

Imperfection and Collaboration

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

You Will Be You Again

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Double Casting I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ontology of Non-Self-Coincidence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Existence as Production

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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- 12 This is contested philosophical ground: “Philosophy has always kept this question open,” Souriau explains with reference to the decision of whether one wants to assume that “the ‘to exist’” is “multiple, that is, not contained within the individuals in which it is actualized and invested, but rather contained in its types.” Philosophical answers to this question, however, are “tendentious. For while they affirm, they also desire”; and thus quite frequently, “when we speak of being, the hope is to see it reign in numerical solicitude” (*Modes of Existence* 97).
- 13 Souriau distinguishes ‘existence’ and ‘reality’: “We will have to consider the specific factors of reality for each mode of the ‘to exist’” (*Modes* 127). We must, he says, “identify and study those different planes, those different modes of existence, without which there would be no existence at all – no more than there would be pure Art without statues, paintings, symphonies, and poems. For art is all the arts. And existence is each of the modes of existence. Each mode is an art of existing unto itself” (*Modes* 131). The modes are the phenomenal (“As manifest in its existence as it is in its essence (the two being inseparable), it

Collaborative Agency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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