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## The Persistence of Monsters

*Catherine Heard*

Modern North American society has been purged of its physical monsters: Siamese twins are surgically separated soon after birth, bearded women receive hormonal therapy and electrolysis, the deformed fetuses which would once have made up the "pickled punks" section of the sideshow are relegated to the analytical realm of the medical world.

The public exhibition of these human oddities, which had been a popular form of entertainment for centuries, began to decline at the beginning of the twentieth century, and today is virtually unknown. Yet, despite the abolition of these images from the public eye, they continue to thrive in the communal imagination. Rachel Adams, author of *Sideshow U.S.A.*, summarizes:

[...] as actual freak shows were evicted from popular culture, their representational currency multiplied, granting them symbolic importance in inverse proportion to their declining status as a profitable mode of live entertainment. Those born after the freak show's heyday had passed find its history and iconography preserved in literature, film, and the visual arts. At the dawn of the new millennium, representations of freaks continue to multiply accompanied by a resurgence of live freak shows in popular culture and performance art.<sup>1</sup>

Monsters have been mankind's shadow companions from prehistory throughout recorded time. The roles they have played have not remained constant, but have shifted in response to the currents of history. In order to understand the ongoing fascination the monstrous holds for humanity, it is necessary to examine some of its history and to hypothesize about what needs its presence has fulfilled.

Freaks and monsters, as aspects of the Other, are feared threatening the individual or the community from outside established physical and psychological boundaries. However—just as each individual harbors within himself a shadow side and the potential seeds of Otherness—the possibility of the monstrous lies dormant in the biology of the human body. A chromosome duplicated or absent, a single cell failing to divide at a critical juncture or a lone faulty gene can result in defects ranging from the innocuous presence of a supernumerary nipple or finger, to defects so severe that the fetus can hardly be identified as human.

Historically, in many cultures, infants with severe deformities were seen

messages or warnings of events to come, or as evidence of God's displeasure. The word monster finds its roots in the Latin *moneo*, to warn, or *monstro*, to show.<sup>2</sup> It was not uncommon, if the child was living at birth, for it to be killed and hastily buried—inevitably, however, a few people would be aware of its birth. It is easy to imagine how, in an orally based culture, the few people who glimpsed such an uncanny creature would tell the story of seeing it; each subsequent teller would embellish the narrative, and eventually the tale would merge with other legends. Many of the prototypical monsters of mythology and fiction exist in reality in the forms of genetic anomalies, disease processes and hormonal defects.<sup>3</sup> The Cyclops, Janus, sirens, and conjoined twins can now be definitively categorized as congenital malformations;<sup>4</sup> while hairy wild men, dwarves, and even vampires can be attributed to hereditary genetic disorders.<sup>5</sup>

The interpretation of the monstrous has not remained static, but has metamorphosed to reflect the circumstances of the societies experiencing particular conditions, during different historical periods. It was not infrequent for more than one understanding of the monstrous to exist simultaneously, or for the symbolic or actual presence of the monster to be employed to different ends within the same geographic area and historical period, depending upon the factors characterizing particular groups within the broader community including religion, education, or social status.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are of particular note in this regard. At the same time that monsters were publicly exhibited in the raucous environment of the sideshows of fairs, they were esteemed by the affluent as ornaments of nature and collected as marvels to be displayed in their *Wunderkammern*, wherein they symbolized the owner's status, prosperity and education. Enlightenment science was concurrently beginning the process of recording and classifying these same phenomena in encyclopediae and seeking explanations for their existence. Simultaneously, philosophers and theologians were debating whether conjoined twins possessed one soul or two, and whether each head should be individually baptized and given last rights.<sup>6</sup> Thus monsters concurrently functioned as entertainment, objects of wonder, symbols of social status, markers of scientific progress, and catalysts for spiritual enquiry.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the monster was valued as a key to understanding the natural world, which science had come to believe was governed by rules that were strictly regular. The newly emerging field of teratology catalogued the monsters that were apparent deviations from these rules, carefully compared them to normal specimens, and hypothesized reasons for their existence in search of revelations about the universal laws governing creation. Consequently, monsters were no longer seen as evidence of the suspension of nature's rules, but were valued as windows

into her workings. In the words of Fontanelle in 1703 on dissecting the fetus of a deformed lamb:

One commonly regards monsters as jests of nature, but philosophers are quite persuaded that nature does not play, that she always inviolably follows the same rules, and that all her works are, so to speak, equally serious. There may be extraordinary ones among them, but not irregular ones; and it is even often the most extraordinary, which give opening to discover the general rules which comprehend all of them.

Enlightenment science argued many potential causes for the presence of monsters—from malnutrition, hybridization of species, an imperfect fusion of the atoms contributed by the parents, an excess or insufficiency of seed, maternal impressions, or accidental severing and recoupling of parts within the womb. Despite their inability to definitively determine the causes of defects, scientists were able to infer information about the normal development of embryos from their observations of certain defects, for example of a fetus born without a mouth but only “a little hole placed between the two ears” supported the hypothesis that the umbilical cord must provide nourishment to the fetus, rather than the mouth.<sup>7</sup>

The evidence provided by deformities was also critical in the construction of arguments in the “quarrel of monsters” in the Royal Academy of Prussia between 1724 and 1743 between preformationists (who believed that miniscule pre-existing germs or homunculi formed into fetuses) and epigenesists (who believed in the formation of the germ as a new product that continued its growth through a process of accretion).<sup>8</sup> The arguments would not be conclusively resolved, however, until nearly one hundred years later, with Karl Ernst Von Baer's observations of the development fetal chicks between 1819 and 1825 and his discovery of the human ovum in 1827. Notably, part of Von Baer's program of study was the production of monsters through the manipulation of chicken eggs, reflecting ongoing scientific fascination with the causes of abnormal development.<sup>9</sup> These experiments did not end in the nineteenth century, but continued through the middle of the twentieth, when in 1948 Dr. Etienne Wolff boasted:

Once we began by describing monsters, today we know how to reproduce them; we can create new forms, hitherto unknown [...]. One can, in a sense, play with the forms of the embryo [...] construct at will and [...] in series, most monstrosities.<sup>10</sup>

In the present day, scientific codes of ethics theoretically restrict the frivolous production of monsters by legitimate scientists, but an apprehensive

public debates the implications of genetically modified and transgenic plant species, and cloning of animals and human cell cultures. As technology becomes more accessible, the threat also exists of non-scientists, unrestricted by ethical constraints, creating monstrous fusions through new technologies.

With the creation of designer species intended as amusements or household pets, the monster potentially may again be perceived, as it was in the seventeenth century, as an ornament of nature. A genetically modified neon tetra, in which a gene from a sea coral is spliced with the fish's DNA to add a fluorescent red-orange color to the normally silver and grayish-blue fish, is already available for home aquariums.<sup>11</sup> Challenging the ethics of genetic modification, Eduardo Kac, an associate professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Ph.D. research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts (CAIA) at the University of Wales, has genetically altered a rabbit, fish, mice, bacteria and plants with a green fluorescent protein from Pacific Northwest Jellyfish. The protein causes the modified creatures to emit a green glow when they are placed under ultra-violet light. In Kac's installations the public is given the opportunity to observe and interact with the creatures.<sup>12</sup> While it would seem reactive to designate Kac's glimmering creations, and the innocently glowing neon tetras as "monsters," they do, in fact, bear comparison to hybrid monsters of history and myth—the camelopard, the minotaur, dog-headed and pig-headed children, and Paré's goat-legged boy—all ostensibly spawned by the unnatural matings of disparate species; and could be considered the "thin edge of the wedge." Where do ethics, law, and society at large draw the line when such creatures give pleasure and cause no apparent harm?

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and for the first half of the twentieth, old notions of the genesis of monsters persisted alongside new scientific knowledge. The myth of maternal impression has been particularly long-lived. While it is not surprising to consider that the deformities of John Merrick, the Elephant Man, were believed by most Londoners of the 1880s to have been caused by his mother being startled by an elephant during her pregnancy,<sup>13</sup> it is more disconcerting to contemplate the fact that belief in maternal impression persists today. In 1993 Dr. Ian Stevenson, the head of the Department of Psychiatric Medicine at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville, Virginia, published a paper titled *Birthmarks and Birth Defects Corresponding to Wounds on Deceased Persons* in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, which "gives voice to scientific issues that are not explored or published by most mainstream scientific journals." In the article he states that, as "[...] almost nothing is known about why pigmented birthmarks (moles or nevi) occur in particular locations of the skin [...]" and that the "[...] causes of most birth defects are also unknown"; he goes on to suggest that it is possible that such defects are representations of wounds

from a past life which have been somehow marked upon the child in the womb. One example he provides is of a child manifesting a birthmark on his head whose paternal uncle was killed with a blow on the head from a heavy knife.<sup>14</sup>

Disregarding anomalous examples such as Dr. Stevenson's research, however, most fallacies about birth defects had been exposed by science by the second decade of the twentieth century. There was growing scientific evidence that physical and mental abnormalities were linked to faulty genes or malfunctions of the hormonal system. Between 1920 and 1940 the popularity of the freak show gradually declined, and people who would have once been exhibited before the public as oddities were institutionalized in physician-run, state-funded asylums. Robert Bogdan observes, "Human difference was increasingly categorized as a disease."<sup>15</sup>

Even when monsters were revealed to have a biological basis, and began to disappear from the public sphere, relegated to medical institutions or receiving corrective surgeries or therapies, we continued to anxiously imagine their presence among us. Perhaps in response to the disappearance of the visibly monstrous from the public sphere, we imagined the presence of monsters that looked like us but harbored dangerous, concealed differences. From the 1950s onwards the notion of the monstrous expanded to include the invisibly deformed—the Communist, the serial killer, the pedophile, the psychopath and the sociopath—and later, the insidious imitations of the human, the clone, the cybernetic robot, and the alien. For proof, one need look no further than contemporary cinema, where monsters such as Frankenstein, Dracula and the Mummy have been replaced by Hannibal Lecter, Norman Bates, and the monstrous twins of Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*, Bev and Elliot Mantle. Adams further elucidates the idea that, as medical science eradicated physical disability, there was parallel rise of psychotherapy, as Americans turned inward to search for distortions within themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The fear of an invisible monster lurking within is contradicted by a strong human conviction that the workings of the mind must be inscribed on the lines of the face or be revealed by the shape of the head. The science of pathognomics arose in the mid-eighteenth century from the roots of humoral medicine that divided man into four physiological types: phlegmatic, choleric, sanguine and melancholic. Each type bore specific physical characteristics—the choleric, for example, "exhibited vigorous curling hair, strong teeth and piercing eyes [he] is unmistakably leonine with a mane of hair and carnivore's teeth." Pathognomics sought to determine, through the study of silhouettes and measurements of the head, the indicators of moral and intellectual characteristics. Protuberances on the surface of the skull were believed to reveal the development of the underlying tissue, thus a highly developed forehead might indicate a high degree of intelligence, while a receding chin

might point to a weak character.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century, doctors and scientists had begun the project of categorizing facial characteristics that were thought to connote an abnormal psychology. The invention of the camera expanded this project, with the work of Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond in Britain and later by Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot in France. In England, Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton used photography to create composite photographs of criminals with the intent of identifying their physiognomic classes. In Italy Cesare Lombroso examined the skull of a convicted serial killer, and discovered:

The problem of the nature of the criminal—an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals. Thus were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheekbones [...] handle-shaped ears [...] insensibility to pain, extremely acute eyesight.

He subsequently described a bank of characteristics that were intended to reveal criminal tendencies.<sup>18</sup>

Current societal fears of the monstrously abnormal psyche concealed within a seemingly normal exterior are paralleled by ongoing scientific research seeking to discover the causes of criminal behaviour, ascribing it to the presence of extra chromosomes, high testosterone levels, or lead toxicity, among other possible causes. The specter of a monster which is undifferentiated from the rest of humanity, except by differences so subtle that they could only be detected under a microscope or through sophisticated genetic testing is at odds with the traditional belief that evil is visibly different from good, that surface appearance reveals inner qualities. James Gillray's *Doublures of Characters*, subtitled with the text, "If you would know Men's Hearts, look into their Faces," drawn in 1798, exemplifies the fantasy that a man's character is imprinted on his face. Each personage is accompanied by a double that exposes the exemplar's concealed disposition by subtly exaggerating his facial features and altering his dress. Thus the "Friend to his Country" is revealed as "Judas Selling his Master", the "Character of High Birth" becomes "Silenus Debauching", and "Strong Sense" devolves into a "Baboon."<sup>19</sup>

The fear that monsters might be among us, existing in cleverly disguised forms is amplified by our individual insecurities about our bodies and impulses. Fiedler argues that the presence of visibly discernable monsters, in myth or reality, fulfills psychological needs, assuring us of our normality. The presence of giants, dwarfs, midgets and characters—like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*—who change in size between these extremes, suggests the importance of this paradigm to the devel-

oping child who "[...] may feel that compared to an adult, he is himself a Midget, while compared to a baby or his last year's self, he is a Giant."<sup>20</sup>

Fiedler goes on to note that the child, like an animal, "born half wild," needs to be civilized by the adults surrounding him. As children reach adolescence they again become like animals—their bodies sprouting hair and subject to inexplicable urges and uncontrollable emissions. Here Fiedler makes the analogy to sexual freaks, and the intense anxieties of adolescent sexuality. Even Freud relates the origin of the uncanny to the first glimpse of the genitals of the parent of the opposite sex, which makes the child aware of him or herself as a "monstre par défaut" or a "monstre par excès."<sup>21</sup>

With the early awareness of ourselves as monsters compared to the seemingly normal adults surrounding us, a deep fear is instilled. We are never fully assured of our own normality, and seek that reassurance through comparison with models of the normal and abnormal. We have an innate need to closely examine the other and to make minute comparisons of difference, but there is an inherent guilt associated with this examination. We are socialized to avert our gaze from the visibly different, to politely look away to avoid greedily staring to sate our curiosity, and fulfill our desire to evaluate our self against the Other. Perhaps part of the aversion to staring is that it reveals our fear of abnormality—it is a confession of insecurity about our own status as normal.

Adams describes the dangerous excitement of the encounter with the Other in the form of the freak or monster as stemming from the possibility of the dissolution of the "corporeal and psychic" boundaries which would then permit a "monstrous fusion," our absorption into the world of the Other. The more closely one observes the freakishly Other, the more persistently one is reminded of the cost of normality—the pressure of repressed urges, the fragility of the façade of civilization. Inevitably the possibility arises that one could realize he is standing on the wrong side of that fine line, and could decide to step across that narrow divide, into the dark embrace of the abject. Adams identifies the perilous pleasure of the freak show as the "[...] frisson that arises from the audience's recognition of the ease with which the normal and abnormal [...] may slide into one another."<sup>22</sup>

Zanika Hanafi similarly identifies the threat of the erosion of borders between the normal self and the monstrous Other, and perceptively articulates the conflicting impulses of attraction and repulsion:

We fear monstrous metaphors because we think they will cause us to degenerate, to lose the solid boundaries of selfhood, to take the place of the admired object, and finally, to become monstrous ourselves [...]. But really, this is a false fear [...]. The truth is, we need to believe in the danger of monstrosity in order not to allow ourselves to be distracted from our straight

path [...]. Women, lovers, madmen, and the mob must be figured as monstrously other in order to allow the preacher (or the scholar) to feel more human. The secret desire to usurp that place of monstrosity, to become the admired object, is part of the game we play "of holding the I together" by imagining its disappearance. A sort of "fort-da" game we play with our civilized selves.<sup>23</sup>

Hanafi presents the possibility that normal adults toy with a desire to become the rare and admired monster. The monstrous transformation she suggests may be the reversion to the id-based state of the infant who is the "admired object" of dotting adults, free of societal rules, and completely absorbed in his own animal being. The fetish image of the adult baby, a predominantly male fantasy, is paralleled by the image of the circus fat lady who is invariably portrayed as a little girl in frilly dress and stage name emphasizing her babyishness—Baby Ruth, Dolly Dimples, and Jolly Dolly were all stage names of circus fat ladies.<sup>24</sup> Ron Mueck's *Big Man* similarly transgresses the boundary between adult body and a child's lack of emotional control, creating a deeply disturbing image, its pathos amplified by its scale (roughly double life size).

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks identify the freak of nature as something which breaches boundaries and subverts classifications: such as artificial and natural or animal and human,<sup>25</sup> including, by extension, Hanafi's play between the civilized self and the monstrous id. Leslie Fiedler agrees, stating that, "the true freak challenges the conventional boundaries between the male and the female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth."<sup>26</sup> In *On Longing* Susan Stewart similarly associates the freak with contravention of accepted limits and boundaries, particularly noting the conjoined twin as transgressing the line between self and other.<sup>27</sup> Rachel Adams further posits that the monster, located outside of known categories of identity, acts as vehicle allowing the viewer to confront and master extreme, frightening aspects of Otherness.<sup>28</sup>

The iconography of hybrid forms has emerged as a motif in postmodern art, as artists manifest the internal psychodramas of self and other. No single icon or symbol of Otherness dominates contemporary art; rather the themes that have materialized reflect wide-ranging societal anxieties about technology, sexuality and the human body.

Of particular note are Gerhard Lang's *Palaeanthropical Physiognomy*, consisting of projections combining human and animal features; Anthony Gormley's *Angel of the North*, and Tim Hawkinson's *Penitent*, both suggesting the fusion of man and machine; Dinos and Jake Chapman's *Tragic Anatomies*, a pastoral scene populated by hermaphroditic Siamese Twins; John Isaac's *In Advance of the Institution*, a clothed male figure sporting a

potato-like head; and Robert Gober's numerous works melding animate and inanimate imagery.

My own artistic production has consistently been characterized by monstrous images that simultaneously attract and repulse, placing the viewer in limbo of conflicted emotion. Works that I would identify as particularly significant in their representations of the monstrous include: *Siamese Twins* (1992), *The Casebook Series* (1993), *Confessional* (1996), *Efflorescence* (1997), *Twin* (1999), *Ennui* (2000), *Dermachrome* (2003), *Symmetries* (2003–2005) and *Stain* (2004).

Human history is irrevocably entwined with that of the monstrous. Monsters populate our imagination both in the legends of the past and in the literature of the present. They are manifested in the gargoyles of architecture, in illuminated manuscripts, printed broadsides, paintings of all historical periods and in the moving images of film. They are inescapable as imagery.

The true power of monsters, however, is that they are not wholly imaginary. They exist in the inevitable mutations of nature. We marvel, as people have throughout time, at reports of two headed snakes and calves, giant vegetables, other peculiarities of nature. Like our ancestors, we may delight in them as harmless aberrations, or may see them as dire warnings—in our times, dire warnings of a poisoned environment, rather than of coming wars or famines. The most horrifying reality of monsters is that our own biology has the potential to engender aberrant progeny—certainly all parents must breathe a sigh of relief when the first ultrasound of their child is declared normal. Even then, they count fingers and toes when the child is born.

Not only are monsters embedded in our genetic makeup, but they appear to be integral to our psychology. As individuals we measure our own bodies and minds against notions of the monstrous, seeking reassurance that we are normal by scrutinizing the aberrant. For communities, monsters have also provided a necessary concept of Otherness, a nebulous threat, but one, which helps to define norms and mores.

Inextricably part of our past and present, it is not inconceivable that our future holds the potential for artificially created monsters exceeding any imagined in history, or the potential that our own bodies will be altered in ways that, if described to us today, we could only conceive of as monstrous.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Adams, Rachel. *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2001. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Fiedler, Leslie. *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978. p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> <http://33.1911encyclopedia.org/M/MO/MONSTER.htm>

- <sup>4</sup> Nishimura, Hideo and Naomasa Okamoto. *Sequential Atlas of Human Congenital Malformations: Observations of Embryos, Fetuses and Newborns*. Baltimore: UPP, 1976.
- <sup>5</sup> Fiedler, pp 13–36
- <sup>6</sup> Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. Boston: MIT Press, 1992. pp. 254–62.
- <sup>7</sup> Daston, p. 204
- <sup>8</sup> Stafford pp. 256–61 Daston, p. 204.
- <sup>9</sup> [http://37.191.encyclopedia.org/B/BA/BAER\\_KARL\\_ERNST\\_VON.htm](http://37.191.encyclopedia.org/B/BA/BAER_KARL_ERNST_VON.htm)
- <sup>10</sup> Dr. Etienne Wolff, quoted by Fiedler, p. 248.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.suntimes.com/output/lifestyles/cst-nws-fish07.html>
- <sup>12</sup> Causey, Matthew. *The Ethics and Anxiety of Being with Monsters and Machines: Thinking Through the Transgenica Art of Eduardo Kac*. Crossings: eJournal of Art and Technology, Volume 2, Issue 1, March 2002. <http://crossings.tcd.ie/issues/2.1/Causey>
- <sup>13</sup> Fiedler, pp. 170–78, p. 215.
- <sup>14</sup> Stevenson, Ian. *Birthmarks and Birth Defects Corresponding to Wounds on Deceased Persons* Journal of Scientific Exploration, Vol. 7, No.4, pp. 403–10, 1993.
- <sup>15</sup> Bogdan, Robert. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- <sup>16</sup> Adams, p. 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Kemp, Martin and Marina Wallace. *Spectacular Bodies*. Berkley: U of California P, 2000. pp. 94–111
- <sup>18</sup> Kemp, pp. 125–43
- <sup>19</sup> Stafford, p. 262.
- <sup>20</sup> Fiedler. pp. 27–34.
- <sup>21</sup> Fiedler. pp. 27–34.
- <sup>22</sup> Adams, pp. 7–9
- <sup>23</sup> Hanafi, Zakiya. *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2000.
- <sup>24</sup> Fiedler, p. 130.
- <sup>25</sup> Daston, p. 14.
- <sup>26</sup> Fiedler, p 27–34.
- <sup>27</sup> Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Souvenirs of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993.
- <sup>28</sup> Adams, p. 2.

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## Book Reviews

### Comptes-rendus de livres

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Brad Buckley and John Conomos, eds., *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD, and the Academy*, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2009, 234 pp., paper \$25, ISBN 978-0-919616-49-3.

*Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy*, edited by Brad Buckley and John Conomos, provides a broad overview of the questions surrounding the evolution of the contemporary art school within the university setting. The subtitle is somewhat misleading as, rather than focus exclusively on the question of the PhD as the newly emerging terminal degree in the visual arts, the essays in this publication encompass broader questions centered on the role of the visual arts within the university, investigating concerns that are relevant to both undergraduate and post-graduate education. The collection provides a timely and provocative series of snapshots of art education from the viewpoints of Australian, Canadian, American, Danish, and Norwegian academics teaching in a wide range of disciplines that fall under the rubric of the visual arts. In our globalized world, the role of the artist is shifting toward a new model of collaborative inquiry, interdisciplinarity, and technological exploration. Simultaneously, the role of the humanities is being scrutinized within the corporatized university system, and the PhD has begun to emerge as a potential new terminal degree for university-level teaching in the visual arts. These concurrent events have unsettled the status quo of undergraduate and postgraduate art programs, and raised the question of how to best prepare a new generation of artists to practise in the twenty-first century.

While some of the issues discussed in the essays are regionally specific—for example, the discussion of the effects of the forced amalgamation of art schools with universities in Australia in 1990, and the analysis of the effect of the 1999 Bologna Declaration on European institutions—these discussions remain informative as comparisons to the Canadian system. Buckley and Conomos, the Australian editors, reflect positively on the decision of Canada's stand-alone art and design colleges, including Emily Carr University of Art + Design and Ontario College of Art and Design, to transition to university status while maintaining their independence. They note that this conversion allowed independent Canadian art and design schools to avoid the profound damage suffered by Australian art and design schools when they were forced into "arranged marriages" with universities. However, while independent institutions such as NSCAD, OCAD, ACAD, and Emily Carr University may have avoided the pitfalls of the arranged marriage, the reality is that these institutions are exceptions to the rule of the art department housed within the university, which remains the norm in schools across Canada. Thus, the conditions that Buckley and

Conomos diagnose in the Australian system are likewise present in Canadian art departments to varying degrees.

In two separate essays, Buckley and Conomos cite the example of Rhode Island School of Design's early twentieth-century situation of the education of artists in "institutions with a strong vocational mission": the principles of art applied to the "requirements of trade and manufacturing" (81, 88). They suggest that this history, which privileges hand skills and utilitarian pursuits over academic challenge and debate, continues to cast a prejudicial shadow over the inclusion of the arts within universities. With the decline of modernism, and its mythic construction of the artist as an isolated, individualist genius, new models for art education have emerged that stress interactivity, inter- and transdisciplinarity, and collaborative approaches. The crux of the problem the editors describe is the incongruity of situating art education in the top-down, market-driven world of the twenty-first-century university, where creative engagement and critical thinking often take a back seat to professional training and quantifiable success—a "dumbing down" of the institution. In this environment, there is an extreme disjuncture between what non-artist academics define as research (work that is measurable, factual, and results-based), and the creative work that artist academics and their students undertake (work which is experiential, intuitive, and open-ended). In the worst case scenario, this dichotomy leads art departments inside universities to be marginalized and alienated within the increasingly corporatized culture of the institutions that house them. The problem is intensified when non-artists, who lack knowledge of contemporary art pedagogy—or worse, who are "contemporary artphobes"—make up the senior management of the institution. Buckley and Conomos ask whether art and design schools would fare better as stand-alone institutions; within ideal, hermetic institutions, different perimeters for research would be established, and different criteria for success would be prioritized. However, they also raise the possibility that the art school inside the university harbours the potential to be a model of the university at its best. Art academics and art students potentially can play valuable roles in the institution when they raise oppositional questions, provoke debate, and challenge the status quo. The artist who is an experimenter and an innovator is uniquely positioned to function as an interdisciplinary practitioner, connecting disparate fields, and forming coherent visions and understandings of complex systems of knowledge.

Other authors in the collection concur with the editors' analyses of the changing role artists in society, and analyze both the pitfalls and the potentials inherent in this rapidly shifting landscape. For example, in his essay, "Art, Design, and Beyond," Luc Corchesne of the School of Industrial Design at the Université de Montréal addresses the challenge of integrating theory