

***Filmic Machines and Animated Monsters:
Retelling Frankenstein in the Digital Age***

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

Frankensteinian monsters have appeared on our screens since the early days of cinema. Indeed, across the history of film we see Mary Shelley’s “hideous progeny” rewritten as alchemical creations, animated corpses, lumbering fiends, robots, cyborgs, replicants, dinosaurs, artificial intelligences and digital constructions. In particular, Shelley’s text shares its speculative depiction of a posthuman future with fantastic and science-fictional cinema of the digital age. At the same time, posthuman bodies are being created by filmmakers. New possibilities in the digital imaging of human presence – from the replacement of actors with computer-generated imagery to the quest for photorealism in digital animation – themselves evoke the Frankenstein tale and consequently make interesting contributions to the evolving Frankenstein myth.

This thesis investigates the retelling of Frankenstein in popular cinema of the digital age. Through close analysis of a series of chosen texts, I examine the figure of the Frankensteinian monster and his/her/its equivalents in today’s popular culture: posthuman figures who negotiate uneasily with the organic world, boundary creatures who both define and unsettle our understandings of human being. I consider the way the tale, its themes and characters have both endured and evolved over time. I also examine the way these new filmic “machines” and animated “monsters” embody crucial problems associated with the technologies that screen them and the media that contain them.

My concern in this project is twofold. Firstly, I seek to map the (changing) relationship between Frankenstein and film. Since the early 1900s, cinema has provided a fertile ground for the retelling of Shelley's tale. At the same time, cinema itself has always been a sort of Frankensteinian experiment: a means of breathing life into stillness, of constructing and re-constructing human presence, of stitching together fragmented moments to create a semblance of wholeness. In the digital age, this experiment grows and changes: new modes of production are continually being trialled, allowing us to re-create and re-present human presence in new and often bizarre ways. The figure of the Frankensteinian monster confronts and responds to these concerns, embodying and performing the uncanny, spectacular, mechanical, or organic-mechanical nature of screen presence.

Secondly, this thesis reads the Frankensteinian monster as a mythic figure for the digital age. I move towards the assertion that Frankenstein is a tale about the artificial body and its negotiation with a lost or disrupted origin in the organic world, and that this particular problem reverberates strongly in an age of digital representation. The analyses that constitute this thesis contribute to the argument that each time the Frankenstein tale is retold, re-technologised, and re-imagined using new filmic techniques, the problem of the *screen* body and *its* troubled origin stories is revisited and complicated.

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I would like to thank all my friends and family who have put up with me during the creation of this “monster”. Deep and special gratitude must go to my husband Luke, for his support (both emotional and financial) and patience; thank you for sharing this journey with me, for introducing me to *Ghost in the Shell* all those years ago and for never getting sick of watching science fiction films with me. Thanks also to my mum, Sharon, for bestowing upon me a love of literature and for putting up with my love of all things cinematic.

Finally, this thesis has its roots in a lifelong enthusiasm for the fantastic in popular culture, and owes a debt of gratitude to all the writers, theorists, academics, filmmakers, authors, colleagues and friends who share and perpetuate this enthusiasm.

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INTRODUCTION

Preface: Frankenstein in the digital age

Nearly two hundred years after Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* was first published, I am watching *Frankenstein*, the 1910 Edison Studios film, on YouTube. I have seen the film many times before, but never quite like this: the monster's body, creepily emerging from its alchemical cauldron, flickers like all images from old films but is framed by my computer screen. Attached to my laptop, I feel particularly "plugged in" to this media experience: in this moment I am a PhD student more than a cinema spectator, my fingers on the keyboard ready to pause, think, write; I am the figure envisioned by N. Katherine Hayles when she observes that "an experienced computer user feels proprioceptive coherence with the keyboard, experiencing the screen surface as a space into which her subjectivity can flow".¹ Like Frankenstein's monster – who is rewritten in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the cyborg, the organic/technological hybrid – I am, in this moment, mechanically enhanced.

Frankenstein's monster, it seems, is alive and well in cyberspace; and when we encounter him/her/it on YouTube we might be tempted to ponder the applicability of Shelley's tale to media culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Mark Poster makes evident such applicability when he uses the term "High-tech Frankenstein" to describe the construction of posthuman identities in cyberspace: this High-tech Frankenstein, he tells us, is "a figure for

¹ N. Katherine Hayles, "The Condition of Virtuality", in *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, ed. Peter Lunenfeld (London: MIT Press, 1999), 88.

the relation of humans online to machines” and “functions as an opening to globalized, machinic post-humanity”.² We can also suggest that there is a wonderful correlation between the monster’s fragmented body and cyberspace itself as a fragmented medium, a space defined by its non-linearity and also by its “monstrous” otherness to film and literature. In this sense, the Edison film is imbued with new meaning when screened online. Some would counter that watching such a text in this form strips away the magic, wonder, and sense of inventiveness that surrounded this early venture into filmmaking. Yet we can also argue that the Frankenstein tale has here been re-technologised for a digital era – a significant claim given that re-technologising the tale for a new era (and a new medium) is exactly what the Edison film itself achieved in 1910, bringing cinematic “life” to Shelley’s narrative in an act of techno-production as spectacular as Victor Frankenstein’s own.

The appearance in cyberspace of this earliest filmic adaptation of Shelley’s novel also attests to the *longevity* of the Frankenstein tale – to its current cultural relevance and to its continuing ability to incite cultural interest. As many theorists have recognised, Shelley’s writing had a certain preemptive quality: her novel demonstrates both an awareness of the future (she writes of scientific endeavours and possibilities, of fantastic shifts in the meaning and experience of human being and human embodiment) and a sense of science-fictionality that has allowed her work to resonate into her *own* future (the twentieth and twenty-first centuries). Adopting an archaic term used by Shelley herself, Jay Clayton offers

² Mark Poster, “High-Tech Frankenstein, or Heidegger Meets Stelarc”, in *The Cyborg Experiments*, ed. Joanna Zylińska (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), 29-30.

a discussion of Frankenstein's "futurity", which he opens with the following question:

In an age of reproductive technology, cloning, artificial intelligence, and robots, has *Frankenstein's* futurity come to pass? Are we living in the time Mary Shelley foreshadowed?³

To Clayton's question we can add another: would the "futurity" that Shelley envisioned have included either the filming of her tale or the reproduction of such a text in cyberspace? Probably not, although here are two striking acts of techno-production that mirror the processes at the heart of the Frankenstein tale. I am reminded of this as I watch the Edison film on YouTube; I am also reminded of the related notion that the tale's longevity is linked to the reproductive powers of visual media – to its constant screening and re-screening, framing and re-framing in popular culture.

This thesis is concerned with the *filmic* reworking of Frankenstein rather than with the tale's applicability to the study of new media or its re-screening on video sharing websites like YouTube. Nevertheless, this viewing of the Frankenstein tale – not only in its earliest filmic form, but also as part of a new media experience – offers a suitable starting point for a study that frames itself with the phrase "Frankenstein in the digital age". Viewers of the Edison film on YouTube might be quietly reminded that Mary Shelley's monster is a figure well suited to the digital age: for he/she/it is posthuman, postorganic, constructed, fragmented, a technological other, a body removed from nature. As this thesis

³ Jay Clayton, "Frankenstein's Futurity: Replicants and Robots", in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 84.

will suggest, these aspects of Shelley's monster have allowed him/her/it, over the years, to embody the strangeness of cinematic presence; but framed here by the mechanisms of cyberspace, this posthuman figure also seems startlingly emblematic of the *postcinematic* aspects of today's media culture – of the threat to cinema posed not only by new modes of media viewing but also by digital effects and the overall *digitising* of film.

Shelley's monster is also a figure constantly re-imag(in)ed in media culture, a figure taken apart and rewritten (“pieced together”, we might say) to confront new cultural worlds and new cultural problems. In this particular instance – the re-screening of the Edison film on YouTube – there is less a “rewriting” of the monster than a transference of an earlier image of him/it; the tale is “retold” in a new medium but in an old form. Other recent texts more actively rework the tale. Let us turn from this media experience to another. Some time before beginning this research project, I was watching the anime *Ghost in the Shell* on DVD: a spectacular film created by Mamoru Oshii in 1995, and also a text that interweaves Shelley's tale with a cyberpunk ethos and blends both with a characteristically “anime” attitude towards technology, subjectivity, and (post)embodiment. I was entranced by this film's dark depiction of a postorganic world; by its appropriation, re-membering, and *remembering* of the Frankenstein tale; by its new vision of a constructed body and also by its evocation of questions that were explored two hundred years ago by Shelley. Where does the soul reside? What does it mean to “be” a body? What is the artificial body's relation to the organic world? I was also fascinated by the way these questions seemed to resonate with the processes of digital animation that created the film.

Edison's *Frankenstein*⁴ and Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* speak strangely to one another. They are nearly a century apart in context: the former appearing at the beginning of the 1900s when cinema was in its infancy, and the latter at the close of the century in a period (and a medium) that can be described as postcinematic. If I were to assess these two texts with the hindsight offered by the process of researching and writing this thesis, I would suggest that what they share is an oscillation between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Both films make *visible* Shelley's monster: they project him/her/it onto a screen, they offer enduring images of a textual body, a literary creation. Significantly, they both feature spectacular creation scenes that "give birth" to the "monster" before our eyes. Yet both films also allow their monsters to *vanish*. In Edison's *Frankenstein*, the monster loses first his body and then his image, becoming a reflection in a mirror that dissolves into the reflection of his creator, Victor Frankenstein; in *Ghost in the Shell*, digital "monster" Kusanagi falls backwards and vanishes from the screen, a moment of vulnerability, of elusive and illusive embodiment, that becomes in this iconic film a fantastic addition to the scene of creation. This thesis attempts to explain what such making visible – and then making *invisible* – of the monster might mean.

⁴ As I will discuss in my analysis of this film in Chapter Two, it is convenient to refer to this text as "Edison's Frankenstein" because of the link between the film and Edison as a historical figure; however, the film was written and directed by J. Searle Dawley, and received no creative input from the inventor himself.

Project aims

The aim of this project is to track the retelling of Frankenstein⁵ in popular cinema of the digital age. I consider both the evolution and the endurance of the tale: I address the reshaping of this tale to confront new contextual circumstances, but I also identify those aspects of the tale that have remained constant and that seem well-suited to the cultural and technological climate of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this sense, the object of analysis for this thesis is the “monstrous body” of Frankenstein popular culture itself. In his analysis of the ongoing adaptation of another great Gothic text – Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* – James Holte refers to the “shape shifting” power of *Dracula*, which matches the continual transformation of the text as it is reworked in popular culture.⁶ In a similar manner, we might speak of the “fragmented” body of the Frankensteinian monster and its link to the fragmentation involved in the cultural reworking of the tale: each adaptation in popular culture involves a process of “sewing together” disjointed images, characters, and concepts from the novel itself, so that in the early twenty-first century we can describe “Frankenstein” as a mega-text,⁷ a monstrous fragmented body. While Frankenstein has of course been adapted and retold in numerous popular texts –

⁵ Throughout this thesis, the name “Frankenstein” will be used to refer not to any specific text but to the tale in its mythic form. I will use the italicised *Frankenstein* when referring either to Shelley’s novel or to specific filmic adaptations of this text.

⁶ James Craig Holte, *Dracula in the Dark: the Dracula Film Adaptations* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), xiii.

⁷ In a slightly different manner, Damien Broderick uses this term to describe the science fiction genre, which consists of an “extensive generic mega-text built up over fifty years, even a century, of mutually imbricated sf texts”. See Damien Broderick, *Reading By Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 59.

from comics to television shows, novels to fan fiction – I limit my discussion to cinematic texts, for reasons that will become apparent below.

The term “digital age” is used in this project to suggest a set of intertwined cultural concerns, theoretical understandings, and technological developments, rather than to indicate a definite time period. I use the term in a similar manner to Elaine Graham, who, in her discussion of popular representations of the posthuman, refers to a “biotechnological and digital age”.⁸ In the twenty-first century, Graham argues, “the implications of digital, genetic, cybernetic and biomedical technologies is precisely what (and who) will define authoritative notions of normative, exemplary, desirable humanity”.⁹ This is a period defined by its own set of critical understandings about embodiment, technology, subjectivity, organicism, and “life”. Informed by developments in biotechnology, science, and medicine as well as in digital media, the digital age emerges as a period in which life can be artificial, embodiment can be virtual, the organic and the technological permeate and penetrate one another. This is a period, furthermore, in which the Frankenstein myth is more relevant than ever; but it is also a period in which this myth is vigorously reworked.

These developments in biotechnology, medicine, science, and media – and the shifting understandings of body, technology, and “life” that they initiate – are paralleled and contributed to by developments in the digital imaging of human presence on screen. Most importantly for this study, then, the “digital age” is a

⁸ Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

period defined by advances in filmmaking – by the rise of digital effects and the emergence of digital animation. Throughout the course of my research, I have found that the problems confronted by the figure of the Frankensteinian monster – problems relating to mechanical reproduction, the suspension of mortality, the presence of a “soul”, the negotiation with organic origins, and the irresolvable tension between “nature” and “technology” – resonate with the processes involved in both digital animation and live-action filmmaking in the digital age. Digitally animated bodies in particular are theoretically and culturally received as posthuman, as postorganic, as monstrous and/or mechanical; and when these bodies appear in fantastic and/or science fiction films (from effects-driven Hollywood blockbusters to dark and confronting anime like *Ghost in the Shell*) this link to the Frankenstein myth is often played upon through strategies of metaphor, intertextuality, and self-reflexivity. In this project, I will therefore consider the figure of the Frankensteinian monster not just as a fantastic being imagined by Shelley in the 1800s or as a cinematic figure brought to life by early filmmakers, but as a mythic figure for the digital age.

Underpinning this investigation will be a broader exploration of the strength and strangeness of the relationship between Frankenstein and film. Here is a tale that has been cinematically adapted many times, a process that contributes to the astounding cultural resonance of Shelley’s now two-hundred-year-old text. These intertwined concerns – the tale’s *durability* and its *screenability* – are described in varying terms by analysts of both the novel and its filmic adaptations. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, for instance, write of the “durability and power of the novel”, adding that “*Frankenstein* continues to be

read, the book's sales periodically increased by its latest popular manifestation in film or television".¹⁰ Yet the screening of the tale does not merely increase the popularity of the novel – in the sense that, perhaps, filmic adaptations of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have done in recent years – but *eclipses* it. As Albert Lavalley points out:

Most of us first became acquainted with Frankenstein and his terrifying creation not through the pages of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel but through our childhood Saturday afternoons at the movies or leisurely sessions before the family television set. By the time we read the novel the images from various films are so firmly imprinted on our minds that it is almost impossible not to filter the events and images of the book through the more familiar ones of the films.¹¹

At the same time, cinema itself has always been a sort of Frankensteinian experiment: a means of breathing life into stillness, of constructing and re-constructing human presence, of stitching together fragmented moments to create a semblance of wholeness. In the digital age, this experiment grows and changes: new modes of production are continually being trialled, allowing us to re-create and re-present human presence in new and often bizarre ways. In its filmic form, the figure of the Frankensteinian monster has always confronted the uncanny, spectacular, mechanical or organic-mechanical nature of filmic presence; and across the history of cinema this figure has been remoulded, a transformation that responds not only to changes in the social/political/cultural world around us but also to technological developments that alter the way we, as

¹⁰ George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (eds), *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xii.

¹¹ Albert J. Lavalley, "The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*: A Survey", in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, eds. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 243.

audiences, receive and engage with media texts. This thesis will map such a transformation, bringing the various filmic “machines” and animated “monsters” that function as reworkings of the Frankensteinian “Creature” into dialogue with the shifts in filmic technology they fantastically represent.

This thesis recognises that much has already been written about the relationship between Frankenstein and film. It is early cinema, however, and particularly the films of James Whale, that figure most prominently in these investigations.

Scholarship in this area is somewhat limited, to the extent that there is a sort of “canon” of Frankenstein films (which includes the 1910 Edison Studios film and the James Whale films *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*). While acknowledging the existent academic work on these texts, I will contribute to this area of study by moving beyond early cinema and journeying into a world of digital and animated monsters. In this sense, the thesis offers a re-examination of the relationship between Frankenstein and film.

Alongside its interest in Frankenstein, this thesis also recognises the importance of the “techno-body” as a mythic figure, a metaphor, and an object of both fantasy and theory. We find such a figure at work in the writing of cultural theorists such as Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles; we also find glimmers of Frankenstein in the work of these theorists, who map a posthuman condition and who mobilise the allegorical power of science fiction and fantasy in a theoretical space. This thesis has been written at a time when theoretical interest in the posthuman is high – and also at a time when we witness the collapse of the posthuman and the *postcinematic*. Today, posthuman bodies are

often represented in popular culture using postcinematic technologies; these bodies are the monsters, the aliens, the fantastic others of our popular texts, and they express anxieties not only over changing definitions of human presence but also over changes and threats to cinematic modes of representation. This territory has been explored by many theorists, particularly those who write about science fiction cinema, including Vivian Sobchack, Garrett Stewart, Scott Bukatman, Charles Tryon, and J.P. Telotte. This thesis is located in dialogue with the writing of such theorists, and acknowledges the importance of the techno-body as a figure who might confront the cinematic – and the postcinematic – technologising of organic presence.

Locating Frankenstein: on genre and choice of texts

This thesis acknowledges and mobilises the mythic quality of the Frankenstein tale, recognising that this tale originates in a novel written in 1818 by Mary Shelley but, today, is not confined (or even, some would argue, clearly linked) to Shelley’s narrative. Other theorists, particularly those who discuss filmic adaptations of Shelley’s novel, refer to this “mythic” quality of the tale. Lavalley reminds us that Frankenstein:

has always been viewed by the playwright or the screenwriter as a mythic text, an occasion for the writer to let loose his own fantasies or to stage what he feels is dramatically effective, to remain true to the central core of the myth, and often to let it interact with fears and tensions of the current time.¹²

¹² Lavalley, 245.

William Nestruck writes in a similar manner about various avant garde adaptations of Frankenstein in the 1960s and 1970s, films that “reanimate the myth of Frankenstein” for a new context.¹³ He writes:

The importance of *Frankenstein* to film has always been more than the history of the film versions of the novel. Since the sixties, the most avant garde filmmakers have returned to the myth as homage, as illusion, as model for their own relationship to film.¹⁴

Levine and Knoepfmacher also address the mythic quality of the tale and its images, which occupy a deep position in the cultural mindstream:

If popular culture has adapted [the tale], no part of culture can ignore it. Its key images and the central structure of the narrative itself enter both our private and culturally shared store of dream, fantasy, and myth.¹⁵

Following in the footsteps of these theorists, we can consider “Frankenstein” as a loose tale separated from the original novel: it is a story about techno-genesis, about artificiality, about postorganic presence, a story about the monstrous and/or mechanical body, and it is constituted not only of Shelley’s writing but of images from various films that place themselves in dialogue with the novel. We might also remind ourselves that, in writing *Frankenstein*, Shelley herself was retelling an older tale. As its full title suggests, *Frankenstein (or, “The Modern Prometheus”)* draws its inspiration from the ancient Greek myth of the rebellious Titan, Prometheus, who stole the spark of life from the Gods and created

¹³ William Nestruck, “Coming to Life: Frankenstein and the Nature of Film Narrative”, in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, eds. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 315.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁵ Levine and Knoepfmacher, xiii.

humankind out of clay; a myth that would have been known to Shelley particularly in the form of its retelling by the Roman poet Ovid. Here, then, is a tale already buried under many retellings, one that articulates a cultural fascination with the act of techno-production in its oldest sense.

Nearly two hundred years later, this mythic tale is told and retold with renewed fervour in both fantastic and theoretical spaces. Thus, as already noted in this introduction, we can be aware of “Frankenstein” without having ever encountered Shelley’s novel. I am reminded here of a conversation I had with a student I was tutoring, many years before I began this project. She arrived at my house one day for her weekly session and glumly informed me that she “had to read some old novel called *Frankenstein*”. I was surprised that she had never heard of the novel. Mary Shelley? The monster, the mad scientist? Only when I described a scene from cinema – the monster coming to life in a shower of electricity, the scientist cackling “it’s alive!” – did a glimmer of recognition come into her eyes. Carl Freedman offers a similar anecdote:

I have taught *Frankenstein* more frequently than any other work of prose fiction, and I have encountered many students who were surprised to learn that the whole Frankenstein story is derived from a single literary text – not to mention a novel written in a florid style by a young Englishwoman in the early nineteenth century. They seemed to have vaguely assumed that ‘Frankenstein’ referred just to a vast collective or anonymous saga, expressed in films, television programs, comic books, and other such forums.¹⁶

For Freedman, this did not necessarily suggest an ignorance on the part of the students but was indicative of the mythic, extra-textual nature of the story itself:

¹⁶ Carl Freedman, “Hail Mary: On the Author of *Frankenstein* and the Origins of Science Fiction”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 29, 2 (2002), 254.

the notion, in other words, that “Shelley’s work has entered our cultural bloodstream in a way that is true of the work of very few, if any, other canonical English authors”.¹⁷

In choosing texts for analysis in this project, I have been governed by an awareness of this mythic quality of the tale. In the spirit of Nestruck, I consider a number of films that “reanimate the myth” of Frankenstein for a new context. I refer to these films as “retellings” rather than “adaptations” of the tale, a choice that indicates my desire to move beyond the aforementioned “canon” of Frankenstein films. Caroline Joan Picart touches on the difference between “adaptations” and “retellings” in her analysis of filmic versions of Frankenstein, which she divides into two groups: those “that re-envisage the original (such as the Universal and Hammer series) within a horror genre” and those that “reimagine that narrative within a different genre, such as comedy or science fiction”.¹⁸ This thesis is generally concerned with the latter group of films, and particularly with science-fictional reworkings of the tale. I agree with Picart that discussions of Frankenstein in film need to address texts other than literal (horror) adaptations of Shelley’s novel. Consequently, this thesis will refer to films that play with the novel’s tropes, scenes, images, and themes but do not necessarily claim the status of “adaptation” – films that, in Frank Smooth’s words, “extend the myth outward a considerable distance”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Freedman, 254.

¹⁸ Caroline Joan Picart, “Introduction: Diffusing Beyond Horror: Frankenstein’s Enduring Resurrections”, in *The Frankenstein Film Sourcebook*, eds. Caroline Joan Picart *et al* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), xi.

¹⁹ Frank Smooth, “A Note on the Entries”, in *The Frankenstein Film Sourcebook*, eds. Caroline Joan Picart *et al* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), xvii.

In concurrence with Picart, I also propose that such texts are often more “active” than literal adaptations: that their engagement with Shelley’s tale is frequently more fruitful. Picart argues that literal adaptations of *Frankenstein* are “pre-set”²⁰ by the structure of the original narrative, but that looser retellings outside the horror genre allow Shelley’s tale to be challenged and subverted. Citing the seminal science fiction films *Blade Runner* and the *Alien* saga as examples, Picart writes that in such texts:

Despite the persistence of traditional themes (the parthenogenetic birth; the scientist as father-mother), various transgressions, which had not been possible in traditional iterations of the Frankenstein myth, now become crucial to the unfolding of the narrative.²¹

These science-fictional retellings show us how the Frankenstein “myth” might (like all good myths) be subverted and reworked to address concerns that were silenced in earlier versions of the tale. Films that play with the strict gender roles assigned to Shelley’s characters provide the simplest example of such subversion: and indeed, many of the texts analysed in this project are similar to the *Alien* films because they undertake a re-gendering of the Frankenstein tale, giving voice to female monsters and/or stripping the monstrous/mechanical body of its gender inscriptions.

Given the science-fictional nature of many of the films under scrutiny in this project, a deeper assessment of the relationship between Frankenstein and the science fiction genre is warranted at this stage. There are some assertions that

²⁰ Picart, xii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* was the "first" science fiction novel; most famously, these come from Brian Aldiss in his book *Billion Year Spree: the History of Science Fiction*.²² Building on Aldiss, other theorists have taken up this claim. Carl Freedman, for instance, refers to Mary Shelley as the "founder of science fiction",²³ noting that Shelley had "never heard the term [science fiction], and she may well have had no conscious notion that she was inventing a new genre. But that is precisely what she did".²⁴ Other theorists recognise the influence that Shelley's text has had on the development of the science fiction genre, and/or the science-fictional aspects of Shelley's writing: Darko Suvin, for instance, reads *Frankenstein* as a "hybrid of horror tale and philosophical SF" and analyses the novel in detail for its contribution to the science fiction genre.²⁵ This thesis acknowledges the debt owed to Shelley's text by today's science fiction writers and filmmakers; it also acknowledges, however, that such generic placement of Shelley's text is problematic. Elaine Graham identifies a common argument that Shelley's *Frankenstein* "must be read more as a work of occult or Gothic literature than as an early example of science fiction shaped with any degree of credibility by the scientific practices of its day".²⁶ Other theorists, however, contend that the novel disrupts the general rules of Gothic literature with its depiction of an act *inspired* by science (if not literally scientific in nature). In this vein, Brian Stableford argues that:

²² Brian W. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: the History of Science Fiction* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

²³ Freedman, 253.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁵ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 127.

²⁶ Graham, 74.

Victor Frankenstein might be regarded as a distant literary cousin of the diabolically-inspired (or seemingly diabolical) villains of the Classic Gothic novels, but his personality and his ambitions are very different. Although he takes some early inspiration from occult writings of a kind which the inquisitorially-minded might regard as the devil's work, he undertakes a decisive change of direction when he decides that it is modern science, not ancient magic, that will open the portals of wisdom for scholars of his and future generations.²⁷

Freedman pinpoints a similar shift in Victor's interests – from the alchemical and the occult to the scientific – and argues that from this moment “the text explicitly operates under the science-fictional protocols that are stubbornly alternative to both known reality and unknowable impossibility”.²⁸ When Victor animates his monster, then, he employs technologies²⁹ that are both scientific and imaginary, both possible and impossible, thus preempting, engaging, or initiating (depending on one's perspective) a science-fictional mode of storytelling.

It is not my intention in this project to constrain myself within the generic boundaries of science fiction, or to enter into any detailed discussion of “genre” itself.³⁰ That the texts considered here are mostly science-fictional in nature shows my interest in the process of reworking Frankenstein *outside* the horror

²⁷ Brian Stableford, “*Frankenstein* and the Origins of Science Fiction”, in *Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and Its Precursors*, ed. David Seed (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 48.

²⁸ Freedman, 256.

²⁹ It is important to acknowledge, however, that such “technologies” are notoriously hazy and are never specifically named by Shelley; instead, she shrouds Victor “scientific” act in a sense of secrecy and semi-religious mystique.

³⁰ For an outstanding discussion of whether we can or should refer to “science fiction” as a “genre” see Damien Broderick, “SF as a Mode”, *Meridian* 11, 2 (1992), 18-30. A summary of this ongoing theoretical debate is also provided by Annette Kuhn, “Introduction: Cultural Theory and Science Fiction Cinema”, in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 1-12. For other discussions of genre see Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), and Stephen Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).

genre as well as my support for the argument that Shelley's novel is *primarily* (if not exclusively) a science-fictional – rather than a horror or Gothic – text.

Neither is it my intention, however, to claim that Shelley's novel was the “first” work of science fiction. Of all such discussions, I find Adam Roberts' words on the subject to be most helpful. Roberts describes *Frankenstein* as “the originary scientific fable about the power of the scientist to create, matched with the unforeseeable nature of the consequences of that creation”;³¹ thus, he tells us, Shelley's novel contains “SF in nascent form”³² even if it was not the “first” science fiction text.

Furthermore – and as I will discuss in chapters ahead – popular culture of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has seen to a *science-fictionalising* of Shelley's tale. From Fritz Lang's early science fiction film *Metropolis* to the anime *Ghost in the Shell* and concurrent Hollywood sci-fi films like *AI: Artificial Intelligence* and *The Matrix*, we find that the Frankenstein tale has been rewritten as a science fiction story about mechanical and/or digitised bodies. This, as theorists such as Clayton³³ and Roberts³⁴ have pointed out, is due to the influence of seminal science fiction writers like E.T.A Hoffman and Isaac Asimov on the project of retelling Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Thus, we can justifiably study Frankenstein's filmic “futurity” by focusing upon robots, cyborgs, replicants, and

³¹ Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 48.

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ Clayton (85) argues that Frankenstein's legacy has been “crossed” with that of science fiction writer Asimov, giving rise to a series of mechanical monsters. This will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

³⁴ Roberts draws a comparison between Shelley's *Frankenstein* and E.T.A. Hoffman's story about automata, “The Sandman”. Again, I will discuss this further in Chapter Two. See Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 93.

avatars, claiming that today's Frankenstein films are less likely to be horror texts than science-fictional tales involving mechanical or otherwise artificial figures. At the same time, we can identify horror and Gothic tendencies in many of today's science fiction texts. As Stableford notes, "[a] great deal of the fiction nowadays categorized as science fiction is horrific, and much of it is born of a fear or even a deep-seated hatred of the scientific world-view";³⁵ thus its resonance with Shelley's *Frankenstein*. We can refer back to Aldiss here who states that "[s]cience fiction was born from the Gothic mode, is hardly free of it now. Nor is the distance between the two modes great".³⁶

Informed by this generic intersection between Frankenstein, the Gothic, and science fiction, this thesis frequently draws upon the work of those who write about science fiction film (as well as those who write about Frankenstein). I have found such theoretical work beneficial because it often brings the technologies of cinema into the analytical equation. Scholarship of science fiction cinema currently seems to revolve around the understanding that science fiction films participate in "the articulation of meta-cinematic reflections on the nature and limitations of the film medium", as Charles Tryon puts it.³⁷ Discussing such self-reflexivity, Roberts refers to the "metaphoric"³⁸ aspect of depictions of technology in science fiction cinema; using the icon of the spaceship as an example, he argues:

³⁵ Stableford, 48.

³⁶ Aldiss, 18.

³⁷ Charles Tryon, "Virtual Cities and Stolen Memories: Temporality and the Digital in *Dark City*", *Film Criticism* 28, 2 (2004), 42.

³⁸ Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 147.

The technology we fans admire so completely, the space-ships that we consider so cool and which are deployed on the screen before us in so exciting a fashion, are nothing more than the external trapping of the technology that we are *really* admiring, the technology of cinema itself.³⁹

In particular, of course, we are “admiring” the *special effects* technologies – these days often digital and thus other to the cinematic – that produce these fantastic images. This has led analysts such as Barry Keith Grant to state that “the genre’s reliance on special effects is itself an enactment of science fiction’s thematic concern with technology”.⁴⁰

Throughout this project, I will place my readings of various Frankenstein films within this analytical framework. Cinematic adaptations of Frankenstein in *all* genres contain depictions of technology that function as “metaphorically” as Roberts’ “space-ship”: when such films depict the “instruments of life”⁴¹ that animate the monster’s body, they cannot avoid an accompanying depiction of the cinematic apparatus itself. What we find in adaptations of Frankenstein, furthermore, is that the *body* is at the centre of this metaphoric play. Shelley’s tale is a tale about (techno-)embodiment in its most fantastic, monstrous, and problematic sense; and the various Frankensteinian monsters that have appeared on our screens across the history of cinema not only stand in for the filmic apparatus but confront cinema’s technologising, decorporealising, and

³⁹ Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 153.

⁴⁰ Barry Keith Grant, “‘Sensuous Elaboration’: Reason and the Visible in the Science-Fiction Film”, in *Alien Zone 2: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 21.

⁴¹ These are the words that Victor uses to describe the nebulous (and otherwise unnamed) life-giving technologies he has invented. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 45.

fragmenting of organic presence. These are the “filmic machines” and “animated monsters” that this thesis takes as its subject.

An outline of the chapters and a trajectory (of sorts)

This thesis consists of five chapters. My first chapter functions as an introductory investigation of Frankenstein and will lay the theoretical groundwork for the analyses that follow. Here, I introduce Mary Shelley’s novel as a text that has inspired much of the research involved in this project. I consider the metaphoric link between “text” and “body” that defines Shelley’s novel: a story about techno-genesis and creativity that can be read as a fantastic depiction of writing a novel. This text/body link has driven many recent retellings of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, including two non-filmic works that are discussed here in conjunction with the original text: Victor Kelleher’s novel *Born of the Sea* and Shelley Jackson’s hypertext *Patchwork Girl*. This chapter also offers a theorising of the monster’s body: a fragmented body onto which are projected the tensions between nature and technology; a postorganic body forever in negotiation with its lost origins in the organic world. These aspects of Shelley’s Creature, I argue, allow him/her/it to operate in dialogue with the techno-bodies – both popular and theoretical – that inhabit our late twentieth/early twenty-first century world. This chapter thus maps the theoretical resonance of the Frankenstein tale; in particular, I compare Shelley’s monster to the theoretically delineated “cyborg” as imagined by Donna Haraway and others.

My second chapter assesses the relationship between Frankenstein and cinema. This relationship, as many theorists have recognised, is built on fantasy, metaphor, and an inside/outside play: filmic versions of the Frankenstein tale are defined by a wonderful self-reflexivity, because filmmaking itself is a “Frankensteinian exercise in artificial reproduction”, as James Heffernan reminds us.⁴² This chapter unpacks the notion of artificial reproduction as a bridge between cinema and the Frankenstein tale, drawing upon the work of Walter Benjamin and his discussion of cinema as “mechanical reproduction”. My analyses begin with the 1910 film *Frankenstein*. Depictions of the monster in this early film, especially in the moment of his/its alchemical creation, express all that is fantastic, supernatural, and *strange* about cinematic presence. Later adaptations would turn the creation scene into a moment of electric spectacle. That Shelley wrote of a certain technologising of the “life force” in *Frankenstein* makes her work preemptive of cinema and resonant with cinema’s own production of electric “life”; this brings a certain self-reflexivity to the creation scenes of James Whale’s *Frankenstein* and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. We can also consider Kenneth Branagh’s 1994 adaptation, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, in this context, although Branagh’s obsession with both authenticity and organicism brings a new concern to the tale in its filmic form and is, we might suggest, symptomatic of an age dominated by digital spectacle.

Chapter Three investigates the way Frankenstein has been reshaped in cinema of the 1990s and post-millennium. This chapter moves beyond both the literal

⁴² James A.W. Heffernan, “Looking at the Monster: *Frankenstein* and Film”, *Critical Inquiry* 24, 1 (1997), 139.

adaptations discussed in the previous chapter and the “myth of animation”⁴³ that links them to cinema: in the digital age, I contend, new concerns have eclipsed cinema’s powers to animate and/or galvanise the body. We find that the monster is rewritten in this period as a simulacrum, a replicant, a cyborg, an artificial being. The emphasis in these new retellings also frequently shifts from the constructed and fragmented *body* to the construction and fragmentation of the *subject* in a hyper-mediated world. We can read the science fiction films *Blade Runner* and *Strange Days* in this regard: they are loose retellings of Frankenstein that dwell upon new themes of mediation, spectatorship, and artificial memory. The period in question is also marked by developments in both biotechnology and digital media, which contribute to a crucial shift in the cultural conception of “life” itself. This shift informs the retelling of Frankenstein in such texts as *Jurassic Park*, *The Fifth Element*, and *The Matrix*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the incorporation of digital effects into the Frankenstein myth and the related emergence of “digital monsters”: figures who embody the otherness of postcinematic technologies.

In Chapters Four and Five, I shift my attention from “filmic machines” to “animated monsters”. Chapter Four addresses new modes of digital animation and the related attempt to digitally reconstruct the organic body (and landscape). Drawing upon the theoretical work of N. Katherine Hayles, I use the condition known as “posthumanism” to forge a link between these new modes of digital animation (which frequently usurp human presence) and the Frankenstein tale (which revolves around a posthuman body). In today’s screen culture, I argue,

⁴³ Nestruck, 292.

the posthuman and the postcinematic collapse, and both find (apocalyptic) expression in science-fictional and fantastic tales that engage the Frankenstein myth. At the same time, new possibilities in the digital imaging of human presence – from the replacement of actors with computer-generated imagery to the quest for photorealism in digital animation – themselves evoke the Frankenstein tale and consequently make interesting contributions to the evolving Frankenstein myth.

Chapter Five moves into the dark and fantastic world of Japanese animation or “anime”. As theorists such as Susan Napier have observed, the body in anime is transformative and magical, fragmented and broken, transcended and posthuman, monstrous and mechanical.⁴⁴ These “strange bodies” are imprinted with the otherness of the medium that contains them: a medium that has always occupied the position of other to the cinematic and that is, increasingly, postcinematic. A space is opened up here for fantastic new retellings of Frankenstein that address animation as a mode of production (itself a means of “breathing life into dead matter”⁴⁵) while reworking the tale in response to notions of embodiment, technology, and subjectivity that are deeply embedded in Japanese culture. I offer the film *Akira* as an example of an apocalyptic rewriting of Shelley’s text (and of the monstrous/mechanical body it contains).

⁴⁴ For Napier’s discussion of the animated body see Susan J. Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke - Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 35-38.

⁴⁵ Richard Weihe, “The Strings of the Marionette”, in *Animated ‘Worlds’*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), 42.

Chapters Four and Five also present detailed analyses of two figures that I read as Frankensteinian monsters for the digital age: the motion-capture character/actress Aki Ross from the photorealistic digital feature *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, and the animated cyborg Kusanagi from Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*. As female characters defined by their beauty⁴⁶ rather than their monstrosity, these figures might seem far removed from Shelley's monster with his "watery eyes... his shriveled complexion and straight black lips".⁴⁷ Like their predecessor, however, Aki and Kusanagi are mechanical bodies defined by problems of (in)visibility, spectral presence, and an uneasy negotiation with "nature". Imbued with artificial life, their posthuman bodies are also emblematic of a digital culture that reconstructs the organic and de-organicises the screen. My intention is that this thesis should culminate in a dialogue between these two bodies and the mythic figure that the Frankensteinian monster has become.

Each of these chapters focuses upon a selection of films that offer significant retellings of Frankenstein. It is not my intention that these analyses should constitute an exhaustive or encyclopaedic assessment of filmic adaptations of Shelley's tale. Instead, I use the individual films as examples and have found it more beneficial to read their dialogue with Frankenstein in detail than to offer a superficial exploration of a larger number of texts. Certain omissions, however, should be acknowledged and explained. For the most part, my chosen texts are films of the 1980s or later. I use a handful of earlier texts to assess the

⁴⁶ As we shall see, Kusanagi is a rather androgynous and de-gendered character, not typically beautiful; nevertheless, her outward appearance suggests perfection rather than monstrosity.

⁴⁷ Shelley, 45.

relationship between Frankenstein and cinema: these include the Edison film, James Whale's *Frankenstein*, and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. I do not refer to the Hammer films of the 1950s and 1960s – *The Curse of Frankenstein* and its sequels – which I feel are outside the scope of a project that focuses on Frankenstein in the *digital* age; for a similar reason, I have not examined the popular unpackings of the Frankenstein myth that appear in films of the 1970s such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Young Frankenstein*. Notable retellings of the 1990s that are neglected as part of an effort to give form and boundaries to a potentially “monstrous” project include Tim Burton's Gothic fantasy *Edward Scissorhands*, which represents a whimsical and sometimes comedic variation on the tale but does not, I feel, address the concerns of the “digital age”.⁴⁸ I have avoided any detailed discussion of *AI: Artificial Intelligence*, a recent retelling of Frankenstein that has already been analysed in great detail by Williams⁴⁹ and Clayton.⁵⁰ Similarly, I have attempted to limit my discussion of *Blade Runner* – which I do analyse briefly in Chapter Three – because of the density of academic scholarship connected to this text.⁵¹ Another

⁴⁸ Like many of Burton's films, *Edward Scissorhands* is set in a pastel suburban fantasy-scape; while the satirical elements of Burton's film are undeniable, the film makes a notable contrast with contemporary science fiction texts like *Blade Runner* in which a similar story is relocated within a high-tech media-scape. In this way, *Blade Runner* becomes the more important text for this study.

⁴⁹ Mark Williams, “Real-time Fairy Tales: Cinema Prefiguring Digital Anxiety”, in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, eds. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 159-178.

⁵⁰ Clayton, 94-98.

⁵¹ *Blade Runner* has been analysed in detail by too many theorists to list here. Vivian Sobchack and Scott Bukatman both include thorough analyses of this film in their broader investigations of the science fiction genre: see Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Ungar, 1988), 223-299; and Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 130-136 and throughout. Giuliana Bruno offers a detailed reading of the film in her essay “Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*”, while Doel and Clarke present

notable omission to this study is the 2008 animation *Igor*, a comedic retelling and gentle subverting of Frankenstein which came to my attention in the latter stages of writing this thesis and an analysis of which, I felt, would contribute little to my overall argument.

The structure of this thesis reflects my desire to tell a story: one that begins with Shelley's novel and ends with its retelling in digital culture. It does not, however, reflect any desire to create a smooth or continuous history of film, or to suggest that literature, film, and animation can – or should – be seen in the same terms. I acknowledge that this project, which takes as its subject the (broken) communication between media, is built upon a number of crucial disparities. Foremost among them is the disparity between written and visual texts – that crucial tension between word and image, novel and film. This disparity has recently entered into theoretical discussions of science fiction cinema. Annette Kuhn, for instance, writes of the need to consider science fiction film in its own terms and not as an extension of science fiction *literature*.⁵² Similarly, Brooks Landon discusses the disparity between science-fictional works of literature and the history of science fiction film, arguing that:

a reply to Bruno in their article, which critiques the way texts like *Blade Runner* are appropriated as “metaphors” for postmodern theory. See Giuliana Bruno, “Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*”, in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 183-195; and Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke, “From Ramble City to the Screening of the Eye: *Blade Runner*, Death, and Symbolic Exchange”, in *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 140-167. Finally, Clayton (88-91) presents a convincing analysis of *Blade Runner* as a retelling of Frankenstein, and cites numerous theorists who make the same claim.

⁵² Annette Kuhn, “Introduction”, in *Alien Zone 2: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 2.

while science-fiction writing has always been a narrative medium, science-fiction film actually began as a non-narrative one, its influences and traditions being quite different from those of science-fiction writing. The two media have developed along widely divergent trajectories.⁵³

For Landon, current science fiction film has more in common with the spectacle and visual magic of early cinema than it might do with science fiction novels (such as *Frankenstein*). Accordingly, Landon recognises a need:

to rethink science-fiction film in film-specific terms, opting variously for epistemologically based or image-based criteria instead of the source-based or narrative-based assumptions that have so far shaped most discussions of science-fiction film.⁵⁴

This thesis does not cohere with such a suggestion because it traces the thematic and story-based echoes and murmurs between *Frankenstein* (as both a novel and a mythic tale) and certain films of the digital age. Consequently, the tension between film and literature – and the problems initiated by such a tension – pervades this thesis.

The disparity between film and literature becomes particularly noticeable and especially problematic when we are considering filmic adaptations of great literary works. Once again, this has special relevance for the science fiction genre: for, while we might speak of the *visual* and image-based quality of the film medium and trace the history of current science fiction film back to early experiments in cinematic spectacle such as George Méliès' *Le Voyage Dans La*

⁵³ Brooks Landon, "Diegetic or Digital? The Convergence of Science-Fiction Literature and Science Fiction Film in Hypermedia", in *Alien Zone 2: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 35.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Lune, we must also acknowledge that many science fiction films of the last thirty years are adaptations of famous novels or stories by such varied writers as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Philip K. Dick, and William Gibson. As Landon observes:

any rigorous attempt to develop a history, theory, or aesthetic of science fiction film must early on confront the special questions posed by the adaptation into film of written SF. That nearly every study of SF film almost routinely assumes adaptations to be intellectually inferior to the written narratives preceding them suggests one aspect of this issue, while the fact that many of the SF films generally regarded as ‘classics’ are themselves adaptations suggests another.⁵⁵

Landon goes on to discuss the problem of authorship in *Blade Runner*, where collaborating screenwriters each contributed to a script that was (somewhat famously) redrafted many times. The image of Frankenstein’s monster, fragmented and sewn-together, might be metaphorically deployed here. Likewise, the relationship between written text and filmic adaptation can be seen in terms of the adaptation as a problematic (or monstrous) “child”, difficult to love; it is the same relationship that Shelley writes of in her novel. Ultimately, the problems of originality and authenticity that Shelley’s narrative negotiates are also the problems faced by any author (or filmmaker) who attempts to rewrite and “adapt” the novel. Thus James Heffernan asks us to consider if filmic versions of Frankenstein can ever “be anything more than vulgarizations or travesties of the original?”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Brooks Landon, “There’s Some of Me in You: *Blade Runner* and the Adaptation of Science Fiction Literature into Film”, in *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. Judith B. Kerman (Wisconsin: Popular Press, 1991), 90-91.

⁵⁶ Heffernan, 136.

If Frankenstein is a tale most famous in *both* its written and filmic forms, then the disparity between film and literature – as well as those problems associated with the very process of “adaptation” – cannot be avoided in any real assessment of the text. Indeed, it has seemed more appropriate, to me, to embrace this disparity as a meaningful, if unavoidable, aspect of this project. After all, Frankenstein is a story about *fragmentation*, about the very disparity between body parts and the jarring mis-relationship between constructed body and natural world. We can evoke the figure of the Frankensteinian monster as a metaphor for the troubled relationship between writing and film, a body onto which the fantastic tensions between word and image can be projected.

The second major disparity that this thesis incorporates is that between film, in its traditional, photographic sense, and digital animation. It should therefore also be acknowledged that there has been much theoretical murmuring in recent times about the need to consider digital media as distinct from (and not as an extension of) cinema or photography. Sean Cubitt writes of a perceived need to “define the digital in terms of its difference from the photomechanical media”, noting however that this can be a problematic approach because it “rests implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – on a conceptualisation of the mechanical photograph as normative, and the digital as a deviation from that norm”.⁵⁷ This conception, he tells us, needs to be overturned “if digital criticism is to come of age”.⁵⁸ Interestingly, N. Katherine Hayles addresses similar concerns in her reading of Shelley Jackson’s hypertext *Patchwork Girl*, a digital retelling of Frankenstein

⁵⁷ Sean Cubitt, “The Distinctiveness of Digital Criticism”, *Screen* 41, 1 (2000), 87.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

that will be referred to in Chapter One of this thesis. Hayles discusses the need for “medium-specific analysis” in an age of digital media and electronic writing, and calls for a shift “from the language of ‘text’ to a more precise vocabulary of screen and page, digital program and analogue interface, code and ink, mutable image and durably inscribed mark, texton and scripton, computer and book”.⁵⁹

While this project does not venture far into the realm of electronic literature, it does bring novels into dialogue with films, digital animation into dialogue with live-action cinema, and refers to various other media texts (including television shows and hypertexts like *Patchwork Girl* itself) along the way; thus “medium-specific analysis”, the need to consider each medium in its own terms, and the related need to avoid collapsing media into one another, has been a concern throughout the research and writing process. Overall, however, I adopt the perspective that what we might think of as “cinema” is not limited to pure, traditional, photographic modes of filmmaking; it can potentially include new digital modes of production and is expanded and enriched – rather than threatened – by these new modes.⁶⁰ Thus I use the term “cinema” to refer to live-action film, animation, and digital filmmaking. I also acknowledge that the theoretical discussion of media specificity is ongoing and unresolved in an age

⁵⁹ N. Katherine Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis”, <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.100/10.2hayles.txt> (accessed June 10, 2009), [3].

⁶⁰ Gene Youngblood tells us that cinema “is the art of organizing a stream of audiovisual events in time. It is an event-stream, like music. There are at least four media through which we can practice cinema – film, video, holography and structured digital code – just as there are many instruments through which we can practice music”. Gene Youngblood, “Cinema and the Code”, in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, eds. Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003), 156.

where texts of different media are never perceived or received in isolation but meet each other in the wonderful mess that is called media culture; thus Hayles, in calling for medium-specific analysis, notes that this does not mean “media should be considered in isolation from one another”.⁶¹

This approach is well-suited to *Frankenstein*, as it would be to any great literary work that has been repeatedly adapted in popular culture and that consequently poses a challenge to the very concept of media specificity. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* is a narrative that has been retold in many technological spaces: from early cinema to the science fiction blockbusters of the 1980s and beyond, from Shelley’s original novel to novels of the postmodern and postfeminist era, from writing to hypertext to anime. The *Frankenstein* “mega-text”, therefore, is spread across many different modes of production; it is by no means a seamless or unproblematic textual “body”. These shifts in medium, as we shall see within, are at least partly responsible for the tale’s endurance and for its evolution – for the remarkable transformation that the *Frankenstein* myth has undergone. With this in mind, let us begin the analytical journey and turn to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a literary work that has had a complicated and compelling relationship with cinema and whose cultural import resonates into the digital age.

⁶¹ Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities”, [3].