

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 left-over 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?

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).