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]

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."