interrogation of the myths of human integrity, biologically and metaphysically.

A monster is not a classified object nor a self-authorized subject but more the result of an act of being named such. So the next circle of ambiguity and relation after that which recognized the monster as familiar and unfamiliar is the relation between the monster and the nonmonster who names it. Again, this involves the element of the familiar, here normal, with the unfamiliar and indefinable, the monster. Both in itself and in its relation with the not-monster, the monster operates through this system of hybridity. We cannot speak of monsters. We speak only of examples of the plasticity and creativity that is inherent in all concepts, including those formed to describe and know biological phenomena. Ambiguous hybridity of form and encounter spatially locate the monster. Temporally, the monster is constituted through metamorphosis and distortion. While the form of a monster may not necessarily undergo perceptible alteration any more than all bodies are in constant state of change, the way the monster is perceived does—historically, monsters have been encountered first as abominations, then with sympathy, then as projects to fix. Again we see that it is the structure of relation with the monster that creates its meaning, rather than the quality or nature of the monster itself.

Monsters in themselves are created through a bordering and create bordering encounters. Within monstrous "identity," therefore, there is already more-than-one, and relating with the monster mirrors this multiplicity within the singular. There is no evidence of discrete identity, not even bad identity. Resonating with the turn to animality in posthuman theory, the monster is often a hybrid of "animal" and "human." But another way to utilize animality in posthuman teratology without assimilation or fetishization comes from fabulations of impossible combinations created not through sutured forms but through intermingling intensities. For example, in fiction, myth, and popular culture we find the werewolf and the vampire. Werewolves are part man, part wolf, without being examples of either. The werewolf is rather the "wolfing" of man. It is defined by its temporal transformations and instability. Additionally, werewolves are frequently characterized by their tragic benevolence and horror at wolfing, so they cannot be reduced to a single expression of intent or nature. The vampire mingles dead with living undead; it becomes bat, wolf, even molecules of fog. The vampire does not metamorphosize; it is itself a metamorphosis. Covert to the tragically benevolent werewolf, the vampire is unapologetically horrifying and seductive precisely for being such. We cannot ask what a werewolf or vampire is, as each is always

changing. In a contradictory conundrum, they are defined by instability, mingling of different forms, and invoking violent aggression in sympathy and irresistible desire in repulsion. "The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. . . . It is always with the anomalous . . . that one enters into alliance with becoming animal."<sup>19</sup>

In a posthuman project toward becoming-animal (where the venture, the *becoming*, is the focus, and the final form never arrives), ironically the fictive animal becomes more real than any becoming based on intimate knowledge of zoology. Just as teratology risks fetishizing the monster, as sacred, as victim, as repulsive, through claims that absolute knowledge will mean absolute capacity to name and describe the limits and meanings of the monster, so zoology's study of animals to the most refined molecular point creates a phantasy of understanding an animal and thus being ethically vindicated in co-opting one, be it through consumption, experimentation, or just idealized symbolicization. The fictive fabulation animals that Deleuze and Guattari mention are those that demand creation and imagination—encounters that ignite thought rather than promise knowledge and its associated powers. As imaginary concepts, most frequently found in art, literature, and film, fabulation animal-monsters such as werewolves and vampires cannot be co-opted, as they exist only as demands for relations of othering. We can never "know" that which does not exist, but, like all art and fiction, it does not mean that our ideologies, paradigmatic tendencies, and responses are not affected by experiences of these entities. Posthuman tribal totems are not those of "primitive" culture, nor even of the use of animals as symbols in modernity, but strange, taxonomically impossible creatures that are us, and *not* us, which move us to different positions. The werewolf is man and beast, the vampire inherently metamorphic to the limit of being gaseous, a future of postdeath rather than eternal, technologically facilitated life. Both are fleshy, furred, corroded, showing different conditions of the smooth, hard flesh of normal humanity and its ambition toward being impervious cyborg metal. Yet both are recognizably human. Most importantly, both infect and exist in packs. By very virtue of being infective, vampires must form packs, even if they are disparate. Indeed the idea that one belongs to a pack although one may never see one's fellow pack mates exemplifies the oxymoronic status of these monstrous evocations. This means that the only way to access these monsters is to be part of them—the encounter is the concept itself. The enigmatic nature of these monsters is eternal but notably popular in contemporary culture. This shows that they are not abject abnormal creatures to be put away, made sacred or profane, but always externalized. They are seductive present promises of extending thoughts of human potentiality, and we enter into an internal teratological realm. Emphasizing the marvelous, fascinating etymology of the word, fabulated monsters can only be encountered by becoming with

them. While each emergence of werewolf and vampire is unique, the packs that they create are communities of those who are not common to each other, as much of a seeming contradiction as monsters themselves.

### Toward an Ethics of Posthuman Monstrosity

There may seem to be a problem here with the possibility of ignoring "real-life" monsters, entities both human and animal that have been forced to suffer through oppression catalyzed by their alterity. The function of fiction here does not oppose that of reality, but it breaks down the binary itself. Fiction requires a belief in the unbelievable. While readers are aware of the fictive form, the affects and intensities incited in the imagination are real and have direct effects on the subjectivity of the reader, just as all fictive art affects the self beyond the fiction, and all science of the real operates via beliefs in what kinds of knowledge are possible and acceptable, the belief in which is its own fiction. Modes of perception are neither fictive nor true. They are constructs of possibilities of ideas. This means that all encounters with alterity will create a choice—to turn away by knowing the other as abnormal and therefore affirming the self as normal, or to enter into a bordering or pack with the monstrous, creating a revolutionary hybridity of two who were already hybrids, and so forth. This bordering is as relevant for political activism as it is for dreams of wolfing and vampirism. Foucault states of power, "That's just like you, always with the same *incapacity to cross the line*, to pass over to the other side . . . it is always the same choice, for the side of power, for what power says or what it causes to be said."<sup>20</sup> It is just as easy for the fictive to incite reiterations of oppressive power—the hybrid must be punished, the abnormal is evil—as it is for the limitless potentials of fiction to exploit those elements that are unthinkable outside of literature and all art. As it is more difficult to imagine the becoming-vampire of everyday subjectivity, so it is more important in reference to the need to think the fact of everyday monstrosity as that which proves the infinite differentiations of the myth of the static human as a single possibility of expression whose only others are considered deviations rather than variations. Encounter and proximity refuse the distance required for one to objectify and name another. And both encountering entities alter within their own nature and as a single new hybrid manifestation. By this can be cured the most monstrous but repressed of animal functions that man operates in his oppressive regimes:

History hides the fact that man is the universal parasite, that everything and everyone around him is hospitable space. Plants and animals are always his hosts; man is necessarily their guest. Always taking, never giving. He bends the logic of exchange and of giving in his favour when he is dealing with nature as a whole. When he is dealing with his kind he continues to do so: He wants to be the parasite of man as well.<sup>21</sup>

Michel Serres shows that it is not the monster who needs normal man to liberate it but man who needs the monster to affirm himself and his status.

The monster is always liberated enough, too much, limitless. The monster's becomings with other monsters, already us as we are already them, is quelled by man's being as parasite. This relation, to know and name the monster, is an act of violence.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently the basic combat situation reappears in knowledge. There. Just as we noted previously, a collectivity united by an agreement finds itself facing the world in a relation, neither dominated nor managed, of unconscious violence: Mastery and possession . . . Science brings together fact and law: whence it is now decisive place. Scientific groups, in a position to control or do violence to the worldwide world, are preparing to take the helm of the worldly world.<sup>23</sup>

Serres pleads for a natural contract, what Guattari would call an ecosophy of alterity and relations over law.<sup>24</sup> That science is law shows the fictitious nature of both, and monstrosity requires a certain lawlessness that, as a concept, is itself seen to be monstrous. It is not, it is simply not top-down. Traversal is active and activating. From abnormal thing to anomalous movement operates. Guattari names this the politics of traversal. Monsters show that all subjectivity must be considered pure singularity. Traversing domains of singularities, creating monstrous territories, promotes

innovatory practices, the expansion of alternative experiences centred around a respect for singularity and through the continuous production of an autonomising subjectivity that can articulate itself appropriately in relation to the rest of society. . . . Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different.<sup>25</sup>

Teratology from taxonomy to traversal celebrates the singularity of each monster while showing that we are all monsters in our singularity. Collectivity comes from the unlike, to transform groups based on expressions of creativity through difference, not of power through knowledge. It also addresses the lived reality of monsters and their/our unique experiences of suffering and jubilation.

### Conclusion

Guattari writes:

We can no longer sit idly by as others steal our mouths, our anuses, our genitals, our nerves, our guts, our arteries, in order to fashion parts and works in an ignoble mechanism of production which links capital, exploitation and the family. We can no longer allow others to turn our mucous membranes, our

skin, all our sensitive areas, into occupied territory—territory controlled and regimented by others, to which we are forbidden access. We can no longer permit our nervous system to serve as a communications network for the system of capitalist exploitation, for the patriarchal state; nor can we permit our brains to be used as instruments of torture programmed by the powers that surround us. We can no longer allow others to repress our fucking, control our shit, our saliva, our energies, all in conformity with the prescriptions of the law and its carefully defined little transgressions. We want to see frigid, imprisoned, mortified bodies exploded to bits, even if capitalism continues to demand they be kept in check at the expense of our living bodies.<sup>26</sup>

Guattari emphasizes that the most monstrous bodies are those already available to us, from neither past nor future, and that are all that we are. The most basic and quiet of corporeal acts, if not enclosed in regimentation and signification, can cause horror, while grand experiments in posthumanism can reiterate the oppression and repression of bodies, depending on what symbolic values and by what means these bodies emerge and are encountered. "Pathology is not a general state of being, a disease which afflicts the whole system, but a local and readable lesion, a mappable topography."<sup>27</sup> Monsters are lesion bodies that must be extricated from the body politic, the corpus. They must be read before they can be encountered and removed, yet we could say that the encounter, which causes horror through aberration as ambiguity, is the catalyst for signification, where marveling converts to meaning. Marveling opens up the witness; meaning closes off the monster. It is a question of a revolutionary or reifying decision, the way the other is mapped. A lesion to be ablated, or a suppurating opening, what Guattari shows is that the way beyond the categorization of the human is what we have already repressed that is inherently part of and all that we are. And one could argue that cyborgs do not sweat, shit nor spit, while animals, including the human animal do, but we perceive it in either a ritualized or naturally innocent fashion.

Kristeva writes that "experimental multiplicity is entirely different from the emptiness and destruction experienced in the loss of identity."<sup>28</sup> Monsters, multiple, hybridic and metamorphic, find their place—a no-place, an every-place—in postmodernity as proliferation. They offer a vitalistic foil to the sometimes cynical, even nihilistic risks that the postmodern loss of identity may entail. The very nature of monsters as sicknesses of a failure to be human makes their divided corporeal aberrancies mirror their place in society as flaws or deformities of the social corpus. But when postmodernity facilitates posthumanity, monsters show the body already remapped. We are faced with our bodies as monstrous because the sites of what would be considered failures or flaws upon a human map, and signified as such, close off thinking the body differently, become openings toward life without and beyond humanity, actual lived experience, being without having to be a specified subject.

Monstrous "deformities" and symptoms traditionally punctuate a normal body as text to be read. These punctuative points can be encountered as *despositifs* that escape signification rather than functioning as an affirmation of the claimed necessity of normality. Lyotard states of the aberrant body that "the body is undone and its pieces are projected across libidinal space, mingling with other pieces in an inextricable patchwork."<sup>29</sup> Patching together despotic aberrations of the flesh, the genetic code connects points that are incommensurable with the normal human but that are also commensurable with each other. Where they are single points—conceptually and physically—that sully the smooth, sealed terrain of the human, they become multiple relations between other nonhumans, and each seam of the patchwork (and each despotic aberration has many sides, and thus many seams and many relations with others) is a unique connective tissue of creative singularity. It demands thought because it has never been encountered before. All bodies, perceived as formerly normal or not, have to think what relations they can make with multiple *despositifs*. Each body must therefore have more than one plane, side, or aspect, and each specific connection exacerbates these multiplications. This operation involves

opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensities and territories and deterritorialisations measured with the craft of a surveyor . . . how can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality?<sup>30</sup>

Teratological connectivity fulfills certain qualities of the posthuman—multiplicity in the one, singularity in the many, the death of reproduction for production of the unlike. This mode of teratological experimentation in thought and practice does not need an actual element of alterity that is not human—animal, machine—but reminds us all that humanity is made up of its own elements of otherness that are repressed, denied, or cataloged. Teratological connectivity affirms that the category of human has never existed properly, but instead of co-opting elements opposed to the human, it celebrates and exploits that we already have everything we need to become posthuman monsters, without the need for fetishization or assimilation of those who cannot choose to become part of nonhuman assemblages, such as animals, or for access to overarching systems of modernity beyond the reach of most people, such as cyborg research. Teratological resignification of all bodies should not involve a forgetting of the realities of the lived experiences of those named monsters by dominant epistemes. While connections involve opening futures as becomings to come, no single body comes from nowhere and the memories of suffering and oppression are part of the specificity of each *despositif* to which each connector will have its own relation, such as shared oppression and accountability. What matters most is that, by refusing regimes of signification, we

all become accountable, while all acknowledging the urgency with which and the reasons why experiments in teratological connectivity are as political as they are interesting, artistic, liberating, and, hopefully, fun.

## Notes

1. Critical key texts that introduce this concept in relation to technology, biology, and popular culture include the following: Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Postmodern Culture?," in *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Madison, Wis.: Coda Press, 1977); N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Neil Badmington, *Posthumanism*, Readers in Cultural Criticism (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Posthumanities 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness beyond the Brain* (Exeter, U.K.: Intellect, 1995); Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).
2. For an elaboration of modes and purposes of teratological ontologies and their paradigmatic shift in contemporary culture, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 3–25 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), and Patricia MacCormack, "Perversion: Transgressive Sexuality and Becoming-Monster," *Thirdspace* 3, no. 2 (2004), [http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/3\\_2\\_maccormack.htm](http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/3_2_maccormack.htm).
3. W. Clark, *A Case of Human Monstrosity*, Folio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1831), 2.
4. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 209.
5. Rodney Cotterill, *Enchanted Looms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 434–36.
6. In relation to the copy as a natural phenomenon and culture's fascination with both studying and creating copies, see Hillel Schwarz, *The Culture of the Copy* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).
7. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1994), 12.
8. Pepperell, *Posthuman Condition*, 26.
9. The authors do not give examples of what they refer to here. They word their comment ominously, however, and so it is difficult to glean whether they are invoking eugenic projects, ultimate Frankensteinian man-making goals, or an extension of the human genome project.
10. C. Ben Mitchell, Edmund D. Pellegrino, Jean Bethke Elshtain, John F. Kilner, and Scott B. Rae, *Biotechnology and the Human Good* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 11.
11. For their home pages, see <http://www.stalkingcat.net/> and <http://www.thelizardman.com/>.

12. For more on the problems of exemplification in discussions of body modification and animal-becomings, see Patricia MacCormack, "The Great Ephemeral Tattooed Skin," *Body and Society* 12, no. 2 (2006): 57–82.
13. In reference to devolutionary alterity, I do not here invoke "modern primitives." In the context of a discussion of teratology, they do not represent the hybridity which the cyborg and human-animal illustrate.
14. This project can be understood as not only assimilative of animal behavior as it is distorted by humans, but it problematically involves the "domestication," tethering, and incarceration of birds of prey. From the perspective of a Spinozan consideration of the nonhuman, this project is unethical. Monika Oechsler, *The Eagle Project*, performance at the James Hockney Gallery, 2007, <http://monikaoechsler.co.uk/pages/eagle.html>.
15. Cary Wolfe, introduction to *Zoontologies*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), x.
16. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 41.
17. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 29–30.
18. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 98.
19. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 244.
20. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Brighton, U.K.: Harvester, 1982), 220. Emphasis is original.
21. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 24.
22. Derrida points out that "a monster is a species for which we do not have a name. . . . [However], as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it." In Jacques Derrida, *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974–1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 386.
23. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 22.
24. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Athlone Press, 2000).
25. Guattari, 59, 69.
26. Félix Guattari, *Soft Subversions*, trans. Jarred Becker (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 31.
27. Catherine Waldby, *Visible Human Project: Bodies and Posthuman Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2000), 24.
28. Julia Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, trans. Brian O'Keeffe (New York: Semiotext(e), 2002), 131.
29. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 60.
30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 160.