12. Monstrous Academics

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Abstract

In this chapter, three academics test an approach to supportive, collaborative writing based on the game known as "Exquisite Corpse," while reflecting on difficult aspects of academic practice in monstrous times. Exquisite Corpse is a drawing game during which players take turns to add sections to what becomes a composition of diverse parts. Here, the approach is adapted to an academic context. Drawers become writers; the three authors become three players. We found that this approach gave us a playful space within which to explore concepts of monstrosity and marginality (including abjection, incursion, and erasure) and also to share our perspectives on experiences of affect within the academy. In a final, collective autopsy, the authors share reflections on epistemological status, interdisciplinarity, and the politics of productivity.

Keywords: Marginality, resistance, home, academia, race, disability, reflection, productivity

Introduction

This chapter is about monstrosity in games and scholarship, as well as monstrous affect in academic practice. The authors reflect on how it feels to work alongside monstrous rapacity and harm, negotiating among structures, systems, embodied feelings, lived experience, and teleological mirage within the academy. Our co-creation has been developed using an adaptation of the game called "Exquisite Corpse" (*cadavre exquis*).

Exquisite Corpse is a well-known drawing game (although it can have different names, e.g., Consequences) that involves the creation of a single image from juxtaposed parts. In the game, players take turns to contribute one section to a drawing. Then, they fold the paper to conceal their contribution from the next player, who takes their turn. When each participant has taken a turn, the paper is unfolded and the (often monstrous) results are revealed. Here, we have taken turns writing rather than drawing. We have chosen this method because it involves collaborative assembly.

The point is to make a space for an agentic, expressive act from each player (or player/author, in this case). The desired result is a piece of writing that accommodates juxtaposition and discontinuity via our accounts of affective experiences within similar spaces and processes. We attempt to write while circumventing the various forms of silencing that we (as academics with experience of marginalization) encounter in the academy, some of which might be experienced as "external," structural, political or institutional and some of which might be experienced as self-imposed. Our intention is to test an approach that allows us to articulate difficult experiences collectively, yet without an obligation to homogenize our varied perspectives. We are adapting Exquisite Corpse to make a piece of work together, and in so doing, we are exploring a form of supportive, playful practice, while reflecting on what it means to do media scholarship in monstrous times.

Our work is informed by game studies literature (for instance, Carr 2014, on quantification as normate reassurance, assessment, and the "death of the clinic" in zombie games) in combination with auto-ethnographic reflections on affect and alienation, disconnection and dismay. As this approach suggests, our work is shaped by frameworks that are familiar to us because we are academics based in the fields of media and cultural studies. Such frameworks include scholarship in critical disability studies, critical race studies, game studies, and everyday life studies, in addition to feminist perspectives on materiality, marginality, and difference. Our work is "monstrous" because we are interested in the energy, affect, and opportunities associated with disjuncture and contradiction (rather than with seamlessness or synthesis). It offers us a way to articulate and materialize difference, and in this way, it resembles a trope that will be particularly familiar to scholars in critical disability studies.

As Mitchell and Snyder have explored in their work on disability in narrative and as Garland Thomson has explained in her studies disability and the spectacular, there is a Western tradition of authoritative "looking" and evidence generation that conflates observable difference with internal deviance—hence, the affinities between Victorian medical sciences, freak shows, racism, and Empire. Sabrina Strings's *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* takes a similar line of argument regarding body size, race and difference. Likewise, monstrous forms in popular media leverage the stigma that is associated with disability to help invest various types of difference with deviance (difference in body size, gender, sexuality, class, or race, for example), while at the same time erasing race and disability in a bait-and-switch that is

formulated from convention and metaphor. Hence the tendency to interpret depictions of impaired bodies as social metaphors, rather than as representations of impairment. Thus, disability itself ricochets between hyper-visibility and erasure by metaphor, and invests the mutability and mobility of bodies (e.g., between states or classifications) with stigma, and so contributes to the problematizing of difference itself.

Playing our version of Exquisite Corpse to generate a piece of writing was messy and necessary, especially because one of the problems that the authors confront is the difficulty of articulating the feelings and emotions that prompt us to continue working, without first "making strange" and denaturalizing the kinds of compensating labour that we do on a daily basis in order to do our work. Participation in mainstream academia can feel conditional on these forms of compensating labour—including the need to manage difference—while simultaneously hiding the evidence that any such work has taken place. Even from ourselves, sometimes. So, one aim of our monstrous undertaking is to make the layers and levels of this exhausting and extractive labour visible. In other words, we seek to materialize this labour in such a way that it is acknowledged within the means of production and, therefore, remains evident in our final composition, rather than being concealed for the sake of meeting any scholastic norms and expectations—including our own. The point is not to (once again) problematize our participation but, instead, to assert and celebrate the generative potentials of marginalized experience, without disembodying the perspectives offered by these opportunities, colluding in their appropriation, or denying the costs involved.

To begin our game, Player 1 takes the role of host, drafting an abstract and introduction and proposing a set of themes. These themes reflect an array of concepts pertinent to monstrosity and familiar to researchers in our field, including Kristeva on abjection, Douglas on purity and danger, Bakhtin and the grotesque, Freud's uncanny, and Thomson's work on freakdom, the normate, and whiteness as "absent centre" (see hooks, 1992; Pajaczkowska & Young, 1992). The authors-as-players join the game, picking up the threads introduced by the host; they pull, adjust and extend the threads in whatever direction they wish, while reflecting on affect and monstrosity, academic roles and practices, or wider tumult and crisis (e.g., environmental, political, or pandemic). Then, during an end-game stage, the three players collectively autopsy or eulogise whatever it is that we have "Frankenstein-ed" into existence. The three starting themes proposed for this particular game are based on the aforementioned literature and include:

(1) Monstrosity and the grotesque: Here, we turn to the bulging at the seams evident when bodies (and embodied subjects and embodied authors) meet with and mess up categories and structures—for example, categories of power, privilege, marginality, masquerade, and imposture.

(2) Monstrosity and mobility: Here, we are evoking the abjection culturally associated with change and transition, including changing bodies and bodies that change state, as well as the (potentially fluid) contextual construction of difference.

(3) Alien monstrosity: This notion is linked to normate subject positions constructed as credible, safe, and neutral, and to the orbital monstrous Other's capacity to experience both spectacular difference and erasure.

Through turn-taking and collaboration, and with reference to games and play (i.e., tensions between rules and representation, connections of rules and play, contingency, structures and agency, penalties, fails, goals, and obstructions), the authors-as-players describe how it feels and why it matters (if it matters) to keep working, while exploring how useful metaphors and concepts of monstrosity might be in helping us articulate our experience, in order that we can continue to teach, research, play and write.

Player 1: Monsters at the Margins

I want to talk about affect and the magical capacity to be at once visible—as a problem, as an obstacle, as a puzzle to be solved—and invisible. I refer to the invisibility that's achieved when you are rocketed beyond the atmosphere, past the margins, into the nebulous limbo-zone of the nonsensical. For example, I'm a deaf academic who lipreads. Recently, a senior colleague reassured me during an email exchange that the university would supply me with a transparent mask for my teaching. While the idea that wearing a transparent mask would empower me to see through other people's face coverings is magical enough, what is also significant is that this was not a conversation about masks or lipreading. It was a conversation about the impact of mask-wearing on pedagogy and learning in general. Here, my deafness—despite not being mentioned,

performed, or made visible—still exerted sufficient power to pull the conversation entirely off course. Experiences like this make me think about disability and difference not just in terms of marginal bodies, but in terms of orbiting black holes.

My work in game studies reflects this interest in marginal perspectives on the normate, together with mainstream representations of disability, the leveraging of disability in the enactment of ability, and the depiction of able bodies. Many games involve a repetitive effort to domesticate bodies through quantification (points, scores, goals) while leveraging Otherness as threat. So, the point is not just that a particular character might be represented as disabled. It's that disability underpins and pays for the status, pleasure, and privileges associated with goal attainment (Carr, 2016; 2019). As so many frantic, imperilled normate avatars have implied, the *idea* of disability lurks in the shadows thrown by the productivity that is culturally associated with normate subjectivity, ready to threaten, taint, or gobble up anyone who falls behind. From this perspective, it is as if the lack of productivity that is attributed to disability is a machine for the production of affect. Disability as spectacle produces the monstrous, while the conventional reading of disability as metaphor disappears the disabled body and erases the disabled subject.[1]

Monsters play a role in the construction of normate subjectivity, and both games and academia play host to regulatory structures. As regulatory structures, they generate monsters in turn: the Other that does not fit.[2] Consider assessment, and what assessment makes possible or materializes, as explored in Ball's work on Foucault, race, and education, Gillman's work on race, gender, and spectacular difference in the Victorian sciences, or Garland Thomson's work on "extraordinary" bodies. As further examples of visibility and disappearance consider how often research on disabled people is led by able-identified researchers (Snyder & Mitchell, 2010) or the frequency with which marginal perspectives and insights are disconnected from marginal scholars prior to enriching mainstream academic discourse.

In my experience, being a deaf academic working online through the pandemic likewise involves both magical erasure and spectacular, individualized difference. For instance, thanks to automatic captioning on some platforms (and everyone else's technical problems), sometimes my

[1] The classic example of magical disappearance is zombies because their spectacular impairment is typically "read" as metaphor. For more on this, see: Mitchell and Snyder (2001) on disability as metaphor; Carr (e.g, 2014, 2020) on disability, monstrosity, and the normate in games, Allan (2013) on technology as cure, Smith (2011) on eugenics discourse in classic horror, or Mogk (2013) on disability onscreen.

[2] See Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.'s work (2008) on the science-fictional grotesque.

difference is rendered negligible. I can't explain how liberating it is to be incidentally, accidentally (temporarily) not the problem. At other times, I am expected to teach, network, and attend meetings held on platforms without captions. When an institution or community adopts a technology that constructs certain bodies as deficient, the onus is generally placed on those individuals facing exclusion to find a way to compensate. Attempting to standardize my participation usually involves having to explain and perform difference-as-deficit throughout extended email exchanges with management, support departments, funders, and service providers. For some of us, professional practice is conditional on our willingness to risk directing attention to those aspects of our subjectivity that professional structures (technological, social, institutional) frame as abject. Just like the proverbial elephant in the room, this is difference as a monster that manages to be spectacularly obvious and yet invisible and often unmentionable. As in a game, in the academy, the monstrous body is that which is out of sync.

One of the reasons I wanted to play Exquisite Corpse is because of how it feels to work in academia, and to be trying to work through these issues while everything is changing. Change and crisis might be exceedingly generative, in theory, but, day to day, I feel like I am wading through a toxic swamp of dis/re/orientation, privilege, loss, and complicity. It connects with some difficult feelings specific to games research, some of which relates to social media and its implications for "reading formations" (Bennett, 1983). Reading formations are an ideologically charged model of inter-textuality used previously in games research to explore the relationships between players, texts, and situated interpretation (e.g., Carr, 2019). These relationships, being contextual, are subject to change. One of the resonant aspects of reading formations, as a concept, is that it connects inter-textuality with cultural and historical contexts. This is a concept that helps to explain why arguments about agency, play, and playfulness (and the implications for alternative and "against the grain" readings), which might have been made before the emergence of social media, feel so different now that we've experienced the churning, inter-textual mega-monster that is social media.

From my perspective, there's a disorientating, unfathomable circularity to all this because some of the changes that I'm trying to prepare for (e.g., masked students) recall the changes that were experienced during the integration and normalizing of voice-use in online worlds (Carr, 2010). Aside from the impact on deaf players, I suspect (but I don't know how to show) that voice-use in games led to ontological shifts. These shifts lent new weight to exclusionary

conventions within player culture, and those conventions were then played out, amplified, and reified in social media. From my perspective, associated feelings of disconnection have been further fuelled by concerns about complicity in relation to the monstrous behaviour lurking within the games industry (from the notion of "crunch time" to racist and sexist pandering in marketing), as well as in relation to fears about monstrous appetites: the colossal challenges posed by the ethical and ecological costs of games hardware, by play and data politics in game worlds, and by questions about how we incorporate all of this into our games education and research. Accompanying these feelings of dismay is the recognition that if we're going to talk about affect, monstrosity, and the value of marginal perspectives, then the other "elephant in the room" is the pandemic—including its disproportionate impact on marginal communities, and the undead, eugenicist discourses on which it feeds.

Player 2: Monstrous Diversity

One of the key tenets of academia is that we must all be professional—that professionalism overrides differences and provides the specific context in which values and ideas can be passed on to students. How the pathways of the professional are navigated by those who have been deemed unfit suggests that some bodies and voices are always already more "professional" than others, and that pointing this prejudice out is labelled as unprofessional. Expressing anger or challenging the normate in academic settings (whether by questioning hegemonic methodology or by being sceptical of universalised theories) is viewed as emotional, unacademic, and, therefore, uncivilized; such gestures are a confirmation of the innate propensity to unprofessionalism of those who are different from the constructed norm.

Asleep: So, imagine, if you will, a spacious and high-ceilinged classroom in an old building at a sought-after location on a campus in central London, and imagine it packed full of 35 academics seated around an imposing wooden table; many of us are in our forties and fifties, seasoned teachers, in fact so seasoned that we're now there to represent the various teaching committees of our disciplines and departments and to reflect back to our employers the thoughts of our respective student and staff bodies. Our role is to nurture students from around the globe, to build in them the capacity for critical and playful thought, and to foster their dialogic imagination. And we've come together to hear the latest guidance from on high: how are we as teachers to respond to and deliver the curriculum in such a way that we please everyone all of the

time, while also carving out time to write and think and publish. Now, let's try to imagine what the classroom looks like. Most of the people around the table are white men; some are white women. Only one of us is a person of colour, yet everyone pretends that we're all the same: professionals. Of course, we have accents—and that's a great thing because having a German scholar sitting next to an American scholar is the height of diversity. The tone of the room is understated and calm, occasionally a little plaintive, and those there from on high are replete with advice and supportive strategies: all will be well; most of us believe that we're worth the ransom our students pay daily to bask in our light.

Awakening: The discussion idles on, then pauses when a second scholar of colour enters. A body quite different from most of the bodies in the room, but disguised, like everyone else's, by its cloak of professionalism. A presentation is set up and delivered by the latest entrant, drawing our attention to a number of unsightly and painful facts about race and academia. The soporific afternoon is suddenly splintered by signals of anxiety, regret, discomfort, irritation, disbelief, frustration, and the urge to push away, to disavow, to make false any possible underlying allegation about the group gathered in the room and those like them: no, we are experienced, fair, civilized, scholarly, brilliant, and … "colour blind." There's no room for doubt. If the unsettling facts—something has gone wrong, students of colour are not being well served, they are being graded more harshly in all circumstances and at all levels, and particularly Black students and Pakistanis are having these experiences—suggest that we are fault, then the facts must be wrong. They must have been collected in a slipshod manner, using an unprofessional method. The scholar of colour who points out the dysfunction must also be wrong. The person who trusts these nasty, painful facts about white teacher's explicit and implicit biases, ideological behaviours, and dangerous pronouncements must be wrong. What we really need is for intellectually strong, worthy, scholarly people like us to start collecting facts (high-quality facts) about student achievement for ourselves. And then surely our (high-quality) facts will tell a different story than the painful narrative of discrimination and deep-seated prejudice told by the (low-quality) facts brought in from the outside by the presenter who is also a person of colour. Our institutional, professional facts (which are high-quality) will tell a different story, a story about those students of colour from our very local neighbourhood and from across the globe who are not as intelligent and not as polished, who never really were worthy, who did not learn to navigate the idioms of white academic intellectual life with as much *sang froid*, and who

therefore underperform (learn by rote) and cannot compete (oh they try, they do try, no one denies that they work hard, but it's all in their brains, genes, or training … cough cough cough; they cannot hope to do as well as their white peers). Much of this is unspoken; some of it is spoken. And, of course, there are counter-currents, counter-discourses. Also mostly unspoken. But enough is said.

Monster. There is dissonance in the group. Things are said. Words. "BAME this.[3] Minority ethnic that. Local schools. Grade inflation." What? Finally, painfully, the scholar of colour already in the room at the start of the presentation intervenes, addressing their remarks to the disavowing white colleagues in the room. This is what she says: "*Excuse me*: You think that mostly white London teachers inflate the grades of their non-white students so that they can get into universities like ours and do as well as white students, even though they don't have the capacity and competence to perform at the same level? You think that those students didn't earn their places fairly, as the white students did? You think that the presenter has invented this data? Doctored this data? You think that our racist marking and grading and mentoring gap is actually a gap in the brains of our non-white students? Our students would be very upset by that. Perhaps you owe them an apology." The word racism is monstrous to those in the room. Everyone looks as if they want to vomit up their free sandwich lunch. There are "good white folk," allies, for sure; but they don't speak up then, there and then, in that moment, when the real monster is upon us. Racism. Racism is happening now, in a discussion which was intended to point out that racism happens. One is reminded forcefully of Sara Ahmed's book, *Complaint*! There are some genteel attempts to paper over the dissonance, to make this out to be a misunderstanding—two equal, intellectual sides in a fair debate who have just skipped a step and therefore are out of sync. One white scholar says to the air, but indicating the two scholars of colour: "Now, come on, let's keep this civilized, no need to shut down debate. Everyone's entitled to their opinion. We all know that kind of thing leads to authoritarianism." By 'that kind of thing' what the speaker indicates is that any questioning of the good intentions and fair practices of white liberal academics when they suggest that racism isn't really systemic is uncivilised and leads to authoritarianism. Savanah Shange's *Progressive Dystopia* sums up the violence that occurs when one questions or undermines a white liberal myth within an education system.

[3] "BAME" is an acronym for "Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic" that is used in the UK.

Pain: The presenter, who is a person of colour, a less senior colleague, and a host of other things, has become the centre of attention in a way that they and their bosses did not anticipate and that quite clearly shatters the fiction of professionalism. And the other person of colour in the room, a senior colleague with a history of voicing frustrations in institutional settings, who has spoken the unacceptable word 'racism' aloud, is now reading the room for signs. Looking around, listening, alert, stressed, angry. Together, in this room of 36 highly accomplished people, the two scholars of colour are full of adrenaline, experiencing physical pain, in fight or flight mode. We recognise this situation. It's written on us. It's replaying things that have happened to us hundreds of times before, in other places and spaces. We swallow our tears of rage and humiliation until we are alone or in a safer space. Because, truly, no space is safe, and all we can think about is our brilliant and vulnerable students of colour, who will always be inscribed as "other" in data and in the flesh, and who we were, once, lifetimes ago.

Equilibrium: Afterwards. There is always an afterwards. That's when the good folk, the allies speak up, softly disavowing their complicity with the monster. It is a balm, in a way, even if it is too little, and too late.

Player 3: The Monster at Home

Home [noun]: "the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010, p. 838).

Commented [KS1]: If this isn't your own definition, the source needs to be cited.

Home. An imaginary realm of emotional attachment. A physical topography of things we wish to remain permanent. In a way. The space that constantly shifts between inside and outside via the permeable tissue of everyday life. Still, home is where you easily sense whether you have arrived, whether you are there, by intuition. Yet home is not the same as a household. Sometimes, the household you return to on a daily basis may not feel like "home" at all. What about a family? It might be convenient to create "familial" relationships within a household, but family is not a *sine qua non* for creating "home" either. At times, a home can be built on a little place left over from the domestic relationships within the family one belongs to; for instance, Kafka (2013/1952) created his "home" out of a sum of tiny, fragmented pieces of emotional space left

over from the tyranny of the "ultimate authority" in his life: his father. For other people, home might mean nothing but family. As the number of stamps on one's diasporic, exhausted passport increases when one migrates from one country to another, from one university, one modality of contract, one imagination to another, home may mean the familiar eyes of a child growing up next to you. When we reach "home," we find that special place reserved for us thanks to our cognitive and emotional sensors, and when we curl up and disappear willingly within that tissue, we know that we are at "home"; like a goal in a game, it is a point of satisfaction and ease. We also know that, with a simple emotional trauma, an infiltration of a "stranger," or a quake in reality, permanent alienation from home is also possible. But home is a powerful institution: the refuge that heals, a care house, or "a total institution," as Goffman (1961) would say. But when that tissue is torn in the middle, home can also be a perfect location to lose one's sense of orientation and get ill. But what happens if the home itself gets ill?[4]

We are working from home, where borders are constantly subject to negotiation and renegotiation; we know home is fragile. When the "outside world" suddenly attempts to penetrate our inner emotional space (through data, platforms, health discourse, emergencies, actions, or professional duties), home can easily lose the boundaries and meaning that distinguish it from "away." This past year showed us, once again, that institutions are capable of entering, monitoring, and invading our homes and/or of distantly disciplining the performances, space, time, and interactions within that inner realm. But, then, what remains of home if its carefully crafted, collectively performed spontaneity suddenly evaporates? What is home without the arbitrary flux of the everyday? It can be disrupted merely by a mobile phone or a computer screen that you are glued to in the middle of your household. Ginsburg (1999) thinks home is "more about where you are going" (p. 35), rather than where you come from. Permanence is important, so they say; it is the magic ingredient that sews together and fixes the different gendered performances, bodies, scenes, costumes, and boundaries that intersect to give identity to home.

Commented [KS2]: Who?

While I think and write all of this, I realize that I forgot the physical space I am in and my own presence within that space. Forgetting where you are should be a sign of feeling at home: the space where one desires the self to be conquered, enveloped, forgotten, unnoticed. I'm home, then. Like the billions of others who have been locked in their homes across the globe during the

[4] See Anthony Faramelli's work (2020) on ill spaces, post-colonialism, and institutional analysis.

pandemic. However, the purpose of these notes is to draft a sketch of the monster that sometimes prevents me from feeling at home. Well, I'm not exactly home then. Or I am, but not alone: with the company of a stranger that I feel does not belong to the in-group living in this household: a moral monster. The home is undergoing a radical transformation: new performances, calendars, meetings, exposures, pressures, concerns that once belonged to the world outside are passing through an inward-opening, digital window, while home is being blurred behind our image on the screen. We are working from a distance, they say; yes, but distant from what? From where we work? Or from home? The institutions we work for have never been so close to us as they are today; they are just like the other structures of power (governments, public authorities, monitoring bodies) we are regulated by, or the digital platforms and infrastructures (Haraway's "informatics of domination") we are heavily dependent on. They are literally wandering around our bodies, chasing us in our households, and leaving templates on our dinner tables to design the way we perform our academic duties while at home. We are connecting from home, yet most of us feel that our workplaces, our schools, our teachers, or our managers are connecting to us from within our homescape. The incredible amount of labour and the nature of professional engagement this new regime of work generates make it clear that it is not the right time for one to feel too much "at home." This intensifying intertwining of machine and human, professional/public and domestic/private, institutional and individual, outside and inside, is working through a feudal sense of entitlement that demands both the inner space and the bodies within that space, producing new precarities and digital peasantries that threaten academic autonomy.

As I write these, I hear the angry, machine-like voice of the teacher of my child. The sound comes from our salon: this is where school has been occurring for months. "The teacher was upset … because some children were not paying attention to what he says … And, he just cut the connection!" My child is staring at me, eyes full of tears, expecting me to do or say something: "Well, since he couldn't manage to keep you all quiet, he wanted to 'slam the door' as a reaction it seems", I say, as if everything is OK, as if all is normal. But it is not! This is our home, not school; the angry voice is coming from our salon; the door is slammed right in front of us—right in our faces. A break-time bell could help with these heavy moments and bring back the cheer. Kids know how to handle such moments. But there is no break-time bell at home; nor are there other instruments, rituals, solidarities (recess, play, whispers, friends, laughters) to cope

Commented [KS3]: These two words mean the same thing. I would pick one. Which one do you prefer?

with emotional pressures. This duality, this doubling of spaces and duties, this increasing fluidity through permeable boundaries inside and outside, in-group and out-group is creating a vertigo effect that many of us do not know how to handle. Did Player 1 tell me that there might be an exit at some point in the game that I could use to escape if I wanted? "Relax, it's just a game," my inner voice says, "you are secure, ontologically at least." Because I can't escape the monster that I know has been chasing me since we starting playing, I choose to push the button to redefine "home."

> *Home [verb]: "(of an animal) return by instinct to its territory after leaving it."* (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010, p. 838)

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After long years abroad, and a life spread across four countries, I have returned (by instinct!) to Ankara, my home city. I have "homed," then. Finally. I know that some of the places I lived in the past do not exist anymore—either psychically or emotionally. But that's OK; part of home resides in memories anyway, and only part of it can be reassembled. I just visited my former university, for instance. The long corridors, my office on the left, the plants close to the window, and all other physical properties of my former department around which I had laboured with my body long enough to feel affection were all there as I had left them. Yet some of my colleagues/friends were not. They were among those brilliant, dedicated researchers, human rights advocates, anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, media scholars, artists … who one day signed a peace petition (Academics for Peace, 2016) and became subject to administrative and criminal investigations across the country. Some were suspended from their positions; others were dismissed from universities. Many have left "home" and moved to other countries, living in voluntary exile. Those who remained in the country have initiated alternative, feminist collectives outside institutional academia in order to keep teaching, learning, questioning, fighting, breathing (Coşar, & Ergül, 2015.). One may argue they were not entirely "at home" since "new ideals, a new mind-set, and a mode of knowledge production and exchange" were introduced to *old* university ways. It is this unsettling feeling that makes some of us feel we are at the wrong place in academia, "in some others' home or merely indifferent" (Ergül & Coşar, 2017, p. 4). Instead of my former colleagues, I see other brilliant, young scholars, who were obliged to "home" in the offices of those dismissed, delivering courses, occupying positions, juggling masks and personas that once

belonged to academics who had left. The long corridors, my office on the left, all other physical properties of my former department … A collection of empty signifiers; a door closing on itself.

I don't know which one is more painful: watching those delivering a monstrous curriculum of doubling, or observing the home you left behind collapsing?

Monster Autopsy: Playing the Game

This final section is based on shared notes and discussions that took place after each player had taken our turn. Recalling the threads shared in our introduction and reflecting on those that had emerged during play, we found and followed threads across our ungainly concoction. The first thread we identified was a shared interest in monstrosity as manifesting in spaces or expressed spatially—including references to marginalization and marginal perspectives, orbital subjectivities relative to normate centrality, spaces as context (online, institutional, political, regional), local constructions of subjectivity, risk and practice, and experiences of unwelcome proximity and egress. When emerging from our lived experience of academic spaces, the monstrous is both how we are forced into experiencing ourselves, and the systemic and individual prejudices, rituals and fetishes which erode, while attempting to contain, our subjectivities. We also noted a shared interest in forms of monstrous doubling and disappearance: the uncanny dissonance of erasure and silencing, haunting and absence. As Player 3 shared: "I found 'mobility, flux and monstrosity' manifesting particularly intensely between our narratives—in our constantly negotiating or crossing boundaries, but also being trapped in-between profound divides, blinding hyper-visibility, doubling roles and personas."

As part of our end-game autopsy, we reflected on how best to present the work in ways which did not hierarchize suffering or experience, but would instead draw out the commonalities between the systems of supremacy and privilege that intrude on, inflect, and curtail our lives as parents, scholars, and teachers. We considered working towards a more conventional, synthesized final version—one that would be considered less academically monstrous (and more likely to survive the assessment criteria applied within academia), one that would fold in the sharp edges in order to be less offensive.[5]

Commented [DC5]: This footnote might belong in the introduction if it relates to literature/examples using the same approach (exquisite corpse).

[5] For more examples of academics exploring similar approaches, see Holbrook and Pourchier, 2012; Pike, Neideck, & Kelly, 2020.

Ultimately, however, we agreed that sharing our work in the form of a documented game, complete with turn-taking and differing strategies and perspectives, had distinct advantages. As Player 3 pointed out: keeping this as a game means building on the idea of depicting the "corpse" through different—but strongly connected—pieces/observations, rather than seeking a more streamlined narrative, which is especially appropriate because of the rationale behind the game. In this sense, we found the "unsafe," somewhat wild nature of the game particularly helpful in providing us with a space or playground not governed by a certain body of knowledge or an authoritarian voice that often affects the outcome and in encouraging solidarity between players regarding their seemingly personal, yet collective "cues." The game was also powerful in triggering "uncertainty" as a disarming approach that invites a minoritarian sense of "private" and "feeling bare and exposed" in understanding how it feels to be within the boundaries of institutional academia and deliver alongside its monsters today. Being a game, our monstrous co-construction invites re-play and resists a sense of completion; Player 2 has explained:

> I like the idea of keeping it quite loose and disparate, partly also because that was only a beginning for me. Writing about the institutional space of racism, I wanted to drag in something about the ways in which what one is researching impacts on one's ability to "play the game" in those spaces. So, for instance, I'm researching things where whole communities of journalists and researchers are being killed, intimidated, or imprisoned for their work on communities who experience ethnic cleansing; and it so difficult trying to talk to academic institutions in relatively secure countries about what it means and how it feels to do this kind of triggering and dangerous research … To do research on racism, while encountering racism, and then face racism again in the blanket assumptions about what outputs one should have and how one should present one's work or how one's students of colour should present themselves and their resumes and ambitions. For instance, think about the racism that's embedded in the expectation that "everyone needs to produce X amount of research in X number of days"—"playing the academic game," in the UK at least, means at some point you suppress your pain and your trauma and the risks you take and your identification with your research subjects and you perform a kind of normative, middle class, able bodied whiteness which will make everybody feel

comfortable—to the extent that you can. And all of that happens alongside the kinds of aggressive monstering that we encounter when discussing how to make teaching less inequitable.

The players agreed that sharing our experiences, assembling our lovely corpse, and reflecting on our assemblage during an end-game autopsy has been productive and unexpectedly restorative during an otherwise difficult pandemic period. In suturing tropes and experiences from social science with those from the arts and humanities, we have aimed to reclaim a modicum of agency for our own scholarly practice. This is a game we'd play again.

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