

We Make Our Own Monsters

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*“We make our own monsters, then fear them for what they show us about ourselves.”
-Carey & Gross, 2011, n.p.*

WE, THE SPECIAL ISSUES EDITORS, devote this special issue of JCT to the theme of monsters—vampires, ghosts, aliens, and anything that identifies as more-than-human, less-than-human, post-human, sub-human, or non-human. In other words, it is the turning of what “is” human sideways, burying, killing, or transforming our Westernized dominant mythos of “humanism” in favor of something...*otherwise*.

This special issue asks: *What does the monster(ous) signify for curriculum theorizing in the 21st century? And, who does the monster signify?* Each chapter engages the reader with a different monster and theme ranging from pop culture to veganism. We “invite in” to our conversation vampires, zombies, aliens, and other-worldly beings that challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions we make about language, society, and self, because “monsters have always challenged the boundaries of human identity” (Richards, 1994, p. 377). Monsters are creatures of the shadows, of the in-between, of the real-but-not-real who emerge from the cracks of our deepest collective unconsciousness. Who are “we” in light of possibilities crafted by the monstrous when layered with memory? And how can we (re)imagine ourselves in relationship to others, and the world, in these intersections between theory and representational forms, transformed by multiple emergent contexts into “unpredicted and un-thought of possibilities” (McDermott & Daspit, 2004, p. 62)?

Monstrous theorizing (such as the examples set forth here) asks: How do we express those things for which we have no language yet? If we don’t know where we’re going, how do we get there? We begin with an introduction by Janicki, who provides an overview of iconic works of monster fiction in western literature and what the authors and their creations say about the writers and modern western society. This overview opens the portal to a discussion of identity, curriculum, and *currere*. In other words, how does the autobiographic gaze rendered as fiction invite in monstrous possibilities?

This question is followed further in McNulty’s piece, which considers how *ficto-currere* might become the next site for theorizing the self in the light of indeterminacy and contingency.

In conducting *currere* as monstrous theorizing, we are “haunted” by the regressive phase, a re-animating of memory into new creatures. To make monstrous is to make the familiar strange and to breathe life into it. As Toni Morrison (1987) reminds us, “even if you don’t remember it, someday you’re going to bump into it” (p. 47). In this sense, *currere* is a haunting. In the novel, *Beloved*, Morrison (1987) explains:

“Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay,” as Sethe explains to Denver: “Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world.... Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.... Nothing ever dies.” (pp. 44-45)

Currere also transforms us from the “I” to the “we” (T. S. Poetter, personal communication, 2018). This “we,” as explored in this special issue, are the “Other;” whether that “Other” belongs to our re-framed, fragmented, distorted “I”—identity—or our relationships with that, or with whom, we fear or love. For example, Waldrop invites us to consider the masculine gaze in the *Alien* franchise and how ideas of mothering are made alien, while Huddleston’s paper reminds us of the multilayered contradictions in our use of language to create false distinctions between hero and monster and how educators are cast as “both.” The fragmented self becomes monstrous in Hollywood narratives about mental illness. O’hara deconstructs for his readers how monsters, demons, and doppel-gangers in films such as *Black Swan* and *The Fisher King* leave viewers with a negative stereotype of the “abnormal” conditions of the human psyche. Kelley considers how othering in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* opens a “vegan horror” analysis of how the means of production and consumption of animals haunts Tobe Hooper’s masterpiece, which is way less bloody than you remember it. Helfenbein explores critical geographies of monstrousness in *True Detective* and *The Walking Dead*, with an eye to the ways that space is increasingly politicized within contemporary conditions. And Osmond’s consideration of the zombie film, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, explores what the evolution of public schooling really means (is it viral...or fungal?) and how curriculum workers will persevere in the neoliberal era without a fundamental reconsideration of what it means to evolve.

As we enter the next era, known as the Anthropocene, our relationship to a posthumanist future looms before us. Imaginative fiction, hybridized with memory, theory, and social action, will “invoke” both hopeful monsters and unspeakable nightmares—as both will assuredly receive our share of “jump scares” from beneath the beds of deviant, extra-scientific, and evolutionary interpretations. These chapters suggest that alternative forms of inquiry must follow and be embedded within the fictional possibilities in which our real world/realities are increasingly finding themselves. In the words of Kelley (2002),

Struggle is par for the course when our dreams go into action. But unless we have the space to imagine and a vision for what it means to fully realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won’t bring about our liberation. (p. 15)

The monster has the potential to construct metaphor for the exploration of “difference, marginality, and alienation” (Richards, 1994, p. 392).

Engaging in this form of inquiry, as in contemporary, geopolitical, and socioeconomic realities, we find ourselves in the “interregnum.” An interregnum is a period of discontinuity or “gap” in a government, organization, or social order (Chan, 2017). Archetypally, it was the period of time between the reign of one monarch and the next, and the concepts of interregnum and regency, therefore, overlap. In other words, monsters are more important—more relevant—now than ever. As Pinar argues of the fourth phase of *currere*, after we have looked back to where we have been, and bracket those exhumed and reconstructed memories within the present moment, we are compelled to ask ourselves, “So what?”..., and “How can this process influence the possible futures we might see or become?” It is in the surreal forms of experience that we can re-examine systemic and structural forms of oppression in which subject is treated as object and language shapes power relationships in reality. And if monsters can alter our understanding of who (or what) is meant by “I, we, them, or us,” then existing social systems can be re-designed as well.

We must decolonize inquiry by changing the ways in which we see ourselves, and others, as well as the ways in which we act to either reinforce or reject the dominant system. As Richards (1994) reminds us,

The metaphor of the monster—the outcast, the stranger, the marginal being who lives in multiple worlds without delegation—is a particularly powerful one for making sense of the glue that holds bodies, entities, texts, and other material and social arrangements together. (p. 405)

Monsters might be the ones we fear, the symbol of uncontrollable rage and violence, the colonizers/destroyers; or the monsters might be “outsiders who partially inhabited a number of networks or worlds of power relations that simultaneously enabled and repressed or marginalized their particular teratological constructions and evolutionary ideas” (Richards, 1994, p. 405). Is the monster that which is evil? Or is the monster that which fights evil? And which are we?

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