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‘Monster’ and ‘monstrous’ have traditionally been used as pejorative terms, creating much pain and suffering for the people who have been labelled with them. At the same time, these terms have been cast opposite terms such as organization and organizing. Struggling to break free from these connotations without ending up in a moral relativism that would ignore the violence they exercise on humans and non-humans, this book has emerged out of my own struggle with becoming monstrous – others sometimes view me as monstrous, and I sometimes view myself as monstrous. Through this book I have therefore attempted to think the monstrous struggles that I and others are involved in beyond dominant norms of good and evil. Part of this struggle involves challenging the established opposition between monsters and organizations, and claiming the monstrous as a powerful term that can be used to pursue radically different ways of living, thinking, working and organizing. And part of it involves claiming the monstrous as a concept that is more telling of who we are. In other words, this book attempts to exercise ethics and politics beyond the rights and self-interests of individuals and unified identity groups, and exercise an ontology of organizational life beyond the stability of homogeneous essences.

While I may view myself as monstrous, I was first encouraged to explore the monstrous in relation to organizations and organization theory by Gibson Burrell, who was then my supervisor at the University of Warwick. At the time I wouldn’t have thought we talked much about monsters at all, but I have come to realize that the monstrous was somehow always embedded in what we talked about. It is difficult to see how I could have written this book without our conversations.

Since then, and before then, this book has also benefited from conversations I have had with numerous other people, not all of whom can be mentioned here. I am extremely grateful to the people I have had the benefit of writing with over the years. My joint writing projects with Steve Cummings, David Knights, Steve Linstead, Alison Pullen and André Spicer have provided creative involutions of heterogeneous ideas as well as important lessons in the craft of writing. If these skills have disappeared from this text I only have myself to blame. Moreover, I would like...
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to thank my friends and colleagues at Stockholm University School of Business, particularly Ali Yakhlef, for our conversations about organization, the body, and what it means to do organization theory while drawing on ideas from other disciplines. Further, I remain grateful to my PhD colleagues at Warwick Business School, for stimulating and provocative discussions and for lasting friendships.

The book has benefited from other people in more specific ways. Conversations with Keith Ansell Pearson and others at the University of Warwick Department of Philosophy have been invaluable in helping me develop my thinking on Gilles Deleuze. My friend the biologist Stanley Shostak has made sure that my discussion of the monstrous aspects of life, as expressed in contemporary biology and throughout the history of biology, has not been completely off the charts. And Ellen O’Connor has helped me better understand what was going on in the early years of organization theory and how it has affected what passes for organization theory today.

It may be obvious that this book has been long – and slow – in the making. I started developing my ideas about the monstrous in 2003 when I spent the spring semester as a visiting scholar at the University of Oregon Lundquist College of Business. I remain grateful to Alan Meyer in particular for his generosity. This visit enabled me to write my first paper on monstrous organization theory, which was published under the title ‘Living on the edge: Towards a monstrous organization theory’. I would like to acknowledge the publisher SAGE for letting me re-use parts of this paper in Chapters 1, 4 and 5 of this book. The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in Organization 13(2) March 2006 by SAGE Publications Ltd. © All rights reserved. I also acknowledge the publisher John Wiley & Sons for granting permission to re-use small parts of my chapter ‘Embodying transgender in studies of gender, work and organization’, published in 2011 in the Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization, edited by E. Jeanes, D. Knights and P. Yancey Martin, pp. 191–204.

Further on, I negotiated a book contract with Edward Elgar in 2005, but I did not start work on the book until November 2007. My thanks are due to my employer at the time, Växjö University, for allowing me to juggle my teaching schedule in such a way that I was able to kick-start the book during a research visit to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Isenberg School of Management. Marta Calás and Linda Smircich were wonderful hosts and generous commentators who immediately became wonderful friends. They gave me the opportunity to present my preliminary ideas to an engaging and supportive group at their Organizations, Institutions & Change seminar series, sponsored by the
journal Organization. My thanks go to the seminar participants for their incisive comments and suggestions.

Over the years, I have received generous funding from the Swedish Research Council, the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) and Stockholm University School of Business. Although this has also taken me into research projects that have diverted my attention away from writing this book, it could not have been written without their financial assistance. Indeed, I am grateful to my editor at Edward Elgar, Francine O’Sullivan, for her patience and for remaining committed to this book at times when I wasn’t. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the book proposal for encouraging me to continue, expand and elaborate my pursuit of monstrous organization theory and the monstrous organization, and for suggesting the title for this book. While commissioning a research monograph, Edward Elgar and my reviewers encouraged me to play with this format and have fun doing so. I can tell you, my only regret is that I didn’t start playing earlier, and that I all too willingly let other things interrupt.

Finally, it is impossible for me to dedicate this book to anyone but Louise, whose intellectual rigour and creativity help me think the monstrous, whose commitment and determination ensure that I never forget my own monstrosity, and whose love and companionship give me the best alliance for living monstrously – ever.