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.

---

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

---

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!"

---

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, ulti-
mately, 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 move-
> ments, 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 vibra-
> tion of fiction will once again fold those folds, renew them in a renewal
> that will engender something unforeseen, something still more un-
> foreseen, 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 sec-
> ond time when, from this earthenware pot held at someone's finger-
> tips, 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 cap-
tured through the encounter of forms with each other, where the mere

---

11   Patrice Maniglier nicely illustrates Latour's thought on the specific inseparabil-
      ity in fiction: "What characterizes the general system of fictions is the insepara-
      bility of matter and form. This is not simply due to the ontological law requir-
      ing 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 inter-
      pretation 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.