MONSTERS AND MARVELS: ALTERITY IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLDS

Edited by Maja Bondestam

Exceptional Bodies in Early Modern Culture

Concepts of Monstrosity before the Advent of the Normal

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in Early Modern Culture

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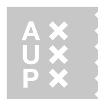

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The monster is by definition the exception.
– Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*

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Introduction

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When a German scholar, Johan Jennings, sent a three-legged dove to the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus in 1748, the response was lukewarm. Linnaeus thanked Jennings officially for the gift in the proceedings of the Royal Swedish Academy of Science and incorporated the bird in the society's collection of natural objects. In a letter to another colleague, however, Linnaeus stated that society not should publish an article about the find, since readers would only be bored with another malformation. According to Linnaeus, three-legged birds appeared every year, were not rare anymore and piqued the interest of naturalists only when anatomized professionally.[1] Naturalists around Europe collected and exchanged odd and unexpected minerals, plants and animals by this time, and Linnaeus's actions reveal how the value of such bodies increased in relation to their rareness. Nothing was exceptional in itself, and the impression a three-legged dove would make depended on its audiences and on their expectations and experiences of the world. The perception of something as exceptional, rare and valuable – or not – depended on a person's identity, prior knowledge and sense of what strayed from the ordinary path of things.[2]

Historians today have come to similar conclusions and connected exceptional bodies to the examination of monsters, monstrosity, disability, defects and wonders. Cultural historian Surekha Davies describes 'monster studies' as the study of that which appears strange to our eyes.

> In the broadest sense, monsters are beings that fall outside the viewer's ontological categories in some way; a two-headed calf and a new animal species both constitute monsters in this sense. Monsters, and our own puzzlement about them, are thus entry-points to a deeper understanding of a culture's way of thinking.[3]

1 Linné, *Bref och skrifvelser*, pp. 120-121.
2 Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 5-7.
3 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, p. 14.

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To define a monster, its impact and effects must be examined, Asa Simon Mittman argues in his introduction to a volume on the subject.[4] In a similar way, historians of disability have paid attention to the observer, more than the observed. 'I define physical disability as a disruption in the sensory field of the observer', writes Lennard J. Davis.[5] Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park claim in their seminal *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, that wonders generally had to be 'rare, mysterious and real not to be dismissed as common deviances' and that they, together with monsters, made up a long-lived cluster of strange objects and phenomena.[6]

The three-legged dove perhaps did not puzzle or disturb Jennings and Linnaeus in their ontological categories, but it definitely had some impact on them and might have disrupted their sensory fields. The dove was real for both of them; it was rare for Jennings but not for Linnaeus, who is famous for his all-embracing and systematic ordering of nature into species and subspecies, classes and families, but also for wondering about curious naturalia and the amazing diversity of creation.[7] According to Linnaeus, the collecting of engraved wood blocks, fossils, bones, optical instruments, coins, bezoars, so-called unicorn horns, corals, birds of paradise and elaborate works in gold, silver and ivory was time well spent. He saw natural explanations as evidence of God's existence and believed for this reason that unexpected, strange and peculiar animals, plants and minerals had the power to move people deeply. Such bodies were supposed to direct the observer's thoughts towards important narratives of the origin of nature and to make the audience understand its own origin and duties better than before.[8]

In his dismissal of the three-legged dove, Linnaeus appears in the traditional guise of the natural philosopher, a 'man who, by debunking their rarity and elucidating their causes, was able to make wonders cease'.[9] Wonders, monsters, and prodigies, however, did not cease that easily. They populated the early modern world; were displayed, collected and described; and reminded people of unpredictable, new and diverse possibilities. A dove with three legs was an exception from the common rule, exempt from the ordinary, well-known and conventional order of things.

The chapters in this book deal with bodies outside all conventions around Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries. Taken

4 Mittman, 'Introduction', p. x.

5 Davis, 'Dr. Johnson', p. 56.

6 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, pp. 10, 17.

7 Broberg, *Mannen som ordnade naturen*, pp. 139-150, 284-286, 313-337.

8 Linné, 'Naturens ordning', p. 63.

9 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, p. 165.

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together, seven case studies reveal a variety of approaches to exceptional bodies before the advent of a modern norm, which in the seventeenth century started to represent all deviances as close and relative to a homogenous standard. The bodies in focus were in their own historical contexts sometimes called monstrous, prodigious or hermaphroditic, and to our late modern eyes they can appear as disabled, unruly, transboundary, dying or deviating from some prescribed position. The volume includes bodies of stillbirths, monsters of maternal imagination, exalted experiences of prodigious births, hermaphrodites as figures of theological inquiry, the effect of physical aberrations on social standing and career, the use of the rhetoric of monstrosity to regulate women's sexuality and moderations of the exercising body. It explores concepts of monstrosity in an expanding early modern Europe and examines how cultural representations and policies incorporated physical deviances before the advent of modernity and its emerging universal standard for the normal body, with its emphasis on health and beauty.

As the case studies will show, exceptional bodies functioned as ways to understand and order the world. They could convert into hierarchies and identities and denote the limits of nature, power, legitimacy, virtue, history, and the human body. In terms of monsters and monstrosity, they actualized connections between specific bodies and an all-embracing cosmic order but could also be ignored and dismissed as irrelevant errors. Before the emergence of a modern, standardized and hegemonic norm centred on the contours of an adult, able-bodied, European man, exceptional bodies could be frightening, good, bad, worth considering, irrelevant, curious and part of people's way of understanding the origin of nature and humanity. Monstrous, prodigious and hermaphroditic bodies framed the porousness of living beings, informed concepts of life and death, the strange and odd. They displayed expected power relations, a certain gender order, hierarchies between humans and animals and the boundaries of a moderate way of life. In this volume, we want to deepen the historical understanding of this range of meanings and propose a narrative based in historically specific tendencies, competing perspectives and local truths. Rare and truly exceptional bodies are at the centre of attention, as are their dynamic meanings, complex social relations and power relations in specific circumstances. To study the function of monsters and monstrosity in the early modern period, as previous research has shown, can help us gain greater understanding of the culture that produced them.[10] The contributors to this volume analyse

10 Deutsch and Nussbaum, *'Defects'*; Mittman, 'Introduction', p. 9.

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experiences, meanings, metaphors and the use and value of exceptional bodies in a period when, according to Michel Foucault, it was monstrous bodies, not behaviours, that evoked the most serious response.[11]

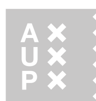
We move from France, the Dutch Republic and Rome to Germany, Sweden and the globally expanding Spanish Empire in the search for a broad spectrum of experiences, and examine a variety of source materials. The volume brings together exceptional bodies from the middle of the sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century and focuses on medicine and natural philosophy but also on early modern culture in a more inclusive sense. Visual culture, satirical poems, novels, political treatises, mirrors for princes, plays, theological inquires, philosophy, court medicine, anatomical flap books, dictionaries, birth manuals, autobiographies and written collections of wonders and monsters are analysed as sites for establishing social relations and order. The transgressive field of monster studies can contribute to our knowledge of physical rules and exceptions, although the object of study is notoriously difficult to define. Where do we look if we are interested in monstrosities, and how do we know that we have found them? What was the nature of monstrous existence before the middle of the eighteenth century? Was a disabled body a monster? What do we call a body with so many different layers of meaning?

The remainder of this introduction suggests some answers to these questions. It relates the volume at hand to earlier research on disability, monsters and wonders as a way to circumscribe the exceptional body in the early modern period. As mentioned already, the case studies examine specific bodies in specific cultural and historical contexts. Here we call them *exceptional* because they could be both outstanding and extraordinary in a positive way and, in a more negative sense, deviations from the general picture, ugly, disturbing, frightening or simply irrelevant. Jennings and Linnaeus acted in relation to this tension in the middle of the eighteenth century, but as we will see, it has a longer history.

Early modern bodies and the advent of the normal

Scholars often say that it is productive to study monsters and deviances, defects, deformities and disabilities because they reveal what a society considers as normal when it comes to physical appearance and competence. Historian David M. Turner underscores that the ways in which ‘a society

11 Foucault, *Abnormal*, pp. 67-75.



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defines disability and whom it identifies as deformed or disabled reveal much about that society's attitudes and values concerning the body, what stigmatizes it, and what it considers "normal"'.[12] This is true in modernity but not as much for the early modern period. In this book, we deal with the value of rare, wondrous, boundary-breaking, frightening and odd corporeality in a range of cultural environments and in a period when a modern Western framework did not define physical deviances in relation to an average standard or statistical norm. We see the early modern period neither as one in which monsters emerged as 'crucial definitional Others in the process of European self and nation formation' nor as a time 'when the modern self – self-determining, individual, self-knowing' – was being created.[13] Monsters before 1750 often had to do with visual difference and exceptions from expected shapes or identities. We cannot, however, take for granted that they always contributed to cultural dichotomies or binary oppositions such as beautiful and ugly, perfect and grotesque, self and Other, subject and object, or that they participated in the mutual constitution of the desired norm and the deviant Other.

The presence of monstrous Others, so often referred to in the field of monster studies, can be questioned before the late eighteenth century. At least if we assume that people did not yet see nature as an absolutely regular and universally homogenous entity, compared natural variations on a common scale, or related exceptional bodies to statistical norms and average standards.[14] Pliny's monstrous races and their afterlife in the first period of colonization were definitely part of early modern culture as they showed up in maps of non-European parts of the world. Nevertheless, it is not certain that they related to the Europeans in the same way before, as after, the late eighteenth century.

Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum claim that when attempts in the eighteenth century were made to define difference as a natural fact, and not as a sign of divine or preternatural agency, the monster was revealed 'as the norm's inverse reflection'.[15] This sentence is interesting in two ways. First, it suggests that the norm has a history, which seems reasonable.

12 Turner, 'Introduction', p. 2. See also Gilbert, Wiseman and Fudge, *At the Borders of the Human*, p. 8. Jeffery Jerome Cohen argues that the monster is best understood as 'an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category, and a resistant Other known only through process and movement, never through dissection-table analysis'. Cohen, 'Preface', p. x.

13 Knoppers and Landes, 'Introduction', p. 7.

14 Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 21-24, 116-121, 126-127, 149-141; Fabian, *Time and the Other*, pp. 106-107, 143; Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 155.

15 Deutsch and Nussbaum, *'Defects'*, p. 13.

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Second, it suggests that monsters have been seen as natural facts only since the eighteenth century, which is harder to agree with. Already in medieval natural philosophy, monsters were, as Daston and Park have shown, explained by natural causes and only seldom by the involvement of divine or demonic powers.This was still the case during most part of the seventeenth century, even while omens were being taken seriously in European elite culture. Monsters were not *naturalized* before 1750, they were *normalized*, which was a slow process, characterized by multiple explanations and uneven courses of events.[16]

The norm has a history, and so does its relation to physical deviances, which some scholars encourage us to take seriously. Lennard J. Davis emphasizes that the norm is more the effect of a certain kind of society than a universal condition of human nature. He connects it with notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality and sexual orientation, which emanated from the late eighteenth century onwards. 'The word "normal" as "constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual" only enters the English language around 1840.'[17] The concept emerged in European culture through statistics and political arithmetic, medicine and public health. The Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet combined *l'homme moyen physique* and *l'homme moyen morale* and in 1835 constructed both a physical and moral human average. The average man was the man in the middle, celebrating moderation and the middle way of life; according to Davis, the bourgeois hegemony had its scientific legitimation in this figure. The average was paradoxically associated with greatness, beauty and goodness and the concept of the norm invited the majority of the population to be part of or to relate itself to the norm. Davis contrasts this to earlier societies and encourages us to see a situation when the hegemony of normalcy did not exist. He describes a premodern era and the relevance of a mytho-poetic, ideal body, the nude Venus or Helen of Troy, linked to the gods and to a divine and ideal body which was not attainable by humans, since an ideal never could be found in this world. Classical painting and sculpture idealized the body, smoothing out every particularity, whereas all members of the population were below the ideal and never expected to conform to it.[18]

In the volume at hand, we are interested in early modern monstrosity and examine exceptional bodies in relation to their historical specific

16 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, p. 14, 129, 176, 192-193, 205.

17 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 24.

18 Ibid., pp. 24-27, 29.

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contexts. This means that we do not see them as smaller versions of modern ones, as the norm's inverse reflection, or as entangled with a culture in which binary concepts of the normal and the abnormal, the self and the Other, were fundamental. As discussed by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, such dynamics of difference, constructions of bodies and dependent relationships appeared in the nineteenth century, when the normal body as an unmarked figure started to gain its meaning 'mainly in residual contrast to various deviant bodies'.[19] Modern vernaculars of rationality, hygiene and bureaucratic order made the sorting of different peoples an imperative and 'fuelled a feverish desire to classify forms of deviance, to locate them in biology, and thus to police them in the larger social body'.[20] This ordering of differences, bodies, identities and power relations was part of heated debates about legal end economic privileges, who they were and were not for, in the modern democracies from the late eighteenth century onwards.[21]

In the 1970s, Foucault discussed eighteenth-century processes of individualization and normalization, which involved meticulous observation and examination of differences between individuals. With reference to Georges Canguilhem's book *On the Normal and the Pathological*, he described a general process of social, political and technical normalization during the eighteenth century that became important in the domains of education, medicine, hospital organization and industrial production. The century saw the invention of new technologies of power, which are important in relation to medicine and physical deviances today. 'We pass from a technology of power that drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalizes, and represses, to a fundamentally positive power that fashions, observes, knows, and multiplies itself on the basis of its own effects.'[22] The word 'positive' may indicate that the new technologies were a good thing but what Foucault identified was rather a shaping and modifying power in modernity. Based on the norm, this power brought with it a principle of both qualification and correction. 'The norm's function is not to exclude and reject. Rather, it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project.'[23] In processes of normalization, individuals were established, fixed, given presence and a place of their own but also exposed for 'constant examination

19 Terry and Urla, 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.

20 Ibid., p. 1.

21 Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, pp. 63-70; Laqueur, *Making Sex*, chap. 5; Scott, 'Some More Reflections', pp. 201-202, 214-218; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, pp. 83-87, 92-93, 113-117, 127-129, 143, 152-153.

22 Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 48.

23 Ibid., p. 50; Canguilhem, *The Normal*, pp. 125-149.

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of a field of regularity within which each individual is constantly assessed in order to determine whether he conforms to the rule, to the defined norm of health'.[24] This is something other than marginalizing, distancing, ignoring, killing or placing monsters as far away as possible.

In their edited volume on monsters in early modern Europe, Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes point to the same passages in Foucault's lectures and state that monsters, like the category *early modern*, 'blur boundaries as well, transgressing, violating, polluting, and mixing what ought to be kept apart'.[25] They search for links between the monstrous and the political and read representations of monsters in relation not only to science but also to religious and political conflict, transformations in print and the rise of the nation-state. Knoppers and Landes study the monstrous on a metaphorical level: its polemic, literary and imaginative uses. How did the language of the monstrous work, what was the significance of monstrous bodies, what emotional responses did they call up and how did myths of monstrosity figure in understandings of self and Other?[26]

In the volume at hand, we follow up on such questions before the advent of a modern physical norm. We are not saying that bodies in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries lacked order and boundaries, or were without prescriptions and prohibitions, but that rules and exceptions from rules were something other than what they are in modernity.[27] In the early modern period there were often clear definitions of what made a proper body and explicit rules for marriage, sexual relationships and inheritance in relation to people's physical capacities. Linnaeus, for example, was impressed by the number of well-behaved (*artiga*) animals, plants and minerals in creation and by appropriate kinds and species whose characteristics followed general habits and established customs.[28] His world was so full of exemplary naturalia that he could not bother to keep track of the erroneous ones as well. He said this in a time when all creation was understood to be pervaded by God's benevolent intentions and inclinations, in which people found values

24 Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 47.

25 Knoppers and Landes, 'Introduction', p. 6.

26 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

27 Rules underwent, according to Lorraine Daston, a noteworthy change in the eighteenth century and moved from the rule-as-model to the rule-as-algorithm. Whereas most rules of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were elastic, leaving room for judgement and adjustment, using examples as well as appeals to experience and even to exceptions, the regulations of the eighteenth century became increasingly rigid in their formulation. Daston, *Rules*.

28 Linnaeus, *Bref och skrifvelser*, p. 71. On the habits of early modern nature, see Daston and Park, *Wonders*, p. 14; Park, 'Nature in Person', pp. 53, 56, 60, 64, 73.

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and guidelines, indications of what was right and wrong. Early modern nature had a certain moral authority and functioned as a source for moral judgements and considerations.[29] According to Daston and Park, morality joined with nature in prearranged harmony, which charged aberrations with meaning, 'whether as warnings from an angry God, sports of playful nature, or blemishes in the uniformity of the universe'.[30]

Elements, humours and complexions built up early modern bodies and connected them with wider environments, with nature, climates and geographies, and a search for similarities and analogies was a fundamental part of how single bodies echoed macrocosmic orders.[31] There were in the early modern era judicial restrictions on marriage and employment for infertile persons, and we can study disabilities, physical irregularities and stigmas to grasp their meanings and aims as well as important categories and values of their societies. Monsters, hermaphrodites, prodigies and all kinds of strange, frightening, erroneous, ominous, transgressing and wondrous bodies and phenomena populated the early modern world. They disturbed legislation, classification of species, rules of physical heritage and concepts of time, and existed as categories of their own. Monsters undermined definitions, challenged boundaries, made people think differently and were genuinely difficult to sort. They sometimes indicated the presence of higher orders and were, through a symbolic system, connected with cosmos as a whole.[32]

To say that early modern monsters reveal a related *norm* can be misleading. Rules before the eighteenth century were often elastic; nature had room for exceptions, and the social order for judgement and adjustment, whereas deviances were not necessarily the opposite of what was right or desirable. Exceptional bodies could also arouse wonder and remind people of a playful nature and of God's freedom and power. Early modern nature had moral authority, bodies were idealized and particularities were evened out. In line with historian Dror Wahrman I would say that identities before the middle of the eighteenth century were generic and had room for deviances and that they not yet were objects of curable operations, of comparisons on a common scale or of examinations in relation to some average body in the statistical middle.[33]

29 Daston and Vidal, 'Necessity and Freedom', p. 206.

30 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, p. 363.

31 Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography*, pp. 25-26; Groebner, '*Complexio*/Complexion'; Deutsch and Nussbaum, '*Defects*', p. 9; Hanafi, *The Monster*, pp. 100-120.

32 Eriksson, *Monstret & människan*, pp. 39-45, 268-269, 278, 280, 309, 322-323.

33 Daston, 'The Nature of Nature', p. 154; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, pp. 182-185, 276-278.

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Early modern monstrosities are an exciting field of research because they unveil concepts of corporeality in a period when people in their daily lives often followed other rules and rationalities than those we have become used to. They deviated from a nature that was ordered by habits, purposes and higher reasons; they were charged with meaning; and their history differs from other periods. One aspect of early modern monstrosity is that exceptional bodies not only were considered degrading and dehumanizing but also evoked curiosity and intellectual interest. This alertness to historical peculiarities is central in this volume.

The nature, location and significance of the monster

The word *monster* has multilayered meanings. The Latin *monere* means 'to warn, remind and encourage'; *monstrum* refers to that which is worthy of warning, reminding, or encouraging; whereas *monstrare* means 'to show or demonstrate'.[34] In the ancient world, a *monster* was something outside the existing order of nature. Aristotle considered anomalous births as monsters and defects of nature. Anything that did not resemble its parents, particularly its father, was a monster in his view. Even women, who lacked the perfection of men, were a kind of monster. The Aristotelian monster did not illustrate or portend anything. It was not ominous, shocking or frightening and had no divine or demonic connections.[35]

Cicero defined monsters as portents of the will of the gods, whereas Saint Augustine, in line with the teratological tradition represented by Pliny the Elder, considered both monstrous births and the legendary races of the East to show God's power and remind men that no law of nature circumscribed him. Monsters could remind men of the limitations of their knowledge, according to Augustine. It was not that these creatures were monstrous; it was that man was not capable of understanding the sense and order of God's diverse creation. God was here an omnipotent artist who repeatedly awoke a sense of wonder.[36]

A tradition, important from the Middle Ages onwards, associated monsters with manifestations of God's will and displeasure. They aroused dislike, fear, repugnance, and were associated with bad omens but also with amusement, fun, gifts from God and physical challenges.[37] John Block Friedman describes

34 Knoppers and Landes, 'Introduction', p. 3.

35 Davies, 'The Unlucky', p. 50.

36 Eriksson, *Monstret & människan*, pp. 128-132; Hanafi, *The Monster*, pp. 7-14.

37 Godden and Mittman, *Monstrosity*, pp. 4-5.

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a strong interest in divination and prodigies in Renaissance thought as well, and claims that monstrous forms fascinated and terrified because they challenged peoples understanding of the human and reminded people of the uncertainty of traditional concepts of man.[38]

An interest in strange bodies connects to the use of striking and thought-provoking examples in early modern culture, and so does the activity of collecting exceptional bodies and things. Natural philosophers, physicians and collectors of naturalia and curiosities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were not preoccupied with revealing false wonders, omens and monsters. Instead, as Paula Findlen and Camilla Mordhorst have shown, they used monstrosities to understand nature, explain the inexplicable and find recurring principles in an irregular world.[39] Findlen reads the collecting of rare naturalia in relation to the empirical explosion of materials by this time, the spreading of ancient texts, increased travel, voyages of discovery and new forms of communication and exchange.[40]

The outstanding capacity of monsters to surprise, to arouse admiration and wonder, was part of their value as a path to homiletic knowledge and enhanced virtue. Krzysztof Pomian notes that viewers of wondrous bodies would ideally remember something specific in the creation or in social life and be encouraged to act in a certain way. In European elite culture, at the courts, and in trade, travel and among collectors of naturalia this approach embraced everything exceptional, odd and rare. Cabinets of curiosity or *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* were, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, part of a tradition that highly valued noteworthy and extraordinary objects and bodies. Paradoxically, the collecting of rarities could in time lead to questions concerning their rarity and exceptional nature. The great number of extraordinary naturalia showed when they gradually appeared in large series, weaving them into larger patterns of systematicity, continuity, kinship and regularity in nature. Natural philosophers compared objects in the same homogenous class and let them explain each other.[41] Jennings's wish to collect odd animals and Linnaeus's more blasé attitude have already given us a glimpse of this devaluation of natural collections in the middle of the eighteenth century.

A lot is known about the changing nature, location and significance of monsters also when we narrow the time period to the sixteenth, seventeenth and

38 Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 3, 108-130.

39 Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, pp. 1-3, 71; Mordhorst, *Genstandsfortællinger*, p. 184.

40 Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, p. 3.

41 Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, pp. 64, 91-92.

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early eighteenth centuries and before I define the subject of this book more precisely, a handful of the most often referred scholars will be introduced.

According to historian Michael Hagner, there were monsters everywhere in seventeenth-century Europe. They appeared as subjects for conversation, in discussions and anecdotes, and functioned as curiosities and entertainment at courts and markets. Learned journals represented monsters as case studies, and for natural philosophers and collectors they were desired objects to put in cabinets. Monsters did not generate feelings of fear or superstition but of wonder, at least at courts and universities, and Hagner examines how that changed during the Enlightenment. Significant shifts had to do with the understanding of life as a *process* in the eighteenth century, with the rise of a more regular and predictable order in nature, a new focus on beauty and with an intensified classification of deviances and differences in science. Hagner calls the monster a revealer of power in the so-called Age of Reason and suggests that universal laws and deterministic processes were overshadowing the old playful, artistic nature by the beginning of the eighteenth century. An effect was that monsters no longer were seen as unusual, wonderful and curious.[42]

A focus on power is central also in Foucault's monster studies. He claimed that, from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, the *monster* was essentially a mixture of two realms, kingdoms or species, such as the animal and the human. It could also be a blending of two individuals, the two sexes or of life and death, such as when a child was born with some morphology that meant it would die in hours or in a few days. The child was not able to live but survived nonetheless for a short period, which made it monstrous. The monster could finally be a mixture of forms, and a person who, like a snake, had no arms or legs, was a monster. Monsters transgressed natural limits and classifications, but the breach of natural law was not enough to constitute monstrosity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought.[43] A monster also had to disturb some interdiction of civil or religious law, and the difference between disability and monstrosity revealed this.

> Disability may well be something that upsets the natural order, but disability is not monstrosity because it has a place in civil or canon law. The disabled person may not conform to nature, but the law in some way provides for him. Monstrosity, however, is the kind of natural irregularity that calls law into question and disables it.[44]

42 Hagner, 'Enlightened Monsters', pp. 175-178.

43 Foucault, *Abnormal*, pp. 63-64.

44 Ibid., p. 64.

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It was, according to Foucault, only when the confusion of a mixed body also overturned or disturbed civil or canon law and created disorder in social life that it became a question of monstrosity. Should shapeless infants inherit from their parents? Was it reasonable to baptize an offspring with two heads once or twice? Was it possible to sentence a conjoined twin to death, or did the authorities then also kill an innocent person? Could a hermaphrodite marry, and with whom?[45] Monstrosity was fundamentally a *juridical-natural* concept, troubling both natural boundaries and the law.

Closer to our own time, Foucault described *the abnormal individual*, an everyday monster, or *the individual to be corrected*. This figure appears clearly in the eighteenth century, can be seen already in the seventeenth century, but much later than the monster, whose frame of reference was nature and society, the system of the laws of the world. The individual to be corrected had a narrower frame of reference and emerged in the play of relations of conflict and support that existed between the family and the school, workshop, street, quarter, parish, church, police and so on. This figure became much more frequent than the monster ever was and it was typically regular, so to speak, in its irregularity. The individual to be corrected always appeared close to the rule, familiar, difficult to define, exhibiting a number of ambiguities that we will encounter again, long after the eighteenth century, in the problematic of the abnormal man. 'The monster is by definition the exception; the individual to be corrected is an everyday phenomenon.'[46]

Does this mean that we find *monsters* in the early modern era and *individuals to be corrected* from the eighteenth century onwards? Nothing is easy in the history of monstrosities, and scholars in the field seldom agree. One narrative is that physically extraordinary persons before the end of the seventeenth century could have a prominent place in culture, carry meaning and remind people of God's presence. They had a playful nature, could be displayed, display themselves, travel and arouse wonder and excitement. During the eighteenth century, all kinds of extraordinary bodies were transformed into mute deformations, distanced from anything elite, simply vulgar. Monsters were embedded in the context of embryology and comparative anatomists extended their knowledge of the normal organism by placing it in relation to these anomalies. Monsters disappeared from streets and marketplaces at the same time as they entered scientific tables and examination rooms, and this once-challenging, original, wondrous,

45 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
46 Ibid., p. 58.

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rare and sometimes threatening category was approved of to the extent that it disappeared.[47]

There are, however, disruptions, and overlapping tendencies in this trajectory and Stephen Pender underlines continuity. He reminds us that the reception of the monster as full of meaning did not simply expire at a certain point, nor was there a principal line of development from monsters as prodigies to monsters as medical pathologies. His research on conjoined twins in the seventeenth century reveals a more fluid interchange between the portentous and the merely anomalous. Pender claims that monsters' political and theological resonance remained important and demonstrates how monsters continued to occasion emblematic thought in cabinets, at birth scenes and at exhibitions throughout the century.[48]

If monsters were rare but seen and displayed on many cultural levels in the early modern period, it seems to have been the opposite with disabilities. Davis describes an absence of discourse on the topic before 1750. He sees the term *disability* as tied to the emergence of discourses that 'aim to cure, remediate, or catalogue variations in bodies' and claims that researchers have had difficulty finding disability before the middle of the century.[49] This is not because variations in ability did not exist, but because disability was not yet an operative category. Physical differences were not pathologized and Davis discusses the historical and cultural transition in which the modern discourse of disability became consolidated. Whereas people with disabilities did not receive much attention, there was in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries an inordinate amount of interest in wonders, *lusus naturae*, giants, dwarfs, hermaphrodites, conjoined twins, hirsute women and anomalous births. Today we would perhaps define such conditions as disabilities, but the grouping together of birth anomalies and disability did not exist much before the nineteenth century.

> Our modern concept of normality requires that all deviations from the norm be treated equally, but under the previous discursive grid, anomalous, strange births were distinguished from disabilities that were acquired, particularly through disease.[50]

47 Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, pp. 70-80; Daston and Park, *Wonders*, pp. 18-20, 204-205; Park and Daston, 'Unnatural Conceptions', pp. 51-54; Canguilhem, *The Normal*, pp. 125-149; Hagner, 'Vom Naturalienkabinett', pp. 73-78; Hagner, 'Enlightened Monsters', p. 178; Curran, 'Afterword', pp. 230-231.
48 Pender, '"No Monsters"', pp. 147, 162.
49 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 56.
50 Ibid., p. 59.

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Davis observes a new discursive category of disability from the middle of the eighteenth century, along with 'the development of an institutional, medicalized apparatus to house, segregate, isolate, or fix people with disabilities'.[51] A medical gaze took the place of staring at wonders, and Davis claims that disabled persons now became observed, commented on, illustrated, treated, dissected, legally placed and inscribed into an economy of bodily traits. In addition, mental illnesses were categorized in types and subtypes, and the concept of normality was invented along with bell curves and statistics.[52]

In this volume, we approach exceptional bodies and concepts of monstrosity before the advent of such a norm. We focus on dramatic instances of physical deviance, monsters, prodigious births and hermaphrodites but also on metaphorical monstrosities and on bodies with the power to disrupt the sensory field of the observer. Our monsters are exceptions rather than individuals to be corrected, and precise analyses of how monstrosity worked in specific contexts are made throughout the book. It is far from surprising that we are more generous in the demarcation of the research object than Foucault, who claimed that monstrosity disrupts both natural and judicial laws. Our topic is also wider than that described by Asa Simon Mittman, who defines monsters and the monstrous as 'threats to common knowledge' that cast doubt on people's 'epistemological worldview'.[53] The exceptional bodies we meet in the volume at hand could definitely act as threats or shape new worldviews, but not only this. They were often rare, unruly, disruptive or wondrous but could also be ignored and dismissed, as exemplified by Linnaeus. Exceptional bodies both astonished and bored people in the early modern period, and this paradox is present in a number of the case studies. The boring side of monsters can be traced back to Aristotle and the scholastics, described briefly below, before the individual case studies in this volume are introduced.

The epistemology of the monstrous: Practices, knowledge, morals, affect

Disregard for monstrosities was an important part of learned culture long before the eighteenth century. Aristotle saw monsters as errors of nature, not

51 Ibid., p. 61.

52 Ibid., p. 62. See also Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, pp. 63-70; Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, pp. 89-90, 100, 105, 107-108, 112-121.

53 Mittman, quoting Noël Coward, in 'Introduction', p. 8.

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portending anything, and his medieval followers rejected irregular bodies as inappropriate for natural philosophers to examine since they deviated from the general picture. The nature of the accidental is the topic here; a temporary, particular, random and failed by-product, which was irrelevant for or even contradicted the essential body in which it appeared. Scholastic natural philosophy marginalized wonders and monsters in the search for regularity in nature, and this attitude persisted throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[54]

Philosophers who aspired to *scientia*, defined by Aristotle as 'certain knowledge', should produce not only probable or possible facts but universally true 'science'. This rigorous epistemological ideal was not easy to apply in relation to the shifting and irregular physical world, as opposed to the unchanging nature of God, and one strategy became to study *types of phenomena* and *universal principles* rather than *particularities*. Bodies and events beyond the ordinary course of nature, such as conjoined twins, rains of blood, monstrous births or individual prodigies, were ignored and seen as the result of unspecifiable causes that were combined in unforeseeable ways. Resulting in singular and utterly contingent bodies, such combinations and processes were, in scholastic natural philosophy, seen as outside the realm of the necessary and universal.[55]

Chapter 5 in this volume connects with the Aristotelian tradition in early modern culture to value universal types more highly than actual bodies and specific cases. Here, Parker Cotton examines how the French philosopher Pierre Bayle, in the interesting and complex web of articles and cross-references comprised in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), located the hermaphrodite in mythology rather than in his own time and reality. The individual case, the local and particular hermaphrodite with a certain shape, character and rootedness in time and space, was not as interesting as the original man, a mythic category, an ideal and a generic type before the Fall. Ovid's Salmacis, the hermaphroditic first man; Adam in Eden; or a monster on a distant continent fuelled Bayle's discussion on hermaphrodites and filled the contours of an exemplary and historical figure with power to change contemporary understandings of divine creation or to give the reader a lesson. The whole issue reveals the persistence of repulsion towards actual and singular bodies even in late-seventeenth-century philosophy and an emerging intellectual discussion about the first man, which made it possible for Bayle to challenge a dogmatic and rigid theology

54 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, pp. 110-112, 120, 126.
55 Ibid., pp. 114-117.

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of his time. 'I believe Bayle's repeated connections of hermaphroditic figures to mythic origin stories offer an ongoing challenge, or reappraisal, of the original state of humanity,' writes Cotton.

The exceptional body also has a more positive conceptual history, far from the Aristotelian generic type, which connects it with the playful and wondrous dimensions of nature, its freedom to deviate from rules and the ability to awake wonder and reveal aspects of human origins and the world's creation. Daston and Park have contributed in many ways to our understanding of monsters, hermaphrodites and wonders before 1750. They show, for example, how the category of wonders embraced a crowd of strange objects and phenomena, such as expensive and unusual animals, plants and naturalia as well as courtly spectacles of various kinds. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, wonders offered pleasure and delight, were seen as sports of a creative and variable nature, as exotic, representing wealth and power, and were valued for their sophistication, strangeness and refinement. Monsters belonged intermittently to this category, and people showed them to each other because of their novelty and capacity to surprise and astonish.[56] Exceptional bodies and things became desirable to own, brought both knowledge of the physical world and the reputation that all men of learning cultivated.[57]

The desire for exceptional bodies as wonders can also be found in various court practices, where, in the same way as a piece of clothing and a rare, exotic or luxurious object, they transcended prosaic experience and contributed to a specific aesthetics. In Chapter 1, Maria Kavvadia analyses the tensions surrounding dance culture in sixteenth-century Rome. Religious and medical discourses overlapped in the work of Girolamo Mercuriale, court physician of one of the most powerful cardinals in Rome in the middle of the century, and Kavvadia lets us follow his regulation of a certain dance, the *moresca*. She shows us that in relation to the Counter-Reformation and the Catholic Church, there was a cultural circulation of medical, moral and religious rules and orders and a search for ancient origins, which emphasized the value of moderation, health and order. Mercuriale was not satisfied with how the *moresca* was performed in his own time and promoted 'ancient dance culture [...] as an example, a model to be followed', as Kavvadia remarks.

A discontentedness with exceptional bodies within the interpreter's own cultural context, accompanied by a fascination with ancient ones, appears

56 Ibid., pp. 101-103, 190-191, 193-201.
57 Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, p. 3.

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not only in the writings of Bayle and Mercuriale but throughout the early modern period, and so does the tension between particular bodies and the study of generic types. This changed, however, during the early modern period and monster studies is a good place to start for anyone interested in the shifting value of particular bodies in relation to universal categories and types. Case studies and actual bodies, monstrous, prodigious and hermaphroditic ones as well, were represented in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medicine, in collections of wonders and curiosities and in learned elite culture. Individual lives and deaths appeared in obstetrics, so did personal witnessing and the practical aspects of extraordinary births.[58]

The presence and value of monsters and wonders in the seventeenth century is complex, and at the end of the century the questions of what a prodigious birth was and what one should do with it were still far from resolved. Living beings were expected to produce offspring resembling themselves, and during this century there was a persisting correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, between the human body and God's wider creation. 'Man is a little world, made in the image of God', as Zakiya Hanafi reminds us.[59] Imitation and similitude were central concepts in seventeenth-century medicine, so what should be done with children missing essential organs, with two heads instead of one or exhibiting hairy instead of naked skin? Chapter 6 in this volume contains my discussion of the so-called prodigious son of a fisherman, born on the east coast of Sweden in the 1660s, and deepens these questions. I analyse the ways in which the humanist and professor of rhetoric and government Johannes Schefferus recalled the most noteworthy things he had come across during his life. In 1668 he described, in his handwritten 'Variae historiae', monstrous births as well as kidney stones, poisonous mines, memorable stories and archaeological findings, and this collection of wondrous and memorable things and bodies makes the case that exceptional bodies should be displayed to people to improve their virtue and knowledge.

Here we are far from the scholastic tradition in which natural philosophers avoided monsters and exceptional bodies as accidental and irrelevant errors in nature, and closer to the tradition of *exempla*, in which fictive and real persons' lives and actions, as well as exceptional bodies and monsters, were represented as models for people to follow or avoid. This tradition relates to the notion of history, nature and culture as being filled

58 Ibid., pp. 1-5; Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, pp. 64, 90-92; Bates, *Emblematic Monsters*, p. 57; Davies, 'The Unlucky', p. 75.
59 Hanafi, *The Monster*, p. 102.

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with homiletic and edificatory examples, mirroring timeless knowledge and providing a path for acquiring virtue. In the sixteenth century, there emerged a whole genre of popular prodigy tales, reprinted and augmented well into the seventeenth century. One constantly expanding volume was *Histoires prodigieuses*, in which different authors during the second half of the century produced one book after the other on both ancient and contemporary wonders. Pierre Boaistuau wrote the first one and gave the volume its title in 1560.[60]

Both *looking* at exceptional bodies and *collecting* them in cabinets and books could be a good thing but what about the physical processes that *produced* them? Rosemary Moore argues in Chapter 2 that maternal imagination and visual imprinting were not only perilous, corrupting, dangerous and unruly aspects of the female anatomy but also part of a productive nature, giving rise to new life forms. Women's gazing on images of perfect male babies could have a positive impact on their fetuses and work as a way to control and positively influence the outcomes of their pregnancies. Moore takes the slippery and ambiguous nature of maternal imagination as an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the conflation of allegorical, religious and medical imagery in the early seventeenth century. In analyses of 'fugitive sheets', anatomical broadsheets whose cut and layered structures carry multiple meanings and ambivalences, she replaces rigid dichotomies and sees, both in pregnant bodies and in medical prints, a lack of stability and an openness to interpretation. A sophisticated reading of the materiality, spatiality and interactive dimensions of anatomical flap books connects us in this chapter with multifaceted, printed layers of the body, carefully arranged to mimic spatiality, specific organs and allegorical symbols. Moore focuses on the 'First Vision' from the physician Johann Remmelin's *Catoptrum microcosmicum* (Mirrors of the microcosm) triptych of fugitive sheets, published in 1619, and shows us that the monster or Medusa's head, which intriguingly forms part of it, was associated with knowledge, virtue and an active nature. 'I hope that this might begin to open up a dialogue about the multiplicities of meanings that can be found just below the surface of Remmelin's print, and of its many possible uses, misuses and (mis)interpretations at the hands of different users,' writes Moore.

Chapter 3 deals with the close relation between body and soul, as well, and with physical and moral beauty. Pablo García Piñar analyses bodily deviance in a globally and administratively expanding seventeenth-century Spanish Empire and focuses on the Mexican playwright and lawyer Juan

60 Eriksson, *Monstret & människan*, pp. 133-136; Daston and Park, *Wonders*, pp. 180-189.

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Ruiz de Alarcón's path to public office. García Piñar examines the language of perception, beauty, perfection, bodily malformation and disability in political treaties, mirrors for princes, satirical poems and pieces, novels and plays from the 1620s and discusses the correspondence between Ruiz de Alarcón's body and the morals of colonial administration. Visual impressions and mediations in satires and plays functioned, along with general notions of the body, as legitimizing sources of authority, and García Piñar analyses the tension between the manner in which a body was formed and the expected behaviour and capabilities of the person. By following a playwright and his fictional characters, García Piñar works at the intersection of early modern literature and disability studies and grasps the experience of being marginalized. 'Don Juan represents the first case – and perhaps the only one – of an early modern disabled character conceived by an author with a disability, that is, created from the embodied experience of being in a disabling world,' he writes.

Exceptional bodies both challenged and supported the ordering of the early modern social world, and so did monstrous sexuality when displayed and demonstrated for larger audiences. Through an analysis of the satirical piece *Divorce satyrique* (1660), which stages the fake confession of Henri IV, king of France, Cécile Tresfels, in Chapter 4, examines representations of feminine power and the sexuality of the king's ex-wife, Marguerite de Valois. In this specific context, the negative function of monstrosity was used on a symbolic level, and the purpose of the satire was to debase the king via the alleged monstrosity of his wife's sexuality. Tresfels shows us a complex set of cultural, political and emotional features, mechanisms and consequences of the satire. The narrator in *Divorce satyrique* underlines that Marguerite's monstrosity comes from within and that her extraordinary sexuality is driven by internal desire. 'Her deformed body is a consequence and manifestation of this internal monstrosity, reflecting materially the depravity of her soul.' In line with Foucault, one could say that Marguerite was an individual to be corrected, a pale monster with too much power, exhibiting behaviour in supposed need of intervention. She was not a monster in the *juridical-natural* sense, a natural transgression or troubling of the law, and it should be noticed that Tresfels' case call into question Foucault's timeline and his clear distinction between early modern and modern practices.

We obviously need to know more about how physical, sexual and behavioural exceptions were conceptualized in the early modern period. How did ideal types, *exempla* and virtue work together and were modern *norms* something entirely different? Daston and Park emphasize the emergence

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of strict norms and absolute regularity, both of nature's customs and God's rules, from the late seventeenth century onwards. Nature's habits hardened into inviolable laws, and new attitudes towards nature were established among natural philosophers who faced 'the subordination of anomalies to watertight natural laws, of nature to God, and of citizens and Christians to established authority'.[61] The natural order became uniform, lost room for exceptions, and in an eighteenth-century anatomical framework monsters were transformed into organisms that failed to achieve their perfect final form. They were normalized and placed in relation to a functional standard and their value now depended, not on their rarity or singularity, as in earlier times, but on the body's capacity to reveal still more encompassing and rigid regularities. The history of monsters as submitted to these strict norms, rather than to secular powers, can be traced for many decades and seen still in the early nineteenth century. Daston and Park close their *Wonders and the Order of Nature* in 1750 and state that monsters were by then reduced to an incomplete part of nature, which in itself became uniform across time and place. There was no enlightenment, disenchantment or clear pattern of naturalization taking monsters from prodigies, by way of wonders, to naturalistic objects.[62]

Daston and Park are convincing in their argument that wonders and monsters not were naturalized or secularized in the seventeenth century, as well as in their description of rare and extraordinary wonders being reduced to distasteful errors in the early eighteenth century. They spend, however, fewer words on the actual process of normalization. What was it, how was it expressed, and where do we find it?

In the volume at hand, we examine exceptional bodies and monstrosity before the emergence of a modern, statistical norm and average standard. We approach early modern sources and try to be sensitive about their historically specific orders and disorders, rules and exceptions, on the level of the body. In Chapter 7 Tove Paulsson Holmberg examines perinatal children as liminal beings. She focuses on stillbirth in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Sweden, tracing the ambiguous, conditional character of unborn corporeality in case studies of emergency obstetric practices. The chapter is about suffering and death in the birth transition, which for centuries had been an expected part of labour, positioning the survival of the mother against the survival of the child. With the pioneering Swedish gynaecologist Johan von Hoorn, who around 1700 introduced

61 Daston and Park, *Wonders*, p. 208.

62 Ibid., pp. 176, 187, 189, 192-193, 202, 205-209, 214, 329, 361.

active obstetric methods, the conditions changed to some extent. New examination and intervention techniques demarcating and describing obstructed, ‘unnaturally’ positioned unborn babies made these marginal entities visible, yet, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the manifest presence of perinatal loss continuously framed all medical and religious practices related to the birth transition. Modern obstetrics would eventually change the expectations of life and death, which again reminds us that the value and meaning of the exceptional body is relative to its viewers and to its cultural and historical contexts.

Taken together, some key themes recur in these chapters. One is the relation between monstrous behaviours and monstrous bodies, and another is how extraordinary bodies have functioned as a path to knowledge and virtue. Throughout the book, we analyse the unstable boundaries between exceptional bodies and their audiences, as well as rules and expectations in relation to physical deviances. Monstrosity, hermaphroditism and prodigious births function as a way to create order, authority, and political and emotional stability. In a concluding afterword, Kathleen Long reflects upon these themes, on the value of exceptional bodies and on the concepts of monsters and monstrosity before the advent of the normal.

Through seven essays, chronologically organized, this volume makes the claim that exceptional bodies not only challenged social, religious, sexual and natural structures and hierarchies in sixteenth-, seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Europe but also contributed to its knowledge, moral values and emotional repertoire. The case studies show that monsters and monstrosity were part of a heterogeneous material world in which they evoked forgotten categories, remarkable creations and memorable rarities. At the same time, exceptional bodies, sometimes in the terms of monstrosity, had a function in relation to political reasoning, created order, delivered critique and enhanced certain messages. Prodigious births, maternal imagination, collections of extraordinary experiences and things, hermaphrodites, powerful women, bodily deviances, ambiguous stillbirths, controversial moves and exercises, shapeshifting phenomena, and hybrids of various kinds were part of an ongoing categorization and ordering of bodies, behaviours, social relations and hierarchies. In a period when customs rather than strict norms were supposed to dominate the processes of nature, monstrosities could contribute to human experience in the most unexpected and sometimes positive ways. Odd, rare, original and unique bodies, practices and phenomena were in certain circumstances not that bad, wrong and frightening after all.

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