

◆ Introduction

Freakish Encounters: Constructions of the Freak in Hispanic Cultures

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What is a freak? There have been a multiplicity of possible approaches to the concept of this figure. The freak has frequently been organized around the principles of hybridity, excess, and absence; the transgressive; the representation of alterity; the visually different; the unpredictable; the anomalous; and a magnet for anxieties, questions, and needs. What undergirds all these constructions is society's desire to encapsulate and frame this figure within the realm of difference: bodies that defy the status quo of human embodiment and morality. This eagerness to affix the unexpected body to certain stable categories has continually impeded understanding of the diversity embodied within this figure as our social and cultural values constrain it from being exhibited through multiple manifestations. Therefore, as a social and cultural category, the freak should be defined in terms of instability, mobility, and porousness, as it is impossible to assign any fixed label to the category. Herein lies the richness of such a dynamic concept, which must be understood in terms of the cracks and interstices of its own cultural manifestations. This volume aims to blur any existing objective categories, to bend them in order to expand the notion of freakishness to other types and figures that are prevalent and problematic in Hispanic cultures. We propose an interdisciplinary perspective to study the figure of the freak with contributions from the fields of literature, theater, film, photography, television, and other forms of art.

Since the last third of the twentieth century, works regarding the figure of the freak have proliferated, although these studies pertain mainly to the English-speaking academic field. Leslie Fiedler's pioneering book *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (1978) was the first to analyze canonical figures such as Hester Prynne and Captain Ahab by attributing equal cultural import to freak-show staples such as the Bearded Lady. Of course, this was

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a highly controversial comparison at a time when most academics sought to “protect” high art from the onslaught of the marketplace and mass culture. The field of freak studies was complemented by later works such as Robert Bogdan’s *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (1988), which examines the social history of freak shows from 1840 to 1940 with a particular emphasis on the “manufacturing” of freakish bodies by the amusement industry, often with the willing participation of the freaks themselves. Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s groundbreaking anthology *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (1996) gives center stage to the figure of the freak from different perspectives: from literature, film, and history to music, talk shows, and tattoos. Her innovative study *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) examines the construction of abnormality in American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as exclusionary discourses produced by hegemonic culture. Rachel Adams’s *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (2001) explores the body of the freak as a stage for understanding twentieth-century social and political concerns such as immigration, race, and gender. These studies suffice to demonstrate the many debates surrounding this controversial figure. In the words of Garland Thomson:

What can be called freak scholarship has several important conversations: First is the cause of the freak show’s demise; second is whether the shows provided dignity with employment that medicalization robs people of; third is whether the shows ended or just shifted into other venues. In brief, Robert Bogdan says medicalization eliminated freak shows; Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that sentimentality also helped end the freak show; Rachel Adams, Jeffrey Weinstock, and Andrea Dennett say it shifted forms. (“Staring at the Other” n.p.)

The lack of agreement regarding this figure does not take away from the fact that this field of study is now an accepted and well-received area of analysis within the US academy, as shown by a burgeoning number of publications.

However, few critics in the Spanish and Latin American academic realm use the term *freak* in their analysis of corporeal difference or in their approaches to subjects that lie outside the norm. As Susan Antebi says in her essay “Blindness and Freakishness,” published in the online journal *Literal*, “there are no freaks in Latin America or its literature, technically speaking, because the word ‘freak’ itself is an English word” (27). The same can certainly be said of Spain too. Indeed, the word is an untranslatable term in Spanish, the

most widely used synonym being “anormal” (abnormal). But a freak is more than that. The word *freak* originated in the mid-sixteenth century to refer to a “whim,” and it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the term came to describe a narrative of deviance. Does this mean that there are no freaks in Spain and Latin America or their cultural products? Certainly, we do not have a Charles Dickens with his *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the literary work responsible for popularizing the term *freak* in the modern English-speaking world. But we do have José Martí, who became familiar with the strange context of US freak show spectacles when he visited Coney Island in the late nineteenth century. He makes passing reference to this experience in his chronicle *Coney Island*, and it is important to note that he fails to use the word *freak*, using the opposition between “us” and “them” instead. He simply refers to what he witnesses during his walk, a series of what he perceives as monstrous human and animal bodies: “[h]uman monsters, freakish fish, bearded ladies, melancholy dwarfs, and rickety elephants” (166). The freak remains an unexplored topic of academic research in Spanish and Latin American cultural production, with the exception of Susan Antebi’s book on Spanish American literature (*Carnal Inscriptions: Spanish American Narratives of Corporeal Difference and Disability*, 2009) and María Arnedo’s unpublished manuscript *Locura, freaks y demás elementos grotescos en la literatura de Javier Tomeo y en imaginario colectivo* (2008). The contributions to this volume aim to fill this gap.

To better understand the emergence and significance of the freak in the Hispanic world, as well as to recognize the existence of freakish bodies throughout history, we find it important to trace a brief genealogy of difference from the classical period until modern times, always keeping in mind that what has changed throughout different historical periods is the terminology used to describe these bodies along with the gaze through which society views and constructs the meaning behind these figures. It is also important to emphasize the symbolic movement from monster to freak in order to draw lines of continuity between them and establish the critical distinctiveness of the term *freak* and its derivatives. Humans have always been fascinated with different bodies. As Fiedler has clearly stated, the strangely formed body has always represented absolute otherness in our collective imaginations, regardless of time or place as we compare our own realities (our bodies) to the unknown. Thus, bodies that lack predictability disquiet us, and we demand explanations that will allow us to regulate those exceptional bodies within our narratives of the world.

In classical times and up to the medieval era, the different body was direct evidence of a disruption in the natural order. One has only to think of abnormal births, often considered religious omens that required study, as they could be symbols of upcoming fatalities or prophetic signs. Aristotle considered anomalous births to be monsters (*terata*), and his classifications of them gave

rise in the seventeenth century to the science of teratology—that is, the study of abnormalities in physiological development. These first careful studies of difference identified monstrosity in terms of excess, defect, or hybridity. The divine significance of the exceptional body continued to exert a fascination beyond the classical era since, as manifestations of the portent of the gods, such bodies allowed humanity to imagine, reconsider, and revise its notion of the natural order of things. The study of nature’s monsters was of great importance to Renaissance-era empirical science, as it afforded the opportunity to closely examine all aspects of nature, including the hidden mysteries that lurked beyond humanity’s gaze.

The singular body has provoked reverence and dread, to such an extent that the Roman author Pliny’s descriptions of “monstrous races” as entities living at the edges of the world (India or Ethiopia) gave rise to a profound interest in races of men considered fabulous monsters that lasted from Greco-Roman times to the Latin Middle Ages. These monstrous races included mouthless hairy creatures, men with dogs’ heads, one-legged creatures, and wild men and women. They usually inhabited faraway lands that evoked mystery to the medieval mind; narratives about them revealed a marked ethnocentrism that made the observer’s culture, language, and physical appearance the norm by which to evaluate all other people. Roger Bartra explains how the notion of the wild man/woman, “a condition of a degenerate individual, far from the city, and fallen from grace” in Western civilization is a European invention that “conditioned the emergence of the notion (and praxis) of civilization” (*Artificial Savage* 14, 3). This idea was later transposed onto the indigenous cultures of the Americas along with the notion of barbarism. As Western Europeans shifted their interests from India and Africa to the so-called New World, perspectives on the monstrous races changed. First, the monstrous men of antiquity were reduced to a single figure—the hairy wild man—and second, this figure became conflated with the aboriginal people found in the New World. In other words, the physical characteristics (and, by extension, the fascination, fears, and anxieties that came with them) of the European monstrous races served to explain the “curiosities” of the New World. The savage man was already a part of European iconoclastic history, and in the colonial context his characteristics were easily applied to the “savage” populations that the conquerors encountered, as this was the only way these others could be understood.

In his seminal work *Canibalia* (2008), Carlos Jáuregui produces an exhaustive analysis of the ways in which the inhabitants of the Americas have been perceived throughout history as the eternal instance of monstrous difference, and analyzes the figure that best exemplifies this imagery: the cannibal. The cannibal is the eternal other who has always inhabited the exotic lands of the Americas. Cannibals evoked the Cyclops and cynocephali of ancient

times, who quickly evolved into the wild indigenous man who had to be enslaved to gain access to the gold and riches of that new land: “Cannibalism becomes the product of a tautological reading of the savage body: the cannibal is ugly and those who are ugly are cannibals. . . . Far from finding a moment of semantic appeasement, the *cannibal* constantly slides throughout a non-linear space: the space of colonial *différance*; a murky mirror in the figuration of the Other and the self” (14). And so the colonial gaze established a semantics of difference in which certain bodies are configured as liminal entities that can be understood only through their association with notions of monstrosity. In the Latin American context, freakery has been an integral part of an identity marked by colonialism. As Antebi would put it, the freak would be “an unfortunate man of color,” (“Blindness”) and thus a reference to a postcolonial history of violence inflicted upon the different body, one evoked as erotic, exotic, stereotyped Latin American.

While this construction of racial difference as savage monstrosity was maintained in the New World in an effort to continue the colonization process, there was a shift in Europe toward the end of the sixteenth century that led to the medicalization of the abnormal body. Of particular importance to the categorization of the monster as a medical specimen is the work of French surgeon Ambroise Paré, who in 1573 produced a treatise on all sorts of marvels, from conjoined twins to unicorns and sea devils. The importance of his efforts lies beyond their medical relevancy, since Paré’s work is a scientific and literary document that reveals his interest in the architecture of nature. Paré believed that his catalogue of monsters provided a study of deviations from the normal course of nature; they were counternatural phenomena. Therefore, the basis of study moved from wonder to error: the monstrous, by the seventeenth century, was no longer a divine warning, but a curiosity that delighted man’s fascination with strangeness. It could be said that Paré’s work planted the seed for a scientific interest in the European seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the form of medical museums and natural history repositories that “still resembled the old-fashioned cabinets of curiosities” (Bondeson vii) used in the sixteenth century to exhibit scientific discoveries of abnormal bodies and which in modern times included items that ranged from the natural to the fantastical: “The most curious and dissimilar objects were exhibited side by side: a dried mermaid, the shin bone of a giant, a unicorn’s horn, Egyptian mummies, and African natives’ gear . . . the skulls of hydrocephalics, and the death masks of famous men” (vii). It could be argued that the collections of material novelties and monsters of the early modern period are the direct predecessors of the freak culture of later centuries.

With the emergence of medical and scientific discourses in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a shift in the study and perception of difference inasmuch as there was a movement from the divine to the bio-

logical explanation of the different body, which gave rise to the concept of the freak for the first time in history. Garland Thomson explains it well: “As the nineteenth century progressed, the ever-worrisome freak was cast less in the language of the marvelous and explained more and more in the ascending scientific discourse of pathology” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 74). What can be observed here is a movement toward scientific reasoning regarding what constitutes normality and a growing fear of the unknown that led to categorizing abnormality as deviance. This emergence of deviant subjects from a medical perspective is closely related to the coining of the word “norm” in its modern sense, as “constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual,” as pioneering disability studies scholar Lennard Davis has explained (1). Davis identifies the appearance of the word in the English language around 1840 (by remarkable coincidence, also the historical date given for the emergence of the freak show). Before this, when the concept of normality didn’t even exist, it was the word “ideal” that was used in the seventeenth century to evoke the image of the divine body, an unattainable trait for humans. But alongside the rise of a number of phenomena such as industrialization and urbanization, and the emergence and consolidation of the middle classes in Europe, came the concept of “the average man” understood as “both a physically average and a morally average construct” (2). Everything outside this norm became abnormal. And it was precisely around this time that the word *freak* started to be used as a synonym for “human corporeal anomaly,” as Garland Thomson herself affirms (*Freakery* 4), and as a consequence, freaks burst into the social imaginary.

Of course, a society operating with the concept of the norm is crowded with freaks who resist the tyranny of the norm to affirm their deviant subjectivities from the margins of society—and it is because of these resistant subjectivities that norms exist. Indeed, it can be safely affirmed that norms are indebted to the abnormal. As Michel Foucault has shown, the norm is a limit that exists only when crossed or transgressed (“A Preface” 34). Freaks, then, are necessary for us to think about ourselves and our society, an idea already announced by Francis Bacon in the sixteenth century when he implied that it is through the careful understanding of “deviance” that one can hope to understand oneself, and not just that: freaks are “repositories of social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity” (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 6). It is from this obsessive social concern with complying with the norm that the enormous success of the celebrated freak shows of the nineteenth century should be understood. In the context of the turbulent transformations and social and political upheavals brought on by modernity, the freak show became a safe, contained space where an anxious audience could confront their own anxieties and fears as they gazed upon a body so extremely deviated from the norm that they could soothe their own

inner apprehensions about their capacity for normality.

In this context it is no coincidence that the history of the freak in the English world, in the sense of abnormality, is inevitably tied to the history of the freak show. The American freak show is a form of entertainment in which bodies are exhibited because of their physical deformities and/or perceived differences. P. T. Barnum inaugurated this lucrative form of entertainment in 1840 with his American Museum. Through his Ten-in-One exhibitions, the public was able to have a live encounter with a freak and later on speak to him or her as they bought autographed photographs from them. We acknowledge the enormous contribution of this American phenomenon to the outline of our own approach to freakery in the Hispanic world. Without question, the visual is an essential component of the freak show, while at the same time it is also an integral element in the culture of modernity. Susan Larson and Eva Maria Woods document this well in their volume *Visualizing Spanish Modernity* (2005), which posits the nineteenth century as a starting point for visual cultural studies. Of course, the descendants of the freak show would be “modern freaks” that still have an important place in visual culture and have been reinterpreted and resignified in the context of the turbulent forces of modernity (urban growth, new architectural designs, suburban expansion, rural migration, capitalist systems, industrialization, the onset of medical advances, etc.). Our interest in freaks derives from the fact that they are bodies that are not just recipients of actions and effects, but also agents that do things, communicate, incarnate pleasure, and inspire fear. For example, in the presence of the freak there is always an interplay of gazes: the freak is not only looked at, but also looks, establishing himself/herself as a subject with a powerful margin for action. Thus, the freak in the following pages acts as a complex and contradictory site of competing discourses, from conservative, even totalitarian and fascist regimentations of both the gaze and the body to the liberating potentiality of deviant reinscriptions of the same. Therefore, the freak authenticates him/herself as a valid subject that demands attention. This is a key point in this volume: we want to shift the perspective by conferring a central role or presence to marginal subjectivities.

It is tempting to link the field of freakery to that of disability studies. In fact, Benjamin Fraser’s pioneering work *Disability Studies and Spanish Culture: Films, Novels, the Comic and the Public Exhibition* (2013) is a welcome addition to the study of disabled bodies in Spanish cultural productions, the only existing study on the field to date. Although disability cannot be simply equated with freakdom, they share certain common traits such as visual and intellectual difference. In the case of both fields, the subjects that are studied have been socially constructed as being opposed to or lying outside the norm. That they are social constructions means that they are not objective existing realities, but instead are determined by the cultural contexts in which

they are produced and interpreted. Nevertheless, historically speaking, disability studies have been defined according to a medical model, viewed as a particular trait in the individual who physically or intellectually departs from notions of perceived normality (the blind, the limbless, the mentally handicapped, etc.). In recent years, there has been an attempt to open this model of study to incorporate a social and sociological aspect of disabilities (Fraser himself, Susan Antebi's work, and Tobin Siebers's *Disability Theory* are cases in point)—that is, disability has been understood as the lack of some people's access to social, economic, and other kinds of resources. Regardless, the concept of disability continues to be associated (in the popular imaginary) with a physical or natural condition related to a medical discourse and that, therefore, does not allow for much dialogue with other models beyond the physiological. To put it simply: intellectual, moral, economic, social, and other forms of difference might be neglected as they are normally overshadowed by physical disability, especially in Hispanic culture. While we recognize the overlap between disability and freak studies, we acknowledge that they are different areas that might or might not be in dialogue; but in this collection we tend to favor freak studies as an unexplored category that includes areas that go beyond physical disabilities—with their social interpretations and constructions—that are determined by biological or medical phenomena. This is the freak we will be working with: not just the physical oddity but also the morally and socially deviant—as Davis points out, “criminals, the poor, and people with disabilities . . . the ‘unfit’” (6)—in any case, a subject with undesirable traits according to the hegemonic cultural construction of the notion of normality.

So why are we interested in using the word *freak*, an untranslatable term with huge shock value for the reader? Our main aim is to expand the notions of the marginal beyond the established categories of otherness, thereby extending the umbrella of alterity to include other types of marginal subjectivities. We aim to examine the profusion of instances of the freak in the Hispanic world in all its connotations and manifestations: the grotesque, the deformed, the disabled, the visually/morally/socially excluded, the prostitute, the terrorist, the antihero, and the homosexual, among other types. We are interested in expanding this term to also include physiologically “normal” bodies that are dissident from normativity in other ways. In sum, our freak is everything that lies outside the “norm”—and therefore might be perceived as deviant—according to the official and legitimized discourse in a particular historical moment and in a specific cultural, social, and geopolitical context. A major intention of this volume is to outline the approaches to how the figure of the freak has been appropriated by artistic and critical discourses to produce sociopolitical interpretations in modern societies, turning the freak into a lucrative figure that, be it mocked, marginalized,

dehumanized, or admired, is an integral part of any society. The essays that make up this volume are cases in point.

We feel it is important to open with a traditional and historicist perspective on the most widely recognized notion of the freak: the freak show as a public space where the different body is exhibited for profit. Anthropologist Roger Bartra, in “El trágico viaje de una mujer salvaje mexicana al mundo civilizado,” examines the existential itinerary of Mexican Julia Pastrana, one of the most famous and horrendous embodiments of exotic monstrosity in nineteenth-century freak shows in the United States and Europe. With striking photographs, Bartra uses Pastrana as an image that produces both the fascination and fear necessary to maintain the capitalist establishment. The status quo is supported by the union between terror and alterity that reinforces the need for normativity. Pastrana’s tragic freak trip (from the numerous exhibitions, both in life and in death, to her burial in Mexico in 2013) serves as an excellent example of the objectification of the freakish body as a mode of consumption in a capitalist system. The next essay in our volume follows the same traditional reading of deviancy in a time prior to the use of the terminology employed to refer to freakish bodies. In his contribution, Luis Avilés allows us to acknowledge the potential overlap between the working notions of the freak and the monster, both to draw lines of continuity and to establish the critical distinctiveness of the term *freak* and its derivatives. Avilés brings to light the rich tradition of the culture of curiosities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by exploring different manifestations of the freak in the Spanish Golden Age (evident in words such as *monster*, *horror*, *weird*, and *strange*) and comparing them to the contemporary notion of *freakishness*. He pays special attention to three aspects associated with the word *freak* and its possible counterparts at the time: physical abnormality; psychological deviations produced by madness, drugs, or any other event having a psychological impact; and confrontation with strange, unusual and extravagant situations. Avilés focuses on a number of texts such as *Lazarillo*, *Don Quixote*, and “El licenciado Vidriera” to reflect on the value that this contemporary notion has for the interpretation of texts of the time. As Bartra has implied, the freak body transcends the physical to generate differences through a racialized body. While this type of body was usually presented in freak shows through the exotic mode, it also has had a tremendous impact on the way race has been deployed in the construction of Latin American identities from a Eurocentric perspective.

In “The Western Hemisphere’s Original Freaks: Indigenous Peoples and Doctrines of Dispossession,” Arturo Arias explores a number of sixteenth-century chronicles to examine how abject and violent representations from a Eurocentric perspective have shaped indigenous subjectivities from the Spanish invasion to the present. By rethinking freakdom from a decol-

onized perspective, Arias exposes how literary constructions of coloniality articulate a stigma that is encoded by race. Antonio Córdoba's "(De)Mythologizing the Disabled: Chilean Freaks in Roberto Bolaño's *El Tercer Reich* and *Estrella distante*" continues in the same vein, emphasizing the power of construction/deformation conveyed by the Western gaze. In his article, Córdoba places the male protagonists of two Bolaño novels (one of them posthumous) in dialogue to trace the discursive movement of freak identities in the author's work. The two characters are linked by their disability as the main aspect based on which a Eurocentric hegemonic gaze determines their processes of subjectivity. Córdoba's main focus is on the application of freak theory to Latin American realities in order to decontextualize the homogenizing or European gaze that construct certain racialized bodies as freaks. Gender identity is also a powerful feature in the articulation of difference from a colonialist perspective. In an innovative coauthored essay titled "La vagina-ojo y otros monstruos gineco-escópicos," Carlos Jáuregui and Paola Uparela Reyes examine the heterogeneous "Canibalia" exhibition, shown in Paris in February 2015. Focusing on a piece by Candice Lin, they approach the concept of anthropophagy from a sexual and gender perspective inasmuch as this vaginal sculpture consumes the observer while being consumed by him or her. They claim that Lin's aim is to take viewers out of their comfort zone with a freakish sculpture that prompts them to look at and disrupt the androgynous observation of female genitalia. As such, not only do the authors invite us to rethink power relations in a colonial relational system, but they also use art as a way to question and resignify the complex historical and symbolic relationship between the human eye and female genitalia. Gender continues to be an object of concern for several of our contributors. Josefina Alcázar, in "Performance art: El cuerpo *freak* de Rocío Boliver (La Congelada de Uva)" considers how performance artists manipulate and transform the body as a means to subverting cultural, social, and political norms. To that end, she turns to Mexican performance artist Rocío Boliver, known as "La Congelada de Uva," to show how her porno-erotic performance functions as a new space of subjectivity that claims freak bodies as sites of resistance and social criticism. This allows the artist to challenge the patriarchal system that upholds heteronormativity as the canonical, established model.

In a similar vein, Julia Chang crosses the Atlantic to examine *la mujer varonil*, or masculine woman, as a recurrent figure in the Spanish realist novel. A monstrous manifestation of womanhood, so-called masculine women were treated by nineteenth-century medical practitioners as abhorrent violations of the laws of nature. They were usually conflated with the figure of the prostitute as a sexually agentic woman who operated in a male-dominated public sphere and was ultimately seen as unmarriageable. Through feminist criticism and nineteenth-century medical literature, Chang approaches Bénito

Pérez Galdós's landmark novel *Fortunata y Jacinta* to explore the prostitute and alcoholic Mauricia la Dura as embodying masculine features that create a striking resemblance between her and the young Napoleon Bonaparte. Here, masculine femininity is treated as both enticing and inflected by a fetishization of French imperial power. In line with Bartra's essay, the figure of the *mujer varonil* is a subject that is at once beautiful and monstrous. Ricardo de la Fuente's essay continues the discussion of nonconforming gender identities, but in this case he focuses on the feminized male body. De la Fuente starts by equating the figures of the dandy and the freak from the perspective of extravagance and eccentricity. Whereas the dandy was a nineteenth-century man distinguished by elegance and good taste, the freak emerged in modern times to replace and displace the former in the social and cultural imaginary as an example of excess and strangeness. For this purpose, de la Fuente uses the fin de siècle Guatemalan writer (émigré to Spain and France) Enrique Gómez Carrillo's singular and lavish personality to analyze a freakish character who projected his dandy freakishness onto his journalistic chronicles, writings that featured a variety of celebrities of the time who were characterized by issues of pathology, alienation, and social periphery. The inversion of gender roles is further problematized by Noël Valis, whose essay "Homosexuality on Display in 1920s Spain: The Hermaphrodite, Eccentricity, and Álvaro Retana" explores the homosexual writer as an example of the freak figure. She first offers a detailed and thorough history of the freak show in Spain and goes on to provide insights into the historical evolution of the concept of the monster. Valis focuses on the enormously popular Álvaro Retana as a persona and as an artist, a multilayered individual who both embraced and denied his status as an outsider and played with it in ways that contrast strongly with the traditional image of homosexuality. Valis links abnormality and uniqueness to the symbolic figure of the hermaphrodite as a classic expression of monstrosity to understand Retana's use of the dual dimension of the self to represent sexuality in his works. With her analysis, Valis brings to light a little-known individual and explores how he was regarded, how the homosexual figure was imagined in his writing, and how he invented himself as a freak in real life and in his work.

While Retana constructs himself as a character whose freakishness is to be consumed by the public in the media of the time (magazines, newspapers), the next series of essays examines the figure of the freak as an object of consumption in an expanding mass culture. Susan Antebi moves away from the freak figure to focus on disabled bodies in "Accounting for Disability in Mexico: Teletón and the Infantilization of Capital" In it, the author draws attention to the Mexican Teletón (a project of Televisa created as an organization dedicated to constructing rehabilitation centers for disabled children in Mexico) and the ways that explicit imagery of disabled children and rehabili-

tation technology highlights dilemmas specific to the contemporary Mexican political economy. Antebi argues that the representation of the hypervisibility of disabled children in Teletón productions underscores the troubling and ambiguous points of contact between public and private finance, especially in a context in which rehabilitation works through corporate sponsorship and in which Televisa is routinely accused of tax fraud. Disability studies scholar Benjamin Fraser continues to dwell on the representation of disability in the media by examining issues of disability and mobility in *El cochecito* (1960) by Marco Ferreri, a Spanish film that features two elderly characters, one disabled and one able-bodied, who travel through urban (and rural) Madrid. His essay, “Urban Difference ‘on the Move,’” deals with an (urbanized) mobility studies approach to trace the characters’ movements throughout the Spanish capital. As the author contends, this suggests the familiar image of a filmic Madrid of the late dictatorship that was very much culturally and physically “on the move.” Fraser moves away from representations of the freak to focus on disability studies, raising significant questions regarding who has a right to the city and how that right may be exercised in the cultural imaginary when it comes to bodies that lie outside the norm.

Along with television and film, the mediatized freak has also been a central element in popular culture. Such is the case of fairy tales. Mass media have appropriated and circulated many fairy tales to exploit a very specific paradigm of the desired object—in the form of princesses or beautiful, innocent girls—and the figure of the freak—monsters, wild beasts, witches. Alberto Sandoval opens his ingenious essay “Nuyorican Fairy Tales: Allegories of Existence and Bare Survival in Migdalia Cruz and Eddie Sánchez’s Theater” with an original approach to the fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast as a fundamental master narrative entangled in the articulation of Angloamerican subjectivity well inscribed in the American national consciousness. From here, Sandoval moves on to examining two works (*Fur* and *Icarus*) by contemporary Nuyorican playwrights Migdalia Cruz and Edwin Sánchez that make visible how processes of abjection, monstrosity, and enfreakment are semiotically set in motion in the embodied figure of the beast. Through these plays, Sandoval aims to undo and unlearn the fairy tale as a hegemonic Western paradigm for monstrosity.

We continue with the exploration of the freak in the media. Ángel Loureiro opens his essay with a shocking affirmation: the physical freak no longer exists, but the freak as a disturbingly deviant being has not yet disappeared. It lives in normal bodies and has become a psychological or a moral freak. This opening serves to introduce the importance of the freak in Pedro Almodóvar, a figure that Loureiro defines as the type of character that always strives to push the boundaries of the acceptable. Whereas in his early movies the measure of freakishness is still linked to the body, Almodóvar’s characters gradually

separate themselves from the norm more and more through moral behaviors that can be considered questionable or deviant and that evoke revulsion, as the physical freak, but also sympathy, because despite their deformities they are still human beings. For this, Loureiro examines *Hable con ella* (2002) with a focus on the character of Benigno to discuss social negotiations about “normality” primarily in a moral but also in a physical sense. His analysis illuminates how, when the moral limits of humanity are pushed and transgressed, the freak is born, with tragic consequences for the characters.

Tragic consequences work well to introduce our next contributions, which explore the violent potential found in moral deviation. In “La dialéctica de lo *freak*: Víctimas y terroristas en dos novelas españolas de principios del siglo XXI,” Gonzalo Martín de Marcos studies the terrorist as freak in the last three decades of Spanish history through the evolution of this figure, characterized by its progressive departure from normative codes in the legally established democracy in 1978. The Spanish Constitution grants broad recognition of rights to the País Vasco that had been denied during Franco’s dictatorship. However, murders, kidnappings, and extortion continued to exist. Despite the terrorist band’s (ETA) efforts to legitimize violence, the democratic consolidation of these years tended to marginalize terrorists. Martín de Marcos makes use of literature to consider how this symbolic space has transformed the image of the terrorist from a fighter against tyranny to a character that resolutely sits outside democratic society. He focuses on two Spanish novels: *Una belleza convulsa* (2001) by José Manuel Fajardo and *Ojos que no ven* (2010) by J. A. González Sainz. His analysis shows clearly how the Spanish cultural scene has contributed to the overcoming of terrorism through the conversion of the terrorist into a freak. Txetxu Aguado picks up the same thread in “España y sus monstruos: La memoria de la violencia terrorista.” He focuses on state terrorism to discuss the figure of the monster as an allegory of the anomalies of Spanish democracy following the Franco regime. The monster figure manifests itself as an uncanny deviation from what constituted the Spanish society until recently—a society formed by obedient citizens unable to decide which kind of society they wanted, by a public space that was seized by a violent and manipulative regime, and by a political and social system constructed on a framework of fear—all of which continues to permeate the social body of Spain today. In other words, Aguado chooses to use the word “monster” as one manifestation of the freak—one that is, according to him, the most deviant, horrific, and impossible to assimilate into the cultural imaginary. To make his point, he explores two cultural productions about terrorist violence: the film *Lasa y Zavala* (2014) by Pablo Malo and the documentary *1980* (2013) by Iñaki Arteta. Aguado’s conclusion is revealing: monsters are everywhere, and all healthy democratic societies should cultivate their own because they are very much needed. In the case of Spain, terrorism entails a monstrous

call for attention that is necessary to reveal the weaknesses and gaps of the foundation of democracy. Following up on Aguado's essay, it makes sense to conclude and close this freakish volume with Daniel Link's contribution on monsters as intrinsic parts of the "foundational fictions" that configure a nation. In "Seremos monstruos monstruosos," Link studies the works of the Argentine writer, cartoonist, and playwright Copi as an archive from which to reexamine the Argentinian national monsters as disturbing strategies for the implementation of mechanisms of normativity and as a way to understand processes of resistance to power.

The articles in this volume bring to light the profuse but critically neglected literary and visual representations of freaks in Hispanic cultural productions, especially in our modern era: the freak as social, political, and economic dissidence that is a fundamental component of our modern societies, though not exclusive to them. Monsters and freaks are necessary, regardless of geopolitical context, to re-create, denounce, question, and in many cases resolve symbolically the normative demands imposed by disciplinary societies. As the reader will infer as a corollary to the reading of this volume, one of the main characteristics of the freak resides in its fluidity, including and beyond the physical: the freak traverses boundaries of race, gender, class, and geography, which makes it a product of modernity. And, as Jo Labanyi argues, fluidity provides an image of a lack of differentiation that is both desired and feared (55). The freak is both desired and feared; it provokes identification and rejection in the observer, just as the fluidity that informs this figure does. Herein lies the seduction of the freak that has inspired us to organize this volume around it: *un sujeto que escapa a cualquier sujeción*.

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