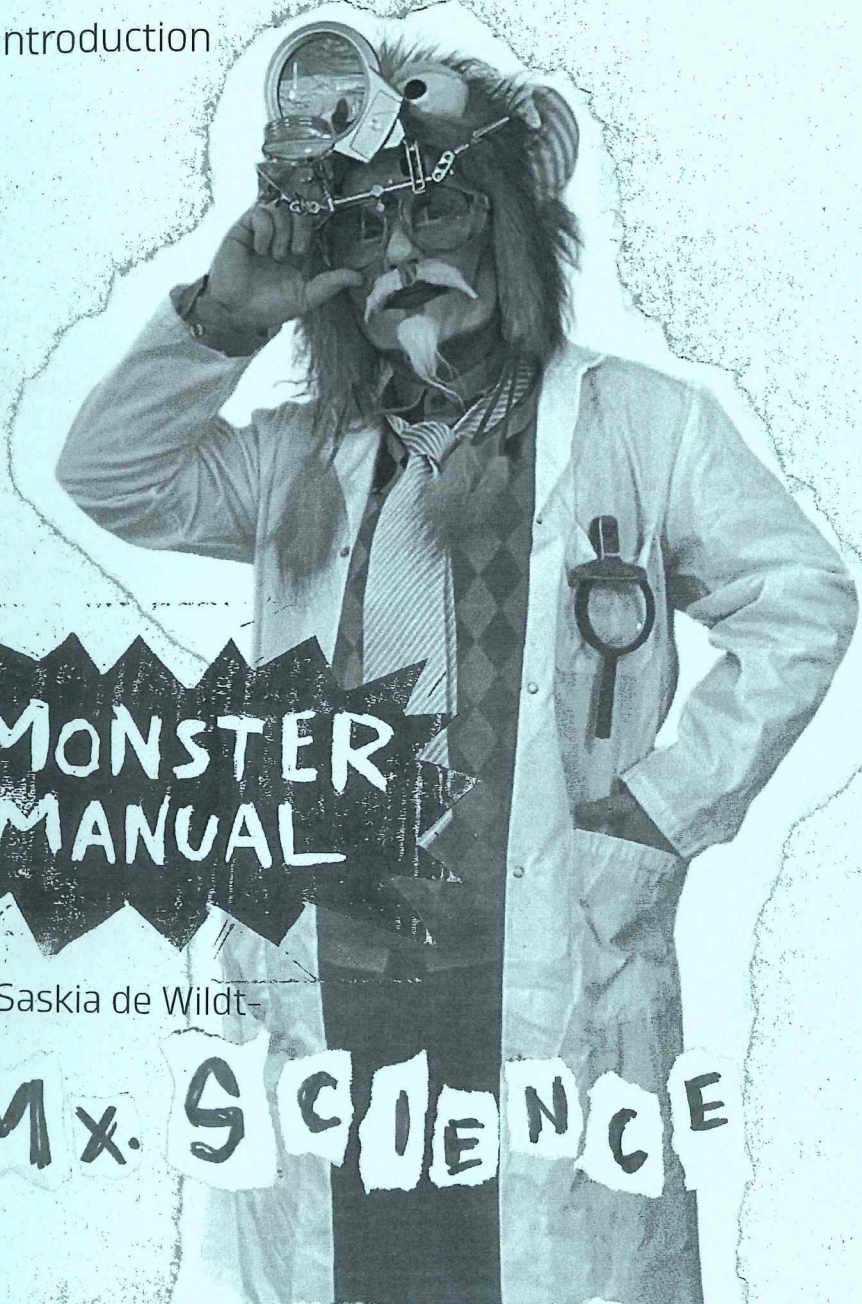


# How to Think With Monsters

An introduction



MONSTER  
MANUAL

By Saskia de Wildt

M x . S C I E N C E

Oh, hello,

What you are holding in your hands is not “just” a monster manual – it’s a *zine*. Zines are commonly self-published creations, emerging from a long tradition of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) practices. As a medium, it is inherently democratic; anyone can make one. You don’t need a computer or a printing press, nor do you need to be an artist to make one! This one was made by using a combination of collages, drawings, lino-cuts, stamps, paper transfers, a little photoshop, a lot of cutting and pasting, a scanner, staples, papercutter and a printer.

This monster manual is designed to be a collaboration between you (the reader) and me (the author). This zine is now **yours**; make notes in it, doodle across its pages, cut it, shred it, re-use it, re-purpose it. Follow instructions – or not. Fold a paper airplane out of its pages.

Engage as you desire.

This zine was created in the spirit of transformation. Help it live up to its purpose.

Scan this QR-code to view the latest edition of this living document:



This monster manual/zine was written and designed by Saskia de Wildt during their research fellowship at the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS).  
(email: saskia.de.wildt@rifs-potsdam.de)

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## WHY A MANUAL ON THINKING WITH MONSTERS?

Can monsters teach us anything? And what is a monster exactly?

So many questions – so little time!

You have very likely received this manual from Mx. Science herself. You might have met them at a scientific conference, at a project meeting or when they were wandering down the halls of your research institute.

More often, than not, an encounter with Mx. Science leaves a trail of questions and confusion. Remaining with questions is not a bad thing – the vulnerability of uncertainty holds a lot of transformative potential – especially in spaces where certainty rules. Having lots of unanswered questions is, however, a common experience for many who have met Mx. Science. For those who remain curious, and want to know more, Mx. Science has created this manual.

Will it answer all your questions? No. But, will it at least explain how thinking with monsters is relevant within your scientific research? Also: No.

This monster manual is for those that *believe* in the transformative power of research and science, but are always a little lost when thinking how they fit into these structures themselves. For those researchers who are always looking for that *particular* space within their research in which they can bring their full selves, their bodies, their communities, their desires, their stories. This monster manual is for them: it aims to be a little paper playground for those who are seeking to remain themselves, as they respectfully engage with others.

Mx. Science believes that when we look a monster deep into its many slitted eyes, there is a good chance we might end up seeing parts of ourselves.

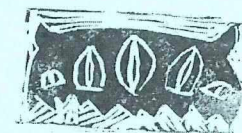


Figure 1: Lino cut monster eyes



**You will enter monstrous terrain in the next couple of pages!**

Let's set some ground rules, shall we?

### **MONSTERS EXIST BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN THEM**

The monster is a social construct; the monster comes into being the moment it is called a monster.<sup>1</sup>

### **MONSTROSITY IS RELATIVE**

The monster exists in a given context. Monsters are what *shouldn't* be – but nevertheless exists. They threaten particular systems of categorizations of the self and its relationship to the world. What may be seen as monstrous within one culture, may thus not be monstrous for another culture.

### **THE MONSTER DOES NOT MIRROR IT INTERFERES WITH OUR SELVES**

Contemporary monster theory no longer focusses on the morphological qualities of monstrosity, but asks how subjects are “monsterized” and what the implications of such processes are for both those considered, and those considering, the monster.

### **THE VULNERABILITY OF UNCERTAINTY HOLDS A LOT OF TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL - ESPECIALLY IN SPACES WHERE CERTAINTY SEEKS TO RULE**

Stay with the trouble. Sit with discomfort. Don't normalize, don't erase. Engage. Follow your desires.

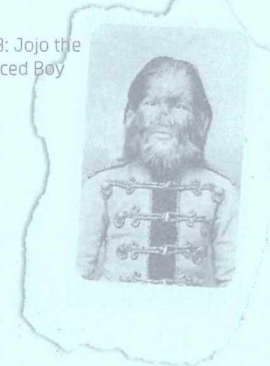


Figure 2: The Kraken



### **HYBRIDS**

Figure 3: Jojo the Dog-Faced Boy



### **MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES**



Figure 4: Monstrous Races



Figure 5: The Monster of Ravenna

### **POLITICAL MONSTERS**

### **THE SUPER NATURAL**

Those that are “monsterized” for political gain/purposes

# BEWARE

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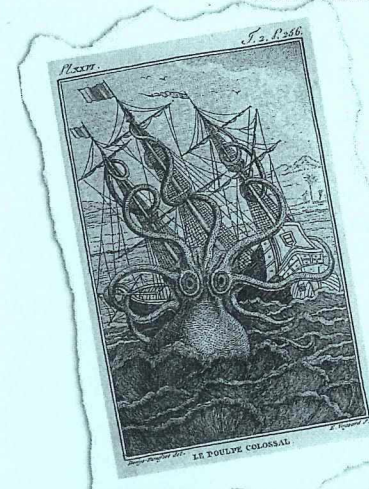
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## THE SUPER NATURAL

## POLITICAL MONSTERS

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## Your Guide Through the Fabulous World of Transformative Monstrosity:

# MX. SCIENCE

Mx. Science is character, a persona, a figure – a fabulation –, some would even say; a “monster”. Their presence might feel a little a little uncanny to some. What is this blue creature doing at my conference? Why are they dressed this way in a professional setting? Isn't research supposed to be serious, neutral and objective? Are they making fun of me? Or, of science?

Great! Keep asking questions! And let them guide you into contemplating your own presence in different scientific spaces... What kind of masks/costumes do you bring to your research? What would a sense of humour, or fun bring to your research? How weird is science? And how weird is your presence in any given space?

Mx. Science has taught me, Saskia de Wildt, a lot. Although there is no clear-cut boundary between me and Mx. Science, we are not the same. Nor is there a markable point where “Saskia” ends and “Mx. Science” begins. There is no “authentic self” somewhere under these layers of make-up.

In other words; Mx. Science is not reducible to questions of sameness and difference but is rather born from a place of liminality; *the in-between*.

This *in-between* -where the monster lives – is a place outside of categories.

Neither one, nor the other. The in-between cannot be represented. It exists within a gesture, an encounter, or action.

Such ambiguity can be a disorienting and scary place for some, intolerable to even imagine – let alone face).

When confronted with such an other-worldly monster we are often left with two responses; **fear or desire.**<sup>1</sup>



Figure 6: The Great White Beast

### Common responses to scary monsters:

**#1: Trying to understand it, by assimilating it into existing or altered epistemological frameworks.**

**#2 Stamping it out of existence**

The in-between is not a static place; it is a doing, a being, a response...

- 
1. Flip to the inside of the back cover, to find a piece of carbon paper
  2. Place the carbon paper on the empty space above (black side down)
  3. Carefully cut the line on the left of this text until halfway the page
  4. Fold this page along the dotted line above, so that the backside of this page flips over to the front



By tracing these words, you have just performed (the) in-between. Neither the mark left on page 5, nor the traces of graphite/ink on the bottom of this page (6) by themselves, however, can accurately represent the action you just performed. This page may be argued to contain a material trace of your original action. However, page 5 cannot be said to represent its results, or even a copy of that action. It rather holds a transfer. A gesture towards the event of something happening in-between page 5 and 6.

It's in this fleeting moment; within an action as it happens, somewhere in-between page 5 and 6 – where the monster lives. Look at the carbon paper, you might find a ghost imprinted on its surface.



5. Take a pencil or a pen and trace over the words below.
6. Keep the page folded

## SOOOOO, HOW SCARED SHOULD WE BE OF THE MONSTER?

Perhaps, the “monster” is kind of special – extra-ordinary even – in its ability to live, sometimes even *thrive* outside of the categories and spaces within which the rest of us try to move through life.

Maybe we can learn something from “monsters”?



Figure 7: Collage  
Tranimal I

# INAPPROPRIATE/D OTHER

Perhaps this monster does not long to be seen. Does not need to be fixed. Does not have a true inner self, and has no wish to (re) turn (to) "normal".<sup>1</sup>

The monster is, like nature, ultimately that what cannot be simplified, or possessed.

Can you think-with its logic of inner differentiation? Outside of modernist taxonomy?

Can you move with its constant redefining of the world? Dance its dance of self-affirmation?<sup>2</sup>



Figure 8: Collage  
Tranimal II

Next time you encounter people, animals, or any other kind of being that does not neatly subscribe to the world as you know it, resist trying to "understand" it! Move away from cognitive rationality, and all its static concepts.

Try not to neutralize it!

Don't segregate its complexities.

First move from a place of fear towards sensing your desires:

Follow your curiosity, scepticism, suspicion, repulsion. What do you feel, when you are not trying to place it - fix it?

<sup>1</sup> Trihn T. Mihn-ha (1986)

<sup>2</sup> Nirta (2021)

# BECOMING OTHER

Whether we fear or desire the monster. Our strong affective responses to encountering one speaks to what such a monster tells us about ourselves.

Let's allow it to transform us.

Becoming other is not a dress up party. It doesn't require layers of make-up – and it is most definitely not about copying or imitating.

Becoming other is to move with our desires and vulnerabilities, it is about joy, and about listening and responding to others...

Consider your encounter with Mx. Science an invitation to contemplate whether all that you might have found odd, weird, **wonderful**, monstrous, uncomfortable or glorious about Mx. Science- may also reside in you...

Figure 9: You

What if we follow our desires, and could become somehow the monster-researcher of our dreams?

Use this space to come as you are: collage, sketch, use the tracing paper, cut and fold the researcher you want to be into existence– heck, even cut holes, add string, or bring the carbon paper back in again!

Ask yourself when you look at your creation: what boundaries/barriers does this "monster" devour without thinking about it twice – by just being.

What boundaries does your "normal" self struggle with when you do research?

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# QUESTIONS

**Dear Mx. Science,**

**The first time I met you, I felt:**



**You made me think about:**

Figure 10: Mx. Science

I would very much appreciate you sending me pictures of your answers, collages, carbon transfers and other interaction with this zine. Your input will be used to inform my research at the RIFS institute, and may be used to create new editions of this zine. If in either of those cases I would like to reference your input, I will reach out for your explicit consent.

Please send any pictures and/or questions you may have to [Saskia.de.wildt@rifs-potsdam.de](mailto:Saskia.de.wildt@rifs-potsdam.de)

Scan this QR code for more information about my research.



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