

PREFACE

This book began at the end: with the intention of exploring the meaning of the monstrous in peripheral areas that are historically framed by an external (and then later internalized) gaze that constructs them as places of excess, anomaly, and demonization. In both Latin America and Africa, but also within national spaces, zones occupied by subaltern segments of society, marginalized for reasons of ethnicity, culture, social class, sexual orientation, corporeality, etc., were and continue to be *monstered* as residual spaces whose rationality assumes unrecognizable forms from perspectives that consider themselves to be epistemic sites of authority. At the same time, the margins produce their own monsters in their attempt to name the Other, the dominator, the persecutor, the master, the landowner, the invader, the torturer, granting it an abject form that allegorizes his attitudes, behaviors, and values.

Monstering is thus a two-way street, a dialectic without synthesis, a form of asymmetrically representing the symbolic exchanges that make up and shape *the social*. The dichotomous operation that guides these processes of construction of the Other conceal beneath an apparent Manicheism complex developments that are rife with ambiguity and paradox, where the borders between I and We are dissolved and the ends

become contaminated. This does not mean that the monster inhabits the shifting space of relativism but rather that its wandering constantly frames a fertile and polyvalent territory. Nor does it signify that the production of the monster is equivalent to the construction of identity, although these processes are intrinsically presupposed. Accordingly, this book moves from centers to mobile peripheries, from canonical monstrosity to its progenies. Monstrosities proliferate in the countryside, in the mountains, and in dark and recondite urban environments. Thus, these pages follow anomalous entities that inhabit theoretical discourses, contributing to the definition of concepts, projects, and positions through which the counterfeit figure of the monster exhibits its emotional charge and its ideological connotations.

Because the notions of center and periphery are relative, instrumental, to a large extent *ideological*, and idiosyncratic, and because, it must be said, they are mostly obsolete concepts, any attempt to use them requires one to recognize at the very least that they designate localities and degrees of power/knowledge from which specific models for the organization of knowledge and social experience have taken form in modern times. Such politico-hermeneutic designs (which include the definition of the normal versus the anomalous, the modern versus the primitive, the harmonious versus the monstrous) impose, at a supposedly universal level, what Foucault called "regimes of truth" that extend to cultural and ideological levels. What began during the composition of this book as an exploration of the meanings and representations of the monstrous in postcolonial societies also entailed a study of the paradigmatic moments from which the monster arose, of the textures and textualities, of the languages and visual images in which the alterity of this figure has been expressed in different cultural registers, from the most canonical to the most marginal.

This book continued to develop, taking as its point of departure the idea that the monster is above all *biopolitical*: relative to the *polis* and to the processes of socialization, linked to the relations of power over the body and the representation of the place of the human with respect

to nature, history, temporality, transcendence, and everydayness. An apparatus of social immunization, a simulacrum that spectacularizes its artificiality, a shifter that activates social dynamics, an assemblage that threatens the machinery of power, the monster symbolizes the heroic resistance of the slave and the sinister excesses of the master. Thus, it is essential to contextualize, even though it may seem fallacious, even the universality that the monster evokes in every one of its apparitions and attributes. In spite of its extreme *empiria*, and although it frequently lacks rationality and language, the monster is in its own way always philosophical. This book proceeds as a critical exercise that follows the meanderings of the monster's "negative aesthetics."

The construction and deconstruction of the monster additionally entail a reflection on the material and symbolic world of the commodity understood as a constellation of knowledges, interests, emotions, and desires. This topic is essential for understanding the *ideological* processes (the production of false consciousness) and the forms of (self-)recognition that, on the collective, popular, social, and community levels, develop ways of conceptualizing *the social* as a heterogeneous, contradictory, and unstable totality.

To study the monster, I attempted to capture its links with sovereignty, the state, the citizen, the nation, modernity, emotions, philosophy, the market, gender, the popular subject, the spectacularization of everyday life, and death. This approach entailed developing an understanding of the relation between capitalism and fear, and the functions that Marx and post-Marxism assign to the symbols of the "cosmic horror" (the "fear and trembling" of modernity) as part of the critique of capitalism and in relation to the basic concepts of the commodity, exploitation, alienation, and surplus value.

The monster is studied here as a limit and as a nexus, as the cultural apparatus or artefact that drives a reflection on life beyond hierarchizations and demarcations between the human and the animal, the material the natural, the cultural, and the biological. Situated at the crossroads of

these domains, the monster advances in all directions, assuming contradiction and paradox, giving form to the impossible in a multidirectional, fluid, and ambiguous movement, animated by the incommensurability of the living. The monstrous is thus uncontainable, it exceeds categories and models, it points to the grotesque and the sublime, it announces and interpellates.

This study focuses on critical and theoretical material in dialogue with different discursive textures: popular beliefs, myths, literary works, film, and performance, with occasional references to music and painting, although only to the extent that they contain signifying plots linked to the book's teratological theme. This book develops through an experimental and tentative mode, turning in on itself through avenues that were marked by the research and disciplinary purviews that the monster has penetrated over the centuries in its irreverent and incessant wandering. A large part of this multidirectional exploration has consisted in the tracing of representational and interpretative models that have taken on the theme of monstrosity, discovering in it unexpected contributions to the critique of modernity. Eminently communicational, the multifaceted nature of the monster is located at the very limits of representation. When the latter is confronted by sublimity, abjection, and atavism, by the experiences of pain and death, by the limitations of cognition, and the dragging of emotionality, monstrosity provides a language that expresses what exceeds rationality. In the monstrous, meanings explode and recompose themselves; the monster is *event* and *pachacuti*, end and beginning.

In its eight sections, *The Monster as War Machine* attempts to cover the broad theme of monstrosity from a historical, philosophical, biopolitical, and aesthetico-ideological perspective. The breadth of its task and the intellectual ambition that guides it undoubtedly point to much more than this study could achieve, given the extent of the ground to cover and the unevenness of the terrain. In this sense, the book appeals to the reader's indulgence and curiosity, that he or she may be inspired by what this

analysis is able to suggest in order to develop new paths and to correct its bearings when necessary.

After an introduction that establishes the foundations of a critico-theoretical approach that could contribute to a poetics of the monster, the book sets forth on a necessarily selective historico-cultural itinerary that covers the colonial period to the present, pausing at moments/texts that are representative reflections on the monstrous and its literary and filmic expression. At key moments, mainly in "The Monster in History," the study pauses to reflect on foundational European works and traditions that were essential for the emergence of the neo-Gothic, as well as for the modern resignification of horror, sublimity, and the like. In this way, even though Latin America constitutes one of the foci of this investigation, the study drifts toward other cultural spheres without which we would never understand the transnationalized and transhistorical trajectory of the monster.

"Monsters and the Critique of Capitalism" concentrates on the tropes of monstrosity utilized by both Marx and post-Marxism in connection to their analysis of world systems and their social and cultural effects. This chapter attempts to offer a vision of the way in which this "Gothic Marxism" has been read and interpreted, particularly with regard to the use of figures like vampires, cyborgs, zombies, and ghosts, which are integrated into the critique of political economy. Although the Deleuzean concept of the *war machine* came well after Marx, the uses of monstrosity that frequently appear throughout *Capital*, the *Communist Manifesto*, and other writings reveal lines of thought that are compatible with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about the dynamics of power and resistance and the way in which subjectivity is affected by the rearticulations of hegemony and sovereignty.

Expanding toward other areas of Western thought, the chapter dedicated to "Monsters and Philosophy" explores some specific concepts and developments around the ideas of the sinister, the abject, *difference*, the normality/anomaly binary, the notion of *event*, sublimity, anamorphosis,

and posthumanism, the relations between monstrosity and machine, monstrosity and gender, etc. Because it has been a persistent concern of modern thought, the theme of the monstrous and the semantic field associated with it can only be approached in a cursory way, as an introduction to innovative and productive conceptual strategies for the exploration of the role of horror and monstrosity in settings impacted by power struggles both at political and cultural levels.

Then, extending this line of inquiry, "Monstrosity and Biopolitics" reflects on some modulations of biopolitical thought in which the monstrous is consolidated as a fertile catalyst of the conceptualization of hegemony and (bio)resistance and in connection to the metaphorization of *the popular*, *the common*, and *the social*. Because the body is one of the principal components of the aesthetico-ideological assemblage of monstrosity, from both the psychoanalytic perspective and from the point of view of cultural archaeology, different biopolitical orientations offer a broad spectrum of hermeneutic strategies and provide a language directed toward discussion of the monster and its particular forms of social interaction and political activity.

"Monstrosity, Representation, and the Market" is concerned with the spectacularization of monstrosity, which is to say, the carnivalization of the discourse of anomaly and fear in relation to the dynamics of supply and demand that make a symbolic commodity a fetishized and marketable product. In its various forms, the monstrous competes with multiple aesthetic registers for the attention of mass audiences who witness the unfolding of its countercultural message and the emotions it unleashes. From freak shows to David Bowie, passing through the figure and the performances of Michael Jackson and the cinematic works of George Romero (which reformulate the representation of the zombie and its politico-ideological meanings), the topic of consumption is articulated to the mass forms of interpellation generated by monsters. As a representational and interpretative *tour de force* of collective experience and social consciousness, the attributes of monstrosity have filtered into all

discourses, staging *difference* and making simulacra and artificiality into glamorous forms of the epiphanic. Monstrosity's repressed, extravagant, grotesque, and delirious contents push up against the system's limits of tolerance and defy its ordering principles, suggesting something *beyond* dominant rationality.

The chapter titled "Monsters on the Margin" studies the radical hybridity that the monstrous supposes in relation to the processes of the formation of the popular subject and the expressive devices through which collective subjectivity expresses its fears, anxieties, and desires in peripheral areas, particularly in Latin America. The topic of corporeality (the individual body, sexualized, subjected to violence, indigence, and marginalization, the colonized and subalternized collective body from colonial days to modernity, its enslaved, migratory, deterritorialized, resistant, subverted, fragmented, and disorganized constitution) is an element in discussions about the monster in all its multiple manifestations. Moreover, in the case of postcolonial societies, corporeality constitutes an imperative, both due to the network of meanings in which it is inscribed, linked to labor, exploitation, and sacrifice, and for its metaphorical value. Indeed, corporeality refers to the body surpassed or diminished by the state, the prolific corporeality of the multitude, the sick or mutilated body, the juridical body, the *corpus delicti*, the body politic. From this organicist fixation, this chapter explores the relation between the real monstrosity of authoritarianism and exploitation, as well as the popular imaginaries that illustrate the precarious positions of each segment of society in relation to systemic violence. Multiple stories and images allegorize the relation between the communitarian body and the monstrous body as well as the symbolic mediations that emerge from popular narratives to allegorize social conflict. *Chupacabras*, *jarjachas*, *pishtacos*, and *sacajos* inhabit a dark domain that expresses the feelings that real violence unleashes in rural and even urban communities. The stories of their apparitions and crimes are unable to overshadow testimonies of the real history of torture, genocide, and territorial devastation to which indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant communities have historically been subject.

Finally, the “Coda” brings together some general elaborations on the different topics dealt with in the book, attempting to articulate critico-theoretical directions that can be instrumental in the recuperation of debates and positions on the monstrous and its significance in the world today.

Throughout the book, concepts like coloniality, the (neo-)Baroque, modernity, nation, postmodernity, posthumanism, biopolitics, affect, heterogeneity, hybridity, transculturation, etc. appear again and again, although they are not discussed in and of themselves but rather assumed to be understood in their most general senses. Any one of these concepts would deserve, or have actually been given, particular attention in other works. For this reason, I provide references to specific studies of these topics which may complement what is included in the present book.

The notion of the “war machine” guides this book’s analysis, largely in an implicit way. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

The war machine is that nomad invention that in fact has war not as its primary object but as its second-order, supplementary or synthetic objective, in the sense that it is determined in such a way as to destroy the State-form and city-form with which it collides. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 418)

Through opposition to the state, the war machine points beyond the discourse of violence and terror: instead, it seeks to escape the violence of the state apparatus, its order of representation, although sometimes it exercises that same violence as part of its function of resistance and the redefinition of power.

Together with the philosophical foundations with which this book attempts to shed light on the figure of the monster from different aesthetico-ideological perspectives, this study also integrates an abundant bibliographical corpus of an interdisciplinary nature, elaborated from a variety of theoretical and political standpoints. Because the critique of the themes this book touches on is copious and challenging, I wanted

to do justice to this body of ideas, explicitly incorporating them into my own reflections. These always refer, in one way or another, to the way in which Latin American culture is situated in global intellectual space and to the historico-cultural specificity of the region, a feature that conditions to a great extent the reshaping of themes, the challenging of aesthetic paradigms, and the proposition of new and innovative models of thought and representation.

Finally, I would like to mention that this book has three biographical foundations that may have played some role in my motivation to write it. The first is a strange journey I once took through the mountains of Transylvania which included a brief and unsettling stay in a Gothic castle. The second is my Pittsburgh home, which had once belonged to George Romero, where, in the living room, I saw scattered murals, masks, and other remnants that belonged to the cinematic paraphernalia of the zombie world that Romero's work redefined in a well-known filmic saga. The third anecdotal element has to do with an unexpected visit from a bat that entered my house late one night when I was writing about *Dracula*. I have witnesses.