

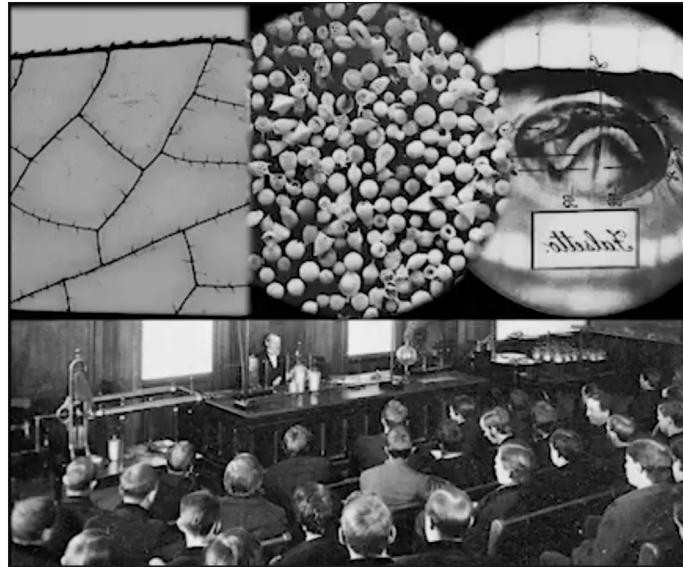


Frankenstein (Re)Membered

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A kaleidoscopic vision of *Frankenstein* comprised of collaged fragments from the entirety of cinematic history and its various adaptations and influences.





Creator's Statement

Since its publication 200 years ago, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has influenced vast swathes of popular culture. Adaptations have starred cinema legends from Boris Karloff and Robert De Niro to even Alvin and the Chipmunks. From tales of science gone mad (*Jurassic Park*) to stories of understanding the other (*E.T.*, *The Hulk*, *Arrival*), traces of the story and its themes have spread across our media. With "Frankenstein (Re)Membered," video artist and film historian Chris Gerrard collects these diverse fragments from the birth of cinema until the present day and, in the tradition of Victor Frankenstein himself, attempts to stitch them back together into an adaptation of the original Shelley novel.

This film aims to draw out the thematic throughlines both of Shelley's original novel and the multitudinous adaptations, placing their responses to the text in historical context and in relation to each other. For instance, one section reads the fear of "science gone mad" in the era of the atom bomb, while another contrasts the positive and fearful reactions to the female body as betrayed by adaptations of the *Bride of Frankenstein*. Visual contrast allows for active participation by the audience in the form.

This form not only thematically parallels the creation of the "monster," by being a revived collage of disparate elements, but also draws on the work of other video essayists. Daniel Morgan described Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988) as playing with the afterlives of cinema, with Godard's heavy use of collage as a post-cinema form that uses the medium as a source for both visuals and critical insight,

while building something new on top. This work aims to continue that aesthetic and conceptual project.

Biography

Dr. Chris Gerrard is a video artist and film historian, focusing on how experimental aesthetics can facilitate knowledge exchange and political change. Their practical work focuses on collage, archival footage, and cinema history, and has been shown at galleries worldwide. Their written work explores the aesthetic development of cinema and television, as well as the impact of popular science fiction. They are the programme leader in Creative Media at Bath Spa University, as well as recently pioneering the Digital Media Arts course at the University for the Creative Arts' Institute for Creativity and Innovation.

Review by Dana Och, University of Pittsburgh

From the opening magic lantern slides and the initial unexpected shot of Chaplin when Gerrard moves into the comedy sections to the eventual final credits of the title screens of the visual media used, this work is exciting and challenging in the best of ways. Gerrard mentions Godard in their Supporting Statement, but I also often thought of *The Green Fog* but with a more tactile approach and attention to the surface of the image and ideas of layering, collaging, decoupage, frankensteining, animating, remembering, and re-animating. The collage moves through the history of direct adaptations of *Frankenstein* as well as extending to unexpected, challenging, and delightful loose connections to not only pose challenging questions but also open interpretation in so many different directions. The sheer expanse of associations and images simultaneously exists as a (perhaps daunting) archive as well as a deeply personal string of associations especially emergent when the layered images move further into three to four levels of collage in a single moment. The layering of audio to a different film's images but with further substituting of faces creates one type of associative argument, while impeccable editing on the graphic match accomplishes another type. Gerrard's experimenting here with the surface of the image often brings, for me, an affective response of pure delight as these familiar and novel associations engage further with questions of technology, historical moment, the limits and possibilities of cinema, and our own interests and biases within this archive that spans medium, genres, and taste cultures. While it is very tempting to simply list a number of these moments that I found delightful, confounding, and inspired, those moments are simply a map of my subjective pleasures and associations: a close-up of my own eye. And we all will have our own.

Review by Marc Olivier, Brigham Young University

Chris Gerrard's "Frankenstein Re-Membered" begins with a Markeresque series of stills of ships attempting to navigate the inhospitable arctic. Dwarfed and nearly consumed by sublime icescapes, the explorers seem to meet the limits of Enlightenment ambitions to rival God. From the ice, a telescope is aimed at the cosmos, a meteor streaks across the sky, lightning flashes, a sled whooshes toward the ship, and Dr. Frankenstein is found, nearly dead, but willing to share his cautionary tale prefaced by a warning, "You seek knowledge and wisdom, but beware." Frankenstein loathes his monstrous creation and fears its desire to procreate. Gerrard shows us through video collage that the monster is indeed alive and thriving in media forms ontologically dependent on suture.

"I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper," writes Shelley in the preface to the third edition of her novel. More than a century later, Gerrard has assembled a family album of that progeny in a playful pastiche befitting its goal of re-membrance. Gerrard invites unexpected relatives into his monstrous family reunion, from German expressionist cousins to Chaplin, Mulder and Scully, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the Bates family, the Hunchback of Notre-Dame, Robocop, and the Hulk. The desolate soundscape and still images of the beginning of the video give way to a frenzy in which all mutation animation, revivification, technophilia, and technophobia become creatures of the Promethean imperative. Consequently, the far-reaching reverberations of Shelley's *Frankenstein* ripple so widely into the mediasphere that their everythingness risks dissolving into nothingness. And yet, the explosive appeal to affect is the greatest strength of this videographic essay, because Gerrard has transmuted Shelley's Burkean or Kantian notions of the sublime into a postcinematic spectacle of accumulation as its affective replacement. The glacial, barren, inhospitable landscape has melted into a sea of Saturday-morning cartoons and midnight movies.

As I watch the exuberantly kinetic end credits set to the tune of "Monster Mash," I recall the second letter in Shelley's masterpiece wherein Robert Walton bemoans the limits of the written word: "I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me, whose eyes would reply to mine." Glued to the screen of my smart TV while a barrage of title cards represents a small sampling of the monster's wonderfully hideous progeny, I find myself agreeing with Walton that paper is not enough. And while Walton's desire for a set of eyes to reply to his own is granted by his encounter with Dr. Frankenstein, the credits remind me that my own set of eyes, like those of so many others, have been brought to sympathize with Frankenstein's monster thanks to its kindred media.

