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STRANGENESS & ODDITIES

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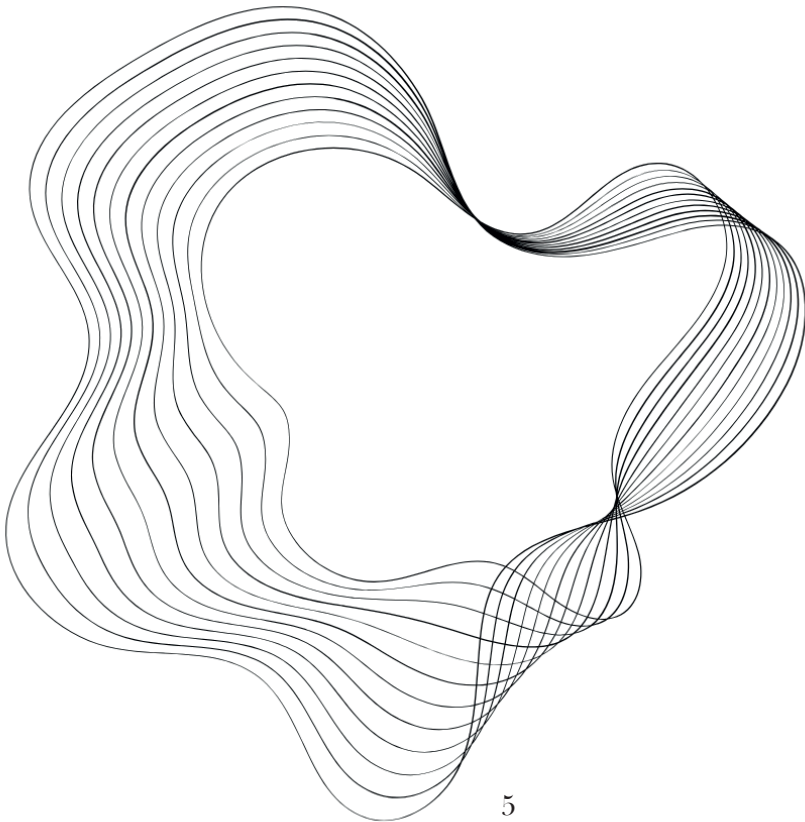
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The Surreal Self: Oddity as the Art of Selfing

Cassie Fielding



'I am not strange, I am just not normal' — Salvador Dalí

Jungian psychology is a psychology of oddity. Though best known for its concept of archetypes and emphasis on the power of myth—both expressions of patterning and repetition—it is anomaly that Jungian thought champions as the driving force behind individuation, and it is strangeness that defines it. Occurring at the intersection of known and unknown, of normality and abnormality, strangeness finds its way into Jungian thought as numinosity, synchronicity, symbolism and dreams, each experienced as unfamiliar familiarities or as, arguably, surreality. This essay explores how surrealism, the art of oddity, can facilitate a relationship to strangeness that may foster individuation, challenge our understanding of personal transformation, and, in recognition of the imagination, the exceptional, and the non-repeatable as valid modes of knowing, contribute to the re-enchantment of a world steeped in commonality, averages and statistics—thus asking whether the only thing normal about us is our abnormality.

First, I outline the ways in which Jungian psychology is a psychology of oddity—particularly Carl Jung's notions of individuation, dream-work and synchronicity, and the numinous affect associated with the experiential aspect of these concepts—which presents psyche as oriented towards the realisation of a wholeness of Self by way of a cultivation of strangeness.

I then look at how the creative practice of surrealism might facilitate this cultivation, as well as contributing an alternative yet complementary mode for understanding individuation and thinking about the Self.

Next, I pose questions my current research is raising as to how

surrealism and Jungian thought might illuminate one another when considering the strangeness of becoming one's Self as an oddity.

I suggest some practical ways to implement surrealist methods as tools of inquiry before moving on to speculate about how the implementation of surrealist-based research techniques is one way to bring the irrational, the exceptional, and the non-repeatable experience—the strangeness of Self—into academia as a valid mode of knowing.

A Psychology of Oddity

Jung's concept of individuation is the ongoing realisation of Self (Salman, 1997, p. 54). Self being a unique expression of the whole; one human's particular expression of humanity; and an emanation of peculiarity that is rooted in universality (Shearer, 2008). Individuation describes the over-arching pattern of multiple series of conjunctions of opposites, or unifications of unconscious contents with consciousness. Jung writes, 'there is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites,' (1954/1968b, par.178) suggesting a necessity in acknowledging that there exists an opposing attitude—a perspective that is at once strangely other yet indigenous—to the conscious position if individuation is to occur.

Due to their logical incompatibility, opposites brought into contact cause a tension from which the imagination, in attempting to resolve the tension, creates something of complete newness that, while consisting of the opposites, transcends them—thus integrating contents of the unconscious into consciousness (Jung, 1954/1968b). The conjunction manifests as a new attitude, or orientation to the Self and of the Self, which Jung names the transcendent function (1958/1969c): the

mechanism through which one can come to recognise their strangeness and find a way to reconcile it with the conscious personality, in a way that will be unique to the individual (Jung, 1925/1989).

Symbol is the concretisation of the transcendent function and the embodiment of oddity. According to Jung the symbol consists of known and unknown qualities (Jung, 1997, p.4)—familiar, yet unfamiliar. Defying a singular or exhaustible meaning, the symbol is alive with potential interpretations, potential experiences, and potential metamorphosis (Jung, 1997, p. 41-42). Formulated as an expression of archetypes—the unknowable, universal patterning of psyche (Jung, 1954/1968a) —the symbol also embodies the opposites of sameness and uniqueness. Sameness in its archetypal essence and uniqueness in its expression of that essence. And, like the Self which is never fully knowable, can be thought of as a distinct actuality of universal potentiality.

Symbol, with all its strangeness, finds its way into Jungian thought in dreams, synchronicity and numinosity. Each of these experiences being often of such oddity that they can become a defining feature of one's life. Dreams are highly symbolic communication from the unknown Self in an attempt to be known (Jung, 1974). Synchronicity describes an experience where an external event and a psychological event occur together in time yet without any causal connection (Jung, 1952/1969b): the mysterious and strange nature of it inciting an intuition of meaningful anomaly. Which leads to the numinous: an embodied feeling of rapture that accompanies symbolic encounters, whether in dreams, art, or synchronicities (Benjamin, 1998). A feeling of other worldliness, of disorienting strangeness that dissolves the barrier between Self and otherness (Schlamm, 2007).

All these experiences are an impeding of the unknown into conscious awareness, often unexpectedly or without warning, always affect-laden. We feel that there is meaning in them, but articulation is beyond reach, their strangeness amplified by a lack of conscious will. Whether we respond or not, we can view these strange happenings as a call to individuate, a call from the Self for realisation, an invitation to unite opposites into a form of oddity that is the lived experience of Self.

The Art of Selfing

Surrealism has its own way of attending to these experiences. Exploring dreams, the *Marvelous*, and moments of *petrifying coincidence* through image, surrealism aims to liberate the unconscious from rational constraints in a ‘decisive step towards the unification of personality’ (Breton, 1934/1978b, p. 138) in the ‘exploration of a mental space outside of normal awareness, in a place where consciousness and unconsciousness, the possible and the impossible, become one’ (Polizzotti, 2024, p. 40). While this echoes the core principle of the Jungian model, it is also an active and explicitly intentional investigation of the Self—a *Selfing*.

Dreams are a source of fascination in surrealism—a place to scavenge for marvels (or numinosities)—but are not only subject to unreliable recall, but prone to embellishments and conscious reordering (Polizzotti, 2024, p. 49-51). Surrealism prefers to enter the waking dream and uses a variety of techniques to recreate the strange world of dreaming. Deploying automatism, which involves entering a meditative state and writing or making art with a minimum of conscious interference (Breton, 1924/1969a), surrealism aims to

make visible what is not visible (Baudin, 2015). It is a method akin to Jung's *active imagination* (von Franz, 1969/1997) during which one enters a state of reverie and actively engages with images from the unconscious, a key difference being the degree to which surrealism bypasses narrative and, rather than dialoguing with images as in active imagination, allows a dialogue to occur between images in attempts to give form to the experience resulting in a more radical absurdity.

From a starting point of automatism, surreal poetry juxtaposes images, phrases and sounds freeing language from the tyranny of standardised meaning, and surreal art juxtaposes images, shapes and/or textures creating a hybridity that belies ordinary experience. Max Ernst offers Lautreamont's example of such juxtaposing and its ultimate effect of what can be viewed as symbolic creations:

A readymade reality (an umbrella), suddenly found in the presence of another very distant and no less absurd reality (a sewing machine), in a place where both must feel out of place (on a dissecting table), will be robbed of its naïve purpose and of its identity into a new absolute, poetic and true; umbrella and sewing machine will make love (in Breton, 1935/1969c, p. 275).

A perfectly surreal way to describe the union of opposites, for the 'opposites' are not logical opposites i.e. black and white, but distant realities. Described as 'a light upon the unrevealed and yet revealable portion of our being' (Breton, 1930/1969b, p. 164), automatism is understood as a method of exploring psyche as the breaking down of logic, of preconceived meaning, finds inner parallel with the breaking

down of fixed ideas about Self and in its reassembling creates it anew. It might be argued, then, that surrealism is an artistic practice that attempts to mimic the mechanisms of the individuating psyche: while Jung's concept might offer a way to explain individuation and the symbolic encounter, surrealism offers a way to incite them.

On one hand automatism enables one to be in readiness for the marvellous but also a generator of 'a feeling familiar in its unfamiliarity' which combines the ordinary with the unexpected (Polizzotti, 2024, p46-47): the numinous experience. The arbitrary generation of the marvellous, which sees umbrellas brought onto dissecting tables with sewing machines, is thought of as a meaningful chance encounter, or petrifying coincidence: 'an acute awareness that more is going on around us than we realised, but that we are actively involved in it all' (Rosemont in Polizzotti, 2024, p. 51): a synchronicity. In addition to automatic methods, surrealism engages in playing games of chance that invite synchronistic experiences, leading to, like automatism, infinite possible expressions of oddity. Just as individuation is never fully realised as consciousness always requires the existence of that which is unconscious, that which is strange, potentiality, according to the law of opposites, is thus informed by actuality, or else is inseparable from it. Surrealism is not only concerned with what might be, but, parallel to individuation as the fulfilment of one's unique expression of unbridled potential, posits that what might be already exists.

Jung explains that 'the difference between the "natural" individuation process, which runs its course unconsciously, and the one which is consciously realised, is tremendous...In the second case so much darkness comes to light' (1952/1969a, para. 756). And so it is that the practice of surrealism brings the unconscious into the

conscious sphere as one kind of Selfing, one which views oddity itself as an art. In the spirit of Jung's convictions that individuation is more effectual, more profound, if one can develop a personal cosmology in which they may 'articulate their own linguistic worlds' (Shamdasani and Hillman, 2013, p. 11), surrealism demonstrates how one may go about cultivating a personal language that also speaks to the transpersonal, leaving to chance, as in automatism and active imagination, the particularity of the images that emerge. Trusting 'the inexhaustible nature of the murmur' (Breton, 1924/1969a, p. 30) or the infinite creativity of the unconscious, surrealism affirms the universal nature of being while, through its use of image and language, allows for a highly personalised and idiosyncratic expression of that being.

Possibilities and Multiplicities

A significant part of my current research is concerned with how looking at surrealism through a Jungian lens can act as a re-imagining of its infamous strangeness, and, equally, how we might consider the potential for surrealism to revitalise Jungian thought with an attitude and a language of oddity. I suggest the following questions as a starting point from which to formulate a novel understanding of Self:

- Can surrealist practice be a way for psyche to come to terms with its own oddity?
- How might surrealist practice answer the call to individuate, or how might it be a means to reach out to the unknown Self as an instigator of individuation?
- In what ways does surrealism expand on what is meant by Self, particularly in a Jungian sense which sees the Self as a unity of personality? Can it be that individuation as the development of

a wholeness of personality is a realisation of psyche's plurality: Self not as a singularity but a multiplicity, always in flux?

- Might we see the Self as surreal—a constant morphing of hybridity? Rather than being one's core 'essence', which implies a stability, what does it mean to imagine Self as unstable? Can surrealism assist in accepting, even embracing, or more daringly, delighting, in such changeability in where one views oneself as eternally mysterious?
- With the idea in mind that individuation is littered with strangeness, might it be considered that it is through oddity that we come to know our sameness?
- Finally, and more metaphysically, what would it mean to imagine that the unconscious transpersonal Self comes to know its infinite potential through each and every individual's embodiment of strangeness?

Techniques of Surprise and Methodologies of the Fantastic

Surrealism champions various linguistic games, 'techniques of surprise and methodologies of the fantastic that...subvert academic modes of enquiry' (Brotchie and Gooding, 1995, p. 10). Here, I suggest a small sample that could be utilised as research tools. While collaboration was emphasised in early surrealism, when one adopts a Jungian attitude that sees active imagination as a collaboration with inner figures of otherness, a solo task becomes a group effort.

The cut-up method (Brotchie and Gooding, 1995, p.36) involves taking a text, cutting it up and rearranging it into a new text. Though *found poetry* is often used in poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2017, p. 215) the difference here is the arbitrary shuffling and blind rearrangement

leading to potentially surprising insights or avenues of thought. Perhaps more than one text can be shuffled with another. The new text ‘will be like you’ writes Tristan Tzara ‘and here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar’ (Brotchie and Gooding, 1995, p.36), emphasising the connection between knowledge of self and knowledge of world.

Another game involves choosing an object—this could be a physical artefact, a concept, a scholar, a text—and coming up with a list of questions to ask it. In a separate list answers are written, preferably unrelated to the questions. Coming to each decided question, select at random an answer to ‘determine the irrational characteristics of the object’ (p. 118).

Echo poems (p. 30) take the last word of a line of poetry and match it phonetically—phonetics have also been viewed as archetypally constituted, accessing another layer of unconscious psyche (Kugler, 2002). A passage could be used from a text or from the researcher’s own annotations, field notes or interviews.

These are all ways of locating tensions that might not be obvious, a way of staying with the trouble and working through unstableness. They have the potential to draw out strangeness, to elicit ideas that are not easily accessible to the conscious, analytical mind. This is not to replace analytical thinking but to complement it for a more holistic research strategy. It is also worth noting that while automatism invites unconscious oddities to present themselves, the surrealist games function in a way that presents strangeness *to* the unconscious, forcing the imagination to engage in meaning-making.

Surrealist methods may or may not produce direct conclusions,

but they awaken the imagination (the strangeness of the researcher) and, rather than looking for patterns and order, search for exceptions and possibilities. As Breton writes: ‘I madly love everything that adventurously breaks the thread of discursive thought and suddenly ignites a flare illuminating a life of relations fecund in another way’ (1947/1978a, p.282).

Homo Inusitatus

In a modern culture characterised by disenchantment in which the Self is isolated as a calculation of thought, in which knowledge is most highly valued within the parameters of rationality, averages and statistics (Weber in Main, 2022, pp. 2-4), it is more important than ever, if we strive to infuse or generate life with deeper meaning, to take steps towards a re-enchantment of our being (Main, 2022). Championing the strange, the odd, the exceptional and the non-repeatable experience as more than merely anecdotal acknowledges the roles of imagination, emotion, and intuition as modes of knowledge. Main looks to Jungian concepts as potentially effectual in re-enchantment, and Jungian analyst Cambray (2024) specifically endorses surrealism as an imaginative reanimation of the more-than-human-world. Art critic Mel Gooding agrees:

We have lived for too long in the dreary region of *homo economicus*, our lives shadowed by principles of self-interest, utilitarian ‘necessities’, instrumental moralities. But we are permitted to hope; to revive those great and optimistic words of Breton: *Perhaps the imagination is on the verge of recovering its rights*. We must welcome, as did the

Surrealists, the re-entry into modern life of *homo ludens*, the imaginative man at play, the intuitive visionary (Brotchie and Gooding, 1995, p. 12).

It is therefore that through the synthesising of Jungian psychology and surrealism, this essay hopes to sow seeds that may contribute to a more holistic understanding of reality and a revivification of meaning. Surrealism, and surrealist-based research, with its nonsensical, irrational language, playful methods and outright strangeness opens up space for the unexpected, the anomalous and the ineffable offering ways with which to explore and express such experiences; to investigate different selves in the world and different worlds in Self; to enter a discourse on the nature, legitimacy and value of the changeability of experience and how different modes of experience might be synthesised. Such categoric advocacy of strangeness and oddity sees *homo ludens* further radicalised by the weird and wonderful entrance of *homo inusitatus multum*, the person of much strangeness, being of many oddities.







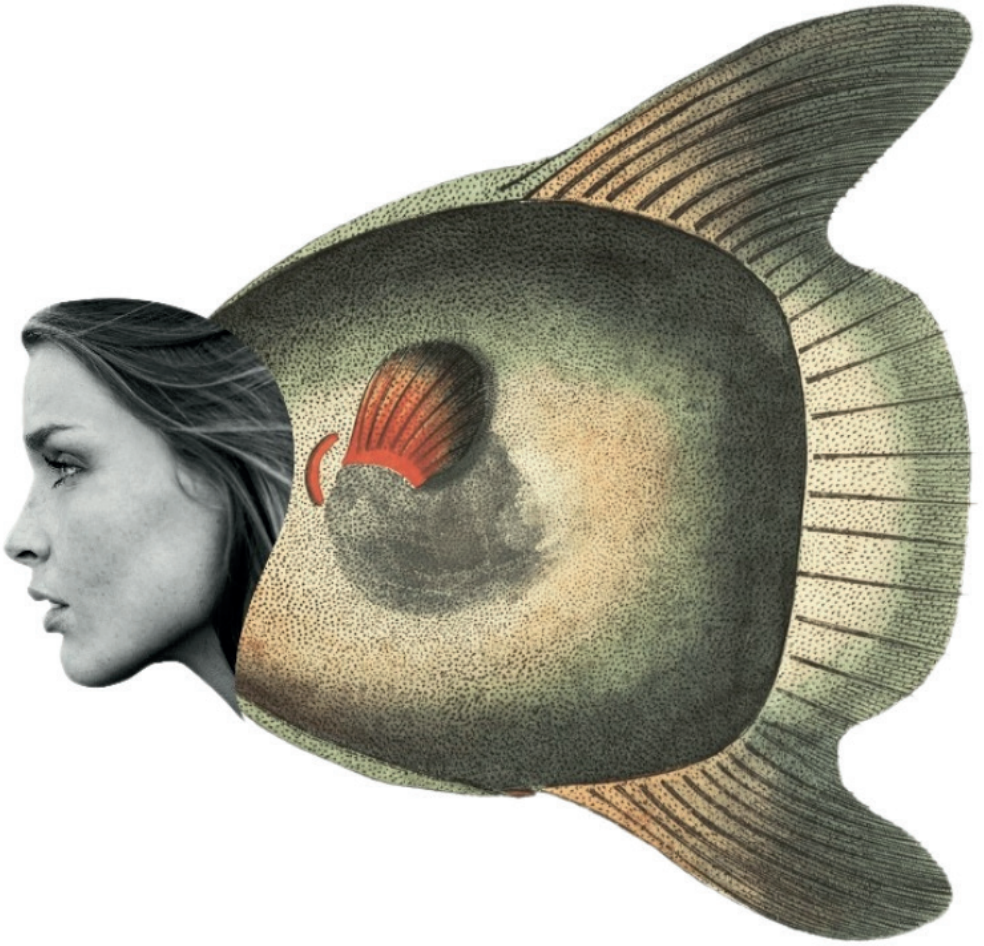
















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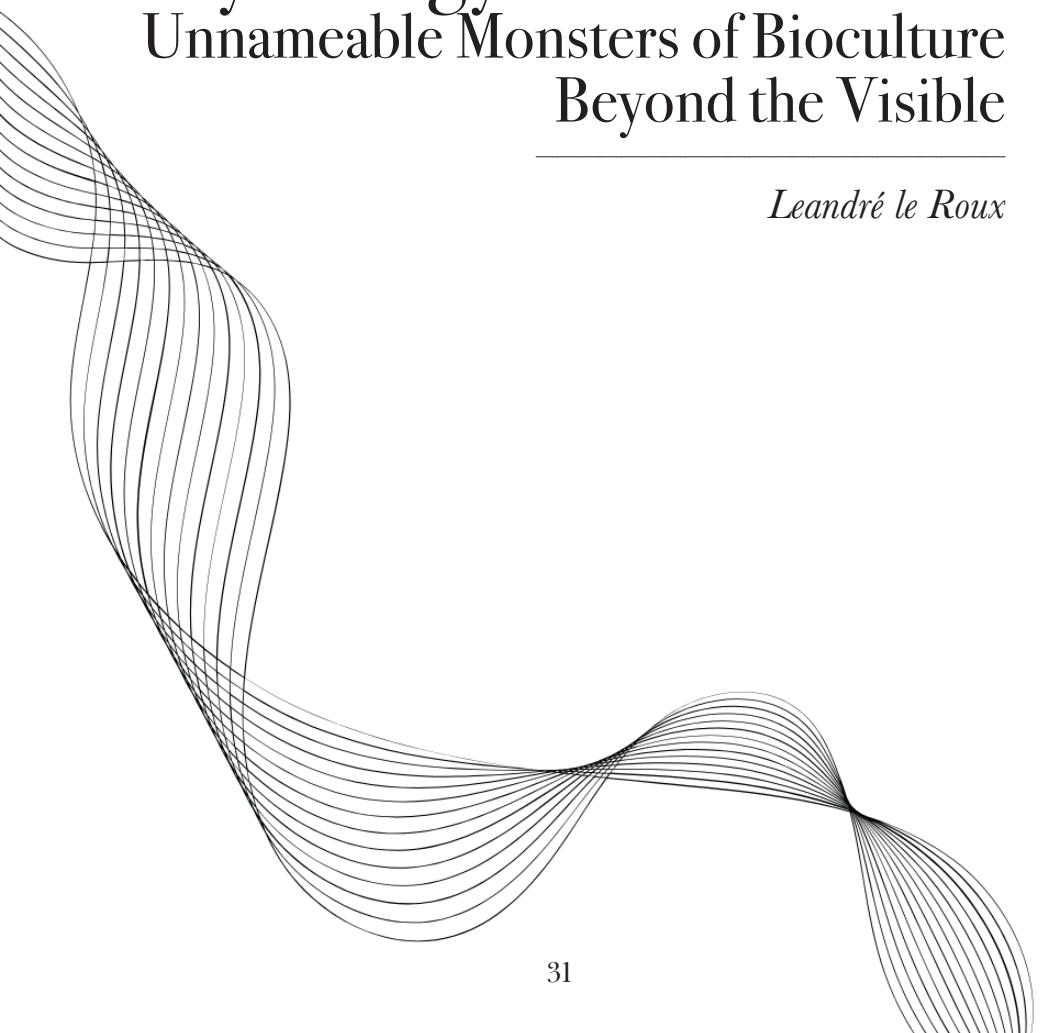
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Psychology of the Unusual: Unnameable Monsters of Bioculture Beyond the Visible

Leandré le Roux



Monsters can be found across human expressions of culture, from cave art to the most contemporary social media mystery pages. The study of monsters has similarly taken on many shapes and shades, from ancient authors involved in teratology, postmodern focuses on the monster's cultural value, to contemporary approaches that weave together biology and culture.

Biocultural studies of monsters, written by authors like Mathias Clasen (2012, 2016 and 2017), Stephen T. Asma (2014), and Bronwyn Monteiro, Bryan West and David A. Pizarro (2023), present new and interdisciplinary ways to study monsters in a contemporary academic environment. Their studies deftly combine evolutionary psychology with other fields drawn on by older versions of Monster Studies, often regarded as subjects that concern the humanities¹. The biocultural approach allows for new and insightful inclusions into understanding what it is that makes humans interested in monsters across the boundaries of different cultures, spaces and time periods by focusing on similarities in human evolution. However, this approach lays heavy focus on decoding the visual manifestation of the monster, something not every monster offers up so willingly for scrutiny.

There is a type of monster that defies the cues and signs often used to read monsters, namely the 'unnameable' monster, as identified and explained by Maria Beville (2014). This monster seems to suffer first from a lack of signification, but in fact holds an excess of descriptors that challenge how meaning is read from its body. Examples of such unnameable monsters can be both ancient, such as the Evil Uduḡ, from the Sumerian *Uduḡ-hul Forerunners* (Old Babylonian Period 2000-1600 BCE) (Bertman, 2003, p. 340) as well as contemporary, as seen

1 Musharbash (2014) gives a summary of these fields.

manifested in the aliens from films like *The Fourth Kind* (Osunsanmi, 2009) and *Dark Skies* (Stewart, 2013). The main focus lines of bioculture might reveal some cues of fear, but with an unclear body, the meanings read can also be unclear.

The challenges to delving meaning from the unnameable monster in its many forms is noted by Beville (2014, p. 75), and the author suggests instead a careful look at the landscapes and spaces such vague and veiled creatures inhabit. Beville (2014) does present some interesting monsters and their abodes, predominantly relying on, and criticizing, ideas established in *Monster Culture* as per Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996), but with new approaches to monsters, perhaps a new approach to finding meaning in the spaces monsters inhabit can be established also.

The main notes of biocultural studies concerning monsters are interestingly also found within the field of ecology, particularly within a theory called the ‘Landscape of Peril Theory’, as named by Doherty and Ruhle (2020). This theory combines the ideas of the ‘Landscape of Fear’ (Laundré, Hernández and Ripple, 2010), and the ‘Landscape of Disgust’ (Weinstein, Buck and Young, 2018) which concern how animals and humans perceive and use space with regards to the risks of infection and predation. Humans have a more complex Landscape of Peril, deeply informed by cultural ideas about space. One can consider here the fundamentals of the Spatial Turn², presented by Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, that space can be investigated as per the trilectic of the Firstspace, physical space; Secondspace, symbolic and perceived ideas about space; and Thirdspace, where these ideas

2 The Spatial Turn here refers to a focus shift in research by social and cultural theorists and literary scholars around the 1970’s and 1980’s to the social production of space (Tally, 2019, p.175). This focus on space’s place in making meaning, is usually called Critical Spatiality, which take the human experience of space into consideration (Tally, 2019, p.175).

intersect and create a lived experience.

Through combining the ideas within the Landscape of Peril and the trilectic of first, second and Thirdspace, a more complete understanding of unnameable monsters can emerge. Within this study new focus points are explained concerning a biocultural and ecological approach to unnameable monsters. The chosen examples of unnameable monsters, both the Ancient Evil Udug and the contemporary aliens shown in *The Fourth Kind* (Osunsanmi, 2009) and *Dark Skies* (Stewart, 2013), show strong cues of culturally oriented biologically evolved fear of predation, enemies and infection, especially when viewed within the landscapes appropriate to them. As both these monsters move from the outer reaches of their respective cultures' outer wilds, into the city, home and body, various cues can be found associated with these spaces that further shows how these monsters are connected to predation, conspecific threats and infection.

Monster Studies and the Biocultural Approach

Traditionally, Monster Studies are heavily based on the Seven Theses of Jeffery Jerome Cohen (1996)³, whose work, and subsequent use, often view the monster as cultural project. However, recent entries into

3 The seven seminal theses of Cohen (2018 [1996], pp. 44-54) are summarized shortly here. Firstly, Cohen (2018 [1996], p. 44) notes that the body of the monster is 'pure' culture, a sign that is meant to be read. In terms of Cohen's (2018 [1996], pp. 44-45) second thesis, the monster is a figure that cannot be destroyed, rather it serves a cultural, political or social function and is always reimagined to serve new problems as they arise. Thirdly, Cohen (2018 [1996], pp. 45-46) explains the idea that the monster is liminal and conglomerate, disturbing categories and causing crisis. As his fourth thesis, Cohen (2018 [1996], pp. 46-49) focuses on difference, noting that the monster is the very manifestation of difference, truly an Other that can be scapegoated. Fifth, Cohen (2018 [1996], pp. 49-52) posits that monsters determine what is possible, policing the boundaries of the known world as a warning to those who transgress. Desire and Fear are the sixth topic that Cohen (2018 [1996], pp. 52-54) delves into, positing the monster as existing in a carnivalesque space where the abject creature can break taboo and the audience can vicariously enjoy the fulfilment of such guilty pleasures with the added bonus of scapegoating and exorcizing the monster afterwards. Finally, Cohen's (2018 [1996], p.54) seventh thesis is a short one, monsters continue to change and reflect human culture and anxieties and are always able to 'become'.

this field are more interdisciplinary. Bioculture takes as its premise that culture is an expression of biology, and that culture, in turn, creates some of the environments humans adapt to through the process of evolution (Boyd, 2006, p. 21-22). Asma (2014, p. 1) identifies horror as deeply biocultural, a place where the subjects of the humanities and sciences intersect, where the evolution of the fears of the human mind as philosophical, cultural, psychological and biological overlap. Prime among these biocultural concerns is how the monster, as an imagined figure, can serve as a point of continued interest across the boundaries of culture, space and time, as well as generate actual fear in a human audience (Clasen, 2012, p. 222).

In essence, there are three main points concerning why humans engage with, and fear, monsters. Firstly, monsters have predatory cues; they trigger the ‘Predator Template’ (Clasen, 2012, p. 223) and make use of a circuit through the brain shown to be triggered by predators. Morin and Sobchuck (2023, p. 1) explain that throughout human evolution, predatory animals have placed pressure on humans, leading to the evolution of certain traits that can help detect such animals, as well as cultural tales featuring exaggerated traits to enhance avoidance and thus survival.

Humans have strong biases towards identifying snakes and spiders, as well as being more easily oriented by culture to fear these creatures (Öhman, Flykt, and Esteves, 2001). Coss (2020, p. 185) explains that, due to a history of heavy predation, humans also have a quick identification response to felid predators. Clasen (2012, p. 223) notes that generally animals with forward-facing eyes, found in predatory animals, sharp teeth, as well as larger body sizes, often capture human attention from an evolutionary perspective. Monteiro, West and

Pizarro (2023, p. 162) refer to these creatures as ‘predatory monsters’.

Secondly, monsters can at times exhibit human qualities embodying a conspecific fear, something that humans evolved to respond to threats from other humans (Clasen and Platts, 2019, p. 29). This fear has a different path through the brain than the stimulus caused by predators (Gross and Canteras, 2012, p. 615). Humans, having lived together in social groups for much of our evolution, have been exposed to an evolutionary pressure of other humans as aggressors. This significant pressure, as explained by Duntley and Buss, led humans to evolve certain ‘anti-homicide adaptations’ (2011, p. 400). Clasen and Platts (2019, p. 29) note that, to be prudently cautious in unsure situations with other people, the dangerous intent of others can be exaggerated, and they are monitored very closely for violent or aggressive cues.

Thirdly, monsters can be wrapped up with a fear of contamination. This fear often manifests as disgust and a desire to avoid material deemed infectious. Monteiro, West and Pizarro name such ‘monsters of contagion’ and point towards the behavioural immune system as activated by these types of monsters (2023, p. 165). The behavioural immune system is explained by Curtis, de Barra and Aungar (2011, p. 389) as a set of avoidance behaviours that both animals and humans have when encountering substances that trigger feelings of disgust. Disgust keeps organisms away from parasites and infectious materials and monitors who came into contact with the perceived ‘disgusting’ substance (Curtis et al 2011, p. 389). This can lead to the avoidance of sick individuals, but such avoidance does not stop with actually infectious persons.

The behavioural immune system produces various ‘false positives’, reading disability or scarring as potentially threatening (Inbar and

Pizarro, 2022). The Uncanny Valley, originally related to the aversion for human-like agents as per Masahiro Mori (1970), can also be related to the behavioural immune system and its tendency to err on the side of caution⁴. It is also deeply involved with how people tend to ‘Other’ certain groups or individuals. Liuzza et al (2019, p. 1) explain that humans experience and express moral disgust, which is also tied to the behavioural immune system. Moral disgust is often aided by cultural ideas, but the underlying biologically evolved structures of disgust can guide this expression when an ‘ethical community’ perceives itself as being in danger (Kusche and Barker, 2019, p. 3). Such moral Others can then become set up as disgusting and threatening; they are turned into monsters (Monteiro, West and Pizarro, 2023, pp. 166-167).

The monster gives off cues from different categories, different stimuli that follow different paths through the brain, and often have different responses. One would approach a parasitic worm differently than a sabretooth tiger. This ‘category jamming’ is described by Asma (2014, pp. 7-9) as a state in which monsters cause extreme confusion, activating a fear of the unknown and often resulting in fascination, to try and gain more information and clarity. Most people have an ‘intolerance of uncertainty’ (Moustafa, 2020, p. 206), this leads humans to judge situations that contain too much uncertainty as severely negative, causing distress. It is here where the unnameable monster lies.

The Unnameable Monster

The unnameable monster is a ‘Thing’; it is always more than the

⁴ The Uncanny Valley can be linked to abjection and a strong aversion to the disgust engendered by substances associated with death and corpses (Ballif, 2015, p. 84). This element of disgust is then linked to the behavioural immune system, as explained by Wang, Lilienfeld and Rochat (2015, p. 394, 395), since it detects that which is inhuman, like a marker of possible disease in agents like robots or monsters.

sum of its parts, and those parts are often elevated from known items, animals, or humans to the unfamiliar and uncanny (Beville, 2014). In its unnameable element as a ‘Thing’ the monster defies categories, existing in excess or in a dire state of changing uncertainties. It does not refer to the monster itself, but to a way to ‘Other Things’. An example here can be that it is *like* something the audience can refer to, but it is unfamiliar and threatening in that it is *unlike* that known item, person, animal, or object. Its absence of description and identification causes anxiety and fear through its close link with the unknown (Long, 2012, p. 195).

The monster as an unnameable ‘Thing’ presents a particular challenge to the usual set of ideas used to approach monsters, such as the Seven Theses of Jeffery Jerome Cohen (1996), as well as the larger body of Monster Studies that draw from these theses. Beville (2014, p. 151) critiques the theses for focusing on tearing the monster apart to identify its individual signifiers, instead of the sublime ‘Thing’ it is as a whole. However, the critique is made from a point in time more than ten years after Beville’s (2014) book, *The Unnameable Monster in Literature and Film*, was published.

The problem identified in this study is an issue that draws from a newer perspective, namely how meaning is made in biocultural studies of monsters as discussed above. In essence, for the new biocultural approach, the hidden, missing, overabundant, or fluid representation of the unnameable ‘Thing’ remains problematic as it does not provide a clear set of bodily signs to interpret. Certain behaviours might be inspected for meaning, but there is a strong bias towards visual information, something the unnameable monster does not give up lightly.

There are, however, other elements to the unnameable monster that carry both interpretations encoded with cultural meaning, as well as biologically relevant understandings. One element expressed by Beville (2014, p. 75) is the importance of space when the unnameable monster is described. In its apparent lack of signification, physical characteristics and associations with places are drawn on to express the sublime nature of the monster. Beville (2014, p. 80) notes that the space the monster as ‘Thing’ is located in, hides it and enables it to cause more fear. This space is woven into an aspect of the monster; often dangerous, geography becomes a further part of the fears that coalesce in the figure of the unnameable monster. This close tie between the landscape and monstrosity can be seen in the chosen examples for the study, namely the Evil Udug and aliens as portrayed in *The Fourth Kind* (Osunsanmi, 2009) and *Dark Skies* (Stewart, 2013).

The Evil Udug has left no real depictions in the otherwise rich visual tradition of Ancient Mesopotamia, so much so that it has been described as face-less (Geller, 2011). The creature appears in the *Udug-hul Forerunners*, Sumerian exorcism texts dating from the third millennium BCE that include multiple evil entities of disease. A general description of the creature for the purposes of this investigation is drawn from Geller’s 1985 translation of these texts, as well as his 2016 updates provided on his earlier translation. From these translations, The Evil Udug is expressed as insubstantial, yet it scares away birds, kills humans and livestock, and binds, beats, and possesses its victim. It is likened to a murderous dog, snake, mongoose, lion, and owl, and is even compared to wild horses. The creature is deeply associated with the outer reaches of the Ancient Mesopotamian understanding of the boundaries of their world, haunting the desert, steppe, and

mountains, only to enter the city, stalk their victims in the streets, and finally overwhelm them in their homes. It is unnameable in that it is like these things and yet unlike them, somewhere between the myriads of descriptions provided.

A contemporary example of unnameable monstrosity would be the alien. The alien, a being from elsewhere that moves inward to infect or do harm, is not novel, but the alien ties into the contemporary, globalized, world view well. It is a creature that grew out of Ufology, recently renamed UAP Studies, which is treated as an active and evolving folklore by authors like Erik A. Östling, (2021). After the end of the Second World War, the UFO phenomenon intertwined with science-fiction tales and narratives of abduction, to create a feedback loop between Ufology and popular culture (Östling, 2021, p. 222), as can be seen in films like *The Fourth Kind* (Osunsanmi, 2009) and *Dark Skies* (Stewart, 2013).

The Fourth Kind and *Dark Skies* show the alien as a monster that has no clear depiction, and often make use of external signifiers to imply traits about it. *The Fourth Kind*, a story centred around alien abductions in Nome, Alaska, never actually show the creatures, but link them visually with owls and the distorted faces of their victims. These creatures are implied as coming from outer space, but the isolated Alaskan wilderness plays a visual part in how the creatures enter the homes and bodies of their intended targets.

Dark Skies provides more visual information on the creatures, but never fully reveals the monsters. The film focuses on a struggling suburban family who begin to suffer from a disturbing presence entering their home to cause harm to them and their two children.

Drawings of the familiar ‘Grey Aliens’⁵ are shown later in the film,

but associations with animals reveal something of their intentions and perception. They are once more perceived as being from outer space, and the area they disturb, and cause the most harm in, is the home.

Both of these unnameable monsters can be investigated in terms of the signs that are provided outside of their bodies. Signs of animals, enemies, and disgust associated with the aliens can be found within these films, however, the spaces associated with the aliens can provide further meanings and contexts to the unnameable monsters.

The Landscape of Peril and the Spatial Turn

Space, as an element to investigate the human experience, can be found in the humanities mainly as the heritage of the Spatial Turn, but it is also abundant in the study of ecology. The Ecology of Fear provides an approach to interpreting the space the unnameable monster occupies. The Landscape of Peril Theory (Doherty and Ruhle, 2020) allows for an exploration that considers landscapes in terms of how humans and animals measure various risks in the landscape from an evolutionary perspective. The Landscape of Peril Theory focuses particularly on how the risk of predation, violent conspecifics, as well as infection are connected to how organisms use and perceive the landscape. The risk of predation and enemies is expressed as the Landscape of Fear (Laundré et al, 2010), while the Landscape of Disgust (Weinstein et al, 2018) concerns avoiding parasites and other potentially infectious material. These two theories combine to create the Landscape of Peril, allowing the main ideas from biocultural studies on monsters, namely

The 'Grey Alien' appears, at first, a whole being, but it reveals references to known animals, people, and places. UFOlogical descriptions and filmic depictions thrive on the slimy, discoloured side, almost amphibian in nature, with large heads and wasted bodies, a lack of facial expression, and a tendency to pierce bodily boundaries. 'Grey Aliens' also move from the outer reaches of space, across wild spaces, and into the home and body. The chosen films do reference this manifestation of the alien in various ways, although the bodies of the aliens are never fully revealed.

cues of predation, dangerous conspecifics, and a fear of infection to be directly linked to the landscape.

Concerning the Landscape of Fear, one might set the basic idea down as demonstrated in a study done by Choi and Kim (2010). Within this study, researchers presented rats with an environment, food, and a simulated predator, dubbed ‘Robogator’. Within the study it was observed that the rats would not forage a particular distance from Robogator; Choi and Kim conclude that the rats had estimated a particular point beyond which the food no longer outweighed the perceived risk of predation (2010, p. 21774). In effect, the rats, the predator, and their foraging created a small Landscape of Fear.

In a 2024 interview conducted by me with Professor Adrian Shrader, from the University of Pretoria’s Zoology and Entomology department, Shrader noted several key ideas about the Landscape of Fear. Professor Shrader explained that Landscapes of Fear are changeable, dependent on the individual or group’s assessment of where possible costs, such as predation or conspecific competition, would outweigh or not outweigh benefits like food, water or access to mates. These risks’ assessment, and the resulting use of the landscape, can be expressed as a mental map that organisms create, follow, and, in turn, their movements can reshape the landscape (Gaynor et al, 2019, p. 4).

The Landscape of Disgust contains similar ideas, but here the risks avoided include parasites, as well as substances that are considered infectious. Doherty and Ruehle (2020) explain how animals have evolved under the pressure of parasites and pathogens, developing ‘disgust’ to avoid such contamination, thus creating a Landscape of Disgust. Within the Landscape of Disgust, conspecifics with markers

of disease are avoided (Regenbogen et al, 2017, p. 6400), carrion and its risk of infection for predators and their prey (Moleón and Sánchez-Zapata, 2021, p. 3), predator dung, and activities that deter parasites can be enacted more or less depending on the perceived risk of the presence of such parasites (Weinstein et al, 2018, p. 1213). Similar to the Landscape of Fear, the Landscape of Disgust shows the changes in movement and behaviour animals make to avoid areas of possible infection, which, in turn, affects the actual landscape (Berger-Tal and Saltz, 2019, p. 4).

An important part of the Landscape of Peril Theory is how both the Landscape of Fear and the Landscape of Disgust involve learning and adjusting behaviours accordingly. Some behaviours might be innate, as Moleón and Sánchez-Zapata (2021, p. 9) explain, but not all. Laundré et al (2010, p. 3) notes that animals who escape perceived risks, like predation, change their behaviours to better survive. These behaviours can be similarly observed in humans. If one takes into consideration how humans have access to deep cultural pooling across multiple generations through narrative (Boyd 2006, pp. 21-22), then the culturally accepted fear or negative connections to certain spaces can begin to gain a deeper meaning.

The Spatial Turn's legacy of Critical Spatiality, arising from the 70's and 80's, shows how space for humans can be socially constructed (Tally, 2019, p. 175). Space becomes an element in which the social relations of a society are captured, as the interconnectedness between space and society constantly mould each other (Macaspac and Moore, 2020, p. 4). Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja make up two key researchers of the Spatial Turn; their work is of value to this study as the core concepts they addressed can be linked to elements within the

Landscape of Peril.

For Lefebvre, (1991, p. 85) the production of space includes nature, such as the physical geographies and materials that make a space. However, it extends beyond just the physical, being subject to the forces that shape human lives and relations such as cultural activities, ideology, technology, power, production, and knowledge. Lefebvre's contribution is summarised by Ghulyan, (2024, p. 2) in the concepts of Perceived Space, Conceived Space and Lived Space. Perceived Space is how societal practices are related to space, Conceived Space is made up of ideas, thoughts and representations of space, and Lived Space is space that is experienced through the symbolism surrounding space.

Edward Soja builds onto these concepts explored by Lefebvre. Soja posits space as a trilectic consisting of First, Second, and Thirdspace. Physical space can be viewed as a Firstspace (Perceived) (Duan, 2023, p. 92). The abstract space of ideology and language forms part of Secondspace (Conceived) (Wang and Gu, 2023, p. 27). Thirdspace (Lived Space) is where the lived experience of space lies, where the realities of space and the imagined, abstract, and ideas concerning space intersect to create fluid and changeable experiences (Hariharan, 2025, p. 52).

In terms of the Landscape of Peril, Firstspace could be understood as the physical and geographical area the subject has to navigate. The mental map that the Landscape of Peril entails with conceptions of predator, parasite, and conspecific risks may be viewed as Secondspace. Thirdspace is expressed where the real geography and ideas about the risk concerning that geography overlap to influence how the space is lived in.

It is within this Thirdspace where the monster often lies in its many

forms. Weinstock (2020, p. 9) explains how the monster is depicted in Thirdspace, a liminal being that is an abstract, imagined, or a literary creation, often overlaid onto a real space where it is said to dwell. One might infer that the monster as symbol of fear, coalesced into a sign of warnings (Musharbash and Gershon, 2023, p. 20) that might be present in an actual place (Wagner et al, 2006, p. 164), combines the real and imagined and might influence how a person interprets a physical space, as well as how they might choose to use or avoid that space. The implication is that, even with a monster like the unnameable monster with confusing signifiers, the biologically evolved ideas of risk, as well as the cultural, social, and historical factors that make up how a place is regarded and then physically used, can be employed to understand better the implied meanings and fears made manifest in the monster.

Unnameable Monstrosity and The Landscape of Peril

The Evil Udug and aliens shown in *The Fourth Kind* and *Dark Skies* follow a particular path through the landscape, the goal of both types of monsters identified here being the penetration of their victim's bodily boundary in some way. Both creatures move from the outer boundaries of their respective cultures' understanding of the world into more known human spaces, such as the city, street, or living areas, to finally enter the home and body. Through each region there are connections to the cultural perceptions of, as well as physicality of, the landscape. In terms of predation, infection, and other violent humans, as well as how this might have been expressed culturally, reveal an extra dimension to the fears that each monster carries.

Reality for the Ancient Mesopotamians broke down at the outer regions of their physical location; the far-off desert, steppe, and

mountains were real places of danger, but also places where chaos lurked outside of the ordered city state. The mountains, such as the actual Zagros Mountains (de Almeida and de Fátima Rosa, 2023, p. 139), were rife with danger, being a place of chaos beyond civilization, along with its association with the Underworld (Artemov, 2012, p. 2; Feldt, 2016, p. 349). The desert and steppe were real spaces of perceived chaos and death (Hirvonen, 2019, p. 316). The Arabian Desert similarly had a physical location and deep cultural significance tying it to the Underworld and chaotic dangers (Vreugdenhill, 2020, p. 71).

The mountain, steppe, and desert contain many indications of predation, infection, and dangerous humans, as well as disgusting Others and death. The connection to the aforementioned Underworld ties the spaces to the danger of death and the abject materials of death. Real predators, such as lions, *Panthera leo* and *Panthera leo persica*, could be found in these regions (Gilbert, 2002, p. 27). The Evil Udug is noted as having leonine features (Geller, 1985, p. 65), creating one clear marker of danger in terms of biology while culturally lions were associated with the forces of destructive chaos (Verderame, 2017, p. 391).⁶

Nomadic peoples, like the Gutians and Kassites (Rainey, 2018), moved through these areas and were viewed as threatening and disgusting Others. Robbers and bandits also lurked in such places, posing real dangers (Fincke, 2013, p. 17). Along with the Evil Udug, other entities of disease came out of these wild spaces to infect people (Fincke, 2013, p. 17). The Evil Udug then is associated with dangerous animals, Others, and the abjection of death and sickness in its relation to space.

6 Culturally, lions were associated with ferocity and power as well (Verderame, 2017, p. 391), but here the element of danger seems more relevant.

The more contemporary aliens from *The Fourth Kind* and *Dark Skies* similarly inhabit the edges of what is known in the 21st century as the so-called ‘final frontier’, outer space. Although the chosen films do not state explicitly where the creatures are from, the alien exists within a rich folklore, particularly aided by the interplay between Ufology and popular culture (Östling, 2021, p. 222), which signals the monsters as associated with outer space. Outer space is presented as dark, cold and a threat to human life. It then follows that spaces humans might experience as similar, and the cues from these spaces, would find their way into the signification of the alien.

One such a space would be the ocean, often described in much the same terms (Fryers, 2020, p. 128), its denizens referred to as ‘alien’ in documentary films, such as *Aliens of the Deep* (Cameron, 2005). However, an inclusion made in both *The Fourth Kind* and *Dark Skies* concerns wooded areas. From an evolutionary perspective, humans have reason to fear densely wooded areas, as it obscures our detection of predators and other dangerous humans. The United States of America’s National Forests have actual predators, such as bears and mountain lions. *The Fourth Kind* makes clear reference to a large owl, which carry strong predator cues, but mostly its behaviour of swooping down and carrying victims off could perhaps be linked to the aliens.

Human Others associated with violence, morally disgusting practices and even physical deformity, such as ‘hillbillies’ in Appalachia (Campbell, 2024, pp. 9-11) are associated with the forest too. Furthermore, dangerous diseases, like Chronic Wasting Disease, can be found in the forest (CDC, 2024). A monster from the woods is then a ‘Thing’ of Others, sickness and predatory danger by association.

Next, the unnameable monster enters into more human spaces.

The Evil Udug enters the city, particularly haunting the street and the home (Geller, 1985, p. 55). The Ancient Mesopotamian city was a place of relative order (Stančius and Grecevičius, 2022, p. 29), but it was not safe. The street held the danger of impure leavings of witchcraft rituals (Robertson, 2020, p. 209), evil infectious entities, trash (Steinert, 2014, p. 138,142), and unfriendly animals (Yuhong, 2001, p. 37). Being from this space, the Evil Udug then carries these connections as it enters the home and body.

The Ancient Mesopotamian home was a space symbolically connected to order, and the holiness of the temple that linked to the very ordering of the cosmos (Van Leeuwen, 2010, p. 399, 402). The Evil Udug enters homes like dangerous and infectious animals such as a murderous dog, understood as rabid; a snake, infecting with its ‘spit’; and a mongoose, greedy and associated with the filth of drains (Geller, 1985, p. 55). It acts like a violent man in the streets (Geller, 1985, p. 21), implying that when it enters the home, the threat of home invasion is not just by an animal, but by a human too. Its presence in the home is an affront to cosmic and holy order.

The contemporary home is a private space, symbolic of contemporary family relations, societal status, and expectations within society. To violate the home is to violate such ideas about the family (Marucci, 2020, p. 253, 256). *The Fourth Kind* shows the predatory owl gazing into the home. *Dark Skies* suggests a racoon has entered the home, an animal associated with trash, and the violent reaction of a guard dog shows the aliens’ danger to the home and family. In both films, the monster’s entry into the home cause a decline in health and social status. The monster is a ‘Thing’ from ‘outside’ that has brought those associations with it ‘inside’.

‘Outside’'s connotation can be the forest, as in *The Fourth Kind*. The house of the main character, Dr Abigail, is shown as dangerously encompassed by the forest. Whatever enters from here carries the signifiers discussed above. *Dark Skies*, however, plays off in the suburbs. This is a space of liminality⁷, but also of clear in-group and out-group dynamics (Patton, 2019, p. 3). Intruders are perceived as Other in class and, historically speaking, in race (Patton, 2019, p. 3). For the aliens to be ‘not’ from the suburb as humanoid beings implies a strong view of them as conspecific Others, particularly violent and infectious Others.

Finally, both of the unnameable monsters enter their victims in some way. The Evil Udug is a possessing entity; the illness it brings is likened to a physical assault (Geller, 1985, p. 31, 65). The Ancient Mesopotamian body as a physical reality was understood to some extent, as seen in diagnostic handbooks, from the 1st and 2nd millennium BCE (Wee, 2021, p. 1), and most cultural purity practices maintained their cleanliness and ‘holiness’ (Guichard and Marti, 2013, p. 47). Part of the fear of the Evil Udug is that it makes one ‘impure’ and then must be itself impure, an agent of disgust.

The contemporary body is still a physical place, often objectified by the medical gaze, as explained by Foucault (2003, p. 4), where the body’s disease and workings take precedence over the sufferer’s experiences. *The Fourth Kind* and *Dark Skies* show the degrading of the victims’ bodies and minds through signs of assault, and behaviours that might signal to the behavioural immune system that the victim is best avoided. The aliens are human-like in their violence and violation but also cause their victims to be seen as morally and physically disgusting,

7 The Suburbs of the United States of America are classed as liminal spaces by Prasad (2018) and Beuka (2000). Physically these spaces occupy areas ‘in-between’ rural areas and the city centre, while experience of the occupants fall ‘between’ the promised idealism of the suburb and the reality of the space (Prasad, 2018, p. 30) (Beuka, 2000, p. 24).

implying that they are so themselves.

Conclusion

To conclude, contemporary Monster Studies provides an insightful and grounded approach to monstrous figures that appear across the spectrum of human cultures, not limited by time and place. Biocultural studies combine evolutionary psychology and the cultural concerns of earlier studies to gain a more complete understanding of the monster as a figure. The main concerns noted by these studies can be summarised as examining cues that make the monster an agent of fear based on its physical manifestation of predatory traits, aggressive and dangerous human traits, as well as its presentation of dangers of parasites and infection through the inclusion of disgust into its hybrid makeup.

The unnameable monster, however, does not clearly show these traits, but through investigating the significance of the space it is portrayed in, more information as to what fears it carries can be understood. The Landscape of Peril Theory (Doherty and Ruhle, 2020) from the study of the Ecology of Fear concerns how organisms perceive risks of predation, dangerous conspecifics, as well as infection. This mental map of risk can also be expressed through the ideas of first, second, and thirdspace, where the physical space, abstract cultural and social elements, as well as how the space would have been used informed by such ideas, can be investigated.

This study has shown that the Evil Udug, as an unnameable monster from ancient Sumerian exorcism texts, as well as contemporary aliens depicted in the films *The Fourth Kind* and *Dark Skies*, as vague and unclear entities that do harm, can be explored further through the investigation of the spaces they are associated with. The chosen unnameable monsters reference real spaces in the wilderness, city,

home, and body, within their relevant geographic locations, and refer to culturally and biologically relevant threats of danger. Through examining more than the likeness of these unnameable monsters it has been found that the Evil Udug and aliens from the chosen films move from the dangerous outer regions as invading Others and predators, bringing sickness into the body.

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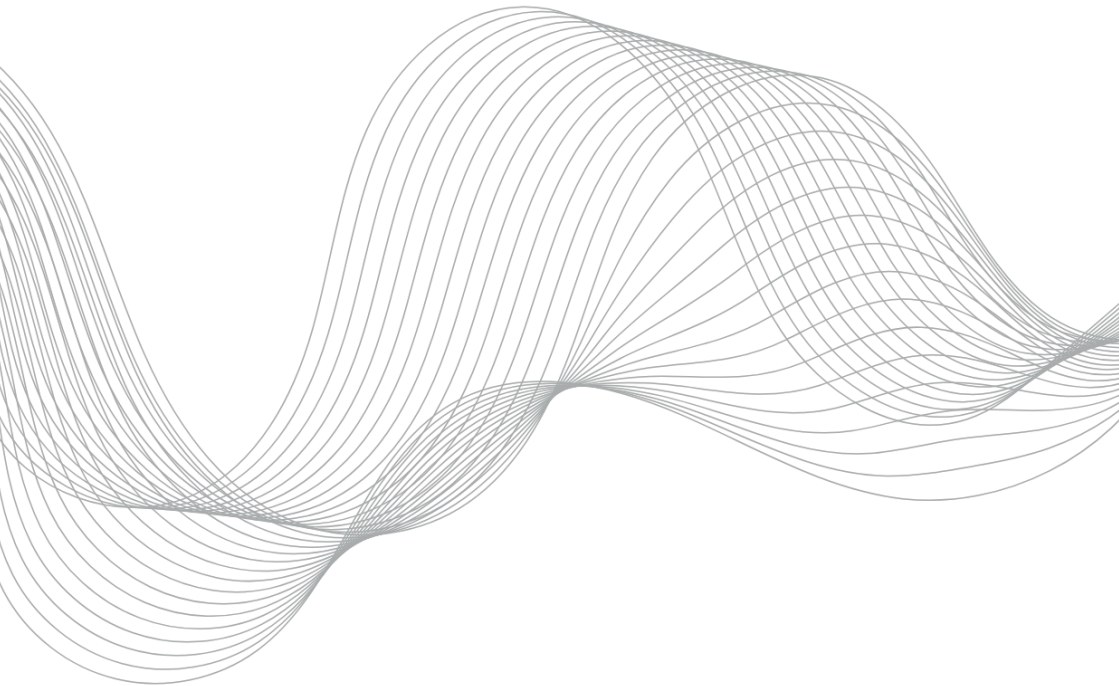
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Exploring the Psyche and the Paranormal Using Sequential Art Structure

Rosalyn Carlos-Bustamante



Encounters with the supernatural can disrupt an individual's view of reality, their certainty of its predictability, and their faith in the truth of their own perceptions. Deconstructing a paranormal account using the structural elements that exist within sequential art facilitates an experienter's ability to gain some measure of distance from the physical details of the encounter. It also allows the individual to retroactively examine their own mental and emotional states during the anomalous incident. Moreover, it also facilitates the automatic and unconscious use of linguistic tools that allows the experienter's mind to focus more on their psychological state during the encounter. After such an examination, the experienter may then discover that various options are available for handling, or choosing not to handle, the aftermath of their encounter.

Sequential Framework

The structure of sequential art balances linguistic and visual representation with a temporal and contextual shorthand that creates an efficient means of conveying emotional and cognitive concepts without breaking the flow of the narrative. It provides the reader with the opportunity to unconsciously fill the spaces, or gutters, between the panels with the appropriate amount of time and connective emotion in a near-intuitive manner. The gaps between panels act as contextual bridges between moments, and this act of connecting the moments is called closure (McCloud, 1994, 63).

Will Eisner coined the term sequential art to describe images placed in a deliberate sequence to convey meaning — the most widely known form of sequential art is comics (Eisner, 1985, p. 5). The various categories of contextual panel sequences can, in many ways,

assist an experiencer in organizing and reframing their encounter. These sequences can show closely succeeding moments (moment-to-moment), major actions (action-to-action close), different yet related perspectives (aspect to aspect), and seemingly disjointed challenges to logic and relationship (non sequitur) (McCloud, 1994, 72). Of these types of sequence, the non sequitur is the most closely related to the initial spontaneous appearance and experience of paranormal phenomena.

The non sequitur challenges the concept of clarity and perceptual certainty and logical coherence in relation to how “reality” is assumed to work (Kripal, 2011, 128, 290). Apparitions are prime examples of the non sequitur in action in the world. They manifest unexpectedly, and for a short period of time, before vanishing, leaving the experiencer to grapple with tension between what happened, what should exist and how it should exist. Space is made for this tension in sequential art, through the interplay of words, images, time and context, as the deconstruction and addition of these elements facilitate the “reading” of the images, actions, emotions, and environment of the supernatural occurrence.

Banking the Account

To illustrate how the structural elements of sequential art may be used in analysis, we will consider an account that occurred in the Admiral Fell Inn, located in Baltimore City’s historic Fells Point neighborhood (Carter and Dray, 2017, pp. 40 and 41).

The account begins in room 218, with a sleeping scientist, who is in town to work on a project at Johns Hopkins University. The scientist is abruptly awoken by the creaking of floorboards, and finds a woman

standing at the foot of the bed, making notations on a medical chart. She looks at him questioningly, then back down at the chart, before turning and walking through the wall. At this point, the scientist rationalizes that he is probably experiencing a waking dream and goes back to sleep.

In the morning, the scientist makes his way downstairs to the front desk and tells the on-duty manager what happened to him the night before, along with a description of the woman. The then manager tells the scientist to look through the book with photographs from the hotel's past, that is in the hotel's racing room. In this book, he finds a photograph of the woman he saw in his room. Under the image is a description: 'a woman in a long dark dress covered by a white apron, her hair swept beneath a white cap' (Carter and Dray, 2017, p. 40). The young woman, it seems, was a volunteer who worked at the location when it was used as a convalescent overflow facility by local hospitals during the 1918 influenza pandemic 'and was, perhaps, another victim of it?' (Carter and Dray, 2017, p. 41).

The Linguistics of Square Pegs and Round Holes

Those who have experienced super natural occurrences often have trouble when attempting to describe what happened to them. This difficulty seems to be both observational and linguistic, in nature. Modern Western views of reality are based in physicalism which prioritizes physically measurable facts (Kelly, 2015, pp. xi-xii), whether via the five physical senses, or preferably, through recording and measuring devices. Unfortunately, this usually precludes psycho-spiritual senses and considerations. To circumvent such limitations, tools such as semiotics (the study of signs and symbols), hermeneutics

(interpretation) and translation (contextual interpretation) may be employed. Not so coincidentally, all of these tools are used when reading sequential art panels. By recognizing and holding the tension among the differing concepts and integrating them, both the human element and a sense of the liminality of the original paranormal experience may be reintroduced. This reintroduction circumvents the inherent limitations of rationalization and oversimplification that can stifle the expression of the experiencer and divorce the experiences of the human psyche from the phenomena and its context.

Breaking Down an Account

In examining the account, the scientist's abrupt awakening and the nurse's appearance are both sudden and disorienting non sequitur-type moments. The closure between these two moments is filled with the puzzled shock of the scientist. This initial discordance flows into a moment-to-moment sequence, where the nurse's apparent inquisitiveness is highlighted when she looks between him and the chart, which is followed closely by her turning and leaving through the wall. The second sequence requires very little closure, as these images follow each other in close succession. As the scientist contemplates what just happened, he finds that his jumbled thoughts and emotions are too much to deal with at that moment, and settles on the safest logical assumption: that he is essentially hallucinating and will deal with it in the morning. This determination seems to temporarily provide him with enough peace of mind to sleep through the rest of the night.

The next sequence consists of the scientist waking for the second time and going downstairs to speak with the on-duty manager in a subject-to-subject sequence. This conversation reintroduces chaos and

uncertainty into the scientist's temporary relief from the anxiety of the situation. This sequence ends with the manager telling the scientist that the book may hold the answer to some of his questions. There is, then, a short action-to-action sequence where the scientist looks through the book and finds the photograph of the woman. The closure within this sequence builds the tension and anticipation that we may imagine the scientist is feeling. The ending is left open and ambiguous, with no further information given as to the scientist's response to the photograph. Both the scientist and the readers are left with more questions than answers about what happened, why it happened, how it happened, and what can or should be done with — or about — any of it.

Trying to Reconcile the Reality of the Paranormal

Supernatural encounters are potentially reality shattering shoves into liminality, where the expected certainty of reality is suspended (Walker, 2013, p. 216). This may cause an individual to experience a catastrophic breakdown of the rationalistic function of naming a previously unknown thing, in order to disempower and contain, or delimit, it (Sells, 1994, p. 15), and thereby neutralize it as a threat. Such breakdowns may cause trauma to develop within the experiencer.

Trauma largely develops from three main factors: fear, confusion, and helplessness (Trauma, 2022). In terms of the paranormal, these factors generally manifest as fear of the out of place or unknown, confusion as to its meaning in relation to the individual's worldview and personal safety, and a feeling of helplessness in how the super natural can or should be handled. The lived experience of the individual becomes disconnected from their known and accustomed reality.

Such disruption can introduce chaos into the experiencers' cultural programming and assumptions of reality. The degradation of this socio-cultural conditioning can leave the experiencer with rumination and grief about the loss of stability, certainty and safety.

As such, the individual is left with three options: 1) gain post-traumatic growth (Cohen, Hetter and Pane, 1998, p. 29) by attempting to integrate the paranormal experience into their worldview; 2) be frozen in psychological stasis; or 3) attempt to revert back to their pre-traumatic state by denying the existence of the occurrence. More options, however, may be found by combining the mechanisms of the four fear responses (Walker, 2013, p. 12) and the types of approaches to the paranormal (Paranormal Beliefs, 2000, pp. 33-40). The affirmational approach says paranormal phenomena exist and is 'empirically valid' (The Paranormal, 2012, p. 49). Radical skepticism takes an open-minded, case-by-case approach. With disbelief, there is no possibility of the validity of the paranormal, all claims are false. And with constructionism, who believes, what they believe, and why are prioritized over considerations of empirical validity, which are viewed as irrelevant. Through this combination, four paths may be discerned: opposition, avoidance, acceptance and exploration. Any of these paths may present themselves in ways that are either more dynamic (adaptable/fluid) or less dynamic (rigid/inflexible). The adaptive versions of these paths can empower experiencers to integrate an understanding of the existence of the super natural. The inflexible paths reinforce the social unacceptability of the paranormal in order to preserve the status quo. One could even consider this inflexibility as being a retrogressive dynamism or fossilization, where organic growth is replaced by a defensive reification of the experiencer's

original worldview. Regardless of which path is chosen, they provide potential guides for experiencers who are considering integrating with, or disengaging from, their own paranormal experience.

Experience Unbound

An experiencer can become frozen or stuck in rumination (Walker, 2013, p. 227) upon experiencing the most unsettling elements of what is supposed to be unreal, especially when it occurs at an unexpected place and time. This may indicate that the experiencer's worldview is disordered in a way that mediates, and potentially alters, what is being perceived. The worldview is disordered because, while focusing solely on maintaining the supposed stability of the physical world and physical survival, the psyche has been trained to ignore other potential threats or hazards — such as psychologically affective conditions and incorporeal presences with the potential to affect the physical world.

The disintegration and fragmentation of the experiencer's previous image of reality can be a deeply traumatic event that may cause the feeling of being unmoored from the very concept of reality. The sense of dread, foreboding and eeriness that is invoked by the numinous (Otto, 1923, pp. 5-7) may cause an experiencer to drift into a psychological state wherein their accustomed boundaries between the fantastic and the sensible (i.e., the rational) are significantly weakened. The senses that had once been 'true enough...for...survival' (Streiber and Kripal, 2016, p. 45) may now be a reminder that things can exist outside of the purview of the physical senses and, as such are exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with previously held beliefs and current scientific understandings (Hunter, 2012, p. 21).

The revelation of the inadequacy of the physical senses in relation

to threat assessment, and the perception of reality and personal safety (Streiber and Kripal, 2016, p. 45), creates tension between any attempt to reconcile the five physical senses with the assumption of the safe predictability of the world and the experiencers' lived experience with super natural phenomena. Healthy responses to such fear are those that have been considered and consciously refined into trained reflexive responses.

Conclusion

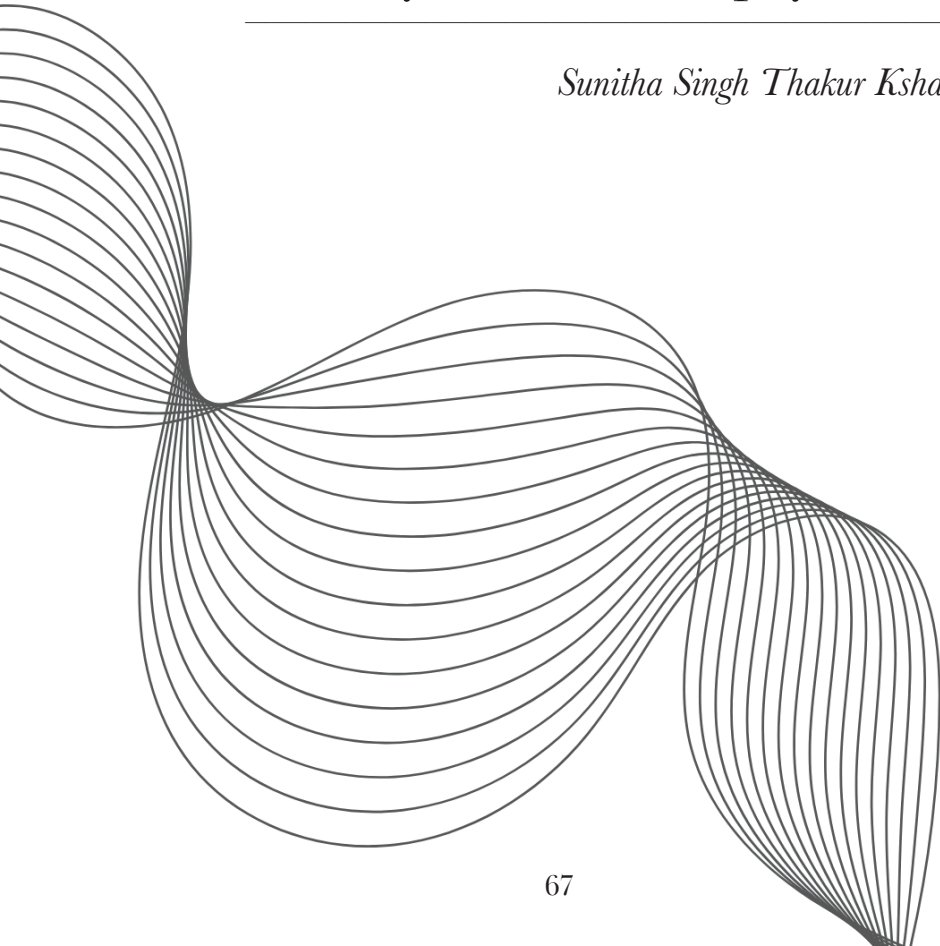
Being confronted with the reality and the consequences of an initial paranormal experience can be a daunting task for those who unexpectedly find themselves coming into contact with super natural phenomena. Expressing and understanding even a small portion of such an encounter encourages experiencers to not only engage with the experience itself, but to also trust that their own first-hand experience of anomalous phenomena is real. Examining such an event by using the structural elements of sequential arts offers a fresh perspective and a unique dynamic methodology with which the nuances of time, environment, sensations and emotions may be explored holistically, by working around the usual modern linguistic constraints of rationalizations, and negative assumptions and biases. The breakdown in the experiencer's accustomed perception of reality can either open the door to an expanded understanding of reality, or it can cause such trauma that the individual may choose to close themselves off from the possibility of the unknown. This is a determination that can only be made by each experiencer, in the specific context of their lives.

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Science and Spirituality: A Unified Inquiry into the Physical and Metaphysical Self

Sunitha Singh Thakur Kshatriya



*A Transdisciplinary Reflection on the Physical and
Metaphysical Dimensions of Self*

The Interplay of the Physical and Metaphysical

Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I go? These questions have echoed through time, guiding seekers across the realms of science and spirituality. Though their languages differ, both disciplines reveal the same fundamental truth: I am energy, temporarily embodied, eternally flowing through the cosmos.

The Energy Within Me

I am a living composition of flesh and bones, an intricate manifestation of energy woven into form. This energy, the eternal traveller, is neither created nor destroyed; it merely transforms. In my mother's womb, this energy reshaped itself into a new existence—me—carrying the essence of my lineage and the vast, unfathomable cosmos.

Tracing my energy backward:

- My body's potential energy came from my mother's kinetic energy.
- Her kinetic energy stemmed from metabolic processes.
- These processes relied on the chemical energy in the food she consumed.
- That energy, in turn, was derived from the Sun's light.
- The Sun's energy came from the fusion of atoms, ignited at its core.
- Those atoms, their origins embedded in the Big Bang, stemmed from the singularity.

Thus, the energy within me can be traced to the very genesis of space, time, and matter. Many call this singularity “God,” the origin and culmination of all existence. Today, I am but a temporary form of this energy, destined to return to formlessness, merging once again into the infinite.

The Cycles of Transformation

The environment shapes my nature, sculpting my identity through experiences, beliefs, and values. Yet beneath it all, I remain the same energy, endlessly shifting through forms. Today, I am known as Sunitha, but this is merely a transient phase. When my form dissolves, my energy will persist—bound for another existence or merging into the singularity, the realm of formlessness.

Science speaks of energy’s transformation; spirituality speaks of the soul’s journey. Both paths reveal a deeper purpose: purification. Energy refines itself through embodiment, evolving from lower to higher states. When fully purified, it no longer needs a form. It merges with the eternal source—nirvana, salvation, unity.

- At birth, formless energy takes form.
- At death, form dissolves back into the formless.
- If desires remain, energy reincarnates, continuing its journey of refinement.
- When purified, it remains formless, liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

I am energy—an eternal traveller, ever-transforming, returning to the source where all beginnings and endings become one.

Returning Home

I am returning home. And on my way, rejoice with me, for there I meet my Beloved, who awaits me, patiently, since eternity.

I searched, I lost, I found, and now, at last, the gates stand open. My home, my home, my sweet home. I am returning home, To my Beloved.

Beat the drums, sound the cymbals, dance with me, for truly, truly, I am returning home. Home—where eternity abides, where peace resides, where I and my Beloved are one.

The Calling

My calling is not of this world, but beyond, as it has always been.

What can I do? I sought my Beloved among faces, in time and timelessness. At last, I found Him within me.

I see now: I AM my own Beloved, that I AM, the one beyond form, residing through me, in me, with me.

The wisdom of the Masters—Sufi, Christian, Shaivite, Vedantin, Buddhist—all saw this truth: to seek is to find, to find is to know: I AM.

The Beloved Within

My Beloved is with me in this moment. Then why does my heart pine, seeking Him elsewhere?

My breath is His, my gaze is His, my awareness, my being—all are He. Yet, I still search.

Within and without, He fills all space, all time, all existence, even non-existence. He is, and always will be.

Why do I seek? Why do I yearn, when He has always been?

Through the mirror of my heart, through the eyes of my soul, I

now see Him—in you, in me, in movement and stillness, in chaos and in peace.

Now, I seek His vision to see Him through His being.

The Ultimate Truth

I am neither my name nor my form. I am the energy that flows through all creation, a ripple of the singularity, a spark of the eternal flame. I return to where I began—to unity, to stillness, to the embrace of the Beloved. The journey has been long, but at last, I know my home and the way to it.

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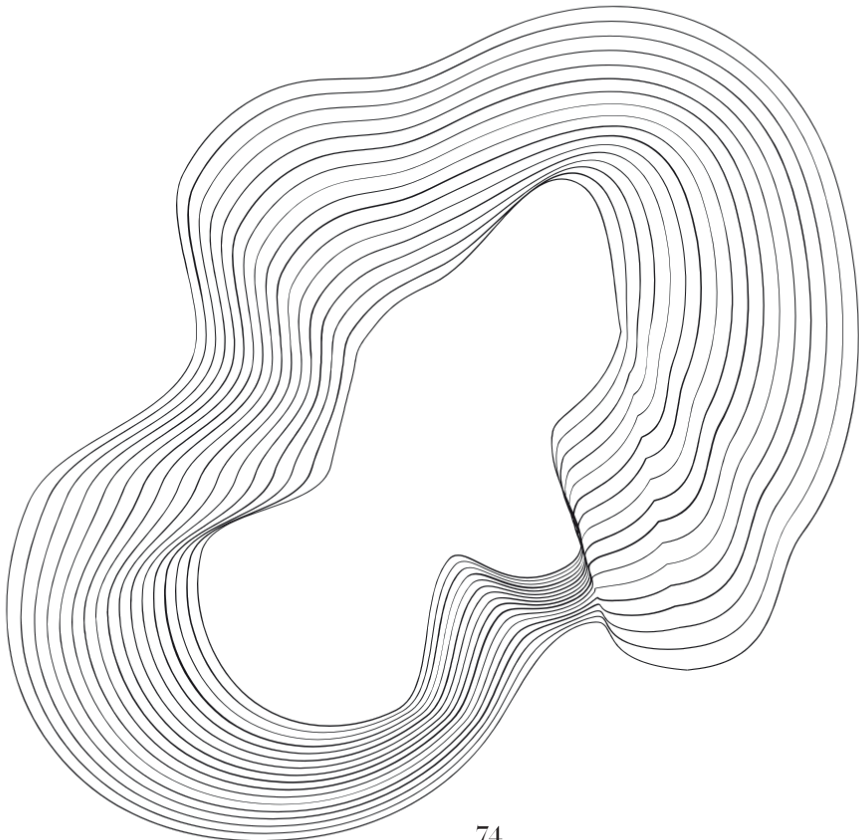
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Uses of Enchantment:

The Transformational Potential of Wonder

Cairi Jacks



The words in italics are invitations into sensory practices and embodied engagement. Take each of them as you wish, adapt them to suit your own needs. Listen to what feels good in your own body.

Find an object close to hand in the room, anything will do. Set it in front of you.

When you are comfortable, take a deep breath in. Feel your torso expanding, your diaphragm engage. As we inhale, we are inhaling the pollen, spores, and oxygen exhaled by plants and trees. As we exhale, we are exhaling what they need to survive. We are co-creating the atmosphere, being breathed by the world.

Enchantment, awe, wonder.

There are many words in the English language for the out of the ordinary experience, the strange and marvellous. In the language of Cymru, Wales, where I am from, the words for enchantment are *hudoliaeth* or *swynol*.

Enchantment is defined as spellbinding moments that temporarily suspend the usual ongoings of time and space. New Materialist scholar, Jane Bennett, describes it as a state of ‘acute sensory activity’ or ‘interactive fascination’ in which observations are sharpened, magnified and intensified (Bennett, 2001, p. 5). They are induced by ‘surprising encounters’ that cause us to be completely present (ibid).

Author Katherine May says that ‘enchantment is small wonder magnified through meaning, fascination ... It relies on small doses of awe’ (2023, p. 8). Moments of enchantment can be brought on by ‘deep engagement’ with the world, the paying of ‘close attention’ (ibid, p. 13), ‘deliberate attention’ (ibid, p. 214), even ‘worshipful attention’ (ibid, p. 30).

Give your shoulders a roll. Find fluidity in your spine, feel your sit bones on the chair, allow your body to rock a little, finding its movement, feeling your own weight, wiggle your toes, feel the texture of the floor.

Dacher Keltner and colleagues have found awe to be a distinct emotion with a distinct neurological profile (Keltner & Haidt, 2003, p. 303).

In her book *The Cow in the Elevator: Anthropology of Wonder*, Tulasi

Srinivas likens moments of wonder to the liminal phase in ritual (2018, p. 36). These are what Sara Ahmed called ‘moments of disorientation’ (Simonsen, 2012, p. 20), and what Emmanuel Levinas called ‘the moment of rupture’ that happens in the meeting with the ‘other’ (Srinivas, 2018, p. 17). Ecopsychology also understands that the ‘point of rupture offers new possibilities’ (Robertson, 2013, p. 57). They offer us what Bayo Akomolafe calls ‘the gift of bewilderment’, inviting us to become ‘generously lost’ (2017, p. 65). Becoming ‘actively confused’, ethnographer James Siegel says, can act as a kind of gateway, ‘an invitation’ into bewilderment (2011, p. 1).

These moments disrupt our habitual modes of thinking and behaving, enabling us to imagine the world anew, creating apertures through which new ways of being can slip.

What sounds can you hear around you? What is the sound furthest away that your ears can pick up? Maybe its bird song. Maybe its traffic. How many different voices, tones, and textures? What is the closest? Maybe you can hear your own heartbeat, the blood in your ears. Remember to relax your jaw, relax your belly.

Art, existing outside of many of the normal rules of social behaviour, is one of the places in which these disorientating experiences can be facilitated. Char Davies believes that art happenings can work at ‘facilitating a temporary release from our habitual perceptions and culturally-biased assumptions about being in the world, to enable us, however momentarily, to perceive ourselves and the world around us *freshly*’ (Davies, 2004). In Suzi Gablik’s *Reenchantment of Art* she says enchantment is ‘a process that breaks the spell and circle of routine built up by modern culture and begins the transition into a different stream of existence’ (1991, p. 11).

For Srinivas, strategic considerations of liminality, ritual, wonder and creativity could ‘transform the ontological possibilities of life itself’ (2018, p. 7).

As a counterpoint to the Western reification of wonder, Srinivas argues for ‘wonder ... as grounded, as birthed, and as stoked by human beings’ (2018, p. 9). Wonder is not just a feeling, it is a state of being and an activity. Wonder is a practice.

As you read, I invite you to rub your fingers across your palms, and to feel one hand with the fingers of the other. What does it feel like to touch your hand with the utmost gentleness? How does deeper touch feel to your body? The incredible organ that is your skin, full of neuroreceptors. It is your tool for curiosity.

Enchantment also comes from the land itself. Indigenous worldviews understand what Vanessa Watts calls *Indigenous Place-Thought*; ‘the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts’ (2013, p. 21).

Akomolafe believes there is a convergence of ‘insights generated by indigenous traditions, quantum physics, and feminist materialisms about the queerness of temporality, the collective intelligence of the world around us, the intra-connectedness of all things’ (Akomolafe, 2017, p. 181) Watts insists that to become truly de-colonial, we must take the land seriously as an animate collaborator, we must learn to listen to her speaking (2013).

Potawatomi botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer says ‘a thing cannot be understood until it is known by all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit’ (2003, p. vii). Black feminist writer Minna Salami advocates for Sensuous Knowledge, a phenomenological approach to knowledge that reflects a ‘vibrant understanding of the world’ (2020, p. 3) and uses all our faculties ‘mind, body and soul’ (ibid, p. 14).

Bennett proposes that enchantment comes from ‘engagement with objects of sensuous experience’ (2001, p. 5). Feminist quantum physicist Karen Barad believes that through an ‘embodied sensibility’ that is always in relationship to and responding to the world around it, we access ‘a mode of wonderment that is antecedent to consciousness’ (2007, p. 391).

Our senses are the key for realising our interconnection and unlocking enchantment.

Pick up the object you found at the start. Forget what you think it is. Let your fingers explore it, turn it over in your hands. How does it feel against the skin of your wrists, your lips? What does it smell like? I invite you to close your eyes for a few moments, to feel this object as if it were strange to you.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology presents a non-dualistic view of the body and its environment, conceiving the body as part of 'the flesh of the world' (Johnson, 2011, p. 206), and suggesting 'thinking from and with bodies and embodiment' (Kuepers, 2014, p. 18). Similarly, philosopher and educational reformist John Dewey asserts that our 'senses are the organ through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoing of the world about him' (1934, p. 22), emphasising the embodied nature of perception and interaction with the world.

The emerging field of Eco-somatics suggests that by making our bodies 'porous' by 'tuning' them to the 'sensate surroundings,' through 'deep attention,' our perceptions of self and world are expanded (Burns, 2021, p. 175). Dancer Andrew Sangers calls this 'eco-somatic enchantment' (Sangers, 2022).

Awakening our sensory engagement, we increase the likelihood of noticing when the world is touching us back. We must be willing, as Barad says, to 'meet the universe halfway' (2007).

What is your object made from? On what journeys have the materials gone to arrive here with you in this current form? Were they once minerals, or oil, deep in the earth? What was it even before then? Perhaps plants or trees? What processes and ingenuity enabled it to be here? And what will happen to it in the future?

Akomolafe says the world is 'made of surprises' (2017, p. 103). It is messy, playful, magical. To 'allow oneself to be touched' by the world, is to be open to 'wild possibilities' (ibid, p. 281). Srinivas believes the potentialities opened up by moment of ritual wonder opened the door for 'radical hope', for glimpses of alternative ontologies, and portals through which new worlds can be manifested (2018, p. 8).

These moments of potential must come with responsibilities. Indigenous paradigms call for an ethics of responsibility, respect and reciprocity, an ethics of care. A commitment to what Jodi Byrd and colleagues call 'Grounded Relationality', grounded as in in relation to land in its specificity, and relationality in the form of 'polymorphous kinships, human reciprocities with and of land, and the other than human' (2018, p. 5), which are considered to have 'agential significance' (ibid, p. 9). Barad proposes an ethics of 'responsibility and

accountability for the entanglements “we” help enact’, ‘for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part’ (2007, p. 382, 394).

Feel your feet on the floor once more. The ground supporting you. Holding you up. Feel your sit bones on the chair. Your amazing animal body moving in space. The journey that these atoms have been on to become you, here, now. The world breathing you in and out.

Remember, wonder is a practice. And it is available to you in every moment, through the way in which you choose to pay attention.

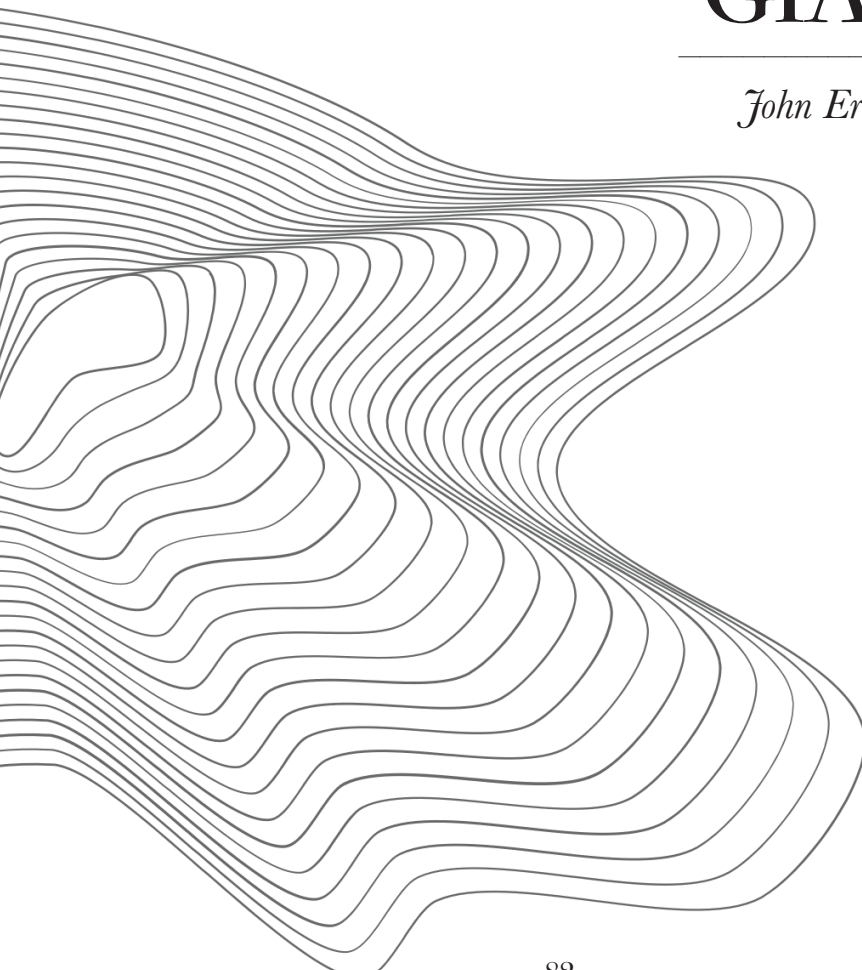
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GIANT

John Eric Hamel



Everyone has a bigfoot story – or that’s
What he said, the septuagenarian Michigan man
I recently met. “One night,” he said,
“The day’d been brilliant sun-dog cold,
I was walking in the park, kids were skating
Under big lights shooting twin columns giant
Beaming into night, two stalking legs
Bulked out by snow-dust scissoring the land
Realizing upward a massive man of light.
His body’s frost-light shimmered as fast
As thought.” He showed me pictures. I couldn’t see it.
He seemed to notice that and began again.
“We all tell at least one incredible tale.
What’s yours? Look at the images:
Do you see Adam Kadmon, the primal man
Whose body is earth? Or the Christ whose crystal
Body refracts the universe into being? I saw
A giant man of light like Nimrod the Hunter
Walking without sound, a luminous agitator,
A muster of particles in beaming limbs, Orion
Tattooed with maze and pyramid, a turbine
Moving like Las Vegas across the prairie,
Like streetlights coming on down an avenue,
Footsteps ablaze behind like piles of strawfire;
Nearly invisible so big a body
Whirling particles each a thought added sparkle there
And this is the man our thoughts have built.”

Strangeness & Oddities

He fell silent. Well, that's my cryptid tale,
I guess, for what it's worth. I'm not one
To contradict the facts – are you? –
And science has yet to prove any of it's true.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Cassie Fielding is a surrealist poet and Jungian scholar from Merseyside, UK. Primarily focused on the transformative power of surrealist poetry writing, her PhD research at the University of Essex grounds surreal poetry as an alchemical practice in the quest for the marvellous through matter. Her poetry has been published in various journals as well as two independent collections and her academic work won her the David Holt Prize for outstanding performance on the MA in Jungian Studies at the University of Essex. No stranger to the London Arts-Based Research Centre, Cassie has presented on both surrealism and alchemy at the centre.

Leandr e le Roux, an artist based in Pretoria, holds both a BA (Fine Arts) (2013) degree and an MA (Fine Arts) (2017) with distinction from the University of Pretoria. Her work has been featured in several exhibitions, including *Fresh Produce* at the Turbine Art Fair (2014) via Assemblage, and the Winter Fair at Nirox Sculpture Garden (2017). She was a finalist in the Sasol New Signatures Art Competition for five consecutive years (2014–2018) and was co-recipient of the Thami Mnye Fine Arts Multi & New Media/Photography Merit Award in 2014. Le Roux’s work has also reached international audiences through the Digital Africa Exhibition in Casablanca, Morocco, as part of the International Casablanca Biennial’s incubation program (2019), and at This is New Brighton #4 (2024) in the United Kingdom. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Fine Arts at the University of South Africa, researching the theme of monsters through biocultural studies of fear. Le Roux enjoys stop-motion animation, creating puppets and sets that bring to life her fascination with movement and fluid, hybrid creatures inspired by ancient mythology, folklore, and contemporary popular culture.

Rosalyn Carlos-Bustamante is an independent scholar with a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies and Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. Broadly speaking, her research interests include Western esoteric traditions, esoteric symbolism in visual

art, the construction of empowered ritual items and the creative effects of mythology and esotericism on modern society.

Rosalyn is a mythologist, researcher, jewelry designer and mixed media artist. Her artistic work explores the interactions between different mediums, the unconscious mind and the imagery and non-imagery that emerges from therein. Her current areas of interest include exploring possible connections between the supernatural, synchronicity and the human psyche. Rosalyn's overarching interest is in a holistic understanding of the interplay between the anomalous and modern cultures, how each has shaped perception of the other, and how said perceptions have influenced modern North American societies.

Sunitha Singh Thakur Kshatriya, PhD is the Director of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center at the American University in Dubai and an Associate Professor of Management. With over 20 years of experience, she has made significant contributions to academic, public, and non-profit institutions in Dubai and Canada, focusing on education, women and youth empowerment, and strategic partnerships.

Dr. Kshatriya is a multidisciplinary leader, specializing in program development, teaching, training, curriculum design, and design thinking. Her work is characterized by an entrepreneurial mindset and an extensive international background in management, policy development, and strategic leadership across public, private, and academic sectors.

She is the author of three academic books in human resource management: *Self Actualization: A Perception Study*, *Empowerment*, and *Selection System and Job Analysis*. Dr. Kshatriya has published over ten journal articles, presented at more than 15 conferences, chaired numerous workshops, and consulted on various research projects. Her current research interests include happiness, design thinking, potential actualization, and empowerment.

Her accolades include the Status of Women, Canada award for her impactful 'Leaders in Residence' project on women's empowerment, as well as 'Best Researcher' and 'Research

Contribution' awards (2012–2015). She was also a TEDx speaker at the Rogers School of Business Management in Toronto.

A poet, seeker, and visionary design thinker, Dr. Kshatriya embodies creativity and inquiry, inspiring others to explore new paradigms of leadership and empowerment.

Cairi Jacks is a multidisciplinary artist, facilitator and researcher from Wales whose work explores the human entanglement with the land through immersive art and song. Her works are an invitation to take part in an embodied, sensory relationship with the natural world, to experience our kinship and interconnection with the more-than-human world. Cairi facilitates workshops for collective exploration of listening to the land, using nature connection practices, ecosomatics, the body and the senses to attune to the animate world, to open up opportunities for enchantment. Their research interests are diverse, drawing on ecology, mythology, psychology and indigenous perspectives. Cairi is am interested in how our stories and beliefs about our place in nature affect our interactions with it on a personal and cultural level, and how our interactions in turn affect our beliefs.

John Eric Hamel was born in New Jersey and studied Classics at Columbia University. He taught Latin at various schools public and private. He also taught literature to adults and university students. Hamel's poems and translations have appeared in journals (*Arion*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*). At the moment he is finishing up two books of poems.