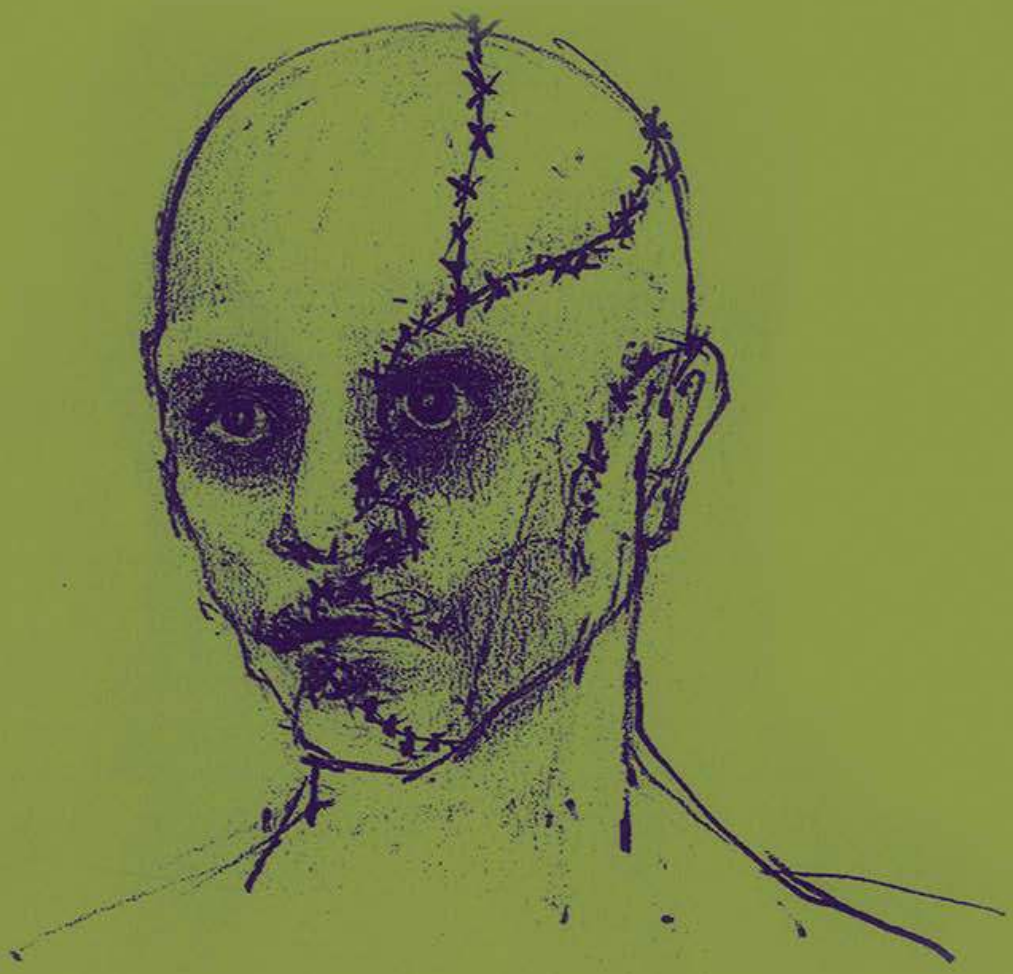
Friederike Danebrock

ON MAKING FICTION

Frankenstein and the Life of Stories



[transcript] Literary Theory

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On Making Fiction

Literary Theory | Volume 5

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Für Papa

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Introduction

Strange(r) Things: Fiction and *Frankenstein*

There is a curious incident in the first episode of the television series *Stranger Things*. The four teenage boys Will, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas are cut short in the middle of the *Dungeons & Dragons* session they are conducting in Mike's basement. The game ends, rather unfortunately, with a dice roll miscast on the floor. It's dinnertime, and the boys have to go home without finishing their campaign. Will, who has seen the number on the dice after all, reveals the truth to Mike before he leaves. The roll was a seven – not enough, according to the rules of the game, for him to be saved from a monster going by the name of Demogorgon. Standing safely on the porch of a suburban family home, young Will shrugs, rather disheartedly, and explains to his best friend: "The Demogorgon, it got me." Then he adds briskly: "See you tomorrow!" and pedals off into the night on his bike. "It got me": is this short-hand for 'it *would have* gotten me in the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*'? Or is it in fact a felicitous and appropriate description of the overall situation? Will seems to feel no contradiction in standing on his best friend's porch, physically unharmed, declaring quite seriously that he has been captured by a monstrous otherworldly creature. He presents the seven on the dice not so much as the indicator of an illusion but rather as a scary truth to be revealed in a quiet moment to a select audience. Contrary to what we might expect, Will doesn't behave as if he's facing airy make-believe on the one and solid reality on the other hand. It is rather as if he's facing two realities standing curiously side by side.

Stranger Things dissolves the strange tension of this scene in a setting where monsters turn out to be as real as high-school teachers – if from another dimension – so that Will's confession on the porch turns from weirdly intriguing statement into mere anticipation and irony, a hunch the boy seems to have had: Will is abducted by a creature not unlike the Demogorgon in his *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign and held captive in the "Upside Down," an alternate dimension that is subject to certain physical restrictions but no less part of reality for that. On the night of the interrupted game, however, when Will speaks, without knowing the fate that will befall him in the near future, of the role-play game monster that "got" him, no such revelations about the 'real' workings of the universe are necessary for his words to make perfect sense. The seven on the dice, going down at the hands of the Demogorgon, the innocent bickering between friends, the average scenery of an average evening in an average US-American town sometime towards the end of the 20th century, dinner, riding home on your bike – all those components are there at the same time, and this is only a contradiction from a certain point of view, namely, if we insist that there is one reality, and in this reality, only certain things are 'really there,' and all the other things, while in some way 'there,' aren't quite 'real' for all that.

Other ways of understanding existence are conceivable, though, such that existence is neither hierarchised, nor mythicised: such that we need not submit the seven on the dice and the rise of the Demogorgon to a sharp, binary distinction where one is a hard fact and the other an insubstantial illusion, but that neither need we embrace the two as one and the same thing. Instead, we can follow a line of thought which spells out 'reality' as the co-existence of different ways of being in the world, each with its own conditions, of which now one, and now the other may step into focus and receive priority. This makes Will's sombre reaction to what is 'only a game' – a game that is over, too – seem much more appropriate. We need not satisfy ourselves with a melancholic reference to the remnants of childlike enthusiasm in early adolescence to explain Will's reaction: his demise at the hands of the Demogorgon in the game might be 'made up,' that is, brought about by specific procedures, behaviours, beliefs and under the requirement of the cooperation

of all the people involved – but this is not altogether different for the circumstance that he will go to school tomorrow. This is not to say that the two are entirely the same thing: the *Dungeons & Dragons* monster is quite unable to bring serious harm to the Will who expects he will go to school tomorrow once the boy has stepped outside of the game, abandoned its utensils, and been left by his fellow players, that is, it is unable to harm Will outside the game in the way it would harm him inside its confines. (In the same way, of course, are we invulnerable to the horrors of *Stranger Things*' fourth dimension once we switch off our televisions and laptops and go to bed.) Will's genuine dismay however, the fine line he seems to be walking with ease when he announces that the Demogorgon got him, *and* that he will go to school tomorrow, does invite us to rethink the dichotomous and hierarchical approach we take to the world, according to which there is tangible, reliable reality on one side and its report, representation, reflection or reconfiguration on the other – and it is ultimately the first part that really matters.

I am interested in this view because it helps me to approach a particularly notorious candidate, which is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its numerous offspring, a selection of which I will examine in detail. In turn, *Frankenstein* helps to examine the potential of a modal, processual concept of fiction which fits into such an understanding of existence as I have just indicated. Fiction and *Frankenstein*, in fact, can help illuminate one another, which is what I aim to make happen over the course of this book. *Frankenstein* suggests with particular insistence that fiction is a productive and not a merely reflective affair. After all, the story of *Frankenstein*, and with it the creature it tells about, have reappeared with extraordinary insistence in all kinds of contexts and media over the past 200 years and consistently escaped our attempts to pin them down, once and for all. This reappearance, moreover, makes for a striking correspondence between the conditions of the text in its sequences of cultural production, and the conditions of existence which hold for its central creature, the monster. *Frankenstein*, the story about making a living being out of body parts which have already seen at least one other life cycle, presents itself, as popular cultural phenomenon, as a sprawling net of adaptations that keeps growing, using the old to generate the new. The

reproduction that *Frankenstein* describes, therefore, is a process that is not contained by the boundaries of its text (or texts). Rather, reproduction, as the phenomenon which is the central issue *in* the story, is at the same time also a process that *the story itself* undergoes again and again. It is precisely the process of fiction itself that is at stake in *Frankenstein*'s curious double reproduction, for it is in the practice of reproduction that 'the real world' and 'the fiction' – or what commonly passes as each – meet. What the story says 'inside itself' is what it does 'with itself' or 'outside of itself.' Something, then, must be going on with these boundaries that escapes from view if we insist on fiction as secondary representation of life (or world, or reality). *Frankenstein* inhabits a curious existential-aesthetic space in which theme and practice coincide.[1] It constitutes, in Michel de Certeau's words, "an act [it] intend[s] to mean" (80). We can therefore question *Frankenstein* for the productive relation between life and fiction; and *Frankenstein* in turn can serve as occasion for fleshing out what it means to understand fiction, in all seriousness, as generative process in its own right. This seems like an attempt worth making not least because *Frankenstein* is notoriously readable as 'standing for' anything and everything, a quality that has led to a mix of fascination and dissatisfaction in criticism. In the face of this mixture of weariness and over-interpretation, an attempt to get back to the ontogenetical capacities of fiction – how *Frankenstein* is able, to begin with, to make the meaning that we struggle so much to figure out – seems well worth pursuing.

Frankenstein, however, isn't only fiction, it is, more specifically, *narrative* fiction (at least in the majority of its incarnations). My concern is therefore more specifically with the productive capacity of stories. Not all fiction is narrative and not all narrative is fiction. But if there is any way of getting at fiction not as a category – supposedly secondary to life as such, into which existing objects or items of discourse either fall or don't fall – but as one of many life practices – productive, but not in the sense of bringing forth fixed and finished items –, then it is likely to be

1 I owe this formulation to a much-appreciated personal comment by Vittoria Borsò.

found through a form of fiction which is emphatically progressive.[2] For narrative, after all, the way in which we get somewhere (the route, the trajectory) is at least as important as what we're actually getting to (the goal, end, or closure). This quality is what I would like to emphasise by preferring, more often than not, the term 'story' over that of 'narrative fiction' or even 'literature.' 'Story' has a versatile, pre-theoretical quality that isn't too strongly affixed to any specific medium or genre, nor does it of necessity imply certain artistic qualities. 'Stories,' loosely defined, are reports of occurrences, arranged for the purpose of their transmission (as the traditional narratological distinction between story and discourse indicates), where we cannot directly identify the occurrences reported in what we understand to be reality. This, however, is not a full explanation of what stories are or what they do. It rather captures the place of stories in current common-sense ontology (the ontology, that is, that moves between the poles of 'the real' – commonly cited examples: stones, tables – and 'the imaginary' – commonly cited examples: Odysseus, magic spells). It is the task of the following pages to figure out, with the help of *Frankenstein*, how this understanding of stories might be extended, modified, and fleshed out.

It follows from this line of reasoning that the investigation at hand will frequently emphasise the figure of the monster over other elements of *Frankenstein*. A common remark has it that Frankenstein's monster has 'a life of its own' in (Western) popular culture. It is worthwhile examining this seemingly metaphorical remark for more literal meaning: what is the life of Frankenstein's creature if it isn't simply a flight of fancy, a projection screen on which people record their concerns with their own

2 The term 'practice' is meant to indicate that one way or another, one gets to *do* something with, in, and for fiction. Western philosophy knows a wide variety of concepts for such doing; the Aristotelian distinction between *poiesis* (making) and *praxis* (acting) being only one prominent conceptualisation. I will gloss over such distinctions to a certain degree and use the term rather liberally because fictional practice seems to unite several aspects, being – for instance – a bit too goal-oriented to fit the criteria for *praxis*, and yet not goal-oriented enough for *poiesis* (the etymology of 'poetry' notwithstanding). The important point is that fiction is active, transformative, contingent.

existences and from which, in due time, they read those same worries off again? If the life of the monster isn't as transparent as this understanding suggests, but far more opaque, contingent, curious and complex; and at least in this respect no less intriguing, alien, changeable, and scary than our human-animal others' lives are to us? In Mary Shelley's novel, the creature's skin famously "scarcely cover[s] the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (39), so that the body – the creature's body, but by implication the body as such, 'the body' as one of the categories by which we frame what it means to exist – loses its self-evidence, its quality of being naturally given. In a broader sense, this principle of exposing how something comes into existence, thereby revealing categories to be processes, can be attributed to quite a few of the adaptations that make up the *Frankenstein* complex, and it is for the sake of this potential that the texts for this investigation have been selected.

Mary Shelley's novel questions what it means, not only to speak from the margins, but what it means to speak to begin with. There is a constant struggle, in this 1818 (and 1831) text, over who gets to be narrator, who gets to make meaning; a struggle resulting in the novel's intricate architecture of narrative frames. The scene on which this struggle is decided – if it is decided at all – is not as abstract as Victor Frankenstein's lofty speeches on honour, courage, and ambition might have us believe; the scene on which this struggle is decided is physical, bodily, spatial. For all that Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* is an invention, a thing (seemingly) of the mind captured on inert paper, it always matters for this story which body the voice that is speaking at any given moment comes from. This problem reappears, with visceral impact, in a 2015 splatter film adaptation by director Bernard Rose, where the story is related from a broken narrative perspective that, because it is implausible, emphasises that the inevitable connection between matter and meaning is also a troubled one. Taken together, these two *Frankenstein* versions reveal the complexities of (narrative) perspective and enunciation; the implications of trying, as situated being, to speak transcendent meaning, to speak from the insides of a body that necessarily always disturbs its normative containments.

Other adaptations perform similar exposures for different aspects of existence. James Whale's 1935 film version *Bride of Frankenstein* as well as John Logan's 2014–16 television series featuring Frankenstein and his creature, *Penny Dreadful*, are self-consciously repetitive texts – one is a sequel, one is a series – which present unapologetically and explicitly repetitive Frankensteinian creatures and thus provoke the question of what it means, not only to be, but to be different; not simply in a normative but in a properly ontological sense. As it turns out, it is only seemingly a contradiction to have repetition reveal the workings of difference (in a similar way as it is only seemingly a contradiction to both look like a corpse and like a living being, with "yellow skin scarcely cover[ing] the work of muscles and arteries beneath"). It is precisely this the-same-but-also-not logic that neither existence nor fiction can do without – singularity can only be recognised in the field of tension between identity and contrast.

And finally, there are such versions of *Frankenstein* as expose how one's own life is always made by the other, and the other's life made by one's own, and how this entanglement traverses any real-life-vs.-fiction divide that we might posit. In this context, the implications of the dynamic double cast that the National Theatre's 2011 staging of *Frankenstein* uses for Victor and the creature appear all the more striking when set off against a fatal politics of rigid identities such as it is exemplified in Theodore Roszak's 1995 novel *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. The "work of muscles and arteries" that these last examples reveal are the workings of dependence underneath autonomy, and freedom underneath dependence.

These, then, are the spatial-physical, the temporal, and the social dimensions in which we need to make sense of narrative fiction as living practice. The examples chosen from the *Frankenstein* complex show that the 'life of its own' that Frankenstein's creature arguably has is not simply a matter of metaphorical, conceptual interest but that this life is dense and not entirely ours to explain away or master – and certainly not with our minds only. "*Frankenstein* complex," incidentally, is a term occasionally brought up in the context of the ever-growing fuzzy set of *Frankenstein* versions (for instance by Dennis R. Cutchins and Dennis R. Perry

in their recent volume on *Adapting Frankenstein*) which I have taken the liberty to borrow because it indicates a structure of both breadth and depth, with a capacity for both inward and outward growth. "Complex" is here supposed to have more of an ontological than a psychological sense (more akin, that is, to the way in which one would speak about a 'complex of buildings' than to the sense in which one would speak of the 'Oedipus complex').[3] Ultimately, however, I would like to avoid fixing the meaning of the term "*Frankenstein* complex" all too rigidly, which seems not entirely unacceptable as my primary interest is not to say what *Frankenstein is* but what it *does* and, even more to the point, *how it is able to do what it does*. My primary interest, in other words, is not to find an accurate description for the *kind* of cultural item that *Frankenstein* is – much less to finish off the debate by finding the 'right' description, once and for all – but to figure out the life that it leads (some of it, anyway). The 'name' "*Frankenstein* complex" is, in this context, a means to an end: I have to call 'it' – this curious multitude of stories – something and will often in fact simply call it *Frankenstein*, without thereby meaning to indicate 'Shelley's original' or any other specific text. This simultaneous vagueness and specificity is, after all, precisely how we encounter the word "Frankenstein" in everyday life.

"Voodoo Metaphysics"? Towards a New Sense of Make-Believe

This investigation of *Frankenstein* specifically in its workings as narrative fiction is based in many ways on the ontology of fiction suggested in

3 I therefore actually use it in quite a different sense than Cutchins and Perry use it: they argue that "each person's aesthetic experiences become a personal collection of texts; or, we might say, they become part of a personal, rather than global, mythology of their own, a Frankenstein Complex, if you will. […] [T]he idea of a Frankenstein Complex located in the minds of individuals, in fact, may offer the only real way to comprehend the web of texts that Frankenstein has become" (6). A particularly thorough overview over the *Frankenstein* complex, of *Frankenstein*'s long career in popular and literary culture has been provided by Susan Tyler Hitchcock. A more recent one is Friedman and Kavey's.

Bruno Latour's *Inquiry into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns*. In particular, I draw on Latour's understanding that fiction is a material-symbolic process which has been misunderstood because of our – "the moderns'," in Latour's idiom – compulsion to classify existents as either 'matter' or 'symbol,' the former constituting 'reality' and the latter a secondary order of more ethereal quality, more inspiring, maybe, but also illusory, existentially noncommittal. *Frankenstein* (the story) and Frankenstein's creature, however, are decidedly un-ethereal. This is true in a trivial sense – it's all about bodies, body parts, and reproduction – but also more systematically. If Shelley's novel, for instance, cannot leave the body behind, if it produces, as I hope to be able to show, meaning *from* the body rather than in spite of or apart from it, how can we then plausibly say that, as theories of fiction in the analytical vein would have it, the story has no *actual* meaning?[4] In another example, to discussed in more detail in the following, Victor and the creature in double cast demonstrate before the audience's eyes at the National Theatre that when we act seemingly as autonomous individuals, we really act collectively, drawing agency from our surroundings. How does an understanding of fiction which, strictly speaking, has need of no more than one agent – even more to the point, no more than one mind – for the thinking up of a story take account of that?

We can lend another sense to the phrase that something has been 'made up,' which so commonly is used precisely to convey a contrast to 'real reality'; a more literal interpretation of the phrase which conveys more clearly that fiction, precisely, needs some actual making. The advantage of Latour's account of fiction, rough around the edges though it may (intentionally?) be, is that it questions how matter is made *and* how meaning is made – all in one breath. Therefore, in questioning how processes of 'making up' and 'making believe' work, his account ranges beyond the sphere of the individual mind which supposedly conjures up – from 'airy nothing' entirely – illusions to be, in a second step, conveyed to the outside world. Mary Shelley's famous report of how the story came

4 One finds this logic in the classical analytical accounts of fiction such as John Searle's 1975 "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse."

to pass – half asleep, the central scene all of a sudden flashes up before her eyes – might support a de-corporealised version of how imagination works ("I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together" ["Introduction" 9]). Yet the *Frankenstein* complex denies it. *Frankenstein* requires an understanding of stories that allows them a genuinely practical component and a vital embeddedness – for where, along *Frankenstein*'s spiral of adaptation and reproduction, would we be able to clearly separate the idea from its implementation? Even Mary Shelley actually remarks, in her account of how she came up with *Frankenstein*, on how imagination precisely *doesn't* work from airy nothing: "Invention, it must humbly be admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself" ("Introduction" 8).

Latour takes the bifurcation, as he calls it, between matter and symbol apart – not in the sense of arguing that there is no matter, or that fiction 'is reality, too'; but by arguing for a more nuanced ontology, which allows for several modes of existence, each with its own conditions. Thereby also the concept of 'reality' as umbrella term and benchmark of ontological solidity steps back behind an idea of existence as multiple, constructed, and networked: Victor Frankenstein isn't real in the same way that my next-door neighbour is, and yet both are in existence under unique respective conditions.

This modal understanding of what it means to exist privileges transformation over being – or rather, it does away with the distinction we might assume between the two. "We have learned to recognize a mode," Latour says, "every time we realize […] that a certain type of continuity, a trajectory, is outlined through the intermediary of a discontinuity." A "mode of existence" is therefore always "a version of being-as-other (a debiting of discontinuity and continuity, difference and repetition, otherness and sameness)" (*Inquiry* 182–83). What a modal ontology does not do then, in a more technical wording, is to analyse being through the distinction of essence and existence. In "a line of writing," as Giorgio Agamben illustrates this point, "the hand's *ductus* passes continually from the

common form of the letters to the particular traits that identify their singular presence, without it being possible at any point to draw a real boundary between the two." Similarly, in a mode "[c]ommon nature and singularity, essence and existence are only the two appearances generated by the incessant *ductus* of substance. And singular existence – the mode – is neither a substance nor a precise fact but an infinite series of modal oscillations, by means of which substance always constitutes and expresses itself" (*Use of Bodies* 172).

Together with the binary distinction between being and transformation, essence and existence, the opposition between the hard substance of reality and the illusions of fiction loses traction. In Latour's understanding, it is precisely a specific form of interaction and dependence between material and symbolic that makes fiction into what it is. Fiction, in Latour's understanding, comes from the unique way in which a certain material constellation incites me to see in it 'more than meets the eye' – without, however, being able to discard the material constellation in favour of the vision. As Patrice Maniglier puts it, "fictional being does not simply designate the 'mental' or 'imaginary' part of the work, but its unstable totality." One has to "move from the work to *something else* (an image, an idea, an emotion) and come back from the 'something else' to the work" and precisely this "risk, uncertainty, or 'hiatus' is what characterizes 'fictions' in Latour's sense" (427–30). The dependence is decidedly reciprocal: "This is not simply due to the ontological law requiring that any imaginary (or mental or incorporeal) content must be supported by something material to be said to *exist*. For the opposite is also true" (426–27): how would I ever choose, for instance, what Frankenstein's creature gets to wear on stage without being guided by ideas that the story provides me with? How, conversely, would the image of the abandoned monster-child wrapping itself in its neglectful father's greatcoat ever bear the poignancy that it does if it weren't for the signifying potential that clothing, as material affair, contributes? It is only where and exactly because the coat and the character, the material and the symbolic, come together that fiction comes about.

Throughout his inquiry, Latour uses the terms "beings of fiction" for the components of this mode of existence. Contrary to what the term

might suggest, these are not restricted to characters or protagonists in the straightforward sense: fiction "accounts for the mode of existence specific to what we, Moderns, identify as 'works of art,' where the medium, forms, and content constitute an inseparable unity," as Yves Citton clarifies (314). *Penny Dreadful*'s female version of Frankenstein's creature, Lily (to make a repeated appearance in the following chapters) exists in the mode of fiction, but so do, say, Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms*; and that is because, in both cases, the "felicity conditions are not to be found in the correspondence with an external reality, but in an immanent force of vibration," something quite aptly captured by the concept of 'consistence' (Citton 314). The consistence of fiction is, in this understanding, a practical consistence before it is a logical consistence: it is a question of "the *making-be* (faire-être) of these objects" (Maniglier 431).[5]

Latour's (metaphysical) approach presents its own solution to what Kendall Walton's iconic analytical account calls the "voodoo metaphysics" that, Walton says, logicians sometimes resort to in explaining the meaningfulness of fiction (385). In the fuss that is made around the existence of "fictitious entities," he says in *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, his foundational text of what has come to be called make-believe theory, it is "hard to escape the impression" that the various attempts to come to terms, analytically, with the privileged status of fiction in spite of its 'unreality' are "tricks designed to camouflage a contradiction" – tricks, more precisely, "whereby ontological respectability is offered to King Lear and his cohorts with one hand only to be taken back with the other" (385). That is

5 Or, as Rita Felski puts it: "The notion of the nonhuman actor […] assumes no particular measure of scale, size, or complexity. It can include not only individual novels or films but also fictional characters, plot devices, literary styles, filming techniques, and other formal devices that travel beyond the boundaries of their home texts to attract allies, generate attachments, trigger translations, and inspire copies, spin-offs, and clones" (168–69). See Citton also for an elaboration of Latour's [FIC] mode in the wider context of the overall ontology presented in Latour's *Inquiry*. See Maniglier further on the question of how it is possible that narratives, figurative art, non-figurative art, 'high' art and 'low' entertainment all end up under the heading of 'fiction' in the Latourian sense.

to say, the "conflicting intuitions" (385) we have with regard to who and what stories tell us about – that such a thing as Frankenstein's monster doesn't exist or isn't real even while, at the same time, we can hardly deny its presence and complexity – lead to various exercises in analytical finesse which try to reconcile the case of fiction with 'regular' forms of existence (such that, for instance, fictitious entities are said to be, but not to exist; or that it is said that they exist without being real).

Walton's point, in turn, is to say that such analyses miss the scope of "pretense" or "make-believe" (390). Make-believe theory makes clear that pretense neither denies actual, concrete actions nor does it indicate acts of deception. To dismiss fictions, Walton says, as "'figments of people's imagination' would be to insult and underestimate them" (42). This is, Walton claims, because of the function that material objects play, more often than not, for fiction. Props, as he calls them, "give fictional worlds and their contents a kind of objectivity, an independence from cognizers and their experiences which contributes much to the excitement of our adventures with them" (42). As does Latour, then, Walton claims that to discredit fiction as 'mere illusion' is to underestimate it, and as does Latour, Walton points out the involvement of material constellations. But where Latour's move is to complicate the notions of 'reality' and 'matter,' Walton's move is to have fiction 'borrow' solidity from reality through the involvement of material elements – wherefore he talks about "fictional truths [and] *those aspects of the real world on which they depend*" (42 [my emphasis]). This ultimately leaves the binary of matter and symbol intact, and it questions neither of the two. To put it another way, in fiction as mode of existence in Latour's sense we find not only a dependence of fiction on "props" but also of "props" on fiction, in the sense that the specific sense and appearance of the 'props' is likewise lost if the (alleged) 'illusion' is detached from them. To repeat the example given above: the coat doesn't continue to exist without the character, not as the same material object – it continues to exist as a bundle of cloth and thread, but not as *the* coat of Frankenstein and his creature. Walton, in saying that to dismiss fiction as figment of the imagination is to "insult or underestimate" it, by implication also insults and underestimates imagination as insubstantial. Latour's account, however, undertakes a reinterpretation

of the term (imagination) such that it is neither omnipotent (the site of creative authorial genius) nor subordinate (the vessel for content cooked up elsewhere), but rather a site of exchange.

Walton claims: "[w]e do not have to solve all of reality's problems in order to treat our own," that is, to treat the problem of fiction (102). The point, however, is that if we try (and this is what Latour attempts – fiction is in Latour's ontology, and the corresponding book, only one ontological problem among others), we gain the advantage of treating fiction as more than an exception or aberration which normalises and demystifies 'reality.' The analytical theory of make-believe puts much emphasis on "propositional attitudes," "thought clusters," "psychological attitudes," "mental states," the "reshap[ing] of our minds and change [of] our inner landscape" (see for instance Peter Lamarque's text on "Thought, Make-Believe and the Opacity of Narrative"). In modal-materialist ontologies, however, such things are as fabricated and/or processual as is everything else, and hence do not serve particularly well as starting points for theorising. To put it in one word, then: where a make-believe approach to fiction puts strong emphasis on the 'believe' part of make-believe, I would like to explore, in investigating the *Frankenstein* complex, the consequences of putting the emphasis on the other half: *make*-believe.[6]

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6 Approaches to fiction(ality) – Monika Fludernik has summed them up quite recently (see "The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality") – tend to not include such a broad ontological panorama as it is presented in Latour's work, where fiction is one mode of existence among many to be investigated. Fludernik also points out that theories of fiction(ality) are notoriously difficult to compare as they involve widely differing premises and points of focus. Make-believe theory appears a worthwhile candidate to look at in more detail not only because of its ongoing popularity but because it is immediately comparable and yet suitably opposed to Latour's modal understanding and thus makes for a useful contrast. Latour's approach has the advantage of involving few ontological assumptions or rather, only such as are developed in the *Inquiry* itself. This can, of course, just as well be seen as a weakness, resulting in lack of specificity. Some more specific suggestions for the case of narrative fiction are precisely what I am after in this examination of *Frankenstein*.

Endlessly Transparent? *Frankenstein*, Literary Criticism, and the Logic of Reflection

In literary studies, the involvement with Bruno Latour's work and actor network theory has led to calls for emphasising agency (what a text does and what is and can be done with a text) over critical superiority (looking 'through' a text to decode its secrets). "What would it mean," Rita Felski asks in *Limits of Critique*, "to acknowledge poems and paintings, fictional characters and narrative devices, as actors? How might our thinking change?" (165). Following the "ANT viewpoint," she insists that "art's distinctive qualities do not rule out social connections but are the very reason that such connections are forged and sustained" and that we therefore need to pay attention to how artworks "can only survive and thrive by making friends, creating allies, attracting disciples, inciting attachments, latching on to receptive hosts. If they are not to fade quickly from view, they must persuade people to hang them on walls, watch them in movie theaters, purchase them on Amazon, dissect them in reviews, recommend them to their friends" (165–66). Stories and artworks, "fictional characters and narrative devices" need to be upgraded, Felski argues with the help of actor-network-theory, from "passive intermediaries" to "active mediators" because "they are not just channels for conveying predetermined meanings but compose and configure these meanings in specific ways" (164).

For the example of *Frankenstein*, this widening of the field of agency makes perfect sense, seeing how there is clearly a collective agency at work behind the story's reproduction. *Frankenstein* obviously wouldn't be the phenomenon that it is without a host of "active mediators," animal, technological, textual. If the agency behind fiction is cooperative and traverses the habitats of matter, symbols, and people, then all kinds of entities can manifest contingently as actors in the process, making each other into participants along the way, shifting each other's role, position, or even being. There is good reason – to borrow a phrase from Wayne Booth – to take seriously the fact that there is a difference "between myself as a reader and the often very different self who goes about paying bills, repairing leaky faucets, and failing in generosity and wisdom" (138).

Felski develops her claims for an agential take on literature in two ways: with the help of Latour's ANT, and against what she calls, borrowing from Paul Ricœur, a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (1). A hermeneutics of suspicion – a "thought style" (2) rather than a clearly delineated philosophy – is characterised by the desire to see through a text, both in the sense of exposing its secret assumptions and in the sense of getting at the reality behind it ("[s]eizing the upper hand, critics read against the grain and between the lines; their self-appointed task is to draw out what a text fails – or willfully refuses – to see"; "a style of interpretation driven by a spirit of disenchantment" [1–2]). In a related spirit, I aim to take the agencies in and of *Frankenstein* seriously: rather than reducing *Frankenstein* to what it *means*, I want to also look to what it *does* and how, in fact, those two aspects are entwined.

Much *Frankenstein* criticism shares in the habit of trying to see *through* the story, so much so that this criticism itself has occasionally lamented its own pointlessness. At the very end of the 20th century, William Christie looks back on three decades of serious scholarly inquiry into Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and concludes that it might be best to just let it go: "Instead of seeking in the myth of Frankenstein's Monster a curious sanction for its own indiscriminate proliferation, therefore, criticism of Mary Shelley's novel might ask itself whether Victor Frankenstein's difficult and necessarily unsatisfactory decision to abort might not have a sad wisdom to offer" (26). Indeed, the tendency to seek "in the myth of Frankenstein's Monster" some kind of "sanction," some kind of explanation for the story's success, has been evident in *Frankenstein* criticism more or less from the beginning. One of the earliest major critical publications on *Frankenstein*, George Levine's and U.C. Knoepflmacher's 1979 *The Endurance of Frankenstein* – published at a time when academics could still only be, as the editors' preface calls it, "closet aficionados" of *Frankenstein* (xi) – remarks on how *Frankenstein*'s monster becomes "an aspect of ourselves" (Levine and Knoepflmacher xiii), a critical theme then much repeated over the following decades. In claiming that *Frankenstein*, "because it has tapped into the center of Western feeling and imagination," has become "a metaphor *for our own cultural crises*," George Levine's approach, in his

essay for the collection, expresses clearly the principle of looking for the 'actual content' transported in the story ("Ambiguous Heritage" 3 [my emphasis]). Mary Shelley, Levine emphasises, did indeed (for all her shortcomings in terms of technique, as he is careful to mention) create an image which "*articulates* powerfully the dominant currents *of her culture and ours*" (8 [my emphasis]). In fact, Levine presents an actual catalogue of the "seven elements ["arbitrarily chosen," as he admits] of the Frankenstein metaphor" (18). These elements include, for instance, "Birth and Creation," "The Defects of Domesticity," or "Technology, Entropy, and the Monstrous" (see 8–17) and they show, Levine claims, how "*Frankenstein* offers us a metaphor that *expresses* the central dualities and tensions *of our time*" (8 [my emphasis]). Levine's approach dedicates itself to pointing out issues, circumstances, and problems – political, philosophical, techno-scientific, artistic, moral or individual-emotional in nature – that are assumed to *be reflected in* and thus *reported back to us* by *Frankenstein*. It thus illustrates quite well the thought style of disenchantment, decoding, figuring out that Felski opposes – complete with a hint of disdain for and distance from the text (the novel "belongs to a prophetic tradition open only, one would have thought, to mature literary imaginations," the preface remarks [xiii]).

Somewhat paradoxically, Levine is at the same time quite aware that there will never be a definitive list of such issues, as there are "inexhaustible possibilities of significance" of the story ("Ambiguous Heritage" 18). *Frankenstein* criticism is frequently haunted by this self-reflective impetus. As it urges itself to unearth the reasons for the proliferation of *Frankenstein*, it presents, consequently, its own *raisons d'être* in the process. This teleological endeavour, this search for ultimate causes outside of the work itself, suggests a transparency that the story doesn't actually possess and in some sense, it misses the point – certainly, *Frankenstein* can plausibly be read as presenting a metaphor for, say, the predicaments of modern man, but if this is *all* we ever read it as, we might as well look to modern man directly. Even criticism in the Gothic vein, much as it emphasises opacity rather than transparency, is inclined to recur ultimately to 'human reality' as the backdrop against which we can make sense of *Frankenstein* (and if it is only, paradoxically, human

reality in its undecipherability). In tendency, readings of *Frankenstein* that examine it explicitly as a text in the Gothic tradition emphasise, in one way or another, how *Frankenstein* has more to do with *doubting* the world than with *depicting* it.[7] However, such doubt or impossibility of interpretation is, implicitly or explicitly, assumed to be less a doubt actually fabricated by and in *Frankenstein* and more a doubt that we have, anyway – we 'as human beings' or as human beings in one historical situation or other – and that we bring to the text or that the text prompts us to confront. Fred Botting, in his *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory*, offers a "writing of readings of *Frankenstein*" which focuses the peculiarities of *Frankenstein* criticism alongside the actual story. This criticism has produced, he argues, "'critical monsters', different critical discourses which assemble their own monsters from the partial and dead signifiers that make up the narrative bodies of *Frankenstein*. Critics suture these fragments into their own commentary to produce new and hideous progenies that have lives of their own" (3). Botting deconstructs the obsession to get at the 'truth' of *Frankenstein* (the "quest to uncover the secret of the text's nature, to unfold once and for all its living presence, its principle of life, does not reveal the unequivocal or authorised voice, but discloses only monstrous doubles, different and distant from any unifying figure" [3]). While he does acknowledge how certain procedures from 'inside' the story ('assembling' dead material, 'suturing' fragments) reappear in the cultural practices that surround it, Botting does not focus on the potentially more general ontological relevance and productive potential of this parallel – which indeed then leaves no option but to conclude that, when it comes to interpreting *Frankenstein*, the "quest for a domain of eternal light is eclipsed by the shadowy textual traces that leave all 'lost in darkness and distance'" (5) and that the text's 'meaning,' if anything, is the complication of meaning itself ("*Frankenstein* can thus be read as an interrogation of origination, creativity and authority, an interrogation which places it in a particularly challenging position for those readers-as-authors who will subsequently arrive, armed with their frames" [22]).

7 See for instance Anderson; Hodgson Anderson; Cameron.

Is Christie's postmodern resignation, his somewhat tired call for "birth control" (25), the only viable alternative we can imagine to a tradition of *Frankenstein* criticism which treats *Frankenstein* more as mirror than as expressive in its own right? It is at least questionable whether more current *Frankenstein* criticism has managed to envision one. Issues appearing or persisting in more recent (that is, 21st century) critical readings include, for instance, the political-philosophical context of Shelley's novel: the story's relation to Enlightenment philosophy (particularly Rousseau's), the French Revolution, questions of human perfectibility, of individualism vs. sociability, of political vs. aesthetic action, of family vs. broader affiliation and generally, to "associational life" and "that most vexed phrase, the liberal political community" (Bentley 341, 347).[8] Also, the novel is (re-)investigated in connection to its scientific context: Marilyn Butler had pointed out the relevance of the vitalist-materialist-controversy going on from 1814 onwards for her edition of the 1818 text of *Frankenstein*. In this broader context, critics recently have worked to loosen the link between *Frankenstein* and electricity that the filmic tradition, most prominently James Whale's 1930s works, has done much to cement and instead point out further relevant scientific fields and contexts.[9] As concerns the vitalist-materialist debate, Russell Smith has pointed out its connection to another topic frequently debated in *Frankenstein* criticism, which is 19th century developments in industrialised capitalism; both are connected, he says, through the issue of automation. Beyond such issues, *Frankenstein* continues to be read through the critical lenses of cultural studies. Traditionally discussed in relation to gender and sexuality, queer theory has added to this field (see for example James Holt McGavran's reading, based on Eve Sedgwick's and Leo Bersani's work, on homosexual attraction-slash-panic in *Frankenstein*). There are diverse readings of Frankenstein's creature as racial other.[10] It has moreover been pointed out how the avoidance

8 See also Reese; Beenstock; Givner; Cook.

9 See Houe; Fairclough; Wang; Ruston.

10 For instance of the novel in the context of 19th century research on natural history (see Mellor, "Racial Science"). See also Elizabeth Young's earlier reading of

of "disability experiences" in *Frankenstein* criticism is itself quite telling and should be remedied (Holmes 347). And as concerns a more formally oriented criticism, more recent approaches often see formal innovations on Mary Shelley's part, in particular in the handling of narrative perspectives, as negotiating concepts of sympathy and pushing the development of first-person narratives.[11] A relatively recent addition to the critical field around *Frankenstein* is an ecocritical perspective: Timothy Morton, for instance, argues that *Frankenstein* forces us to go beyond any idea of Nature (with a capital N) and think environmentality as a mode of "being-into" (150) that evokes questions of care precisely because it is vague, difficult to pinpoint. Thomas H. Ford develops a reading of Shelley's *Frankenstein* as reflecting on 'nature poetry after nature poetry': as Romantic poetry can only re-write natural poetry in a more self-conscious, artificial-technological context, so the creature is, somewhat paradoxically, a figure that even though in itself advanced works to make a more primary state available (so that ultimately, the creature "figures the technological fate of the poetic re-enchantment of nature in a man's world" [284]). And finally, *Frankenstein* has also been picked up for digital humanities research (to which Shelley's *Frankenstein* is said to lend itself because of its native interest in the concept of information).[12]

Valid as such readings undoubtedly are, they nonetheless – to greater or lesser extent – exhibit the same inclinations to see *through* the text to figure out the 'bigger picture' behind it (from Rousseau's general will to homophobia to the epistolary genre). For the most part, they broaden the

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Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* in relation to the film's 1930ies US-American background).

11 See Clark; Britton. In relation to the novel genre, specifically, see also George Levine's earlier work on "Frankenstein and the Tradition of Realism," where he argues that *Frankenstein*, in spite of its subject matter, shares in many conventions of the realist novel, and yet contradicts them in its confrontation of radically individual motivation and ambition (it "foreshadows," Levine says, "the ultimate self-destruction of realist techniques […] *Frankenstein* can help us to understand some of the powerful and inexplicit energies that lie beneath the surface of realist fiction in England" [30]).

12 See Burkett.

thematic canon of *Frankenstein* criticism. All this works to further consolidate the idea that fiction is reflective rather than productive. *Frankenstein*, however, is such a prime example of fiction's productive capacities, its proliferation across diverse media, contexts, minds, and bodies, that it seems a missed opportunity not to address it in precisely that capacity more often, and more directly.[13]

That fictional texts aren't passive objects, silently enduring being figured out, ideally once and for all, by human masterminds, has long been established in literary theory and is among the core assumptions of reader-response criticism. Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response in *The Act of Reading* is a suitable example regarding the awareness of processual qualities in traditional literary theory and at the same time is a good resource to make evident that a reader-response framework doesn't go far enough to accommodate the momentum of the *Frankenstein* complex. This momentum, after all, traverses or upsets so many ontological divides (that between 'reality' and 'fiction' but also between identity and difference, between one individual and another, even, as it will turn out, between past and present) that the distinction of referential vs. non-referential, so important to Iser's theory, loses its primacy. Iser claims that literature depends on a kind of feedback loop, prompted by the text and carried out by the reader. Reader and text thus "merge into a single situation," where "the division between subject and object no longer applies" and "meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced" (9–10). In Iser's phenomenologically oriented account, agency is not entirely limited to the human reader's capacity, or rather, human readers are not properly independent from the text in their acts of meaning-making. When it comes to literature, according to Iser, perceivers come to be included in what they perceive – in particular in the discrepancies and gaps that arise in the processing of non-referential texts – in addition to the perceived being produced

13 Somewhat ironically, Latour himself treats *Frankenstein* as "parable" – as he puts it himself –, as a reminder of our greatest sin: not technological revolution itself, but the failure to care for its output, for "our technological creations" ("Love your Monsters").

by the perceiver. And yet, ultimately, the *telos* of this process remains the reader's imagination and comprehension. Readers are *involved*, but texts are *dependent*: the "need for constant readjustment" in the processing of literature "arises primarily from the fact that the aesthetic object has no existence of its own, and can consequently only come into being by way of such processes" of structuring on the part of the reader (113). This structuring and meaning-making, in turn, while arguably connected to sensory perception in more than an abstract way, seems to find its ultimate and proper place, in Iser's account, in the mind: the "reader's consciousness" (107), the "individual reader's faculties of perceiving and processing" (107), the "reader's act of comprehension" (9), and the text's "presence in our minds" (129).

There is certainly some ambivalence in Iser's account regarding the precise degree of agency to be attributed to a literary text but he insists that in any case, the fictional text "offers guidance as to what is to be produced, and cannot therefore itself be the product" (107). In Latour's network-oriented account, however, the roles of producer and product, agent and object, are more mobile and shifting than that: a work of fiction and its recipients (authors included) are to be thought of as producers of each other in a framework not only of involvement, but of radical cooperation, mutual dependence, and reciprocal making. This is a useful expansion of established ideas of response precisely because it does not require us to limit the agency that we attribute to fiction (such that texts offer guidance, but readers are the actual producers, etc.). According to a theory of response, it is plausible only to say that *Frankenstein* prompts reproduction – say, because the secret of how the monster is actually made is a persistent discrepancy or gap that we need to resolve or fill again and again. In this understanding, *Frankenstein* can effect but not *do* something. Reality – with a capital R – stays intact. My interest, however, concerns precisely the alternative account of what stories do that becomes thinkable with the help of Latour's modal/network account of reality (with a lower case r) and, more importantly, in the light of *Frankenstein*'s curious cultural status and agency; that is, the alternative account that becomes thinkable when we look at *Frankenstein*, not as a novel that happens to be rewritten a certain number of times, but as a *Frankenstein*

complex that brings forth more substance than a mere list of its components can indicate or entail.

The Transformation of Stories: Adaptation, Mediation, and the Real of Intertextuality

As it turns out, it is not least a conventional understanding of how mediation works that makes the application of other, seemingly rather obvious theoretical frameworks to the *Frankenstein* complex so unsatisfactory – a conventional understanding, that is, of what media or what texts are, who makes them and how, and at which point and under whose auspices the meaning that is conveyed is created. Adaptation studies and related studies in intermediality, while they appear as natural candidates for tackling the *Frankenstein* complex, actually offer little help in grasping it as fictional practice – precisely because *Frankenstein* suggests an understanding of fictionality that renders the communicative matrix often employed in adaptation studies inoperable. Of course, adaptation studies look precisely at operations on boundaries, at processes of translation, appropriation, transformation, replication, variation from one setting to another. Folded into theories of adaptation such as for instance Linda Hutcheon's, however, is the figure of an extratextual subject that, while certainly seen as entangled in texts, nevertheless is understood as ultimately independent from them. 'Author' or 'creator' is presented as a priori category – I *am* a creator, in this understanding, long before I *become* the creator of this or that specific work; whereas in a processual understanding of fiction, I *become* an author as, and because, the work unfolds itself.

While adaptation studies do rely on a rather mobile scenario in which producers, recipients, and texts appear quite flexible, they tend not to ultimately call into question established understandings of agency, its sources (people), and its destinations (texts). "Stories," Hutcheon says, "do not consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genres). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and

communicate narrative meaning *to someone in some context*, and they are created *by someone with that intent*" (26). The image of channelling keeps the dichotomy between material means and symbolic intent intact and, furthermore, implicitly conveys a hierarchy of stability in which subjects (and contexts) are more stable and durable than texts and thus able to make use of texts to do things, while making it sound far less likely that texts would ever end up doing things with subjects, at least nothing of a fundamental nature. The communicative matrix of sender, receiver, and context features as a 'real-world' institution that both precedes and outlasts the event of stories. There is, for my taste, just a bit too much reliance on the agents who produce or receive adaptations – in Booth's words, the reader and the person who pays the bills – holding together naturally, without effort, by themselves and for themselves.

Hutcheon defends her move as non-reactionary: "In what some call our 'posthumanist' times, with our suspicions of and challenges to notions of coherent subjectivity, what I am proposing may at first appear to be a step backward in theoretical-historical terms," she says. "But adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know 'why'" (107). As long as "urges" and motives remain the focal point of such study, however, it is difficult to see how it would help much to come to terms with the particularities of the *Frankenstein* complex as fictional practice. Certainly, the 'authors' – in the conventional sense – of the *Frankenstein* complex have their urges, and these contribute to the "creative process." Saying that the makers of the 2015 filmic version of *Frankenstein* apparently felt the "urge" to translate the story into the splatter genre is an interesting enough observation; but is this because the makers of the film were smart enough to recognise the right generic channel for their material – or because, through a veritable *encounter* with the material, a gorier and more fragmented *Frankenstein* story makes it to the screen than we might be used to? The very fact that some of us will feel that this version is highly appropriate whereas others will disagree entirely suggests that there is something that we engage with, that we judge this filmic language to be appropriate *for*, which is apparently obstinate enough to create insecurity, controversy, and sec-

ond thoughts; and which eludes the explanatory power of 'a creative subject's motive' – even an unconscious one.

The tendency, however, to look to more or less masterful creator-subjects actualises itself quite forcefully in studies of *Frankenstein* undertaken explicitly as applications of adaptation studies. Dennis R. Perry, for instance, argues that "[b]ecause intertextual theory posits that all texts are the result of a conscious or unconscious synthesis of previous texts, all authors, in drawing on preexisting plot lines, characters, and themes, reflect Frankenstein himself, who made his creature by suturing together parts from different corpses." Here, the recourse to authorial agents as guarantors of fictional-textual transitions becomes obvious. "Authors" (maybe readers) are the ultimate facilitators of the parallel reproduction (of monsters and texts) of *Frankenstein*. "I would argue," Perry continues, "that all Frankenstein films, because of their inherent intertextuality, are implicitly about adaptation as well." He calls this phenomenon "the intertextual creation trope" ("Recombinant Mystery"). This goes to show that, while the parallel between form, content, and afterlife of *Frankenstein* (bodies, texts, and adaptations or franchises are equally stitched together) is frequently remarked upon, this parallel is not necessarily taken seriously beyond its status as "trope" or metaphor, the curiosity of which is accounted for with recourse to a creating subject's agency and intention. An adaptation studies approach to *Frankenstein* does favour the "complex relationship *between* the various texts, disparate traditions, and dynamic media" (Cutchins and Perry 2) over closed-off texts or ultimate meanings as focus of study, thus seeing textual meaning as resulting from a multiplicity of sources rather than a single one; but it doesn't dedicate itself to the question of how being-fiction might play a significant role in this 'between-realm.'

In contrast to what the prefixed communicative matrix of adaptation studies implies, I would like to assume that all the agents involved in the *Frankenstein* complex (human subjects certainly among them) come into being and find their force on the same stage.[14] With this comes a shift of

14 I am indebted for this image and logic of the scene to several discussions on the issue of 'writing scenes' with both Maria Ostrovskaya and Roger Lüdeke.

focus and a reversal of hierarchies: not the transportation of given stories (works, texts, …) from here to there, then to now, is in focus but the (cooperative, self-)constitution of stories as living practices, that is, as 'travelling things' for which transposition, variation, continuation, and adaptation are not curiosities done to them but native capacities of their own, actualised – with our help, certainly, but not under our command – in historically and culturally localisable 'works.' Certainly, fictionality is quite simply not the primary interest of adaptation studies. But by targeting the aspect of fiction, some of the things that we conventionally understand to be external and independent from it, and which form important ingredients to adaptation studies – subjects, objects, text, media – begin to appear in a new light. Once these become involved in the fictional process, they become, in a sense, 'vulnerable' to it; their position, status, and role shift and shift again as the process unfolds.

Therefore, just as the matrix of subjects and channels estranges me, in tendency, from adaptation studies, so a related grid of channel and content discourages me from relying on studies in intermediality. Studies in intermediality and remediation (for instance Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's) can be helpful in figuring out how specific media settings are *used* to tell the story of *Frankenstein*. However, a modal ontology – or really rather ontogenesis – of fiction implies that fiction and the material means of its expression are connected in a reciprocally constitutive sense-making process which includes authors, audiences, and established media traditions not as the pillars on which the 'building of fiction' rests, but as the *results* of a cooperative building activity. The underlying assumption of trans-/intermedial narratology is that stories can be realised in various media, and that the specificities of the medial means employed will influence the shape of the story that gets to be told with their help.[15] My investigation into the *Frankenstein* complex in principle shares this assumption, but in a different sense. In an ontogenetical framework, there is not only no pre-given categorical distinction between meaningful element and material carrier but not even a stable

15 For a comprehensive overview, see Marie-Laure Ryan, "Narration in Various Media."

division of labour between content and means of expression. This is slippery ground for many intermedial approaches – those asking for 'how content x can be transmitted through channel y' – to gain traction on.[16] Therefore, if I am interested in what are conventionally called 'media,' it is in their contingent function as means of creating and expressing a sense of fiction (rather than, for instance, in their status in a particular cultural landscape, their technological specificities, or similar).

If fiction is a generative process, transformative rather than reflective, then the boundaries between text and life which are established along the way cannot be pre-given and an understanding of texts or media as mere means of representation chosen with greater or lesser care by the 'master mind' presiding over the process is insufficient. If, therefore, the recent adaptation studies approaches to *Frankenstein* which Cutchins and Perry have collected argue that "there are any number of paths *through* a text, each potentially a source for an adaptation" and that "the very act of adaptation creates even more meaning, more possible paths with which future adaptors may engage" (5 [my emphasis]), my question in turn concerns the possibility that the text (story, drama, medial arrangement) might *itself* be a path.

As it turns out, it is not least Julia Kristeva's original account of intertextuality which provides further support for this endeavour – ironically so, seeing how her work is used to this day to support the more static communicative models of, precisely, adaptation studies. Her account implies more radical onto- and epistemological consequences than

16 It stands to reason that we must then understand the study of intermediality as implicit in the study of stories. Roger Lüdeke has made precisely such a case for studying literature itself as intermedium, inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Gold-Bug," where the eponymous bug oscillates quite vexingly between functioning as carrier of meaning, and appearing as random piece of matter. It does de facto help along a semiotic process (figuring out a treasure map), but at the same time, it does so in a confusingly random manner, its status bordering on the superfluous. It is this undecidability between constitutive sense-producing agency and random matter that can, if at all, be solved only by assuming the possibility of a reciprocal sense-constitution between medium and meaning ("Poes Goldkäfer").

Perry's ("intertextual creation trope") or Hutcheon's (21) references to it indicate. It therefore legitimises the notion of an *actual* transformation in the process of fiction, rather than a merely abstract, pretense, or as-if transformation.

Kristeva assumes that multi-transformative relations hold *inside* a text ("between different units of a sentence") as well as *beyond* it. Apart from the aspect of meaning spreading across several texts rather than arising from a single signifying source (a claim mirrored clearly in adaptation studies, and presumably the reason for why they draw on her work to begin with), Kristeva is interested, ultimately, in what this multiplicity tells us about *being*. If meaning is properly dialogical, then the "subject of narration" is "drawn in, and therefore reduced [...] to an *anonymity* (as writer, subject of enunciation) mediated by a third person, the *he/she* character, the subject of utterance." Therefore, the writer – and likewise, arguably, the reader – is not simply a fixed constituent of the communicative process of storytelling: "[t]he writer is thus the subject of narration *transformed by his having included himself within the narrative system*; he is neither nothingness nor anybody, but the possibility of permutation from S [subject] to A [addressee], from story to discourse and from discourse to story" (*Desire in Language* 74 [my emphasis]). Intertextuality, therefore, does not exhaust itself in the notion of 'connection': the "logic of *distance* and *relationship* between the different units of a sentence or narrative structure" indicates, Kristeva says, "a *becoming* – in opposition to the level of continuity and substance, both of which obey the logic of being and are thus monological" (*Desire* 71–72). In the communicative matrix of adaptation studies, producers and receivers are conceived of as external to the textual variations going on – whereas Kristeva's becoming clearly indicates that the sources of transmission are transformed alongside whatever meaning is transmitted; that, in fact, the meaning might *consist in* the transformation of its sources. "We see the problem of death, birth, and sex appear when literature touches upon this strategic point" (*Desire* 74–5) where senders or receivers turn from writing or reading subjects into "possibilit[ies] of permutation." The rather bland translation, in adaptation studies, of this textual "becoming" into an "in-

tertextual creation trope" understates the extent of this transformation quite drastically.[17]

Kristeva's account certainly projects a much more radical process than adaptation studies or even reader-response theory allow for in that she refuses, ultimately, to limit transformation to a symbolic realm. If senders are assumed to precede, existentially speaking, the process of reception and meaning-making, the logic of 'the symbolic' as binarily opposed to 'the material' and hence essentially 'unreal' remains operative. If, however, the process of meaning-making is assumed to shape both senders and receivers as such, complex patterns of making and unmaking take the place of an either-or logic of (non)existence.

In the psychoanalytic register employed by Kristeva, the difference between 'the symbolic' and 'the real' is not at all an opposition in substantiality: both equally affect us, but where the symbolic forms us through differential signification, the real, in an endless and hence horrible affirmation of being, constantly exceeds, shifts, and endangers such signification. In the psychoanalytic logic, therefore, what is real shatters the subject *and* founds existence, at the same time. In that sense, the communicative matrix of adaptation studies precisely misses out on the option of taking this real into account; of allowing a reciprocal transformation of speaker-listeners that truly and in any radical sense affects their way of being in the world. "Death, birth, and sex" can hardly feature as more than abstract motifs in adaptation studies such as these studies are conceived in the examples just given. The process of intertextuality as Kristeva presents it, however, involves the structural elements in Hutcheon's description – "means of [...] transmission (media)," "the rules that structure them (genres)," "narrative expectations" and "narrative meaning," a "context," as well as two "someones" of which one speaks and one receives – in a reciprocally constitutive and potentially destructive practice in more than a metaphorical sense and more than a cogni-

17 In spite of their focus on relations, many concepts of adaptation may in fact be said to display precisely what Kristeva calls a monological structure, where an "extratextual, absolute entity (God or community)" (*Desire* 87) cancels out the transformative possibilities of dialogue.

tive regard. So does *Frankenstein*, which constantly insists on presenting, side by side, a differentially signified world (where subjects have bodies, and texts can be read starting at the beginning, and ending at the end) *and* "the work of muscles and arteries beneath." Kristeva's psychoanalytically informed understanding of intertextuality therefore provides more support for employing Latour's processual approach to fiction than Latour's own expressed distaste for psychoanalysis would suggest.[18]

An important ally in this enterprise is Peter Brooks who, both in his *Reading for the Plot* and in his *Body Work*, has argued for what could be called a 'vital narratology' – an understanding of narrative fiction, that is, which includes desire, rather than 'mere' interest, into our idea of what happens when we read stories. Desire is not a metaphor in Brooks's understanding – his point is not to suggest that we are drawn towards a story's conclusion *as if* we were drawn towards a real-life object of desire. He understands desire, rather, as a properly Freudian *eros*, an actual life force that steers us forward, towards greater complexity, as readers as well as as living creatures generally. And as the Freudian *eros* is a vital force transcending the individual – having more to do with 'what life wants' than with 'what I want' –, so stories are, in Brooks's narrative theory, quite literally animate, and not just metaphorically or abstractly animated by our conscious and deliberate interest to fill in missing information. Narratology – and in saying narratology, Brooks means more specifically structuralist narratology, from Vladimir Propp to Tzvetan Todorov and beyond – has its difficulties, Brooks claims, in accounting for the dynamic, movement, and, ultimately, erotics of storytelling. Relying on Freud to remedy this blind spot prompts him to assume a "correspondence between literary and psychic dynamics" that, as I would extend Brooks's argument, likewise then implies that there are vital, downright corporeal and material aspects to stories (*Reading*

18 See the chapter on the "beings of metamorphosis" in Latour's *Inquiry*, where, while positioning himself against Freud, even mocking psychoanalytic jargon, Latour goes on to claim that "to exist, for a self […], is first to resist successive waves of fright, any one of which could devour us" (192) – a statement which could just as well have been taken straight from the psychoanalytic canon.

36). Because this connection is, as I would argue, inherent in Brooks's work, his suggestions for an energetics of narrative can be expanded – radicalised, even – by connecting them to (new) materialist ontologies and (in a rather loose sense of the term) to philosophies of life more generally. Conversely, Brooks can help to 'finetune' such philosophical suggestions to the specific case of narrative fiction. This allows further reflection not only on what stories are, but also what their ethical potential, beyond their capacity for thematic reflection, might be.

Figures, Repetition, Company: Where to Look for What *Frankenstein* Does

Felski claims: "Literary works are not actors in [a] rugged, individualist sense […]. If they make a difference, they do so only as coactors and codependents, enmeshed in a motley array of attachments and associations," a networked agency involving "countless helpers: publishers, advertisers, critics, prize committees, reviews, word-of-mouth recommendations, syllabi, textbooks and anthologies, changing tastes and scholarly vocabularies, and last, but not least, the passions and predilections of ourselves and our students" (170). But, I think, more can be said about this. *Frankenstein* is obviously exceptionally good at enlisting the support of such helpers as Felski names. As scholars, we can in turn enlist adaptation studies or intermediality studies or reader-response theory or yet another framework altogether to help us come to terms with the cultural dynamics of it all. What *does* it mean, however, that what this "motley array" produces is *fiction*? If the standard concept of pre-given author- or reader-subjects transmitting and receiving a 'bigger picture' through the channel of the story is somewhat unsatisfactory – what other suggestions can be made towards grasping what happens when stories come into existence?[19] *Frankenstein*, in particular,

19 Come into existence: our vocabulary seems so poor when it comes to expressing collaborative agency that it is hard to even find the right expression here. To say that stories 'are made' is as right and as wrong as to say that they 'make

demands that such an attempt be made because the (re)production that it depicts refuses to stay inside the boundaries of its story. The *Frankenstein* complex thus radically calls into question where fiction begins, where it ends, and who is master of the process. How can we trace the practice of "making-be" (as Maniglier calls it) across the inside-vs.-outside-the-story distinction? What does this mean specifically for the case of *narrative* fiction, of stories?

Overused as this medical metaphor may be: the aim of this investigation is to get at the sutures of *Frankenstein* and look at those junctions where an unruly material-symbolic process seems to cross realms that we normally keep apart as 'real' versus 'imaginary.' These sore spots need to be valued in their double function: as indicators of instability and contradiction, of something hidden; as well as as sites of reproduction, of the affirmation and the fabrication of something new. In the following, I will, for the purpose of investigation, break story-practice apart into three aspects: figures, repetition, and company; and follow these spatial, temporal, and social practices as they manifest the *Frankenstein* complex, and manifest *in* the *Frankenstein* complex. These aspects are not too different from what Latour describes with such terms as "reprise" throughout the *Inquiry* but they offer, I think, opportunities for looking at the critical potential of story-practice alongside its material, or ontogenetical, dimension – an issue that, arguably, remains untouched in Latour's account.

For one could think that all this focus on productive agency impedes a certain critical sharpness. Need we not look at, say, the impressions of biotechnological gadgets and disappointed parents that Rose's *Frankenstein* film presents as a commentary on our stance towards dis-/different abilities? Do we not suppress such critical messages if we focus too much on the constructive aspect of things; if we look only at how the creature in Rose's film is brought into existence as being of fiction, rather than at what it represents or speaks about? However, to re-inject ontological

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themselves'. To say that they 'happen' is too weak in terms of the agency and effort required.

solidity into fictional practice in no way means to empty it of the capacities of difference, reflection, or negativity – if critical insights are ultimately based on the principal question of "how, *from within* the flat order of positive being, the very gap between thought and being, the negativity of thought, emerges" (as Slavoj Žižek usefully phrases it [6]). In this sense, then, stories can be productive *and* critical at the same time. To ask for how the creature in Rose's film is brought into existence is precisely to allow for an affective involvement with the film's protagonist, this unfortunate young man created by overreaching scientists, which deactivates oppositions between critique and experience: we do not only look at this being. We make him and he makes us; and our reflections on what he stands for indeed constitute a "gap between thought and being" that emerges from an actual involvement, not from conceptual recognition only. And if conceptual insights, in turn, result organically from an engagement with beings of fiction – when we for example claim, after seeing the film, that it 'alerts us to the marginalisation of the differently abled' – then such critical insight follows from but need not be assumed to replace vital experience. And overall – if, as Judith Butler claims (in her text "What is Critique?"), critique is to ask "after the occlusive constitution of the field of categories themselves," then to think about new places for fiction in our understanding of 'reality' is a critical enterprise.

In detail, then, Part One (FIGURES) dedicates itself to matter and form as they become an issue with the creature's body, which sits at the heart of the story and occupies a double role, for it works both as the object and as the source of narrative interest in *Frankenstein*. Frankenstein tells us *about* the creature's body and at the same time couldn't tell us a single thing if it weren't *for* the creature's body. Both functions are ultimately related to the creature's marked-ness – the properly *figural* quality of his body, which is never only body, but also sign; and never only sign, but also body. This marked-ness constitutes, quite concretely, a space of constant divergence from the very principle of norm, a space in which corporeality and meaningfulness are as much in radical tension as they are inseparable. In such a space, the mechanisms of ideology – which substitute signs for bodies in order to delete the latter from the domain of meaning – encounter serious resistance. This becomes

evident in the tendency of *Frankenstein* stories to struggle with the physicality of their narrative speakers. Victor Frankenstein's (in)famous description of the monster's looks in Shelley's novel alone exemplifies this – the "luxuriances" of proportionate limbs, "pearly" white teeth, and "lustrous" black hair simply do not cohere for anything with the "watery" eyes, the "shrivelled" complexion, and "straight black lips" (39). Is the creature beautiful or ugly, then? There is no neutral point of observation from which we, as readers, could decide. Matter keeps getting in the way of clear designation; and yet matter is also the occasion, aim and source of this very same designation. The grotesque thus turns out to be essential to, not excessive of meaning – without therefore losing its disturbing quality. Rose's 2015 film version, which de-naturalises and disperses the creature's narrative voice through filmic language, further engages us with this essential monstrosity of enunciation.

This inseparability of bodies and meaningfulness shows how both are equally characterised by processes of alteration, a capacity and necessity (even an urge or a drive?) to repeat, but with a difference. *Frankenstein* as a cultural phenomenon with its 200 years of adaptation history is subject to such alteration at a textual level, and so are its creatures, who incorporate the ambivalence between production and reproduction. Part Two (REPETITION) therefore asks: What happens when the material/corporeal meaningfulness of the creature's marked body stretches into a proper narrative trajectory, a chain of alteration that can be followed? Ultimately, iteration or differential repetition – that is, the coincidence of the same and the different, the paradoxically retroactive production of original meaning – reveals itself as vital process superordinate to actual as well as fictional beings and texts. This becomes a particularly interesting issue with regard to the narrative logic of sequels and series, which is what Part Two will look at by way of examples. Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*, and even more so Logan's *Penny Dreadful*, find themselves in a position where repetition cannot plausibly be framed as exception or secondary to the default case of clear identity. They cannot, as it were, naively present Frankenstein's creature as himself. They have to deal with the fact that what they must present as sensational has explicitly and obviously been there before – because they

are adaptations, but also because sequentiality and seriality necessitate a constant reworking of old into new and past into present. This ambiguity between 'again' and 'anew' makes for the fact that the monstrous protagonists of both the film and the series can only be grasped in a logic of singularity. In *Penny Dreadful*, for instance, the serial structure of narration corresponds with a serial production of monsters (three in total) on the part of Victor Frankenstein. We might expect the third creature to turn out a tired copy; instead, she ends up inventing her own past and her own future, thereby revealing the reservoir of originality underneath imitation – a claim that equally applies to the way in which stories develop significance in their own right, regardless of the fact that they are inevitably stories *of* something else.

And finally: *Frankenstein* subverts ideology through the refusal to let meaningfulness be detached from body, and such corporeal expressivity is driven and expanded in time by the differential capacities of life. Which forms of individuality and community, which forms of self and which forms of relation are established in the process? Part Three (COMPANY) looks at the implications of stories being a radically cooperative practice, and how this required social practice relates to the problem of socio-political community (including feminist questions) as it is debated as theme in *Frankenstein*. In many ways, *Frankenstein* is a story about the failure of rigid identities, about the impossibility of creating live beings after conceptual blueprints. This is not only what Victor Frankenstein's famous hybris in Mary Shelley's novel consists in. It is also what, for instance, Theodore Roszak's purposefully 'feminist' 1995 novel *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* shows: in demonstrating, through the very failure of its aesthetic strategies, that little progress will be made if patriarchally conditioned identities are simply exchanged for supposedly more natural, feminine ones, the very regime of identity is put up for debate. In contrast to such failures, other *Frankenstein* stories show how not only story content but the very practice of fiction opposes this rigidity and requires different forms of relation and different forms of communal agency. In fact, it is often practices of double casting – such as we see them in Danny Boyle's staging of *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre, but also in the double cast twist in Whale's *Bride* film,

where the same actress plays Mary Shelley as well as the monstrous bride – which reveal that agency is as such communal or collective, and seldom more radically so than when we tell stories. In the events and the creatures it tells us about, *Frankenstein* drafts the individual not as segregated nor as collective but precisely as the site and agent of negotiation between inside and outside, accessibility and enclosure, agency and passion. And as narrative fiction, it demands a practice of self – and, hence, a practice of community – in precisely this spirit.

The *Frankenstein* versions that I have selected have been chosen for their potential to address these issues of figures, repetitions, and company, but at the same time they provide a halfway reasonable cross-section through the *Frankenstein* complex – being chosen from different media contexts and different time periods (19th century literature, 20th century cinema, 21st century theatre, and so on).[20] In investigating them, I aim at something like a critical-material double vision: I would like to appreciate both *Frankenstein*'s critical-symbolic sharpness and its medial-material agency, so that my account shuttles between the principles of productive affirmation and critical deconstruction.[21] I want to read *Frankenstein*'s (re)productive potential in the light of an account of fiction that sees the latter as ontogenetical practice, that is, a practice productive of being, material dimension and all. And yet I think that stories, by virtue of being stories, have an inherent critical potential that frequently includes but is not necessarily limited to or identical with what they represent. Story-practice has its own ethically and politically relevant implications. In the sense of a 'critique that matters,' then, I want to try and balance the affirmation of material agency and the critique of symbolic iteration.

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20 I am taking the liberty of leaving the question of the cultural and historical *universality* of fiction open. (Catherine Gallagher, for instance, has commented on the historically variable sense of 'fiction,' and suggested that our current common-sense definitions of 'fiction' might in fact be intricately connected to the genre of the novel and its inception).

21 Susan Friedman has argued, with reference to Rita Felski's postcritique, that we do in fact need both, or as she puts it: "Both/And."

Part One: Figures

Frankenstein seems an apt example to illustrate that modern narratives, as Peter Brooks claims – 'modern,' in his definition, "starting sometime in the eighteenth century" – "appear to produce a semioticization of the body which is matched by a somatization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and a locus of meanings, and that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of signification" (*Body Work* xii). Indeed, *Frankenstein* depends on the body to an extraordinary degree: the creature's body is the pivotal element of the story, in whichever version; generating, directly or indirectly, most of the other plot incidents, thus being the crucial factor in generating narrative interest. It is through its marked-ness, more specifically, that the creature's body is able to generate this interest: whether it is that the creature is imagined as having actual scars or some other kind of lesion, or whether it is made clear in other ways that there is 'something wrong with him,' he does stand out, is marked – quite literally and physically – as exceptional. It is as if we are dealing with an inherently narrative body, which through an either very obvious or sometimes also a subtle marked-ness (often for female creatures) makes evident and tangible that 'there is a story to tell here' – the second most common reaction after immediate and outright rejection that the create receives, it seems, consists in attempts at causal explanation: factory accident (*Penny Dreadful*), burn victim (Roszak), "the wars" (Dear's screenplay for the National Theatre).

While *Frankenstein* is among the examples that Brooks investigates to develop his claims, there is a peculiarity to it that does not quite seem to

receive the specific attention that it deserves from Brooks, and this peculiarity is connected to the fact that the creature's corporeality and its role for the story cannot sufficiently be accounted for by the mechanisms of signification. If Brooks's "subject is the nexus of desire, the body, the drive to know, and narrative: those stories we tell about the body in the effort to know and to have it" (*Body Work* 5), then the – marked – body that is the "source and [the] locus of meanings" for story can, in his view, have only the elusive absence-presence of an ever-receding object of desire for narrative. Frankenstein's creature, however, whose body provokes and keeps provoking so much storytelling, counteracts such ghostly flatness or insubstantiality. Victor's creative practice is, after all, first and foremost re-creative: the problem of life poses itself to him first and foremost as the problem of death, the question of creation turns into a consequence, a sequel, almost, of discarding, dissolution, of becoming-useless. Victor is literally confronted with a 'difficult' material, both hard to source and hard to manage, the processing of which costs him severe effort precisely because this material has a life and a history of its own. The marked-ness of the finished creature incorporates these dimensions of history and labour, which lend a depth to whatever concrete mark(s) the creature bears on his body that goes beyond a logic of signification as indication. It is not only that "the body ha[s] been marked with a special *sign*, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic *signifier*" (*Body Work* 3 [my emphasis]), but that these marks provide a plastic, tangible *remnant* of the process of its creation, which not only indicates but in some sense *is* itself the creation process, or part of it. In this, these marks apparently function differently from the paradigm cases cited by Brooks such as the ominous birthmarks, scars or tokens which betray a protagonist's ancestry but which matter only in their shape and indexical function, not in their substance.[22]

22 They are therefore more substantial than "the notorious *croix de ma mère* of melodrama" that Brooks cites, "the token affixed to or engraved on the abandoned orphan which at last enables the establishment of identity" (*Body Work* 3).

The *Frankenstein* complex keeps signifying, compulsively, the body it centres on, as Brooks claims; but at the same time it is intimately, existentially connected to this body or rather, to this body's thickness, its depth – a connection that is well reflected in the fact that the protagonists tend to perceive this body as too near, too present rather than as a mysterious, elusive apparition; a being that needs to be chased away rather than captured. The creature's marked-ness thus creates a space in which matter and form do not come together in any casual way but in which they keep open between them a field of tension, manifested in the creature's body. There is a space of divergence that makes sure that no matter which surroundings – in terms of natural environments, societies, or literary adaptations – the creature appears in, he will always be 'different,' 'other,' 'unlike,' or, in one word, a 'monster.'[23] It is precisely this space of divergence surrounding the creature, resulting from the re-working process, from which he speaks and ultimately, from which the story emerges and sources its dynamic. There is a thickness to the monster's flesh, more specifically to its marked-ness that accommodates this space of divergence, this history, this work, as well as the arabesque, as Brooks calls it, of plot.

In such a combined interest in and dependence on corporeal space, narrative fiction refuses to dismiss bodiliness. (It is thus little surprising that the creature can usually not be given a proper name, or if so, only a mythical or stage name, a pseudo- rather than a proper name of its own: Adam, Caliban, Lily – as if he denied the distance necessary to give him proper linguistic packaging.) Whatever the body is, precisely – Brooks

23 Michel Foucault points out that this is what gives monstrosity its tautological quality: "the characteristic feature of the monster is to express itself as, precisely, monstrous, to be the explanation of every little deviation that may derive from it, but to be unintelligible itself. Thus, it is this tautological intelligibility, this principle of explanation that refers only to itself that lies at the heart of analyses of abnormality" (*Abnormal* 57). Adaptations of *Frankenstein* often preserve this 'being different' to the point of nonsense, for instance in Lily in *Penny Dreadful*, who fits all mainstream demands on appearance but who is still shown to be perceived as 'somehow different' by people, because of her exceptionally cold touch, her extraordinary beauty, etc.

for one emphasises that by 'body' he does not mean a seemingly simple biological unit but rather the conglomerate of 'real-world' phenomena, subjective desires, and cultural constraints condensed in it – for stories, it never vanishes entirely behind the meaning that it helps produce.[24]

Part One aims to investigate the seemingly obvious role of the body for the *Frankenstein* complex and relate it to the role which the body, in its dynamic materiality, plays for the production of stories. For in a very basic and general sense, fiction is characterised by its ability to put us in a shifting, mobile relation to our material surroundings, presenting occurrences that both derive from and transcend tangible 'realities'; in fiction, as Latour puts it, "*raw materials* – unrelated, let us recall, to the idealism of 'matter' – seem capable of also producing forms or, better, *figures* [my emphasis]" (*Inquiry* 243). In calling these "fragile vibration[s]" of "disturbed materials" (*Inquiry* 245) 'figures' and occasionally, 'figurations,' Latour picks up a long tradition of naming the encounter between form and matter, and anything pertaining to or resulting from such an encounter. The most adequate translation of Latin *figura*, Erich Auerbach claims, is 'plastic form'; and in addition to the crossings of matter and form, it has often come to denote the elements that stay stable in any given transformation, as well as – once 'figure' comes to be a technical term for rhetorics – ornament, design, the non-literal, that is, anything that exceeds a description of the 'pure facts of the matter' ("Figura"). (Roland Barthes, incidentally, refers to the figure as "what in the straining body can be immobilized" [*Lover's Discourse* 4]). The concept of the figure is, admittedly, a "hackneyed theme" (as Latour calls it [*Inquiry* 243]) the history

24 "I address the question of the body in different modes," Brooks says, "allowing a broad semantic range for 'body' – biological entity, psycho-sexual construction, cultural product – since I believe that it is all of these, often all at once, to writers and readers" (*Body Work* xii). In the context at hand, the more abstract term 'corporeality' seems as appropriate as the simple word 'body' – the former because bodies are hardly objective givens but rather existential circumstances when it comes to *Frankenstein*; and the latter for the sake of the personal relevance and intimacy it suggests. I therefore use both in the following. Nowhere, however, is the personal relevance and intimacy of 'body' supposed to imply any such thing as self-evidence, simplicity, or transparency.

of which I will not be able to do justice in this context but which I will nevertheless appropriate in order to capture the peculiar capacity to relate to and transcend given material environments in one complex move. Fiction (as Latour argues) relates to other ways of being in the world through a particular interaction with materiality – given circumstances become marked as being significant beyond the way in which they immediately present themselves – as when lines drawn on paper become something more than charcoal and cellulose. The 'imitation of nature,' the 'intention of the artist,' and related aspects might be factors in the process, but they do not bring fiction about all on their own. Fiction lives off the capacity of existents to transcend themselves through the interaction with other existents. From the interaction between pen, paper, idea (or intention), and line (or form), a new being emerges; and at the same time, pen, paper, intention, and form are requirements this new being makes to hold itself in existence. (The temporality of this occurrence is complex; as is the solidarity required. Parts Two and Three will investigate them.)

Intuitively plausible as this might be for such a straightforward case as a 'simple' drawing: how does it work for narrative fiction? For stories, the manipulation of 'what is,' of given circumstances, happens through the intermediary of enunciation – stories have the quality of being-told. This quality goes beyond the question of the materiality of language and exposes the body's place (or struggle for place) in discourse. *Frankenstein* leads us right to this problem: in *Frankenstein*, the body works, so to speak, as the marked canvas – the domain of what Latour calls "figure" – that holds and produces the sense of fiction. It refuses to be relegated to the position of passive object of interest or that of silent matter, of mere carrier of meaning generated (supposedly) elsewhere, in language or institutions (the body here thus pre-empts what Latour refers to as "double-click" gestures throughout his *Inquiry*). In the creature's body specifically, in the way it sits at the very heart of the story, the condition of the story being produced, being told, becomes entangled with the story's content – all the more so since the creature ends up quite frequently in the position of narrator.

That telling a story and being listened to while you are doing it is something of a high-wire act for the creature exposes both the mecha-

nisms of ideology in their stubbornness, and why stories have the potential to nevertheless subvert them. Where one cannot dismiss corporeal marked-ness, where one cannot separate the body from the story, objective regimes of standardisation are precluded. That the monster's body refuses to acquire properly the quality of an object for its own story thus has implications for a critique of ideology in and through *Frankenstein* – implications that go beyond the thematic level. It has actually been argued that the thematic level is the only level on which (Shelley's) *Frankenstein* operates anti-ideologically: on the level of form, the narrative layering effects a constant distancing from ideological content that then itself actually propagates a (Romantic) ideology of transcendence (Comitini, "Limits of Discourse"). I would argue, however, that because of the double function of the creature's body as object-and-engine of narration, it is precisely *not* the case that the story projects anything beyond itself which would finally be universal rather than particular. The form of the novel, its existence as narrative work, depends not only on the creature's body but on this body's living transformation. The creature is, besides being a character, also the (dynamic) physical space in which the story 'founds itself'; he never only speaks, he can only ever speak-and-be and therefore cannot serve as grounds outside of the story on which this story could secure any claim to transcendence. To give a spatial metaphor, the creature 'draws us back in' rather than 'propelling us beyond.' In this dependence on and entanglement with dynamic materiality, *Frankenstein* complicates the idea of a discourse that speaks itself so drastically that not only is ideology refused, it begins to appear inconsequential.

In significant ways, *Frankenstein* supports Jean-François Lyotard's claim that meaningfulness has roots in a specifically figural depth that we do not always admit into our understanding of how signification works. Most of its (re)writings, admittedly, present more or less linear narratives and more or less conventional discursive structures. But even so, *Frankenstein* does develop disruptive or subversive force in its own particular way, it gains momentum to upset the orders of signification because the creature is both extremely textual *and* extremely corporeal – he refuses to cater to any easy separation of the material from the symbolic as he is both the story's motor or basis, and its invention; he is,

as Lyotard says about the figure in relation to language, "both without and within" (7). *Frankenstein*'s subversive potential can thus really only be measured if its manifest form and content are looked at together with the conditions of its existence as a work of narrative fiction.[25]

Frankenstein thus advances with considerable force the "revolution" that Julia Kristeva detects "in poetic language," and not only in poetic language, but in poetic mimesis, that is, in fiction – a revolution which she claims to be decidedly connected to the spatial and more specifically, the corporeal dimension of language. The figural (Lyotard) or somatic (Kristeva) level of meaning is not a supplement to discourse, language, or signification but *inhabits* these structures. In much the same way, Frankenstein's creature inhabits his story: the conditions of the body as material – rather than as ontological unit – that both requires and defies work, that due to this tension is eternally caught in processes of formation, confronts what Michel de Certeau calls the "lust to be a viewpoint, and nothing more" (92). Viewpoints which are *nothing but* viewpoints reveal themselves as the phantasms they are; an objective core of a given story – the true skeleton story of, say, *Frankenstein* – seems hard to define, for precisely this reason.[26] In this sense, the *Frankenstein* complex clearly capitalises on the anti-ideological potential of the figural – even where it caters to popular taste; and this capacity is rooted not only in *Frankenstein*'s subject matter, but in its fictionality and narrativity, as well.

In many of its versions, *Frankenstein* presents itself as a staging of the (im-)possibilities of enunciation; as a dramatization of the fact that, as Émile Benveniste puts it, "*I* and *you* cannot exist as potentialities; they exist only insofar as they are actualized in the instance of discourse, in which, by each of their own instances, they mark the process of appropriation by the speaker" (220). Shelley's 1818 novel has its own specific,

25 Arne de Boever has called storytelling, quite fittingly, "a practice that would resist, precisely, the governance in which storytelling *also* participates" (7).

26 It thus appears doubtful whether the "myth" of *Frankenstein* carries – as it does according to Chris Baldick – "a skeleton story which requires only two sentences: (a) Frankenstein makes a living creature out of bits of corpses. (b) The Creature turns against him and runs amok" (3).

but indirect way of thematising the relation between 'flat' signification and 'thick' corporeality, emphasising the latter as condition of the former even while hiding it, to some degree, from view through elaborate narrative packaging. Bernard Rose's 2015 film *Frankenstein* reveals more directly narrative fiction's capacity to lay bare the conditions of enunciation, as Chapter Two will elaborate. In presenting de-naturalised enunciatory situations, where we hear a speaker uttering what he can't possibly be saying in terms of diegetic settings, the film establishes a logical gap between the creature's corporeal circumstances and the words he utters that points to the labour, and also the violence, with which the body is inserted into the logic of signification, the logic of cultural legibility; and emphasises how this process is anything but trivial, and not to be taken for granted. In Rose's film, the monster not only struggles with the tension between corporeal circumstances and the conventions of signification. He literally becomes equivalent to this very tension, he *is* this tension because he serves as narrator to the story and subjective source of filmic images even where the plot seems to say that he can't.

Narrative Interest and the Body

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)

No Body, no Story...

The "human senses," Frankenstein's monster claims when he meets his maker on the summit of Montanvert to tell his story and negotiate for a female companion, "are insurmountable barriers to our union" (Shelley 119). In saying "our union," the creature addresses himself to mankind in general; but of course, Victor acts as a stand-in for "man" (119) at that moment, and demonstrates the truth of what his creature is saying: Victor's senses are truly "barriers" in that they literally enclose the creature's tale, set at the centre of Shelley's novel. They need to be dealt with before that tale can begin, and again before negotiations can be finalised.

The creature has come to talk: "I entreat you to hear me," he says to Victor, who attacks him; and then, when Victor does not relent, the creature repeats: "Listen to my tale"; "Listen to me, Frankenstein"; "listen to me" (78). But Victor is unwilling to put up with having to look at the being he has created: "Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form," he insists (79). The creature attempts to find a compromise, of sorts, as Victor reports: "'Thus I relieve thee, my creator,' he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; 'thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me, and grant me thy compassion'" (79). By virtue of this compromise, the creature is finally able to begin his story. After he has finished, however, a similar struggle occurs: debating the option of a female companion for the creature, Victor again finds that he cannot reconcile the creature's

words with his appearance: "His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (121).[1]

Whether one is able or not to tell a story depends, it seems, on a successful negotiation of sense impressions and corporeal circumstances: seeing the monster interferes with hearing him; the body from which he speaks confounds the content that his words convey. The creature's physicality needs to be actively shut out in order for his tale to make proper sense; the feelings of "horror and hatred" that the "filthy mass that moved and talked" provokes – a jumble of corporeal circumstances, it seems, that does not even properly justify the word 'body' – need to be shut out for the story to get through to Victor and restore to him the faculty of moral judgement: "I tried to stifle these sensations," he says, "I thought, that as I could not sympathize with him, I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow" (121).

There is a profound contradiction implicit in Victor's and the creature's negotiations. While both of them struggle to take the corporeal

1 It is almost as if those scenes anticipate a paradigm shift that is often linked to later developments such as psychoanalysis' talking cure, which switches from looking at the body to listening to it speak: "The transferential model of listening to the body's talk recognizes both the involvement of the listener and the final otherness of others' bodies and stories, both the capacities and the limits of knowing. It marks a partial subversion of the nineteenth-century model of the body held as an object of scrutiny in a detached and objective scientific gaze. […] The content of the delicate vessels cannot fully be specified, only their narrative trajectory" (Brooks, *Body Work* 255–56). – See also Scott Juengel on "[Johann] Lavater's physiognomics, the science of divining inscrutable spiritual qualities from the visible testimony of the body's exterior" as "*the* governing epistemological model operating in Shelley's *Frankenstein*," a connection of which we find traces in Boris Karloff's 1930s filmic incarnations of the monster. The ethics of (mis-)reading and interpretation, Juengel says, are interrogated in the story through this very paradigm and there is a "proto-cinematic" quality to both Shelley's narrative techniques and Lavater's physiognomics (254–5).

factor out of the equation by covering the other's eyes, or by suppressing their own visceral reactions, precisely this corporeal factor is the reason why the two have to get involved with each other. It is the reason why the creature comes to negotiate for a female companion in the first place – "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects" (118). It is the crucial point when it comes to the modification of (im-)moral behaviour – "I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?", the creature reasons. "You would not call it murder, if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. […] Let [man] live with me in the interchange of kindness, and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude" (119). It is, in each and every instance, the reason for the creature to be shut off from the company he craves – a point that Shelley's novel, and many of its adaptations, drive home by contrasting how the creature is received by the blind old De Lacey with his reception by people with their eyesight intact. "I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance," the old man explains, "but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere" (109); but when Felix, Agatha, and Safie enter, the contrast could hardly be greater: "Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted; and Safie […] rushed out of the cottage. Felix […] dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick" (110). In the rejection they provoke, the creature's corporeal circumstances are the reason for him to turn "malicious" (119), murder William and frame Justine: supposing William, at first, too young "to have imbibed a horror of deformity" (117), the creature kills him upon finding out that the child is not only related to Victor but exhibits the same revulsion as everyone else. Justine, in turn, is precondemned as "one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but me" (118). This corporeal factor also ends up being one of the major reasons that Victor cites for not finishing the female companion for the creature – a twisted and rather perverse argument, it is nonetheless what prompts Victor to destroy his half-finished work: "They might even hate each other," he reasons, "the creature who already lived

loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She might also turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species" (138). And above all, this corporeal factor is the reason for Victor to abandon the creature upon finishing him ("The different accidents of life are not so changeable as human nature. […] Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room" [39]).

The dependence, in other words, is radical. From the moment the first creature is finished – an event that comes to pass very early on, in the first quarter of the text – it is hard to think of any plot-driving incident that cannot, in one way or the other, be traced back to the creature's appearance, or, more precisely: to the gap between what he *does* looks like, and what he is *supposed* to look like. Peter Brooks has claimed this significance of the corporeal for modern narrative fiction in general. Acknowledging the pitfalls hiding beneath the term 'body,' Brooks nevertheless insists on its outstanding relevance, asking "why and how bodies […] have been made key tokens in modern narratives[.]" Those narratives insist, Brooks says, "that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations" (*Body Work* xii).[2] And indeed, the monster's physical appearance features as the "the focus of [the text's]

2 Brooks argues for an emphasis on modern narrative, specifically, with reference to the interdependent rise of privacy, the novel, and realism, a development which supports an interest in individuals and their concrete circumstances, including bodies, which are now properly 'theirs': "To know the body by way of a narrative that leads to its specific identity, to give the body specific markings that make it recognizable, and indeed make it a key narrative sign, are large preoccupations of modern narrative. If these preoccupations are most fully dramatized in the nineteenth-century novel, they need to be perceived first in the rise of the novel, along with the rise of the modern sense of individualism, in the eighteenth century. The work of social and cultural historians has more and more confirmed our commonsense view that the Enlightenment is the crucible of the modern sense of the individual, the individual's rights, and the private space in which the individual stakes out a claim to introspection, protection, and secrecy, including private practices of sexuality and writing. […] Within this

narrative logics," it occupies the double role of being the story's "object and motive" (*Body Work* xi).

In fact it is hard to imagine how the story of *Frankenstein* could possibly be told "without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations." In another sense, though, this is not an uncontroversial claim. There is some ambiguity when it comes to reading the creature either as organic or as an achievement of technology. Mark Hansen claims that "*Frankenstein* embodies [...] a 'machinic text' – a text constructed from materials (most centrally language, but also materially concrete social institutions like the law, the family, and indeed technology itself) which are not set off against the real, but which form its very substance" (578–79). This description captures quite well the material rootings of the text, but it curiously neglects all organic or visceral dimensions. Hansen examines how *Frankenstein*, through the contingencies, that is, the element of ungoverned chance in plot, does justice to the radical exteriority of technology's materiality, which Romantic models of creation fail to take account of. He insists on the radically inorganic nature of 'modern technology' as crucial factor for Shelley's novel. This, however, relies on an overly sharp distinction between the organic and the technological.[3] Frankenstein's creature and the relevance of his bodily appearance and functioning for the unfolding of his story suggest a vital energy that has to do with intimacy, unpredictability, growth and development. In which ways an energy of this kind also concerns or even comes from machines in the wider sense is up for debate – Hansen is certainly not working from a trivial understanding of 'the machinic' – but in any case, the role of the creature's body for *Frankenstein* can

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private space, what often appears to be most problematic, interesting, anguishing is the body" (*Body Work* 26).

3 This distinction has certainly been revised in the years since Hansen made his claim. Zack Sitter points out that "[i]norganic matter is constantly *becoming organic* through the action of living creatures; one of the distinguishing features of organic life, in fact, is its ability, even its drive, to incorporate the inorganic into its substance" (657). See Sitter further for a tracing of the distinction between organic and inorganic through the (anti-)vitalist debates of the early 19th century. I will return to the question of technology in more detail in Chapter Two.

hardly be connected to a predictable, cold, soulless, or banal mechanics. Of course, different adaptations have allowed the creature differing ranges of cognitive and emotional ability; and yet his capacity to affect and to generate such plot momentum as he does shows that even where the creature performs the role of mindless brute *inside* the story, such objectification is untenable when looking at the overall dynamics *of* the story, even more so when looking at the dynamics of the *Frankenstein* complex as a whole.

It is in this context quite telling that, as Elizabeth R. Napier points out, the creature "is never given an *objective*, cohesive description in the novel" (179 [my emphasis]). Napier argues that creation, for Shelley's Victor, works as "a purgative operation, as an act that antibiotically rids the mind or body of an idea" and of which the question never seems to be whether it should be undertaken, but only how (172–73). This denigration of embodiment, Napier says, shows in the fact that "longing for a kind of 'transparent' creation, in which the art object, as Plato hoped, would reflect the 'real' idea […] Frankenstein unluckily creates an object whose opacity, whose insistent physicality seems, frighteningly, to deny any possibility of semantic translation" (180). And as if to "confirm this ambivalent relationship to the literal, Shelley constructs *Frankenstein* as a tale with a high degree of narrativity, with a constant emphasis on audition rather than spectacle," which is also why the description of the creature's physique is ultimately uninventive in the novel and why on top of that, all physical impressions and descriptions are veiled by layers of narrative packaging (180–81). While I agree with Napier's diagnosis that to confer proper object status on bodies is at best a difficult operation, maybe not an option at all in *Frankenstein*, I would draw a different conclusion from that, which is also somewhat opposed to Hansen's claim of radical exteriority: it is not that the semantic overrides the physical in the case of Frankenstein's creature, but that the creature's physique is always already meaningful and that the creature's body isn't covered by narrative but rather generates it. There is certainly an "ambivalent relationship to the literal" in *Frankenstein*, in particular on the part of the protagonists. But representation can be said to fail in the face of the creature's body only if we deny its productive entanglement with precisely this 'messy'

lump of corporeality. Therefore, while the creature might be difficult to describe, this isn't proof that the body acts as opponent of meaning but rather indicates, quite simply, that meaning is more than description. This very idea is illustrated by the complex and rather fundamental role the creature's physicality plays for Shelley's novel.

Difficult Material

Such bodily meaningfulness as Brooks focuses on is achieved quite often, he says, by the function of marked-ness (which helps to redeem, Brooks claims, a specifically modern form of alienation), a "marking or signing of the body" which makes this body into a "signifier, or the place on which messages are written." When in narrative literature "the body's story, through the trials of desire and over time, […] is very much part of the story of a character," the result is "a narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal" (*Body Work* 21). Such reciprocal conversions lead, along with the "semioticization of the body," to a "somatization of story: the implicit claim that the body is a key sign in narrative and a central nexus of narrative meanings" (*Body Work* 25). In producing the conflicts that fuel *Frankenstein*'s narrative developments, the creature's body is obviously such a "nexus" from which the story proceeds, and to which it keeps returning again and again.

Victor's project is, of course, unusually ambitious: neither is he 'simply' after raising an individual body from the dead, nor 'simply' after creating a working automaton, but he is after creating a functioning autonomous being from bodies that have already completed one cycle of life. The resources Victor is working with are thus, in a sense, not only his materials, not simply the 'stuff' to carry the imprint of his ideas, these resources are, rather, his equals and his opponents, seeing how they must both subject to his ministrations and 'do as they are told,' but also generate their own impulse – when the time is right.

Naturally, such resources are hard to come by, and difficult to deal with. Severe effort goes into finding as well as into managing them: Victor speaks of "days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue," of

"so much time spent in painful labour" and with "toils" (Shelley 34).[4] In fact, the expressions "labour" and "toil" keep repeating themselves in those pages which Shelley dedicates to Victor's animation experiment (33–40) as the text pays close attention to that experiment's physical conditions.[5] The creation of the monster is depicted as being not least an encounter of flesh with flesh which by far does not exhaust itself in Victor manipulating dead tissue to fit what his imagination proposes, but which also includes Victor's imagination being subject to the settings his resources dictate and, what is more, in which Victor's own corporeal circumstances depend on the operations that the fleshy materials he is working on prompt him to perform.

For the materials Victor uses, pre-formed and inherently historical as they are, demand, on the one hand, conceptual work ("Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation," Victor explains, "yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour"; and as "the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of gigantic stature" [35–36]). On the other hand, those materials demand physical exertion, too, as becomes evident from the notorious passage in which Victor lets us in on what goes on in his "workshop of filthy creation", which it is worth quoting at length. Rather than presenting Victor as mastermind operating in lofty conceptual spheres only, the passage gives us an urgent sense of his body and the struggles it is involved in:

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4 The text is famously unflinching in its depiction of physical detail: "I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheeks of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain" (34).

5 The allusions to childbirth are hard to miss and have been capitalised on by feminist criticism. I will address feminist criticism in more detail in Part Three.

> My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize. […] [T]he moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion. (36–37)

There's hunger (pale cheeks and an emaciated person), nausea (he turns with loathing, his eyes swim – as in someone whose stomach is heaving), strained eyesight (to the point where eyeballs start from sockets), a diaphragm that's tensing up (in unrelaxed breathlessness), and a number of expressions conveying an agitated physical state, a vibration of muscles and extremities: toil, frantic impulse, trembling limbs. There is thus considerable material opposition to be overcome before success can be achieved; we can tell how massive it is from the force (mental and physical) Victor needs to exert to precisely that end. It doesn't seem accurate, then, to claim, as for instance Jude Wright does, that for "Shelley's Victor the event is horrible, but it is a quiet horror: a trauma of the mind not of

the body" (257). Rather the opposite is the case. In the way it engages Victor wholly – body and soul, if you like – the creature's body is vital even before it is alive.

For all that Victor keeps secret his actual methods, Shelley's text nevertheless, and somewhat paradoxically, lingers on the passage from plan to product, zooming in on Victor's efforts and the obstinacy of his materials. It is this labour and this historicity that ultimately make room for things to go awry: in spite of all the hard work Victor puts into his project, he is unable to 'get it right'; and in spite of all the attention he pays to the peculiarities of the parts that he tries to bring together, he miscalculates. So while, in one sense, Victor is extraordinarily successful – producing a being that is not only capable of autonomous existence but will turn out to be immensely strong, tall, and physically resilient – in another, he fails miserably, and brings forth a creature whose physical deviance from the norm (and from Victor's expectations) is so great no one will ever be able to overlook it. The first and most comprehensive description of the creature that the novel presents is all about deviances, contrasts, and things not being as they should:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (39)

"Beautiful! – Great God!": the solid ground of sober planning (limbs set in proportion and selected according to quality standards) suddenly breaks away into an abyss of deviance where nothing is as expected; and the shock reverberates even in the syntactic arrangement of the passage, into which the exclamation inserts a gap, a terrible moment of waiting before the description rushes into the hell of watery eyes and open wounds. What *should* be and what *is* clash so forcefully that

individual aspects (hair, teeth, complexion, lips) cease mattering in themselves, and come to count only in their shrill dissonance (*all* that "these luxuriances" do is form a horrid contrast). This deviance, then, is what will form an "insurmountable barrier" between the creature and his maker, as well as between the creature and human beings in general. And this deviance congeals, as it were, in whatever marks and scars the creature bears – marks which thus contain an 'undergrowth' of history and labour that prevents their flattening out into easy readability. It remains evident that this 'matter,' assembled in the monster's body, has been somewhere before, that something has been done to it, and that it has a life of its own. Frankenstein's creature is, all in all, the opposite incarnate of the self-evidence that we so often attribute to the material world, including the body.

Figures

Jean-François Lyotard's account of figuration captures the involvements of the material world with human discursive habits, to the effect that we cannot assume the material world to be still and silent in itself and discourse to float freely above all material ties. Deconstructing the juxtaposition of the sensory paradigm to that of signification, Lyotard sets out, in his phenomenological account, from the assumption that "there is no absolutely Other, but there is the element dividing itself and turning over, becoming vis-à-vis and therefore perceptible; there is a 'there is' that is not originally a heard utterance, but the product of a driftwork that tears the element in two" (5). How speaking individuals relate, for the meaning they aim to convey, to the world that they talk *about* even while they are entangled *in* it is of central relevance for *Frankenstein*; even to the point that we can acknowledge, beyond the question of individual characters' fates, a material agency driving the whole story forward.

This productive ambivalence is suitably indicated by the concept of the 'figure' or the 'figural.'[6]

Designation, Lyotard says, that is, talking *about* or thinking *about* something, depends not only on the differences between signifiers that make language into what it is, but just as well on the distance that the designating instance *establishes* toward what is being designated, an act of meaningfulness (the 'there is' that is not an utterance) different from the structures of syntax and lexicon. Discourse is not the same as gesture ("when one simply combines word and gesture, when saying is dissolved in seeing," then either "saying goes silent, or the seen must already be something like the said" [6]) but it is not entirely other to it, either. Rather the opposite is the case: the 'flat' difference between signifiers depends, in order to produce meaningful discourse, on the 'thick' difference between observer and observed – thick because spatial, depending on distance, "drift," the very kind of thickness characterising the body of Frankenstein's creature. This is how and where, according to Lyotard, we encounter the figure: we "can get to the figure by making clear that every discourse possesses its counterpart," that there is a "gesticulatory expanse that makes depth or representation possible" (7–8).

Seeing and speaking, while clearly distinct, can therefore hardly provide the relief from one another that the creature seeks in imploring his creator to *only* listen to him. For the figure is both the sensory at the heart of discourse, and provides discourse with its surroundings: it is "over there, like what it designates in a horizon: sight on the edge of discourse"; but one can also "get in the figure without leaving language behind because the figure is embedded in it. One only has to allow oneself

6 Lyotard says, in more detail, that his investigation "takes the side of the eye, of its siting; shadow is its prey. The half-light that, after Plato, the word threw like a gray pall over the sensory, that it consistently thematized as a lesser being, whose side has been very rarely really taken, taken in truth, since it was understood that its side is that of falsity, skepticism, the rhetorician, the painter, the *condottiere*, the libertine, the materialist – this half-light is precisely what interests this book" (5).

to slip into the well of discourse to find the eye lodged at its core, an eye of discourse in the sense that at the center of the cyclone lies an eye of calm. The figure is both without and within" (Lyotard 7). Curiously without and within is also the creature's body to the story of *Frankenstein*: always perceived as an impediment to the creature's meaning-making activity by its intradiegetic listeners, it is the condition for the creature's extradiegetic audience's attention. In its dependence on what is, apparently, the most horrible of bodies, *Frankenstein* thus confirms that "[d]iscourse is always thick. It does not merely signify, but expresses. And if it expresses, it is because it too has something trembling trapped within it, enough movement and power to overthrow the tables of signification with a quake that produces the meaning" (9). If "the symbol's transcendence is the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken" (7), that means the figure, conversely, has a peculiar form of transcendence, too, a curiously incorporated transcendence – rather like Frankenstein's creature, as what is maybe the most corporeal of imaginary beings. Speech (in *Frankenstein* and, following Lyotard, elsewhere) evolves in constant emancipation from, and thus also dependence on, corporeal existence; and corporeal existence in turn gains its significance precisely from its capacity to explode speech.

Admittedly, '*overthrowing* the tables of signification' seems a bit much to ask of a work of fiction so deeply entrenched in popular culture, and so prone to be represented in formally conventional, linear narratives as the story of *Frankenstein*. However, its inconspicuousness as cultural artefact notwithstanding, there is much transgressive potential to the curious mobility (a "mobility constitutive of depth," as Lyotard puts it [54]) of Frankenstein's creature. The creature is, of course, transgressive in the sense that he tends to upset a number of common binary distinctions (human-animal, natural-cultural or biological-technological, male-female, and so forth). But he is also transgressive in a more profound sense, seeing how he tends to occupy his texts' margins as well as their centres. This is even formally true in the case of Shelley's novel, where the creature's own account is nested at the centre of two layers of narrative, but also resurfaces, if still in quotation, on the top layer at

the end of the novel. Always ready to leave his concrete textual manifestation in a given adaptation behind and appear in another one, the creature nevertheless manifests itself only in and through those texts, even while he resists the dissolution of corporeality in linguistic structures. The creature's transgression, then, concerns multiple junctures: that of the double and somewhat contradictory role he fulfils for his fellow protagonists (where he provokes repulsion) and his audiences (where he produces narrative interest), respectively; but also the juncture between centre and margin of a given text as well as the juncture between several texts. The creature's body has an existence that is as bound to its site of origin and given shape as it is able to exceed it. Both the creature's own utterances (whenever he presents a first-person narrative) as well as the language that describes him are made of signs that are unmistakeably *of* the body (as Brooks puts it, "a mark of the body" rather than only a "mark on the body" [*Body Work* 220]). The creature is both other *and* essential to the texts he appears in and thus reveals these texts to be practices, metastable at best, rather than mere containers or carriers of disembodied messages. The question of hierarchy – does the monster create the text, or the text create the monster? is the creature's body in the story, or is it of the story? – becomes moot if "[c]reation" is assumed to hold "sway over both nature and art" (Lyotard 231).

Speak and Be

What the story thus both proceeds from and aims at is a thickness of flesh and a thickness of existence which always puts the monster one step closer to his opponents and audiences than the frameworks of signification seem to allow, or those opponents find bearable. Just as his skin doesn't cover the recesses of his body, the creature in general is prevented from translating his own being into a surface to hide his depth, such as for instance the beautiful De Laceys have, who do not only exhibit "perfect forms" (Shelley 90) but also "gentle manners" (87), who, in other words, seem to conform in thought, deed, and appearance to an ideal that the creature, although still a 'savage' at that point, is 'natu-

rally' acquainted with – and, what is more, that is outwardly readable, and straightforwardly attributable to inner qualities. Just as the "work" – whether 'work' in the sense of 'apparatus that Victor has put together' or 'work' in the sense of 'workings, mechanisms' is open to interpretation – of "muscles and arteries beneath" is visible through his skin, so the creature as a whole is a walking struggle, and uneasy alliance, of physicality with signification, and matter with form. In this historical and labour-intense thickness, extraordinary in every sense of the word (unusual, as for instance the contrast to the De Laceys emphasises, and also unintended, as Victor's reaction to his own success makes clear), the creature is literally a "body that matters," or a being that forbids such simplifications of materiality as serve the purpose of excluding matter from the complexities of meaning. The monster's corporeal constitution attests to the differentiated and differentiating potential of physical resources – a potential the role of which has vacillated throughout the history of Western philosophy. As Judith Butler helpfully elaborates:

> In both the Latin and the Greek, matter (*materia* and *hyle*) is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized. […] Insofar as matter appears in these cases to be invested with a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it also supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested from the more modern empirical deployments of the term. […] In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where 'to matter' means at once 'to materialize' and 'to mean.' (*Bodies that Matter* 7)[7]

In that sense, the irony of the creature's constitution is that it *does* consist in a "brute positivity" – an overwhelming, all-too-present corporeal-

7 Lest she appear a proper Aristotelian, Butler qualifies: "Obviously, no feminist would encourage a simple return to Aristotle's natural teleologies in order to rethink the 'materiality' of bodies. I want to consider, however, […] a possible contemporary redeployment of Aristotelian terminology" (*Bodies* 7).

ity – but simultaneously refuses the simplicity associated with such positivity. Through his discordant appearance, the monster exhibits an insistent spatiality, a form of 'matter' in which it is hard to locate any such thing as a 'silent nature' (of the Platonic kind: a "receiving principle," a *physis* to accommodate form or shape [Butler, *Bodies* 14]). He *is* signification instead of 'merely' articulating it. His narrative voice is unusual in that this voice does not permit us to forget about the conditions of its possibility. In that sense, nothing speaks through the monster, but the monster speaks himself, articulates his own (mode of) existence as fictional character. There is altogether more agentiality involved than seems to speak from Brooks's description of how "[s]igning or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story" (*Body Work* 3).[8]

This seems counterintuitive, given how the creature's tale is 'packaged' in so many narrative layers in Shelley's text, but that is precisely where *Frankenstein*'s radical dependence, as a story, on the bodies that it depicts comes in: buried under several others as the creature's voice may be, the corporeal conditions from which it is not separable still assert their sovereignty in driving the story mercilessly towards its desolate ending. Walton, who is the last to see the creature alive shortly before it vanishes in "darkness and distance" (Shelley 191), mimics Victor's reaction during the negotiations on Montanvert: "Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness," Walton tells us (or rather, his sister Margaret), "I shut my eyes involuntarily"; at the same time, however, he is acutely aware of the creature's "powers of eloquence and persuasion" (187–88). One needs to be properly blind, as the old De Lacey, it seems, to stand a chance of separating the creature's words from the creature's body; of being able to

8 Brooks sees in the confrontations of the visual and the verbal in Frankenstein, among other things, a confrontation of genres, of Enlightenment writing with the Gothic novel (*Body Work* 309, note 3). I would, however, contradict the dichotomy of the symbolic and the material that is implicit in casting the relation between the visual and the verbal as a simple confrontation.

perceive only one of the two. As a rule, the creature's body inhabits his discourse so stubbornly – or, to put it the other way round, the creature's discourse clings to his body so forcefully, that whoever encounters him is forced to confront the entirety of his being, including his existential contingencies: the "work of muscles and arteries beneath," the fact that this being (as all others are, only less visibly so) is not simply a given, but depends on the ongoing establishment of coherences between what is disparate, distinct, or discoordinated. Possibly, the creature is more, not less natural than his fellow beings, in that he lacks a skin to cover his conditionality.[9] Even his readers are automatically confronted with the double relevance of the creature – he is dependent on the text which he brings forth himself, not only as speaker, but also as principal narrative interest. On all accounts – to formulate a preliminary summary – the creature is always and inevitably both extremely textual, and extremely corporeal: textual *in its corporeality*, and corporeal *in its textuality*. This, ultimately, puts the creature, and with it, the *Frankenstein* story, at odds with ideology not only in a specific sense, but also in principle: the creature pushes against various norms and conventions (of 'proper' bodily form and so on), but additionally, in his meaning-making potential, he also pushes against our reliance on truth as entirely objective, which subjects can master through confirmation or recognition but have not 'spoiled' through any actual involvement in its production.

For Brooks, what matters most in modern literature's dependence on the marked body are the possibilities of recuperation and recognition. For him and for many of the texts he investigates, the body's impact is conditioned on its absence, and to mark this body enables us to retrieve and identify it in the "countless moments in modern literature when recognition takes place through markings made on the body itself" because "[s]igning the body indicates its recovery for the realm of the semiotic" and its "recreation as a narrative signifier" (*Body Work* 21–22).[10] The point about Frankenstein's creature is not only that his marked-ness

9 Brooks calls the monster "postnatural and precultural" (*Body Work* 217).

10 Brooks cites as an example preceding, but emblematic for the paradigm to fully develop in modern literature a moment in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus, though

– not only the actual traces we assume that he bears on his skin, but also, in a more general sense, his conspicuousness – is so excessive, so overly present that authentication is unnecessary. In a sense, the creature is a puzzle without mystery, an enigma that isn't really all that engimatic: we never really know how, precisely, he is brought into being (technically speaking), but there is never any doubt as to his identity when he appears, and he is always more present than his fellow beings would like him to be – nobody ever goes looking for Frankenstein's creature (in contrast to, for example, for the equally iconic figure of Count Dracula). More than that, the point about Frankenstein's creature is also that when he speaks, what is really speaking – generating not only words, but (literary) meaningfulness – is the space of his deviance, the difference between himself and his fellow beings, the gap between his actual appearance and what he should, ideally, look like. It is not in itself the physical appearance of the creature that cannot be ignored by whoever listens to him, but rather the fact that this appearance differs so widely from what is "beautiful" or even bearable.

Brooks does not quite go far enough when he claims that "the Monster offers an inversion of the many scenarios […] in which the human body is marked or signed in order to bring it into the field of signification, so that it can be a narrative signifier." According to him, what is at stake in *Frankenstein* is "the capacity of language to create a body, one that in turn calls into question the language we use to classify and control bodies" (*Body Work* 220). What we see, Brooks implies, is a drama of separation between body and sign: circumstances require that the two be reconciled, yet by nature those two orders are mutually repellent. (In Brooks's psychoanalytic terminology: the creature's "definition as monster leads him to an overvaluation of language, as that which could take him out of that specular position. Yet he is required, by the logic of desire, to attempt to make language produce another body, to return to the imaginary, the specular, and the drama of sexual difference" [*Body Work*

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he is in disguise, is recognised by an old nurse from the scar on his thigh – "recognition comes […] through a mark on the body itself" (*Body Work* 2–3).

211]). What if, however, the drama is one of involvement, not of repulsion? The tension that captures narrative interest, I would argue, results not principally from the fact that the sign and the body don't get along, that the two are of fundamentally different orders and life, as it were, forces them to live together. (This view is also what Lytoard opposes in his analysis of the figure.) Rather, what we find in *Frankenstein* is an indication that one arises out of the other, that the sign and the body feed off each other and it is circumstance that, rather than forcing together what doesn't fit, asks us to keep apart what is connected – though never, certainly, harmoniously. It isn't so much that language is a 'way out' of matter – however much the creature might himself adhere to that belief. The creature speaks from the margins of the textual, being entrenched too deeply in physicality to allow us to equate him, fictionality notwithstanding, to 'mere letters on the page' – seeing how none of the protagonists are able to listen to the creature while ignoring his looks; seeing how there would be no story to tell if it weren't for that part of the creature which is 'not language.' He also speaks, however, from the margins of the corporeal, presented and presenting himself as a 'man of letters' – reading Goethe, Plutarch, and Milton, and capable of great rhetorical finesse – and/or an icon of literary history. Matter, or the body, serve as more than enigma that keeps the story going. They are at the same time a source of actual productivity, of narrative meaning. The creature's existence (as the outcast he is inside the story, and as fictional character we read about) is anchored in matter *and* language. It therefore speaks the entanglement of the body with the sign rather than the drama of their separation.

Try as he might, the monster's use of signs, his eloquence, does not and cannot move 'him' – as transcendental subject, if you like – away from his body, and that is not (or not only) because the logic of desire, desire for a female companion, ties him to corporeality, as Brooks claims (*Body Work* 211). It is almost as if the creature's body makes meaning in spite of itself. Signification need not recuperate corporeality here but rather cannot efface it and, what is more, even proceeds from it – not simply in the fashion of a "material support," as Brooks claims for the letter in relation to the message (*Body Work* 20–21), but in a truly gener-

ative relation. Brooks might be assessing correctly a broadly contemporary sentiment in saying that "we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic," notwithstanding the fact that we assume – some of us, at least – that "bodily parts, sensations, and perceptions" are "the first building blocks in the construction of a symbolic order, including speech, play, and the whole system of human language"; so that our ultimate impression is that "symbolic structures and discursive systems" move us "away from the body, as any use of signs must necessarily do" (*Body Work* 7–8). This sentiment is certainly not unreasonable – Brooks compellingly argues that "[w]hatever it once was, the body is now problematic; and our sense that it was once less so may be a reflection of how much it now is" (5) – but there is no imperative here: signs do not "necessarily" move us away from the body. They may just as well perform a profound interdependence where not only is one the support of the other, but where the dynamic of one is hard to think without the energy of the other.[11] If the creature's body weren't in itself, besides appalling,

11 Here is Brooks's argument in more detail, which is informative because it showcases precisely the understanding of signification which Lyotard's account, for instance, opposes: "One tradition of contemporary thought would have it that the body is a social and linguistic construct, the creation of specific discursive practices, very much including those that construct the female body as distinct from the male. If the sociocultural body clearly is a construct, an ideological product, nonetheless we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic: sensations of pleasure and especially of pain, for instance, are generally held to be experiences outside language; and the body's end, in death, is not simply a discursive construct. […] Bodily parts, sensations, and perceptions (including the notorious recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes) are the first building blocks in the construction of a symbolic order, including speech, play, and the whole system of human language, within which the child finds a libidinally invested place. In this sense, the most highly elaborated symbolic structures and discursive systems no doubt ultimately derive from bodily sensations. Yet these structures and systems move us away from the body, as any use of signs must necessarily do. Representation of the body in signs endeavors to make the body present, but always within the context of its absence, since use of the linguistic sign implies the absence of the thing for which it stands. The body appears alien to the very constructs derived from it" (*Body Work* 7–8). Note that nothing in the scenario Brooks describes ac-

also mobile, differential, out-of-sync, other not just to language but also to itself – what would *Frankenstein* even be talking about? "The novel insistently thematises issues of language and rhetoric because the symbolic order of language appears to offer the Monster his only escape from the order of visual, specular, and imaginary relations […] it promises escape from a condition of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'," Brooks argues (218). Where both he and the creature seem to go wrong, though, is in the assumption that such to-be-looked-at-ness is to be located entirely outside signification (Brooks argues that a monster, by 'definition,' "exceeds the very basis of classification, language itself: it is an excess of signification, a strange byproduct or leftover of the process of making meaning" [*Body Work* 218]).[12]

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tually forces him to conclude that the "use of signs" must "move us away from the body" – rather the opposite.

12 To say that language is not an escape from the body because it is not its opposite does not, however, entail that it would be, conversely, the natural and immediate expression of a being all transparent to itself. Both views, in fact, imply a simplification of bodies and of matter. Though what speaks from Brooks's analysis might just be a deconstructivist inclination – a turn from the unitary subject to whom the world is self-evident and thus truthfully and rationally describable – such inclination does not necessitate the relegation of matter into an absolute beyond. In fact, such relegation can itself turn into a form of reliance, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out: "If I have not very often used the word 'matter,' it is not, as you know, because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that […] this concept has been too often reinvested with 'logocentric' values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent etc. Realism or sensualism – 'empiricism' – are modifications of logocentrism. […] I will not say that the concept of matter is in and of itself either metaphysical or nonmetaphysical. This depends upon the work to which it yields, and you know that I have unceasingly insisted, as concerns the nonideal exteriority of writing, the gram, the trace, the text, etc., upon the necessity of never separating it from work [.] [I]t seems to me that the materialist insistence can function as a means of having the necessary generalisation of the concept of text, its extension with no simple exterior limit […] not wind up […] as the definition of a new self-interiority, a new 'idealism,' if you will, of the text. In effect, we must avoid having the indispensable critique of a certain naïve relationship to the signified or the

Truth, Judgment, Fiction

When the creature is confronted directly with his own corporeal deviance, his own monstrosity, he encounters this monstrosity not so much as verified (and verifiable) reality, a truth of knowledge and judgement, but as a truth which is a matter of revelation, of the undeniability of effect, rather than of confirmation. Truth as a matter of judgement becomes fraught, Lyotard points out, once one admits the figural into signification: "If I show that in any discourse, in its underground, lies a form in which an energy is caught and according to which the energy acts upon its surface," – an understanding of discourse which *Frankenstein* clearly confirms – "if I can show that this discourse is not only signification and rationality but also expression and affect, do I not destroy the very possibility of truth?" (10). Only, he goes on to argue, if we define truth "in terms of the internal consistency of a system, or of operativeness upon an object of reference" (12). If we admit "words' capacity to *utter* the pre-eminence of the figure" (13), however, truth is not what is tested and confirmed, but what reveals itself: "truth never appears where it is expected" – rather like the creature's monstrous physicality, as, incidentally, Lyotard's choice of words suggests, as well:

> Truth is discordant […] its impossible *topos* cannot be determined through the coordinates of the geography of knowledge. Instead it makes itself felt on the surface of discourse through effects, and this presence of meaning is called expression. However, not all expression is truth. […] Nonetheless one must fight to allow the effects of truth

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referent, to sense or meaning, remain fixed in a suspension, that is, a pure and simple suppression, of meaning or reference [because] [t]he outside can [otherwise] always become again an 'object' in the polarity subject/object, or the reassuring reality of what is outside the text" (*Positions* 64–67). In this spirit, too, can we argue that if it is the body that is speaking in *Frankenstein*, it is the body in its originary deviance – its presence, but not its self-evidence.

> to come to the surface, to unleash its *monsters of meaning* in the midst of discourse, within the very rule of signification. (12 [my emphasis])[13]

It might thus ultimately be the creature's independence from judgements of truth – and thus his very fictionality – that lend him revolutionary potential and existential force. His extraordinary powers of *appearance*, his blatant figurality, reflected in the fact that this figurality cannot be overlooked, not even by the kindest of beings (the De Laceys, that is), make him a "monster of meaning" more than a figment of the imagination. Beyond Shelley's novel, too, the creature is rarely, both to his fellow protagonists and to his audiences, what needs to be looked for; he is mostly that which presents itself more often, and more closely than anyone would really like it to (we never have to go dig for a *Frankenstein* movie, there are always more of them around than we can count). Much to the regret of the creature, as he learns when he meets the cottagers, being "master of their language" in no way guarantees that the "deformity of [his] figure" will be "overlook[ed]" (Shelley 90).

"Over*look* the de*form*ity of my *figure*": curiously, the creature seems to hope that the cottagers will see but not see, that they will un-see his physical appearance after they have understood that there is something wrong with it – deformity is, at least according to the way in which the creature uses the term here, perceivable only in the visual paradigm, where the creature hopes, paradoxically, that this deformity will not be seen. The figural, however – that through which the gaze cannot easily move – has a curious relation to truth, and truth will out, or rather, the real will out. The creature has a striking encounter with this kind of realness when he encounters his mirror image in a pool and contrasts it to the cottagers' "perfect forms": "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror," the monster says, "and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and

13 In the same vein, Latour quotes Spinoza: "It is about the work [of art] rather than about geometry that we should say *verum index sui*: what is true verifies itself" (*Inquiry* 245).

mortification" (Shelley 90). In Lacanian terms, we could read this experience as a perverted mirror stage: where for non-monsters, the "jubilant [if premature] assumption" (76) of imaginary bodily unity prepares the entry into the symbolic order, the creature is thrown back from his imaginary engagement with the spectacle of the cottagers' beauty into a real that not so much ignores systematic, external confirmation but rather pre-empts it as it confirms itself: "*I was in reality* the monster that *I am*," the creature says. Unlike Lacan's infant whose identity is projected forward and outward onto an alien form, the creature is thrown back tautologically unto himself. Reference to a judging instance beyond the immediate self is not so much evaded as it is infelicitous to begin with.

The monster's 'truth,' then, is his physical, bodily, spatial circumstance: an entirely different kind of truth than we commonly expect our judgements of truth values to yield; a kind of truth that is not at all opposed to fiction but that is a kind of 'figural truth' in the sense that it directs us "toward what is fabricated, consistent, real" (as Latour puts it [*Inquiry* 238]). It is this peculiarity in which Julia Kristeva sees the *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the fundamental anti-ideological potential of literature and fiction. *Frankenstein*, interestingly, confirms but also generalises Kristeva's point. Truth values, Kristeva points out, don't occur naturally. They depend on the construction of a position of judgement, a position from which to look at something and *call it* true or false: the "realm of signification" is "always that of a proposition or judgement, in other words, a realm of *positions*. This positionality [...] is structured as a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality. We shall call this break, which produces the positing of signification, a *thetic* phase" (*Revolution* 43).[14] What this thetic break requires is to cleanse meaning-making from all corporeality, including the underlying somatic layers of meaning which Kristeva calls "the semiotic" (as opposed to "the symbolic"), consisting of organic connections and kinetic rhythms. Far

14 This is not unsimilar to what Lyotard has to say on the figural, but Kristeva's analysis has the added value of being specifically directed towards literature, language, and fiction.

from being a kind of featureless sludge, the semiotic has structure and organisation, but it doesn't lend itself to the disembodiment that propositionality strives for or claims for itself (though never actually achieves: signifying systems, Kristeva says, ultimately depend on semiotic and symbolic alike).[15]

Problems arise, Kristeva says, when we begin to equate thetic significance with meaning in general, and to regard this kind of position as subjecthood per se – when we start to think that this is the only way to make meaning, that is, and that only this kind of stance identifies 'the subject' (when we, as Kristeva puts it, reify the subject "as a transcendental ego," functioning "solely within the systems of science and monotheistic religion" [*Revolution* 59]). Ideology relies heavily on rendering the thetic moment absolute: on the immobilisation of vital processes on behalf of unequivocal judgement and pre-determined values. Fiction counters this, according to Kristeva, because it presents a meaningful use of signs without, however, producing truth values, at least none of the propositional kind. "Mimetic verisimilitude […] preserves meaning and, with it, a certain object," she says. "But neither true nor false, the very status of this verisimilar object throws into question the absoluteness of the break that establishes truth." Mimesis and poetic language thus reveal that thetic positions are neither natural nor unavoidable. In this way, they "prevent the thetic from becoming theological; in other

15 In Kristeva's words: the semiotic is "a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonists of family structure. But we shall distinguish this functioning from symbolic operations that depend on language as a sign system—whether the language *[langue]* is vocalized or gestural (as with deaf-mutes). The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject. The genesis of the *functions* organizing the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other scene of pre-symbolic functions" (*Revolution* 27).

words, they prevent the imposition of the thetic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it" (*Revolution* 58). This, then, is the "revolution in poetic language" as such, beyond any particular points of critique that we can distil from specific works: that "mimesis and poetic language do more than engage in an intraideological debate; they question the very *principle* of the ideological" (*Revolution* 61 [my emphasis]).

Indeed, *Frankenstein* presents a story that makes it particularly hard to ignore the semiotic and the corporeal; not only, as this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, because it thematises the body (and its place in language, too), but because it reveals the degree to which fiction is entangled with the corporeal, such that the body is not only the object that the story steers toward, but also its motor, its source of energy to begin with. In that sense, *Frankenstein* strengthens Kristeva's point regarding a general anti-ideological potential of fiction. "If there exists a 'discourse' which is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, or the testimony of a withdrawn body, […] it is 'literature,'" in general, and, I would add, *Frankenstein*, in particular (*Revolution* 16). However, *Frankenstein* also undermines a further restriction that Kristeva introduces; which is the restriction of the properly revolutionary to the properly poetic text and therefore to the more avantgarde and experimental brands of literature. Kristeva derives this restriction from the capacity of the poetic text to not only produce *objects* that are "verisimilar" and hence deactivate thetic true/false-judgment, but to additionally thoroughly deconstruct the speaking *subject*:

> [M]odern poetic language goes further than any classical mimesis – whether theatrical or novelistic – because it attacks not only denotation (the positing of the object) but meaning (the positing of the enunciating subject) as well. In thus eroding the verisimilitude that inevitably underlaid classical mimesis and, more importantly, the very position of enunciation (i.e., the positing of the subject as absent from the signifier), poetic language puts the subject in process/on trial. (*Revolution* 58)

Only the transgression of grammaticality, in other words, fully deactivates the concept of a pre-existing, stable subject which would only avail

itself of (rather than being constituted by) a linguistic set of rules to register propositions and their truth values.

I am, however, not sure that we have said quite enough about fiction if we limit ourselves, essentially, to pointing out its lack of extralinguistic reference (its lack of true or false propositions, that is, which is substituted by verisimilar objects, to put it in Kristeva's jargon). There is good reason to assume that "classical mimesis" – 'normal stories,' as it were – draws the thetic subject into question, too, and that is precisely because, not unlike the avantgarde poetic text, it makes any claims to God-like enunciatory positions appear questionable. It may seem to contain conventional acts of signification ("Mimesis does not actually call into question the unicity of the thetic; indeed it could not, since mimetic discourse takes on the structure of language and, through narrative sentences, posits a signified and signifying object," Kristeva claims [*Revolution* 58]). Those, however, have their own way of putting the subject "in process." Almost as when in an impressionist painting, what appears as your average (if fantastically beautiful) water lily from afar on closer look disintegrates into a chaos of brushstrokes, the speakers of narrative fiction, if we try to grasp them firmly, often enough have a disturbing tendency to crumble into inconsistency, unreliability, and inscrutability. Who is it that's speaking? And how? They very fact that this is a standard question to ask of narrative fiction shows how different it is from thetic signification: for this is precisely what we *don't* ask of the thetic. (It is, in some sense, the very definition of the thetic to discourage that kind of question; and it is precisely that kind of question over which monster and maker haggle in their confrontation on the glacier of Montanvert.)

To be sure, most versions of *Frankenstein* employ conventional narrative structures, that is, they not only leave grammar intact but also, more often than not, narrative conventions (narrating events in chronological order, for instance). It is not unusual, however, that *Frankenstein* stories bring about systematic dispersals of the "enunciating subject" which manage to question that subject through its sensuous entanglements without, however, rendering it ineffective as speaker, thus producing meaningful discourse, but without "hiding the semiotic process that produces it." The more drastic examples of such displacements, as Chap-

ter Two will discuss, thus foreground the only seemingly trivial quality that stories have of being-told. Classical mimesis or not, meaning, for narrative fiction, can never quite be said to be generated 'elsewhere,' without the actual involvement of that speaking subject which supposedly only needs to grasp a world which presents itself, ready for description. Hence a thetic sense of what it means to speak (to judge objectively) is deactivated quite without the help of the transgressive syntax of experimental poetic texts.

Physicality and Perspective

Bernard Rose's *Frankenstein* (2015)

Narrative Architecture

The actual practice of (story)telling is an omnipresent issue in Shelley's novel – if not always explicitly thematised. The text, with its several narrative frames, contains a struggle for the mastery of perspectives in which no party is ever quite successful. In theory, all of the novel is filtered through Victor. But not only does the creature 'resurface' from the inner frames of the text to meet Walton on its outer level after Victor dies toward the end of the novel. Also, it seems unlikely that Victor's editing can utterly contain the diverse narrative practices that the novel assembles, which are always physical as much as symbolic, and always immersed in the tendentiousness of this or that restricted perspective. The overall story does not belong to any one person or perspective from which it could be controlled. In the terms of a distinction suggested by Michel de Certeau: there is a struggle in which no strategy gains the upper hand over the textual tactics that it aims to subsume and dominate. Strategy, de Certeau explains, "becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.'" Strategy "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clientèles,' 'targets,' or objects of research)" (xix). This elevated position of speaking is clearly what Victor is going for when he, as Walton reports in the letters to his sister Margaret that the novel's audience gets to read,

modifies Walton's account of his own accord, saying: "I would not that a mutilated [narration] go down to posterity" (Shelley 179). And yet we are left in thorough doubt as to what the one true objective account of events would be as we get entangled, as the novel proceeds, in the ambivalences and intimacies of various narrators.[1] Storytelling in *Frankenstein* is in this sense tactical because tactic, according to de Certeau, is "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality." A tactic "has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances" (xix).

Shelley's novel thus scrapes at the pedestal of the "transcendental ego," as Kristeva names it – certainly, a strategic institution in de Certeau's sense – by virtue of being a work of fiction but also due to its specific narrative architecture. It undermines truth not only externally but also internally – for who could say whose account, Walton's, Frankenstein's, or the monster's (or even Safie's letter), is reliable? In substituting multiple perspectives, all of them mediated rather than immediate, for the account of a narrator presiding, in some fashion, over the action, Shelley's novel illustrates that the instauration (to borrow a term from Étienne Souriau) of a "transcendental ego" is, not least, a gesture of power which obscures the conditions of its own possibility. These conditions would include, as de Certeau says, defining a 'proper' and thus securing an overview over and independence from circumstances. Shelley's novel, on the contrary, insists on putting a discourse produced by and in a printed text into the mouths not of neutral narrators but into the mouths of active protagonists who are all notorious in their unreliability. The charged relationship between bodies and discourse that sits at the heart of the story's being-told is thus part of the novel's very

1 It is ironic that in one of the manuscript versions, "not" is inserted belatedly into Victor's affirmation, as he reports the stages of his revolutionary discovery to Walton, "Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman" (Shelley 34; leaf 16r in Notebook A, the first surviving draft of the novel, accessible online as "Frankenstein, Volume I" at *The Shelley-Godwin Archive*).

condition of existence, the 'being in the world' of this particular piece of literature. Is this only a curiosity of Shelley's novel, or somehow related more generally to what stories do, as material and semiotic practices? The exploration of Bernard Rose's film in this chapter will help to further elaborate on this question.

In Shelley's text, the suspension of true-false-distinctions is affiliated with a suspension of the anonymity of speakers – there is no impersonal discourse, all utterances are ascribed to protagonists and thus perspectivity is emphasised. At stake – rather urgently, in the case of *Frankenstein* – is the relation between the cognitive and the spatial sense of 'perspective': between producing discourse from a position of knowledge, and the very 'positionality' implied in the process. Knowing, living, and speaking tend to coincide in one and the same body.[2] De Certeau explains how commonly we suppress this very fact. He illustrates this with his analysis of the bird's-eye view experience (the epitome of which is "[s]eeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center" [91]), wherein knowledge comes to be associated with total readability – and this comes from being (supposedly) elevated above a certain messy, processual, opaque physicality and corporeality. (From achieving strategic seeing, in other words.)

Narrative fiction, it would seem, allows us to resolve the tension between knowing, speaking, and living in precisely this way: by pushing the living body out of the scenario, leaving only a voice to transmit pure thought without physical referent. *Frankenstein*, however, calls this radically into question by making every perspective, and every speaking body, a problem; conceptually, emotionally, and technically. The novel provides additional reflection on the possibility of truth in language by

2 Criscilla Benford points out that, beyond the question of unreliability, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* actually deals in the inassimilable, that is, it involves "ideological collisions" which confront readers with what is at stake in specific ideologies and in "sense-making frames" in general (341, 325). However, all this for Benford seems to play out primarily on a cognitive level (ideological collisions are "cognitively valuable" 341), where clashes and divergences then make for subversive potential.

its narrative design, which makes of all its audiences "walkers" rather than "voyeurs," to borrow from de Certeau's descriptions of spatial perspectives (92).[3] While an "erotics of knowledge" allows the individual to become "a solar Eye," what this eye reads depends nevertheless on the 'thickness of meaning,' as becomes evident in de Certeau's reflection of reading the city from a bird's-eye view: for the "ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins […] they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (92–93). "Thicks and thins" – a hybrid corporeality, material but also already caught up in continual formations and reformations – bind the legible to the physical. Shelley's "intersecting writings" indeed "compose a manifold story" which "has neither author nor spectator" and which – because other than de Certeau's urban stories, it is 'truly fictional' – forbids us to immobilise "its opaque mobility in a transparent text" (92–93). One cannot, in this case, leave behind the "mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators" (92) and gain an overview from a vantage point from where it would become evident, for instance, what Victor's secret of creation is.

Beth Newman, investigating the frame structure of Shelley's novel, points out how the very method with which the story of Shelley's *Frankenstein* is told multiplies the stances that can be taken toward it: "The syntactic placement of these narratives (one inside the other) moves the reader inward, setting up a pulsion toward a center, creating a spatial image for narrative as something closed, finite, contained by its own borders," suggesting "a middle set off from the rest of language by a beginning and an end. And yet the rhetorical strategy of the narrative chain moves continually outward, implicating through each narration someone outside the tale" (154). In a setup of this kind, it seems that all perspectives are equally (dis-)privileged: "The frame structure of *Frankenstein*," Newman says, "suggests that 'point of view' is

3 De Certeau's objective is to adapt the theory of speech acts to a theory of spatial practice; hence it seems rather fitting to re-appropriate his spatial vocabulary for the description of textual practice.

not the point at all" (147). The correspondence between the bodily shape of the creature and the narrative shape of the novel has frequently been remarked upon: both are flayed, disparate, and so on.[4] The 'monstrosity' that is thus claimed for the text consists, crucially, in its refusal to cohere into one clear proposition. Even though individual *Frankenstein* adaptations may attempt to contain this multiplicity – dropping the unreliability, the contradictory perspectives, the multiple narrators – it turns back up, at the latest, on the level of the *Frankenstein* complex as a whole, which then again presents itself as a protean assemblage of multiple elements, cohesive and contradictory at the same time.

But is it the definitive absence of a superordinate perspective that we are dealing with? Maybe the multiplicity of stances towards its story that *Frankenstein* offers is not so much a rejection of point of view, as Newman claims, but rather more specifically a rejection of the disembodiment of speakers. While generally speaking, in the *Frankenstein* complex, few people can really just comfortably 'be who they are,' Shelley's text, in particular, bars a certain generalising strategy from taking hold, prevents an "elevation" that "transfigures [the spectator] into a voyeur," "puts him at a distance" and "transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes." Such elevation would allow one to "read" the world, "to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (de Certeau 92). Of those who narrate Shelley's novel, no one is "nothing more" than a viewpoint. The individualisation of voices and embodiment of perspectives makes sure of it.

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4 Compare for instance Halberstam: "The form of the novel is its monstrosity; its form opens out onto excess because, like the monster of the story, the sum of the novel's parts exceeds the whole. Its structure, the exoskeleton, and not its dignified contents – philosophies of life, meditations on the sublime, sentimental narratives of family and morality, discussions of aesthetics – makes this novel a monster text. The monstrosity of *Frankenstein* is literally built into the textuality of the novel to the point where textual production itself is responsible for generating monsters" (31).

Voices and Images

This narrative architecture is rebuilt, partially, in a film by British director Bernard Rose (*Frankenstein*, 2015). Rose's film seems intent on living up to the challenge of visually (re-)creating Frankenstein's monster in a way that is sufficiently gory for a splatter movie while simultaneously capturing the self-reflection and eloquence of Shelley's creature. In Rose's film, the creature is the result of 21st century biomedical engineering, designed by a scientist couple (husband and wife, possibly) and their team. Possessing extraordinary strength, the looks of a handsome young man, but the cognitive abilities of an infant, the creature wreaks havoc on the laboratory in which it is brought to life, escapes, and sets out on a lonely trip through the outside world during which his body – due to some flaw in its design – begins to mutate into deformity as ulcers are spreading all over his skin. Its progress in terms of linguistic and motor skills is nothing to speak of. Still, the creature's experiences are accompanied by a first-person narrative in voice-over which quotes, almost to the letter, passages from the monster's skilfully crafted tale in Shelley's novel.

For film, generally, "the voice *does not explain why there are images*," Christian Metz insists in his approach to the "impersonal enunciation" of film (768). Remarkably, for the bulk of Rose's film, the opposite is true: the images do not explain why there is a voice, at least not such a voice and such a discourse as we hear. Shelley's narrative frame structure does not leave the problem of embodied language entirely unsolved, accounting logically not only for the speakers' respective competencies but also for their discourses' transmission to the reader in the form of letters and journals: having lived next to the De Lacey family and gaining possession of books, the creature, for instance, has learned to speak and read.[5] The novel's structural design thus accommodates, to a compara-

5 Although Shelley's novel is certainly not simplistic in this regard, implying, as it does, the fundamental unreliability of all reports in all media. Walton's journal, for instance – part of the outer frames of the narrative, and thus our primary access to the events reported – ends up being edited by Victor Frankenstein. Wal-

tively great degree, the assumption that somebody – or, literally: some body – is speaking. Rose's film is more radical in that regard.

"It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original æra of my being" – so begin both the core narrative of Mary Shelley's novel, and the 2015 film. In the latter, confused impressions of light and darkness, intercut with close-up shots of somebody's eyes, are accompanied by a narrative in voice-over. The wording is taken directly from Shelley's text:

> It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original æra of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. […] I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me, and troubled me; but hardly had I felt this, when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in upon me again. (Shelley 79–80)

The film seems to present, alternately, the visual impressions of the speaker, the "I" from the voice-over, and the eyes of that very speaker, which produce the sense impressions articulated. It seems clear – considering a phrase such as "I now suppose" – that we are dealing with the retrospective account of the speaker looking back on earlier occurrences; a speaker which we either already know or will soon gather to be, as the voice-over keeps accompanying the film's main protagonist, Frankenstein's creature. As it turns out, however, this creature struggles with language until the end of the film. He starts out, right after coming to life, to produce inarticulate sounds – semantically void sounds, Victor Frankenstein insists (such as "babies make them" which "we ascribe

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ton's remark is quite suspicious, on closer look: "Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history," Walton tells us. "[H]e asked to see them, and then himself *corrected* and *augmented* them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. 'Since you have preserved my narration,' said he, 'I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity'" (179 [my emphasis]).

meaning to" [00:11:29]), which are however easily interpretable as one-syllable words like "Mum," "Dad," and "good." At the end of the film the creature is able to confront his 'parents,' putting together – with, it seems, both motoric and cognitive difficulty – simple sentences such as "You made me ugly" (01:14:00), but nothing more. At the same time, the film keeps picking up passages from the monster's tale in Shelley's novel, recounted in voice-over as we watch the monster's half-articulate filmic incarnation struggle along. In the final take of the film, we see him carry his 'mother's' dead body towards the shore of a lake where he assembles a funeral pyre for both of them. The voice-over, again, recounts a passage from Shelley:

> I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch, who would create such another as I have been. […] He [in the film: she] is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish. I shall no longer see the sun or stars, or feel the winds play on my cheeks. […] I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell. (Shelley 190–91)[6]

Assembling a funeral pyre: the activities of the off-screen speaker and the on-screen person coincide – but not their linguistic competence; we have just seen the creature struggle for words in confronting his parents, conversing in three-word sentences, if at all. And if that being is going to die now in the last scene of the film, as we might reasonably expect at that point – who, then, has spoken the words of the voice-over? Only in the very last moment does the film present – or rather, allude to – a solution for this logical impasse: in the flames consuming the two bodies, we see, for a split second only, a strange face, screaming: "I am Adam!"

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6 What the film presents is an abbreviated version, but otherwise still a literal quotation of the very ending of Shelley's novel.

(01:21:29).[7] This is not the disfigured face of the creature who has just set itself on fire. Even though we can see it only for the fraction of a second, this face appears unharmed and rather average, suggesting that there is some point in the future at which Adam, surviving his self-immolation, will evolve to a state of being where he both looks and speaks rather like everyone else. This concerns only the very last moment before the credits roll, though; for almost the film's entire duration, the origin of the narrating voice seems as obscure as it is, at the same time, clear that it is the monster's voice, for it is the monster's situation and actions that are described in first person.

Who, in other words, is the "I" that introduces itself to us simply by beginning to speak in the first seconds of the film? Deictic and pronominal expressions such as *I* and *you*, Émile Benveniste explains, cannot be 'wrong' in the way an assertion can be wrong: "Since they lack material reference, they cannot be misused; since they do not assert anything, they are not subject to the condition of truth and escape all denial. The use thus has as a condition the situation of discourse and no other" (220). *I* is "a unique but mobile sign" which "can be assumed by each speaker on the condition that he refers each time only to the instance of his own discourse" and is thus "linked to the *exercise* of language and announces the speaker as speaker." Thus the "indicators *I* and *you* cannot exist as potentialities; they exist only insofar as they are actualized in the instance of discourse, in which, by each of their own instances, they mark the process of appropriation by the speaker" (220). Benveniste thus sees in the act of saying "I" an instance in which the link between discourse and living being can neither be broken nor covered up.

On one interpretation, this amounts to a claim of presence, according to which tangible senders and receivers are necessarily implied by such utterances. Metz, for instance, examining the usefulness of the category of enunciation for the investigation of film, explains: "What is meant by the word 'enunciation' is the presence, at both ends of the

7 It has just been revealed moments ago to the creature by his parents that his name is Adam – Rose's film is by far not the only one to pick up Shelley's references to Milton in this way.

utterance, of two human persons, or, rather, two *subjects*" (747). Deictic conceptions of this kind, Metz argues, are ultimately unsuitable for capturing the peculiarities of filmic enunciation since, after all, films work through images alongside, and often before, working through language:

> "If it speaks [ça parle], it means someone is speaking": this is the general impression, even about a book. But the cinematic equivalent of this inner and immediate belief is far from certain. "If they are images to be seen, this means someone arranged them": not everyone feels it clearly. The spectator spontaneously attributes the dialogues in the film to an enclosed, second-level instance; and he attributes the speeches of a potential off-narrator, or anonymous commentator, who pretends to be almighty, to an enunciative position, yet still unfocused and vague, or somehow blurred, or at least veiled by the image […]. The spectator is never able to pretend that the first, authentic enunciation does not come from the "Grand Imager" […] whose globally extralinguistic enterprise never gives the clear impression of a specialized, personalized, enunciative presence. But in most cases, this spectator does not think of the "imager." On the other hand, he does not, of course, believe that things reveal themselves: he simply *sees images*. (752–53)[8]

Whether there is "mimicking transcription" (751) of oral discourse or not, source and target of filmic communication, Metz insists, need to be differentiated from their incarnations (more precisely, their "instances

8 "Grand Imager" is a concept Metz borrows from Albert Laffay. Metz claims that what he says even holds for non-anonymous off-commentary: "When someone tells us, as often happens, that in the 'first person on the soundtrack,' in voice-over, the enunciator has provisionally borrowed the voice of one of the protagonists, this person only describes some strange ballet in which all the terms belong to the film: enunciated mark of the enunciator […], 'voice' of a character, presence of an explicit narration, and so on – one example among many of the various metadiscursive twists which constitute cinematic enunciation by folding the different instances of the film over each other, in the exact same manner that there are several ways to fold a napkin" (763).

of incarnation" [760]). "The human subject reappears when someone comes to *occupy* the source or the target" (748) but as such, the latter are, "considered in their literal inscription," to be regarded as "*parts of text*"; they are "*orientations*, vectors in a textual topography, more abstract instances than is usually said" (763). To avoid what Metz regards as quasi-esoteric exercises in applying the principle of enunciation to film, to not end up supposing something "'nonempirical' yet personalized" (767), he suggests to keep actual sources or targets and the instances to which source and target are respectively ascribed carefully apart: the "level of enunciation [...] corresponds in fact to two different stages: a textual stage (the 'markers', source and target), and a personal stage (imaginary author and spectator, enunciator and addressee; this is the level of *attributions*: the marker is ascribed to someone)" (768). The markers of source and target are, ultimately, technical – "configurations" of the text, such as shot-reverse shot arrangements (763) – and the actual enunciator is the whole film as such, "the film as activity" (759).

Rose's sampled voice over showcases and simultaneously complicates the attributions that Metz talks about: Shelley's text integrates her personalised perspectives one into the other. It refuses superiority to any one of its speakers and makes it difficult to read them as 'pure' voices without bodies but, since all impersonations of discourse are (linguistically, textually) plausible, they also appear to some degree 'natural.' Rose's film, however, constructs impersonations even while denying them plausibility and thus diffracts the levels or aspects of enunciation, separating utterance and speaker, message and body even while at the same time stubbornly retaining their link through the coincidence of action and description. In a sense, the film does two contradictory things at once and thus exposes the dubiousness of what is a strangely common operation: separating body and meaningful utterance.

This filmic dispersion is effected, ultimately, because the body of Rose's creature is caught oscillating between symbolic and somatic orders; in Kristevan terms, the semiotic realm with its somatic rhythms and resonances, its "topology" here doesn't work alongside and with the "algebra" of syntax but the two clash and reject each other (*Revolution* 87). After escaping from the research facility in which it was 'born,' for

instance, the creature's first laborious struggles to survive on his own feature in voice-over those passages from Shelley's novel which report the corresponding period in the text:

> Here I lay, resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This roused me from my nearly dormant state. I slaked my thirst at the brook; and then lying down, was overcome by sleep. It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch. I began to distinguish my sensations from each other. I gradually saw plainly the clear stream that supplied me with drink and the trees that shaded me with their foliage. I began also to observe, with greater accuracy, the forms that surrounded me, and to perceive the boundaries of the radiant roof of light which canopied me. One day, when I was pressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by someone, and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects. (00:25:50-30:50)[9]

The repeated subjective shots from below through the canopy of trees remind us who the first-person speaker is: the young man whose behaviour and appearance stand in such violent contrast to the eloquence of the voice-over. The passage from Shelley is accompanied, in parts even interrupted, by scenes of insistent physicality which show the creature as a being without the slightest concept of civilisation or its own humanity: discovering the elements, searching for simple shelter, eating everything that he finds – worms, roaches, roadkill – and befriending a stray dog, which he greets, at its first appearance, with a surprised, inarticulate grunt. The most abject impression the film creates during this passage – a close-up of the creature feeding himself from the corpse of a deer which, from the looks of it, is several days dead – proceeds without

9 Compare the same passage in Shelley (80–81). The passage in Shelley is longer but other than that, only the specific references (for instance to the town of Ingolstadt) have been changed in the film.

any words being spoken during a longer break in the voice-over, as if the linguistic flow had dried up momentarily in the face of such brute physicality. The detail with which the film presents the gory particulars of the creature's survival undermine the floating, airy quality of the words that we hear spoken, much as the latter might be supported by the soft sunlight illuminating those scenes. This gory detail works almost like an anchor added to Shelley's passage to tie the words to the baseness of matter.

"[I]t is true," Metz admits, that enunciative "roles call for an incarnation"; "the nature of this call," however, he says, "still remains enigmatic." Consequently, he keeps insisting that "the 'enunciator' is incarnated in the only available body, the body of the text, that is, a *thing*, which will never be an I, which is not in charge of any exchange with some YOU, but which is a source of images and sounds, and nothing else" (759). Is Metz's text a little too quick to discard this 'enigmatic call' as mystery to remain unsolved? Such a dismissal underestimates the "vaguely demonstrative '*There is*' [Voici]" that Metz himself describes and that we also find mentioned in Lyotard as the site of the figural, "which is always tacit and always present and, in addition, proper to images rather than to film. (The image of an object presents this object, it contains some kind of designative elements that are little differentiated)" (Metz 756). It is no coincidence that the "enigma" of the call for incarnation becomes particularly hard to ignore in a *Frankenstein* film, where the body that is speaking (or not speaking, or not speaking as one would expect it to speak) is of such fundamental, basic relevance to the story as such, seeing how it founds, secures and directs narrative interest.

Productive Foldings

To claim that such a body is 'merely' a "metadiscursive fold" (769) in which the film points at itself – as when for instance in "subjective framing," of which there is a lot in Rose's film, "the gazing and at the same time showing character duplicates both the spectator and the camera"

(769) – is a somewhat reductive argument.[10] Such folding, in addition to doubling its own medium (or material), also produces a *heterogeneous* existential layer through the figurative power such "material/form vibration[s]" possess (Latour, "Figure") – such encounters of assemblages of matter with formal constellations, of which a specific arrangement of filmic images and sounds "calling" for an "incarnation" is only one example. As Latour argues:

> How are we to determine the alteration proper to beings of fiction that gives them their allure, their status, their identity, or rather their singular avidity? I suggest situating it, quite classically, in a new way of *folding* [my emphasis] existents so as to make them the blueprint for a kind of expression that nevertheless cannot be detached from them, a mystery that the hackneyed theme of form and content signals but does not analyze. The *raw materials* – unrelated, let us recall, to the idealism of "matter" – seem capable of *also* producing forms or, better, figures (if we are careful not to connect this term too quickly to the question, proper to art history, of mimetic figuration). (*Inquiry* 243)

Such figural alterations triggered by folded matter are more surprising than we normally register, Latour argues – precisely because they are irreducible and heterogeneous to their source, even while dependent on it, that is, they are thoroughly transcendent and thoroughly material at

10 To be fair, Metz never makes the textual capacities he describes appear banal but rather indicates, repeatedly, their extraordinary productive, mysterious capacities to effect complexity, as when he says that by virtue of this metadiscursive folding, "a slightly sliding-off layer of film is constituted. It detaches itself from the rest and settles at once through this very folding that puts it, as it were, on a double lane on the register of enunciation" (769).

the same time.[11] Such folds and foldings produce something that, ultimately, cannot be derived from them. We forget, says Latour,

> the stunning originality of fiction. Here we have a mode of existence like no other, defined by hesitation, vacillation, back-and-forth movements, the establishment of resonance between the successive layers of raw material from which are drawn, provisionally, figurations that nevertheless cannot separate themselves from this material. Just as technology, as we have seen, manages to extract metamorphoses […] and persistences […], new and totally unforeseen folds, so the vibration of fiction will once again fold those folds, renew them in a renewal that will engender something unforeseen, something still more unforeseen, as it were! For hundreds of thousands of years, clay lay on the floor of that cave before it found itself folded into an earthenware pot baked over a fire, but it finds itself transformed, transported, a second time when, from this earthenware pot held at someone's fingertips, some surprising anthropomorphic figure is extracted […]. (*Inquiry* 244–45)

In other words, folded material – of the filmic kind, too – might be able to bring forth, not more of, but something *other* than itself; an energy captured through the encounter of forms with each other, where the mere

11 Patrice Maniglier nicely illustrates Latour's thought on the specific inseparability in fiction: "What characterizes the general system of fictions is the inseparability of matter and form. This is not simply due to the ontological law requiring that any imaginary (or mental or incorporeal) content must art as fiction be supported by something material to be said to *exist*. For the opposite is also true: if one wants to separate the vision of [Manet's] asparagus from its interpretation as asparagus, we have nothing left, not even the articulation of stuck-on pigments. What then would the 'painting' consist of? Why not include the frame, and the weft of the cloth and even the dust that is sometimes found on it? In such a scenario, as soon as one dusts off the painting, it will no longer be 'the same.' What reasons do we have here to speak of one and the same object, except insofar as it is the support for a representation? In the same way, if you don't hear the way sounds are organized in a melody, you simply no longer hear the *same* sounds. The 'figure' thus gives as much being to the 'material' as it gets from it" (426–27).

suggestion of there being something more to a formal arrangement than meets the eye is sufficient to make this 'extra something' a force to be reckoned with (to make it count, to make it matter). Isn't this what the "enigmatic call" that Metz describes consists in?

The filmic folds of the de-naturalised enunciative occurrences in Rose's *Frankenstein*, in generating such a heterogeneous, distinct entity as does not exhaust itself in the film's textuality, cannot help but generate something of a corporeal nature. They generate not (only) the concrete body we see on screen (the young man trudging on wretchedly), but they project, from this concrete body, a superordinate body of narrative plot. We cannot help but attribute enunciation to the creature, even though he is not a plausible candidate; we cannot help but wonder: who is it that's speaking? What those filmic folds and implausibilities expose, then, is the inevitable corporeality of perspective, which fictionality pre-empts from the de-corporealisation that is applied to the (supposedly) 'bare viewpoints' of non-fictional readings of the world (the "fiction of knowledge," to repeat de Certeau, "is related to [the] lust to be a viewpoint, *and nothing more*" [my emphasis]). Fiction stubbornly refuses to cover up and contain the corporeal, the indeterminate, or the singular.

All plots, in one way or the other, imprint a perspective on the story that they hold together; or, to put it differently, there are always contingencies in the telling of a story, always other ways to tell the same story – follow one protagonist but not another, focus on one setting but not another, withhold one piece of information while providing another, and so on – and the management of these contingencies projects, as the source of its trajectory, an instance that is endowed with the capacities of perception. Fictional narratives, in comparison to other forms of narrative, are particularly radical here: nothing can be asserted about the untold parts of stories until they are told, after all. It becomes obvious that there is no neutral ground to retreat to, no ultimate, static, no *actual* account that exists, 'somewhere out there,' without a perceiving instance to relate it. This perceiving instance is not necessarily anthropomorphic but, in a specific sense, still a live body – live body because it shares in many of the capacities of actual organisms: their mobility, their transformativity, but

also their situatedness, their restrictedness. Plot is the narrative development of the materially conditioned impossibility to see everything.[12]

Readers, of course, are plausible empirical candidates for who or what those perceiving instances are. And yet it is not, as I will further argue for in Part Three, the reader alone who is doing this work. The foldings and oscillations Latour describes, when combined with narrative plot, produce between them a perspective, a position of observation and experience, that readers can assume but that is not theirs alone to produce and occupy. We can sum up a film like Rose's in a couple of sentences, but only at the price of turning the experience and movement of plot into something quite different, something that is in fact indicated by another sense of the word "plot": a two-dimensional construct, a sketch on a flat surface, indifferent to and separable from its observers. "Since the dawn of time," Latour says in this context, "no one has ever managed to *summarize* a work without making it vanish at once. Summarize *La Recherche du temps perdu*? Simplify Rembrandt's *Night Watch*? Shorten *Les Troyens*? And why? To discover 'what they express' *apart from* and *alongside* their 'expression'? […] This impossibility is the work itself" (*Inquiry* 244). If plot is an interest in the way rather than the

12 For how and why unnatural narratology, though seemingly an obvious framework in which to approach counterintuitive scenarios of narration, is insufficient to understand them properly, compare Ridvan Askin's scathing critique: he points out that unnatural narratology either "works to rein in deviant behaviour and tries to reinscribe it within the established representational paradigm," or "it gives these anomalies some leeway just to parade them before our eyes in a kind of freak show" (12). Askin, in turn, approaches such scenarios, referencing Deleuze, as expressing "the impersonal voice of univocal being," "perspectivity itself" (31). I both agree and disagree with Askin's presentation of the problem because I would likewise diagnose an exposure of "perspectivity itself" in such a scenario as Rose's film presents. However, I would emphasise its productive more than its subtractive side – arguing that it not so much subtracts personhood from the process of enunciation but that it involves us in personhood's constant re-production. Rather than depersonalising narrative, I would argue, the point is more that *Frankenstein* often renders narrative so radically personal that it outgrows personhood as categorical term. I address Askin's analysis in more detail in Part Two.

endpoint, as Peter Brooks for one suggests throughout his *Reading for the Plot*, then narrative plots are precisely the opposite of two-dimensional overviews. Receiving the information: "and then the starving creature eats roadkill," is simply not the same thing as witnessing the creature eat roadkill while we are following the story, as Rose's film forces us to do for quite an uncomfortable stretch of time – and this is not only because of the vivid visual quality of the cinematic image (or, for that matter, the stylistic quality of a written text). A whole array of other factors are involved – the reaction of our own bodies to those images is only one of them, and that factor is in itself complex. And to suggest that the actual incident in the story triggers our empathic reaction more than the sober summary does is ultimately another way of saying that stories are vital, even visceral practices drawing on the energies and potential of all the actors involved. (In that sense, yet another sense of the word 'plot' provides an appropriate metaphor: 'plot' as expression referring to a stretch of land on which I work, into which I put physical labour to make it yield crops.)

The Body of Narrative Plot

Such bodies of narrative plot – the situated perspectives from which one follows the story – overcome many of the restrictions of animal bodies (for instance in the knowledge that they can have) even while they are subject to some extra-restrictions unknown to us (concerning, for example, their capacities of actual, organic engagement). But if narrativity stems, not least, from the – creative, productive – gap between events and their relation (between story and discourse, in traditional narratological terms), it harbours a dimension of depth similar to the one the monster's body holds, a dimension of labour, contingency, and temporality. There is a moment in Shelley's novel, incidentally, where this becomes particularly obvious: Victor, as he reports the success of his experiments to Walton, reproaches the latter for his curiosity by saying, "I see by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am

acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject" (35). What is arguably the most interesting detail in the story – *how Victor actually managed to create the monster* – remains secret.

There is some irony in the circumstance that the monstrous assemblage of texts that constitutes the *Frankenstein* complex in some sense revolves around a piece of information *not* given. The circumstance is ironic, but also telling: there is no possibility for the reader to transcend the position of the curious inquirer Walton, no bird's-eye view from which Victor's secret of creation would become obvious, but only the compulsion to stay in the thick of things, to tolerate the confrontation with an opacity conditioned by vitality itself: by the fact that it is two speaking bodies in dialogue we are dealing with, not two transparent minds deciphering one another. When Victor steps out of his own discourse to comment on the narration, his comment not only marks the gap between the what and the how of telling. It reveals, further, that this gap is not actually an empty space (in the idiom of reader-response theory, a blank for the reader to fill in) but an inscrutability inherent in live bodies. The fact that arguably, many readers will not fill in the blank precisely because they, like Walton, would not know how, further supports the argument: we don't know *how*, but we know *that*, which in some sense is the very curiosity of life itself. The blank of how the monster is created, then, is not really a blank after all, not an empty space conditioned by the non-referentiality of fiction; but a kind of organic mysteriousness, a lump or a knot more than a gap. Or, in Lyotard's words, we could call it a "gesticulatory expanse": a stretch or a distance, maybe, but one corporeally conditioned. (It becomes questionable, then, how omniscient even omniscient narrators actually are – for even they emerge from the fabrication of their narrative position out of a certain figural stirring, a "vaguely demonstrative 'There is'" [Metz] that pertains, not only to images in the conventional sense, but equally to the 'images' of a written narration. Omniscient narrators say 'look at this from my perspective' as much as any narrator, and while their perspective might be, quantitatively speaking, more inclusive and elevated, it is not therefore qualitatively different in any fundamental sense. As Latour puts

it elsewhere, somewhat curtly: "the opposite of embodied is dead, not omniscient" ["How to talk about the body" 209]).

Ultimately, then, the apparent implausibility of perspective in Rose's film emphasises, once more, how stories – as is Latour's point about beings of fiction in general – direct us not towards the true/false-distinction, but "toward what is fabricated, consistent, real" (*Inquiry* 238): they depend on some kind of physical in- and ex-scription of which the narrating and narrated body is only a striking, maybe the most striking, manifestation (and the technique of voice-over another, intriguing variant). Stories aren't neutral: they are somebody's story, even some body's story, however elusive, 'omniscient,' dispersed and alien that some-body may be. This is why the nature of the call for incarnation in film is not quite as enigmatic as Metz claims it is: film, as long as it is narrative and has a plot, is just as perspectivised as is a written story. It is not untrue, in that sense, that "the film as activity" is the enunciator; but such activity cannot be reduced to the technologies, in the conventional sense, of film.[13]

The body – to revisit one of Brooks's suggestions mentioned earlier – doesn't *pass into* writing or is *recovered for* the semiotic but is an integral part of the meaning-making process itself, particularly so for stories. The unreliability that we find in Shelley's novel, then, might have less to do with the factors that Beth Newman, for instance, lists: a greater interest in abstract qualities of protagonists than in the depiction of concrete individual psychology, which leads to a lack of formal distinction between speakers, which makes 'voices' a purely textual phenomenon – a claim

13 Wayne Booth has made a similar point in his re-evaluation of the showing-telling-distinction in narratology, pointing out how the choice alone to tell this story and no other pre-empts neutrality. Since Flaubert – as Booth claims – literature might have held up the values of objectivity or impersonality and therefore claimed the superiority of showing over telling, and yet in every change of subject, every skipping of time and so on, partiality and choice betray themselves (as in "the choice to tell the story of Emma Bovary rather than the potentially heroic tale of Dr. Larivière"). Everything "show[n] will serve to tell" (20). However, other than Booth originally suggested, the source of such partiality need not be a human author, or rather, it's never human authors *on their own*.

concerning written narrative that clearly corresponds to Metz's claim about filmic narrative. It might have more to do with the fact that the voices of *Frankenstein* are precisely *not* purely textual *even while* they refuse to conform to certain rules as to what counts as 'a body' (a proper body, that is). It doesn't seem altogether convincing to me to say that (Shelley's) *Frankenstein* shows that "a story is emphatically separable from the character who first tells it," as Newman says it is; that once a narrative "has been uttered, it exists as a verbal structure with its own integrity, and can, like myth, think itself in the minds of men (and women). Being infinitely repeatable in new contexts, it has achieved autonomy; it now functions as a text, having been severed from its own origins, divested of its originating voice. The mark of this severance is the frame itself" (Newman 147). The frame is not so much the mark of the "severance" of the story from its speakers and thus the physical conditions of its telling, but rather the site and instance where the reciprocal engagement of producers, protagonists and audiences becomes evident. It is not the mark of the story's autonomy but of its iterative dynamics. The story is autonomous 'only' in the sense that it is collective; in none of its realisations does the story tell itself all on its own.

Contingencies, Technological and Organic

The semantic doesn't override the physical in and for *Frankenstein*, and the creature's body isn't covered up by narrative, but generates it: there is more to be said on how this bodily richness of meaning relates to *Frankenstein*'s ties to technology. *Frankenstein* is routinely read as reflecting on technological modernity. And yet these readings sometimes confirm a strict division of technology and normal life even at the same time as they push technology into the centre of attention – a somewhat paradoxical move that excludes and includes technology at the same time. "Insofar as it 'gives birth' to something it cannot contain, *Frankenstein* performs the very techno-logic it explores, and in so doing, comes to function as a reality-check on the logocentrism of romantic poets," Hansen for instance argues (with regard to Shelley's novel). "As a technological per-

formance in this sense, it effectively resists the ideological sway of […] the putting-into-discourse of technology" (581). Hansen reads the creature as a "figure for technological exteriority" because the creature, he says, isn't simply the calculated and calculable application of scientific knowledge, "but rather a *technological product* in a quite specific, postindustrial sense" (582): a product the workings of which are neither evident nor predictable, a product that even by its maker can only be initiated, but never controlled. In Hansen's reading, there is hence no possibility of being properly intimate with the creature – it is radically other, outside of comprehension or connection. The creature, he says, is not so much a hybrid being between organism and machine but refuses these terms altogether, as it isn't reconcilable with the machinic as restricted *techne* but introduces a "materially robust form of technology as radical exteriority." It is the result of the application of "natural force to unnatural ends" and there is "in short, *nothing* organic" about modern technology in the form of the creature (583–84) – not so much (as I understand Hansen) because it is made from artificial material (which it clearly isn't, as least not in Shelley) but because the agency and fate of the creature are entirely out of reach of its maker and also, as Hansen goes on to argue, of the reach of common human comprehension.

However, Hansen's argument relies to some extent on reading novel and creature alike as exceptional cases which, even though in some regards adequate (what could be more sensational and bewildering and worthy of story than Frankenstein's creature?), in other regards ignores the fact that creature and story in many ways share the circumstances of all their fellow creatures/stories. In some sense, after all, *Frankenstein* is simply a story about what it means to be alive. I concur with Hansen that *Frankenstein* merges agency and reflection (performing and exploring), and share his view that *Frankenstein* can only be approached on the basis of an understanding of literature as expressive: on the basis of a model of literature which doesn't focus on literature's (non-)referentiality but which sees "the domain of expression (a domain which includes but is certainly not exhausted by literature) and the domain of content (the material domain, including the 'hardware' of social institutions) de-

velop *within a single, encompassing configuration of the real*" (601).[14] And yet I do not quite agree with the suggestion that *Frankenstein*, and Frankenstein's creature, are all that unusual in their unpredictability. The workings of *Frankenstein* as "a-signifying performance of a technological machine," of a "techno-material real" (603) can according to Hansen be seen particularly clearly in "the textual contradictions generated by the monster," which "emerge at moments where narrative fails to domesticate what Frankenstein dubs 'strange coincidences'" (603). Radical technological alterity corresponds to the principle of chance and the presence of the creature in the story leads to precisely such instances of inexplicable chance, or at least what must on the surface look like inexplicable chance to those who don't know (of) the monster. The circumstantial evidence leading to Justine's conviction – such as the locket turning up in her possession, an inexplicable circumstance to Justine herself which then leads to the construction of an incorrect official account of events – is such a coincidence where "circumstances conspire" (607).

However, aren't such unruly events, arguably, only a radical version of what narrative plot generally is, which is always, in one way or the other, an unfolding of at least somewhat contingent developments? Should we then equate plot in general with techno-material exteriority, with radical strangeness? I would much rather argue that narrative plot has the capacity to express such kinds of alterity as cannot usefully be categorised into 'natural' or 'unnatural,' 'familiar' or 'strange' at all. The fact that stories aren't neutral but fabricated is neither reason enough to call them 'unnatural' nor inconspicuous enough to call them 'natural.' Framing technology – postindustrial or not – as a "radical exterior," as Hansen does, indirectly assumes the safe ground of 'normal,' reliable, comprehensible organicity and everyday life. If we admit, however, that the otherness we experience in the monster is simply – although there is really nothing 'simple' about it – the necessary otherness or inscrutability that comes with being alive, and the strangeness of the novel

14 Hansen sees the former (the dominant view) represented in work from Plato to de Man and the latter in work by Adorno, Bakhtin, Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault (601).

is the necessary contingency of narrative plot; then the case presents itself differently than such readings of the creature as representative of a-human technology suggest. It is not so much that in *Frankenstein*, we look from a position of familiarity, of what we know (the body, language) at something we don't (technology). The "radical exteriority" that Frankenstein confronts us with is at the same time a radical interiority. The strangeness is our own.[15]

It seems, then, that we need a more inclusive understanding of technology in order to properly understand what *Frankenstein* has to say about it. Shane Denson, who regards the medium of film as the "anthropotechnical interface" at which and through which narrative content and material-technological circumstances connect (see his *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface*), argues that the creature, in particular, works as an 'articulator' of the materiality of film, which in turn is part of the greater context of the history of technology. This doubly re-presentative nature – so that monstrosity and technological change aren't only thematised, but concretely, actually presented by *Frankenstein* and in the creature – does not set off only when *Frankenstein* goes to Hollywood (or on film, more generally). It is "imperative," Denson says, that we likewise "view the novel not just as offering *representations* of monstrosity that are subsequently re-worked, re-presented, or 'remediated' in film, but as a text that is itself *materially* imbricated in a historical upheaval of humanity's simultaneously material and discursive 'nature' – an *upheaval* centrally precipitated by the industrial revolution and its lifeworld impacts." *Frankenstein* (as I emphatically agree) does not just comment on human-technological or gender relations. Its involvement with such matters is more tangible, "contingent upon the book's material interconnection with an extra-

15 I limit myself at this point to reflecting on the 'un/naturalness' of bodies and of technology *for Frankenstein as narrative fiction*. As a more general philosophical concern, the interrelations between vitality, signification, technology and biology have seen much recent attention (with differing emphases) in the works of, for instance, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, Vicki Kirby, Catherine Malabou, or the recently re-popularised Gilbert Simondon.

discursive reality in the very process of historical transformation." And if we "can conceive the novel in this double way, then we have a basis for understanding cinema's own double nature and for approaching the potential of *Frankenstein* films to shed light on [...] reorganizations of human subjectivity that may be less obvious but no less far-reaching than those induced by the industrial revolution" (151).

This is certainly a more inclusive approach to technology as something that we are involved with rather than separate from, a process rather than a spectacle. Denson suggests a kind of techno-material metabolism that provides all the more reason for taking *Frankenstein*, and the *Frankenstein* complex, seriously as generative process rather than as an endless series of reflections of ourselves. Approaching Shelley's novel according to the logic of exemplification, Denson elaborates *Frankenstein*'s "double nature" as conceptual *and* actual re-presentation of monstrosity and technology through the capacity of technological change to affect bodies on a large scale.[16] This requires Denson to come up with a scenario in which technological events, such as the advent of the steam engine, can plausibly be said to become part of a story or a piece of literature in a more concrete sense than the concept of 'inspiration' suggests (179–81). This is less mysterious than it may seem, Denson's argumentation suggests, because technological innovation does not proceed in sterile isolation but rather has an impact on the people that come into touch with whatever the innovation at hand may consist in; and because bodies tend to have an impact on other bodies, major technological innovations aren't only spectacular events but rather condition "radical changes in human embodiment," in what it means to be/have a body, as such (180). Consequently, the novel itself potentially reframes and reorganizes this embodiment. There we have "arrived at a material mechanism capable of explaining how Shelley could be infected by industrial technology and induced, without her intentional consent, to embody the rhythms of the steam enginge [or

16 An example or parable, Denson explains following Brian Massumi and Giorgio Agamben, has the peculiarity of being itself an active part of what it conceptually stands for (176–77).

the modern city, for that matter, Denson says], turning her into a machine productive of another machine: *Frankenstein* as an exemplar of technological invention" (180). The novel is thus "not set off from the material reality it describes but partakes of it, drawing its materials from there, transducing them, and feeding them back into the flux. Neither a metaphor nor an allegory, *Frankenstein* is an exemplary *parable* of historical technological revolution and the concomitant anthropotechnical revision of humanity" (181).

These dynamics become even more relevant for Denson's primary technology of interest, that is, for film: if the novel, "as a machine, serves as a parable for the industrial revolution as a historical reconfiguration of the affective body," this revolution "can be taken as parable (or paradigmatic example, if one prefers) for other such transformations, including those effected by the mediating technologies of cinema." Both "the steam engine and the apparatus of camera/projector are abstractly similar in reshaping humans' phenomenal relations to the world and affective capacities of their bodies" (184). Watching Victor's bio-techno-logical achievement on screen, I become myself quite forcefully and physically involved with the very technological achievement that produces the image for me: cinema. Cinema and the creature, in that sense, becomes examples of each other.

The Substance of Fiction

I share Denson's view that for *Frankenstein*, monstrosity must be located somewhere else besides "squarely in the realm of discourse" (152); that a non-conventional logic of representation is necessary to account for what the text does. One of my own starting points for the inquiry at hand is, after all, the observation that *Frankenstein* itself performs what it designates as its own theme (reproduction, that is). But – to pick up Denson's cinematic situation – in the contact zone between filmic apparatus as technological environment and spectators' bodies that

Denson describes,[17] in which ways is it important that what I see (or read, for that matter) is a *story*? I feel that this aspect of fictionality should be taken into consideration when focusing in more detail on the question of how representation – of technology or anything else – works in (for, with) *Frankenstein*. Fiction is itself, to pick up Denson's phrasing regarding technological innovation, a reorganisation of embodiment. Certainly, there are 'actual people' involved – people that experience steam engines (or high-speed trains, or Wi-Fi) and the according impact on their sense of embodiment. And yet it would seem that those 'actual people,' in experiencing a *Frankenstein* story, experience an alteration of what it means 'to have a body,' 'to be alive,' or 'to be oneself' that, besides being caused by historical techno-material reorganisations, is further also conditioned by fictionality itself.

What fiction does, among other things, is to reconfigure not only matter or bodies as such (or bodies in their interaction with the world), but matter's or bodies' relation to meaningfulness and 'fantasies' – and vice versa. Going to the movies is certainly a visceral experience, but a visceral experience *which is something else, too* – simultaneously and inherently. Denson's account is strongly focused on the affective realm and its connections to technology – reflection, when it comes to *Frankenstein*, is, he says, "best understood on the model of the simple physical reflex" (181). However, fiction itself – because it needs, marks, and makes bodies, all of this in one move of figuration – cannot easily be made to confirm to a matter-first-meaning-after paradigm. Where would I ever, with any decisiveness, be able to draw a sharp line between being, say, drawn in by the flickering lights of the cinematic apparatus, and my sharp interest in what happens to the poor mangled being I watch being chased off by ungracious villagers? Are they not properly inseparable because they bring each other into existence? I am not entirely sure, then, that, as Denson claims, Frankensteinian monsters "may *become* meaning machines" only *after* they "start out life in this aoristic realm of the flesh" (203) of the world. It would seem to me, rather, that monsters

17 See, for more detail, 184–193.

are meaning machines *as* they start out life in the flesh, and that they start out life in the flesh *as* they are meaning machines.[18]

Quite apart from the media-technological setup which they are presented in, which may or may not affect me in a certain way, stories, by virtue of being stories, *fabricate* positions of perception and enunciation which have a clearly corporeal quality to them – not least, paradoxically, because of their limitations, because of their partiality and restrictedness and the many things that remain invisible from them. The *Frankenstein* complex suggests that stories upset our ideas of how signification works not so much because they lack reference, because they aren't real *enough*, but because they are in some sense *too* real to allow the fiction of disembodiment and depersonalisation that both propositional logic and ideology rely on – it is not for nothing that de Certeau talks about the apparent paradox of a "*fiction* of *knowledge*." The curiosity of fiction does not exhaust itself in the fact that we are unable to evaluate propositional statements in fiction such as, say, Victor describing the looks of his creature, as true or false – it is that we cannot exclude from the content of the proposition an awareness of who uttered it, and under which

18 In a sense, Denson says as much: "Like the novel itself, *Frankenstein*'s filmic progenies are multi-layered, not reducible to the molecular intensities that, in the pre-personal interface of bodies and machines, may be said to produce their most radical moments; such productions always explode into personal and suprapersonal contexts and structures, which they may disrupt *or* reinforce as they assume objective shape, narrative form, and ideological significance. […] If I have downplayed these stabilizing processes […], it is not because I regard them as illusory or unimportant. Rather, it is because I am convinced that the materiality of embodiment, in its technologically variable openness to the environment, forms a non-foundational ground from which representation cannot be divorced" (202). ('Meaning machines' is originally Halberstam's phrase.)

circumstances.[19] In a certain sense, fiction therefore has too much substance, and not too little.

19 And this, by the way, goes for "purveyors of discourse" as much as for "inhabitants of story," a narratological distinction that Seymour Chatman has insisted on (*Coming to Terms* 4). In fact, I would argue that the imprecision that narratology associates with the term 'point of view' (Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 139–41) has to do with the fact that narratology treats 'point of view' as referring to an actual position and not to a *practice* of inhabiting or situating oneself – the term itself, admittedly, suggests this –, which is why it can then only be allowed metaphorical meaning once applied to narrative fiction. If, however, 'point of view' refers to the practice first, of which the position is only the result – then the meaning of the term for stories becomes at once a lot more substantial. In fact, Chatman's insistence that it "makes no sense to say that a story is told 'through' the narrator's perception since he/she/it is precisely *narrating*, which is not an act of perception but of presentation or representation" conveys precisely the sense of 'invent first, tell later' that ultimately depends on the "bifurcation" of the world into the substance on the one, and symbolic creation on the other hand (*Coming to Terms* 142). It is the dichotomous separation of the two that forces one to assume that narrating can under no circumstances be an act of perception. – Does this mean that no story could ever be ideological, in effect or purpose? Probably not. It might mean, however, that we recognise fiction as propaganda precisely when and where we are invited to ignore its characteristics as fiction, its opacity, and accept it as the bodiless propositional statement as which it disguises itself.

Part One: Coda

Shelley's novel presents a written text that subverts the law due to insisting on embodiments of perspective. Rose's film continues this subversion in prying apart quite forcefully the body on the one and the 'law' of designative language on the other hand, a subversion that peaks in the seemingly illogical self-designations of the voice-over speeches. This *Frankenstein* film works with inconsistencies of language *and* inconsistencies of narrative logic or rather, makes the two aspects into two sides of the same coin, namely that of enunciation. "What is meant by the word 'enunciation' is the presence, at both ends of the utterance, of two human persons, or, rather, two *subjects*" (Metz 747): Metz makes somewhat light here of Benveniste's repeated assertion that uttering "I" (or "you") refers only to "the reality of discourse" as such (Benveniste 218), that such pronouns "are distinguished from all other designations a language articulates in that *they do not refer to a concept or to an individual*" (Benveniste 226). Such expressions, wherever they appear (inside fiction and out), always already refuse, to some degree, the subjection of the corporeal to the licit and the legal: No one, after all, can forbid me to say, and speak as, 'I'…

…or so it would seem. Such discursive performance is powerful in its self-sufficiency at the same time as it is fragile and precarious. Its success is an eventuality that lends force to the attempt, in the first place. There is "a 'perhaps'," as Alexander García Düttmann argues, that is "not a tool in the repertory of scepticism, at least not inasmuch as it makes the success of communication into an achievement" and thus "reveals something about a, or the, feeling of life" (54). There is, in other words, an undecidability of success and failure, a mutual implication ("the inscription

of failure within success" that turns success into an "achievement" [52]), that makes speech acts expressive and thus, ultimately, into instances of liveliness (this is Düttmann's answer to the question "What is a deconstructionist's feeling of life?" [49]). While there are "habits, conventional behaviour, established practices that blind us to the expressiveness of felicitous performative utterances," we need to move – through deconstructionist thought, Düttmann argues – from "an understanding of the performative utterance as a speech act whose success can be ascertained" to an "understanding of it as an act of expression, or a form of expressiveness, as a saying that is also a showing" (52). Simply put, there is depth and life in signification and communication because it can always also go wrong:

> This pure expressiveness of speech acts, and of communication, is engendered by a tension that can be weaker or stronger, and that always tends toward one of its poles. It is the tension between the expressive and the ultimately inexpressive, between success and failure (mere success and mere failure being equally inexpressive), between the taking place of what is done with words and an interruption that may lead to an inquiry into what went wrong. 'Was there something that forced me to say what I did not want to say?' While it is likely that an answer to this question can be found in a significant number of cases, no inquiry will ever be able to bridge, or fill, all the gaps. (53)

Such life, and such depth, come from the principle of iteration, from the circumstance that going awry and missing the point are not only inevitable, but productive of singular identities or even 'authenticity,' in the first place.

> The logic of iterability accounts for both the 'only-once' as an instance of repetition (the exception confirms and ratifies the rule) *and* the 'only-once' as an instance of alteration (the exception has a destabilizing effect upon the rule). […] Iterability signals that, in language, nothing can ever happen only once and everything always does. […] [T]he conjunction ['and'] points to a tension, does not indicate its resolution, and this is the reason for language becoming expressive in

> its usage, and for the transcendental being inseparable from the empirical, the law from its manifestation, the rule from its application: the becoming-expressive of language is of its very essence. (56)[1]

Expression, then – expressiveness – has something to do with the circumstance that every utterance can *also* fail, and this has something to do with the impossible possibilities of iteration: the circumstance that every utterance, to mean something, *must* repeat, but also must *not* repeat – must follow a certain logic of the repetition of difference. A meaningful gap opens up between utterances that is not unlike the deviance in and of the monster's speaking body. Stories do not only concern the moment of speaking – they also concern its progress, the progress of telling time. This is, precisely, the domain of iteration, repetition, variation. What is the place of repetition in the *Frankenstein* complex; and more generally its role for the meaningfulness of stories?

1 Düttmann continues: "If one accepts […] the argument of iterability as an argument about life, then one could perhaps infer from it that life, for the deconstructionist, is the occurrence, or the event, of what always occurs only once because it occurs more than once, and of what always occurs more than once because it occurs only once. […] [L]ife is tension, a tension between an 'only-once' and a 'once-more', between an 'only-once' haunted by a 'once-more' and a 'once-more' haunted by an 'only-once'" (57).

Part Two: Repetition

Intuitively, it doesn't even need a lot of arguments to support the claim that somehow, the *Frankenstein* complex is all about repetition. For one, Victor Frankenstein's creative practice is a practice of re-use, where dead flesh is made to come to life again. For another thing, the *Frankenstein* complex results and keeps growing from all the new old ways of re-telling the story of the creature and his maker. And on top of it all, *Frankenstein* is a narrative, so isn't *Frankenstein* somehow naturally repetitive? Narrative, after all, is a form of recounting events and reporting something that has already happened.

There is more to this than meets the eye, though. On close inspection, repetition is a complicated issue, and so is the repetitive quality of narrative. In the *Frankenstein* complex, repetition reveals itself, first, as a dynamic of sameness and difference, oriented forward as much as backward – somewhat unsurprisingly, one might say, the same river we never step in twice is after all proverbial, not only among philosophers. But further, repetition also reveals itself as not so much a means that narrative avails itself of to devise coherent representations of life, but rather as a general, driving ontological force that stories, as living practice, tap into. This is not to say that repetition doesn't have the effect of creating coherence, but that its status, for narrative fiction, is more than that of an instrument or a technique.

In an admittedly rather categorical statement, Brooks claims that narrative "always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered […] as the detective retraces the tracks of the criminal. This claim to an act of repetition –

'I sing of', 'I tell of' – appears to be initiatory of narrative" (*Reading for the Plot* 97). While it might not be as obviously true as Brooks makes it appear that this is "always" the case, it is plausible enough that the indication that one is 'telling *of*' is the prototypical gesture of storytelling. This impression of repetition cannot be accurate in a conventional sense for a number of reasons (and Brooks is indeed careful to only talk about a "claim"): for one, narrative *fiction*, in particular, is certainly not a simple construct in the manner of 'object + representation.' Also, any technique of representation – whatever precise mechanisms we assume for it – will inevitably alter and change what it represents. Repetition is nevertheless the principle of existence stories project for themselves: to be linked to something prior to or beyond themselves which they are able to relate by virtue of this linkage, however much they might make this something up themselves.

This characteristic may be particularly evident for the case of standard written narrative, a story narrated in past tense with a clearly identifiable narrator. More basically, however, it has to do, quite simply, with the fact that something is arranged with regard to something else: the form and order in which events are related is arranged with regard to the form and order of their (supposed) actual occurrence (in narratological vocabulary, the relation between discourse and story). Narrative repetition is thus not in itself bound to a specific medium, though it may be more obvious in some than in others. (This has long been one of the basic tenets of narratology: "[o]nce we define Narrative as the composite of story and discourse (on the basis of its unique double chronology), then *logically*, at least, narratives can be said to be actualizable on the stage or in other iconic media" [Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 114]). It is thus their aboutness that gives stories their repetitive appearance. Then again stories are, as it were, not to be trusted on this account: we can easily argue that this link in the form of 'being about' is illusory as nothing exists prior to the story. It seems, therefore, that stories' indication of repetition in the conventional sense (that is, their indication that they are going over something *again*) is more of a gesture than an actual performance, and that stories are really involved in another kind of repetition – or, to turn this idea around, that the seemingly paradoxical repetitiveness of stories

is a good indicator that repetition is not quite what we think it is, if we think that repetition defines and exhausts itself in a static reappearance of the exact same.

The recognisability of any item, deconstruction famously claims, be it a written mark or an event or a piece of experience, depends on an inherent break in this item's identity – it can appear as itself because it can re-appear in different forms and contexts and still be identifiable, which in turn implies that it was never completely one with itself, or never limited to itself, in the first place: anything that is identifiable is iterable, and iterability ties repetition to alterity. This is not simply a de-substantialisation, a depletion of identity. Jacques Derrida has captured this, quite accessibly, in the concept of dehiscence, borrowed from botany: "this word marks emphatically that the divided opening, in the growth of a plant, is also what, in a *positive* sense, makes production, reproduction, development possible" (*Limited Inc* 59). Derrida's analysis of iterability thus links identity or individuality, something being recognisable as itself, to repetition and furthermore also emphasises that repetition does more than 'do something again.' Others, in fact, would go as far as claiming that repetition does something else altogether. Gilles Deleuze, for one, discovers repetition as a form assumed by difference, and difference as the movement of being which enables singular beings to emerge. Difference 'hides beneath' apparent re-occurrences of objects or beings; even more to the point, it is *because* difference is able to manifest that objects or beings exist in the first place, and can be identified as repetitions. In a reversal of terms not unsimilar to Derrida's reversal of the relation between iteration and identity (it is because of iteration that there is identity, not the other way round), Deleuze reformulates singularity as the condition of repetition: it is because singularity is something like an ontological capacity – we can distinguish two objects from each other even if they are completely alike – that time and thus life make any sense to us. And how are we to imagine narrative without singularity and without time?

In many ways, stories seem to tap into this 'natural' resource of repetitive productivity; that is, their 'repetition' is really, if anything, a celebration, and thus itself a production, of living singularity – significantly,

Deleuze speaks of celebrations, of "festivals," right at the outset of *Difference and Repetition*, saying that "this is the apparent paradox of festivals: they repeat an 'unrepeatable.' They do not add a second and third time to the first, but carry the first time to the 'nth' power" (2). Living repetition itself – in other words, singularity – enables this multiplication in Deleuze's account. There might thus be something in the nature of the existent that enables its re-production in narrative rather than the other way around (rather than narrative imposing its repetitive character on reality in recounting it, that is). Whether we want to lay emphasis on the condition of iterability for something being-recognisable-as-itself, or whether we want to lay emphasis on the fundamental factor of non-categorical difference as ontological threshold into singular existence: ultimately, both ideas imply a directionality that essentially accords with the directionality – the progress that is never simply a progress – of stories. Part Two thus aims to investigate the following claim: stories do not so much look back on something they go over again. Rather, stories manifest precisely the paradoxical character of repetition because through revisiting they pro-ject, cast forth or, in other words, create what they tell us about. Their gesture of re-creation is really pro-creative in bringing forth the new and the singular. Existential repetition – whether we want to call it 'iteration' or 'difference' – governs life as much as it governs stories.

The re/pro-creation of life is also what Victor Frankenstein gets himself involved with, of course. His attempts bring up all kinds of questions pertaining to the relation of uniqueness to similarity, novelty to familiarity. In the context at hand, the creatures Victor struggles with are particularly worth looking at as *narrative* creatures, that is, as creatures brought about by virtue of the access narrative has to the dynamics of existential repetition, by narrative's capacity to 'celebrate' them, to react to the invitation to differential repetition that singularity, on the level of personhood as elsewhere, exudes. In the *Frankenstein* complex, this capacity is further enhanced in a particular way: all *Frankenstein* stories in a sense also write the *Frankenstein* story's story and connect, through their own differential repetition, to the differential repetitions of singularity which enabled the story in the first place. Or, to put it in more Derridean

terms: if *Frankenstein* is iterable – and if its creature is iterable – it must have been 'split' from the start, or something of itself must have always already evaded it and then have become productive (catastrophically productive in the case of the creature) in its further genealogy. For what is *Frankenstein* if not, to borrow a passage from Derrida's "Signature Event Context," a "network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself" (*Limited Inc* 10)?

Ridvan Askin, working towards a narrative theory based on Deleuzian ontology, criticises conventional narratology for its focus on the human and the cognitive, for its "explanatory frameworks, which cast narrative precisely as representational and experiential with no purchase on any mind-independent reality whatsoever" (9). Askin's suggestions towards a differential narratology, in contrast, push "narrative theory to where epistemology capsizes and reverts into ontology, to where narrative ceases merely to be a form of human access to things (while also being that) and becomes expressive of being as such" (5). In some sense, then, Askin uses Deleuze to push precisely towards the vitalism that has been claimed – namely, by Brooks – to be missing from narratology. To a considerable extent, I share Askin's premises. I, too, would like to claim that we need to cast "narrative as expressive rather than representational" (21) and that our guiding questions so far – "What does a text mean? What is its aesthetic value? What are its formal properties?" – need to be supplemented by questions of, "How does [the text] work? What does it do? Which forces does it harbour?" (24). But neither do I take issue with narrative theory's focus on human ethics and understanding in quite as thoroughly a fashion as Askin does nor do I believe that it is only the self-conscious or rather, self-questioning work of postmodernist fiction that involves us in the intricacy

of its own ontology.[2] In other words, I do believe that something as conventional and widespread as for instance the serial format can and does grant access to the differential repetition – the ontological force – it expresses.

And further, I do believe that there is something to the representational side of things as well that is worth looking at. Askin explains that he does "not deny that narrative always is about something," but that he wishes "to emphasise that before being *about* something it simply *is* something itself and that this *is* determines its aboutness" (5–6). I would like to modify this into the claim that it is not that narrative is something *before* being about something but that it *is* something (with all the ontological weight this implicates) *as* it is about something. For stories, being-about consolidates being, and being consolidates being-about. I feel that Brooks's supplementation of narratology with the vitality of desire borrowed from psychoanalysis can itself usefully be supplemented by a more comprehensive inclusion of materiality such as Deleuze's ontology can provide. But I do not therefore believe that this means we should turn our focus by exactly 180 degrees to approach narrative from the other side entirely – entirely from the non-human, non-representative, affective side of things, that is.

Another opportunity to understand more fully how narrative is, as Askin puts it, "expressive of being as such," is provided by looking more closely at the fact – only seemingly trivial – that narrative is expansive, that it covers more than one state of things. Derrida's description as given above – of a "network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability" – is originally a description of what Derrida calls the "field of the mark" (*Lim Inc* 10). As Part One has repeatedly insisted, Frankenstein's creature is marked in ways which are crucial for his story. There's no looking at the monster without knowing that 'something has happened here.' In this, there is a curious parallel between the way bodies make meaning and the way fiction makes meaning, and it all

2 For the record, the latter is not something that Askin claims, either; but he voices and practises a strong preference for postmodern fiction when it comes to showing the workings of his differential narratology.

comes down to figures, to the way in which physical marks can convey meaningfulness both tied to and reaching beyond their own materiality. What happens, then, when this meaningfulness takes narrative form, creates and follows a narrative arc, or what Bruno Latour would maybe call a "trajectory" (if his use of the term in *Inquiry* is any indication)? Does narrative's differential repetition demonstrate the opening of the mark onto existence (physical, energetic, vital) and vice versa? This is conceivable not only through a Deleuzian reinterpretation of what repetition is but also through the – essentially Freudian – notion of delay or deferral, which features in both Derrida's and Brooks's work. Where delay configures the relation between life and death for Freud, it configures the relation between psyche and story for Brooks, and it determines the way that traces make meaning for Derrida. Apparently, vital energies are at work in those moments where figures stretch into narrative arcs. We look at the creature's marked-ness and know that 'something has happened,' that there's a story to tell; and yet, at the same time, it is through this very instance of meaningfulness that the story projects itself in the first place, which suggests, contrary to what Askin implies, a certain simultaneity of representation and being. The story creates its trajectory through following it. Certainly, Deleuze's and Derrida's accounts of how repetition and difference work diverge, and yet they both work towards understanding this very paradox of repetition: its conservative-*and*-creative effect, affirming-*and*-differing, repeating-*and*-renewing – not in the banal sense of variation, but in a more fundamental, idiosyncratic fashion that resonates, also, with the curious temporality that Brooks points out for stories, which live, even as they only begin, off the anticipation of an ending that is at the same time rejected and delayed.

To put it in more figurative terms: where Part One delved into the figural depth of the creature's body as marked, and thus into the bodiliness of life as figured in fiction, the section at hand follows the fate of this mark or marked-ness as it projects and expands in time. To investigate these issues, Part Two is going to look at two versions of *Frankenstein* which make iteration their designated programme through taking the form of sequels and series. Both can be said to frame this iterative

programme in the terms of actual resurrections: in the frame story to James Whale's film *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), Mary Shelley explicitly resurrects her story, and with it the creature, from the end both have found in the previous film. Where this kind of 'resurrecting return' is more of an introductory device for Whale's film, it becomes a pervading issue in John Logan's television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016). In re-making and re-combining literary classics – most prominently, *Frankenstein*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – *Penny Dreadful* relies on the iterability of these texts' protagonists and plot elements and brings up the question of adaptation in a narrower sense. But more than that: being a serial narrative, it doubles the differentially repetitive movement of narrative and confronts us with a diffraction of narrative repetition onto various levels – the level of outward form (serial narration), the level of context (adaptation), and the level of personal uniqueness, which is a pressing concern arising for Victor's creatures (of which there are, quite tellingly, three) in the series.

Sequels: Going Forward, Looking Back

James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and John Logan's *Penny Dreadful* (2014–16)

That Was Not the End At All

James Whale's sequel to his 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein* (produced in 1935 for Universal Studios), performs the backward-forward-impulse of narrative repetition with particular emphasis, gesturing towards something that has (supposedly) happened before the story is told while at the same time exploiting the generative, forward-moving potential narrative gains by way of this backward orientation. The sequel does not start directly where the previous film leaves off – with the burning mill in which the creature, supposedly, finds its end – but inserts a framing device between the two films which shows Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron spending a stormy night in a cozy living room, talking about Mary's story. Domestic serenity is emphasised (or mocked?) by cheerful violin music and Mary doing needlework. As the scene proceeds, it involves us in a swivelling of orientations: are we looking back on or forward towards something? A remark from Byron refreshes everybody's memory: "Can you believe that bland and lovely brow conceived of *Frankenstein*? A monster created from cadavers out of rifled graves? Isn't it astonishing?" (00:03:03-03:13). Mary's answer is ambiguous in reference when she points out that "such an audience needs something stronger than a pretty little love story" (00:03:16-03:19) – "such an audience" potentially referring to the earlier

film's audience, to the present film's audience, or to a potential reading public which, speaking from her point in time, she has not been able to reach yet because, as Byron explains, "Murray's refused to publish the book. He says his reading public would be too shocked" (a fact which leaves Mary unperturbed: "It will be published, *I* think," she assures us [00:03:23-03:28]).

Does the tale already exist at this point? The fact that the answer is both yes and no quite appropriately reflects stories' re-generative capacity: a 1935 film, going back in time to some point between 1816 and 1818 and simultaneously to four years earlier, 1931, when Universal released its first *Frankenstein* film; but also projecting into the very near future – that is, to the remaining 67 minutes of the current film – all these points in time assuming meaning and hence appearing properly only by virtue of this frame story, which creates their significance in the first place. The frame story then turns 'properly' repetitive when Byron sums up the plot of the earlier film while the according images appear on screen:

> What a setting in that churchyard to begin with! The sobbing women, the first clod of earth on the coffin. That was a pretty chill. Frankenstein and the dwarf stealing the body out of its new-made grave. Cutting the hanged man down from the gallows, where he swung creaking in the wind. The cunning of Frankenstein in his mountain laboratory, picking dead men apart and building up a human monster so fearful and so horrible that only a half-crazed brain could have devised. And then the murders, the little child who drowned. Henry Frankenstein himself thrown from the top of the burning mill by the very monster he had created.[1]

The scenery switches back to the living room, and Byron concludes, approaching Mary and her needlework: "And it was these fragile white

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1 Byron's remark about half-crazed brains has a rather nasty undertone, considering how he has just referred to the mystery of Mary's "bland and lovely brow" conceiving of a monster "created from cadavers." The protagonist's (Victor Frankenstein's, that is) and the author's (the fictional Mary Shelley's, that is) minds are thus doubled and repeated in each other.

fingers that penned the nightmare" (00:03:53-04:38). Besides being an allusion to the origin Mary Shelley herself suggests in the Introduction to the 1831 edition of her novel – where she claims to have dreamed the key scene in which a "student of the unhallowed arts" sits next to a cadaverous being of his own making (9) – Byron's concluding phrase marks the story of *Frankenstein* as an entity of quasi-independent pre-existence that needs capturing, but at the same time it foregrounds the story's madeness, its roots in a generative flow of creation (which is steered by Mary's fingers). "These fragile white fingers" become the pivot of backwards-and-forwards, or recursive-progressive movement because through them and, as Byron argues implicitly, only because of them, we can access the various points in time which come together and exhibit their generative connection in this sequel film's frame episode.

The frame thus accomplishes an iterative assemblage of heterogeneous moments in time. Mary then asks her companions (and her "audience") whether they want to learn more about the creature's fate. Looking teasingly at Byron, she asks: "That wasn't the end at all. Would you like to hear what happened after that? I feel like telling it." And while the three of them sit down on the sofa, she explains: "It's a perfect night for mystery and horror. The air itself is filled with monsters" (00:04:50-05:03).[2] Her question – "would you like to hear what happened after that" – 'disguises' or clothes what is only now unfolding, or going to unfold in a minute, as having been (always) already there. "What happened after that" is marked – in good storytelling fashion – as something already existent which the story then only needs to transmit, but at the same time "what happened after that" unfolds as moving image in the present and into the future (and since we are dealing, in the main body of the film, with a 'fictive fiction' rather than a direct adaptation of Shelley's novel, we might not even *really* rely on her text as factual precedent).

Still, having Mary gesture towards "what happened after that" is more than simply a ruse: the story *is* quite able to bring forth its future

2 On the gendered/sexualised dynamics of the Percy-Mary-Byron triangle, and how it anticipates the monster-mate-Victor triangle later in the film, see Young 408–09.

as its past. As Latour remarks, it is "not for nothing that works 'make up whole worlds': […] Nothing precedes them, because they can make anything exist, as it were, 'from scratch.' Put a placard on stage staying 'Asia begins here' – and there you have it, Asia begins. This is a rather odd way to *make existence*" (*Inquiry* 247). If we do not stumble over the offhand claim that 'Asia begins here' – or that "that was not the end at all" even though to our knowledge, the monster is resurrected only once, and that is on the occasion of his birth – it is precisely because fiction, to fulfil the requirements of its own particular mode of existence, depends not on accurate representation but rather on its capacity to motivate its audiences' investment and participation (which is, in a way, the whole point of Latour's argument concerning "beings of fiction"). This does not simply mean, as a commonplace version of this argument would have it, that 'the audience needs to imagine what the story is saying and then it is as if Asia began 'there" – for one because, in this Latourian framework, ontological hierarchies are flattened out and authors become quasi-readers of their own work, making reception a more complex process than an explanation of this kind can indicate (an aspect which Part Three will return to); but also because this flattening of ontological hierarchies results, in the first place, from the abolishment of the distinction, underlying these ontological hierarchies, between 'real' and 'symbolic,' an abolishment which upsets conventional concepts of 'imagination.' If there is a "what happened after that" already existent, it is because the story's future *becomes* the story's past once the story claims it to do so – and thus genuinely makes it so. James Whale's Mary Shelley continues: "Well then. Imagine yourselves standing by the wreckage of the mill. The fire is dying down." The camera zooms out of the living room and blends over into a picture of the burning mill where the creature found its end in the first film. Mary continues in voice-over: "Soon the bare skeleton of the building rolls over, the gaunt rafters against the sky" (00:05:10-05:24). Precisely *what* Mary describes happens to the mill precisely *as* she describes it, creating a present concurrence of description and 'reality' which also works as an iteration, or differential repetition, that re-presents or elicits the audience's memory – and simultaneously projects into the future as promise of 'more to come' (for this was in-

deed not the end at all!). The scene then switches to the screaming mob surrounding the mill and we are 'inside' the story that Mary is telling to Percy and Byron on the sofa.

A Resurrection in Three Parts

The film proper then begins with a veritable exploitation of the idea of resurrection, drawing out the monster's return, raising it bit by bit from the dead – and even here, we find an equivalence of repetition and creation because this bringing back corresponds precisely to the way in which the monster was created in the first place, which was in itself an act of triggering progression by going backwards: creating life from dead body parts. *Bride of Frankenstein* re-introduces the creature in pieces both in terms of discursive allusions and in terms of the successive presentation of body parts. While the mob looks on as the mill burns down, there are repeated allusions to the creature being not actually dead. "There's more yet," is one ominous remark by onlookers as the flames flare up in one particularly violent burst, "that's his insides caught at last." "Isn't the monster dead yet?" one woman asks anxiously, and another tries to get her husband home, who sticks around after the crowd has dispersed (they are the parents of the girl Maria, in fact, who the creature drowned accidentally in the earlier film): "Come home, Hans. The monster is dead now. Nothing *could* be left alive in that furnace. Why do you stay here?" The husband insists: "I want to see it with my own eyes." The couple's exchange clearly establishes a link to the audience's expectations, who must have known from the moment they entered the movie theatre that the monster would reappear, and who are now waiting themselves to see it with *their* "own eyes." With an appropriate overemphasis on modal verbs suggesting that she is quite wrong about what is and is not possible, the wife assures her husband: "Oh, Hans, he *must* be dead. And dead or alive, nothing can bring our little Maria back to us," but her husband will not be held back. In his search for the creature's "blackened bones," a visual proof to enable him to "sleep at

night," he crashes through a pile of burned wood into the millpond, leaving his wife swooning outside.

In the back-and-forth between the husband's suspicions and his wife's assurances, the creature's survival is indirectly confirmed even before it becomes evident. This fragmentation of revelation, its being drawn out over time, its logic of addition – adding hint to hint – is then continued in the corporeal presentation of the creature, making it appear, literally, in instalments – in, as it were, serial fashion. The scene switches to the millpond, where we see the arm and hand of the creature rise ominously from the waters while Hans is splashing helplessly around. Bit by bit, the torso and hand of the creature, quite alive, turn up from behind a corner, followed by a closeup on Karloff's iconic face. The staging techniques mirror quite closely the famous presentation of the finished creature in the first film, with its stashing of three ever-closer close-ups, so that here, too, we find an instance of differential repetition: same creature, same actor, same makeup, same technical principle, and yet the overall scene is different from its predecessor. The creature then approaches Hans with his typically inarticulate growls and screeches and drowns him. The moment of successive corporeal (re)appearance is repeated when the creature then proceeds to climb from the destroyed mill. Outside, Hans's wife, recovering from unconsciousness, reaches a hand into the rubble, thinking her husband is making his way out. Again, the creature's body reappears bit by bit from its covers, hand first; then gets a hold of Hans's wife and throws her into the millpond, too (00:06:21-09:08). Each death, paradoxically, propels the monster forward – the victims' 'way into' the mill which kills them and thus makes them creatures of the past is at the same time the creature's 'way out,' back into life and back into the future of the film.

The body of Frankenstein's creature – of most Frankenstein creatures, as most of them struggle with bodily marked-ness in crucial ways – showcases the depth of signification, as Part One has argued at length. The question that presents itself at this point, then, is, what happens when this 'meaningful mark' stretches – horizontally, as it were – along a full-blown narrative arc? This is, after all, what the beginning of *Bride*, with its frame episode, highlights: that the creature's meaningfulness,

unique as it is, is expandable in time and variable in essence. The act of zooming in that is suggested by the filmic arrangement – in the filmic framing, in the step-by-step fashion in which the creature is re-introduced – is presented as the hinge between story and sequel: what Mary Shelley says, effectively, when she says "this was not the end at all," is that we're going to look both closer into as well as beyond the story that we already know. We are going to fill up a gap or rather – and it is significant that this is precisely the direction in which this filmic Mary Shelley's rhetoric points – we are going to in-vent, create as we discover, what this gap has been filled with *all along*.

If the thickness of the creature's marked body thus interacts with a significance stretched out over time, the two are only seemingly of different orders – one of presence, one of absence; one vertical, one horizontal; one physical, one textual. In one of the more recent attempts to reconcile the efforts of new materialism with the thought of deconstruction, Vicki Kirby asks: "What happens [...] if the very stuff of 'matter'" is acknowledged as "ubiquitous and chameleon and 'the natural order'" as "essentially sociological, errant, and always 'out of place', or 'out of sync' with itself?" ("Foreword" x). Indeed, as Kirby argues, to oppose the stasis of matter to the progression of text in any radical sense is quite misleading. She brings up the example of cryptography: on the one hand, a cipher code "involves pure reference: every sign conjures another, and another, and another, sliding along a chain of associational possibilities"; on the other hand, "the very process of this sliding transformativity that appears straightforwardly linear is at the same time a punctum, wherein radical alterity (another language in this case) is already 'present' in the point of departure and arrival" ("Matter out of Place" 13). There is materiality involved in the realm of signification, and signification involved in the realm of materiality. Iteration and difference (*différance*, in Derridean terminology) are more universally relevant then 'just' along a chain of signifiers; and, as Kirby indicates with her "punctum," there's a certain locality, and with that a certain thickness and depth, to signifiers, too.[3] It

3 In fact, Derrida himself points out how writing cannot be contained in the framework of '(human) symbolic technology': "Of course, if one defines lan-

is therefore not enough to say that *Frankenstein* stories simply happen to speak about a particularly conspicuous kind of body – or rather, 'speaking about' is not as simple an activity as it might seem. This is not only because, as Part One has insisted, enunciation is always a situated activity, a spatial practice which requires me to position myself in non-self-evident ways. It is also because such acts of signification involve a complex temporal creativity (and *Bride of Frankenstein* highlights this).

Indeed, it is because in deconstructivist thought every existent is assumed to be fundamentally displaced that it becomes useful in figuring out what happens when Whale's *Frankenstein* sequel upsets the division between future, present, and past in such a curious way. Mary Shelley's storytelling gestures, her and the film's resurrection of the creature, direct us forward into the past by way of numerous little nudges. This appears as an impossible thing to do only as long as we insist that any original event precedes its iteration, absolutely and necessarily. If, however, we allow the reverse thought that iterability and iteration in fact condition recognisability and identity, then what might seem like quirky screenwriting suddenly appears far less extraordinary. It is after all only because we can detach ("wean," as Derrida puts it [*Limited Inc* 10]) something from its context that it comes to appear as both unique, identifiable as itself, *and* repeatable – and only if something is flexibly repeatable can we detach it from its context and make it appear elsewhere. There is thus some kind of break implicit in every thing and, equally, every sign; even as something closes in on itself, it can do so only on the condition of its capacity to open up to and connect with, even turn into, what it is not ("And if a certain 'break' is always possible, that with which it breaks must necessarily bear the mark of this possibility inscribed in

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guage in such a way that it is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, *are themselves not only human*" ("Eating Well" 116). In other words, writing, in the conventional sense, might be human, might be symbolic; its possibility is not.

its structure" [Derrida, *Limited Inc* 64]).[4] This break, however, this out-of-placeness, is not to be thought of as the flat kind of negativity; a dysfunctionality or desubstantialisation. In fact, the Derridean metaphor of dehiscence counters precisely this conclusion: "The iteration structuring [the utterance] a priori introduces into it a dehiscence and a cleft [*brisure*] which are essential," he claims in "Signature Event Context" (18). "As in the realm of botany, from which [dehiscence] draws it metaphorical value," he explains later in *Limited Inc*, "this word marks emphatically that the divided opening, in the growth of a plant, is also what, in a positive sense, makes production, reproduction, development possible" (59). And indeed, "divided opening" seems quite the right metaphor to capture the logic and effect of Mary Shelley's physical and rhetorical gesture, such as the film's frame presents it.

Generation without Origin

"Everything begins with reproduction," that is what Derrida says about the trace, memory, and meaning in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (211). Intuitively, this almost reads like a motto for the *Frankenstein* complex where everything does, indeed, begin with reproduction in one way or another. The creature, in particular, made from the dead as it is, seems like a walking embodiment of the "always already" that Derrida insists on (for instance, "Scene" 211). The curious temporality of the gap and the projection at the beginning of *Bride* is indicative of a fundamental relevance of iteration for stories: if marks or traces, according to the logic of *différance*, project back to an origin that never was because they in-vent

4 This concerns in particular the identity and meaning of marks and signs, but not exclusively so. The features of iteration and iterability, Derrida argues, are to be found "in the totality of 'experience' insofar as it is inseparable from th[e] field of the mark, which is to say, from the network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself" (*Limited Inc* 10).

it as they refer to it, then Mary Shelley's storytelling gesture in *Bride* is, in many ways, an instance of such tracing – and so, arguably, are many other instances of storytelling which create the past that they tell about. Shelley's gesture and remark – "that was not the end at all" – mark a beginning that is an ending that is a beginning. They present a trace which produces a gap that is thick with meaning, fed by the power of differentiation inherent in the existent. In that sense, *Frankenstein* (in *Bride* and elsewhere) exposes with particular clarity how stories are entwined with the force of singularity, both with existents' ontological capacity to differentiate themselves, and with our capacity to process such singularity. Isn't this what lies beneath our impression, when looking at the monster and its marked-ness, that 'something must have happened to it,' that 'there's something wrong with it,' that 'this is peculiar'? (It doesn't seem to matter too much, in this regard, whether we're dealing with an obviously marked monster like the one impersonated by Boris Karloff, or whether we have a more 'rhetorically marked' monster like *Penny Dreadful*'s Lily, where the marks which her body lacks are sustained in other people's reaction to her, which keep emphasising her 'extraordinary' nature.)

Derrida's engagement with Freud, memory and the trace is interesting because it ultimately figures being as inscription – and vice versa, as Kirby insists, inscription as being. This allows for a productivity or creativity, a generation without origin which, even though it is condemned to 'lag behind,' is not therefore mere replication. Rather, the inscribed produces itself as inscription of something – which is exactly what narrative does in its paradoxical 'aboutness.' Essentially, what this concept of inscription or tracing relieves narrative off is the subordinate status that is routinely derived from its representational capacities: the assumption that because the narration of an event comes *after* it is necessarily secondary *to* the event; that narrative is good at depicting things but not at making them; that it is, existentially speaking, barren, a dead end, because even if consecutive narratives follow on a given story, their *raison d'être* derives again from the originary event, not the story of it.

The temporal structure that Derrida, inspired by Freud, ascribes to the trace is that of belatedness, of *Nachträglichkeit*: "Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*." However, "the transition to consciousness is *not* a derivative or repetitive writing [my emphasis], a transcription duplicating an unconscious writing, it occurs in an original manner and, in its very secondariness, is originary and irreducible." This is because "consciousness for Freud is a surface exposed to the external world" – not merely a place of storage, that is, but quite literally a site where the individual opens towards experience. It is thus "that instead of reading through the metaphor in the usual sense, we must, on the contrary, understand the possibility of a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world" ("Scene" 211–12). In that sense, then, "we perhaps should think that what we are describing here as the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world" ("Scene" 212).[5]

Traces, Path-Breakers

In other words, Freud's conception of memory as the result of breaching reveals, in Derrida's reading, an understanding of consciousness as converter of present and past, space and time, meaning and matter. It is not

5 On the matter of negativity and presence/absence, there is maybe some degree of ambivalence in Derrida – as for instance when he talks about how the primacy of the supplement "*hollows out* […] the present" ("Scene 212" [my emphasis]). Whether a new materialist reading such as it is suggested for instance by Kirby is tendentious is a question that I will take the freedom to circumvent here. Generally speaking, to my mind, much of what Derrida says at least allows a stronger shift towards productivity and vitality than is traditionally associated with deconstruction. Francesco Vitale's *Biodeconstruction* is a very detailed examination of Derrida's texts in this regard. On Derrida and the life sciences, see further also Basile.

simply that impressions leave a trace and thus a 'memory.' Memory depends on traces which in turn are fundamentally dependent on, not the force which leaves a trace, nor the resistance of matter where no force can leave a trace, but on the difference between trace and no-trace: "An equality of resistance to breaching, or an equivalence of the breaching forces, would eliminate any *preference* in the choice of itinerary. Memory would be paralyzed. It is the difference between breaches which is the true origin of memory, and thus of the psyche." Ultimately, therefore, psychic life "is neither the transparency of meaning nor the opacity of force but the difference within the exertion of forces" ("Scene" 201). Difference – in the force of the traces as well as in the forces of resistance that they meet – affords the transformation of 'the material world' into 'symbolic consciousness.' A conventional sequence of memory following event, representation following represented item conveys little of this dynamic.

Traces are thus less a matter of leftovers but rather of path-breaking, a spatial and temporal jarring that constitutes a past through the forward breach that it effects. Freud's understanding of "the work of the memory-trace" presents, Derrida says, the

> *itinerant* work of the trace, producing and following its route, the trace which traces, the trace which breaks open its own path. The metaphor of path-breaking, so frequently used in Freud's descriptions, is always in communication with the theme of the *supplementary delay* and with the reconstitution of meaning through deferral, after a mole-like progression, after the subterranean toil of an impression. […] The postscript which constitutes the past present as such is not satisfied […] with reawakening or revealing the present past in its truth. It *produces the present past* [my emphasis]. ("Scene" 214)

In other words: tracing unites life and writing and it constitutes both in the mode of belatedness. The trace constitutes itself as trace and thus disallows distinctions of origin and consequence, creation and replication. A difference that is a punctum that comes too late that pro-duces a gap in reaching back to an origin that is only produced through the reach itself – what else is it to say that "that was not the end at all," and thus launch a sequel to an existing story? Narrative here shows itself to be a form of

tracing, too, which finds perfect creaturely resonance in Frankenstein's monster, with his marked body made from the dead. Traces have a double value: the trace is both what comes after, but also what brings forth. Traces open up a gap that is by no means a void but rather a meaningful space – and so do stories, which "break open [their] own path," too, constituting themselves as reports of what they themselves invent; thus, in their curiously dependent autonomy, creating their subject through the very distance which they take from it. This *différance* is temporal as well as spatial: the trace depends for its existence on the difference in resistance that it meets. It happens, therefore, between matter and form ("difference is the articulation of space and time" ["Scene" 219]). This very logic of the trace is instantiated as the logic of story by *Bride of Frankenstein*, and particularly by the film's beginning.

Incidentally, this also effects a shift in perspective when it comes to language and the inter- or transmediality of narrative – the general assumption being that while the 'go-to medium' for narrative would be language, other media likewise have the capacity to express narrative (or narrativity), with varying 'talent' for this or that kind of content.[6] To relate narrative more systematically to an idea of tracing, however, both complicates and fleshes out the notion of 'content expressed in a story.' Mary Shelley's ominous remark, in *Bride*, that "that was not the end at all" doesn't so much express something pre-given as it carves out room for the story, to begin with, making *and* referring to it at the same time. Neither language nor any other medium are in that sense a channel that content is, as it were, poured into with a greater or lesser amount of spillage. Rather, the story and the means of its transmission evolve in tandem and generate each other, a sense of distinction between the telling and the told emerging only through the process itself. (And this is, by the way, how new materialism envisions language to work, generally – for stories and elsewhere: that "the world is articulated and [...] this is why we sometimes manage to take up certain of its articulations through the intermediary of expressions." The productive, material, historical chain of the use and translation of sounds and signs is thus seen to interact with

6 See for instance Ryan, "Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology."

the inherent abilities of that sound-matter to carry, receive or even produce difference. "Everything flows, everything creeps in the same *sense*, in the same direction: the world and words alike. In short, beings utter themselves, and this is why, from time to time, we are capable of speaking truthfully about something, provided that we go at it over and over" [Latour, *Inquiry* 256–57]).[7]

Begin and End

That there is a certain belatedness to meaning in narrative has long been pointed out. Brooks quotes Russian formalist Boris Tomashevsky's witticism that "if a character in a play hammers a nail into the wall in Act I, then he or another character will have to hang himself from it in Act III" (*Reading* 14), that is to say, the anticipation of relevance is something we routinely perform on the elements of narrative plot. However, this kind of belated meaningfulness is generally understood to be specific and, for the most part, limited to narrative; it is thus seen as a veneer of meaning semiotically constructed and, at most, effectively borrowed to gloss over the contingencies of 'real' life. 'We read life *as if* it were a story in order to come up with a comprehensive representation,' is how the argument often goes (systematically articulated, for instance, in Jerome Bruner's work).[8] This is not too helpful in putting Derrida's notion of a 'worldly

7 That "the world is articulated" does not, however, comprehensively explain how exactly it articulates itself in language. See further the chapter on "Circulating Reference" in Latour's *Pandora's Hope* for an example on how he envisions material-symbolic chains to work. Maniglier goes as far as to include language into Latour's "fiction" as mode of existence: "the poem is a second-degree fiction, since it is made from first-degree fictions, i.e., forms of language. […] Language is a fiction, but it is undoubtedly useful for many things" (433).

8 Compare Bruner's offhand dismissal of metaphysics and concurrent confidence in the powers of psychological explanation: "The philosopher W.T. Stace proposed two philosophical generations ago that the only recourse we have against solipsism (the unassailable view that argues that we cannot prove the existence of a real world, since all we can know is our own experience) is that human minds are alike and, more important, that they 'labor in common to-

writing' ("a writing advanced as conscious and as acting in the world") that disables the distinction between being and its iteration ("the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world") to use for narrative fiction. This is where I would like to turn to the television series *Penny Dreadful*. The show is interesting not because it has a particularly challenging aesthetic programme – for the most part, *Penny Dreadful* does what television series, on average, do (if with a comparatively large budget). But on close inspection – and not least because Frankenstein's creature is involved – the series helps to reveal the general creative force of narrative iteration, which cannot adequately be captured by reducing it to a cognitive contrivance.

In a very straightforward sense, repetition is everywhere in *Penny Dreadful*: John Logan's show is not only a serial story but moreover makes Frankenstein's creature into a properly serial creature. Here, Victor resurrects not one, but three beings in total. Produced for Showtime, the series ran in three seasons from 2014 to 2016. *Penny Dreadful* uses *Frankenstein* as one among several canonical literary resources (the two other main texts the series uses are Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) and assembles them together with original figures and plots into one large narrative. The series presents Victor as a penniless young doctor, haunted by the early death of his mother as well as a serious drug habit, insecure among human company (female company, in particular), yet quite self-assured where medical matters are concerned. His first attempt at reanimation proceeds as disastrously as it does in Shelley's novel, producing a creature (called, first, by no proper

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gether.' One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common, I would want to argue, is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual biographies […] depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities. It is a sense of belonging to this canonical past that permits us to form our own narratives of deviation while maintaining complicity with the canon. Perhaps Stace was too concerned with metaphysics when he invoked this process as a defense against solipsism. We would more likely say today that it must surely be a major prophylactic against alienation" (20).

name, then Caliban, then, in the later instalments, John Clare) which is intelligent and literate, yet isolated and mistreated and, in consequence, quite vengeful. Contrary to the novel, however, during the time that the creature is absent from Victor's place and on its own, Victor embarks on a second attempt at creation – this one more successful than the first in that the second creature looks like a perfectly average young man and also because Victor, rather than abandoning, assumes responsibility for him (this one called Proteus). The 'raising' of Proteus is interrupted when the first creature returns to Frankenstein's laboratory and kills his successor in order to lend further emphasis to his own notorious demand for a female companion. Victor finally complies with his creature's demands and – the third time in his series of reanimation – kills the fatally ill prostitute Brona, a passing acquaintance of his, to create Lily. (Lily, obviously intended by Victor to become a docile 'angel in the house,' turns out to develop in unforeseen directions and will keep Victor and his first creature – as well as Dorian Gray – busy for both Season Two and Three.)

This evident iterative quality – serial format, recycling of literary classics, serial production of creatures – culminates in the series' ending in interesting ways. There is, for *Penny Dreadful*, a double obligation to negotiate the problem of endings and beginnings – in other words, to manage iteration in the sense of deciding when (not) to go for another one. The show has to do so both in its capacity as serial narrative, and as story about immortal creatures. Serial endings are interesting endings because they cannot, as it were, rest comfortably in themselves but must afford, more so than 'regular' narrative endings, the opportunity of new beginnings – and conversely, are under double pressure of justifying themselves when they don't (note the controversy that the finales of popular series tend to spark). This is in itself challenge enough but becomes even more pressing an affair if the subject of the series in question is Frankenstein's creature. What results is a curiously layered and often contradictory way of 'ending things.'

Penny Dreadful finishes its three-season run with the image of Frankenstein's creature – kneeling, ironically, at a grave. This is ironic not only because the creature itself will, even though it is made from the dead, never be dead itself (the series implies in several instances that

Frankensteinian creatures are, in terms of physical design, practically immortal). It is ironic also because here, the confirmation of resurrection meets its rejection, both in narrative as well as in existential terms. In some ways, the series finds an absolute ending, for instance in the death of its main protagonist, Vanessa Ives (she is the one whose grave the creature is mourning over). This, however, stands in contrast to the 'endlessness' of some of its characters – not only is it quite obvious that this is not the last we have seen of Frankenstein's creature generally, in whatever incarnation. Theoretically, it would also be possible that we see more of *Penny Dreadful*'s third Frankenstein creature, Lily; for she is presented, in the season finale, as standing not only at the end of several developments and transformations she has undergone, but at the beginning of new ones. It is certainly a curious constellation to have an undead-and-hence-immortal creature kneel at a graveside, reciting (in 'ghostly' voiceover) Wordsworth's ode to immortality, of all texts, right before "The End" appears on the blackened screen – and all this in a story which is even more challenged than others to negotiate the contingency of its ending because it is a *serial* story, and thus faced, by definition, with the possibility of its own endlessness.

This constellation is made all the more poignant by the fact that seconds earlier, we have seen the creature – the first creature, Caliban/John Clare, that is, the one who is now mourning over the grave – bury his son Jack. John Clare has managed, in Season Three, to find his former family, from the time before he became material for Victor's efforts as creator of 'new' life: a wife, Marjorie, and a little son, Jack, who suffers from tuberculosis. He dies of this illness just as the three are getting re-acquainted. Marjorie demands that Clare ask Victor to resurrect their son. When Clare, taken aback by this demand, begs her not to ask this of him, Marjorie becomes only more determined: "Return with him alive, or don't return at all" (Season 3 Episode 9, 00:23:49-26:10). In spite of this blackmailing, one of the last scenes of the series sees Clare bury his son Jack in the Thames, deliberately rejecting immortality. The negotiation of this death and the series' ending share the same premise: both Jack's life and the series *could* go on, but won't. There are different orientations of reproduction in effect, then: backwards *re*production and forward re*pro-*

duction, so to speak, their combination leading to a negotiability of survival which emerges only because they occur in and with a story. While the series' own continued existence might itself be negotiated only implicitly, this debate is mirrored in the explicit negotiation of the continued existence of its protagonists, who are the site of precisely those contrasting impulses concerning continuance, resurrection and procreation vs. closure, cessation, and resignation.

For John Clare is not the only protagonist to end up at these crossroads. In the last episode of the series we also see Lily return to her lover Dorian's house after a time of absence, where she has set up her centre of command, recruiting like-minded women from her own former profession to embark with her on her project of revenge. Dorian has thrown everybody out after delivering Lily into Victor's hands with a trick, so that Victor could attempt to 're-programme' her into the docile young woman she appeared as right after her creation. Now, after having convinced Victor to set her free, Lily comes to say goodbye to Dorian. The dead body of the first prostitute Lily has recruited, young Justine, is all that is left of Lily's 'squad.' Lily mourns her passing. "So my great enterprise comes to no more than this," she says. "One more dead child." Her regret prompts a programmatic speech from Dorian: "Do you not yet comprehend the wicked secret of the immortal? All age and die, save you. All rot and fall to dust, save you. Any child you bear becomes a crone and perishes before your eyes. Any lover withers and shrinks into incontinence and bent, toothless senility. While you, only you, never age. Never tire. Never fade. [...] And one day, you'll realize you've become like them," and here the camera wanders over the countless portraits hanging on the walls of Dorian's ballroom: "beautiful and dead. You have become a perfect, unchanging portrait of yourself." He continues: "Small price to pay for such immortal perfection, isn't it?" Lily takes this as cue to say her goodbyes and walks out of the room. "You'll be back," Dorian tells her, but Lily does not turn around and only switches on Dorian's gramophone on her way out as if indicating that if he cares so little for connection, he might as well have his waltzes alone. "And I'll be here," Dorian finishes his sentence to the empty room. "I'll always be here," he repeats, as if in spite of his earlier programmatic declaration of the secret of immortal-

ity, he only just really discovered the meaning of the phrase, after all (3.9, 00:13:52-18:10).

This is the last we see of Lily. Dorian and Lily might have been partners in crime, two of a kind, but what becomes obvious here is that they embody two different versions of infinitude: as the references to the portraits indicate, as well as the way the two move about the room (in fact, nothing and no one moves in this scene except Lily), Dorian's static 'foreverness' literally exhausts itself, is evened out in the equilibrium of "immortal perfection," as he himself calls it. His last phrase – "I'll always be here" – also implies, in a sense, that there is no more story to tell about him. Lily, on the other hand, is literally 'moving on' when she walks out of the room – her silent rejection of Dorian's ideas is a rejection of stasis and an affirmation of transformativity.

Operation in Two Directions

The characters of Marjorie and John Clare, Lily and Dorian Gray thus negotiate the conditions of immortality. Lily's refusal of Dorian's version of immortality clears space for alternatives – which, however, remain unspecified at the end of the series. The 'open future' that Lily seems to be walking towards when she leaves Dorian's ballroom contrasts sharply with the image of the first creature, Clare, hunched over a grave, mourning his friend and his son, deliberately refusing the option of resurrection. Lily, herself the result of repetition (of Victor repeating his operations, to be precise), appears as the progressive counterpoint to Clare's 'static cyclicity' – or rather, his *expectations* of the endless reappearance of the very same circumstances, which is precisely what he feels he renounces in renouncing resurrection. Whereas Clare seems to assume that 'doing things again' will lead to more of the same – "And make him suffer like I did?!" he asks his wife Marjorie when she sends him to make Victor reanimate little Jack – Lily's development demonstrates that 'doing things again' might lead to difference, after all. Retaining the past – as re-animated creature, who, as it turns out in the course of the series, furthermore deliberately holds on to memories of her old life – she nev-

ertheless moves towards the 'something else' that a future might hold. Clare's hell of unchangeability contrasts with the difference-in-repetition of Lily's future. Dorian, in a sense, presents another variation on this theme: the 'option' of static linearity, of an infinity of linear succession in which one thing does come after another, but only to 'crash' on the immortal subject's unchangeability. Transformation, succession, repetition: *Penny Dreadful* 'sources out' or 'copies' its own rhythms and patterns of narrative repetition into the existential struggles of its characters, which are related precisely to these characters' capacities for immortality and resurrection, to their respective repetitions and repeatabilities – the characters recommending themselves as sites for these negotiations not least because many of them are Frankensteinian creatures (or, as Dorian Gray, otherwise immortal). It is precisely their extraordinary capacity for reappearance and/or persistence that makes them privileged channels for expressing the nuances of repetition.

Reading *Penny Dreadful* from the end in this way helps to explore the convoluted temporality of narrative in concrete detail because it combines opposing forces, juxtaposing, in several instances, forward opportunity with a cessation of development. It is because of this equivocality that *Penny Dreadful*'s ending is – narratologically speaking, if not necessarily stylistically – more interesting than its beginning. Put simply, what the ambiguities inherent in *Penny Dreadful*'s narrative-creaturely endings suggest is that narrative endings are never pure closures. This is easy enough to overlook – we read stories linearly, from first page (or minute, or scene) to last, an experience that suggests a straightforward distinction and temporal hierarchy between beginning and end. But not only does serial narrative, as special case, make such distinctions difficult to apply, upsetting linear models of reading with its more rhythmic progress. It also suggests a more comprehensive existential relevance of stories; one that, rather than claiming that narrative helps to order life in reflection and leave it at that, allows for a genuine connection between life and story – derived, precisely, from the principle of 'original repetition.' Brooks's vital narratology and model of the Freudian masterplot supports this argument. In applying the Freudian improvisations on the theme of life and death in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to narrative, Brooks

helps to translate Derrida's claims on the involvement of writing with being and being with writing into their more specifically narratological relevance.

In some ways, Brooks argues, reading stories from the end is what we always do. This is one of the core arguments in his *Reading for the Plot*: that our activity of following a plot is crucially determined by our interest in the end it leads to. This – some would say, obvious – circumstance is curious, on closer inspection, because it involves quite contradictory patterns of "narrative desire" (*Reading* 37): we want to find out how the story ends, but we also want to go on reading (or watching), which ultimately consigns narrative plot to working as a delay: postponing the ending without letting go of it, keeping it in sight without revealing it. The directionality of narrative interest and desire is thus layered and complex, its forward urge towards development, continuance, change is permeated by an urge to 'get it over with,' to find out what happens at the end and be done with the whole thing, to return to a state of things identical, or nearly so, to the state of things before the story started. This idea in some ways radicalises a claim made by Paul Ricœur on the explicit re-telling of existing stories: "the repetition of a story" that has already been told, "governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past toward the future, following the well-known metaphor of the 'arrow of time'," Ricœur suggests. "It is as though recollection inverted the so-called 'natural' order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences" (*Time and Narrative I* 67–68). But repetition concerns not only this special case of narration. It is a structural element but also a general programme of all stories – retold or not – and thus more primary than the concept of '(re)activation by the reader' can account for on its own. Telling and re-telling are, categorically speaking, not altogether different.

Narrative interest is directed by the end of the story at least as much as by the beginning; it seems, even, as if the end point confers meaning on the beginning, in the first place. "We might say," Brooks says,

> that we are able to read present moments – in literature and, by extension, in life – as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot. To say 'I have begun …' (whatever it may be) acquires meaning only through postulation of a narrative begun, and that beginning depends on its ending. (*Reading* 94).

We can connect this meaning-making effect of the ending and the back-and-forth, the density of contradictory desires it involves us in, to the temporality and productivity of the trace such as Derrida envisions it. For what we seem to have, in what Brooks calls "reading for the plot," is a belated production of meaning – belated, however, not in the sense of 'too late' or 'merely retrospective' but in the sense of a belatedness that is constitutive, originary, productive. The difference that the beginning of a story makes is simultaneously the significance of its ending; and this is quite similar to the way in which the trace, in referring back to an origin that it 'only' projects, creates a space of meaningfulness. Brooks idea of plot is "a dynamic model that structures ends (death, quiescence, nonnarratability) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as detour, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, an arabesque in the dilatory space of the text" (*Reading* 107–08). This "dilatory space" is dense, meaningful, complex – the middle between beginning and end becomes, in Brooks's conception, a "field of force" (*Reading* 47) – as is, arguably, the gap opened up by the Derridean trace.

Brooks's concept of narrative is energetical – the elements of his theory are psychic energies, force is at least as important as form. He voices – garnering explicit support, actually, from Derrida – a "dissatisfaction" with "the static models of much formalism" and aims for "models that would be more adequate to our experience of reading narrative as a dynamic operation," arguing that we would "do well to recognize the existence of textual *force*" alongside textual *form* (*Reading* 47 [my emphasis]). He emphasises, further, the fundamental role that repetition plays not only for but also within narrative: it builds structures and binds ener-

gies. "Repetition, repeat, recall, symmetry, all these journeys back in the text, returns to and returns of, that allow us to bind one textual moment to another" (Brooks, *Reading* 101) are what gives us 'the story' – the story as a whole, that is, the 'thing' that we like and dislike, remember and compare. "Narrative […] must ever present itself as a repetition of events that have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized repetition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events" (*Reading* 99): the 'ordered whole' that we can recognise the story as is secured, not least, by the story creating echoes within itself. These "bindings" help to consolidate the complex directionality of stories; as Brooks puts it, "these bindings are a system of repetitions which are returns to and returns of" (*Reading* 108).

In fact – as Brooks takes care to emphasise, too – narratology has long acknowledged that narrative is a matter of back-and-forth dependent on a dynamics of variation and sameness, of transformation: "The simple relation of successive facts does not constitute a narrative: these facts must be organized, which is to say, ultimately, that they must have elements in common. But if all the elements are in common, there is no longer a narrative, for there is no longer anything to recount," this is how Tzvetan Todorov underlines the key status of transformation. "Rather than a 'two-sided unit,'" he explains, transformation "is *an operation in two directions*: it asserts both resemblance and difference; it engages and suspends time, in a single movement" (*Poetics of Prose* 233 [my emphasis]) – or, as Todorov puts it elsewhere, not *all* interest in narrative "stem[s] from the question 'what happens afterward?'" It is "not true that the only relationship between the units [of a narrative] is one of *succession*; we can say that the relationship of the units must also be one of *transformation*" ("Two Principles" 39–40).

However, adding to this Derrida's account of difference, trace, and meaning helps to explain *why* repetition is able to fulfil this structuring role. Todorov, identifying succession and transformation as the specific principles of narrative, doesn't aim at questioning our ability to process the two, and, crucially, what this ability feeds off, beyond any alleged psychological necessities. Implicitly, Todorov's principles 'simply' rely on

our capacities of memory and recognition – which is precisely the capacity which Derrida sets out to examine with the help of Freud, and which Brooks endows with psychical energy deriving from drives which traverse individual consciousness much more than they originate from it. In fact, in the light of Derridean ideas of tracing and *différance*, succession and transformation appear as one principle rather than two. The trace interconnects space and time – the origin it projects is situated both 'out there' and 'back then' – as much as it interconnects psyche and text through the inscriptions of memory. Brooks provides the aspect of narrative, and Derrida that of iteration in this attempt to reconceive the creative capacities of an apparently replicative practice.

Reading *Penny Dreadful* from the end, then, only makes explicit an operation that is implicit in narrative anyway, an operation that is a good indicator of how repetition, as existential force, is at work in stories. Stories are neither brute succession, nor brute recapitulation, but express the differential process itself – particularly so when they are serial. *Penny Dreadful* brings together the question of narrative ending and that of creaturely ending, as if asking, for both cases, the question of 'how (much of) repetition is bearable?'. As seems appropriate for a story that is both told in serial format, and tells of Frankensteinian, quasi-immortal creatures, the prospect looming ahead is not so much that of death but of monotony, of too-much-of-the-same. And yet, this "quiescence" (Brooks) must have been decisive for the narrative dynamics from the start – if we follow Brooks. It must have acted as the resistance which enables the trace of narrative beginnings to leave its mark, to project meaning, in much the same manner that lifeless flesh enables the scandalously intriguing bodies of the creatures to take shape. Unruly forms of not-quite-repetition seem to inhabit the space of story as much as that of creaturely existence. Derrida and Brooks help to legitimate a notion of narrative repetition as vital process and to deactivate the temporal and ontological hierarchies between events and their representation, between beginnings and endings, allowing for productive force at both ends of those binary oppositions. But in what, precisely, does this productive force consist?

Repeating Repetition: Series and Singularity

Penny Dreadful, the Second

Series and Adaptations

For narrative fiction, identity or imitation are as important as they are problematic. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan sums up "The Paradoxical Status of Repetition" for prose fiction: not only does it seem that repetition always drags along differences and that we only seem to be able to value repetition aesthetically when it does precisely that. Also, in "mimetic theories of different kinds and degrees, narration is seen as a repetition of an antecedent presence, be it reality, fictional reality, *fabula*, or *histoire*"; and yet "narrative also makes the opposite claim. […] Narrative, we can argue, also repeats by creating, and what it repeats is the absence from which it springs and which it renders present through its creation. It is in and through narration that 'reality' exists, and the only true reality in narrative is that of the narration itself" (157). Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* puts precisely this paradoxical capacity of narrative to use, in the frame story that works as a bridge between the first, 1931 film and its 1935 sequel. Which further aspects of narrative repetition does seriality – as, if you will, 'generified' sequel – reveal, with its constant negotiation of ending versus going-on such as we see it exemplified in *Penny Dreadful*? How is the continuation and variation of specific, already existing stories connected to stories' general repetitive quality? And does this, incidentally, offer an alternative view on adaptation, one that doesn't content itself with understanding adaptation as a form of

cultural industry (in which 'we' tell ourselves stories about ourselves to come to terms with ourselves)?

Frankenstein, the *Frankenstein* complex, *Penny Dreadful*: they all encircle the question of what can, or cannot, be done *again*, and how. *Penny Dreadful* stands out because it is explicitly laid out as a *serial* story – and, what is more, as serial *adaptation*. Certainly, a set of films such as the Universal franchise from 1931 to 1948 has something serial to it; maybe the *Frankenstein* complex as a whole does – in particular because seriality is a fuzzy concept to begin with, and has become even more so in recent years, during which we have come a long way from the weekly instalments of 1990s commercial television.[1] *Penny Dreadful*, however, still followed traditional patterns when it was originally aired, with one episode being released per week and a longer break of one year between seasons. Seriality – an unruly concept, in part, as Sabine Sielke suggests, because it resists visualization ("Network" 31) – relates to "objects or phenomena [that] are arranged as or come in a succession or sequence; they are joined by recurring elements whose very interrelations – causality, temporality, logic, or pattern – are part of an ongoing debate" ("Significance of Seriality" 38). Sielke emphasises recursion as *the* characteristic of series: a series is a "string, chain, or succession that works recursively, not linearly" ("Significance of Seriality" 45). However, for all its non-linearity, seriality, as a framework that "favor[s] emergence and becoming" ("Network" 81), still implies *some* kind of progression. Quite often, seriality is associated with the interplay between "continuity-creating repetition and uncertainty-fostering innovation," with an "aesthetics […] based on a to and fro between repetition and innovation, between those moments, on the one hand, that reinforce recipients' memory by connecting the series' present to the series' past and, on the other hand, those

1 Denson, in fact, has suggested that there are good reasons to conceive of the *Frankenstein* complex in general as a series (*Postnaturalism* 332). If there is in fact an existential dynamic of differential repetition governing narrative in general, as I will try to make plausible in the following, there is all the more reason to do so.

unexpected turns of event that prevent recipients from imagining that they know what's coming next" (Denson 338).

Can we then employ this oscillation between surprise and the reinforcement of memory as defining feature of serial narrative, seeing how narrative as such is regarded as 'bidirectionally transformative' (for instance by Todorov), seeing how it is said to always include repetitive bindings (Brooks) – or is serial narrative essentially nothing but a 'mega-story,' different in degree but not in kind from 'regular' plotted narrative? It is, admittedly, not easy to hold up a strong concept of seriality especially in the face of recent developments in popular fiction and its distribution, where the lines between serial narration proper and extensive narrative arcs in general become blurred. At the same time, the concept is undeniably *en vogue* both in criticism and popular culture. Elusive yet omnipresent, seriality exerts its attraction unperturbedly in spite of our difficulties in pinning it down as cultural category. Quite frequently, it seems, it is more important for a narrative to be labelled as serial – or to appear on the appropriate distribution channels – than to actually proceed according to serial logic. The series seems to literally generate itself, even as concept: in the quasi-organic processes of "non-directional evolution" that Sielke ascribes to it ("Significance of Seriality" 47), but also in the way the series exploits the category of popular culture that it works itself to maintain. If anything, it is maybe this tendency that we can single out as a peculiarity of serial narrative, as opposed to narrative in general: the tendency to flaunt, as opposed to only imply, its own potential endlessness (regardless of whether the series is actually meant to run as long as possible, or whether a specific length is targeted from the beginning), which is in turn precisely what obliges the series to a more complicated negotiation of its own ending vs. continuance than non-serial stories are obliged to conduct.[2] It is because of these characteristics that series, in

2 As Michael Newman puts it in a discussion on the disdain sequels often face, "[e]ndings are always, to an extent, arbitrary. Sequels exploit the affordance of narrative to continue" (Bordwell and Thompson 13). Jason Mittell, in the same discussion, points out: "Continuity of a narrative world is a core part of nearly every storytelling form, but the language of 'sequel' is applied predominantly

particular, reveal some of the more radical aspects of narrative repetition.

Serial narration, in a way, strengthens the paradoxical power of repetition which, through (seemingly) going backwards, achieves generation and therefore forward movement. This principle is at work both for the story, *Penny Dreadful*, as cultural artefact and for its protagonists: the successive production of creatures, three in total, by Victor Frankenstein establishes an absolute repeatability – an 'exponential repetition,' repetition to the nth time – which makes what-has-been-before and what-is-yet-to-come coincide in each creature, making them both emphatically present and never unconditionally congruent with themselves. In much the same manner, the story can furthermore also be said to 'write the story's story,' with the same ambivalence between 'over-presence' and elusiveness: the story – the *Frankenstein* story, that is – has been told before, but has it been this story? With every *Frankenstein*-related turn of plot that *Penny Dreadful* presents, its context – the bizarre formation consisting of (more than) the sum of the individual adaptations and variations that it is made of – is both invoked and left behind. In the paradoxical orientation of recursion that Frankenstein's creatures, the host of more or less loosely connected stories they appear in, and fictional narrativity in general share, futurity and generativity are a result of backward orientation, though not of an actual backward ontology. If this sprawling complex cannot be reduced to the conscious (or unconscious) decisions of producer- or receiver-individuals – as a certain logic of 'adaptation' would have it – what else is it possibly grounded in? The productivity of traces, of an "always already" as it becomes visible with *Bride of Frankenstein* is one aspect. But what to make of the hyper-replicative quality that *Penny Dreadful* so candidly exhibits?

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to film. 'Series' seems a more respectable term, as it suggests an organic continuity rather than a reactive stance of 'Hey, let's do that again!'" (18).

Repetition Unbound

Penny Dreadful invents no origin stories, after all – as *Bride*, albeit ironically, does. It presents itself unashamedly as 'mere' variation (in, if you will, postmodern fashion). In *Penny Dreadful*, we are alerted to the radical potential of repetition because with its three serially-produced 'monsters,' the series exhibits not only repetitive narrative structures, but also scandalously repetitive narrative creatures. The serial production of creatures in *Penny Dreadful* proceeds from probing the potential of repetition to exploiting its generative capacities, thus in a way recursively incorporating recursive progression itself (which is, of course, what recursive progression always does). Where the sequel, such as *Bride of Frankenstein*, presents something *again* in order to modify it in continuation, the series presents something again *and again*, to the same end, thus demonstrating the emancipation of reproduction from any remaining confines of a model-copy-relation. Limitless repeatability as the series implies it will necessarily liberate itself at some point from essential correspondences, relegating identity to a surface effect, albeit a powerful one.

Adding a second and a third to a first time, as Gilles Deleuze points out, carries repetition beyond itself by demonstrating not only repeatability, but absolute repeatability. It carries "the first time to the 'nth' power" (*Difference and Repetition* 2) by demonstrating that whatever it is can be done again, and again, and again. It puts singular instances of repetition – the individual story, episode or, in fact, creature – up against a background of countless of their kind – somehow all the same, somehow all different. A picture of futuristic excess results: "the third repetition," in particular, "this time by excess," constitutes "a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return" (again *and again* and …) (*Difference and Repetition* 117–18). It is thus the third time of something, in particular, which seems to set off the step from 'linear' to 'exponential' repetition, from a *negotiation of repeatability* to a *demonstration of its boundlessness* – and thus its unrestricted productivity. To speak with Deleuze, the third time "ensures […] the totality of the series": "It is repetition by excess which leaves intact nothing of the

default or the becoming-equal. It is itself the new, complete novelty. It is by itself the third time in the series, the future as such" (*Difference* 122, 118).

Brooks sees narrative as well as memory perform an operation of struggle against temporal progress, extracting meaningful figurations from a passing stream: "Repetition, remembering, re-enactment are the ways in which we replay time, so that it may not be lost. We are thus always trying to work back through time to that transcendent home, knowing, of course, that we cannot. All we can do is subvert or, perhaps better, pervert time: which is what narrative does" (*Reading* 111). This sees narrative as temporally complex, and yet otherwise assumes time to be linear, progressing steadily onwards, unperturbed by what happens in it. Deleuzian ontology, however, presents a reversion of this to the effect that it is not so much that processes of becoming take place in time but that time is the effect of processes of becoming taking place. If narrative, then, is tuned in to process (if it "asserts both resemblance and difference," as Todorov says), it generates temporal structure just as these processes do. Narrative, then, is not a perversion of time; rather, linear time is a perversion of narrative.[3] Serial narratives, with their recursive pro-

3 As James Williams puts it: "Time for Deleuze is therefore not only irreducibly multiple at the level of types of time: present, present as dimension of the past, future as dimension of the present, future, and so on. It is also irreducibly complex insofar as each one of those types can only be said to be fully given when it is associated with singular events, which are themselves determined in accordance with series of singularities or singular processes drawing events together as processes of becoming that make times" (5). A proper mapping of Deleuze's philosophy of time onto the temporal qualities of narrative would surpass the scope of this investigation; but it does appear to be the case that both are founded on the processual quality of being, therefore both crucially dependent on singularity. It is in this light hard to argue for time as the superior order, which would then be replicated and twisted – "perverted" – in narrative. Time, arguably, is in itself already rather perverse in the Deleuzian conception. – Essentially, what I am presenting in the following much confirms Askin's diagnosis that "the futurity of the future past is that of fictional narrative, which combines fiction-making, the future-oriented act of creation (what will be), with narrative retrospection (what was). […] [F]rom the point of view

ductivity that can so poorly be inserted into linear time, seem a case in point. Other than non-serial narration, series cannot even be smoothed into a linear model of time by way of consumption. After all, no matter how complex the temporal arrangements that, say, a film presents, we can still watch it in one sitting. Strictly speaking, this does not work for a properly serial narrative; and the by-now standard compression of serial stories into instantly available 'hyperstories' might just amount to a containment of precisely this intractability of serial narratives.

In the Deleuzian sense, series constitute a relation of differences to each other, and their nebulous quality is cleared up precisely through the "third time in the series, the future as such," that is, an element that has no identity *but* that which consists in ordering the series (that is, the other differences) when it arrives. James Williams gives the useful example of the culprit in a criminal investigation: the culprit is of interest only as the element that shifts, relates and orders the other elements of the crime (victim, crime scene, …); the identity of culprit is exactly, and nothing but, their function as culprit, as element added to a series of differences (127–28). This logic of development, besides linking serial stories to a rhythm of existence, suggests that there is more to the process of 'adaptation' than much of adaptation studies suggests. The play of similarities and differences that characterises *Frankenstein* is not an expression of cultural or personal specificities only. Rather, it indicates a more general existential dynamic that the growth of stories is entangled with. It allows us to think of the again-and-anew rhythms of adaptation as a pattern, not only of (pop-)cultural phenomena such as the *Frankenstein* complex but more generally, of being as such. For what Deleuze describes for the "third time in the series" is something that we regularly

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of *metaphysics* – that is, from the perspective of the unfolding of time itself, fiction marks the act of creation unfolding, the virtuality of a future to come, and narrative – in this narrow traditional sense – its recursive capturing" (131). The *Frankenstein* complex presents to this, however, the additional challenge of conceptualising repetition and its temporality not only in narrative, but also across several particular instances of narrative, which introduces the additional question of the recognisability of individuals and thus a specifically creaturely or, if you will, personal dimension of "creation unfolding."

find in cultural adaptation: 'new' elements that relate to 'old' elements – sometimes with few definable similarities – each with its arrival introducing a different order into the string or set of already existing versions. The point is, not least, that any ordering elements are inherently 'futuric,' always yet-to-come since there is no essential place that they could be assigned – which is why the *Frankenstein* complex cannot be delineated, that is, its elements can never be exhaustively enumerated or anticipated, nor can there be a definitive list of traits that we can tick off to identify a '*Frankenstein* story.' The relationality of the existential, as well as the narrative, series is an open one. The specificities of adaptation therefore can and should be viewed in the context of the general productive capacities of fiction.

Creature No. 3

The third repetition, Deleuze says, "constitutes the autonomy of the product, the independence of the work" because it leaves all identities behind (*Difference and Repetition* 118). The third time in the series is not obliged to any essence, it is future, novelty, and yet it relates to something that has gone before. Much of this is embodied in *Penny Dreadful*'s Lily, the third creature that Victor makes after Proteus and Caliban-Clare. Nothing definitively decides whether she essentially belongs to the *Frankenstein* complex. Is she too beautiful? Too much at ease in a crowd? Or does her resurrection during a thunderstorm suffice? But isn't the thunderstorm Universal picture's invention, not Shelley's? Where would we then 'anchor' Lily's identity as Frankenstein's creature? Lily recursively embodies seriality as her own narrative principle of existence. As 'third time' – Victor's third 'product' – she is the free element-to-come that orders the series as well as proving its continuability. The beauty and self-assurance the series ascribes to her make her the unlikeliest of *Frankenstein* creatures, and yet that is what she is and what we understand her as. She has no 'true' identity beyond and beneath this. She is a conglomeration of past and future and thus embodies the linearly unsolvable rhythm of repetition; and among the three creatures

Victor makes in the series, she is the one to become most independent. Where Proteus, the second creature, is a negotiation of repeatability – a failed one, due to the lack of cooperation on the part of the first creature – Lily-Brona demonstrates the boundlessness of repetition. Her development over the three seasons of the series instantiates the "nonlinear temporality and the futurity involved in varied repetitions of evolving forms" (Sielke, "Network" 92) that is the recursive-progressive principle of serial cohesion. Her character *appears* in the first season (as street-smart prostitute Brona), *returns* in the second (as vengeful Lily), and *walks away* in the third, to a future beyond the narrative.

We are reminded, by Lily-Brona's fate as the series presents it to us, of Deleuze's conceptualisation of destiny as made up of "non-localisable connections" rather than "step-by-step" relations between "successive presents"; in which "actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes, objective chances, signs, signals and roles which transcend spatial locations and temporal successions" (*Difference and Repetition* 109) make up the overall construct. It is a connectivity of this kind – rather than a linear one – which holds Lily-Brona's story together. The successive transformations of her fashioned body (19th century street prostitute, well-mannered *fin de siècle* debutante, self-assured new woman in femme fatale outfit) correlate with other inner and outer transformations and re-transformations and the manner in which these are revealed by the narrative: the playback and restart of Brona's doomed existence when Victor suffocates and reanimates her; details of Brona's life 'before the story began' revealed only as Lily has already stepped into a new existence; the question – kept open for quite some time – of whether Lily retains or regains Brona's memories and the final confirmation that she does. While this connectivity applies to most characters in the story – one of the dominant themes is the haunting reappearance of people's past transgressions – we do not become witness to it in the same degree. Most characters' pasts we experience in flashbacks; Lily-Brona's development plays itself out before our eyes. As this connectivity unfolds, Lily-Brona – being the third creature – all

the while embodies the serial principle quite literally, the limitlessness of repetition demonstrated by the repetition of repetition itself.[4]

Penny Dreadful introduces Brona at the beginning of the first season as a young prostitute with a shrewd sense of humour who ended up as a London streetwalker because she lost her job in a weaving mill, due to increased automatisation. It is not so much the early link between industrial developments and what is to become a Frankenstein creature that is of interest here (while industrial developments are a recurring issue in the series, they are not treated in a substantial matter, but rather serve as a historical-discursive formation that the series keeps alluding to more or less in passing). What matters is rather the way in which Brona foreshadows, 'reversely echoes' her later transformation when she explains: "we were all replaced by better new machines" – the syntax marking her as machine even now (if she is replaced by a *better* machine that implies that she *is* a machine), in the moment of speaking, long before this becomes a plausible category to put her in. That is, not only are further developments of this protagonist foreshadowed in her first appearance (as is, arguably, quite the standard introduction for a fictional character) but she is presented, from the start, as already being the result of what has yet to happen to her: machinic reproduction. The series is silent on the actual mechanisms of Victor's methods but here and elsewhere clearly aims at the general idea of opposing technical to biological reproduction. Lily-Brona is from the start a concrescence or assemblage of multiple temporalities and ontologies, a dispersed individual always partly ahead of, partly lagging behind herself. Which might just be the reason why she assures us: "Not much surprises me" (Season 1 Episode 2, 00:10:13-10:46).

She is also, quite fittingly, representative of *Penny Dreadful*'s mashup of sex and death, of (non-)procreation and repetition. Dorian Gray is

4 And here, whether *Penny Dreadful* knows it or not, the series makes a feminist case that is more complex than any slogan of the 'the future is female'-kind (which we might read from the constellation described), on the face of it, indicates: in Lily, the series presents its own case of becoming-woman, in that it unties the female creature among the three from the fetters of 'identity.' At least temporarily so.

introduced to the series in a scene in which he has sex with Brona in order to have the two of them photographed. As they perform for the camera, Brona – who, as we have already learned, suffers from tuberculosis – starts coughing up blood. Fascinated – for reasons that are, at that point, obvious only for those familiar with the story of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* – Dorian tells her, "I've never fucked a dying creature before" (1.2, 00:20:41-42). Similarly, some episodes later, Brona rejects her lover Ethan by telling him: "It's a sad spectacle, Ethan, why don't we just admit it. […] You're fucking a skeleton every night, for Christ's sake. There's no goddamn future in it for either of us" (1.4, 00:40:05-40:16). When it comes to (Lily-)Brona, sex is death, but death – in a redirection rather than, as is commonly associated with *Frankenstein*, a circumvention of biological procreation – is the threshold to immortality. When Victor Frankenstein finds himself, in his capacity as medical doctor, alone with dying Brona and uses the opportunity to hurry her death, he does not simply kill her. In fact, he announces her own resurrection to her – letting her *decide*, almost, for resurrection, for Brona nods ever so slightly to what he is saying and does not put up a fight when he puts a pillow over her face: "I believe in a place between heaven and hell, between the living and the dead, a glorious place of everlasting rebirth, perhaps even salvation. Do you believe in such a place? Now there is a price to pay for such a passage, as there is with all things. I know that you'll pay it easily" (1.8, 00:29:39-30:17).

Procreation as repetition (that is, as resurrection) substitutes procreation as an instantiation of linearly progressive temporality. "Everlasting rebirth" is offered where 'regular' organic reproduction is denied. In some ways, this is not a surprising issue for a *Frankenstein* story to bring up – but the motif acquires heightened significance in the context of the infinite repeatability that *serial* narration rehearses (if never actually achieves: even the longest-running series are cancelled at some point). Lily's transformation from angel in the house, taking care of domestic chores for Victor, to vengeful femme fatale takes place – or at least becomes perceptible – in this very field of tension between sex, death, and procreation: namely when she seduces and then kills her first victim, a stranger who she picks up in a pub and then strangles while having sex

with him (2.7, 00:041:10-43:42). It is during the act that Lily loses the air of innocent curiosity about her – or that her innocent curiosity is twisted into an uncanny impulse. It is (at least at that moment, and the matter is not entirely resolved later on) quite unclear whether Lily commits her first murder on a whim, whether she is acting purposefully, or whether she might even be driven by an occult form of memory, as a habitual way of acting from her former life as prostitute (picking up a stranger to sleep with him) manifests as a compulsion to repeat, and then transforms itself under the influence of Lily's new forcefulness.

Lily spends some time caressing the dead body of her victim, telling him: "How sad that boys feel they must grow up. You'll never grow up now" (2.8, 00:01:48-02:00). Infantilising him through killing him, Lily turns the perpetrator into a dead child and thus creates another one of those stunted beginnings that haunt the protagonists in *Penny Dreadful*. Her murderous act in fact appears as a reverse image of Victor's methods of bringing her to life. His preparations for Lily's resurrection are framed in the terms of pregnancy, yet simultaneously presented as an (auto-)erotic exercise: Victor keeps Lily submerged in a large basin filled with unspecified fluid, apparently waiting for the next thunderstorm to happen so that he can source sufficient electric charge to work his machinery. Crouching next to her basin, he talks to her as if to an unborn child: "What will you make of this life, I wonder? I'll miss talking to you […]. Who will you be?" Taking her hand, he asks: "Will this hand ever know love?". Victor is not only a protective, but also a transgressive father, though: reaching into the tank, he examines the scars from the surgery he has performed on Lily (or rather, Brona) earlier and – so it appears – cannot resist the temptation of touching her further. The camera shows us an underwater close-up of Lily's breast and Victor's fingers through cloudy liquid in a disturbingly twisted prenatal image. This move from the thoughtful ("Who will you be?") to the sentimental ("Will this hand ever know love?") to the tongue-in-cheek tasteless (fondling undead Brona) is a signature *Penny Dreadful* move. Putting it drastically, creature and creator are having sex in an externalised womb – this *is* a penny dreadful, after all – and what they bring forth is a life

story (what Lily will make of this life, whether her hand will ever know love, and so forth) (2.1, 00:29:00-30:28).

Making Memories

Lily – named after "the flower of resurrection and rebirth," as Victor explains at one point (2.2, 00:13:12) – is actually the result of a creative collaboration between Victor and his first creature: Caliban-Clare works the ropes to lower the bier on which Brona's lifeless body awaits resurrection into a tank of fluid, much like he works the ropes at the Grand Guignol theatre in the first season – and what he produces is, quite literally, a fiction in the same way that the theatre plays he helped stage were fiction, that is, it is both the result of concrete labour (of making), and existing beyond 'reality.'[5] In fact, Lily triggers both invention and recollection, or rather, her existence triggers memories *as* stories. Victor keeps the 'newborn' Lily in his home under the pretense that she is a cousin of his who has been in an accident and lost her memory. His first creature he introduces to her as her former fiancé. Both Victor and Clare end up putting the generative capacity of narration to use when they both invent a past for her in an act of phantasmatic wish-fulfilment all the more powerful because the (supposed) blank slate of Lily's mind gives them the opportunity to inscribe as recollection what is really their own, momentary projection.[6]

"There were long summer afternoons and we were comrades in great adventures," Victor tells Lily, adopting a storyteller's bearing, when she asks him how he remembers her from their childhood. "Pirates on the Spanish Main or conquistadors exploring the New World. They were happy days, our youth. […] When there were thunderstorms, you came

5 Lily is thus situated 'between men' as much as Mary is in *Bride of Frankenstein*'s frame episode.

6 Lily says as much later when she rejects Victor with the words: "Take your romance, and your memories, which are a most kind fiction, and go" (3.2, 00:47:26-47:32).

to my bed. We never slept. We clung together until the storms passed" (2.2, 00:32:24-32:52). Almost conveniently, Lily confirms this pseudo-factual account when she does come to Victor's bed during a thunderstorm a while later (2.5; 00:49:25-52:37) – turning fiction into fact, 'pseudo-repeating' history and in the course of doing so also recreating her own electric birth when she sleeps with Victor. Not only does the thunderstorm – iconic as it has certainly become for the *Frankenstein* complex – clearly allude to the moment of Lily's creation, and their intimacy to Victor's interactions with unborn Lily. Also, in repeating an invented past, Lily's actions turn Victor's invented account into quasi-history.

The first creature, Clare, has no such luck, even though he, too, invents a blueprint to be 'repeated.' In the same manner as Victor, he projects a shared past for Lily, whose favour he hopes to win: "Ours is an exceptional history. We were friends once and that friendship grew between us. […] I remember one night we were walking through the village, and we came across some men outside a tavern, drunken they were. And they saw me with you and they laughed and pointed and said, 'How could the likes of her be with the likes of him?' […] You took my hand, and you held it" (2.5, 00:20:22-21:17). This history, however, is determined to remain fiction. Whether and how much Lily remembers from her life as Brona is, from the start, an issue much discussed between Victor and his first creature. Lily will claim later on that she has been in the know from the beginning, but apart from her own words, the audience receives no independent and unambiguous confirmation for that. Yet while Victor and Clare worry about Lily's capacity of memory, Lily actually becomes herself a challenge to the memory of others. When Dorian Gray hosts a ball, Lily returns to the very room she has visited before, as prostitute Brona hired by Dorian for his pornographic productions. "I have the strangest sense we've met before," Dorian tells her. "I have the funniest feeling that I've been in this room before," Lily says (2.6, 00:38:06, 00:36:07). Whether or not Dorian and Lily have or have not, at this point, actually figured out the mystery – the show's audience certainly picks up the reference to the the respective scenes in the first season. Apart from the fact that repetition is here organising, as it commonly does, narrative

plot, it is, again, quite striking that this narrative *principle* is embodied in a narrative *creature*: Lily is literally a transformative character in the sense that she is not only living through change, as protagonists generally do, but that she *is* living change herself.

The further the series proceeds, the more the aspect of concurrence is emphasised over that of sequential transformation in Lily's development. Towards the end of Season Two, a frustrated Clare confronts Lily, who has held him at a polite distance for a while but whose meek behaviour towards him he has begun to mistrust. In the exchange that follows, Lily drops her pretense, mocks Caliban's ideas of romance and rejects him as partner, only to approach him seconds later on her own erotic terms – explaining, as she goes along, her visions of revenge and a new age dawning. As she is speaking, the camera at some point switches from her face to a broken mirror in which it is reflected so that there are really a number of Lilys (five, to be exact) speaking to us – none of them 'the original.'[7] Quite fittingly, Brona's Irish accent intermittently creeps back into her speech as she is recounting her painful experiences as street prostitute that motivate her current plans of action. Lily-Brona is here literally speaking as the iterative, hence multiple creature that she is. Sitting on Clare's lap, she explains to him how the two of them – being equals – could, after sleeping together, wait for Victor to come home, kill him and, in some rather unspecified way, 'take over' from him: "We were created to rule, my love. And the blood of mankind will water our garden. Us, and our kin, and our children, and our generations. We are the conquerors. We are the pure blood. We are steel and sinew both. We are the next thousand years. We are the dead." Kissing Clare, she promises him: "No being who ever was, or ever will be, shall love you like I do" (2.8, 00:37:37-45:05). The murder of Victor Frankenstein never comes to pass. How much of the rest of Lily's proposals does is hard to say; but the scene clearly establishes Lily as a being traversing

7 To be precise, Lily is shown as fragmented mirror image while she is quoting Clare's vision of their relationship – in which Lily lovingly defies people's rejection of the creature – back to him, so that the idea of Lily as 'mere' projection screen (now broken) for the creature's hopes is emphasised.

multiple temporal layers, or as an anchor of multiple both narrative and existential directions – being both "the next thousand years" and "the dead," in her transformativity both propelling the narrative forward, promising further eventfulness, and providing the ties to earlier stages of the story, thus creating meaningfulness and organising plot. The episode in which this exchange occurs is, rather appropriately, titled "Memento mori" – referring to the act of thinking *back* to *future* endings.

Interestingly, the ending of Season Two foreshadows, in a minor key, the ending of Season Three as regards the negotiation of immortality and resurrection: in the closing scene of the second season, Vanessa takes the crucifix from her bedroom wall and burns it in the fireplace. Plot-wise, this is a result of the ongoing struggle with demonic forces she is shown to be engaged in and a clear sign of the abandonment she feels by the God she believes in; symbolically, however, it is of course also the idea of resurrection and/or eternal life that is burnt to ashes when Vanessa delivers the figure of Christ to the flames. And as in Season Three, we can here also find a contrasting scene involving Lily which reads as an affirmation of immortality: a heartbroken Victor seeks out Lily at Dorian's house, where she seems to have moved in, and interrupts the two waltzing through Dorian's ballroom, dressed in white evening wear. Unsuccessfully pleading for Lily to come home but receiving only mockery, Victor shoots both Lily and Dorian. Neither of the two die. "Please, creator, you made me too well for that," Lily scoffs. They decide to let Victor live and escape for now even though, as Dorian points out, killing someone is the most interesting experience he can think of: "I've experienced so many sensations over the years but never one precisely like this. Complete supremacy" (2.10, 00:32:25-34:45). Victor, overwhelmed, rushes out of the house and leaves the two of them to their extravagant scenery, bleeding from their gunshot wounds and obviously enjoying themselves, smearing the marble floor with blood as they resume the waltz they have interrupted for Victor's visit.

The symbolic density of the scene is quite hyperbolic (such as, for instance, the blood smearing the white ballgowns as a consequence of Lily taunting Victor about the "awkward virginity" that he lost with her); yet what stands out in the context at hand is how Lily's and Dorian's dance

of the undead conveys the idea of eternal life as unstoppable, yet recursive movement – not quite cyclic, more of a spiral – corresponding to the generations of (serial) narration. Actually, it is precisely the difference between cycles and spirals that will manifest in the 'partner scene' between Lily and Dorian in Season Three, that is, in the series' finale, in which Lily parts from Dorian – and his portraits – in the very same ballroom, moving along while Dorian stays put. All the latter – who, as he points out earlier, has "lived through so many *revolutions*" that "it's all so familiar" to him (3.7, 00:40:5540:41 [my emphasis]) – is left with are, quite fittingly, the rotations of his gramophone cylinders (of which he knows, as he says, "every groove" [1.4, 00:52:53]). For him, the story closes as a cycle and leaves him exactly in the place in which he started. Lily, on the other hand, might be entangled in a number of returns and repetitions, but ends up spiralically displaced.

Tracing the Individual

What the frame story of *Bride of Frankenstein* with its peculiar directions of narrative production (going forward by going backwards, and going backwards in going forward) has suggested is that stories' quality of 'being-about' something is a matter of tracing, where tracing constitutes a genuine productivity or creativity, yet without origin, or, to say it the other way round, an iteration without model. Such tracing is afforded *between* circumstances and their symbolic indication and does not have a predetermined direction. It constitutes an aboutness that cannot be reduced to a topical aboutness.[8] Stories trace, that is, follow creatures or situations; but at the same time, creatures or situations also trace stories, that is, show marks of being extraordinary, peculiar, worth telling – in the case of Frankensteinian creatures in a very physical, literal way.

8 Arthur C. Danto has conceptualised aboutness as a critical characteristic of art, as opposed to things, though his concept of aboutness relies much more strongly on communities of interpretation than on material-semiotic dynamics (see his *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and also "The Artworld").

Penny Dreadful traces Lily – and Lily traces *Penny Dreadful* –, it is *about* Lily. Can more light be shed on this repetition in the sense of narrative aboutness and how it is afforded by a general capacity of singularity that is as essential for the progress of existence as for that of stories?

In one of the first examples that Gilles Deleuze brings up to initiate his investigation of *Difference and Repetition*, he points out that it is "not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the federation days; or Monet's first water lily which repeats all the others" (2). These examples articulate rather plausibly the idea that there must be something, some existential capacity or force or circumstance, that *enables* repetition, or even representation, and is more fundamental than it. Repetition, taken in a certain sense, is a matter of outward behaviour and secondary patterns, not of the inward being of any thing: "To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent. And perhaps this repetition at the level of external conduct echoes, for its own part, a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal repetition within the singular" (*Difference* 2). Difference (this "secret vibration") is the more fundamental force which causes existents to come into being as singular entities and to remain involved in an ongoing process of becoming – a dynamics well illustrated by the idea of Monet's first water lily which, precisely by emerging in its singularity, sets the scene for all its variations. Difference itself ("[p]ure difference, the pure concept of difference, not difference mediated within the concept of the general", *Difference* 75), in spite of or rather because of its fundamental character, cannot be described, depicted, or otherwise represented. Rather, it makes all categorisation, negation and thus representation and repetition possible, underlies and transcends it. It is, in Deleuze's words, "a plastic, anarchic and nomadic principle, contemporaneous with the process of individuation, no less capable of dissolving and destroying individuals than of constituting them temporarily." Things don't start with identity, with an entity being identifiable as belonging to a set or a kind, but with the becoming of the singular entity, brought about by non-categorical difference: the "individuating is not the simple individual," which

is why the task is to show "how individuation properly precedes matter and form, species and parts, and every other element of the constituted individual" (*Difference* 49).

"Everywhere, the depth of difference is primary" and therefore it "is not difference which presupposes opposition but opposition which presupposes difference" (*Difference* 64–65). This difference is not negative but rather affirmative and generative, so that negation, "like the ripples in a pond, is the effect of an affirmation which is too strong or too different" (68). It is "not the negative which is the motor. Rather, there are positive differential elements which determine the genesis of both the affirmation and the difference affirmed" (70). Categorising an entity or a being is 'only' the second step happening on a ground of differences beyond and before identities, a ground made up of the simple fact of difference as such happening, a ground of "difference in itself," as Deleuze names it, not difference 'in terms of' one thing or another.

It is not difficult to see how hybrids and monsters such as Frankenstein's creature – in most of its incarnations, anyway – confront us with this field of free differences that Deleuze tells us we should envision more often:

> There is a crucial experience of difference and a corresponding experiment: every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition. A more profound real element must be defined in order for oppositions of forces or limitations of forms to be drawn, one which is determined as an abstract and potential multiplicity. (*Difference* 63–64)[9]

9 "Those formulae according to which 'the object denies what it is not', or 'distinguishes itself from everything that it is not', are logical monsters […] in the service of identity," Deleuze explains. "It is said that difference is negativity, that it extends or must extend to the point of contradiction once it is taken to the

Singularity, in this sense, is more important and more basic than identity.

To be more precise: certainly, there is such a thing as a justified impression of repetition. Two 'similar' or 'identical' objects appearing leave a different impression from two entirely distinct objects and can, moreover, conceptually be grouped together and thus do allow representation by the same term, and structures of representation in general. But underneath and inside these mechanisms – which we might otherwise be tempted to treat as the ground zero of all ontology – there's more going on. Repetition is complex. Thus, Deleuze explains, it is "a question of knowing why repetition cannot be explained by the form of identity in concepts or representations; in what sense it demands a superior 'positive' principle" (*Difference* 23). After all, "it is no more possible to exchange one's soul than it is to substitute real twins for one another" (*Difference* 1). Therefore, even though we are "right to speak of repetition when we find ourselves confronted by identical elements with exactly the same concept," repetition turns out to be made up of "'bare' repetition," or "repetition of the Same," as well as of an inherent, "covered" repetition. "In every case, repetition is difference without a concept": but where for bare repetition, difference comes from objects occupying distinct spaces and times, the more "secret" repetition within it is determined by singularity – by each being being only itself and irreducibly itself (*Difference* 28–29). In other words: where difference is fundamental for Being, repetition with its core of singularity shows us that we cannot, ultimately, govern this Being.

A Deleuzian reordering of hierarchies – such that singularity and difference are more fundamental than identity and sameness; such that repetition is complex rather than simple – can be of help with the curious habit of stories to "repeat by creating" (Rimmon-Kenan). For in an ontological framework where difference is primary and makes repetition (and identity, and representation) possible, narrative repetition suddenly appears far less paradoxical: repetition in this sense

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limit. This is true only to the extent that difference is already placed on a path or along a thread laid out by identity" (*Difference and Repetition* 63).

is a surface effect or a gesture, borne by the capacity of differences to manifest themselves. The impression that stories repeat life even though it is obvious that they make up what they 're-port' is perplexing mostly when we reduce repetition, conceptually, to what Deleuze calls "bare repetition." The real 'madness' of narrative fiction (serial or not) lies in the way it incorporates, almost imbibes the ontological force of difference, the ontological circumstance of singularity. Grounded in the folded material, the "material-form vibrations" (Latour) of a line on canvas or a narrator's voice speaking, it draws from, and proceeds to manifest, the very core of difference as existential force: it draws from and manifests the *fold* in the material; the sense of '*something* going on' and stirring the flow of life's events; the very *discriminability* of subjects, objects, circumstances (all factors which Frankenstein's creature suitably embodies); the impression that *this* protagonist's life is worthwhile following; or that it becomes worthwhile following from *that* very incident onward. Where other systems of representation content themselves with attaching themselves to and describing whatever singularities difference produces, stories delve deeper, in a sense, and get themselves entangled at the – differential – root of things. This helps to clear out any vestiges of 'identity' persisting in the idea that stories are *either* told about something which is special (in itself), *or* that stories make special what they tell about (when it would be unremarkable in itself). While neither of the two ideas is wholly inappropriate, it is really only their combination which helps to rid notions of noteworthiness or tellability from their exclusive dependence on subjective judgment. Beyond (or before) both the noteworthiness of existents and the means found, in authorial decision, to convey it, we have the very capacity of the world to become special. In that sense, stories express individuation (becoming-extraordinary, if you like) rather than 'extraordinary individuals' (or events).

And thus because difference is a differentiating agent, and processes of becoming are ultimately the engine of time, it is no surprise that narrative fiction, once it is underway, is filled with, as Todorov points out, transformation *and* succession. Stories are one way, among many others, in which singularity, differential repetition, processes of becoming may

express themselves – and also be expressed. *Penny Dreadful* is instructive in this regard because it interconnects in such an insistent way the creaturely movements of existence – creation, transformation, im/mortality – with the narrative movements of continuity, variation, cessation.

Repetition, High and Low

Is it wrong, then, to see in narrative a means of representation? Is narrative always associated with individuating novelty, exploding the categorical and the subjective in favour of differential becoming? Generally, representation has the effect of containing differences in identities (in fact, representation *is* this very effect). Once material repetition has become "an object of representation," Deleuze says, "this repetition is subordinated to the identity of the elements or to the resemblance of the conserved and added cases" (*Difference and Repetition* 110). The similarity and identity that representation works with is a produced effect, not a primary circumstance. Representation thus "fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. […] It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing." Not so, however, in the realm of art: "Difference must become the element […]. Every object, every thing, must see its own identity swallowed up in difference. Difference must be shown differing. We know that modern art tends to realise these conditions: in this sense it becomes a veritable *theatre* of metamorphoses and permutations" (*Difference* 71).

Deleuze seems to suggest that literature – just like "modern art" – is the system of representation interested, in contrast to other systems of representation, in capturing difference and singularity rather than effecting similarity, identity, and repetition: "To write is not to recount one's memories and voyages, one's loves and griefs, one's dreams and phantasms," Deleuze argues. Literature, he says, "exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal – which is not a generality but a singularity at the highest point: a man, a woman, a beast, a stomach, a child … ." Therefore, it is "not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us

of the power to say 'I'" ("Literature and Life" 227 [ellipsis in original]). 'Stories' are, I think, a more neutral category in this regard: 'serious art' and 'trivial entertainment' can equally fall under this heading, and therefore stories' explicit interest may lie sometimes more in capturing difference, sometimes more in effecting identity, and sometimes in both in an ambivalent, oscillating fashion. Stories may be experiments in "becoming-imperceptible" ("Literature and Life" 225), but they may also recount "memories and voyages." They may make the impersonal speak in singular fashion, but they may also be dominated by highly personal, determinate perspectives and point of views. And yet ultimately, no story can deny its radical dependence on difference, which makes for the "revolutionary" potential of not only poetic language, but also poetic mimesis (on poetry, mimesis, and revolution see Part One); just as repetition, however monotonous and "bare," inevitably harbours singularity within it, and is thus always opposed to the law even where it is entangled with it: "If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law. […] If repetition can be found, even in nature, it is in the name of a power which affirms itself against the law, which works underneath laws, perhaps superior to laws. […] It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality" (*Difference and Repetition* 3).

Penny Dreadful is instructive in this regard. Its representative aspects work everywhere in tandem with its differential narrative becoming. Lily, for instance, is the most stereotypical of femme fatales at the same time as she drives this category towards collapse in impersonating it just a little *too* pointedly, lending a hint of clumsiness or naivety to the depiction that counteracts the smooth professionality of this big-budget production. Or, more casually put, on the whole, *Penny Dreadful* is always one Wordsworth quote away from becoming properly ridiculous. It is not exactly that because of this ambiguity, *Penny Dreadful* solves the entire tension between signification and becoming, trace and presence. (This is simultaneously a tension that one might perceive between two major theoretical reference points of this section, Derridean deconstruction and Deleuzian processual materialism: a tension between Deleuze's "profound real element," a field of "free, wild or untamed

differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition"; and Derridean ideas of iteration and tracing, where "everything begins with reproduction" and exists in the mode of an "always already," where meaning is deferred, belated, and is productive and inventive precisely through this gap.) The ambiguity does, however, suggest that the solution cannot be to privilege one over the other; that any account of narrative becoming must simultaneously keep in view, wherever possible, narrative representation, and vice versa. In fact, Derrida acknowledges both principles when he talks about "the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation" ("Scene" 224). Generally speaking, Frankenstein's creature is a case in point. In Frankenstein's creature(s), negativity and plenty coincide. In fact, the creature's marked body is a very good example for a trace that is *also* matter; for a mark that is productive singularity at the same time as it is scission, belated, beside itself. The creature's body is, on the one hand, an 'object' become significant and signifying through different resistances that its matter has offered to tracing, retaining one trace but not another. And yet, the creature's body is also mutable, plentiful and of an overwhelming singular *presence* in its 'being-marked-by-traces.'[10] And more specifically, as regards the text at hand, *Penny Dreadful* equally resonates with both ideas, in fact, its characteristic quality results from the symbiosis of both: the narrative dynamics of repetition (serial story, serial creatures) and the fundamentally quotational character of it all (remix of the literary canon that it is).

In this ambiguity, then, *Penny Dreadful* suggests that whatever a more vital, less cognitive understanding of narrative looks like, it should not

10 The creature, the creature's body is, as it were, voice *and* writing, a writing which is a voice which is writing which is voice. In fact, many versions of the *Frankenstein* story – not least Shelley's own – seem drawn to this issue in the way that they problematise the relation of the monster's speech to the technologies and media securing its existence and transmission.

downplay representation all too drastically (not least because reversing the hierarchy between mind and matter does little to get rid of the dichotomy on which this hierarchy is based). Askin, too, relies on Deleuze's work on difference to make a case for "becoming, the dynamic and continuous process of selecting and gathering heterogenous elements to be expressed" to be regarded as "the ontologically primary virtual realm of any given actual narrative" (180). Through case studies in postmodernist and contemporary literature, which, he says, make the ontological ties of narrative particularly explicit (18–19), Askin shows that narrative expresses difference, thus expresses being as such, "the fundamental metaphysical processes of onto- and morphogenesis" (3). Ultimately, Askin claims that we find not only the "becoming of narrative" but also the "narrativity of becoming," so that narrative and narrativization name "the machinery of relation as such" (181–82). Narrative is being, the expression of being, but being is also narrative – a "narrative ontology" that, Askin concludes his investigations, "still awaits its invention" (187). The main idea against which Askin protests with his "differential narratology" (1) is the idea that narrative is an exclusively cognitive, exclusively human, exclusively ethical affair: canonical works such as Paul Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*, which argue for "storytelling making experience intelligible, both to oneself and to others," undertake, he says, "an unjustified ethicisation of narrative." Against this, Askin's differential narratology, while granting that "narrative can and frequently does play out within the categories of human world, knowledge, and experience," insists that "the ground from which to extract a coherent concept of narrative has to be trans-experiential, unconscious, and non-human" (3).

Being and Being-About

In fact, the conclusion that stories are 'larger than us' is yielded both by a Deleuzian ontology of narrative as well as by a psychoanalytically based approach such as it is presented by Brooks – which, as I would argue, should nevertheless not mislead us into thinking that stories' conscious, representative aspect is some kind of by-product, negligible in compari-

son to their non-human ontogenesis. The claim that narrative isn't just a cognitive exercise is easily reconcilable with Brooks's energetics of narrative, modelled on the principles of drives (life drives and death drive) and their interaction. Drives, after all, aren't simply born from the individual's mind but rather traverse it ("it would be a mistake," as Joan Copjec puts it, "to confuse drive with will or whim, since drive does not appear to be at the disposal of the conscious subject; on the contrary, it exerts an unrelenting, internal pressure which mere will is unable to oppose and the body is unable to escape" [179]).[11] In that sense, while Brooks's Freudian masterplot does not theorise the affective aspect of narrative all too explicitly, it certainly includes and implies it. At the same time, it is maybe for good reason that Brooks speaks about "narrative desire" rather than "narrative drive," thus leaving quite unspecified where the attraction of narrative comes from – from within our minds, or from beyond our bodies.

"If narrative goes beyond human knowledge and experience, it cannot be representational," is what Askin claims (3). But Frankensteinian creatures and all the stories of *Frankenstein* produce, in fact, the distinct impression that topic and ontology, representation and matter, or politics and poetics (to use Askin's binary pair [41]) are certainly equally important, probably reciprocally productive, maybe properly co-original. *Penny Dreadful*'s Lily-Brona, at least, is *represented* as differentially repetitive creature as much as she is *created* as one. There is a correspondence in the mode in which story and creature exist. This correspondence suggests that *being* (ontology, matter, poetics) and *being-about* (topic, representation, politics) are hard to disentangle. Isn't Lily's fate a narrative (or structural) as well as an existential one? Where would we draw a line between her reincarnations in fictional late Victorian London (Brona,

11 Or, in Kristeva's more convoluted phrasing: "Drives are material, but they are not solely biological since they both connect and differentiate the biological and symbolic within the dialectic of the signifying body invested in a practice. Neither inside nor outside, drives are neither the ideational interior of a subject of understanding, nor the exteriority of the Hegelian Force. Drives are, instead, the repeated scission of matter that generates signifiance" (*Revolution* 167).

the innocent country girl out of a job – Brona, the street-smart prostitute compromised by the city's sinful ways – Lily, the vengeful immortal amazon – Lily, liberated survivor of the series' tragic ending) one the one hand, and the recursive progression of serial episodes she appears in on the other? Does the story invent Lily or does Lily invent the story? Who is occasion for what?

Askin argues that the 'is' of narrative is prior to, or more fundamental than its 'being-about' ("before being *about* something it simply *is* something itself and [...] this *is* determines its aboutness" [6]). I would like to suggest that stories – not only as narratives, but as narrative *fictions* – are more peculiar than that. To understand the role of difference, of becoming for narrative we need to follow, Askin argues, "the reverse movement of the speculative becoming-virtual of actual narratives as they crack open their representational surface and burrow ever deeper towards their conditioning differentials" (180). If that is the case, a glossy Netflix series like *Penny Dreadful*, which can hardly be said to "crack open" its representational surface, is probably the wrong place to look. Or is it? It might just be that it is precisely the series' brushed-up surfaces that hold a certain subversive power, at the same time as they have a containing, conservative, representational effect. For it can be the singularity of surfaces that most effectively opposes the false promises of identity. This becomes visible, once again, in relation to the themes of death, resurrection, and immortality in *Penny Dreadful*.

Surfaces and Simulacra

There is something highly, almost clumsily serious and at the same time entirely irreverent to the manner in which the show approaches mortality. It is as if death, because it is in some ways optional in *Penny Dreadful*, develops all the more sentimental and structural impact whenever it does arrive – or is allowed. *Penny Dreadful*'s ending negotiates not only the continued existence of its characters in general and thus its own continuation as narrative but is also centred, more specifically, around the death of several children. For one, there is Justine, "one more dead

child," which motivates the exchange between Lily and Dorian. In fact, Lily – or rather, Brona – has had another child to mourn before – as she tells Victor, who, in another experiment he takes up with a certain Dr. Jekyll, intends to turn Lily back into the harmless young woman she appeared to be right after her creation. As this experiment would include some kind of amnesia, Lily is forced to beg Victor not to rob her of her memories of her daughter Sarah. She thus reveals a secret from her past (3.8, 00:30:08-34:45): her little daughter Sarah froze to death because Brona was forced to go out working on a very cold night and, being struck unconscious by a violent customer, returns too late to the apartment to rekindle the fire. An earlier episode had her standing in front of the tombstone of Sarah Croft (3.7, 00:03:00-03:50), a counterpart to the scene in which Clare carries his son's shrouded body into the river. It is this account of little Sarah's death that makes Victor relent from his plan of fixing Lily in "immortal perfection," letting her go instead (both physically and emotionally, we presume).

At the core of Lily's futurity and transformativity we thus find a kernel of unchangeability and irreversibility, a death that pre-empts further developments. Coincidentally, this element of irreversibility also constitutes the end of the narrative, or at least of one of its plotlines (that of the romance between Victor and Lily), as if this serial story could only find its ending in the negation of procreation – the death of children. The series' most prominent character, Vanessa Ives, is shot according to her own wish by her never-quite-lover Ethan – another instance where further procreation is pre-empted. Victor recognizes, after he has let Lily go: "There is no road ahead for me" (3.9, 00:19:31-19:32). The various attempts to overthrow finitude – not only by Victor Frankenstein or Clare's wife Marjorie, but also that of the demonic forces who have been haunting Vanessa – are thwarted or seem undesirable, after all (as Dorian's static existence). Plotlines die along with the characters they were focused on, providing the endings and finalities that even extensive serial narratives live on – the quasi-magnetic force that stories' endings provide as they keep looming in the distance.

Or do these plotlines and characters die? Not only does the "quiescence" before and beyond narrative (Brooks) provide, for the narrative

franchises of popular culture and serial narration, material for spin-offs, sequels, prequels and the like – like a dormant space of difference. It is also in the nature of fictional characters in general that whatever fate befalls them, they can always reappear for another telling of the story – or, to speak with Deleuze, it is with *simulacra* that the order of repetition finally arrives: with beings that are not obligated to be truthful representatives of originals (on the origin of the term as Latin for 'statue,' 'idol' see Daniel Smith [89]). The simulacrum opens another perspective on the question of narrative continuation, of which we can see, as it were, a mild version in the sequel (*Bride*) and a strong version in the series (*Penny*). It captures the repeat-ability of narrative fiction in such a way that a certain lawlessness becomes obvious, where 'doing it right' has to step back, as concern, behind 'doing it any way,' that is, without too much respect for standards of quality, appropriateness, or sensibility. (Isn't this the standard accusation for long-running series or franchises – that they didn't know when to stop? But how would they have known? From which criteria?)

In a sense, all fictional beings function in some way as simulacra – which are really functionally equivalent to the aforementioned "third time in the series," the element-to-come that cannot be defined in essence – yet not all of them confront us as blatantly as serial creatures do with the unexpectedly subversive power of appearances. This superficial yet non-trivial quality might even be what makes for the campy quality of both *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Penny Dreadful*; camp being, as Susan Sontag has defined it, more interested in surfaces, styles, and textures than in content, yet not therefore 'bad' or poorly done. It exaggerates, it "sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp but a 'lamp'; not a woman but a 'woman.' To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater" (9–10).[12]

12 *Penny Dreadful*, it seems to me, collapses into kitsch precisely whenever it tries too hard to add substance (and it does this ever more frequently the further the series proceeds).

Tellingly, Steven Shaviro uses Batman to illustrate Deleuze's idea of the simulacrum – he thus refers to a fictional creature with a similarly extensive network of adaptations and variations as Frankenstein's creature has. "No Gotham City and Batman can be privileged above the rest," Shaviro explains, "not even Bob Kane's 'original' conception, which is just as much a particular, circumstantial actualization as are all the others" (117). The same can easily be formulated for Frankenstein and his creature – as well as for other personnel in *Penny Dreadful*, such as Dorian Gray, Dracula, and Dr. Jekyll:

> In this sense, Batman [Frankenstein's creature] is a simulacrum. There is no Platonic Idea of Batman [Frankenstein's creature], no model that all the iterations of Batman [Frankenstein's creature] would conform to more or less, and in relation to which they could all be hierarchically ranked according to the degree of their resemblance. There is also no best of all possible Batmans [Frankenstein's creatures], no iteration that can be judged more perfect than all the rest. (118)

Overtly repetitive/repeated fictional characters such as Batman or Frankenstein's creature or Dorian Gray make the workings of singularity particularly obvious; in a Deleuzian sense, they "do not have identity, because they are caught up in continual metamorphoses. But they can be described, nevertheless, as *singularities*, because—even as they pass through all possible predicates—they do not have these predicates *all at once*. Batman has no fixed identity, but each iteration of Batman is a singular one" (Shaviro 121). It is only fitting, in this regard, that the creatures in *Penny Dreadful* – Caliban/Clare, Lily-Brona, Proteus – are all named after myths, literary or cultural icons, in other words, chimeras: in a sense they have too many names and thus, like Shelley's monster, no proper name at all. Appearances can indeed be deceiving – to the eye that looks to essence exclusively.

But even disregarding these particular creatures' (Frankensteinian creatures, that is) extensive adaptation history, there is something of the power of the simulacrum inherent in creatures of narrative fiction, in general – in the creatures that stories bring forth in their capacity to express singularity, differential repetition, processes of becoming. *Penny*

Dreadful, in what is an almost directly metafictional comment, makes this explicit. In the first season, Caliban is taken in as a stagehand by the benevolent director of a boulevard theatre. He watches from behind the scenes as characters are shot on stage and actors rise, seconds later, to receive their applause. "Could there have been a more appropriate place for me?" he reflects. "Night after night, the players died gruesomely and then came back to life again for the next show. They were undying, like me – creatures of perpetual resurrection" (1.3, 00:21:35-52). Linking Caliban/Clare, in particular, to institutions of popular fiction – the Grand Guignol theatre in Season One, a wax works in Season Two – seems to suggest that he becomes a paradigm case of fictional creatures in general *because* he is a Frankenstein creature, that is, because of his explicit negotiability in terms of resurrection.

Caliban's (self-)assessment is both glaringly obvious and infinitely obscure – as is the simulacrum. "[F]olded within" fictional creatures there is, just as Deleuze claims for the simulacra under attack by Plato, "a process of limitlessness" – the potential of unlimited return, always the same but not the same as before ("Plato" 49). In Deleuze's review of Plato, the simulacrum – the "mirage," the "counterfeit" ("Plato" 47), "dreams, shadows, reflections, paintings" (*Difference and Repetition* 85) – appears as something like the 'evil twin' to the copy and is explained in opposition to it: while copies resemble 'inwardly,' in their "essence" ("Plato" 49) rather than, or before, resembling externally, simulacra resemble only externally. "The copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance," Deleuze explains, like "man" who has, according to the catechism, "through sin [...] lost the resemblance while retaining the image" of God ("Plato" 48). Simulacra thus have "externalised resemblance and live on difference instead" (*Difference and Repetition* 162). Liberated from the demand of essential correspondence, the simulacrum "implies great dimensions, depths, and distances which the observer cannot dominate" ("Plato" 49).[13] While in *Penny Dreadful*, such limitless existence is, more often

13 Simulacra "embody the evil power of the false claimant [in Plato]" (Deleuze, "Plato" 47). See Daniel Smith for how the whole problem of simulacra, of

than not, denied in the single instance (Jack needs to be buried, Victor's workshop of creation is abandoned, Dorian's existence will petrify in beauty, Ethan has to shoot his lover, and all stories must end), it lives on in principle – in the differential repeatability of (narrative) fiction. It is in this quality of differential repetition and repeatability that, according to Deleuze, 'real life' and the order of simulacra correspond: "This, then, is the way the conditions of real experience and the structure of the work of art reunite: […] the internal reverberation and amplified movement, the aggressiveness of the simulacra" ("Plato" 52).

Beyond Sovereign Imitation

Going back to the question of difference and representation, then: *are* simulacra or are they *about*? If anything, they are one because they are the other, in a paradoxical revolution of surfaces. Stories as simulacra are indeed an "operation in two directions" – and rarely is this more obvious than in serial stories – because they need not look forward in order to be productive. They are very well able to be productive through and precisely *in* the moment in which they are being retrospective. Of course, not

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essences vs. existences, arises from the desire to separate true claimants (for, say, a political office) from false ones. He sums up the point of Deleuze's concept of simulacra as follows: "The essential Platonic distinction, Deleuze argues, is more profound than the speculative distinction between model and copy, original and image. The deeper, practical distinction moves between two kinds of images or *eidolon*, for which the Platonic Idea is meant to provide a concrete criterion of selection. 'Copies' or icons (*eikones*) are well-grounded claimants to the transcendent Idea, authenticated by their internal resemblance to the Idea, whereas 'simulacra' (*phantasmata*) are like false claimants, built on a dissimilarity and implying an essential perversion or deviation from the Idea. If the goal of Platonism is the triumph of icons over simulacra, the inversion of Platonism would entail an *affirmation* of the simulacrum as such, which must thus be given its own concept. Deleuze consequently defines the simulacrum in terms of an internal dissimilitude or 'disparateness,' which in turn implies a new conception of Ideas, no longer as self-identical qualities […], but rather as constituting *a pure concept of difference*" (89).

every story begins by saying 'once upon a time.' And yet, stories are able to begin by saying 'once upon a time', and in this sense have a tendency to free themselves from the hierarchy of 'what came first,' the original or the copy. (And in fact, maybe those which we least expect to do so – the supposedly most conventional of their species, the 'once upon a time' forms of story – do so most thoroughly.)

In Deleuzian terms, this makes perfect sense: as simulacra, stories imitate the future. This, arguably, allows singularity as properly ontological – ontogenetical – factor to come to the fore more clearly than it does through Derridean notions of tracing alone, though those follow a similar temporal 'illogicality.' Ultimately, however, whether we frame difference as productive singularity or as creative scission – or even, in Latour's terminology, as "being-as-other" (*Inquiry* 162) – in either case the kind of difference that is implied is non-oppositional and non-categorical. Deleuze talks about "difference without a concept" as the basis for individuation; Derrida's logic of the trace and its belatedness, or its *différance*, requires all production (of meaning and of existence) to be a continuous process (an "always already") which might imply a cascade of thresholds but is without sharp edges towards its 'outsides.'[14] In much the same way, I would like to suggest, does narrative fiction work by virtue of the production of non-oppositional difference. Stories are not sharply, categorically delineated from their 'outside,' towards reality; rather, they have thresholds of difference which can be crossed by certain practices, from drawing up a curtain to setting the camera at an angle to quite simply imagining myself to be somebody else.

Crucially, this emancipates imitation from its dependence on a 'master imitator,' that is, a consciousness which would *recognise*, in its supposed particular astuteness, the correspondences between life and story, or one story and another, and then manage to find adequate means for translating them. The adaptive industriousness (or even, the adaptation industry) that builds and re-builds the *Frankenstein* complex involves us,

14 On the latter issue, see also Andrade on "Derrida's Writing: Notes on the Freudian Model of Language."

but it isn't, in any narrower or exclusive sense, 'ours.' The cohesion between stories and life, and between one story and another, is warranted by more than that – beyond similarity, it is enabled by singularity, which presides over both fictional beings and the stories which express them. It might be a necessary ingredient in the process that somebody capable of writing (or painting, or …) picks up their pen – but the compulsion to insist that this is the only *real* requirement for a story to come into existence, and also the first, speaks maybe to no more than the persistent seductiveness of a conventional representational paradigm.

Part Two: Coda

Penny Dreadful's as well as *Bride of Frankenstein*'s reconfigurations of 'conventional' ontological directions depend, ultimately, on (fictional) narrative's existential, as opposed to 'only' formal, relation to repetition. The series makes thorough use in particular of the ambivalent or oscillating relation between characters and their temporalities: is it the characters granting access to multiple temporalities (Vanessa, whose biography we learn of bit by bit, is readable in terms of this functionality) or does the concrescence of different points in time generate the characters (Lily being the paradigm case here)? That this question can even be asked is, not least, a result of the fact that we follow (in Latour's words, we "prolong") beings of fiction along their "path of life" (*Inquiry* 242).

But *who* is doing the following here? To understand stories as (among other things) expressions of non-categorical difference and complex repetition is not to say that there are no human agents, no authors involved in making stories. It means, however, that human agents don't and can't tell stories on their own but only in cooperation with other beings, other things, and other processes; and that human agents achieve this because they are part of a differential universe that also enables – alongside humans, stones, computers, and friendships – narrative transformations-and-successions (being, after all, being univocal).[1] What these human

1 As Deleuze puts it: "In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. […] It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense. *The essence*

agents can do, then, is foster those circumstances of difference to the point where they acquire an undeniable solidity, sometimes to an astonishing degree, such as we see it in the *Frankenstein* complex.[2]

However, that the world is itself only in not being itself and that it is this break (*différance*, in Derridean terminology, difference in Deleuze's, and "hiatus" in Latour's idiom throughout the *Inquiry*) which supports the production of meaning, including stories, is in equal parts a liberating and a scary idea. Latour, for his part, works with the notion of a "mini-transcendence," a narrowing of the (alleged) gap between symbol and world that meaning has to cross. He emphasises the role of material cycles of translation, "the predecessors and the successors of any course of action," "the path that has to be navigated in order for something to persist in being," "what must be added in order to translate [an existent], to take it up again, to grasp it anew, to interpret it" (*Inquiry* 236–37). Latour's point is that the gap of this mini-transcendence can only be crossed in cooperation – which is both an important point and, possibly, not quite enough said. This becomes evident in a remark of his on the (non-)arbitrariness of the sign. It doesn't seem quite as certain as Latour claims that the sign is arbitrary *only* "for those who, having agreed to lose the experience of relations, try to reinject relations on the basis of the 'human mind' into a 'material world' that has been emptied in advance of all articulations," as Latour claims (*Inquiry* 256). Of course, Latour is being purposefully polemical when he points out, exasperated, "Yes, of course, *cheval* in French is 'horse' in English! What conclusions are we to draw from this, except that there are many ways for a large number of horses galloping on the plains to enter into relation with many tribes garbling French and English?" (*Inquiry* 256) – and yet, isn't the notion of relation thrown in here in a slightly too off-hand manner, in the assumption that if only enough tribesmen and -women have related to

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of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence" (*Difference and Repetition* 46 [my emphasis]).

2 I use the term 'foster' here thinking of Isabelle Stenger's "Ecology of Practices" (where she points out that 'fostering' is, in contrast to 'empowering,' the less normative tactics).

horses, and related to each other, a functioning semiotic system will be a natural and quite unremarkable consequence? Isn't relation, besides being a glue to repair the rift between mind and world, also a space, if not of arbitrariness, then at least of contingency? Latour's "mini-transcendence" is still a transcendence. Whatever gap there is cannot, or can only rarely, be crossed seamlessly. Whether the capacity of the world to go beyond itself in differing from itself is arbitrary, whether or not it is immanent, it is certainly not entirely containable.

All this means that matters are in any case more complicated than any simplistic version of reception aesthetics or reader-response criticism can account for. A simplistic version of reception aesthetics might in fact mean, as Latour claims, "imagining social beings already in place, as it were: beings whose existence could not be in doubt, who would lend their subjectivity to something that had no solidity in itself" ("Reflections on Souriau" 325). The principle of instauration that Latour advocates for – he borrows it from Étienne Souriau – shifts the terms of what it means to bring fiction about:

> To say, for example, that a fact is 'constructed' is inevitably […] to designate the knowing subject as the origin of the vector, as in the image of God the potter. But the opposite move, of saying of a work of art that it results from an instauration, is to get oneself ready to see the potter as one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores, and invents the form of the work, just as one discovers or 'invents' a treasure. ("Reflections" 311)

This kind of in-ventive work implies forms of cooperation, relation, and shared agency which are not themselves without risks. For arguably, singular agents do not settle completely, without resistance or protest or, for that matter, pain, into joyfully fiddling about in cooperative processes – but neither can they exist without them. If we aren't God the potter but neither are we mere "catalysts" ("Reflections" 311) for the works we encounter, how can we conceive of the individual and multiple selves involved in such acts of following?

Part Three: Company

"What does it mean," Judith Butler asks in her essays on the *Senses of the Subject*, "to require what breaks you?" (9). *Frankenstein* presents this question in novel (filmic, theatrical, …) form. It asks for the fault lines and connections between single beings and their surroundings not only in terms of plot, but also in terms of fictional production and existence. The first problem in the *Frankenstein* story might be the body, but following hard on its heels is the problem of social life. Or rather, both problems condition each other: for Frankenstein's creature, finding a companion wouldn't be so much of a problem if one weren't hideous, and being hideous wouldn't be so much of a problem if one had a companion to alleviate the loneliness. Being yourself, being by yourself, and being with others seem equally complicated. Many protagonists of the *Frankenstein* complex (be they authors, readers, characters, or texts) seem to struggle with the assumption, appropriation or inhibition of 'identities' which come to figure, mostly, as that which is *not* available, which is reductive, too large, or generally inadequate. 'Identity' as a regime of self-equivalence becomes troubled, so much so that everybody comes to be only the difference from what they not quite are: a *muted* female subject (Angela Wright), a troubled author trying to figure out how to write herself into *inherited* traditions (as Gilbert and Gubar argue), a "*collective* and *artificial* creature" in an "ambivalent, dialectical relationship" to its maker like wage-labour is to capital (Moretti 85); a young scientist literally *possessed* by an ambition that catapults him out of his proper circumstances (Victor), a *reluctant* fiancé (also Victor), a *never-quite* wife (Elizabeth), an *alleged* criminal (Justine), and so on – including, of course, the creature,

eternal outcast that he is. And further, the texts of the *Frankenstein* complex get to be called "inferior sequels," "diminishing returns," "threadbare" interpretations, "sketch[es] of the novel," "baroque exercise[s]," "atmospheric rendering[s]," "affectionate homage[s]," "semblance[s] of former glory," and "simulacric vision[s]" (Dixon 509–19).

The *Frankenstein* complex thus complicates what it means to be (an) individual. Its protagonists are as unable to stand alone, self-sufficient in their autonomous identities, as they are unable to seamlessly insert themselves into the community at hand. In most *Frankenstein* stories, communal existence is a veritable *pharmakon*, figuring sometimes as obstacle or 'poison,' and sometimes as remedy.[3] This double value is mirrored on a more global, extradiegetic level: where the *Frankenstein* story itself tells about a lonely sufferer, this lonely sufferer in turn requires our, the audience's, solidarity and attention – our suffering-with this isolated being – so that the story persists as a work of fiction and even makes it into a long-lasting pop-cultural phenomenon. 'Being yourself' is complicated for everyone and everything involved: for the creature, for its primary author, for its adaptations and variations and last but not least, for its audience. Where, for instance, the creature is generally coded as biological problem inserted into the social fabric – and thus, automatically, as social problem inserted into the biological fabric – the story as a whole has in turn often been investigated as a paradigm case of female authorship, situated uneasily in a context of male discursive agency.

If stories are collaborative practices, resulting from shared efforts between authors, audiences, and beings of fiction, then the struggles

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3 The problem is not new – Bill Hughes puts it in its literary-historical context: "the figure of Romantic solitude is frequently rendered as unhealthy in […] related texts [by Percy Shelley and John Polidori]. Romantic monsters, without Promethean emancipation, are asocial, 'self-consumed', exhibiting an atomised individualism" (10). He elaborates on the tensions between Enlightenment principles of social reason and Romantic inwardness and the importance of dialogue as principle and genre. An "ideal of qualified individualism […] hovers behind *Frankenstein*," he says (10). The novel "envisages […] a way of life that is communal while critiquing a narrow sense of individual interest" (13). There is, in Shelley, "an affirmation of a radical sociability" (14).

that for instance the monster finds himself in are not simply subject to a conscious matching between protagonists and audiences, where audiences recognise their own circumstances in those of the creature (or Victor, or Elizabeth, or Mary Shelley, for that matter). Rather, these struggles must be understood more fundamentally as a shared existential situation. Communal existence and practice is the ultimate 'point' of *Frankenstein*, and of its fictional practice, in a specific, somewhat paradoxical sense: *Frankenstein* is all about the problem of community insofar as community is about the question of how separate beings can be together; and it is all about the individual insofar as the individual finds itself confronted with the question of how fundamentally entangled beings can become autonomous. In many ways, then, *Frankenstein* is all about the process of individuation – which is inevitably an individuation-in and an individuation-from one's surroundings, and thus both a solitary as well as a communal affair.

Vulnerabilities emerge along all kinds of sutures in this constellation: the suture between organism and person, so impressively visible on the creature's body, but also in the contact zones between the creature and its fellow protagonists as well as in the spheres of encounter between these beings of fiction and their readers and viewers.[4] Individuation is a material-*and*-ethical affair in and for *Frankenstein*. In the context of such vulnerabilities, self and relation reveal themselves to be both opposed and indissolubly tied to each other – "it is not just," as Butler phrases it, "that this or that body is bound up in a network of relations, but that the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps by virtue of those boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible" (*Assembly* 130). Community, vulnerability, and individual agency thus traverse and condition each other, and bodies play an important, maybe even a primary part in this, as they reveal the interrelations between politics and intimacy.

The creature's body becomes the material-semiotic site for the negotiation of both vulnerability and freedom as dimensions of individ-

4 I borrow the person/organism terminology from Tim Ingold.

ual agency.[5] *Frankenstein* dramatises the tragic failure of ideals of self-reliance and self-sufficiency and highlights the difficulty of making singularity count for individual beings trying to express themselves without resorting to the language and logic of 'identity.' And yet it doesn't exhaust itself in depicting the failure of such politics of self. Rather, vulnerability and isolation acquire a double value for *Frankenstein* as story and thus as collaborative practice: what isolates the creature from its fellow protagonists is precisely what makes its audience follow its narrative. The *Frankenstein* complex thus highlights that bound up with the question of what individuality beyond identity might be are complex question of self-expression, agency and freedom on the one, and of obligation, vulnerability and restraint on the other hand; and further, that stories are practices of a curiously constraint freedom, or free constraint. As he struggles for both companionship and self-assertion, the creature engages his audiences in their respective capacities for being wounded, and for being free. This is what this section is going to examine: how *Frankenstein* asks for relational ways of being oneself, and more specifically, for relational ways of being oneself in the practice of narrative fiction. All forms of being-*with*, unavoidable and constitutive as they are, still, and crucially, entail forms of being-*such*.[6] It is due to these contradictory dynamics that fiction turns out to be an intimate practice, if intimacy (as Giorgio Agamben suggests) is a form of close connection that nonetheless preserves strangeness – a non-appropriative communal experience.

This section discusses two *Frankenstein* stories which demonstrate the failure of identity politics and two versions which, through their aesthetic strategies, instantiate a relational politics based on intimacy and

5 I borrow the term material-semiotic from Donna Haraway's work, as it turns up for instance in her *Staying with the Trouble*.

6 Haraway, advocating the end of "bounded individualism," makes an extended case for the centrality of "being-with" as factor for any ontology and politics that do our ecological entanglements justice (see *Staying with the Trouble*, in particular the chapter "Tentacular Thinking").

vulnerability, and are more successful at establishing community without appropriation. Feminist theory in general has brought forth sharp critiques of notions of identity as transparent and stable, as literally 'self-identical'; and not surprisingly, feminist readings of *Frankenstein* focus on those very same issues.[7] For obvious reasons: many versions of *Frankenstein* quite explicitly set struggles of personal essence versus singular occurrence in the context of patriarchal conventions. In Bernard Rose's film, the debate concerning personhood and the claim to inviolable essences is framed as a debate between 'father' and 'son' – a debate without a solution; the film's brutal bleakness leaves little hope for alternative relational patterns. Nonetheless, the creature in Rose's film does try to insist – though hardly successfully – on a more entangled understanding of singular being. This entangled singularity is unfolded quite vividly Danny Boyle's 2011 staging of Nick Dear's stage play *Frankenstein*, and reveals itself as direct source of aesthetic production (rather than 'only' as interesting topic for discussion). For Boyle's staging, the two main actors alternate roles as Victor Frankenstein and his creature, a strategy of double casting that manifests, demonstrates intra- and extradiegetically, how the sphere of corporeal performance

7 It is worth mentioning, in this context, that readings of Shelley's *Frankenstein* which treat it in its connection to Enlightenment political philosophy make a point of bringing up the problematic exclusion of women in that context, and link it explicitly to the struggle between individual and social existence. Diana Reese suggests Rousseau's and Kant's works as useful intertexts for Shelley's novel, because "existence and perpetuation of the social group (that is, the elided 'facts' of both Kant's imperative and Rousseau's contract) haunt Geneva in the form of the monster's irrepressible demand" and "Victor Frankenstein can hear the justice of the monster's claim (as an ideal citizen) but cannot grant him the corollary rights of man" (64). Similarly, Zoe Beenstock claims that Frankenstein presents a "dark allegory of Rousseau's social contract theory" (406) at a "watershed moment in the intertwined development of individualist social theory and Romantic literary form" (419). Both Reese and Beenstock emphasise how much of the critical potential of Shelley's novel when it comes to models of society hinges on the included-excluded (created-aborted) female (monster), whose problematic status reveals that a satisfactory reconciliation between the individual and the social, or the singular and the general, remains pending.

and with it, the sphere of individual agency, exceed the limits of the individual body.

However, feminist criticism of Frankenstein has itself occasionally neglected such entanglements and resorted to a rather essentialising notion of individual 'identity'; a shortcoming that plays itself out in novel form in Theodore Roszak's 1995 *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. Roszak's novel ostensibly aims at revealing an alternative precisely to patriarchally conditioned identity. Its failure to do this in any convincing form, however, only serves to highlight the futility of exchanging one identity for another in terms of privilege, while never questioning the regime of identity itself. It is not least the communicative tactics of narrative fiction that can indicate a solution to this impasse. Whale's film *Bride of Frankenstein*, like Boyle's stage version, employs a method of double casting that allows to translate the estrangement of the (female) subject – lamented for good reason, but ineffectively attacked in certain forms of feminist criticism – into a constitutive strangeness that is equally the individual's bane, and the individual's liberation. In *Bride of Frankenstein*, the actress playing Mary Shelley in the frame story reappears as the creature's intended bride in the main body of the film. Not only do these metaleptic shifts (of Mary Shelley 'into' her own story or, depending on one's viewpoint, her creature's 'out' of it) reveal how the positions of authors and recipients are relationally and cooperatively produced. This specific instance of double casting also raises the question of whether the self-estrangement that feminist criticism has examined as a painful consequence of power relations also has another aspect to it, that is, whether this estrangement also allows, precisely in the form of narrative fiction, a form of keeping ourselves company that transcends the opposition of community and isolation.

The vulnerabilities and alterations that a politics of identity tries to avoid may actually turn out to be productive sources not only of community and relation, but also self-relation and intimacy. The double casts in Boyle's stage and Whale's film version, in particular, not only debate the question of entangled individualities but put those entanglements to use quite insistently in their methods of aesthetic production. They thus reveal how discursive negotiations of community, *in* fiction, are them-

selves, *as* fiction, based in participatory practice – which means, also, that the ethical questions of which *Frankenstein* speaks are at the same time inscribed in its very ontology as a work of fiction.

Imperfection and Collaboration

Rose's *Frankenstein* Revisited, and the National Theatre's *Frankenstein* (2011)

You Will Be You Again

Victor's solution to the 'failure' of his creative experiment in Bernard Rose's sci-fi/horror film version is as perfidious as it is naïve. Less interested, it seems, in the opportunities of something like cloning, that is, of being able to produce a multiplicity of beings, than in the production of the one perfect specimen, Victor appears determined to get it right the second time: thinking his first creature gone for good, he sets about producing another to replace it. Unlike in Shelley's novel and many other versions, he does so of his own accord, without any interference on the part of the first creature: the aim is clearly the accomplishment of a feat much more than the production of life. It is not least due to this priority that the individuals Victor creates in the film are manifestations of a pre-defined concept much more than they are individuals in the sense of the word, that is, to his understanding, the beings he creates are not so much present as such but always only present as something else: present as representatives of beauty and proof of his own skills. This not only reflects on the specific norms that individuals are measured against (of, for instance, physical form – symmetrical features, smooth skin, and the like, such as the creature in Rose's film initially displays). It also says something general about the inevitable displacement of identities in

such a regime of equivalences, where the individual is identified by its accordance with a concept.[1]

Towards the end of Rose's film, when the creature reappears at the research facility in which it came to life, a confrontation ensues between the monster on the one hand and Victor and his partner on the other, both of whom clearly have not expected ever to see Adam again. Taking him to the laboratories in the basement, the scientists show their creature their new work: the lifeless body of a young man contained in a glass tube, the upper half of his skull still missing, revealing parts of his brain. "See that's how we made you," Victor explains. "And we'll make you again. […] And this time, you'll – you'll be beautiful." His tone of voice is conciliatory, even subtly enthusiastic. Adam, however, insists on the futility of this attempt: "He's not me, not me. He's – other!", he argues with regard to the unfinished creature, struggling to find the right words. "He's exactly like you," Victor insists, but Adam keeps contradicting – the matter clearly too complex for his limited vocabulary: "No! I am – I." Victor tries to soothe him: "Yes. And you will be you again. My boy, I understand your unhappiness. I understand your pain. And I can make it go away. You will close your eyes and you will sleep. And when you wake up, you will be just fine." But Adam will not let himself be calmed. Rather, he literally dashes the new creature's brains in, screaming: "No! I am I am I am I am–." (01:14:33-16:58).

Clearly, whether the same or different, the 'new' or second creature is intended to be *better*. Something must have given the scientists in Rose's film hope for better results the second time round – 'better,' in that case, meaning mostly 'nicer to look at.' Clearly, they want one perfect creature, not one misshapen Adam plus one beautiful sibling. Any concrete physical being resulting from his activities is for Rose's Victor, accordingly, only a manifestation, a print, as it were, of an underlying, unchanging idea and hence both practically identical with and exchangeable for any

1 See Harriet Hustis on the implication of the Prometheus myth and its modernisation when it comes to the question of responsible creation and demands of support (in particular the question of how Frankenstein suggests alternatives to a rational 'fairness' towards others).

other being representing the same model (the film's allusions to the technology of 3D printing contribute to this impression). Adam, on the other hand – naturally, as he is stuck with one of the bodies that Victor declares interchangeable – can hardly agree with his creator on the matter. He is, quite literally, beside himself: unable to lay claim to any definable and abstractable aspects or properties that prove him to be *un*like, *not* equivalent to his designated successor, he nevertheless distinguishes the two of them, insisting on their ontological distinctness. Adam's presence, even more so than his words, suggests that individuality is situated as much at the boundaries of a given being as it is situated at its core. No matter whether the new Adam will be "exactly like" the old: a line can still be drawn between them as singular occurrences, singular ontological 'items,' as it were, no matter how much Victor insists on them simply being equivalent representations, embodiments of the same essence.

All Adam can manage might be the circular, yet undeniably correct assertion "I am I" in a repetitive chant that carries the intricacies of repetition and difference even to the level of syntax. Yet even while his difficulties to express this individuality can be ascribed to limited linguistic and/or cognitive abilities, his struggle nonetheless indicates the difficulty of acknowledging singularity beyond comparison and contrast – or, as Adam's aimlessly wandering sentence suggests, of making sense of a subject without a separate predicate to define it. "In this world," after all – at least, this seems very much true about "this world" according to Rose's film – "the subject's confrontation with singularity is the most horrifying thing of all," as Lauren Berlant explains, since singularity "is the part of one's sovereignty that cannot be handed off to a concept, object, or property" (42). Or, as Giorgio Agamben elaborates for his sketch of a coming community of "whatever being[s]":

> The Whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being *such as it is*. […] [S]uch-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) – and it is reclaimed not

> for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being-*such*, for belonging itself. (*Coming Community* 1–2)

Singularity, in other words, makes for the identifiability of an individual – but not on the grounds of predefined characteristics or concepts but more on the grounds of ontological appearance as such. For precisely this reason, the "in-kind reciprocity" that Victor dreams of in substituting Adam for his better version is "a mirage" (Berlant 42).[2]

In fact, the film renders Victor's stance quite absurd – through the near-ungrammaticality of his assertion, "we will make you again," "you will be you again" in the presence of precisely the addressee who protests vigorously against such attempts at disposal. "You" is, after all, a deictic expression, meaningful only in its connection to singular circumstances. Victor's counterintuitive use of the pronoun indicates his (mis)conception of individuality: he uses a deictic expression where a non-deictic one would be appropriate, and fails to differentiate adequately between singularity and identity. Where a non-deictic expression functions as comparatively stable in meaning because it is determined by its ties to a reference point external to the concrete situation, a deictic expression is indissolubly tied to the circumstances it is used in, acquiring meaning only momentarily and practically. Announcing the substitution of the referent of a deictic expression ("you will be you again") misses precisely this singularity, that is, an individuality that is not detachable from its contingent occurrence.[3]

Victor's attempts to identify the beings he is situationally confronted with not through and in these actual encounters with them but

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2 Agamben makes an intuitively accessible point here that helps also to further clarify the concept: "Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favour of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover's particular fetishism" (*Coming Community* 2).

3 For a more detailed discussion of deixis for instance in Émile Benveniste's linguistics, see the previous discussion of Rose's film in Chapter Two.

by recourse to an external factor of comparison that supposedly tells him what these beings are *like* ("he's exactly like you"), what they are equivalent to, hence which value they have, hence who can be exchanged for who, all but ignore the immediate givens of the situation, thus exemplifying a problematic politics of identity. For Victor is, *de facto*, confronted with two animate, functioning bodies. No matter whether he classifies one of them as unworthy of life and still has to add the finishing touches to the other, no matter who he ends up designating as the 'new Adam,' there will always be, quite literally, mortal *remains* to his equations. This becomes all the more obvious when Victor sedates an enraged Adam, who has set about smashing both the glass tube and the being contained therein to pieces, and attempts to decapitate him: this is not about rendering Adam harmless, it is about removing him entirely – the insufficient 'first try,' Adam, will not vanish by itself as soon as the second try succeeds. Additional work is necessary to clear the scene on which the substitution is to take place. Victor's concepts of perfection as well as his instruments and technologies are too narrow to contain all of the life that he is confronted with.

The contradictions of Victor's behaviour ultimately reveal self-identity as a phantasm: self-identity, that is, as resulting from a process where 'self' is asserted through an external detour, to a concept which will help define the self, as Berlant explains it. Such detours inadvertently expose those very selves to incongruences they must then work to deny. However, personal essence, and in particular its (in)violability is a turbulent horizon one way or the other, for the opposite of Victor's identity politics of external equivalence is not a politics of comfortable 'real' self-identity but rather one in which, due to the reinterpretation of identity in terms of singularity, vulnerability turns from undesirable side effect into the constitutive condition of individuality. Victor, in his attempt to replicate his creation in an improved version, insists that there is such a thing as personal essence, even while his cruel methods show that it is not inviolable. His creature, on the other hand, even though he has difficulties laying claim to personal essence logically (his statement remains tautological, hence empty: "I am I"), insists on this non-essence's inviolability by killing his successor before he can

be brought to life. Vulnerability appears in two aspects in this clash between Adam and his creator – as adverse side effect in a paradigm of equivalent identities (Victor's concept), and as constitutive fragility in a scenario of emergent individuality (Adam's idea).

The film, incidentally, marks this misunderstanding as a specifically patriarchal conflict. It frames the debate between Victor and his creature in the terms of an Oedipal drama, made possible by giving Victor a partner, a literal partner in crime, who has little to do with Shelley's Elizabeth but who is quite actively involved in Victor's experiments (to which degree precisely is hard to say). In that sense, Victor has parents rather than only a father in Rose's version. (An impression that is supported by the fact that the conventional distribution of 'motherly' and 'fatherly' duties stays quite intact: Victor's partner is shown in all caring and nurturing activities, whereas Victor's primary responsibilities are technical, scientific, and occasionally, as in that last confrontation, philosophical.) When the creature returns to the research facility at the end of the film, he watches his father's erotic advances on his mother through the bedroom window before breaking in – a primal scene the dynamic of which carries through to the confrontation in the laboratory, albeit in a somewhat twisted fashion, as Adam first attacks his sibling and is then attacked by his father, who accidentally kills Adam's mother when she tries to protect her son from his father's attacks. The impression of incestuous entanglements is emphasised by the suggestive hallucinatory visions the sedated Adam has of himself, a grown-up young man, only half-clad, with his mother lying down beside him, putting her head on his chest (01:18:23). The struggle for personal identities that we witness between Adam and Victor is thus clearly cast as a struggle 'between men,' and an issue of patriarchal order.

Double Casting I

What Rose's Victor refuses to acknowledge is, to borrow Gilbert Simondon's formulation, that "the individual is the reality of a constituting

relation, not the interiority of a constituted term" (qtd. Manning 107).[4] In a 2011 staging of *Frankenstein* by the National Theatre, however, such constituting relations are elevated into an explicit aesthetic programme; thus suggesting that besides being a thematic concern for most *Frankenstein* stories, these entanglements are also an existential condition of fiction as such. In this stage version, the construction of the play as play is laid open but – counterintuitively, or so it might seem at first – this doesn't diminish but rather enhances the impact of fiction. Victor and the creature seem to gain in 'reality,' rather than fade into mere constructs, although it could hardly be made more obvious that they are the results of actors' 'pretenses.' What this shows, once again, is that fiction, rather than only depicting this or that form of practice – here, the practice of social relations – is a veritable (social) practice itself. And because of this, the vividness of stories and characters doesn't have to suffer when their madeness is exposed: there is no contradiction between being made, and being 'really there.'

In a making-of video that the National Theatre provided for its staging of *Frankenstein*, one of the actors says: "What the rest of the company has to deal with is not two actors switching parts but four different characters" (National Theatre). What he refers to is the author's and the director's (Nick Dear's and Danny Boyle's) decision to have the two main actors (Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch) switch roles as Frankenstein and the creature from one performance to the next. This twist becomes the vehicle of a productive force not to be contained by the frame of the play as a self-contained 'work.' A level of meaningfulness emerges that necessarily always surpasses the singular instance of the play being staged, even beyond the usual intertextual links to other renderings of the *Frankenstein* story. The alternative version with its switched cast hovers in the background of today's spectacle as tomorrow evening's differing incarnation of the same thing, a kind of 'outpost' or supplement.

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4 As Gilbert Simondon's works have been translated into English only partially, I am relying here on Erin Manning's translations from the French original, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (Jerom Millon, 1995).

At the end of seeing the play for the first time, one reviewer says, for instance, that "one felt a weird, unprecedented combination of indefinitely postponed catharsis and real cliff-hanger suspense. How was this so? Because Danny Boyle's extraordinarily haunting production is predicated on the notion of alternating the two leading actors […]. To get the full beauty of the concept, you would ideally (and with a deep enough pocket) see the production twice" (Taylor).[5]

Interestingly, switching the main cast, while it does emphasise the actual production processes behind the play, doesn't make Frankenstein and his creature 'less real' or 'less relevant' or in some way more ephemeral or artificial when they appear on stage. Rather, what develops is a sphere or a space formed by interindividual relation, by the specific use this staging makes of a general condition of individuals, that is, their accessibility to others, the openness and contingency of their borders and limits, physical and metaphysical alike. In particular when we are dealing with an actual stage performance, this pushes us to acknowledge the actuality of such connections, including their material dimensions; it presents rather than represents them.[6] It shows that the co-constitution of alterity and identity, participation as aspect of individuality, are not simply matters of reflection, obscure circumstances to be found out in careful analysis, but matters of practice. In other words, this particular staging draws on a general ontological condition. It thus

5 "Rip out the non-monster-master scenes, turn the rest of the dialogue into reported speech and make the play into a two-hander, and he [Boyle] would have directed not only a thrilling phenomenon but a work of art" (Clapp). As becomes obvious here: the double casting is really the whole point of the play.

6 That is to say, if we've been lucky enough to catch one of the stage performances instead of watching a recording on cinema screen. (The recordings have toured through European cinemas but are not available on DVD or for streaming.) See Lynette Porter for a detailed account of the "netherworld" (7) of differences emerging through the play's shift from theatre stage to cinema screen. The focus is shifted even more emphatically to the two main actors and their interaction due to the filmic possibilities of close-up etc. and less emphasis on stage design and the surrounding room.

connects, in a material and literal fashion, what the story reports to the vitality of those receiving it.

Not only do the play's dialogues insist on general relationality, beyond and before concrete social attachments, as condition for meaningful (and hence individually bearable) existence: "All I ask is the *possibility* of love," the creature claims as it negotiates desperately for a mate, blaming its exclusion from social connectivity as such, less its lack of an actual companion, for its miserable state (Dear 42 [my emphasis]). Dear's and Boyle's *Frankenstein* also reinforces the negotiability of individual and communal spheres and spaces by other means. The play does not just talk about bodies, but it stages them in a particular way that actualises – rather than just indicating – their relevance to all socio-political framing, thus expanding theatre's general capacity for immediacy. It generates expression not only *from* but *from between* bodies. Dear's and Boyle's method of staging *Frankenstein* mobilises the potential of bodies for plural performative expressivity, or rather, it emphasises how the sphere of bodily performance exceeds the limits of the individual and thus interrogates our understanding of what constitutes individual agency.

It does, apparently, make a great difference in the concrete design of the performance(s) whether there are two bodies available rather than one for the main protagonist: "We couldn't do it eight shows a week, not the way we've decided to go about it," one of the actors explains. "It's given us licence to go about it in a slightly lunatic fashion" (Jury 3).[7] The play as a whole thus has an extended physicality at its disposal; one that is not, as would otherwise be the case, limited to the capacity of a single actor's body. Doubling the physical force behind the role changes the character that is going to appear on stage. Each actor can go beyond his usual physical and mental limits because he can draw from the energy the other actor has; what enables the play (or the performance as a whole) to take the shape it does, then, is precisely the fact that the body doesn't entirely "stay in its own place" (Butler, *Assembly* 149) – and neither

7 "'You come off stage with a cut on your lip, your wrists are bruised and you've just shed 5lb,' is how Cumberbatch describes it" (Hills 44).

does individual agency. Judith Butler points out that "whatever action we may be capable of is an action that is, as it were, already underway, not only or fully our action, but an action that is upon us already as we assume something called action in our name and for ourselves" (*Senses* 61). She draws this conclusion from a reflection on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that there is what he calls a "flesh of things" (*The Visible and the Invisible* 133) in the context of which individuals interact. Butler explains that this "flesh is not my flesh or yours, but neither is it some third thing. It is the name for a relation of proximity and of breaking up" (*Senses* 54). This explanation captures quite well the distribution of physical capacities – of energy, skills, and patterns of movement – that Boyle's staging of *Frankenstein* lives off: there is not directly a third actor, but there is a sphere of corporeality constituting itself which provides the play with an extra source of physical power and which fortifies but simultaneously disintegrates the respective individuals' bodies, as it detaches a number of 'signature movements' from them while *at the same time* underlining the idiosyncratic way of moving each individual actor-body has.

The play's first two scenes, for instance, in which the creature is 'born,' have little to distract the audience from the bare physicality of the main actor, who as the creature is going through the evidently painful process of experiencing his own body for the first time. The actual movements in and through which the respective performers convey what is happening differ, but at the same time, some moves are recognisably the same, for instance the flailing, seemingly 'electrocuted' arms right after the creature is birthed from an envelope of something translucent and skin-like, stretched on a round wooden frame. The same goes for some of the creature's postures in first trying to stand up. Other movements are identifiable as being the same form of movement but are executed differently (for instance the first careful steps the creature takes); and some techniques of depiction are radically different (one actor includes an imitation of bird cries that is entirely missing from the other's performance, for instance).[8] This oscillation between mergings

8 Something similar goes for make-up: the overall impression is the same, some 'signature marks' are the same, for instance the circular scar on the creature's

and demarcations of individual bodily spheres is precisely what invites us to compare the two actors. Rather than estranging us from the play and driving a wedge between the actors and their roles what switching the main cast does is, it seems, to invite further reflection on what the creature (or what Victor) 'is really like' and which actor does more justice to this real-ness.

Accordingly, reviewers' remarks, too, frequently refer to the creature and Victor as superordinate entities hovering, as it were, in the background of the play; debating whose actor's performance actually takes us closer to those beings. "In the centre of the Olivier theatre is a pale disc like an enormous seed pod [and] out of the pod rips a pink, blotched raw thing whose naked limbs have gone all wrong […]. On one night that thing is Jonny Lee Miller; on the next, it is Benedict Cumberbatch. […] And who acts best? Well, they sustain each other," is one description of the play's beginning, for instance (Clapp). Not only does the mentioning of sustenance support the impression that in addition to the energy the two actors' bodies provide as such, an additional sphere or source of physicality forms in and through the relation between them. The "pink, blotched raw thing" that Susannah Clapp talks about appears to exist before being impersonated by either actor, and at the same time to entirely dissolve into that performance, that is, this "thing" seems to precede the actors in her description, but also comes to be synonymous with them ("one night that thing is Jonny Lee Miller…"). "The first time round, it was the more intuitively 'natural' casting," another critic claims, with Cumberbatch "in cruelly distant, arrogantly self-involved boffin-mode as Frankenstein. […] Lee Miller takes us further into the feeling. The latter superbly communicates the Creature's aching need for contact" (Tay-

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head, but Cumberbatch's creature has, for instance, a few patches of hair on his skull, and Miller's doesn't. Such impressions, however, will by necessity have to remain vague to a certain degree: impressions that the screened version makes possible which the live version doesn't and vice versa; moreover, the screening of the second version uses slightly different filmic angles. Also, the press were privileged in being shown the two versions on alternate nights, but many regular theatregoers will have been unable to do that as the show was largely sold out.

lor). It seems quite ambivalent in this description whether it is the actor's characteristics that fit the protagonist depicted, or whether it is the protagonist's characteristics that fit the actor – whether the vulnerability is Miller's or the creature's, for instance, or whether there is a correspondence of vulnerabilities that is missing in the other version of the main cast.

The double cast for Boyle's *Frankenstein* is not a merely metaphorical exercise to emphasise the doppelgänger relation between monster and creator (even though that is certainly capitalised on, too). It constitutes, rather, an interpersonal encounter, in which Victor and the creature are taken quite seriously as participants. As Paul Rae puts it, the "critical and public recognition also underscores the inherent theatricality of the Creature as a creation. He presents a spectacle, and is at the same time very explicitly made up" which is why, Rae argues, he embodies theatrical production "in a single figure." Audience members are "[c]omplicit in his spectacularization" as well as "curious about his development" and hence "invited to conspire in making him up" (127).[9] I would in fact add that this conspiration doesn't happen on the level of the audience alone. Victor and the creature, as beings of fiction, are neither only the source, nor only the result of the performances we see but in fact both and in this, have the same status as the actors, who are made by the play and the protagonists as much as they make it and them. Victor, the creature, Miller, Cumberbatch, Miller-as-creature, Cumberbatch-as-creature, et cetera: it is not at all easy to draw the lines between those individual agents and at the same time, the synergies between them simultaneously help to sharpen their respective profile and recognisability.

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9 Paul Rae comments on the National Theatre's creature in relation to theatre in general as assemblage in the sense of Deleuze/Guattari, Bennett, and Latour: "Moreover, as the continuities between stage and auditorium at the opening of the NT's Frankenstein establishes, the Creature is not an isolated entity but a node in a wider network that combines the organic and the mechanical, the human and nonhuman, the vital and the inanimate. Once we recognize the evocative force of this figure we begin to see how widely it can be mobilized as an assemblage" (127). See Rae further for technical production details.

Such entanglement calls to mind Merleau-Ponty's 'medium of corporeality,' the aforementioned "flesh of things" in which and through which individual bodies exist and perceive. That flesh "is not matter," Merleau-Ponty explains in "The Intertwining," the last chapter in the unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*, "is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle" (139). This "general thing" becomes evident from the simple possibility of corporeal interaction: for "how does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship" (133).

It is certainly something of this kind that enables the dispersal of bodies in Boyle's *Frankenstein* staging, those free-floating distributions that are never to be taken hold of as such but keep arranging and re-arranging themselves in clusters of bodies, gestures, movement, and character traits. As in Merleau-Ponty's description, the interactivity and interrelatedness of the bodies on stage results, ultimately, not in their exchangeability or homogeneity, but in their distinctiveness. This "flesh of things" means a reciprocal enabling, of perceiver and perceived, to inhabit each other's being without collapsing into it, thus effecting both intense connection and an inside-outside-distinction, or, in Merleau-Ponty's words, an "identity without superposition" and a "difference without contradiction" (135–36). Both open and self-contained, the prominent bodies of the two actors in Boyle's *Frankenstein* display such an "identity without superposition" acquired by inhabiting a position of movement, speech, and overall existence defined as the position of Frankenstein's creature (respectively, of its creator) to the same degree as it is defined as the respective actor's position or style.

Ontology of Non-Self-Coincidence

Judith Butler perceives in Merleau-Ponty's ideas an opportunity to think relation through difference. She develops this reading, somewhat circuitously, through a deconstruction of Luce Irigaray's deconstruction of Merleau-Ponty's text as an example of "monologic masculinism" which, according to Irigaray, insists on appropriating the other, thus reducing the difference between self and other, and including everything in the "closed circuit of the subject" (Butler, *Senses* 154–55). But, as Butler points out, the terms change if one understands how "one's own separateness is *a function of* one's dependency on the Other" (*Senses* 160 [my emphasis]). If one does, then to be "intertwined" as Merleau-Ponty suggests one is in a "flesh of things" does not mean to see in the other only the self, two beings interchangeable for one another (a belief in interchangeability that Victor Frankenstein displays in Rose's film, as discussed earlier). Rather, it means to encounter in the other one's "own internal impossibility," the other who "constitutes [you] internally" (*Senses* 168). What this amounts to is an ontology of non-self-coincidence which, rather than putting forward a simplistic version of natural beings finding themselves discontent in civilisation, derives this non-coincidence precisely from the interplay, the necessary "intertwining" of physical affect, meaning-making, and time. As Butler puts it, "the hand that touches is not identical to the hand that is touched, even if it is the same hand, and this noncoincidence is a function of the temporally noncoincident ontology of the flesh" (*Senses* 169). According to Butler this "dynamic differentiation in proximity" (*Senses* 159) offers the opportunity to think connection and distinction between individuals "outside the binary trap of mothers and men" (166). Difference, in this understanding, opens a window of opportunity rather than closing off categories or beings from one another (without however for that reason ceasing to be difference).

Existing, moving, and speaking as Frankenstein's creature entails both great vulnerability and great vigour; an ambivalence Boyle's and Dear's play captures by combining physical skill with physical handicap into a counterintuitive mixture which conveys the sense that, as one reviewer puts it almost derisively, "it is as if they were St. Vi-

tus dancers performing a gavotte, and Touretters delivering tongue-twisters" (Clapp). There is, for example, one scene in which Victor attempts to trick his creature with a clever move, diverting his attention with a sweeping gesture of the arm so he can try to get at his throat with a knife – without success; yet when the creature repeats the same technique a while later, he turns out to be much better at it. Such scenes suggest a dexterity that is countered by the fact, for instance, that the creature isn't quite able to speak without a considerable amount of drooling and slobbering – as if the insides of his body refused to stay in. He delivers semantically challenging utterances (he finds it "infuriating" when somebody is "inconsistent" [Dear 42]) with the motoric methods of a two-year-old. Rae captures the overall impression well when he says that "[p]hysically and philosophically, [the creature] has been assembled against himself" (127). Dependency, openness and vulnerability combine with self-assertion and self-possession in Frankenstein's creature in general, and in Boyle's Frankenstein's creature in particular, as it is the product of a particularly emphatic joint corporeal action.

The "intercorporeal being" described by Merleau-Ponty, this "presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present" (143) has consequences, as Butler points out, for the notions of agency applicable in its context, for it complicates the allocations of the *source* of an action. This gives Butler reason to assume that agency is, in some sense, a form of community. The exchange of actors on the Olivier stage at the National Theatre demonstrates this in its own way. Whenever I act, Butler argues, I act as, in the name of, from out of my supporting – or, in fact, insufficient – infrastructural network. None of us can move without being granted appropriate space to move in; none of us can survive without being able to source sustenance from somewhere; and so on: "the body has to be understood […] in terms of its supporting network of relations" (*Assembly* 129). This includes organic and inorganic surroundings alike. We thus encounter a zone of differentiation, as in Merleau-Ponty's description, where it is "not altogether right to conceive of individual bodies as completely distinct from one another" but "neither are they blended into some amorphous social body." The body, "despite its clear

boundaries, or perhaps by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life *and action* possible" (*Assembly* 130 [my emphasis]). We therefore "have to be able to think," she argues, of

> *plural* action, presupposing a plurality of bodies who enact their convergent and divergent purposes in ways that fail to conform to a single kind of acting, or reduce to a single kind of claim. At issue for us will be the question of how politics changes when the idea of abstract rights vocally claimed by individuals gives way to a plurality of embodied actors who enact their claims, sometimes through language, sometimes not. (*Assembly* 157 [my emphasis])

What Butler calls "plural performativity" (*Assembly* 8) implies an understanding of agency which rejects the convention of one-to-one attributability – such that one clearly identifiable individual would be responsible for one clearly identifiable action. "Plural performativity" acknowledges that bodies are entangled with each other in their vulnerability, and that more generally individuals are, too, in their limitations of the physical, mental, and agential kind – that there is really no such thing as properly autonomous action. To appear where and in a manner in which one is not supposed to appear – as Frankenstein's creature inevitably always does – reveals that resistance and vulnerability, strength and dependency, are not actually opposites. In fact, as Butler points out, it is acting in spite of adverse circumstances ("under duress or in the name of duress") which signifies "persistence and resistance" (*Assembly* 23).[10]

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10 To claim this is not to deny that we do not often try – and are encouraged – to reject this vulnerability: "Of course, many people act as if they were not formed, and that is an interesting posture to behold. To posit that capacity to act as a fully independent feature of one's individuality (with no account of individuation) is to engage in a form of disavowal that seeks to wish away primary and enduring modes of dependency and interdependency […] Certain versions of the sovereign 'I' are supported by that denial, which means, of course, that they are thoroughly brittle" (Butler, *Senses* 8–9). There is an official discourse that does not acknowledge that "[a]cted on, I act still, but it is hardly this 'I' that

Re-evaluating agency in this manner in spite of the common pressure for self-sufficiency (as we saw it exerted, for instance, in Rose's *Frankenstein*) does not amount to a simple celebration of vulnerability (or permeability, or non-self-coincidence) but rather acknowledges its contradictory potential. The accessibility of the individual to its surroundings is as responsible for community as it is for isolation – "we cannot understand," as Butler puts it, "vulnerability outside of this conception of its constitutive relations to other humans, living processes, and inorganic conditions and vehicles for living" (*Assembly* 130). The performativity developing between bodies need not be to the benefit of (all) the bodies involved – as Dear's and Boyle's *Frankenstein* version certainly does not fail to point out, for instance when the creature emphasises that he always remains "the one who stands outside the door" (Dear 23). At the same time, however, the creature's loneliness and vulnerability is what draws the story's audiences in and, what is more, it is what brings audiences together. In particular when this double function of vulnerability translates itself into a theatrical performance, as in Boyle's and Dear's play, it emphasises how *Frankenstein* gives rise to a form of community which foregrounds the simultaneity, and reciprocal conditioning, of self-assertion and self-estrangement, pain and power.

Existence as Production

The "uneasy *and* promising relation" as which Butler describes (inter-)subjective experience (*Senses* 12 [my emphasis]) turns out to be a resource also for the experience of fiction – which isn't simply to say that the subject invents stories according to its own experience, but rather that there are aspects of existence which condition both what it means to live as individual subject, and what it means to live (in, with) fiction. For *Frankenstein* can be questioned for the sociality it engenders just as much as it can be examined in the terms of isolation, marginalisation,

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acts alone, and even though, or precisely because, it never quite gets done with being undone" (*Senses* 16).

oppression, injustice. Curiously, for instance, while Mary Shelley's own remark about her "hideous progeny" has become proverbial, the way she elaborates on her stance toward it often goes unmentioned: "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper," she says in the introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*: "I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone; and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more" (10). In a way, it seems absurd for Mary Shelley to claim that during any time of her turbulent young adult life (including the experiences of illegitimate pregnancy, early infant death, suicides in her extended family) death and grief were "but words" to her – and yet she does. Speculation on the motivations behind her statement aside: as such the words hint at precisely the oscillation of isolation and community that suffuses the *Frankenstein* complex, an oscillation or ambivalence where not only one can turn into the other at any given moment but also where quite frequently, one constitutes or appears as the other on another existential level.

For the creature's physiognomy, which emphasises the vulnerability of living organisms, is, on the one hand, the reason for its lack of social integration, but at the same time suggests its receptivity and susceptibility as being of fiction.[11] Incompleteness appears both as danger or

11 For historically/contextually specific readings of *Frankenstein* which read Shelley's novel in the context of ideas of sympathy around 1800 (most notably, Adam Smith's), see Clark or Britton. Significantly, as both Clark and Britton point out, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* insists on the factor of distance in sympathy – we never *quite* make it into another's shoes, and yet we feel for them. This simultaneous connection-and-distance between self and other (and even self and self) is equally relevant, I would like to argue, for the question of fiction as cooperative practice. Britton claims that "if sympathy in the novel can be said to fail because it is madly but fruitlessly pursued or disastrous in its results, it might alternatively be understood to succeed in that it leads […] to the textual production and narrative levels that structure the novel itself." Sympathy in *Frankenstein* "is manifested most reliably not in the imaginative space be-

threat as well as as motor, generative of vitality and social cohesion. The *Frankenstein* complex, in its curious productivity, shifts vulnerability into focus from subject matter, that is, from inner-diegetic concern, to existential circumstance connecting 'real' lives to those of fiction (the National Theatre's *Frankenstein* provides vivid example for this). The constant production of 'alive-ness' that the rewritings of *Frankenstein* demand actualises and performs this fundamental existential circumstance of vulnerability. The monster's deformity constitutes, in a somewhat twisted manner, its capacity for association and companionship: for what isolates the creature from its fellow protagonists is precisely what makes its audience follow its trajectory, makes it 'take up,' 'accompany,' 'interpret' and 'reprise' the creature, to pick up Bruno Latour's expressions (*Inquiry* 249; 242). This practice of following not only amounts to complex iterative, hence temporal expansions (as elaborated in Part Two), it also implies forms of sociality or association: if "listeners are gripped by a piece [here, of music, but Latour doesn't make much distinction between forms of art, nor in fact between art and fiction], it is not at all because they are projecting their own pathetic subjectivity on it; it is because the work demands that they […] become part of its *journey of instauration*" (Inquiry 241).

The creature's affliction, its experiences of abjection, thus license the joint progressive iteration that leads to a being of fiction's "continuous creation" (Latour, *Inquiry* 242). If beings of fiction have "*solicitudinary* existence"– an idea that Latour picks up from Étienne Souriau and his *Different Modes of Existence* (153) – then *Frankenstein*, specifically the creature, epitomises this condition. It exposes the fact that there is a general unfinishedness to all beings, an existential incompletion that is as unavoidable as it is necessary, and that provides the impulse for productive agency and interindividual association. Is this imperfection

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tween two individuals but rather in the textual space of the novelistic page." By "guiding the transition between media," sympathy thus generates the novel's "particular form – a written version of spoken tales" (3; 13). Beyond this specifically novelistic productivity, attention to the other is a core ingredient of the fictional process generally.

the bane (and privilege) of living beings? Is it at all a feature of beings, or isn't it much more a trait of existence itself? It is not at all self-evident, in the traditions of Western philosophy, that existence is a matter that can be subject to modulation, that beings do not exist – yes or no, but that they exist – more or less: "Is existence ever a piece of property that we possess? Is it not rather an objective and a hope? So much so that in response to the question, 'Does that being exist?,' it is prudent to admit that we can hardly respond in accordance with the Yes-No-couple, and that we must instead respond in accordance with that of the More and the Less," Souriau points out, claiming the "existential incompletion of every thing" ("Work-to-be-made" 220).[12] From this perspective, existence *is* production. Aesthetic production is not so much the description of this condition as it is its expression – its exposition, actualisation and performance. Accordingly, Souriau treats the 'work of art' in the conventional sense as one example, not as the only representative of the "instaurations" that found existence in different modes (*Modes of Existence*). This confirms, philosophically, what the National Theatre's double casting coup suggests artistically: that the struggles for autonomy and connection that we witness on stage cannot be reduced to a theme in the story.[13]

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12 This is contested philosophical ground: "Philosophy has always kept this question open," Souriau explains with reference to the decision of whether one wants to assume that "the 'to exist'" is "multiple, that is, not contained within the individuals in which it is actualized and invested, but rather contained in its types." Philosophical answers to this question, however, are "tendentious. For while they affirm, they also desire"; and thus quite frequently, "when we speak of being, the hope is to see it reign in numerical solicitude" (*Modes of Existence* 97).

13 Soriau distinguishes 'existence' and 'reality': "We will have to consider the specific factors of reality for each mode of the 'to exist'" (*Modes* 127). We must, he says, "identify and study those different planes, those different modes of existence, without which there would be no existence at all – no more than there would be pure Art without statues, paintings, symphonies, and poems. For art is all the arts. And existence is each of the modes of existence. Each mode is an art of existing unto itself" (*Modes* 131). The modes are the phenomenal ("As manifest in its existence as it is in its essence (the two being inseparable), it

Collaborative Agency

This state of affairs is the result of the plurality of modes of existence: any object, any being, Souriau argues, might be finished, 'there' and given from one perspective (that of the manufacturer, for example), but might still be on its way to 'becoming something' from another (that of, for example, the artist). And the most direct opportunity to experience entities as "work[s] to-be-made" is to put oneself in the position of producer:

> On their own, I can grasp neither the flat and simple experience of the physical […] thing without its halo of appeals for an accomplishment; nor the pure virtuality of that accomplishment without the confused givens that sketch it […] in the concrete. But in the experience of making, I grasp the gradual metamorphosis of the one into the other […]. Watching the work of the sculptor, I see how with each blow of the mallet and chisel, the statue, at first a work to-be-made, absolutely distinct from the block of marble, is gradually incarnated in that very marble. ("Work" 225)

Instauration, then, is a "drama of three characters" according to Souriau, in which the work to-be-made, "still virtual and in limbo," the work such as it is already present in the concrete, and the producing agent who

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may just be the manifest in itself. It is presence, a radiance, a given that cannot be repelled. It is and it claims to be just what it is" [*Modes* 133]); the réique ("the thing is defined and constituted by its identity across its diverse appearances" [*Modes* 140)]; the solicitudinary, concerning fiction and imagination; and the virtual ("an existence cut from the stuff of pure nothingness […] Is saying that a thing exists virtually, the same as saying that it does not exist? Not at all. But neither is it saying that the thing is possible. It is saying that some reality conditions it, without thereby including or positing it. […] The broken or newly begun arch of a bridge virtually outlines the missing section […] but completion – whether in representation, perception, or dream – is neither necessary, nor present" [*Modes* 156]). In addition to these modes, Souriau identifies a transcendent "surexistence" (187), evident through the fact that in referring to one another, the individual modes indicate the existence of something beyond themselves, a common horizon, as it were, which enables and conditions them.

has taken it "into his charge" to bring the two together, all have a role to play (Souriau's producer is therefore hardly a 'God the Potter' or a master imitator figure) ("Work" 229). If one steps in at the moment of unfinished-ness and relates to the work to-be-made, one enters into mutual questioning: the work is constantly demanding our decisions (what we are going to do next), and we are constantly wondering about the nature of the object we are completing, in order to figure out appropriate steps of action (which words to use in a text, which colours in a painting, and so on – or, as Victor Frankensteins might be wondering, which body parts to pick out or which DNA to programme). This is what makes the work to-be-made into a veritable "sphinx" that interrogates its creators: "And what are you going to do now? With what actions are you going to promote or deteriorate me?" ("Work" 229, 232). Precisely because of this "existential urgency," in facing a work to-be-made, we inevitably accept an "obligation" and a "responsibility" towards it that is not without its scary moments as we begin the "poignant progression through the shadows, in which we grope our way forward like someone climbing a mountain at night, always unsure if his foot is about to encounter an abyss" ("Work" 223, 229). Souriau's sphinxes – Latour's beings of fiction – and their interlocutors are involved in a scenario of collaborative agency in which producing and receiving, acting and suffering, coincide. The way in which the creature's cruel fate strengthens bonds as much as it destroys them mirrors this double value.

Arguing for a primary (both in the sense of basic, and of temporally prior) impressionability underlying the 'subject' as autonomous individual, Butler attributes to fiction a special capacity for exploring such susceptibilities and vulnerabilities: "Even if we cannot return to primary impressionability as an originary condition except through fantastic narrative turns, that is no reason to dispute its importance. It just affirms that we require forms of fiction to arrive at self-understanding and that verification cannot operate in the usual way in this domain" (*Senses* 16). In this analysis, stories figure as a method of contemplation and a source of information, allowing perspectives otherwise impossible to make us see (in the sense of understand) what otherwise remains obscured. Can we not take this claim one step further and assume that stories not only

tell us about but make us make active use of such 'occult' susceptibility as a resource for production? For they confront us, not only with the fact but also with all the intricacies of dependence and relationality as we are faced with the paradoxical responsibility that beings of fiction confer on us, as being self-determined and yet ours to create and keep alive: Latour says as much when he emphasises that imagination is not "the source but rather the *receptacle* of beings of fiction" and that beings of fiction both "impose themselves" *and* "need our *solicitude*" (*Inquiry* 246, 242). In other words, they require of us a *sensing* of what they are. Souriau describes this sensing at length but while he capitalises on the intellectual ambivalences and reciprocal address it involves, depicting the work as a sphinx with a riddle (the riddle of how to go about its instauration) that needs solving, he does not quite elaborate on the resources it draws from: beyond the capacities of thought, this sensing is an exchange that, as it concerns the stratum of physical co-existence, of affecting and being affected, from which the individual's sense of self emerges, is in fact immersed in vital practicalities and outside the scope of 'truth' ('truth,' that is, as name for a conceptual statement whose accordance with material circumstances I can check, and then affirm). Accordingly, whether the producer in fact has found a solution to the Sphinx's riddle cannot be induced or deduced but reveals itself only in practice, since beings of fiction direct our attention not "toward illusion, toward falsity, but toward what is fabricated, consistent, real" (*Inquiry* 238). Here, then, is the social consequence of the corporeal expressivity explored in Part One.

Frankenstein spells this out for its audience. Even where a *Frankenstein* story aims at effects of repulsion (or, sometimes, amusement) rather than sympathy, this is itself an operation on mechanisms of social attraction. Unavoidably, issues of affect and physical co-existence and co-dependence become ostentatious concerns even in the most slapstick of renderings – and even where Frankensteinian creatures do turn out "as beautiful," their physicality need nonetheless be marked as extraordinary, peculiar, vexing. These stories can address such concerns because they produce, existentially, precisely those relations which they contemplate discursively. If there is a truth to the riddle of *Frankenstein*, it is a truth of involvement – of involvement in a relationality that stands

both before and beyond judgement precisely because "verification cannot operate in the usual way in this domain." *Frankenstein* takes us into the space where those judgements that in everyday life appear as facts rather than as claims form in the first place: the distinction between self and other, the inhabitation of bodies and lives, the differentiation (if at all possible) between existence and becoming. Vulnerability, agency, the work of instauration is not similar between the creature and its audience, it is shared.

Strange Intimacies: Vulnerability and Liberation

Theodore Roszak's *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* (1995), and *Bride of Frankenstein* (Again)

Intimacy Inhibited

Feminist readings and rewritings of *Frankenstein* can be limited in their critical impact by a disregard for the idea that there might be such a thing as a general unfinishedness to all existents, a necessity for their continuing instauration, and a concomitant relatability to be valued in this. This can make for an unfortunate connection between feminist critique and a language of 'identities' such as Victor Frankenstein in Rose's film employs it. In much feminist criticism, the bodies in and around *Frankenstein* acquire relevance mostly in their role of being *subjected to* politics, shaped by and thus victim to power and hence indicators of a domination to be overcome. In this logic, individuals possess a vulnerability that, rather than native to the beings in question, is forced upon them under specific circumstances. Victor's misguided creative attempts, Gilbert and Gubar have famously claimed, mirror Shelley's "anxiety about her own aesthetic activity" (in her "alienated attic workshop of filthy creation she has given birth to a deformed book, a literary abortion or miscarriage" [233]). Simultaneously, Shelley is seen to reduplicate in Victor's creature, which is "himself as nameless as a woman is in patriarchal society, as nameless as unmarried, illegitimately pregnant Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin may have felt herself to be at the time she

wrote *Frankenstein*" (241). Vulnerability here figures as a specifically female problem ("femaleness [being] the gender definition of mothers and daughters, orphans and beggars, monsters and false creators" [232]). In a similar vein, Mary Poovey has argued that *Frankenstein* is born, essentially, from the clash between Romantic aesthetics (self-assertive) and prevalent ideals of femininity (self-effacing) in which Mary Shelley finds herself caught up.

In a more literal interpretation, Ellen Moers' famous early reading of *Frankenstein* as "Female Gothic" sees the story as "birth myth" (140) rooted in the female body and returning to the body in the end (due to its Gothic capacities to affect and scare). "[P]erhaps no literary work of any kind by a woman, better repays examination in the light of the sex of its author," Moers says. "*Frankenstein* seems to be distinctly a *woman's* mythmaking on the subject of birth because its emphasis is upon [...] the trauma of the afterbirth" (142) and thus expresses a sensitivity to the affective complexities of childbearing that was enabled, not least, by Mary Shelley's unusually chaotic and difficult private circumstances (148). Margaret Homans argues further that Victor Frankenstein's "circumvention of the maternal" expresses a problem with embodiment as such that is, essentially, oedipally conditioned – *Frankenstein*, she argues, effects a "literalization of male literature" (118) which spells out a manifestation of objects of desire as "necessarily imperfect yet independent" beings which can, inside oedipal frameworks, only seem "monstrous and alarming" (115).

What such readings implicitly suggest is that inconsistency or dissonance emerge *only* upon the occasion of the (female) writer's and/or the (female) body's entry into cultural, into symbolic order (in the literal sense of the word: the order of values and equivalences that in particular Rose's Victor relies on, where "you" can always be made again). This characterises the (female and/or natural and/or monstrous) body-subject simultaneously as self-evident and opaque – before and beyond this order, these readings assume, this body-subject 'just is,' unproblematically. Theodore Roszak's 1995 novel *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* presents a rather clumsy version of such critique in novel form, and thus illustrates its problematic implications quite well. The novel reconstructs *Frankenstein* as a story of repressed nature – inevitably gendered

female – which breaks free (if only for a while) in a telepathic merge of Elizabeth Lavenza and the creature, both marked as the animal opposition to Victor's technocratic dominion. The novel presents the journals of Elizabeth as edited by Robert Walton, which recount her childhood and youth in the Frankenstein household, where she and Victor become involved in the Baroness Frankenstein's strongly eroticised alchemical studies and ambitions. Victor's immoderate temperament and ambition have these erotic exercises end in the rape of his foster sister and fiancée. This occurrence causes him to retreat to Ingolstadt and embark on his fatal project of reanimation; and Elizabeth, in turn, to flee into the mountains to "become a feral woman" (284). The creature befriends his creator's companion and a telepathic bond develops between the two which, however, does not prevent Elizabeth from suffering a violent death at the creature's hands in the end. *Memoirs* clearly aims to be a feminist text and yet it is more in its shortcomings as such a text than in its overt agenda that it illustrates all the problems that identity politics hold not only, but decidedly in the context of feminist thinking.

The novel presents itself as advocate for nature, gender equality, and more communal forms of living, and yet it fails to give an adequate impression of those very things, that is, one that would in any way be vivid or dynamic. Intimate connection is a missed opportunity in and for *Memoirs*. This failure is itself instructive because it indirectly highlights the centrality of relation for narrative fiction, or, to put it differently: *Memoirs* ultimately leaves its readers waiting in vain for the very connection it purportedly works to establish. It reaches for a communal fictional experience – but infelicitously so; and what stands in the way, both in terms of plot and of poetic strategy, is a patriarchal politics of identity. Erin Manning confirms how "individuation has not been adequately thought […] because a sole form of equilibrium has been foregrounded that has privileged stability over metastability" (90). If we acknowledge dynamic individuation, however, Manning says, identity is exposed "as a moment in a process" (90) and "matter and form" in turn appear as "processual states" (87). The dangers of reifying identity, even if it is in the name of 'justice,' are precisely what manifests in and with Roszak's *Memoirs* even more than for instance in Rose's film

because the latter, unlike the novel, doesn't fool itself as to the validity of such identities. In the process, however, Roszak's novel also adumbrates a relational paradigm which is one of intimacy more than of identity, of relation more than recognition. *Memoirs* is unable to flesh out these politics of intimacy and yet it contains traces of them.[1]

Feral Woman

Again and again, Roszak's novel applies itself to a critique of the oppression of 'female nature' by 'male technology and science.' The novel's heroine is emphatically associated with the natural world, which she takes refuge in after being raped by Victor – or what the novel takes to be the 'natural world' in its stark oppositions of science and domestic environments versus alpine landscape, mystic knowledge, and female pagan rituals. Mixing a rather crude eco-feminism into Elizabeth's personal recollection of trauma, the passages depicting her flight into the wild equate Elizabeth's body with the animal and vegetable world,

1 Nancy Fraser's rather laconic phrasing seems to have lost none of its actuality: "Ironically, […] the identity model serves as a vehicle for misrecognition: in reifying group identity, it ends up obscuring the politics of cultural identification" (112). One might, of course, find some of the feminist issues I rehearse here and in the following self-evident. Then again, very little seems self-evident about feminism at a time when Dior is selling T-shirts prompting us all to be feminists at 620 Euros per piece. – Manning, in turn, is making a more general philosophical point by relying on Gilbert Simondon's work. Simondon grasps the problem of individuation by substituting the traditional matter-form-dichotomy and -asymmetry by the concept of the in-formation of a metastable field: originating from a structural core, form is not so much imposed on matter but spreads progressively, one element affecting the next, in a field that, by virtue of not being stabilised and thus possessing a certain tension or energy, is able to manifest, bit by bit, the form 'transduced' (as Simondon calls it) by the core. Effectively, Simondon modifies Platonic and Aristotelian ideas of archetype and hylemorphism into an energetics of form. This is, as Simondon claims, a model for the genesis of living creatures as much as for social structure ("Form, Information, Potentiale").

thus strengthening the impression that the Frankensteinian enterprise is a veritable crime against nature. This crime is attributed to a male-dominated practice of science which deludes itself that it is superior to the world which it studies, thus turning objectivity into objectification. "I have heard that the Cartesian philosophers perform dissections upon live specimens," Elizabeth contextualises her experiences of violence, equating science and rape, "dismissing their cries of anguish as merely 'mechanical' twinge. […] I have heard they nail cats and dogs to the boards and cut them and beat them to study their response. I know how these poor creatures suffer; I have tasted their humiliation. I have been that beast nailed to the wall" (285).

Her life in the wild is presented as the opposite of scientific objectivity/objectification, as she dissolves into and merges with, or lives in continuation of, her surroundings: "I live more and more like the beasts in the immediacy of my experience, letting necessity determine my schedule. I wake and sleep as fatigue dictates; I lie down wherever I please and eat as appetite decrees […]. I give no names to things […]. Adam named the animals in Eden. *Adam*. Not Eve." She has become "the feral woman, the female child of Nature" (286–87). During this time in the wild, her experiences are reported in diary form – in contrast to the tidy and retrospective journal form in which the bulk of the text is presented. This period of Elizabeth's life radicalises what has earlier in the novel been captured as ritualised female interaction with nature, for instance in Elizabeth's initiation into the local women's secret community – which consists in a ritual taking place at night in the woods and involves a group of naked women, drums, chants, a stone altar, two sacred daggers, bodies moving "with the elemental flowing" (108) and, of course, a rising moon.

Roszak's novel diagnoses in its source material an undercurrent demanding exposure and explication – the "bold, hauntingly erotic retelling of *Frankenstein*," the "shocking tale that Mary Shelley dared not write," is what the book's cover announces – and this undercurrent is made out to be not simply 'the female side of things' but likewise a less segregated form of co-existence. Alchemy, in Roszak's text, is easily readable as symbolising this existential unity – "it is the *oneness* that matters," alchemical teacher Seraphina explains about her work at some

point (216), which puts her into sharp contrast to the disaffected male observers in the novel who are involved in mainstream science. At one point, the air pump experiment mentioned only in passing in Shelley's novel is depicted at length and turns into a veritable killing spree as more and more animals are put under the glass dome (187–89). Where Victor is fascinated, Elizabeth and Baroness Caroline Frankenstein are horrified. Lady Caroline's and Seraphina's alchemical training of Victor and Elizabeth, in contrast, seems to follow an agenda of sexual liberation as well as liberation from language as representational means of communication, for instance when Victor is made to meditate on Elizabeth's naked body until it seems to Elizabeth that she "know[s] his desire from inside his own thoughts" and Victor reports "I was both you and myself" (198).[2]

Into the stark dichotomy that it sets up – of civilisation, science, technology (male) versus nature and the natural body (female) – the novel, towards its end, inserts Frankenstein's creature itself. The monster turns up at Belrive where Elizabeth is waiting for Victor's return

2 Hughes comments on alchemy in relation to Shelley's text: "if we see the dark occult processes of alchemy as standing in for the other dialectical moment of Enlightenment [which is] its antisocial atomism and privatisation of knowledge in the service of capital – my analysis still holds. This points to the constraints that individual interest places on reason under capitalism, where reason is instrumental and not practiced consensually […]. It is not so much alchemy that is denounced, [in *Frankenstein*,] as that darkness within modern science itself that works against the human liberty that this very same knowledge may enable. This darkness is made visible in the novel through Frankenstein's refusal to grant rights to his creation and his secretive possessiveness over knowledge" (12–3). Roszak, for his part, clearly isn't ashamed to make assumptions: "I have long felt that the *Frankenstein* Mary most wanted to offer the world lies hidden in an under-story that only Elizabeth could have written. […] In placing an alchemical romance at the center of the novel, Mary Shelley was delving deeper into the psychological foundations of Western science than she may have consciously realized. In her own time, she could not have known the more exotic sources of alchemy; but her intuitive insight into what alchemy reveals about the sexual politics of science has proven to be astonishingly correct," is what Roszak explains in his "Author's Note" preceding the text (vii-viii).

(after forgiving him for the rape and the ensuing miscarriage she has suffered). As in other versions of *Frankenstein*, the creature has taken to calling itself Adam. Elizabeth overcomes her initial apprehension at his appearance and the two begin "an acquaintanceship more astonishing than any [she] might have imagined" (381), even though the (to her) mysterious stranger initially behaves "like some savage who had never learnt that conversation is the natural intercourse between people" (381). His eyes "have no hint of humanity to them. Rather, they are the eyes of a beast, staring with a blank, predatory curiosity" (378). Savage, predatory, animal-like – here and elsewhere the creature is associated with the wilderness that Elizabeth has fled to before. In time, the two need fewer and fewer spoken words to communicate. The extent to which communication is displaced toward another, apparently more intimate level is demonstrated in a scene in which the creature lets Elizabeth know the secret of his origin:

> "You have asked who I am," he says at last. "I cannot find the words. But there are other ways to speak." […] He reaches out his hand to take mine. […] I am startled to feel the blood race to the roots of my hair. Not with fear. The contact is strangely rousing: daring, dangerous, and intimate – like touching a lion's paw. […] [A] bell-like vibration echoes in my ears, so near that it makes me dizzy. […] My vision blurs as if I had grown drunk. The room spins; the walls vanish; I am in another place, dark, dank, and noisome. (392–93)

In a nightmarish vision, the creature makes Elizabeth witness Victor working on his secret experiments. "[M]y mind melts into his," is how she describes these moments of telepathic sharing (403). They mirror the earlier scenes in which Victor and Elizabeth experience mergings of mind and body during their alchemical experiments. In both cases, the communal experiences depicted remain ambivalent – the alchemical experiments turn into rape; the creature's touch remains "odious" (394) and will likewise, at the end of the novel, become violent. This stands in contrast to the perfect union Elizabeth is depicted to have experienced during her time in the wild.

Thus interference remains in many ways a male business in the logic of the novel, and surrender a female one (Elizabeth finds herself "lying weak and shivering against Adam's breast" after their shared vision [394]). The novel deals in contrasts in (dis-)connection: spoken dialogue vs. mind-reading, well-behaved journal vs. scribbled diary, the divided world of science vs. the unified world of nature. Yet ultimately, many of the images of connection and intimacy that the text comes up with – the aforementioned full-moon initiation, for instance – have something ready-made about them. This stock-image quality counters the overt ambition of the novel – to reveal the 'true Elizabeth' in her immediate connection to her peers and natural/animal companions, including Adam – and complements the containing efforts of fictional editor Robert Walton. For the most part, the text is unable to come up with an imaginary of interpersonal connection that goes beyond well-established clichés, to the point where the characters whose true story we are supposed to learn remain hidden behind their stereotypes. The novel's failure to stage the failure of patriarchal order in any complexity is something like a double exposure of the problem of intimacy in the context of identities and essences (such as 'female nature'). Patriarchal order fails in the novel; and yet the novel likewise fails in its ostentatious critical ambition because its glorification of authenticity ultimately overrides any awareness that identity might be, at best, as Manning puts it, a "moment in a process."

All this is linked to the problem of connectivity as problem of writing (or editorial) practice; and finds its end in Elizabeth's lasting silence: her death. It is fictional editor Walton who becomes the voice of patriarchal bafflement whenever intimacy – including the intimacy of following somebody's life story – is required. *Memoirs*' ambition to be a novel of disclosure, and its eventual failure to achieve this, with Robert Walton being the figure of this failure, in combination manifest the whole dilemma of a politics that searches for 'truthfulness' where it cannot leave behind preformed identities. It shows *Memoirs* as a novel on the brink: the attempt to deconstruct objectification and 'tell things as they were' yields itself either stereotypes (the liberation of bodies in nightly rituals in the woods, under a full moon) or silence: the mediation through a prejudiced

editor which makes it impossible to tell whether we're actually learning the 'naked truth' about Elizabeth. There's no genuine imaginary of intimacy available for the novel. Recognition constantly slides into appropriation – either patriarchal appropriation on the part of the protagonists; or identitarian appropriaton on the part of the novel.

Walton's editing appears as deliberate showcase of misogynist prejudice. Worrying about a portrait of Elizabeth in his possession and how it does not show any indication of Elizabeth's sexual preferences, such as they are expressed in her text, Robert Walton asks, in one of the "Editor's Notes" inserted into the text (*Memoirs* 101–3): "Was it possible, I found myself speculating, that the cultivation of self-possession and high intelligence in woman must always risk the moral degeneracy that led to Elizabeth Frankenstein's undoing?" He is prompted to make this remark by two things: an unflattering self-description by Elizabeth in her journal, which he (ironically) wants to substitute by a "less subjective image," and a detailed investigation on his part of Elizabeth's physique – which betrays the erotic interest it does not voice actively, and which it then displaces into a patronising reflection on 'how to foster women's intellectual development without endangering their morals.' For according to Walton, the portrait shows Elizabeth as "a strikingly lovely woman in her late adolescence," with a "vividly memorable refinement to the face – the cheekbones high, the chin proud, the lips full." Her eyes are "frank and penetrating" and there is "no hint of virginal timidity in the gaze, but rather a vivacity of expression that bespeaks high intelligence and an enquiring mind untypical of her sex." Her "throat and shoulders match the delicacy of the visage, as does the tautness of the young bosom. I could not, indeed, cast my eye upon that fragile throat without ruminating morbidly upon how easily it was crushed in the hands that stopped this lady's life; that act could have been no more difficult than snapping the bones of a songbird." This is hardly the objective, disinterested description Walton promises the reader – "I will confess that this portrait occasioned great unease during my research," he admits. "Since my studies of these papers began, this captivating portrait has been before me constantly, displayed upon the desk where now I write. Not a day has passed but I have scrutinised it yet again, seeking to elicit the true character that

lay hidden beneath the chaste surface." The portrait captivates him, yet it is displayed before him for his scrutiny: who is subject, who object during the editing of Elizabeth's memoirs? Walton saves himself by retreating to the paternal position of the protector of female virtue.

Here and elsewhere, editor Walton presents himself as problematic mediator between Elizabeth and her readers, inhibiting precisely the impulse of disclosure or revelation that the novel is premised on. He oscillates between well-meaning but deluded and downright misogynist and in any case, he is clearly unreliable. Not only does he make clear, from the start, that he regards Elizabeth's involvement in the alchemical-slash-tantric exercises she describes as a sign of "female degeneracy" (xvi) – without voicing comparable worry regarding Victor's morals – and the alchemical texts the group are working from as "frankly obscene" and full of "sexual perversions" (163). He also admits right away in his editorial preface to Elizabeth's memoirs that he left out parts of Victor's narration in his first *Frankenstein* edition – namely, anything to do with alchemy, since it could have been, after all, "no more than the guilty rantings of a dying soul" (xv). Therefore, whenever editorial notes or footnotes appear as the text proceeds – where, for instance, Walton explains that he has only reproduced those parts of the letters, drawings, diary fragments included in Elizabeth's journal "whose meaning was reasonably certain" (260) or where he declares that passages "were illegible and so have been omitted" (283) – readers are invited to doubt Walton's judgment and left to wonder whether they are actually reading Elizabeth's account as she did set it down herself, or whether Walton's prejudices didn't get the better of him. Voyeuristic desire, the ambition to set the record straight, a tendency to take recourse to established identities rather than establishing personal connection: the novel as a whole and its fictional editor Walton have quite a lot in common.

On the face of it, the text might seem to present intimacy as the truth behind and a potential relief from objectification and hierarchy; and yet, ultimately, intimacy remains a problem more than a solution for the novel. The change between orderly journal and more vivid, immediate diary format as well as the allusions to Elizabeth's actual, physical writing practice (for instance the "smudged" entries in her diary

during her "feral" time [283]) allows for a certain play with Elizabeth's presence, at some points seemingly shifting her closer to her audience; and yet because we are always reminded that there is an unreliable editor at work on these documents, the barriers through which Elizabeth speaks to us – standard language, journal form, her own collocation of documents and then most importantly, Walton's editing, on top of it all – are held up, even consolidated. It is logical but also telling that Walton, as the barrier between readers and Elizabeth Frankenstein, always makes himself heard in connection with more immediate marks left by Elizabeth's writing practice than those of a standardised alphabet allow: crumpled pages, wild drawings, anything hinting at affect not containable by 'proper' writing tends to elicit a commenting footnote from Walton, as if to remind the audience that they are dealing with an account twice removed from its groundings in experience. The erotic descriptions with which the novel abounds might *refer* to intimacy and connection; and yet if anything, it is the struggle we witness that brings us close to the *practice* of it: the struggle between intimate connection and editorial/scientific regimes of objectivity, but also the struggle of intimacy against its own clichéd depiction.

The ghostly narrative presence of Elizabeth, at odds with the text's agenda of disclosure and unveiling, is mirrored in the equally obscure death at Adam's hands that the story has in store for her. Adam's animal nature appears to demand the removal of interpersonal barriers: "I have learnt that his eyes, like those of an animal, are deprived of human expression," Elizabeth describes her companion. "They can but gaze blankly. And as with the beasts, one feels the greater pity, knowing their feeling must be locked away. If he hurts, one must feel the hurt with him; it will not show outwardly. If he sorrows, one must feel the sorrow; there will be no tears. What I feel now in his presence is an unbearable anguish" (395). She literally feels what the creature feels. Both in these encounters with the creature as well as in Elizabeth's time in the wild, the novel seems to project an alternative to conventional sociality. Appropriately, her acquaintanceship with Adam, too, is reported in the more immediate, personal diary rather than in journal form. In some ways, then, Roszak's story presents a vision of living together in which no one is a

specimen anymore because the position of observer, of (in the sense of the word) the *man* of science and letters, is abolished. The way in which Elizabeth and the creature – both marked as 'natural' beings – participate in each other's experiences and thoughts allows for no such objective/objectifying detachment and disengagement, nor does it allow for representational modes of communication.

And yet such "radical sociability" (as Bill Hughes attests to Shelley's novel [14]) has limits in Roszak's story, even beyond Walton's editorial interference. The immediacy the creature shares with Elizabeth does not prevent him from exerting the same patriarchal violence he has himself been subjected to (and is the product of). "My mind is like some dumb machine that can but mimic your mental habits," the creature explains to Elizabeth at one point. "I know less than a peasant child who understands what it means to laugh and to weep. I have never laughed, nor can I shed tears. But there are things great Nature herself teaches, primitive truth the same everywhere for all beings. 'An eye shall be taken for an eye, a tooth shall be taken for a tooth.' This I understand. This is the justice of the beast" (396).

It is from remarks such as this one that Elizabeth understands that her death will be the revenge for Victor breaking his promise to produce a female companion for Adam, that she is the pawn in a struggle between creator and creature. She does not struggle against this fate, though. The novel ends with her resignedly preparing for death in her bridal chamber. Nature thus sacrifices nature (Adam sacrifices Elizabeth, that is) in the "iron balance" that the creature says he adheres to (396). He marks his justice as natural and yet, one is tempted to correct him, 'an eye for an eye' is a decidedly human rule.

Elizabeth – her writing practice, her mental and bodily life – remains a shadowy outline that we project simply because we know Walton is not giving us the truth; because we know that the truth of things lies somewhere between and beyond Elizabeth's lines and her editor's interference. The novel appears to conclude that non-segregated existence, free communion with nature and one another, is a vision, speculation, unavailable – as of now, at least – to direct experience. Where the creature transforms into a veritable parasite, cast out yet feeding from both or-

ders, the 'natural' as well as the 'scientific' one, Elizabeth remains representative of an alternative; she cannot be the status quo. The resignation with which she accepts her death as collateral damage seems only to speak to this. This might serve to emphasise the rigid, inflexible, and oppressive nature of 'male science,' which suffocates more 'natural' ways of being. Killing off Elizabeth is, in some sense, quite simply realistic. Yet there is also a self-effacing streak in this fictional character that it is not easily reconciled with the agenda of liberation that the novel clearly sets itself. It is not only that she forgives Victor for the rape, a fact that we might or might not find plausible depending on how we read the original occurrence, as well as how sympathetic we decide to be with Victor and how he ends up suffering from the chaos he has caused. There is also the somewhat unexplained readiness with which Elizabeth sacrifices herself into a marriage that she knows to be doomed: "Father's declining health lends his request [that Elizabeth and Victor be married] the urgency of a dying man's last wish. I quickly resign myself to accepting the marriage as inevitable; toward this end my life flows as surely as the streams run from the mountains to the sea" (412) is all the explanation that we get. That she lets herself be shut in on Victor's orders into the marriage chamber at the inn at Evian even though she seems to be perfectly aware that she will meet her death there appears the ultimate symbol for her willingness to self-sacrifice.[3]

These contradictions; Walton's editorial interferences; the fact that the alchemical union manifests itself as an act of rape; the fact that the creature with its 'mind-merging' powers of clairvoyance and telepathy ultimately kills the "female child of Nature" Elizabeth: on all levels, intimacy and interpersonal connection remain a problem in *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. There is, on top of it all, something appropriative in the implicit voyeurism of the novel's basic premise – presenting the

3 "[G]arment by garment, I let my streaming clothes fall from me and lie at my feet until I stand naked in the centre of the room," Elizabeth's diary reports. "I stare long at the canopied bed that fills most of the chamber. I think: […] *I shall lie upon this bed like the sacrificial lamb awaiting the expiatory stroke. And I shall not rise to see the light of day again*" (419).

"bold, hauntingly erotic retelling of *Frankenstein*," the "shocking tale that Mary Shelley dared not write": here we have feminine mystery revealed. Doesn't this repeat the same baffled, pseudo-objective inquisition into 'female nature,' minus the moralisations, that editor Walton is preoccupied with, and doesn't this then keep the protagonist of the book in the position of being an object of study?[4] The novel seems caught up, then, in a curious position between opposing demands: the urge to depict interindividual connection without the interference and distancing effect of 'objective' identities; and the inability to spell this out in any but the terms licensed by the very symbolic order that it sets out to attack.

A More Cryptic Feminist Text

It seems that canonical feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* finds itself before some of the very same stumbling blocks over which Roszak's novel so gracelessly trips, and recognises the need to ward off a certain essentialism: To "leave the question […] with an easy recourse to the female signature or to female being, is either to beg it or to biologize it," Mary Jacobus says (138).[5] Nancy Armstrong has argued that "at the heart of the new [read: 1980's] feminist criticism, then, one finds the familiar theme

4 For comparison: *Penny Dreadful*, as discussed in Part Two, goes about this in a less one-sided manner. We are certainly prompted to reject the chauvinistic attitude displayed by Victor; but then again, Lily is a sufficiently ambivalent character and Victor is sufficiently helpless to make for a certain balance between the two.

5 Of course, this in some ways quite simply harks back to an old – and arguably unsolved – feminist problem, put succinctly by Joan Wallach Scott: "Feminism was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate 'sexual difference' in politics, but it had to make its claim on behalf of 'women' (who were discursively produced through 'sexual difference'). To the extent that it acted for 'women,' feminism produced the 'sexual difference' it sought to eliminate. This paradox – the need both to accept *and* to refuse 'sexual difference' – was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement throughout its long history" (3–4).

of 'individual vs. society' […]. Like the maiden and harlot, such opposites cooperate to authorize a single notion of the self" and obfuscate the fact that "it is finally 'language' that produces the self, normal or deviant, rather than the other way around" (1254–56). Some readings derive a distinctively queer effect from such inquiries into the productions of self. Halberstam insists that critics generally don't acknowledge how radical the monster's hybridity is, as they fail to see that Shelley's creature expresses "the potentiality of any one form of othering to become another" (30). Bette London argues that there is, in fact, a "circulation of the position of monstrosity" in the story, a "destabiliz[ation of] the sexual hierarchies that underwrite the novel's meaning, making the *male* body the site of an ineradicable materiality. Yet the discomposing presence of that body remains the thing most resistant to critical insight; […] it is preeminently visible but persistently unseen, consigned to modern oblivion" (255). It is because male anxieties are staged "*across* the female body [my emphasis]," and because *Frankenstein* criticism is no different in this regard – hence its fixation on "authority and bodily limits" – that *Frankenstein* comes to appear as being about *female* vulnerability (256).[6]

Beyond questions of (to bring the debate down to an admittedly much simplifying formula) 'essentialism vs. constructivism,' or 'male vs. female vulnerability,' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has remarked – even at the heyday of feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* – that whatever interpretation we go for, there remains something weird about *Frankenstein* as a feminist text: "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [is] a text of nascent feminism that remains cryptic, I think, simply because it does not speak the language of feminist individualism which we have come to hail as the language of high feminism within English literature" (254). In other words, according to Spivak *Frankenstein*'s critique of oppression and marginalisation does not presuppose the position of 'woman in society' as a given – nor does it, strictly speaking, illustrate the production of

6 In that regard, it is quite telling that it is the male and monstrous body that is assembled according to the conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet ("the representation of the loved one as a composite of details, a collection of parts": the straight black lips, the flowing black hair, the pearly white teeth [London 261]).

women as subjects, through language or otherwise. It is less specific and more ambivalent than that:

> Frankenstein is not a battleground of male and female individualism articulated in terms of sexual reproduction (family and female) and social subject-production (race and male). That binary opposition is undone in Victor Frankenstein's laboratory – an artificial womb where both projects are undertaken simultaneously, though the terms are never openly spelled out[,]

as Spivak explains (254–55). "[M]asculine and feminine individualists are hence reversed and displaced" (256) – individualism in general, I would add, is destabilised, and yet not rejected pointblank. "Shelley differentiates the Other, works at the Caliban/Ariel distinction," showing that "the absolutely Other cannot be selfed," until "distinctions of human individuality themselves seem to fall away from the novel" (257–58). They fall away, however, not in favour of an unlimited intimacy[7] but in favour of forms of companionship or community which rely on the limits of the individual as much as they work at their deconstruction. Rose's film shows the tragic consequences of subordinating life to a static individual form in the bitter fate it envisions for the creature. Roszak's novel, curiously ambivalent, grapples with those limits and their status, alternately criticising and re-inscribing them. The somewhat crude quality of Roszak's adaptation might, in this sense, result precisely from the fact that the novel insists on translating *Frankenstein* into a "language of feminist individualism" that *Frankenstein* doesn't actually speak.

Vulnerability and Imagination

A critique specifically of female circumstances is in no way an illegitimate reading of *Frankenstein*. And yet – as Spivak, too, points out – there is a certain tendency, among such readings, to position their critique at a point where vital forces have already been formed into categorised

7 A phrase I appropriate from Tim Dean's thus-titled book.

life. It is worthwhile, therefore, to focus more closely on how vital forces and political agency interact both beyond and before identifiable, categorizable personhood. This is a matter of gender, but not exclusively so. In Manning's understanding, for example, the question of gender(ing) addresses precisely the issue of individuation, of the formation of vital energies into (metastable) identities – and vice versa, individuation is at stake in all processes of (en)gender(ing). ('Gender,' as Manning points out, is etymologically related to 'generate.' "To engender is to undertake a reworking of form [and] to potentialize matter" [90].) A problematic politics of gender is, in this understanding – and as Spivak suggests as well – a problematic politics of self. "In positing gender as a principle of strict differentiation, form is placed unto matter in a way that calls forth a complete individual rather than an individuation" (Manning 93). If we acknowledge, however, that (en)genderings are "contingent on the environments through which they individuate" (98) and that "within engendering is a virtual form" (92), the field widens. Gender, specifically, and the self, more generally, become "equal to [their] emergence," processes not only of defining and limiting but also of enabling (89).

This approach implies a re-evaluation of vulnerability, of the permeability of individuals which, however, can never be naïvely affirmative. Vulnerability needs to be, as Judith Butler elaborates (for instance in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*), acknowledged as both the source of and an obstacle to political agency, both produced by power and the condition of resistance to it; a feature of individuality possessing, as it were, two sides or aspects which both, moreover, concern interindividual relations as much as they concern the intraindividual entanglement of mind with matter, the organic with the symbolic, the natural with the cultural. Such inter- and "intra-actions" between the political and the physical, such back-and-forth between strength and vulnerability, keep playing across the body of Frankenstein's creature in its various incarnations and draw into question any implications, in criticism or fiction, that vulnerability would concern only culture, only the symbolic, and be absent from 'natural' existence.[8] Alongside

8 "Intra-actions" is the term Karen Barad coins in her *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

the expressivity of physical depth that we see in the marked-ness of the creature and its role for plot (Part One), alongside the forces of procreation through repetition (Part Two), there is a striking source of power to be found in vulnerability so that the individual ultimately comes to appear as self-possessed in its openness, more than in its self-containment; and this latter factor, too, sits at the heart of the workings of narrative fiction and can be seen with extraordinary clarity in the *Frankenstein* complex.

The notion of an unfinished- or openness as constitutive not only of gendered (Manning), but of individuated existence in general (Butler, Souriau) firmly dispels any ideas of self-contained, autonomous individuals – without, for that matter, dissolving the individual entirely in relationality or affect. The outlines of individuals become something more akin to border zones, sites of negotiating between inside and outside, me and not-me. How does this reframe what we have come to accept as, so to speak, the labour division behind stories, where one person gets to tell, and the other gets to listen? Being authors or audiences turns out to be not so much a predetermined feature of individuals but a situational modification of the existences which individuals inhabit.[9] While the manifestation and shape of fiction certainly depends on the sensitivities, interests, skills, knowledge, and so forth, of the producers and recipients involved, the source and trigger of such activities is ultimately the *encounter* of producers, recipients, and beings of fiction, rather than their respective individual predispositions; a collaboration even across ontological divides (Souriau's "drama of three characters"). It is a meeting, an approaching (or, in fact, a failure to approach) that supports the idea that the beings of fiction themselves (Victor, for instance, or the monster) have a say in the matter.

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9 Although of course, all kinds of factors can determine the respective sensitivities of different individuals to different encounters – the point is not to promote the egalitarian distribution of 'talent' but to argue for acknowledging the contribution of more factors than that of individual predisposition to the emergence of works of fiction.

"It is quite true that the work depends on its receiver, but the notion of imagination does not account very well for this dependency," Latour argues (*Inquiry* 246); by which he means to say that even if we abandon the 'intention of the author/artist' as decisive criterion for making sense of a work of art or fiction, the solution lies not in bestowing all the authority on the reader, or audience. Rather, acknowledging the *distribution* of agency in the paradigm of fiction means to allow, conceptually, for a complex mutual engendering of creators, works, and audiences. None of the three instances appears *as such* (*as* creator, work, or audience, that is) without the other two involved. It is not only that beings of fiction depend on our investment even while they dictate, in part, its form; it is also that 'author' and 'audience' are, in turn, forms of self shaped by the works themselves. "A work of art *engages* us," Latour insists,

> and if it is quite true that it has to be interpreted, at no point do we have the feeling that we are free to do 'whatever we want' with it. If the work needs a *subjective* interpretation, it is in a very special sense of the adjective: we are *subject* to it, or rather we *win* our subjectivity through it. Someone who says 'I love Bach' becomes in part a subject capable of loving that music […]. If the interpretations of a work diverge so much, it is not at all because the constraints of reality and truth have been 'suspended' but because the work must possess many folds, engender many partial subjectivities [.] (*Inquiry* 241)

Accordingly, Latour argues that whenever we have been "dispatched" by fiction (into "another space, another time, another figure or character or atmosphere or reality" [*Inquiry* 246–47]), we

> have surely not been dispatched thanks to the flesh-and-blood author, who doesn't know very well what she has done and who, as a good artist, may lie like a rug about her own identity. And to whom is she addressing herself? Certainly not to 'me,' here, now, but to someone, a function, a position, that varies with each work, with each detail of the work, and that in no way pre-exists her – a function or position that I agree to fill and occupy, or not. Here is a second level, situated *beneath* the work, that begins to shape both a virtual sender and a vir-

> tual receiver – speakers and addressees inscribed within the folds of the work. (*Inquiry* 247)

James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* zooms in on precisely such encounters and inscriptions. "Imagine yourselves standing by the wreckage of the mill," Mary Shelley tells us as the images from the frame story, in which she passes the evening with telling the story to Percy and Byron, blend over into the images from the 'story proper.' Her words thus provide a sound bridge, that is, an actual route of access whose spatial quality is emphasised further by the fact that Mary raises her arm into the vague direction of 'out there' while we move 'into' her story.[10] This blending of images and sounds draws out the process of "dispatch" ("[m]usic begins, a text is read, a drawing sketched out and 'there we go'" [Latour, *Inquiry* 246]). It emphasises how

> as soon as the raw materials begin to vibrate toward forms or figures that cannot, however, be detached from them, and toward whose peculiarities they never cease to refer, two new levels are immediately generated, the one ahead of, beyond, what is expressed, level n+1, and the other, beneath, behind, but also ahead, level n-1, that of the virtual addressee. It is through this double movement of sending ahead and pulling back that the world populates itself with other stories, other places, other actors, and that the possible positions of actor, creator, and subject appear. (*Inquiry* 248)

The figural and the iterative, hence temporal dimensions of fiction thus open up the field of subjectivity in a way particular to (narrative) fiction – in a way, that is, that reveals this field to be the field of vulnerability and relationality and the field of individuality and power in equal parts. Such magnifying as we find in Whale's *Bride* film offers up the process of the ascription of subjectivities as Latour describes it for closer inspection, revealing how such ascriptions depend on and shift in relation to the roles we ascribe to the other actors involved in the process: Mary Shelley

10 Ann Marie Adams has provided a detailed analysis of this sound bridge and other filmic-technical detail of the film.

appears as author, Byron and Percy Shelley appear as her audience in the introductory scenes to Whale's film – in relation to the main film and the story it tells. Simultaneously, though, the Shelleys and Byron are fictional impersonations, and their authors and audience are we, who are watching the film now, the filmmakers, as well as whoever has watched the film before and will watch it in the future. Whale's film showcases relationality by zooming in on the act of following a story (across a sound bridge, in the direction of Mary Shelley's outstretched arm, to 'out there'). This work is indeed "folded" (to use Latour's expression), as the story is triggered not once, but twice: once in and by the beginning of the movie (possibly the darkening of the theatre space and the opening curtain, figures appearing on the darkened screen, the opening credits, the opening score, the first dialogue, …), and then another time by Mary Shelley saying: "Imagine yourselves standing by the wreckage of the mill" while the living room scene blends over into the inner diegetic setting. Such "folding" multiplies not only the stories told by the film but also the subjective or self-positionings (as producer, participant, recipient) that the film licenses. The morphing of images and sounds happening on-screen, one half fading out and the other fading in, with Mary raising her arm in the 'direction' of the plot – to 'where the story is' – draws attention to the "double movement of sending ahead and pulling back" that positions individuals as speakers or listeners, creators or audience, or, in fact, the beings of fiction themselves.

Double Casting II

This facilitates another perspective on the self-estrangement that feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* puts so much emphasis on; it helps to translate this estrangement into a constitutive strangeness, a more native vulnerability that holds as much danger for the individual as it holds the chance for liberation. Mary, in the beginning of the film, can be positioned both as creator (and thus, in a sense, also audience) of the story of the main film; and as being a protagonist (a being of fiction) herself. She is both representative of a historical person, and an ostentatious fiction-

alisation of that person; the latter circumstance becoming all the more tangible when the actress playing Mary Shelley, Elsa Lanchester, reappears as the female creature at the end of the film. Unlike the male creature, played by Boris Karloff in his (in)famous make-up, the female creature that Victor fashions in *Bride of Frankenstein* is monstrous mostly in terms of hairstyle. Her face is clearly recognisable as Lanchester's face – and thus as that of Mary Shelley earlier in the film. While her costume has been changed to a white dress looking like a mixture of hospital gown and wedding dress, a scar along her jawline is the only visible trace of surgery on her. Even though her manner is, of course, decidedly transformed – from domestic creature, suggestive undertones to her angelic appearance notwithstanding, to jerky head movements which make her appear rather like a bird of prey – her facial features remain unchanged, are emphasised, even, in a series of close-ups comparable to those in which Karloff's face is presented in the 1931 film and at the beginning of this one (*Bride of Frankenstein* 01:07:16-09:15). Does this double casting – which is not altogether different from that in Dear's and Boyle's stage play – tie actor and role, 'bodily material' and figure closer together, or does it foreground the artificial, contingent nature of this connection? To put it differently: does the Bride become more 'real' through being incorporated by the same actress who also plays Shelley – or does Shelley become less real through being incorporated by the same actress as the Bride?[11]

The final scenes of the film establish further parallels to the beginning, besides Lanchester's appearance: the Bride ends up positioned between Frankenstein and the creature on a sofa precisely as Mary was positioned earlier between Percy and Byron. A case can even be made for further framing strategies employed: mid-film, the ominous Dr. Pretorius presents his research to a reluctant Frankenstein, promoting a cooperation between the two of them. His accomplishments consist in a number of comic miniature half-automata that he keeps in glass tubes, where they make funny sounds and seem quite absorbed in their own

11 As is Karloff's, the Bride actress's identity is only given as "…?" in the end credits of the film.

world. He has succeeded at, as he puts it, growing – rather than forming – his creatures "as nature does, from seed" (00:20:15-23:28): this is clearly a film about female creation (women's creative output as well as women *as* creative output), and inserting Pretorius' presentation in the middle of it foreshadows what is to come in a miniature – and, in many ways, queer – version. All in all, the film thus quite frequently puts the audience in a superordinate position, at one remove from sharing the involvement of the protagonists: not only do various exclamations of "It's alive" appeal to the audience's recollection of Whale's earlier film. The figure of Pretorius, moreover, plays with the gap between the perspective of the protagonists and the knowledge of the audience – for instance when he fools Frankenstein with regard to the source of the female body on which they are working. He claims that she is the victim of an accident whose body his assistant Karl has stolen from a hospital – the lie is obvious to the audience, but Frankenstein seems oblivious to it (and also, rather willing to believe). "There are always accidental deaths occurring," Frankenstein muses, and Pretorius, in mock regret, echoes: "Always…" (00:50:36-56:40).[12]

There is, to say the least, more than one layer to the story that *Bride of Frankenstein* tells, and all the tongue-in-cheek allusions, parodistic repetitions, and foreshadowing emphasise that point in addition to the double casting and introductory scenes. The latter in particular work to establish a metaleptic frame which – depending on which perspective one takes – either has (the historical) Mary Shelley 'jump into' the diegesis, or the monstrous Bride jump out of it. This oscillation of status not only shows that the various subjective positions surrounding a story can only be attributed relationally. In making the same actress appear both as storyteller and as object of the plot (the film is *about* the bride of Franken-

12 Over the course of the film, Pretorius also claims two different things (gin and cigars) to be his only weakness. The glee with which Pretorius generally goes about his business throughout the film makes him appear too cunning for proper self-delusion, so that one must assume that the two contradictory claims are made on purpose – which leaves the audience as the only possible addressee for whatever the message is that is conveyed in that way.

stein, after all), the film prevents us from understanding such subjectivities as unitary, as stable one-to-one unit of individual and role. The subjectivities offered are not only mobile but also split or at least layered as one actress covers two roles – where Dear and Boyle's *Frankenstein* seems to expand individual spheres, Whale's film seems rather to partition them, inserting a certain amount of alterity, of leeway, as it were, where 'normally' we would slip easily into the positions of author or audience offered to us by a story.

Address and Response

Criticism has long since identified this split as specific feature of *Frankenstein* and its production context. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, have claimed that

> the madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be. (78)

They interpret the creature as a "female in disguise" and point out the parallels between the monster's and Mary Shelley's situation and thus declare Shelley's novel a manifestation of self-estrangement. Critics investigating Whale's film have pointed out that this motif repeats itself in the double casting of Elsa Lanchester as Mary and as Bride: "Whale and his scriptwriters and Gilbert and Gubar" choose a "common symbolic mechanism – the doubling of the demure author with a fictive monster." Whale's film "literally envision[s] the female writer as a decorous woman who expresses her 'unfeminine' feelings of passion and rage in a wild creation that is a dark picture of herself," Ann Marie Adams claims (409–10).

Such readings emphasise the influence of external demands on individuals (of demureness, proper conduct, and so on), which ultimately exert such pressure that some aspects of those individuals break or split off and are, for instance, sourced out into the image of a nameless monster. These readings thus depend on the assumption not only that "no one transcends the matrix of relations that gives rise to the subject" but that "it might be that the constituting relations have a certain pattern of breakage in them, that they actually constitute and break us at the same time" (Butler, *Senses* 8–9). There is a certain perversity to this captivity because it implies that we depend, in both positive and negative, enhancing and restrictive ways, on what possesses the power to destroy us ("What does it mean," Butler therefore asks, "to require what breaks you?" [*Senses* 9]). It might well be that Frankenstein's creature in general expresses precisely this perversity of fundamental relationality: in its capacity as being of fiction, that is, as a being receptive and demanding of subjective investment, but a monstrous being nonetheless.

Such captivity, however, simultaneously constitutes a specific capacity – it is, as mentioned earlier, "uneasy *and* promising" (Butler). It is not only a restriction in being but also a potential for action – an aspect that deserves more attention than it receives in a reading such as Adams' or Gilbert's and Gubar's. Where the National Theatre's *Frankenstein* brings to the fore the relational nature of being and action – of being-in-action, if you like – *Bride* helps to further clarify the ethical consequences, but also the ethical potential, of the coincidence of production and reception. After all, the necessity to behave toward something enables in some ways also the ability to respond to it. That is, the "encounter with a world I never chose," the "involuntary exposure to otherness as the condition of relationality," not only sub-jects the individual but provides it with its ethical capacity. If "the ethical describes a structure of address," what is addressed is not simply the individual, but the individual in its capacity as respondent:

> What follows it that form of relationality that we might call 'ethical': a certain demand or obligation impinges upon me, and the response relies on my capacity to affirm this having been acted on, formed into

> one who can respond to this or that call. Aesthetic relationality also follows: something impresses itself upon me, and I develop impressions that cannot be fully separated from what acts on me. (Butler, *Senses* 12)

If *Bride of Frankenstein*, then, takes its cue from an explicit scene of address ("Would you like to hear what happened after that?", "Imagine yourselves standing…"), it also posits structures of response – and these responses in turn are as much active (I respond) as passive (I am made to respond by what "impresses" on me).

Bride splits the position of its "virtual sender" (Latour) – there is the material-imaginary dynamic, the cooperation of lights and sound, that constitutes the overall beginning of the movie and that projects its own source; and there is the iteration of that very moment roughly five minutes later, when Mary directs viewers into the main body of the film (an imaginary that also Whale's first *Frankenstein* film plays with by having producer Carl Laemmle appear on a theatre stage with an unraised curtain). This double projection of sender positions, in particular in combination with the double casting of Elsa Lanchester, makes for a heightened multiplicity and optionality of viewpoints that inserts into each possible position – as sender, receiver, or indeed as being of fiction – a certain strangeness to itself (which might, not least, be a crucial factor in the overall campiness of the movie). Is this split necessarily a torturous one, provoked by unfavourable sociocultural demands – on, for instance, as classical feminist readings suggest, women in general, and women authors in particular?

And further, how does this multiplicity and strangeness play itself out on the other side of the equation, that is, for the position of the "virtual receiver" (Latour) that is projected at the same moment and by the same dynamic that the "virtual sender" is posited? What happens when a work, as *Bride of Frankenstein* does, offers the position of receiver to me by virtue of being a work of fiction – and then offers it to me (the 'virtual-receiver-me') *again*, by fictionalising and integrating authorial practice? Senders and receivers are then not only virtualised, but 'doubly virtualised' through the narrative frame: they accompany themselves, as it

were, as they follow the story. Beyond – or rather, before – the self-reflection that might result from such a split, there is keeping yourself company: the possibility, supported emphatically by *Bride of Frankenstein*, that individuals-as-recipients invest in their own investment, and thus, in a sense, react to their own fragility in the way they react to the beings of fiction, who impose "such fragility, such responsibility," who are so "eager to be able to continue to exist through the 'we' whom they help to figure" (Latour, *Inquiry* 249). Such 'self-company' is in no sense an escape from or the rejection, through indulgence, of self-critique; it is even, strictly speaking, self-critique's precondition, allowing, as it does, the deconstruction of identities without forcing their dissolution. It thus not only supports a general critique of an identity politics of equivalence (according to which individual, body, and position or role are supposedly all in stable congruence), it also emphasises the double value of individuality, which acquires meaning in relation to both isolation *and* community, vulnerability *and* agency. The creature's peculiar existence consists in the manifestation of this double value: damaged from one perspective, unfinished from the other.

Both Strange and Familiar

"Imagine yourselves" (…standing by the wreckage of the mill): what does the filmic Mary Shelley invite her audience to do at the beginning of Whale's film? Isn't it, in some sense, an invitation to make "use" of oneself quite in the sense that Agamben understands the term – that is, a relation which acknowledges 'inappropriability,' but where this acknowledgment doesn't preclude intimacy, or privacy? "We can call 'intimacy' use-of-oneself as relation with an inappropriable," Agamben says.

> Whether it is a matter of bodily life in all its aspects […] or of the special presence-absence to ourselves that we live in moments of solitude, that of which we have an experience of intimacy is our being held in relation with an inappropriable zone of non-consciousness. Here famil-

> iarity with self reaches an intensity all the more extreme and jealous insofar as it is no way translated into anything that we could master. (*Use of Bodies* 91–2)

Plausibly, following a story – a practice showcased in its unique characteristics by such stagings as Whale's filmic frame – offers quite such moments of "presence-absence" to oneself where alienation or distance from and knowledge or experience of self work together; and it is plausible, also, to assume that it does precisely because of the characteristics of the encounter which it facilitates: encounters where agency and suffering are re-organised and where agency is, fundamentally, collective and/or collaborative.[13]

A familiarity that for all its familiarity we can nevertheless not master: isn't this what life 'as we know it' becomes when it expresses itself as fiction? Individual being doesn't side with either solitary essence or singular occurrence, to use terms brought up earlier in relation to Rose's film and Roszak's novel, but is rather in the continuous passing from solitary essence into singular occurrence, and in this passing exhausts

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13 One of the most vicious methods at the availability of sovereign power is the appropriation of this intimacy. "Against this attempt […] it is necessary to remember that intimacy can preserve its political meaning only on condition that it remains inappropriable. *What is common is never a property but only the inappropriable*. The sharing of this inappropriable is love," Agamben insists (93). In relation to Agamben's concept of use, see also Roberto del Valle Alcalá's highly illuminative reading of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. He argues that the novel stages both the drama of the Western division of life into its bare (*zoe*) and its biopolitical (*bios*) aspect, and a possible exit strategy from these restrictions in terms of use and inoperativity. The creature's monstrosity, specifically, "signifies that operation whereby the possibility of an inseparable *zoe*, as irreducible process and potentiality, is forcibly inscribed with incompleteness, with lack of form, and hence, with the attributes of bare life." Monstrosity is thus precisely "not a fact internal to the creature's life" which, however, has nonetheless been forcefully injected into that very life (622). Incidentally, I find this a useful argument for calling the creature 'monstrous' in spite of the scruples we might harbour to continue applying such a disastrous label. 'Monstrous' about the creature is precisely the fact that he is *continuously made to embody* this inscription, and cannot escape from it.

itself, again and again, continuously on the verge between strange and familiar. Might not this just be why it is hard for us to get fiction (or life, for that matter) *right* – not because there is an essence to be expressed correctly (as in conventional ideas of 'self-realisation'), but because there is a passage to be secured, and a balance to be upheld? In that sense, the communicative matrix of fiction offers a particularly productive estrangement of senders and receivers from themselves.

What comes through here is, once again, the implications of understanding existence as modal, which is as relevant for Latour's "anthropology of the moderns" as it is for Agamben's concept of use; which can be connected to Merleau-Ponty's "differentiation in proximity" (Butler) and Butler's internally impossible subject; and is nowhere as visible, as Souriau points out, as in the instaurations of art and fiction. Agamben captures the logic of 'mode' in an accessible metaphor when he says: "We are accustomed to think in a *substantival* mode, while mode has a constitutively *adverbial* nature, it expresses not 'what' but 'how' being is" (*Use of Bodies* 164). And since 'hows,' contrary to 'whats,' never stop evolving, modal being implicates a necessary, constitutive, and continual shift of beings against themselves. This meeting of strangeness and familiarity is precisely what Agamben captures in the concept of use. "In a modal ontology, being uses-itself, that is to say, it constitutes, expresses, and loves itself in the affection that it receives from its own modifications" (*Use* 165).

In Latour's "anthropology," this implication of a modal ontology becomes particularly clear when he discusses subjective interiority, and the making thereof. For "the continuity of self," too, "is not ensured by its authentic and, as it were, native core, but by its capacity to let itself be carried along, carried away, by forces capable at every moment of shattering it or, on the contrary, of installing themselves in it." (The name that Latour gives to this mode in which subjectivity exists is "metamorphosis" [196]). "This does not mean," Latour qualifies, "that subjects lack cavities, but that any such must always be *dug out* by an effort of mining" (188). The self, then, "is no longer a madman who talks to himself in search of authenticity: one speaks to that self, it answers, it has an apparatus at its

disposal" for its own instauration and continuation (194). It keeps itself company.

A modal ontology, then, is an ontology of alteration, where being yourself is being not yourself but holding together, anyway; where any one thing holds together only by going through processes of changing and becoming something else. Crucially, a modal ontology is an ontology that has its own ethics. In fact, ontology and ethics do not figure as separate domains anymore but rather meet on a "threshold of indifference": just as "in ethics character (*ethos*) expresses the irreducible being-thus of an individual, so also in ontology, what is in question is the 'as' of being, the mode in which substance is its modifications" (Agamben, *Use* 172). If the 'how' of being is at stake with being in every instance, then 'living' and 'living well' become one and the same question.

As the National Theatre's *Frankenstein* and also Whale's *Bride* film have illustrated: being-as-modification confounds distinctions between agency and passion, between the part that does something and the part that something is done to (in Agamben's words, it implies "the immanence [...] of the passive in the active" [*Use* 166]). Likewise, it confounds distinctions between the familiar and the strange, locating one in the other. The ethical implication of this – in general, but in particular for fiction as mode of existence – is one of non-appropriation. The practice of fiction is a reflection on freedom, though not quite in the way that we may think: not because fiction makes me 'forget myself' or 'forget reality for a while,' but because beneath this impression of forgetting lies the obscure intuition that is was never a question of 'having myself' to begin with, and that consequentially, it can never be a question of 'having' the other, either. If there is a way to 'have myself,' it lies precisely in the capacity to bear alteration without dissolving, which is not only what we mean when we give somebody the advice to 'own' something (a character flaw, an embarrassing habit), but also what we do when we follow stories. Ultimately, the ethical implication is that there is, strictly speaking, no 'pure' ethics of stories, just as a 'pure' ontology of stories cannot be written. One will always and inevitably cross over into the other.

Genuine Transformations

Such alteration can of course be impeded. This is what happens, according to Agamben's biopolitical framework, if living beings are split into a politically relevant part, a personal essence, the part able to govern, and a core of 'mere life,' a part that can be governed but is never allowed to properly feed into the form of the political individual. Keeping the passage open, however, would lead being-otherwise (being strange, multiple, inappropriable) and being-inalienable to coincide in a given individualised existence, pre-empting the segregation of individuals and attributes that, for instance, Rose's Victor attempts, and beyond which Roszak's novel cannot move. This, as I read it, is what Agamben means to suggest by distinguishing between forms of life and forms-of-life. The "concept of life," Agamben says, "will not be truly thought as long as the biopolitical machine, which has always already captured it within itself by means of a series of divisions and articulations, has not been deactivated. Until then, bare life will weigh on Western politics like an obscure and impenetrable sacral residue" (*Use* 203).[14] Where 'life' has come to designate "the bare common presupposition that it is always possible to isolate in each of the innumerable forms of life," that is, where terminological distinctions between *bios* and *zoe* disappear and the term 'life' becomes, for the most part, congruous with the latter, form-of-life in turn indicates a 'unity of equals' between the two: "with the term *form-of-life*, by contrast, we understand a life that can never be separated from

14 Although a closer investigation of the issue goes beyond the scope of the discussion here, it is worth mentioning Butler's critique of Agamben's notion of bare life: "[O]f course, we need a language to describe that status of unacceptable exposure, but we have to be careful that the language we use does not further deprive such populations of all forms of agency and resistance" (*Assembly* 79–80). Then again, the very restrictedness of our means of expression when it comes to finding such a language confirms precisely Agamben's point (that unless the biopolitical machine is deactivated, the concept of life will not be truly thought. The expression "Frankenstein's monster," by the way, is a case in point. We have no other name for it).

its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate and keep distinct something like a bare life" (*Use* 207).

Arne de Boever has engaged, in his *Narrative Care*, with Agamben's biopolitics in the context of a theory of the novel which includes the potential of a care of self. De Boever argues that biopolitics and the novel are connected not only through historical origin but through the practice of managing (governing, writing – caring for or taking care of) lives and that therefore, the novel offers a properly differentiated critique of biopolitics, one which allows us to see that one and the same instrument or technique (for instance of the welfare state) might turn out beneficial in one circumstance, and detrimental in the next (hence de Boever's use of the concept of *pharmakon*). Much of his analysis clashes with understanding fiction as cooperative practice and mode of existence, even though some of the questions that keep turning up in his examination of contemporary novels could just as well have been inspired by the *Frankenstein* complex (and indeed, *Frankenstein* keeps turning up in *Narrative Care*): "How to explain the liveliness of [a literary character's] life, the fact that one cares about characters, sometimes more so than about real people, in spite of the fact that they are not real (as we know very well…)? What questions for ethics and politics does the aesthetic being of the character pose?" (*Narrative Care* 47).

I would disagree, for instance, with de Boever's reading that the lives of literary characters have something of encamped life about them, in the sense that they are bare life manipulated into pure political relevance: "Indeed, do not readers […] to a certain extent expect that every gesture or detail of a character's life, including the way he or she dresses or even walks, has a precise meaning, and is caught in a series of functions and effects that can be meticulously studied?" de Boever asks. "Is this not how we tend to read novels – in the expectation that everything that is present on the page ultimately adds up to a meaningful whole?" (71). I would much rather link the lives of literary characters and generally beings of fiction to the idea of a form-of-life and argue that everything about them seems significant precisely because they do not allow the reduction of political life into bare life or vice versa: from the "scission between man and citizen," Agamben argues,

> there follows that [scission] between bare life, ultimate and opaque bearer of sovereignty, and the multiple forms of life abstractly recodified into juridical-social identities (voter, employee, journalist, student, but also HIV-positive, transvestite, porn star, senior citizen, parent, woman), which all rest on the former. […] A political life, which is to say, one oriented toward the idea of happiness and cohering in a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from emancipation from this scission. (*Use* 209–10)

Foregrounding this concept changes de Boever's argument that in the novel, "the author's law coincides to the letter with the lives of the individuals being described," and that this is what links the novel and the camp in their modernity (69). Souriau, for instance, (and Latour, too), while they do not concern themselves with anything so detailed as a theory of literary characters (or even a suggestion as to what such a theory could look like), both insist that "works" or "beings of fiction" (and "beings of fiction" plausibly include, as one of their most important manifestations, literary characters) are created cooperatively, in an instauration. This view on creative practice as cooperative (involving producers, beings of fiction, and recipients) doesn't go very well with seeing something of the camp in the novel. It seems to me that it is rather that Agamben's idea of a form-of-life – open, but impossible to empty out –, if combined with the idea of beings of fiction as agents involved in an instauration, helps to contradict this notion of an author scripting (to borrow an expression from de Boever) a quasi-encamped character's life. In other words, it is not only that the (lives of the) individuals in a story express the author's law, the author's law also expresses (the lives of) the individuals, and *this* is the reason why everything about those individuals and their stories is potentially significant.

Still, the suggestion that de Boever works his way toward through a reading of Agamben actually supports what I have been suggesting regarding fictional opportunities for keeping ourselves company. De Boever suggests that part of the solution might lie in developing an "art of living," a form of living that pre-empts a "bare life, where life has become separated from art and one is attempting to demonstrate the

worth of one's life through something that is exterior to it" (83–4). For forms-of-life, being-otherwise becomes an inalienable trait of the individual which is 'just so,' which sets against any bare life trying to prove its value through something exterior the practice of a transformation that is always genuine. Isn't something of this kind made to count when Whale's Mary Shelley asks us to "imagine ourselves" standing as witness to the creature's demise in the burning mill? Frankenstein's creature, certainly, in its long career and throughout its countless transformations in Western culture, is never itself and yet is never anything but itself – is never the essential, true, and proper Monster and yet is always true to the monster as which it is fabricated in any given incarnation. There are no 'true' and 'less true' versions of it – unless one wants to establish a hierarchy of authority from Shelley's novel to whatever the latest adaptation happens to be. And yet, not every fictional creature can, at random, achieve consistency and presence – as Latour would put it, "hold together" (*Inquiry* 245) – as Frankenstein's creature.[15] There is a right and wrong in this, and yet it's not the right and wrong of truth judgements. It is a right and wrong of making, of transformation, of passage.

15 This play of, not only strangeness in the familiar but also, importantly, the familiar in the strange might ultimately even help make sense of the monster's various commodifications into cuteness: however monstrous, it is never *quite* a stranger to us.

Part Three: Coda

At the end of *Bride of Frankenstein*, all glitches in the system, all friendless outsiders, queer bystanders, and monstrous female animals are disposed of, through those monsters' own acknowledgment of the proper order, and that they have no place in it: "We belong dead," the creature says and, ordering Frankenstein to leave the tower with Elizabeth, pulls the lever that will make the building explode. The soon to be happy-ever-after couple looks on as the tower with its "workshop of filthy creation" crashes to the ground – the scene is clean. Or so it seems: eternal leftover that it is, the creature will, for the 1939 sequel *Son of Frankenstein*, crawl out of this rubble as it did out of the remains of the burning mill from Whale's 1931 film.

Wherever it is part of a *Frankenstein* story, the creature's suicide has a disturbing tendency to remain either un-committed or un-successful. Shelley's novel famously ends with the creature announcing that he will kill himself, and then vanishing "in darkness and distance" (Shelley 191). Rose's film ends by suggesting that the creature will survive his self-built funeral pyre. Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* has the creature blow up the roof over his head, and yet this only puts him into a coma. There's something terribly desolate to the thought that in spite of his best efforts, the creature fails to kill himself. Those efforts are, after all, the creature's reaction to the realisation that he will never be granted what he so absolutely requires (a minimum of social connection), that his existence is absurd because it cannot move beyond existential frustration. There is something supremely pointless to the creature's survival, which is nowhere more aptly represented than in Shelley's ending – which is

not even an ending properly speaking but rather consists in the story fading out in a dim arctic vastness. All things considered, we can only imagine the creature's post-suicide existence to continue rather like the flat line on an ECG monitor that nobody has made the effort to switch off.

What do we make of such bleakness? Do we read it as the sad and superfluous byproduct of the regime of biopower and symbolic-material bifurcation, a shred of aliveness of which the question of living well can indeed not sensibly be asked? Or is it an example for life taking on a life of its own, against the control, logic, and wish of a governing consciousness?[1] The creature's 'failed' suicide seems to constitute a double negation of the existential kind – the refusal of the creature's refusal to live on. What, if anything, is affirmed in this double negation? Again, here is a parallel between the creature's life and the dynamics of fiction that suggests that both are conditioned by, the 'offspring' of, broader existential conditions. Because a similar question applies to fiction: does fiction exemplify what living practice could be, even should be, if it weren't for the forcibly imposed coordinates of our existence – ideology, patriarchy, property, sovereignty, …, in one word, appropriation? Or is it a form of relief conditioned precisely by the lack those regimes impose, and therefore unthinkable without them? Is fiction an escape *from* symbolic order, or an escape *within* symbolic order? Is it even an escape at all?

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1 Judith Butler, by the way, through a juxtaposition of Spinoza's perseverance in being and Freud's death drive, comes to the conclusion that the desire to live is precisely the desire to exceed ourselves and that what we need is not a reduction of this desire to keep us 'safe,' but precisely an environment which recognises this desire for what it is – partly destructive – and allows it to play out as the community-producing force that it is. "What I have been exploring," she says, "is a set of approaches to ethics that honor desire without collapsing into the egomaniacal defense of what is one's own, of ownership, and that honor the death drive without letting it emerge as violence to oneself or to another. These are the makings of an *ethics under pressure*, one that would be constituted as a struggle and one that has 'anxiety,' rather than conviction as its condition" (*Senses* 85).

To Conclude

"Love Your Monsters"

The creature's indefinitely postponed or stubbornly ineffective suicide leaves us with a curiously bipartite moment that, on the face of it, resists my efforts, over the last six chapters, to present an understanding of stories that integrates what stories say with what stories do, of specifying the 'organic' connection between *how* they exist and *that* they exist, of elevating the correspondence between theme and practice from mere coincidence into a genuine cohesion. For the desolate, bitter non-end of the creature's life on the one hand and our obvious enjoyment of it, attested by the continuing popularity of *Frankenstein* and the way we, as it were, 'force' the creature to survive, on the other, no such genuine cohesion appears plausible. The bitterness and the enjoyment, the content of the story and the form of its reception, our pleasure and the creature's radical un-pleasure, appear irreconcilable except through an essentially subjective-anthropological argument (such that we pity the creature, or experience catharsis in his downfall, or simply select some parts of the story as enjoyable and therefore are willing to bear with others).

A related problem has already appeared in the last section, in the seeming contradiction between the creature's painful isolation and the company we, as audience, keep him in that isolation; and I have tried to integrate the two through an understanding of self and other that regards the two as oscillations in the process of being rather than as mutually exclusive states. This allows for the thought that the creature's isolation and our fellowship with him, rather than being stark opposites, do in fact cohere through more than an abstract form of compassion – a cohesion that is genuine though not, in a conventional sense, causal.

Is something similar possible for, not only the company that we keep with the creature, but also our enjoyment of its desolate fate? And why is this at all important? It is important, I would argue, because the scenario I have sketched so far might otherwise appear to leave no room for a form of pleasure routinely, and for good reason, associated with stories; which is, in the widest sense, a pleasure of escape and loss, connected to ideas such as, for instance, that stories are a relief from the seriousness of everyday existence, or a realm of freedom where no statement is ultimately binding. The peculiar relief through loss that stories enable – escaping 'into the world of [insert your favourite story here]' and forgetting yourself for a while – seems quite indebted to the idea that stories are mere fictional add-ons to reality, experiments in the what-if, immaterial products of the imagination. In that sense, when it comes to the question of the pleasure of fiction – of fiction, specifically, not so much the broader aesthetic question of the pleasure of art – one comes back quite quickly to the factor of non-referentiality, and to the idea that there is, one the one hand, a 'full' reality (full of, basically, matter), and on the other hand, a hollow imaginary realm, lacking substance.

However, my investigation seems to march quite firmly in the other direction. In a sense, I have been pursuing the claim that stories are, not so much *non*-referential, but more precisely, non-*referential*. Being an operation on the dynamics of the material and the symbolic (a practice of FIGURATION, that is), stories join in the differential going-on of existence (its REPETITIONS) and prompt a reconfiguration of singularity and alterity. Stories, in less abstract words, entangle bodies (and other stuff) with words, sameness with difference, one being with another; they work in and through the passage from one to the other, they even facilitate that passage. It is not enough – though seemingly an obvious claim – to say that *Frankenstein* is a text chasing after a body which, in its gruesomeness, exceeds the means of description available. For this insistent deviance of the creature's body is at the same time the wellspring of the story and prompts everything that is said about it, even though it cannot be captured by any of it. The *Frankenstein* complex would not exist, not simply without this body, but would more specifically not exist without its constant organic divergence. This divergence is thus situated not only

between the body and the words we find *for* it, but inside the body and the words we find *with* it. *Frankenstein* therefore works as indication that fiction does not pretend signification, as is routinely claimed, but that it rather showcases signification's 'bare bones': the existential productivity of matter-form-interaction. This stands square against any ideological obfuscation of the madeness of meaning. If a text such as Rose's 2015 splatter version of *Frankenstein* refuses to present a naturalised, pure, and unfragmented narrative voice, it suggests quite insistently that meaning cannot simply be plucked from the world but that its articulation and transmission everywhere requires work and transformative processing.

In order for this not to become an indirectly positivist claim – by tacitly positing a standard, a normality that such divergence diverges from – it is necessary to understand such difference as existential, non-categorical difference (the founding accident of being, as it were). The creature can never be subsumed into any term that would pre-exist it. This is a trademark obstinacy of narrative creatures and events – for why else tell stories about them, if everything is already said? And yet, one need also take into account that the singularity or difference in question can never be attributed one-sidedly either to those creatures (or events), or to the story that relates them. To say that the narrative renders special whatever it reports, while not untrue, is not enough said; but likewise is it insufficient to claim that only what is special in itself will generate a story. Rather, it is the productivity of difference itself that enables creature and story alike. Therefore, when a sequel such as Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* resurrects the creature with a specific narrative gesture – claiming that the end of the previous film, and therefore the monster's death "was not the end at all" – this gesture is enabled by the peculiarity of the creature as much as it can be said to 'bring the creature to life.'

All this suggests that stories, in fact, might not so much lack substance as lack the intermediaries – the abstractions, concepts, and categories – that, for better or worse, prop up referential discourse. Put differently: their non-referentiality, while in a certain sense undeniable – there is no *historical* Victor Frankenstein or creature – might not be the most important thing about them; their insistence, their stubborn (re)appearance in spite of the overwhelming agreement as to their insub-

stantiality, deserves at least as much attention, if not more. To reduce the issue of fiction to the issue of its referentiality is to eschew fundamental ontological questions.

Which consequences does this have, potentially, for the way we study narrative fiction? The fundamental claim of structuralist poetics, put forward for instance by Seymour Chatman as the claim for the existence of a "separate[e] narrative structure from any of its mere manifestations, linguistic or otherwise," remains of fundamental relevance (*Story and Discourse* 15–6); in the sense that it consolidates the idea that there is such a thing as 'story,' which cannot be conceptually dissolved in any list of media, genres, or artistic traditions. This investigation is obviously everywhere indebted to the idea that the *Frankenstein* complex can be studied as something else besides a set of related novels, films, and stage plays. Importantly, this claim also enables, to begin with, the distinction of what Chatman captures accessibly as the "what" and the "way" of narrative (his paraphrase for narratology's story-discourse-distinction [*Story* 9]).

However, *Frankenstein* suggests that narrative fiction is not the representation or the description but the production of another way of being, fragile as it may be. Narratology sees the transposability of stories from one manifestation to the next as, not only an indication of their independence from genre, but as proof of their immateriality. This is a curiously contradictory move which, quite as Latour puts it in a more general context, means that stories are "valued to an extreme" and yet "deprived of their ontological weight" (*Inquiry* 239). It puts stories in a gilded cage, as it were, as it allows them independence but no agency or effectiveness. For between the "what" and the "way" of narrative, only the latter can in this understanding have any proper purchase on reality; the arrangements, words, style, rhetoric, forms, colours, …, figure as the real-world 'arm' of the flow of story, which otherwise is assumed to take place elsewhere. ("The substance of events and existents [in the story] is the whole universe," Chatman says, but then goes on to correct himself: "or, better, the set of possible objects, events, abstractions, and so on that can be 'imitated' by an author (film director, etc.)" [*Story* 24]).

The independence that narrative is attested by narratology thus remains, in another sense, curiously un-implemented; narrative is said to exist beyond established institutions ('literature,' 'art,' 'film') but at the same time said not to exist at all. Story "exists only at an abstract level" (Chatman, *Story* 37) and thus, quite literally, does not ultimately 'matter.' Transposability is assigned the paradoxical role of proving both independence and non-existence: that the supposed "skeleton story" (Baldick) of *Frankenstein* can appear, say, in a 1927 stage play and a 1994 Hollywood film is taken as indication that *Frankenstein* is a purely abstract construction – when we could just as well argue that it is a sign that there is an actual consistency to *Frankenstein*, even if it is not the consistency of stones or chairs.

In response to structuralist narrative theory, Brooks's studies of narrative plot and the body point in the direction of an understanding of narrative that does allow for a nexus between the "way" and the "what" of story; and that is quite unafraid of the barrier between 'fantasy' and 'reality' (a consequence, not least, of the psychoanalytical grounding of Brooks's study) – for the object of narrative desire is, in Brooks's account, not bound to either sphere but drifts quite loosely between being the reader's desire for the story's ending, the protagonist's desire for their romantic (or commercial) interests, and the reader's desire for the protagonist's objects of desire.[1] But more than that, the "whats" of the story may not be willing to, as it were, content themselves with the status of objects (of desire or anything else); as for instance the curious role of the creature's body in Mary Shelley's novel has shown, working as the source *and* the aim of narrative enunciation. Narrative discourse may be *about* narrative events and existents, but if it weren't for the singularity of those events and existents, no such aboutness could come about; it is hence quite impossible to say with any definitiveness whether, for instance, the serial installations of *Penny Dreadful* bring about its protagonist Lily, or

1 "'Plot' seems to me to cut across the *fabula/sjužet* [i.e., story/discourse] distinction in that to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering" (Brooks, *Reading* 13).

whether it is in fact Lily who enables *Penny Dreadful* to return and repeat itself in its narrative spirals.

The "what" of narrative fiction, then, has its own productivity, its own density. Where in a traditional narratological account, narrative is in a certain sense open only to one side, the story being accessible through the discourse, *Frankenstein*'s long and meandering career through popular fiction may just as well be seen to suggest a more inclusive, immediate picture: such that the "whats" and the "ways" of storytelling form a productive pair where none has privilege over the other. This demands a narratological approach that gives some serious weight to the imaginary, and should therefore caution us against focusing narrative's sense-making aspect to the exclusion of its other capacities. For the sense that narrative makes is, in the latter understanding, mostly sense of 'the real world,' such as it supposedly is. Justified as it in principle may be, therefore, such prioritising runs the risk of confining narrative to the function of figuring out the status quo (in better resolution, as it were), therefore giving too little credit to the productive aspect of narrative and in doing so, ultimately understating its ethical capacity.

It might well be the case that "although narratives are grounded in and adapted to a human-scale lifeworld, storytelling practices furnish means for negotiating the differences of scale introduced by phenomena beyond the scope of the human" and that "narrative-based resource[s]" afford the "conceptual scaffolding for engaging with macro-level phenomena more or less massively distributed in space and time" (Herman 258; 21). Such claims follow a logic of detection: they ascribe to stories the capacity to detect the parts of this world not (yet) accessible to our perception and understanding, and bring them "within the scope of human comprehension" (22). Certainly, storytelling lends itself to such 'detective' enterprises. And yet, I find it important to address the capacities of narrative beyond such use, valuable as the latter may be. For if this is *all* the narrative that we ever tell about narrative, then we curtail it more than we promote it, as we confine it, ultimately, to what is already given (though maybe as of now beyond our reach). Narrative does more than fill in missing information, or help gain information theretofore inaccessible. In fact, stories work against the persistently widespread agree-

ment, so characteristic of the 'information age' and likewise implicit in subordinating narrative to comprehension, that if we only know what is true, we will also know what is right; an understanding that, if practiced consistently, amounts to deleting the ethical as such. A more radical approach to stories – a radical narratology, as it were – by contrast insists that while certainly, stories are pathways to the theretofore un-detected (whether that be a critical or a cosmological insight), they are also, and more importantly, manifestations of the properly un-known.[2]

Returning to the question of what it means to enjoy all of this: if I expect, even in this kind of affirmative scenario – where what is fictional is, in some ways, *more* and not less 'there' – for there to be a genuine connection between the fictional and a pleasure with a decided tinge of the negative (where I can lose myself, speak without consequences, and so forth): how would that work? I am not quite content to leave it at the general aesthetic observation – however plausible – of the pleasure of form-giving. Leo Bersani, for instance, has argued that aesthetic practice can dismantle the armour of subjecthood, for it reveals to us that we are part of the world and thus diverts us from our attempts to possess it as an object of our desire. Art (in the widest possible sense) reveals to us "correspondences of forms within a universal solidarity of being" and can thus lead us "back from objects, or the actual hunt, to the vast repertory of virtual being that constitutes […] the 'marvels' that art seeks beyond its own visibility" ("Aesthetic Subject" 164; 170). The inscriptions as which artworks manifest "are the world, and they are the subject" (171). The enjoyment which one gains from them is thus at variance with the essentially negative pleasure otherwise associated with subjecthood, which is essentially based on "the prejudice of psychic lack, a prejudice that conveniently justifies invasive appropriations of the world's seductive and threatening otherness." This prejudice is ultimately responsible for the

2 Lüdeke has argued that Gothic mimesis, specifically, alerts us to the possibility of reading contingency and realism differently: such that the question is not one of probability ('possible vs. impossible') but of radical being ('fiction depicts what does not exist according to realist standards'); whereby the status of 'reality' as benchmark is shifted ("Gothic Truth").

fact that "[p]sychoanalytically defined sexuality is not a relation; it is the fantasized ecstasy of a oneness gained by the simultaneous destruction of the self and the world. This ecstatic destruction of the subject is the most extreme consequence of a psychological subjectivity, a subjectivity for which the world as lack is an object of suspicion and of desire" (172). The aesthetic subject, however, enjoys quite differently; thus opening the way for art to become a practice that, upsetting though it may sometimes appear, counters what Bersani has elsewhere captured as "the sacrosanct value of selfhood, a value that accounts for human beings' extraordinary willingness to kill in order to protect the seriousness of their statements" ("Rectum" 222).

This does much to reduce the tension between the constructive and the destructive that persists, likewise, in wanting to say of fiction equally that it is a generative, affirmative process, and that it is connected to some kind of loss, relief, and letting-go. One could thus say – as seems to follow from Bersani's analysis – that fiction is a form of losing self (the suspiciously desiring self), and gaining world. Aesthetic practice might well be such a defense against the defense mechanism of substituting our selves for the world in order to cope with the traumatic memory and realisation that we cannot master it; it might be a chance to recognise, "as bizarre as this may sound, that, ontologically, the world cares for us," that it affords us (Bersani, "Aesthetic Subject" 174). However, Bersani himself ends his proposal towards an aesthetic conception of the subject on a more ambivalent note, saying: "[f]inally, however, [...] it is part of the complexity of a human destiny that we may fail to find that care sufficiently satisfying, and so we will undoubtedly never stop insisting – if only intermittently – that the jouissance of an illusion of suppressing otherness can surpass the pleasure of finding ourselves harbored within it" (174).

This ambivalence is, I think, worth retaining; for a similar ambivalence characterises the notion that fiction might be a way of gaining *but also* of losing world, in a similar way as I have argued, in Part Three of this

investigation, that stories are a way of losing *but also* of gaining self.[3] Stories are a practice of great potential and yet also of great fragility, dependent as they are on the ongoing cooperation of numerous participants (the COMPANY those participants keep each other). These entanglements are entanglements in a radical sense: not merely connections, but fundamental involvements and dependencies which nevertheless never quite dissolve one being in the other. Agency reveals itself, in *Frankenstein*, not as the opposite of but as born out of vulnerability and suffering (in that sense, agency figures primarily as resistance: appearing where one is not supposed to appear, speaking where one is expected to be silent – as the creature constantly does). In the face of such displacements, all 'identity' must fail, as to be oneself means, at the same time, to be quite beside oneself. And this is likewise true for the story's audience, who, rather than having full control over their own position as creators or recipients, end up shifting from one role into the other. Thus vulnerability is revealed as the source of agency across any fictional-vs.-non-fictional divides; and individuality appears as a kind of unalterable alterability that, more than identification, requires intimacy as non-appropriative communal practice. Importantly, in this scenario, vulnerability is not so much overcome by agency as it conditions it, and is therefore everywhere at work in it. This yields a more ambivalent picture than is conveyed by the idea of an aesthetic subject that, through realising its affinity with the world, gives up on the attempt to master it. But it does resonate more clearly with Bersani's conclusion that it may be "part of the complexity of a human destiny" that affiliation and withdrawal, immersion and deprivation both have a role to play in the way we relate to the world – stories included.

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3 "World," incidentally, here is supposed to indicate something quite different from what it tends to mean in the theory of fictional worlds, where its basic significance remains that which it used to have for possible worlds theory: a set of true propositions (a significance derived from the function possible worlds, as logical objects, were supposed to fulfil in formal semantics – explicating the truth conditions for counterfactuals). In comparison to the latter understanding, I intend the term to have a decidedly more 'cosmological' meaning.

Joan Copjec, in her *Imagine there's no Woman*, outlines an ethical perspective that makes use of such ambivalence. She draws for this both on a reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and on Jacques Lacan's seemingly depressing description of love as a process wherein "I love in you more than you" (see in particular Copjec's chapter on "The Tomb of Perseverance"). Her analysis culminates in a theory of sublimation that allows, precisely, to think of the enjoyment of stories as neither loss nor mastery of self but, in fact, a process of liberation that puts self and world on equal footing. It is an account that is helpful to come to terms with the pleasures of, not art in general, but fiction in particular because, more than in the aspect of giving form, it is interested in the changing of it. Bersani's account sticks to the idea that "psychoanalytically defined sexuality is not a relation"; which secures a distinction between the libidinal and the aesthetic that ultimately does more to keep the content of a story and its formal existence (the what and the way of narrative) apart than it helps to fuse them together. Copjec, however, reads subjective desire quite differently, as an experience of loss and gain alike. It is a reading that helps to sketch an ethical perspective on stories that, first, leaves room for their generative capacity rather than reducing them to instruments of detection, and second, is connected precisely to the pleasure we derive from them. This idea of pleasure can finally help to build a bridge between the creature's desolation, and our inclination towards it; between relief, on the one hand – a taking away or being-taken-away – and affirmation and productivity, on the other (and everything, in other words, that could potentially make fiction appear a dreadfully *heavy* and properly *serious* business).

In the psychoanalytic – more specifically, Freudian – conception, there is, as Copjec points out, no such thing as a drive toward higher development or greater complexity. Drives have nothing to do with progress. Rather the opposite: drives aim at the past. In a more narrow psychoanalytic interpretation, this is of course the mother-child dyad; but what is important about this aim of the drive is not only that temporal progress makes its fulfilment impossible but that it cannot be conceptually fulfilled, either, for it aims at what *founds* representation (categorisation, memory, …) and therefore cannot itself be represented.

Through this double and inevitable inhibition, the drive is forced to become protean, making transformation, substitution, partialisation and particularisation part of its own way of functioning.

The vulgar translation of this scenario might go something like this: we all want to go back to the comforts of the early infant stage, and since that is impossible, we come up with substitute objects which are the next best thing, and to which we then attach our urges. A more nuanced understanding is possible, though, as Copjec shows; and it is one that has specifically ethical consequences. For rather than sticking to a narrow idea of substitution, we can allow for the idea of elevation: for the idea that, because of the drive's internal impossibility, it actually elevates items in the world to the status of being the source of satisfaction, genuinely willing a transformation from impossibility to presence (rather than contenting itself with compromises). Where the notion of 'the next best thing' preserves the object's self-identity as object, the notion of its elevation implies its genuine metamorphosis into something desirable – a metamorphosis that the object must afford or, so to speak, be complicit in. This concept of drive/desire is based, not so much on a logic of representation ('next best thing'), but on a logic of transformation. Rather than the prosaic idea of substituting sexual objects by more socially accepted interests, Copjec suggests (with Lacan), this process of elevation is what the concept of sublimation really implies.[4]

In this process, the object "is no longer a means of attaining satisfaction, […] it is directly satisfying" (Copjec 37). (Nicely illustrating this in an anecdote, Copjec cites an interview with Jasper Johns who, asked whether he uses a specific sort of commercially available stencil for his

4 Copjec's analysis can thus help to refine Peter Brooks's concept of the "Freudian masterplot," based on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Brooks's reading is based on the notion of the interplay of two drives, life drives and death drives. Copjec substitutes this with the idea of, not the interplay of several drives, but an internal splitting or modification of drive through its objects. If Brooks helps to put forward an understanding of narrative which is live-ly, that is, vital, Copjec's differentiations help to show its ethical aspect. Brooks shows the relation of stories to desire, and Copjec's account of the sublime aspect of desire shows up the ethics of this relation.

artwork because he likes it, or because that is the form in which the stencils are available, answers: "But that is what I like about them, that they come that way" [38].) "[C]onstruction and discovery, thinking and being, as well as drive and object" are thus "soldered together" (38): the object is elevated and at the same time left exactly as it is because of the subject's, as it were, appropriate desire, the subject's willingness and capacity to desire *this* object.

Copjec's (Lacanian) reading of Antigone's fate in Sophocles' tragedy helps to illustrate this. For Antigone does not defend the brother she buries in any way against King Creon's accusations regarding his character – all she does is insist on her love for him. This illustrates the literally 'un-reason-able' quality of love, the tautological quality in which it is directed at the object of love in regard, but not because of any of its qualities. Copjec captures this quality by saying that "love is that which renders what the other is loveable." The point of this is not so much to simply point out the other's singular, unfathomable otherness, that 'they are just what they are,' but to point out the transformative power of a desire that is never wholly the desirer's. Lacan's much-cited phrase "I love in you something more than you" is easily misunderstood in that sense. It does not mean 'I love in you something that you are not/that isn't you,' it means that, as Copjec puts it, "the 'is' of the beloved is split," that the "beloved is always slightly different from or more than, herself." The beloved thus is, importantly, "more than just an ordinary object of my attention" (41–42). They mean more to me than their immediate presence and manifestation can account for – commonly understood as the violence of misrecognition, this can likewise be understood as the indicator of a reciprocal vulnerability and affectation.

The fact that Antigone rejects a compromise with worldly law in the name of such love is not, Copjec says, a sign of rigidity but instead of unboundedness: "If she is able to undertake such a fundamental break with the existing laws of her community, this is only because she has first been able to unloose herself from the fundamental laws of her own being" (42) (a "radical metamorphosis," "inhuman rather than heroic" [43]). What this suggests is that "ethical progress has nothing to do with that form of progress promoted by modern industry, or the 'service of good,'

but is rather a matter of personal conversion, of the subjective necessity of going beyond oneself" (43). Thus – and this is, as I read it, the pivotal point in Copjec's analysis – the elevation which the drive's inherent futility necessitates generates, in the subject, a capacity to turn love into freedom. There is a necessity on which sublimation is based – that the drive needs to elevate objects into objects of desire, as no 'natural' representative for what the drive wants is available; and this elevation demands, at the same time, a radical transformativity in the subject. Sublimation, therefore, "does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge" as it has the capacity to "unloose" a person from what is established (in laws, customs, forms of relation).

What happens when we miss out on this opportunity is illustrated in the figure of Antigone's adversary, Creon: "Creon's fixation on the laws of the State, betray a dependence of jouissance on a supposed subject of knowledge. This does not mean that enjoyment becomes proscribed [...] but that jouissance is now prescribed: 'Henceforth you will find your enjoyment in the following way!'" (45). In this way, Copjec says, Creon remains firmly under the rule of the superego: for the superego provides the "idealization of dissatisfaction" that induces one to bind one's enjoyment to laws, not because the superego is an internalisation of laws but because by fixing enjoyment to laws its proper fulfilment is transposed into an inaccessible beyond, and dissatisfaction thus secured (45). (In that sense, it is not, as popular understanding would have it, that the superego comes from laws which are internalized, but that Law comes from the superego and its insistence on dissatisfaction.)

Antigone, in contrast, raises herself out of this condition because she learns to transform herself alongside the world, alongside the objects which she elevates into the objects of her desire. She transforms herself not in the way the superego prescribes, that is, not in the name of an unattainable satisfaction – a transformation which would make her appear flexible but would really make her inflexible by keeping her bound to an ideal that is set in stone, because it is located beyond the limit of being. Antigone transforms herself, rather, in the name of the *potential* of what *is*. And this suggests a base for an ethics of sublimation because this way lies freedom, not only from the iron rule of the superego, but

also – another factor in Copjec's analysis – from the sovereign rule over naked life. Here is how she puts it:

> The superego thus maintains a rigorous division between that satisfaction available to us and the one that lies beyond. It is possible to argue that there where Agamben has observed the notion of "bare" or "nude" life emerging out of the metaphysical positing of a realm of pure Being, "indeterminant and impenetrable" and located beyond an "unthinkable limit" that separates us from all it offers, there, too, one can recognize the handiwork of the superego. If […] Creon represents a sovereign law that knows no limit, if he seeks "the good of all without limit," this is because his superegoic positing of a pure satisfaction or absolute goal is founded on the prior positing of an external limit to the world. This limit decompletes, empties out, all his endeavors, all his satisfactions, causing him to strive fruitlessly toward a goal he will never attain. Creon's hounding of Polynices beyond the limit of death prefigures modern science's hounding of the subject beyond death, apparently without limit, into infinitely extendable states (in principle, at least) of *coma passé*. When she covers the exposed body of her brother, Antigone raises herself out of the conditions of naked existence to which Creon remains bound. (46)[5]

How is this relevant to the enjoyment of stories? It is relevant because fiction might just go to show that, as the Lacanian lover loves in their beloved something more than them, we love in the world something more than the world – if we do not read this statement (as Copjec says we should not) as meaning that we misrecognise the world, but as indicating that we lift it up. This is more ambivalent – but therefore also possibly more appropriate – than saying that we lose the self (the fixed self, the master self, the one causing all the problems) in fiction and

5 It is interesting to see that, via the psychoanalytical route, Copjec arrives at a solution to the biopolitical impasse quite in keeping with what Agamben sketches in his notion of a form-of-life.

that it is therefore a practice of non-violence, as Bersani's concept of the "aesthetic subject" would suggest.[6]

So do we, or do we not, 'lose ourselves' in stories? If so, it is due to a radical freedom based on the capacity to lift what is (oneself, one's beloved, the world) from what is; in a similar way as Antigone, in Copjec's analysis, lifts herself from "the fundamental law of her own being." If "love is that which renders what the other is loveable," this sketches an ethics that upsets the boundaries between subject and object, who acts and who suffers, more thoroughly than even, for instance, a Foucauldian concern for self does (otherwise a plausible candidate, because it implies that I care for myself as for an other, and for an other as I do for myself, in "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" ["Ethics of the Concern for Self" 282]). Where such an aesthetics of existence is in many ways indebted to the recognition of what is good, to conduct, these 'Antigonean' ethics are an ethics that includes radical novelty – one creates the lover that one falls for, but one does not therefore misrecognise them. It is out of love that one creates them that way. The love comes before the blueprint. Antigone does not recognise what is good, she makes it; her ethics thus includes the possibility of shedding all tradition. "I love in you more than you" basically means freeing the other – the beloved, the interlocutor, the world – from the obligation to remain.[7]

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6 Certainly, the move towards psychoanalysis to account for the pleasures of the unpleasurable is a conventional move, much practiced with gothic literature and horror fiction. But it yields insights on a more abstract level, too; that is, beyond the question of uncomfortable subject matter and its attractions, it also helps to formulate an account of the pleasure of stories *as stories* (and not as representations-of).

7 "Care of the self is, of course, knowledge *[connaissance]* of the self," Foucault elaborates, "but also knowledge of a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions" ("Ethics of Concern" 285). Such "care of the self also implies a relationship with the other insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counselor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you" (287). Copjec's

And in that way, I feel tempted to propose, do we approach 'what is' in stories: without any expectation that it remain (remain 'that way,' remain 'itself,' remain at all) but in the willingness to remake ourselves always in such a way as to still be able to follow the story and everything in it, as the lover is willing to always generate exactly the desire that makes the beloved lovable. This is a necessarily two-sided transformation – and hence a proper union – as it includes the admission that I cannot change the other without changing myself (I cannot render the lover lovable without submitting myself to a transformation of my desire). It is in *this* way that fiction connects me to the world by making me lose my self – not so much because it shatters the ego that wants to master the world and therefore re-sub-jects me to the world; but because it "solders" me to the world in showing that any action on the world is an action on myself. This is the ethics *and* the pleasure of stories.[8]

In that sense, Copjec's ethics of sublimation helps to follow Latour's injunction to "love our monsters," though Latour probably had something quite different in mind. The notion of love emerging from an ethics of sublimation that has nothing to do with care, it is not a care-ful love, nor with self-negation or ego-shattering, nor with reflection and conduct. It preserves the inexplicability of love (though one could argue,

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ethics of sublimation is, in turn, the opposite of listening to the master – even if the master is a friend.

8 We need not, therefore, take such great pains as for instance Derek Attridge does to exclude "sentimentality" from the ethical dimension of fiction; who insists that "it is in th[e] apprehension of otherness and in the demands it makes that the peculiar pleasure of the literary response (over and above the pleasure to be gained from new information, sensuous patterning, stirring of memory, moral exemplification, and so on) is to be experienced" (131). Attridge's account is one that can salvage pleasure for an "ethics of literature" only at the cost of somehow diminishing it as pleasure. The point here is not to downplay this account as ill-humoured or pedantic or even prudish but to say that it misses out on an opportunity, the opportunity of allowing pleasure, *as* pleasure, the capacity for a genuine ethical contribution – which precisely amounts to liberating the idea of sublimation from its narrow conceptualisation as 'substitution of a cerebral for a sexual object of interest' and to translate it into something more transversal, profound, and unsettling.

that is its theoretical undercomplexity), it preserves love as love without translating it into care, affect, or reflection. Putting the enjoyment of stories into the context of sublimation thus brings the advantage of allowing for a precarious balance of construction and destruction, rather than indirectly translating one into the other. It thus helps to preserve the sense of a relief through loss that we associate with the pleasure of stories; without therefore committing us to the bi-partition of the world into reality (matter, discourse) vs. illusion (fantasy, *fabula*). If stories aren't opposed to 'reality' – if, in fact, 'the fictive, imaginary, symbolic, immaterial' doesn't provide the dichotomous reference point with the help of which 'reality' can be defined, as Latour's *Inquiry* suggests – then stories don't lack anything. Nor are they excessive. They are singular, material-semiotic processes such as everything else, to which an economic question – do they lack something, do they provide a surplus – cannot, it would seem, sensibly be posed: it would, after all, be 'reality' in relation to which they lack something, or which they exceed. And yet, the forms of enjoyment which we associate with stories – losing ourselves, liberation, relief, immersion – seem indebted conceptually precisely to the lack-surplus-reality nexus; the idea that in fiction, we 'lose' something. But if we "love our monsters" with a desire that includes radical transformation – then gain and loss necessarily go together in our enjoyment of stories.

How does sublimation help me with the organic cohesion – the non-separation of story content, and story existence – that appears difficult to spell out precisely when one looks at the pleasure of stories (and doesn't want to make an ultimately psychological argument)? Stories are productive, but the pleasure connected to them is negative: this contradiction is what sublimation (or the ethics thereof) helps to counter, because it allows for desire to have a constructive force: in this scenario, desire isn't, in the sense of the word, passion, at least not entirely. Nor is it mastery. That is to say, it isn't usefully captured either by a scenario of the individual subject, suffering so from its own lack that it keeps running helplessly after a series of object a's; nor by a scenario in which a greedy subject repaints a helpless world as its hallucinatory appetites dictate. Aaron Schuster, in another context, captures sublimated

pleasure as "an answer without a question […] an answer that forces a new question precisely because it does not quite fit into any previously existing ones" (122): the willingness for transformation implied by an ethics of sublimation turns lack from something like an anthropological constant into a potential of the world. It re-conceptualises enjoyment in such a way as to allow an easy connection to stories, without therefore demanding that stories are something insubstantial.

In the bleak scenario of postponed suicide, then, where the creature trudges on forever through an arctic "darkness and distance," lies in a coma between a film and its sequel, it is precisely our sublime interest that can rescue it from there. Living on and on, with no wish to do so, the creature ends up – not unlike Creon, though in the creature's case, through little fault of his own – forever chained to a satisfaction, that of friendship and family, that through its unattainability limits his life to bare existence. The exit from such superegoic captivity demands the transformation of desire, a genuine elevation of 'what is' that affects desirer and desired alike. If desire is mutable in that way, if our attachment to Frankenstein's creature can create an exit from 'what is' or rather, can transform 'what is' into more than itself, then, if we render what the creature is loveable (in Copjec's terms), we change both his world and ours quite effectively. We change the terms – the Law, as it were – of what is loveable, thus making the creature other than what it is and our selves, too.

If the idealisation of dissatisfaction leads to an insistence on the unattainability of desire, and hence the prescription of desire in Law, then it is *inexplicable* desire, specifically, which indicates a way out of this predicament. For loving the monster and enjoying his bleak fate suspends precisely the prescription of enjoyment that would say, 'enjoy only what feels good,' or 'love only what you like.' The point here is that we don't have to explain *why* we enjoy this gruesome story but that we must *do* it. The doing of it, not the knowing why, destabilises Law (with a capital L) and insists on the transformativity of the world, an insistence that stands contrary to an ontology which supposes the reality of stones on the one, and the irrelevance of Frankenstein's creature on the other hand (and leaves it at that). This is the cohesion, organic but neither

causal nor necessary, between the bleakness of the creature's fate, and our enjoyment of *Frankenstein*. In that sense, then, can and should we "love our monsters" – or this particular monster, at least: not simply out of a sense of responsibility but because, as when Antigone covers her unburied brother's body, what is at stake is the potential of the world to be different from what it is.

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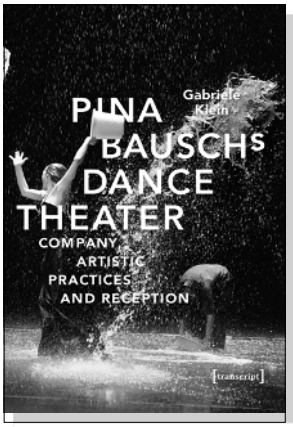

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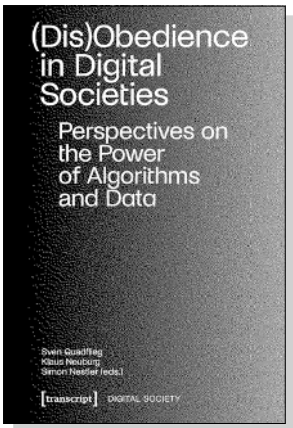

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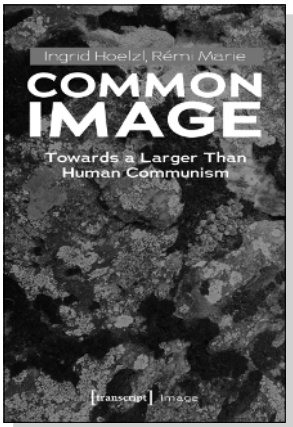

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