MONSTROUS TEXTUALITIES

Writing the Other in Gothic Narratives from Mary Shelley to Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Shelley Jackson and Toni Morrison

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Abstract

This study begins with a basic thesis about monstrous textuality in Gothic narratives – namely that texts like *Frankenstein* reflect the monstrous in their narrative structure and that this structural particularity can be connected to critical arguments about the textual representation of marginalized Others. By reading Mary Shelley's novel as an example of monstrous textuality – manifested by an open structure, multi-perspectivity and a multitude of intertextual and discursive connections – the introductory chapter on *Frankenstein* provides a basis for a more complex argument about Gothic narratives of resistance that allow marginalized writers to foreground meta-narrative critical explorations of textual production in their poetics and reclaim authority over their work under circumstances of systemic cultural omission and oppression of the Other. The methodology of this study draws on a concept of posthumanist literary criticism developed by Rosi Braidotti, foregrounding strategies of non-linearity and de-familiarization, a focus on memory and ethical accountability and a blurring of the boundaries between theory and narrative (see Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities”). Reading literary texts from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Love* (2003), via Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) as well as her *Maddaddam* trilogy (2003-13) to Shelley Jackson's hypertext novel *Patchwork Girl* (1995) within this critical framework, the main part of this study also addresses related theoretical contexts – from Derridean and Black feminist hauntology, via feminist literary theory between second-wave politics and the third-wave's questioning of binaries to posthumanist criticism and cyborg reading and writing practices – to eventually present a more comprehensive argument about how these texts might be read within a framework of critical posthumanist questioning of knowledge production and epistemological exploration beyond the exclusionary humanist paradigm.
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Introduction: Teratologies

"Derrida will come home mumbling about a she-monster who beset him in the woods." (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "mementos")

In Western traditions of knowledge production it is customary to begin at the beginning. But where does one start with an argument about the possibility of troubling such linear narratives and hierarchical epistemologies? And, if these concerns are taken seriously, is there even a subject position to speak and raise these questions from?

In "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities" Rosi Braidotti draws attention to a necessary critique of the idea of the humanist subject position based on its "structural anthropocentrism" and "in-built Eurocentrism". As Braidotti argues, this would "shift[...] the point of reference away from the authority of the past and onto accountability for the present" (Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities" 8). Her "methodological guidelines" for such a process include,

- cartographic accuracy, with the corollary of ethical accountability, and the combination of critique with creativity, including a flair for paradoxes and the recognition of the specificity of art practices. Other criteria are: non-linearity, the powers of memory and the imagination and the strategy of de-familiarization (Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities" 16)

While I will trace these elements of posthumanist methodology in my discussions of literary work by Toni Morrison, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Shelley Jackson in the three main parts of this study, my introduction will provide the necessary localization of my topic within a framework of critical discourses and ideas that will reoccur throughout the three parts of this project, as well as in my preliminary discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its critical paratexts as an important structural and thematic template that prefigures some of the strategies outlined by Braidotti.

My main argumentative focus lies on monstrous figures that emerge from and draw attention to the margins of cultural conceptualizations of the human and their destabilization of an exclusive humanist subject position. The monsters’ origins are connected to discursive practices of normalization, categorization and definition that exclude an Other, yet they are not created by these practices in an orderly, rationalist manner. Instead, monsters creep from the cracks and appear at the edges of such discourses. Monsters are abjected and marginalized in human processes of identity construction. The monstrous is always a matter of perspective, as its perception as an Other depends on a normalized, human subject
position – but the monster also, "throws humanness into relief because it emphasizes the constructedness of all identity" (Halberstam, *Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technoloty of Monsters* 38). The monster's position at the "borders of the possible" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 12), thus, also makes it a powerful oppositional figure, a marginalized critical position from which to undermine and destabilize hegemonic discourses. This is where monster theory intersects with critical positions focused on gendered, racialized and non-human Otherness as well as posthumanist inquiries that criticize the anthropocentrism and other exclusionary tendencies within humanism.

There are a number of trajectories that have led me to this critical intersection:

My first interest in monstrous Others stems from the role of corporeality in Gothic fiction and criticism, specifically in the female Gothic tradition, in the nineteenth-century Gothic's obsession with monstrous/Gothic bodies (see Hurley) and in the intersections of these in the contemporary (post-)feminist Gothic (see Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction*; see Brabon and Genz). While postmodern Gothic narratives tend towards the virtual and multiple layers of simulacra (see Botting, *Gothic* 181), there is a distinct tension between these tendencies and a focus on Gothic corporealities – especially in texts leaning toward the horror spectrum (see Aldana Reyes) and in narratives that revolve around the critical potential of corporeal representations. The Gothic's "negative aesthetic" (Botting, *Gothic* 1) facilitates the creation of narrative spaces to explore the underlying horrors of contemporary culture's fixation on the perfectability of bodies, as well as the multiple forms of oppression that arise out of narrow (gendered, racialized, ableist etc.) beauty standards and other, frequently highly technologized forms of corporeal representation. Within this framework of Gothic corporeality, my thesis is based on an observation that Gothic texts revolving around monstrous figures frequently reflect the presence of the monster in their structure and that this might, in fact, not be a coincidence but rather a specific writing strategy employed to extend the critical range of the monster in the text. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents itself as an early example of this concurrence of monstrous body and monster text and remains a pivotal text within my argumentative framework, but I also recognize similar structures in postmodern and contemporary textual examples – especially in the work of feminist and other marginalized writers using their literary work to express a critique of systematic cultural oppressions. This suggests a reading of Gothic corporeality, no longer tied, as in Ellen Moers' definition of the female Gothic (see Moers) to the gendered body of the author, but, rather more productively, revolving around the textual use of (monstrous) embodiment as a critical figure against various forms of systemic cultural oppression.

Intersectional feminism, thus, presents a second critical trajectory for my argument – especially an interest in representation and the question of who is regularly and systemically omitted from mainstream discourses and read as Other and what types of systemic
oppression underlie these omissions in various cultural and medial contexts. Mary Shelley's attempts at reclaiming authority over her own writing and establishing a poetics of resistance will be presented as a model reading of such processes in the short chapter that follows this introduction, before I take these arguments to the work of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter in part I and II of this study – considering their texts from different angles of gendered and racialized oppression and drawing on their own theoretical contexts.

My third argumentative trajectory, connected to the others by kinship (see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*) rather than genealogy, is critical posthumanism and the questioning of the humanist subject position – my focus in part III, where my main examples will come from Shelley Jackson's and Atwood's work. I will define my understanding of posthumanist approaches more closely in part III, but for the current context posthumanism is to be understood as the troubling of the category of “the human” as a stable subject position and based on the premise that both technology and the non-human play a role in these processes. This posthumanist approach also raises questions of methodology – that is, how posthumanist criticism might frame reading and writing practices and how to approach texts from a posthumanist point of view. A posthumanist literary criticism would have to take the decentering of the human into account and approach texts from a critical framework that actively counters privileged reading practices based on a hegemonic humanist subject position. As Carolyn Lau argues,

[*In posthuman literary criticism, creativity and critique is a concurrent dynamic practice that activates, de-territorializes stable identities, and forms affirmative and alternative subjects. It rejects linearity and questions the existence of Truth and centrality of Man in the text. Linearity in the form of blind deference to the authority of established narratives of the past prevents the creation of new conceptual personae and figurations. This calls for non-linear visions of memory as imagination, creation as becoming. (Lau 347)*

Critical posthumanist literary studies adds the "concurrent dynamic practice" of narrative and theory (or creativity and critique) and a focus on individual perspectives rather than hegemonic genealogies. To frame these theoretically, I will draw on Braidotti's and Donna Haraway's work – especially the cyborg figure and the concept of sym-poiesis/making together – as a critical narrative practice. This posthumanist approach has wider ramifications for the dismantling of hierarchies and the questioning of hierarchical forms of knowledge production, for linguistic practices of naming and classification underlying hierarchically structured communication and teaching, as well as for methodologies in the humanities and the sciences that rely on the structuring principles of these discourses.
Posthuman questioning is connected to the monstrous, precisely because monstrous figures trouble binaries and undermine stable hierarchies. Like the posthuman, the monster points towards the future; it stands "at the threshold of becoming" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 20).

Monstrous textuality, as I understand it for the purpose of my argument here, consists of an open network of intertextual connections to various literary and critical sources, metanarrative commentary and non-linear or multilayered structural effects that reflect and support the critical potential of a text. More importantly: monstrous textuality is self-reflexive. It comments on the circumstances of its own production and (potential) reception, the form of its medialization as well as the possibilities of non-hierarchical epistemologies and the creation of narrative in general. My model for this type of monstrous textuality (which I will further clarify in the brief exemplary reading following this introduction) is the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* with its open narrative structure and critical paratext. This kind of monstrous textuality foregrounds narratives of resistance against oppressive systems and hegemonic structures that erase marginalized writers precisely because it has the ability to juxtapose different perspectives and draw attention to oppressive systems of discourse. It is rooted in feminist thought and feminist resistance against centuries-old traditions of "female silence" and the "exclusion of women from the exercise of discursive power" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 75), but also open to the representation and critical examination of intersecting forms of oppression.

Based on Shelley's own comments on authority and their reflection throughout the novel, *Frankenstein* can be read as a foundational text in a poetics of writing against omission that is rooted in an understanding of the pervasiveness of these systems and incorporates gestures of resistance into the narrative structure. This tradition of metacommentary on textual production as resistance can still be traced in contemporary texts drawing on *Frankenstein*'s monstrous textuality and adapting its structure to comment on forms of oppression and marginalization based on (gendered, racialized, ableist or other intersecting) strategies of Othering. The three parts that follow my model reading of Shelley's work focus on absent bodies (ghosts), uncategorizable monstrous bodies (freaks) and techno-bodies (cyborgs and non-/posthuman species) respectively, attempting to draw parallels to relevant critical models (hauntology, feminism, disability- and fat studies, posthumanist theory) to also highlight the blurring of theoretical and narrative discourses as part of a critical posthumanist approach to monstrous textuality. More precisely:

**Part I**

**Chapter 1** focuses on Derrida's concept of hauntology and the necessity to supplement it for an African American context to make visible the ghosts of other Others omitted from both mainstream historical and theoretical, deconstructivist discussions. Toni
Morrison's use of ghostly and monstrous narratives in *Beloved* (1987) and *Love* (2003) to visualize these omissions will be the central focus of critical discussion in **Chapter 2**, while **Chapter 3** analyzes monstrous narrative structures in Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) and *Love*. My critical approach here, as in the other parts, will be both historically specific in terms of framing Morrison's texts within their cultural context and based on a posthumanist critical position that does not simply attempt to broaden the category of "the human" but rather uses the marginalized subject positions presented in Morrison's work to draw attention to the omissions and oppression of African Americans and other Others in hegemonic discourses.

**Part II**

**Chapter 4** draws on feminist theory (most prominently Cixous' "Laugh of Medusa") as an analytical framework for the discussion of feminist texts produced in the 1970s and 1980s and introduces gazes, mirrors and frames as textual strategies in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984). **Chapter 5** introduces intersecting discourses of corporeality, especially body size and taking up space (as concepts of fat studies and disability studies), to focus on how Carter's narrative resists the framing of its protagonist as an object of the male gaze. **Chapter 6** begins by introducing fat as a feminist issue, before considering fatness as a performative category. I will argue that the narrative texts I discuss in this chapter are representative of and engage with the theoretical discourses at a specific moment in the history of feminist criticism – that is marked by a reintroduction of corporeality into feminist theory and writing and a simultaneous queering of hegemonic discourses of corporeality geared towards a dissolution of representational and conceptual binaries.

**Part III**

**Chapter 7** introduces a theoretical argument about posthuman reading practices by focusing on forms of non-linear textuality (hypertext), drawing on adaptations of *Frankenstein* as examples, most prominently Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995). **Chapter 8** revolves around posthuman narrative, beginning with conceptualizations of the biomediated body and drawing on Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, and argues that these textual forms comment on the ways in which knowledge is structured as (in)accessible, how it is controlled or passed on. My discussion in **Chapter 9** takes these ideas of posthuman narrative bodies to a critical reading of Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy (2003-2013), to show how the novels highlight meta-narrative and self-reflexive textual strategies that revolve around the exclusionary tendencies of the humanist paradigm as the underlying epistemological structure of Western cultural production and explore alternative forms of representation.
While Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* is an adaptation of *Frankenstein* and Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy establishes a number of thematic parallels to Shelley's novel, the connections between these texts are not linear but networked and may even seem eclectic, where the focus remains on questions of plot and motif. Rather than attempt to draw a direct historical line from Shelley to Atwood, Carter, Morrison and Jackson, I would therefore like to argue that the parallels between the texts I discuss here are structural (in terms of their use of monstrous textuality) and point towards common forms of systemic oppression and discursive omissions against which these texts establish themselves as (meta-)narratives of resistance. This underlying monstrous textuality emerges as a form of textual openness to various discourses that frequently, but not necessarily coincides with the representation of disruptive monstrous figures in the text. Drawing on *Frankenstein* as a structural model, my reading of monstrous textuality is informed by a critical posthumanist perspective that is geared towards an understanding of how monstrous counter-narratives can disrupt hegemonic structures of knowledge production and create new, less linear and hierarchical epistemologies.

While I draw on different cultural, historical and theoretical contexts to discuss the texts in part I to III, connections can be established via a model of monstrous textual structure established by Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as well as a critical posthumanist reading focused on the questioning of hegemonic models of subjectivity and the possibility of knowledge production beyond exclusive humanist paradigms. As Braidotti argues,

Deleuze’s hybrid nomadic selves; the multiple feminist-operated becoming-woman of women; Irigaray’s woman as not-one; Haraway’s cyborgs, not unlike Cixous’s new Medusa (1975), are often rendered in the old-fashioned social imaginary as monstrous, hybrid, scary deviants. What if what was at fault here, however, were the very social imaginary that can only register changes of this magnitude on the panic-stricken moralistic register of deviancy? What if these unprogrammed-for others were forms of subjectivity that have simply shrugged off the shadow of binary logic and negativity and have moved on? (Braidotti, “Posthuman, All Too Human - Towards a New Process Ontology” 205)

What if these monstrous narratives were indeed not merely "harbingers of category crisis" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 6) of and for the human but could point towards different epistemological paradigms beyond the humanist subject position and its tenacious tendencies of abjecting Others? The etymological roots of the word harbinger (in the old French and Saxon terms for the person who finds quarters for an arriving army) point towards the fact that the appearance of the monster is, in fact, not merely a brief signal and
that the arriving category crisis is here to stay and potentially merge into a monstrous future. As Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova argue,

> [g]ender and sexual difference, race and ethnicity, class and education, health and able-bodiedness are crucial markers and gatekeepers of acceptable 'humanity'. They are terms that index access to the rights, prerogatives and entitlements of being human. [...] This insight about structural exclusions flies in the face of the universalist pretensions of the humanist tradition. This critical position also lies at the core of bio-political analyses of contemporary power relations and feeds into a critique of the limitations of humanist thought and practices. (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2–3)

Critical posthumanism draws attention to these exclusionary paradigms, but, more importantly, it is interested in alternative epistemologies and in how more inclusive narratives might be produced. As a self-declared optimist, Braidotti points towards the emerging Posthumanities (see Braidotti, “Posthuman Knowledge”) to explore these possibilities. Literary studies might contribute to this project, if it can, as Stefan Herbrechter argues, "remain 'critical' in the sense of developing reading techniques, forms of conceptualizations and subjectivities that are both self-reflexive and aware of their own genealogies" (Herbrechter, “Critical Posthumanism” 95). In this sense, a critical posthumanist literary studies – even if it is first and foremost interested in texts and readings that attempt to move beyond the problematic, exclusionary aspects of the humanist paradigm – would still have to stay connected to "'literal', 'literary' and 'textual' approaches" (Herbrechter, “Critical Posthumanism” 95) to provide a common critical basis.

My approach in the following is, therefore, based in the critical analysis of monstrous textuality as an opening, a point of entry, from which to raise questions of representation and epistemologies beyond humanist exclusions within a critical posthumanist framework. Read in the context of Braidotti's brand of Deleuzean posthumanist theory, the monster breaks the human / non-human binary – and other hierarchical constructions derived from it. As Nikita Mazurov argues in the Posthuman Glossary, it can be understood as

> a continuous, unstable project of both disassembly or ex-figuration and of unsanctioned coupling, concrete and relational, it is a practiced hybridity of form which eludes conceptual formalization, existing as it does as a state of contestation and troubling – shifting, adjusting, and dissolving at whim. (Mazurov 262)
Monsters resist categorizations, trouble binary structures and disrupt "congealed" (Mazurov 262) humanist narratives of subject formation based on an understanding of the human and its radical Others by drawing attention to their liminal position and constant becomings. The texts I will discuss in the following three parts are concerned with the representation of culturally specific Others and make critical points against very specific racist, gendered and ableist contexts of oppression, but they can, nevertheless, be considered within the same critical framework of disruptive, self-reflexive structures of monstrous textuality that I have outlined here.
Troubling Genealogies: Monstrous Textuality and Narratives of Resistance in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

"It is true, we shall be monsters" (Shelley 99)

In this short introductory chapter I will present a model reading of monstrous textuality as it emerges from Shelley's work in and on the periphery of *Frankenstein*. I will argue that Shelley's approach to authority and creation in *Frankenstein* presents the novel as a founding text of a feminist narrative tradition that uses monstrous textuality to explore representations of the Other. *Frankenstein* adapts Gothic aesthetics in a number of interesting ways, introducing the nineteenth-century Gothic's focus on monster narratives as well as a proto-posthuman Gothic focus on the intersections of corporeality and technology (see Heise-von der Lippe, "Introduction: Post/Human/Gothic"). The novel's enduring popularity and its merging into a cultural myth that exists separate from its origin text suggest a meta-critical reading of the narrative and its context. Moreover, as I would like to suggest, Shelley's work presents itself as a useful textual model based on a number of meta-narrative and critical connections to contemporary themes and issues that recur in the narratives I will discuss in part I to III, most prominently,

- the novel is concerned with questions of creation and authority both within its narrative framework and in the paratext, as well as the author's own reactions to omission by the critics;
- the theme of creation and the questioning of authority inform the structural level of the text – most prominently by using multiple contradictory narrative perspectives and by drawing on and creating connections to a number of discursive contexts – thus creating what can be read as a model of monstrous textuality to be picked up by later writers;
- the novel introduces these ideas by presenting a poetics of writing from a non-authoritative position whose dismissal by the critics hinges on the gender of its author (addressed in the paratexts) in a world that did (and frequently still does) not judge women on the same standards as men;
- as Shelley's case demonstrates this creates a situation in which women writers constantly have to defend their authority over their own work and literally write against a dominant standard, thus often creating meta-narratives of resistance (Shelley's own work in the introduction of the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* is an example of this);
the novel's narrative of monstrous creation troubles the conception of the human and the related concepts of a humanist subject position and humanist epistemology from which those perceived as Other can be distinguished, oppressed and omitted from hegemonic discourses.

I will introduce these steps in a model analysis of Shelley's novel and its context before I move on to the discussion of the more recent texts that draw on *Frankenstein's* model of monstrous textuality in parts I to III.

In the introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley describes a poetics of creation that resembles a Frankensteinian process of making a monster out of collected body parts:

> Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. (Shelley 167)

Contrary to the 1818 edition's preface, which had been written by Percy Shelley in her name (see Shelley 169), the 1831 introduction reflects Mary Shelley's own views on creation. It describes narrative as a process of combining knowledge from different sources and discourse and, in this, both runs counter to traditional concepts of god-like Romantic genius creating ex nihilo and foreshadows a feminist view of narrative creation as more of a community effort than the work of a single genius (see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*).

If creation, as Shelley argues, occurs from "materials [... ] afforded", her gesture to describe herself as "a devout and silent listener" to the "many and long [...] conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley" about "philosophical doctrines" (Shelley 167–68) can be read as a comment on the types of knowledge acquisition available to women at the time and her way of making use of them. Thus, while critics may have seen Shelley's remarks in the introduction as an admission of her debt to the male authors or figures of authority surrounding her (see Schoene-Harwood 27–28), they could also be read as the core of a poetics of storytelling – a poetics that privileges the acquisition and structuring of knowledge in non-hierarchical ways and favors multiple, individual perspectives over single, authoritative ones and might, therefore, be read as inherently feminist (see, for example, Braidotti, "Posthuman Knowledge").

Shelley's assertion that the idea for the novel presented itself to her in a nightmarish vision, seeing "with shut eyes, but acute mental vision" (Shelley 168), seems to mirror Gothic conventions - editorial fictions, found manuscripts and frame narratives (see Tracey) – but *Frankenstein* uses this troubling of the origin (of textual sources) to ask important questions
about authority – both paternal and authorial – and to problematize the dominant discourse of Enlightenment rationalism and its insistence on teleological historical developments and genealogies. Where early Gothic texts are concerned with how "the sins of the father" (Walpole 6) might bear upon later generations, *Frankenstein* introduces a monstrous figure that undermines paternal authority in a narrative configuration that found its continuation in the ultimately parent-less twentieth-century figure of the cyborg. As Fred Botting argues, "[U]nlke Frankenstein's monster [...] cyborgs do not expect the father-creator to save them" (Botting, *The Limits of Horror* 14). Nor do they rely on authorial/authoritative figures of creation: "uncoupled from organic reproduction" cyborgs also have "no origin story in the Western sense" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 292).

As I will argue in chapter 8, the cyborg presents a profoundly feminist figure that undermines patriarchal structures of paternal authority. Cyborgs exist outside of traditional biological and historical frameworks of reproduction and they write their own stories about the future. Frankenstein's monster, in spite of his search for a father, can, nevertheless, be read as an early cyborg figure (see Waldby). As a human-animal hybrid, assembled from body parts gleaned from "the dissecting room and the slaughter house" (Shelley 34) and brought to life through a techno-scientific "spark of being" (Shelley 35) the monster prefigures the cyborg by asking troubling questions about his own creation and position in the world. *Frankenstein* can, thus, be situated towards the beginning of a feminist tradition of monster texts that trouble the underlying patriarchal structures of earlier Gothic narratives and introduce a counter-model of knowledge production and (narrative) creation. Moreover, they do so on the level of structure, presenting multi-layered, open textual models with multiple perspectives and discourses.

In his reading of *Frankenstein* in *Skin Shows* Jack (b. Judith) Halberstam argues, that "the form of the novel is its monstrosity [...] The monstrosity of *Frankenstein* is literally built into the textuality." (Halberstam, *Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technoloty of Monsters* 31) Botting makes a similar argument about the novel's "narrative [...] indeterminacy" and "crumbling structures":

*Frankenstein*, it appears, operates along the borders of narrative and linguistic indeterminacy, traversing the indefinite boundaries which police the differences constitutive of meaning. These traversals reflect back upon its own crumbling structures and the processes that construct narratives to interrogate the distinctions which guarantee the singularity of the meanings of author, text and reader. The novel questions its own status as literature in its echoes and inclusions of many other literary

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1 See http://www.jackhalberstam.com/on-pronouns/. For bibliographic clarity Jack Halberstam’s birth name will be used in the bibliography for works published under the name Judith Halberstam.
texts; it raises issues of creativity and its consequences in the depiction of
Frankenstein’s work. (Botting, *Making Monstrous* 4)

*Frankenstein*’s intricate, multi-layered narrative structure invites interpretations and further
framings and the autodiegetic narrative aspects of the introduction suggest a reading of the
paratext as a further extradiegetic frame that can be added to the novel’s diegetic levels.
Shelley’s comments on authority and creation can certainly be read in conjunction with the
creation story within the text, pointing towards a reading of the novel as a model for later
texts hinging on meta-narrative comments about their own production and authorial position.
Multiple adaptations of *Frankenstein*, from films like James Whale’s *Bride of Frankenstein*
(1935) to Shelley Jackson’s hypertext novel *Patchwork Girl* (1995) reproduce and sometimes
expand upon the structural particularities of Shelley’s text, suggesting that the frame
structure – including the authorial paratext and the readerly frame created, as Gayatri Spivak
argues, by Mrs. Saville as the recipient of Walton’s letters (see Spivak, “Three Women’s
Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” 259) – should be considered an integral part of the
original novel’s argument (see Adams). The narrators of the other diegetic levels – Walton,
Frankenstein and the creature – also mirror each other in intricate ways (see Mellor; see
Botting, *Making Monstrous*), creating a framework of connections and oppositions that
reflects the novel’s central narrative of monstrous creation. This multi-layered structure
revolving around a core of monstrosity is a central element of monstrous textuality.

The frames also add a certain modular flexibility to the presentation of the narrative
events that opened the text up for later experiments with even more complex structures like
hypertext, as I will argue in chapter 7. Although the format of the printed book suggests a
linear approach, it is still possible to read the complex narrative structure of *Frankenstein*
from the inside out, starting with the creation of the monster. This reading would follow the
chronology of the writing process described by Mary Shelley in the 1831 introduction: "I
began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*" (Shelley 169), now the
beginning of Volume I, Chapter IV, writing the novel from the inside out with the monster at
its center. If, as Jurij Lottman argues in *Structure of the Artistic Text*, the beginning and the
ending of a literary text make up its presentational frame (see Lotman 210), then
*Frankenstein*, presents a distorted textual body, a monstrous structure. Not only does it begin
at the end (at the end of both Victor Frankenstein and his creation in the arctic sea), but also
is the beginning, the creation story not told until the middle of the novel, while each frame –
including the outer frame of the authorial introduction – is the retelling of the same story: the
creation of a monster. Moreover, it is a self-conscious monster narrative, that reflects on
creation, authority, and the question of origins and genealogies both within the narrative and
in its paratextual framework.
While it is possible to establish an intertextual link between *Frankenstein*'s use of narrative frames and Horace Walpole's early "attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient [medieval romance] and the modern [novel]" (Walpole 7) to create a new form of Gothic narrative, the type of multi-discursive structure Shelley introduces in *Frankenstein* can much better be described as monstrous textuality, as the text foreshadows an emerging tradition of feminist narratives of resistance rather than point towards the declining model of Gothic antiquarianism represented by Walpole. As Jack Halberstam argues,

Gothic novels are technologies that produce the monster as a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body. The monster's body, indeed, is a machine, that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative. The monster functions as monster, in other words, when it is able to condense as many fear-producing traits as possible into one body. Hence the sense that *Frankenstein*'s monster is bursting out of his skin – he is indeed filled to bursting point with flesh and meaning both. (Halberstam, *Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* 21)

The novel itself resembles the monster. It too is bursting with meanings and *Frankenstein* is a monster text in more than one regard, as the multi-layered textuality of the novel mirrors the patchwork corporeality of the monster in the text. The narrative frames play a role in this reading, but their relatively symmetrical arrangement has also been described as a Matryoshka chain (see Heiss) or a Chinese box system, even if, as Botting argues, they are not quite as cleanly separate as such a structure would suggest (see Botting, *Making Monstrous* 23). Beyond the narrative framework the impression of the novel as a monstrous patchwork structure is supported by its vast network of references to various intertexts and cultural discourses. Shelley identifies some of these in the paratexts, among them intertextual references to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as well as a volume of German ghost stories (Shelley 166); discourses of natural philosophy/science about "the principle of life" and the experiments of "Dr. [Erasmus] Darwin", galvanism and reanimation, to name only a few (Shelley 168). The novel's narrative frames add numerous others – often combining them in unexpected ways, like the obscure reference to the "instruments of life" and the "spark of being" that describe the act of monstrous creation and can, ambiguously, be read to reference both scientific and religious discourses (Shelley 35). By combining conflicting narrative perspectives and often deliberately ambiguous discursive references, the novel creates a complicated network of meanings that resist uniform interpretations but opens the door to multiple connections. As Botting points out, "Frankenstein incorporates its (critical)
readers into its monstrous textual body" (Botting, *Making Monstrous* 4), offering various narrative and textual tangents to pursue and the scope and variety of *Frankenstein* criticism has reached monstrous proportions in and of itself. At the same time, the novel resists stable interpretations, as its monstrous textuality "destroys any hope of narrative teleology whereby a definitive authoritative voice will be heard enunciating a unifying conclusion, a formal presentation of the meaning of the text." (Botting, *Making Monstrous* 4) This resistance to authoritative readings positions *Frankenstein* as one of the founding texts of a feminist tradition of narratives of resistance against more authoritative epistemological models that often position women as the monstrous Other.

It is *Frankenstein* the novel, which can, thus, be read as monstrous, above and beyond the question of the monster(s) in the text and its potential meanings, and this monstrousness presents both a major innovation to the Gothic genre and one of the reasons for the novel's lasting popularity and cultural impact. As Margrit Shildrick argues,

> [a]lthough the image of the monster is long familiar in popular culture, from the earliest recorded narrative and plastic representations through to the cyborg figures of the present day and future anticipation, it is in its operation as a concept – the monstrous – that it shows itself to be a deeply disruptive force. (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 1)

Monstrousness defers meaning from the figure of the monster itself to acts, circumstances and texts, opening further interpretive spaces beyond the presence of the monster – a fact that makes it an especially useful concept for critics of various dominant discourses that wish to trouble existing categorizations. Monsters have historically been read as signs and omens. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, they occur as "harbingers of category crisis" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 6) in times of upheaval, drawing attention to the fact that we – humans – need to come to terms with contradictory elements in our understanding of the world and our own position in it. "The monster's body is a cultural body", Cohen argues; it "is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 4). Expressing "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 4) the monster text reflects its cultural moment, but it does so in a manner that is critical of the present and points towards the future: "[t]he monster stands at the threshold of becoming". Monsters "ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them." (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 20). As Derrida argues, "the future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters." (Derrida, "Passages - From Traumatism to Promise" 386–
At the same time, the monster remains elusive, unknowable, oriented towards future becomings. It can never be fully grasped lest it risk domestication (see Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 386). From a feminist – especially an intersectional feminist – point of view this not altogether undesirable orientation towards an open and undomesticated future emerges as the "promises of monsters" (see Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters”) – the possibility of a subject position beyond the exclusionary tendencies of enlightenment rationalism and humanism.

In Limits of Horror Botting draws attention to a weakening of the monster’s critical edge through an overuse of monstrous and horrific narratives in recent popular culture and this may also be true for Gothic criticism. As Botting argues, "[i]n looking for monsters, anticipating their (posthuman) advent, their arrival is already contained by expectation and readily assimilated." (Botting, The Limits of Horror 160) With Derrida, Botting situates the monster's remaining critical potential as dependent on a "division in the category of monstrosity between an oxymoronic 'normal monstrosity' and a tautological 'monstrous monstrosity'." (Botting, The Limits of Horror 160) While I agree with Botting's view about the overuse and ensuing meaninglessness of monsters in mainstream popular culture, I would like to point out, that even in the process of domestication (see Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 386) the monster still draws attention to the problem of perspective. As Derrida argues, "[a] monstrosity can only be "mis-known" (méconnue), that is, unrecognized and misunderstood. It can only be recognized afterwards, when it has become normal or the norm." (Derrida, “Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms and Other Small Seismisms” 79) But who is this "one", this normal speaking subject who has the power to perceive and to name and, in the process, domesticate the monster? While mainstream texts may have incorporated, domesticated and commercialized the monster to the point of meaninglessness, I would like to argue that feminist (and other marginalized) voices may still reclaim the monster as a critical figure that draws attention to processes of Othering and the exclusiveness of the category of the human. My argument in the three parts that follow hinges on a reading of Morrison, Carter, Atwood and Jackson’s work as drawing on the critical potential of the monstrous as a subversive figure that troubles dominant discourses of Otherness and limiting cultural categorizations.

In Frankenstein questions about humanity and monstrosity are not only voiced by the monstrous creature, they also arise from the structure of the text that draws attention to omissions and absences. After all, does a text that describes, as critics have argued, creation without women (see Gilbert and Gubar; see Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”) and in which nearly every female character dies a violent death, not quite conspicuously make an argument concerning the lack of female authority and agency?
As Spivak argues, there is a hidden, "framing woman" in *Frankenstein*: Walton's addressee, Mrs. Saville, who functions as the occasion, though not the protagonist, of the novel" (Spivak, "Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" 259), and creates the potential to alert readers to the other (hidden) female presences in the text.

The novel comes closest to a direct comment on these questions of female representation and authority – albeit in a negative manner – in Victor Frankenstein's contemplation of the monster’s female companion and his reasons for destroying her instead of bringing her to life:

> She might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. [...] she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. (Shelley 118–19)

Beyond the fear that she might not get along with the male monster and the fear that the two creatures might reproduce and create a "race of devils" (Shelley 119), the phrasing of Frankenstein's objections also clearly highlights female authority and free will as a force to be reckoned with, thus aligning itself with the novel's meta-commentary on female authority in the introduction. As Alan Rauch argues, Frankenstein's arguments show that he is "completely unable to contemplate the notion of a female embodiment of knowledge." (Rauch 234) He decides to destroy the female creature precisely because she would be "a thinking and reasoning animal".

*Frankenstein* adaptations from *Patchwork Girl* to Kate Horsley's *The Monster's Wife* often pick up on and reimagine this particular aspect of Shelley's novel in favor of letting the female monster live and thrive in an environment that has proven hostile to the male creature, creating a female subject position based on monstrous otherness where Shelley's novel makes a point of having her creator refuse the female creature both existence and a voice. Horsley's main character Oona, for instance, manages to escape her creator's clutches only to discover that her appearance and manner are not read as monstrous outside her small Orkney islander community: "She was from Orkney where the funny lot lived and that was all they saw." (Horsley 252) Shelley Jackson's meta-critical hypertext, which I will analyze in more detail in chapter 7, re-imagines not only the female monster but also constructs the writing process as a patchwork, claiming that the text was written by "Mary/Shelley and herself" (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* “title”). By presenting several parallel creation stories, the text's labyrinthine structure also offers a meta-commentary on the concept of authoritative textual production. The possibilities of writing or sewing the monster (see S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* “written” and “sewn”) also evoke traditionally gendered
modes of creation (as well as the historical exclusion of women from official modes of textual production). Commenting on her corporeal and textual multiplicity the female monster claims: "I was not one body and there is more than one way to write this." (S. Jackson, Patchwork Girl)

Both Frankenstein's destruction of the female monster and the adaptations' exploration of possible outcomes for her survival draw attention to the novel's underlying questions of creation and authority. As Shildrick argues, "[w]e might well read the chaotic outcome of Victor Frankenstein's creation as Mary Shelley's own comment on the refusal to take responsibility for the monstrous other" (Shildrick 125), an other which, as Shildrick also points out, is a "man-made hybrid" springing "from the authority of the male imagination" (Shildrick 125). In a reverse reading, Halberstam argues that the monster "by embodying what is not human, produces the human as a discursive effect. The human in Frankenstein, of course, is the Western European, bourgeois, male scientist" (Halberstam, Skin Shows. Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters 46) – a figure imbued with the discursive power of a number of dominant cultural discourses. Botting draws attention to the ways in which the text evokes this tension between creation and creative authority by juxtaposing Victor Frankenstein's act of creation with the context of authorial and narrative creation:

Frankenstein [...] displays a monstrous (and textual) resistance to the power of a scientist-author and would-be god. The novel also offers an appropriate metaphor of the writer's activity: the reconstruction of dead fragments from many bodies, the traces of many texts, into a new and hideous combination that refuses to submit to the authority of the creator. Frankenstein can thus be read as an interrogation of origination, creativity and authority (Botting, Making Monstrous 22)

Writing, the novel seems to suggest, is already "making monstrous" - the assembly of a textual monster from various sources and discourses. And the gendering of the acts of textual creation and destruction in Frankenstein raises further questions about authority in this context. What is creation? – the novel seems to ask; who can be considered a creator? Does narrative creation really depend on discursive authority?

The fate of the almost-finished female monster, thus, fulfills more than one narrative function. Her destruction sets off the monster's killing spree and confirms Victor Frankenstein in his role as a terrible parent but, more importantly, it serves to underline the general textual argument about (gendered) authority that is reiterated by the 1831 introduction. She is the epitome of the Gothic body, both problematically gendered and uncategorizable. As Dani Cavallaro argues, reading the female monster as a predecessor of the cyborg:
An intricate and befuddling incarnation of often repressed desires and fantasies, the Gothic body eludes labelling and its appeal is accordingly complex. Above all, it is boundless; this condition is most famously epitomized by the formless pulp of the unfinished female creature that Dr Frankenstein ends up scattering over the floor of his laboratory. (Cavallaro 172)

The female monster's destruction draws attention to a gendered powerlessness that highlights her importance for the narrative, as well as for the paratextual context of authority evoked in the 1831 introduction.

Shelley's authority as the creator of *Frankenstein* was called into question immediately after the novel's first (anonymous) publication, when authorship was falsely attributed to her husband by a number of critics. On 14 June 1818 Shelley wrote a letter addressed to Walter Scott, who had favorably reviewed *Frankenstein* in *Blackwood's Magazine* in March but attributed the novel to Percy Shelley (see Scott); after politely expressing her thanks the letter explains:

Mr Shelley soon after its publication took the liberty of sending you a copy [of *Frankenstein*] but as both he and I thought in a manner which would prevent you from supposing that he was the author [sic] we were surprised therefore to see him mentioned in the notice as the probable author, - I am anxious to prevent your continuing in the mistake of supposing Mr Shelley guilty of a juvenile attempt of mine; to which – from its being written at an early age, I abstained from putting my name – and from respect to those persons from whom I bear it. (B. T. Bennett 34)

Shelley finishes her letter by begging Scott's pardon for the "intrusion of this explanation" (B. T. Bennett 34); and one might read the apologetic stance and the suggestion that it was "a juvenile attempt" as an admission of insecurity or even the expression of a sense of inferiority, but that does not deter from the general purpose of the letter – the reclaiming of her position as the author of *Frankenstein*. Jill Lepore draws attention to the difficulty of doing so for someone who, socially "had no name of her own. Like the creature pieced together from cadavers collected by Victor Frankenstein, her name was an assemblage of parts" (Lepore). While Lepore's article draws on the critical tradition of reading Shelley's life in the light of her work (see Botting, *Making Monstrous*), it must be taken into account that Mary Shelley's work is still frequently introduced within the biographical context, putting it in comparison with her husband's poetic work or the political writings of her parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin's. Shelley acknowledges her heritage as "the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity" in the 1831 introduction, mirroring her letter to...
Scott and presenting herself almost as an experiment, of her husband’s, who "desired that I should write, not so much with the idea that I could produce any thing worthy of notice, but that he might himself judge how far I possessed the promise of better things hereafter" (Shelley 166). There is a certain sense of condescension in this description, which Mary Shelley seems to write against in her account of writing *Frankenstein*.

As I have argued above, the 1831 introduction mirrors Shelley's resistance to Scott's assumptions. Written over a decade after the original publication of the novel, the paratext allowed the author to retrospectively comment on the critical reception of *Frankenstein* and, thus, incorporate her reaction to the critics' misreadings of her novel as her husband's work. Here she defends her position as the author of the text, commenting on Percy Shelley's role as an editor but also clarifying that:

> I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world. (Shelley 169)

The distinction between "incidents" and "trains of feeling" on the one hand and "the form in which it was presented" on the other draws a clear line of authority, separating her own ideas from her husband's contribution to the structure of the text. The emphasis ("certainly") suggests the importance of this distinction to Mary Shelley's own understanding of her authorship. As Botting argues, "[f]rom the outset *Frankenstein*'s author is displaced." (Botting, *Making Monstrous* 2), and Shelley is clearly writing against this displacement in the 1831 introduction. It is this gesture of resistance that presents itself as most fruitful for my discussion of twentieth-century, and a few twenty-first-century texts which draw on Shelley's model of writing the Other against dominant cultural discourses. Jackson's work in particular not only draws on *Frankenstein* but also comments on questions of authority and textual production, as well as incorporating critical and theoretical positions on *Frankenstein* in its labyrinthine network of texts.

*Frankenstein*s monster has been discussed in the context of various critical discourses from uncontrolled scientific creation (see Knellwolf), to feminist (see Liggins; see Gilbert and Gubar) and postcolonialist and indigenous studies approaches (see Spivak, "Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"; see Morford), to name only a few. While this openness to various interpretations is intentional, as I have argued above, the novel also comments on the problem of misreading in the shape of both Victor Frankenstein's accidental introduction to the "entirely exploded" principles of medieval alchemists (Shelley 22) and in the creature's failed humanist education from the works of Milton, Goethe and Plutarch (see Shelley 89). The novel certainly foregrounds the parallel between the double figures of creator and
creature, but one could also argue that the monster's problem is not so much a misunderstanding of the texts but a too literal reading which leads him to attempt an integration into human society based on his understanding of humanity from canonized literature. The novel, thus, draws attention towards the figure of the Other that can not be interpreted within a humanist framework of understanding as well as to the impossibility to create a useful concept of humanity from such a limited number of examples.

Shelley's attempts at reclaiming authority over her own work notwithstanding, critics seemed to continue to struggle with her authority over her text until well into the twentieth century, and the same oppressive hierarchies and traces of Shelley's poetics of resistance against them can be detected in a number of later adaptations of the novel and fictionalizations of its origin story. Stephanie Hemphill's *Hideous Love* – a poetic biography of Mary Shelley, based on the author's journals and letters – for instance, reflects Shelley's ambiguous stance towards having to publish her work anonymously:

I think that when
I can name myself
I shall use Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
in memory of my mother.

If I were a man
I might not wear
the cloak of anonymity.
(Hemphill 182)

Hemphill presents Mary Shelley as an early feminist writer in the tradition of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Someone who is aware of her own position in the world: "I want to be equal, but I am not." (Hemphill 1) Her Mary Shelley uses writing, as a tool to undermine her position in society: "the wiser, patient Mary just keeps writing without a name" (Hemphill 182), echoing the reality of many women writers who published anonymously (the title page of the 1818 first edition of *Frankenstein* bears no author's name) or under male pseudonyms (as numerous science fiction writers, like Andre Norton or James Tiptree Junior, did well into the twentieth century). Female authority and authorship are still not the default position in many ways and a number of the texts that I discuss in part II and III (*Lady Oracle* and *Patchwork Girl* in particular) draw on Shelley's work to engage with systematic omissions and forms of oppression.

While the introduction to the 1831 edition details Shelley's creative process, its stated purpose is to "give a general answer to the question, so frequently asked [...] – 'How I, then
a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?" (Shelley 165). That this was a question apparently at the forefront of everyone's mind is clear from Shelley's own account, but also from the frequent medial repetitions of the origin story. The frame narrative of Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*, for instance, shows Mary as a gentle young woman – played by Elsa Lanchester, who, also took on the role of the female monster, reiterating the doubling of monster and creator in an interesting way. Whale's Mary is focused on her needlework and confesses to be alarmed by thunderstorms, which leads the character of Byron to wonder "[c]an you believe that bland and lovely brow conceived of Frankenstein?" (Whale). It would, certainly, be tempting to read Whale's version of Mary Shelley as representative of its production period, but such an interpretation would be, in itself, a clear indicator of the ingrained and enduring cultural bias against the work of marginalized writers in general and women writers specifically, which often manifests itself in denying the existence and continuity of systemic oppression.

In *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) Joanna Russ asks, only half-ironically: "[w]hat to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense is to deny that she wrote it. Since women cannot write, someone else (a man) must have written it." (Russ 20) Another strategy, which she describes as "Isolation", includes the possibility to create "[b]y careful selection […] the myth of the isolated achievement, that is, the impression that although X appears in this history of literature […] it is only because of one book" (Russ 62). One of the examples she cites of the latter is Mary Shelley's work, or rather the lack of recognition of her work beyond *Frankenstein*:

In the fall of 1974 there were three or four different paperback editions of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in print and on sale in the bookstore of the university where I worked. There was no edition of Shelley's *The Last Man* there or in any other bookstore in town. There was, as it turned out, one edition of *The Last Man* in print in the United States, a relatively expensive edition issued by a university press. (Russ 62–63)

Access to Mary Shelley's other work has become much easier over the last decades, but, as numerous articles on the 200th anniversary of *Frankenstein* in 2018 show, popular culture mostly sees Mary Shelley as *The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* (see Sampson). Moreover, editions of *Frankenstein* still outnumber those of *The Last Man, Mathilda* or *Valperga* and criticism of Shelley's work centers on *Frankenstein* by a wide margin. Russ's other suggestion – denial of authorship – is also applicable in Shelley's case, as the author had to push back against assumptions that the novel had been written by her husband. Russ comments on the subtle cultural mechanisms with which women's work is often belittled or
not recognized as work, or their work, or meaningful. In the chapter "Denial of Agency", for instance, she quotes Ellen Moers' summary of an early twentieth-century male critic's assessment of Mary Shelley's work. As Moers writes:

> Her extreme youth, as well as her sex, have contributed to the generally held opinion that she was not so much an author in her own right as a transparent medium through which passed the ideas of those around her. 'All Mrs. Shelley did,' writes Mario Praz, 'was to provide a passive reflection of some of the wild fantasies which were living in the air around her.' (cited in Russ 21)

"Mrs." Shelley is, in Praz' view, constructed merely as an appendage to a male writer, a vessel which conveys the great ideas of the geniuses at work around her. This view, as Margaret Ezell argues, is rooted in literary critics' "insistence on women's literary history following a nineteenth-century model of narrative historiography", which encompasses a number of expectations inherently problematic for female writers, from the assumption of publishing as an economic career, to the "linear mode of organization" of literary history, which is interested in "finding 'origins' and significant turning points in an evolutionary pattern that leads up to and explains the contemporary situation" (Ezell 21–22) As a teleological narrative often geared towards fitting specific authors into already defined literary periods and movements, this system is bound to fail female authors, who seldom had the opportunity to work within the same social, economic or intellectual frameworks as their male contemporaries or the "serious" literary authors looking down on their amateurish dabbling in genre fiction. Authors not fitting into the preconceived expectations would then, automatically, be characterized as marginal to those periods and movements – more so if the male authors seemed to conform to a specific stereotype like the Romantic genius. Moreover, those frameworks might be constructed on the basis of excluding an Other in order to define an ideal of authority in the first place. As Brit Mandelo argues, this led to an isolation of women writers to the point that "[e]ach generation feels that they're the first and the only to want to be a woman writer, that they must do it on their own." (Mandelo) This sense of exclusion is, of course, multiplied for writers with multiple, intersecting oppressed identities.

Mary Shelley's case demonstrates that critical strategies of omission are not even always all that subtle – or even limited to writers of genre fiction (as opposed to more "highbrow" literary attempts). Literary critics continued to doubt Shelley's command of her own brain well into the second half of the twentieth century, as Bertold Schoene-Harwood points out. Even as late as 1979, the editors of the highly influential collection *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, George Levine and U.C. Knoepflmacher, felt the need to defend their critical
interest in Shelley's work and ask "[h]ow much of the book's complexity is actually the result of Mary Shelley's self-conscious art and how much is merely the product of the happy circumstances of subject, moment, milieu?" (quoted in Schoene-Harwood 28) Muriel Spark, arguably Mary Shelley's most famous biographer and an acclaimed author in her own right, argues:

*Frankenstein* is Mary Shelley's best novel because at that age she was not yet well acquainted with her own mind. As her self-insight grew [...] so did her work suffer from causes the very opposite of her intention; and what very often mars her later writing is extreme explicitness. In *Frankenstein*, however, it is the implicit utterance which gives the theme its power. (Spark 127)

As Schoene-Harwood summarizes, "Spark appears to be arguing that an enduring success like *Frankenstein* could never have been written by a woman in full possession of her mental faculties, but only by a girl, confused and ventriloquizing." (Schoene-Harwood 27) Lepore calls the critic's stance "[t]his enduring condescension, the idea of the author as a vessel for the ideas of other people – a fiction in which the author participated, so as to avoid the scandal of her own brain" (Lepore), but Shelley's attempts to reclaim at least some authority over her creation in 1831 seems to suggest that this is not an entirely accurate reading. Shelley's curious description of the novel as her "hideous progeny" (Shelley 169) reflects her ambiguous position towards a creation that she both undeniably claimed as hers and, at the same time, saw as a monstrosity in itself.

One of the possible reasons for this careful construction might be the fact that, by 1831, her creation had detached itself from her control and spawned offspring in the form of a theatrical adaptation. Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) shows the creature as a monster of few words – a far cry from the eloquent narrator in *Frankenstein* – a presentation that was taken up by numerous film versions, in which the monster's silence echoes the critical silencing of the novel's author. Ashley Caranto Morford draws attention to the colonialist connotations of this silencing and the privileging of Victor Frankenstein's perspectives in many adaptations, as the creature's depiction in the novel resonates with "colonial imaginings of racialized Otherness" (Morford) and, one might add, other forms of cultural oppression focused on gender, disability and class, that are certainly part of the reason for the continued popularity of the text among readers and writers who have also experienced some form of marginalization. More importantly, perhaps, the novel actively develops a narrative of resistance against such silencing strategies by presenting the radical Other as eloquent. The oral narrative of the monster within the text mirrors Shelley's own
attempts to defend her position as an author and draws attention to cultural strategies of omission and silencing creating a poetics of resistance in the process.

Over the last 200 years, Mary Shelley's authority over her own text has been undermined by a process of cultural disappearance of the author behind the text, to the point that *Frankenstein* is now as Botting claims "a product of criticism, not a work of literature" (Botting, *Making Monstrous* 3). As Ann Marie Adams argues: “Mary Shelley’s authorial experience demonstrated how a literary artist could be rendered almost superfluous to the artwork that she created” (Adams 403). Moreover, Shelley's role in the creation of the novel and her biographical background became a narrative theme in its own right and the events that led to the creation of *Frankenstein* have frequently been explored by biographical and fictional narratives from Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1987) to Haifaa al-Mansour's *Mary Shelley* (2018). These fictionalized Mary Shellesys, quite ironically, often assert their authority over their work, presenting a successful narrative of resistance that runs counter to the cultural detachment of the actual author from her work. By becoming what Adams terms a “mythic archetype” (Adams 403) *Frankenstein* facilitated adaptations; and adaptors, uninhibited by notions of unchallengeable authorial genius, assembled their own hybrid textual monsters from the ideas and concepts evoked by the novel.

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging" as well as "an extended intertextual engagement" (Hutcheon 8) that can create "its own palimpsestic thing" (Hutcheon 9). *Frankenstein’s* network of intertextual and discursive connections offers a multitude of themes and threads to engage with from various critical and readerly perspectives, and contemporary adaptations frequently explore the narrative's potential to accommodate new ideas and conceptualizations. Adaptations like Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* (2018), for instance, draw a connection between the proto-posthumanist *Frankenstein* narrative and the more recent critical context of posthumanism and cyborg theory to challenge the dominant subject position of the human. Their monstrous texts create a number of new connections to contemporary cultural contexts of oppression. *Frankenstein’s* open structure presents a model of monstrous textuality that specifically lends itself to such adaptations, and this includes the novel's meta-critical context, creating openings for feminist explorations of authority and narratives of resistance against being framed as Other by a dominant epistemological system. As Botting argues, "with feminism’s challenge to male institutions, including an assault on the patriarchal foundations of psychoanalysis, all signifiers of paternal power find themselves subject to stringent criticism" (Botting, *The Limits of Horror* 24). This questioning of paternal authority occurs in the form of a challenging of narrative authority and authoritative narratives, but representational equity remains a distant dream for many
marginalized writers. As Carmen Maria Machado argues, drawing on Joanna Russ' *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, we should not content ourselves with the occasional, usually posthumous rediscovery and celebration of a brilliant female writer. Instead "we need [...] more thoughtful vigilance; to help women and people of color and queer folks and working-class artists and so many others find their rightful place in the canon—ideally, while they're still alive to witness it." (Machado, “How to Suppress Women’s Criticism”) The sense of cultural isolation described by Machado and Mandelo figures as intellectual homelessness in Hélène Cixous’ work (which I will address in part II). While women writers have certainly been recognized and canonized in the last decades, a sense of isolation is still a crucial part of the processes of literary production for countless writers from the margins, whose social or economic minority status limits their cultural representation as well as the perception of their work. Their writing is, in consequence, often rife with the kind of meta-narrative comment on and criticism of these limitations. Where such narratives intersect with monstrous textuality, writing against various forms of oppression creates a poetics of resistance that can, ultimately, be traced back to the context of *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley’s attempts at establishing authority over her own work.

As a recent example, I would like to cite Machado's own short story "The Husband Stitch", which inscribes itself into the tradition of *Frankensteinian* monstrous textuality by being, among other things, a narrative about storytelling. Meta-commentary on how the story should be told, constructs the unnamed autodiegetic narrator's voice as "high-pitched, forgettable" and suggests, from the beginning, that "all other women" speak with a voice that is "interchangeable with [her] own" (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 1), evoking continuous cultural issues like mansplaining (see Goodwin) and the discursive underrepresentation of women’s voices in various professional contexts (see Kendall and Tannen). Moreover, all female bodies are 'marked' with ribbons, which they must protect from the curious male touch or risk falling apart, in a very Frankensteinian manner, as the narrator does when her husband pulls off the ribbon around her neck at the end of the story: "As my lopped head tips backward off my neck and rolls off the bed, I feel as lonely as I have ever been." (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 31) The ribbon, the narrative suggests is not a secret, but it is the only thing that is hers, the only thing holding her together. The story implies a patriarchal complicity between the male characters, the husband, the doctor and the son, which is negotiated via their combined hegemonic power over and their impact on the woman's body. The connection to other women’s lives and narratives is established via the shared burden of having to wear a ribbon: an accessory sometimes tied in impractical places that gets in the way of various tasks and works as a constant temptation to the male characters, who want to know what lies beneath and if it will come off. The image of the ribbon evokes a number of metaphorical readings, which are, however, never substantiated by the story itself — a fact
which the narrator comments on at the end: "I'm afraid I can't tell you, because I don't know." (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 31) The ribbon's materiality, elevated to the presence of a vital female body part, points toward a complete dissolution of the body in a network of material and discursive connections and relations between the narrator and her surroundings. Her body, held together by the ribbon alone, does not possess an internal stability but depends on the actions and (non-)interference of others. It poses a constant threat to her integrity in a cultural context that is dominated by the male gaze and by women's institutionalized lack of control over their own bodies. The narrator's lack of authority over her own autodiegetic narrative is presented alongside and as a result of the male power to mark and change her body, evoking a curious gender imbalance that permeates the narrative and whose main metaphorical but also quite literal embodiment is the ribbon.

Instead of definitive interpretations, the narrator presents a number of confounding stories throughout, none of which end well, as the women die from inadvertently wearing the second-hand wedding dresses of dead brides that poison them with embalming fluids or accidentally hide "in the attic, in an old trunk that snapped shut around her and did not open. She was trapped there until she died." (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 11) The narrator's conclusion that "Brides never fare well in stories. Stories can sense happiness and snuff it out like a candle" (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 11) echoes Victor Frankenstein's destruction of the unfinished female creature as well as the fate of his own bride, Elizabeth, who is killed by the monster on their wedding night. Like *Frankenstein*, "The husband stitch" is a complex, multilayered narrative, which invites a number of readings by actively resisting interpretation and closure. As Machado's narrator suggests: "For these questions and others, and their lack of resolution, I am sorry." (Machado, “The Husband Stitch” 31) Moreover, the story seems to actively provoke and invite these questions. By resisting an authoritative reading of its protagonist's fate – as well as that of the many other women in the story – "The Husband Stitch" draws attention to the role of questioning and challenging categorizations as a strategy of knowledge production that undermines hegemonic epistemological structures. As Machado suggests in an interview "the Gothic can be conducive to suppressed voices emerging, like in a haunted house. At its core, the Gothic drama is fundamentally about voiceless things—the dead, the past, the marginalized—gaining voices that cannot be ignored." (McCombs) Hegemonic structures are haunted by the ghosts of oppressed history, undermined by uncategorizable monsters and freaks, and called into question by non- and posthuman Others.

While it has, as Andy Miah argues, become a cliché to evoke *Frankenstein* in polarized debates about the possibilities and ethical limitations of science (Miah 7), such a simplified reading omits the novel's monstrous textuality, reducing it to a one-dimensional mad-scientist
narrative about a dystopian future produced by scientific hubris. More importantly, it misreads
the creature's potential as a disruptive figure of Otherness that undermines such simplified
inscriptions and points towards a posthumanist multiplicity of subject positions and what Miah
calls "an ongoing undecidability over the value of transgressing boundaries" (Miah 18). The
novel's multi-layered creation of ethical uncertainty offers multiple opportunities to rethink
exclusions and omissions inscribed in humanist traditions of thought and the scientific
systems based in them. The texts I will discuss in part I to III also struggle with the problem
of writing Otherness instead of being framed as Other and frequently attempt to shift the
perspective towards the (posthuman) Other – the ghost, the monster, the cyborg – to draw
attention to how these liminal figures trouble conceptions of a stable human subject position.
I: What Moves at the Margin

Introduction

"A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism." (Marx and Engels 14)

"A specter is haunting the specter of communism: the specter of the nonhuman." (Morton 1)

"[E]verything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely by the waiting for this apparition" (Derrida, Specters of Marx 2), Derrida states in his discussion of Hamlet in Specters of Marx. Haunting – the feeling that "time is out of joint" – presents the basis for Derrida's re-conceptualization of an ontology for a constantly deferred present as hauntology. Like ontology – the homonym from which the term is derived – hauntology is also concerned with questions of being in the world, replacing, however, the predominant categories of 'being' and 'presence' with the figure of the ghost as something that is neither dead nor alive, neither absent, nor present.

As Tiina Kirss observes, Derrida's long-expected discussion of Marx after the fall of the Berlin wall in Spectres of Marx was also accompanied by a "vigorous polemic" (Kirss 24), making it a complicated theoretical position to work from. While it draws on Derrida's concept of hauntology, my discussion here is more urgently concerned with a number of unexpected ghosts, who clamor for a supplement to hauntology as a theory of being in the world for those whose presence is contested based on systemic inequities. My argument draws on an intersectional model of oppression (see Crenshaw) that considers race, gender, class and ability as coexistent forms of identity, which can reinforce and amplify oppression and the omission from cultural representation. Taking hauntology's orientation towards justice at face value, this part deals with ghosts that arise from the active suppression of specific historical injustices – those faced by African American women – as easily dismissed individual memories and/or the Other excluded by Enlightenment humanism. I read representation of these subject positions as narratives of resistance that draw on liminal figures (monsters and ghosts) to make a point about their omission from cultural discourses and representations.

As Kashif Jerome Powell argues for the African American context, in terms of its representation, Blackness is already a form of haunting:

The presence of blackness [...] its representation and relation to the world, is characterized by the dense absence of subjectivity lost in the midst of chattel slavery. This absence is continually made present through thousands of stories that work to reify the borders of the black body. Blackness, then, is ontological positioned as an
incessant and immutable return to abject conditions of loss and absence. It is incomprehensible, perhaps even nonexistent, beyond its own phenomenon. As such, blackness cannot be described by ontology alone. (Powell 2–3)

As Powell argues, Black bodies are represented at the intersection of "presence and absence to articulate blackness as the ever-evolving relationship between the flesh-and-blood body and slavery’s ecologies of death" (Powell 3) He draws on Frantz Fanon's assertion in Black Skin/White Masks that "ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man", that is Black people need to situate themselves in relation to "two systems of reference" (Fanon 90) – indeed, more than two if intersecting categories like gender, class, able-bodiedness, etc. are rightfully taken into account. In this context, Qwo-Li Driskill's argument that there is a connection between biopolitics and colonialism offers a useful way of making sense of these entangled discourses of spectrality and embodiment. Driskill argues that

[a]bleism is colonial. It is employed to maintain an ideal body of a white supremacist imagination. The ideal body is heterosexual, male, white, Christian, non-disabled, and well muscled. It is an ideal with a long and troubling history inseparable from racism, genocide, misogyny, and eugenics. (Driskill et al. 84)

These discourses of physical difference serve the hegemonic purpose of maintaining a status quo that grants certain privileges and advantages to those conforming to or at least coming close to the ideal. Historical inequities based on these constructions of difference are still present in contemporary societies, even where openly racist, sexist, or ableist discourses seem to have been addressed and are no longer accepted by mainstream culture. The editors of Critical Multicultural Perspectives on Whiteness draw attention to race as a particularly persistent "pseudo-scientific [...] theory [that] was created to legitimize the slave trade, and chattel slavery, an economic system that required the cooperation of 'free,' often poor colonial Whites" (Lea et al. 2). This discursive construction of race, based on a perceived set of physical differences, served global economic interests and was, therefore, written into the laws of colonial nations like the United States and many European countries pursuing their own interests in the global south. "Whiteness is a representation of cultural hegemony" that grants "unearned privileges" to the those considered "white" (Lea et al. 3), but its associations with power and a perceived concept of normality have made it almost invisible, resulting in marking as Other almost everyone who is perceived as non-white or not conforming to the associated categories of normality. The reminders of these troubled
ontologies, although frequently repressed by mainstream culture, have a tendency to return as hauntologies that disrupt discourses of power based on Othering.

In Toni Morrison's work, which forms the main literary focus of this part, the conceptualization of Black presence/absence as hauntology is complicated by the intersectional nature of identity constructions that form the basis of her fictional as well as her critical exploration of race and gender as intertwined categories of oppression. Morrison's writing is informed by what Jeffrey Weinstock has termed the "spectral turn' of contemporary literary theory" (Weinstock 4).

As María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Preeren argue, "ghosts have played vital roles in oral and written narratives throughout history and across cultures" – however, since the end of the twentieth century ghosts have also become "influential conceptual metaphors" (Del Pilar Blanco and Preeren 1). Their work draws on Mieke Bal's definition of a conceptual metaphor as "evoking [...] a discourse, a system of producing knowledge" (Del Pilar Blanco and Preeren 1). In this contemporary theoretical guise, often referred to as "the specter", the liminal position of the ghost between "life and death, materiality and immateriality" raises important questions about

the temporal and spatial sedimentation of history and tradition, and its impact on possibilities for social change; the intricacies of memory and trauma, personal and collective [...], and the exclusionary, effacing dimensions of social norms pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class. (Del Pilar Blanco and Preeren 2)

As Del Pilar Blanco and Preeren argue, ghosts are also related to "powerful affects like fear and obsession" (Del Pilar Blanco and Preeren 2). Generally speaking, "[g]hosts return to exact revenge, to complete unfinished business, to request proper burial, and to warn the living of danger." (Felton 251)

As Weinstock notes, "[g]hosts are unstable interstitial figures that problematize dichotomous thinking" (Weinstock 4) and, as such, have become "a privileged poststructuralist academic trope" (Weinstock 4). As both an author of fiction and an academic, Morrison is clearly aware of and, to an extent, also an influential part of these discussions – especially considering the cultural impact of her novel Beloved (1987) which can only be described as a key text of African American literature on slavery and its consequences. As Weinstock argues, "the phantom calls into question the linearity of history" (Weinstock 4). Its impossible presence/absence undermines hegemonic historical discourses. "The ubiquity of ghost stories in our particular cultural moment is connected to the recognition that history is always fragmented and perspectival and to contestations for control of the meaning of history as minority voices foreground the 'exclusions and
invisibilities' of American history." (Weinstock 6) Such narratives harness blatant figurations of Otherness – the monster, the freak, the ghost, and other Others – to draw attention to cultural processes of omission and oppression and to present narratives of resistance against them.

While Morrison's critical as well as her narratological concept of haunting can be traced back to Derrida's concept of hauntology, her texts also provide a specific African-American perspective that adds important, situational questions, which I will explore in the following. *Beloved* focuses on the continued hauntological presence of slavery and is certainly her best known ghost narrative. The later novels *Love* (2003) and *A Mercy* (2008) transfer the cultural questioning of blackness as a hauntological presence to different historical and cultural time frames. Hauntology also plays a role in Morrison's critical work, most prominently her discussion of an Africanist presence in *Playing in the Dark* (1992).

My discussion of these texts will draw on critical posthumanism as a theoretical framework to rethink such narratives beyond ingrained historical conceptualizations of the human as an exclusive, culturally ingrained category. As I have argued elsewhere (see Heise-von der Lippe, "Introduction: Post/Human/Gothic” 7), this challenging of the humanist subject position connects the posthuman to the "negative aesthetics" (Botting, *Gothic* 1) of the Gothic, which has always been concerned with drawing attention to the constructedness and precariousness of what is considered "normal" in a specific cultural context. The ghost and the monster function as reminders of the fact that normality is a brittle, discursively constructed surface that may crack at any time. Focused on visualizing these breaks and gaps, Gothic narratives revolve around the monstrous and the spectral as both narrative figures and theoretical concepts. Steeped from its earliest beginnings in the counter-Enlightenment exploration of superstitions, supernatural elements and the pre-rational sublime, the Gothic offers a narrative aesthetics particularly prone to highlighting outside perspectives and exploring processes of Othering.

In the Gothic, ghost stories are anchored in time – the past – and space – the haunted house, which, in its metaphorical use as the representation of a specific family, can also be an indicator of past "family transgressions" (Botting, *Gothic* 116), for which punishment may be visited upon the descendants. In Morrison's specific take on this theme in *Beloved* the haunted house stands for more than the trauma of one family or a single past transgression. While the violent death of Sethe's daughter lies at the heart of the haunting, the novel also traces personal tragedy to its roots in the wider historical context of the inhumane system of slavery, suggesting that American culture is haunted by its violent past and present. "What'd be the point?" of moving away, Grandma Baby Suggs asks in the novel. "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief." (Morrison, *Beloved* 5) Morrison's concept of "rememory" that separates memories of past traumatic events from the
experiencing subject, serves as the theoretical framework of this concept of haunting. As JaeEun Yoo argues this dimension of haunting is typical of the postmodern Gothic that stages haunting as a transgression of the boundary protecting reality from spectral invasions of the past:

As simulacral maps replace actual locality, a spatial logic that replaces temporality dominates postmodernism, and postmodern Gothic performs the uncanny by staging the return of the repressed Other in spatial terms. In many cases of postmodern Gothic, the fear of the Other is thus expressed spatially as the fear of the violation of the boundary between the spectral and the real. (Yoo 153–54)

Morrison's novels use such spectral invasions to draw attention to the brittleness of cultural constructions of reality and normality based on the abjection of a suppressed spectral Other. As Sethe tells her daughter Denver in *Beloved*,

> [p]laces, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. […] Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (Morrison, *Beloved* 36)

While Sethe's description could be understood in the context of generational trauma and of a mother trying to protect her children from having to relive the experiences that marked her, Morrison's conceptualization of rememory also manifests itself as a form of spatial memory, in which traumatic events cling to a specific location, creating a form of culturally-specific, localized haunting.

> In classic Gothic texts "[r]emnants of the past – ruins, superstitions, passions – are attributes of an earlier epoch superseded by modern practices and qualities." (Botting, “Aftergothic” 279) These remaining fears are an inherent feature of any sense of modernity and progress. As Botting argues, "Gothic figures come to represent these anxieties and give them fearful form as monsters, ghosts, and demons whose return terrifies bourgeois normality and undermines ordered notions of civilized humanity and rational progress." (Botting, “Aftergothic” 279) Written in 2002, Botting's diagnosis of the contemporary Gothic in "Aftergothic" suggests that these monsters have now largely come to be empty threats: "A sense of cultural exhaustion haunts the present. An inhuman future is shrouded in old Gothic
trappings emptied of any strong charge; past images and forms are worn too thin to veil the
gaping hole of objectless anxiety." (Botting, "Aftergothic" 289) This was and is certainly true
for the overly commodified, constantly recycled monsters of late capitalist Western
mainstream culture, but may be less true for Gothic writing from the cultural margins that
appropriates genre trappings and narrative strategies to work through related but somewhat
different anxieties. As Joanne Chassot notes, "[t]he gothic's particular ability to throw into
relief both the anxieties and the dysfunctions of hegemonic culture makes it a logical mode
for writers concerned with exposing the contradictions between America's democratic ideals
and racial subjugation and with disrupting national myths of progress and liberty." (Chassot
183) While Gothic tropes tend to congeal over time and become repetitive to the point of
pastiche, Gothic aesthetics also have a tendency to constantly revive and renew themselves
(see Botting, Gothic). As Wisker summarizes, "some elements of the Gothic can be
trappings, stagy layouts and creaking artifices, cardboard villains and cardboard castles, bats
on strings and equally creaking performances of Hammer Horror films", but the same tropes
may also be used to express different and new aspects of culture. In Morrison's Beloved,
"the home in which Sethe and her family live is a haunted house, one with its own destructive
energies, and it is also the haunted house of the American South and its past." (Wisker,
Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction 104) Beloved is, as Barbara Hill Rigney points out,
"not an ordinary ghost story" (Rigney 234); it presents haunting as a reaction to an
unbearable historical reality: "Sethe's burnt-out eyes, Baby Suggs's depression before she
dies, Paul D's uncontrollably trembling hands are all sane reactions to an insane world."
(Rigney 234)

Morrison's engagement with the Gothic tradition draws attention to the affective
possibilities of the genre, which is associated with the creation of negative emotions like fear
and terror. As Wisker argues, there is a critical metanarrative aspect to Morrison's specific
choice of genre:

Writing the Gothic also carries its own second-class citizenship, since for African
American (and Black British) women, the forms of writing most accepted in the early
1980s, when their work started to gain a wider audience, was that of realism and
testimony. [...] But testimony does not necessarily involve the imaginatively lived, the
emotionally lived experience, as well as the factual. In her use of the Gothic,
constructing a haunted house and developing the figure of a ghost returned into a
Black household, Morrison knew she was taking a risk, because her use of the
supernatural and of the strategies of the literary Gothic could themselves be seen as a
simplistic mode. (Wisker, Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction 96)
With its focus on metanarrative techniques of textual production, the Gothic emerges as a deliberate choice for Morrison's project, as Gothic aesthetics foregrounds the formal elements of the monstrous/spectral narrative, as well as its intertextual connections. In a cultural climate that privileges rational, techno-scientific explanations, monsters and ghosts present powerful narrative disruptions and counter-narratives.

Like the ghost, the monster also emerges as a critical category in Morrison's novels, which often employ figures of monstrosity to draw attention to the abject Other and narratives of resistance that trouble categorizations and discourses of "normality". Monster theory, most prominently Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seminal theses that read monsters as "harbinger[s] of category crisis" and as "policing the borders of the possible" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 6, 12), frames within the reference system of the Gothic, processes of Othering that have, historically, excluded certain groups in an attempt to establish a standard of "normal" humanity. In normalized social structures the appearance of a monster – an uncategorized entity – signals category crisis to those within the system, because the monster works as a reminder of the unstable, discursive nature of processes of categorization and exclusion. As Derrida argues,

> monstrosity may reveal or make one aware of what normality is. Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history – which is the case with discursive norms, philosophical norms, socio-cultural norms, they have a history – any appearance of monstrosity in this domain. (Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 385)

Monsters, thus, define "the borders of the possible", because they need to be constantly re-defined as transgressing those discursive boundaries to reiterate the normality of the status quo. As Cohen argues, the monster "haunts [...] metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. [...] The monstrous body is pure culture." (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 4) Even in a cultural climate that aims to scientifically define and understand monstrosity, to domesticate the monster, "the monster retains a haunting complexity" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 19). Its monstrosity can never be fully consoled with mainstream culture because mainstream culture needs the monster to represent everything that is not "normal". To highlight this incommensurability can be a function of textuality as Derrida argues: "one must produce what in fact looks like a discursive monster so that the analysis will be a practical effect, so that people will be forced to become aware of the history of normality." (Derrida, "Passages - From Traumatism to Promise" 386) And:
Texts and discourses that provoke at the outset reactions of rejection, that are denounced precisely as anomalies or monstrosities are often texts that, before being in turn appropriated, assimilated, acculturated, transform the nature of the field of reception, transform the nature of social and cultural experience, historical experience. (Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 387)

As I have argued in my general introduction, I read monster texts in the feminist tradition of *Frankenstein* as narratives of resistance against the normalization of patriarchal structures that exclude women (and other Others) and theorize the exclusion of women as a normative process often discursively based on seemingly individual, situationally specific arguments (see Russ). In this context, Derrida’s observation about domesticating the monster appears problematic in its generality, particularly if it can be read as indicative of an oppressive/colonialist silencing of the radical Other. He observes:

> All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant*, to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits (Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 387).

While this may indeed, as Derrida points out, be “the movement of culture” (Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 387), the question remains as to who or what may be suppressed and once again marginalized, in domesticating the monster and “having it assume the habits” – in the normalizing movement of human culture. After all, what might such a process of domestication entail, rather than a silencing of discourses perceived as Other?

Within this critical framework, this part will explore ghosts that haunt already haunted territories, where meaning has never been stable and was and is further deferred by attempts at categorization and colonization.

The three chapters in this part will:
1. introduce the necessity of supplementing Derrida’s concept of hauntology for a postcolonial African American context that foregrounds individual women’s experiences as narratives of resistance against cultural marginalization, as well as the representation as Other within the apocalyptic logic of colonialist contexts;
2. provide an analysis of Morrison’s engagement with the theoretical basis of hauntology and the literary strategies of hauntology to draw attention to the experiences of African American women throughout different periods of American culture and history;
3. present a reading of Morrison's ghostly / monstrous narratives within the context of Gothic narratives of resistance, which function within a wider argumentative framework of critical posthumanist re-valuations of a normalized humanist subject position.
1 Hauntologies

1.1 Specters of Derrida

This chapter discusses Derrida's concept of hauntology and its necessary supplementation for certain contexts of Othering – specifically Black Feminist Hauntologies. As Derrida argues, "a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back." (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 11) This is, as Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx* (1993), always a historical-political project oriented towards justice:

No justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xviii)

Derrida's project in *Specters of Marx* concerns the necessity of class struggle after the fall of the Berlin wall and the (proclaimed) end of history (see Fukuyama). The text identifies the "plagues of the 'new world order'" – underemployment, democratic exclusion of the homeless and deportation of immigrants, economic wars, non-regulation of the free market, the aggravation of foreign debt, the arms industry and trade, the spread of nuclear weapons, inter-ethnic wars, the rise of what he calls "phantom states" (like the mafia and drug cartels) and the failure of international law and institutions (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 100–04). While the text discusses these plagues in some depth, it does not draw direct connections between them. As Spivak notes

Derrida can't see the systemic connections between [sic] the ten plagues of the New World Order [SM 81] because he cannot know the connection between industrial capitalism, colonialism, so-called postindustrial capitalism, neocolonialism, electronified capitalism, and the current financialization of the globe, with the attendant phenomena of migrancy and ecological disaster. (For him hi-tech is all good, and only the media, albeit broadly defined, is "technologically invasive" [SM 39].) He offers us rather the best of the West – the auto-critical Enlightenment (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 68).

Derrida's list of plagues and his argument, thus, only seem comprehensive in their inclusion of Othering mechanisms (racism, colonialism, sexism, etc.) on the surface, but, as the
classification as "victims of violence" already suggests, these forms of oppression will carry a slightly different meaning if viewed from the oppressed margins. Spivak draws attention to the specific position of Derrida's argument:

How, in other words, is the New International so new? Perhaps it is, to the European left liberal; but why should the South feel any degree of confidence in the project? A researched account would need at least to refer generally to the longstanding global struggles from below (one of the problems with Human Rights and International Law lobbies is that they are so irreproachably well-bred), which undo the opposition between economic resistance, cultural identity, and women's minded bodies (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 69).

Hinging on the contemporary echoes of questions raised by Marxism and the communist manifesto, Derrida's project of justice challenges neoliberal capitalism as the political ultima ratio of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, but his project does not address the echoes of Otherness in his own rhetoric. For instance, the term "slave" is used metaphorically throughout *Specters of Marx*, without addressing its literal meaning for those who "have no autonomy" and are perceived "as objects in the service of men, for men" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 172). The problem may seem historical, but in the light of 46 million people living under conditions of modern slavery, mostly in countries of the Global South (India, Pakistan) as well as China and the former Soviet Union (see *Global Slavery Index*) there is sufficient cause to argue that these questions possess a contemporary political urgency that goes way beyond the historical concept. While Derrida's focus is, of course, largely European, the metaphorical use of the term "slave" evokes certain expectations concerning the discussion of the European involvement in the international slave trade which is, however, not fulfilled by the text. The specter of communism is clearly not the only specter haunting Europe. If money and economic transactions themselves can be read as spectral simulacra (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 56–57), linking commodities to death, these are, in turn, haunted by the very real specters of the historical economies that produced European wealth and the necropolitical commodification of non-European bodies and territories in the process. As Morton points out, Western philosophical traditions are haunted by the underlying "specter of the non-human" (Morton 1), the uneasy, exclusive legacy of Enlightenment humanism. Coming to terms with cultural haunting is a critical project we must face more than ever, as the anthropocene progresses and we are more and more confronted with the destructive legacies of teleological narratives of progress.
Nils Bubandt draws attention to "an important and unsettling feature of the anthropocene, namely, the increasing impossibility of distinguishing human from nonhuman forces, the anthropos from the geos" (Bubandt G122), suggesting that in a time of global warming, ocean acidification, and mass extinction, [...] necropolitics has come to cover a much broader and much more stochastic politics of life and death [than the context of war originally suggested by Achille Mbembe]. Humans, animals, plants, fungi, and bacteria now live and die under conditions that may have been critically shaped by human activity but that are also increasingly outside of human control. I use the notion of a necropolitics of the Anthropocene to indicate the life-and-death effects – intended as well as unintended – of this kind of ruination and extinction. (Bubandt G124)

Bubandt's argument draws attention to the necessary theoretical connection between marginalized identity politics and posthumanist criticism, which must acknowledge kinship, not on the basis of a glorified love for animals and the beauty of nature but as a necessary strategy of survival in the anthropocene – particularly in those areas of the world most directly affected by climate change and capitalist exploitation.

What concerns me here is how the fundamental Eurocentrism of poststructuralism highlights the necessity of addressing the underlying assumptions of hauntology. Jodey Castricano reads haunting as a central figure of identity construction in Derrida's work, which is only guaranteed via the "memory of the other" (Castricano 23) after its death. Castricano sets Derrida's use of the spectral within the context of the Gothic, arguing that, "many of the familiar Gothic tropes and topoi" (Castricano 6) find an echo in Derrida's deconstruction, which she sees as the most influential contemporary theoretical paradigm regarding the discursive construction of "truths". The ghost (like the crypt) is a function of the text, a "condition of texutality in general" (Castricano 46) as well as writing: "the work of mourning – or cryptomimesis – [is] a certain writing that draws us into history as well as the production of the ghost. Writing, in this case, is the Gothic equivalent of pursuing a phantom through labyrinthine vaults" (Castricano 120).

While the idea of the ghost, as Weinstock notes, "disrupts oppositional thinking and the linearity of historical chronology" (Weinstock 5), hauntological questioning has so far largely failed, as Viviane Saleh-Hanna argues, to address its roots in colonialist philosophy and psychology. What is needed then, is a derivative approach, that of "Black Feminist Hauntology", that is, "an anti-colonial analysis of time that captures the expanding and repetitive nature of structural violence, a process whereby we begin to locate a language to speak about the actual, not just symbolic or theorized violence that is racial colonialism." (Saleh-Hanna 8)
Black Feminist Hauntology in Saleh-Hanna’s sense and Morrison’s work thus assumes a different stance towards systems of justice. As Derrida suggests, "being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations," which he wishes to address "in the name of justice" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xviii), which "must carry beyond present life" to "the life of others" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xix). This understanding of justice is based on the relatively straightforward assumption that both the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s) of an injustice exist within the same legal as well as discursive system – as they do in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Derrida’s most prominent example in *Specters of Marx*. The hauntological aspect of the father’s ghostly return lies in the continued injustice, which could potentially be resolved by restoring hegemonic power and it is potentially possible to achieve a sense of justice by holding accountable the person who committed the murder and by reinstating a rightful ruler. The situation is much more complicated in the historical case underlying Morrison’s ghostly narrative in *Beloved*, as the legal system did not acknowledge the rights of slaves who were not considered fully human by all parties and in all territories. As Saleh-Hanna argues, concerning the case of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner, who killed her daughter to keep her from being taken back to slavery,

> [a] truly sincere advocacy for justice would have required [white abolitionists] push for the indictment of slave owners and their accomplices for kidnapping, all forms of assault, involuntary confinement, blackmail, and murder. They did no such thing. Instead, they advocated for Margaret to be indicted and tried for the murder of her enslaved daughter. (Saleh-Hanna 3)

There is no sense of justice for Margaret Garner (or Sethe in Morrison’s novel). The proposed trial for murder, while establishing personhood for both Garner and her daughter, does not question her motives for resisting the system of slavery and, thus, only serves to shift the blame towards the Other. The inhumane system of slavery would not be held accountable for its dehumanization or its denial of personhood for Garner and her daughter. Garner/Sethe remains an Other in this scenario, paradoxically regarded as both non-human property (without agency) and a person in front of the law, a perpetrator in control of her own decisions and fate. The return and lingering presence of her daughter’s ghost in the novel, thus, serve as ultimate reminders of denied justice and the liminal legal position of the escaped slave.

The problem with the applicability of Derrida’s argument for this specific context is, thus, its equation of "others" in the future with the "other others" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xix) in the past, which disregards the discursive nature of their Otherness or Othering within
specific cultural systems and the continuing inequalities and injustices arising from these historical inequities. As Spivak argues, "because it coordinates the future in the past, the ghost is not only a revenant (a returner, the French for ghost), but also an arrivant, one who arrives" (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 71) – a figure that points backwards as well as forwards.

In terms of the central argument of the Communist Manifesto, which Derrida draws on, the historical groups pitted against each other in class struggle are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the fight is being waged over labor power and ownership of the means of production. As Line Henriksen summarizes, Derrida "argues for a relational ethics that takes seriously the agency of such absent others, suggesting that ethics does not merely concern that which can be said to be present and immediate, but also absent presences, such as those who are yet to be born, those who are no longer and those who may never be." (Henriksen 14) What neither the manifesto itself, or Derrida's "remembered" reading of it in Specters of Marx accounts for, however, is the omission of "other others" whose existence and experience has historically been excluded from these arguments about class struggle on the basis of their status as a non-human or sub-human commodity that was discursively constructed precisely for the purpose of imagining and establishing a bourgeois capitalist class system. If such discussions, as Spivak argues, tend to create "a binary opposition between labor and commodity" (Spivak, “Supplementing Marxism” 183), these have a tendency to exclude those, whose bodies and lives were and are regarded as a commodity. The "grand unifying projects" of Europe, whose "dramaturgy" Marx and Engels tried to describe with "the experience of the specter" (Derrida, Specters of Marx 3) have a tendency to simplify these discussions as well as their underlying principles of justice and accountability. As Saleh-Hanna argues, for the African-American context specifically, there is a basic structure to American culture that has been and needs to be continuously and actively suppressed in this context in order to construct such historical narratives:

Beneath the surface of plantations in the South and factories in the North lies a deep and unforgiving thorn: the so-called civilized peoples of the modern world occupy lands that will never belong to them because they are European, and North America, regardless of how many Indigenous peoples they massacre or displace or how many colonial laws they pass, will always belong to their victims and the murdered ghosts of their ancestors. (Saleh-Hanna 5)

Saleh-Hanna cites Derrida's pied-noir upbringing to account for his omission of this discussion, suggesting that his writing is deeply rooted in colonialist thought (see Saleh-Hanna 7). While this simple referral to the biographical background, in my opinion, constitutes an argumentative shortcut, "the double bind of identity" (Spivak, “Supplementing
Marxism” 182) still raises important questions – most prominently those of representation in certain philosophical and cultural discourses. Spivak specifically criticizes Derrida's use of the undocumented immigrant as metaphor in *Specters of Marx*: “this privileging of the metaphors (and axiomatics) of migrancy by well-placed migrants helps to occlude precisely the struggles of those who are forcibly displaced, or those who slowly perish in their place as a result of sustained exploitation: globality” (Spivak, “Ghostwriting” 71).

Similarly, "woman is nowhere [...] in *Specters of Marx*" (Spivak, “Ghostwriting” 66) and yet,

in the new new international economic order after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is the labor of the patriarchally defined subaltern woman that has been most effectively socialized. I would expand this, by way of a Marxist theorization of reproductive engineering and population control as the socialization of reproductive labor-power, not 'the feminization of labor.' (Spivak, “Ghostwriting” 67)

Biopolitics (and necropolitics) are gendered, especially in the Global South, and to disregard this factor, along with racialized constructions of Otherness, presents far more than an argumentative omission. The fact that the "reproductive body of woman has now been [...] computed into the average abstract labor" (Spivak, “Ghostwriting” 67) suggests a necessary shift in understanding of the Derridean concept of hauntology – one that acknowledges gendered corporeality as well as its biopolitical institutional incorporation. Moreover, as Spivak argues in an article re-assessing her contribution to the 1992 conference from which *Specters of Marx* emerged, these identity problems are already inherent in Marxist thought:

when "Marx uses the word 'social' or 'society' to project or describe the goal of the public use of reason he seems to be relying on an unresearched, incoherent, humanist notion." (Spivak, “Supplementing Marxism” 183) This is also more than a discursive problem, as becomes clear in the context of Derrida's argument about the "unconditional dignity" of "man as example of a finite and reasonable being" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xx), which he seems to equate with "the living self" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xx). As Rosi Braidotti argues (drawing on Cary Wolfe), this concept of a human(ist) subject position is both historically specific and subject to discursive changes,

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history. Not if by 'human' we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: ‘The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian "community of reasonable beings", or,
in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on’. (Braidotti, The Posthuman 1)

While Braidotti's argument points towards the necessity of the posthuman as an argumentative framework, it also serves to destabilize humanist tenets of exclusion and Othering that have been used to prop up exploitative political systems for centuries. In this regard, "man" seems an even more exclusive term than "human", as it historically omits and continuously silences those defined as not male. Even where women are (silently) included into the category of "Man", feminist discussions still have a history of omitting intersectional forms of oppression (see Collins and Bilge 106–07), that is those forms of oppression that "cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination" (Crenshaw 140). Several of Derrida's observations are, thus, not only complicated by the namelessness and discursively constructed non-personhood of those trapped in the continuously interlaced systems of slavery, anti-Blackness and patriarchy (and the economic forms of oppression resulting from them). It could, rather, be argued that Derrida's concept of hauntology is further haunted by those it excludes from its argumentative setup. As Saleh-Hanna argues it is only

[through Black Feminist Hauntology, [that] racial colonialism re-appears an implicitly abusive system of power (capitalism) and control (enslaved, reservation-bound, imprisoned and many more varying forms of conquest). A system built upon White supremacist conceptions of humanity and conquest is a system that must appear and re-appear in varying forms to uphold its own lies. (Saleh-Hanna 9)

Within this system of oppression, attention is often drawn away from the exclusion inherent in this kind of categorization and towards the oppressors. As Morrison argues, "distinguishing between those who belong to the human race and those who are decidedly non-human is so powerful the spotlight turns away and shines not on the object of degradation but on its creator." (Morrison, The Origin of Others 30) These mechanisms are, thus, not only systemic, they also underpin critical discussions of their nature, making it particularly hard to highlight systemic oppressions and exclusions. Morrison's literary and critical engagement with hauntology has, consequently, taken a more indirect route. There is no easy way out of the "double bind" of identity; Spivak instead suggests that "[i]ncorporation seems a particularly productive act of semi-mourning" (Spivak, “Supplementing Marxism” 187), that is a form of critical engagement rooted in identity politics but also aware of its shortcomings. As Spivak argues, "working with the rational kernel of Marx's rational thought in the context of a more diversified struggle", that includes "feminism, anti-racism, anti-colonialism", necessitates a
from of "incomplete incorporation" (Spivak, “Supplementing Marxism” 187) that allows a person to inhabit a subject position from which they would traditionally have been excluded as an Other.

Both Morrison and Spivak use the concept of the "spectral" to refer to interferences, interventions of what is perceived as Other into the mainstream. In this context, Leslie Bow draws a parallel between Morrison's and Spivak's work, suggesting that the former's discussion of an Africanist presence in American national literature should be resituated within a global context of intellectual inquiry concerned with the ways in which the racialized subaltern has been made serviceable to the causes of nationalism and to the unmarked subjectivity of the colonialist. Gayatri Spivak had indicated in 1988 that the subaltern might 'speak,' albeit only within the excesses of official discourses that represent her, excesses whose latency is to be teased out by intellectuals who are nonetheless always already complicit with the interests of Western international capitalism. (Bow 559)

As Bow argues with Michael Awkward, it is not so much the originality of her argument in Playing in the Dark, which should be highlighted in this context, but rather the authority conveyed on these ideas by Morrison's position in both the academic and the literary world. From an Asian American perspective, Bow reads the project outlined by Morrison as "unfinished, particularly in terms of our attention to where and how race surfaces metaphorically, allegorically, and without reference to the 'minority' subject." (Bow 564)

For the purpose of my argument, I would like to suggest that Morrison's critical work must be read in complement with her narrative work, which centers African American perspectives to provide precisely those missing readings. My focus here is on a supplement to the concept of hauntology – Saleh-Hanna's "Black Feminist Hauntology" – addressing these questions from the (narrative) perspective of the Other that has traditionally been excluded from hegemonic historical discourses. Black Feminist Hauntology shifts the focus towards a specific figure of marginalization, which takes into account that for Black women as postcolonial subjects, ghosts do not need to be "discovered" or "remembered", as Saleh-Hanna argues, they are always already present (Saleh-Hanna 6). As I have argued above, Black Feminist Hauntologies create the possibility to negotiate the representation of other Others as argumentative subject positions within hauntological systems. In the following I will focus on the necessity for such (narrative) subject positions in the context of the double apocalypse logic of colonialism and slavery that forms the historical basis of North American culture as viewed from the margins.
1.2 Apocalypse Logic

Morrison's narrative work focuses on what Kathleen Brogan has called a “reevaluation of historical methodology, [...], of what can be identified as history ('fact') versus story ('fiction')", which can “profoundly change our understanding of how the past is translated and how ethnicity is constructed.” (Brogan 4) By creating intentional narrative gaps, Morrison's novels instigate a process of deconstructivist criticism directed towards the cultural context, visualizing systematic cultural evasions and omissions. As Gina Wisker points out, "postcolonial Gothic works [...] deal with haunted spaces and histories which must be enacted, embodied, faced and lived beyond" (Wisker, Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction 25) In Beloved, Wisker argues, "the succubus of the dead baby’s ghost is a lived presence of the harmful, corrosive internalisation of response to the experience of slavery. Her exorcism opens up the opportunity for recovering of both community and selfhood." (Wisker, Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction 91) Morrison's work highlights the intersecting identity constructions of African American women whose voices have traditionally been omitted from historical narratives and suggests that their relationships are often fundamental to the healing of black communities and to their resistance against oppressive power structures that construct them as Other.

This focus on community – especially the community of women of color – as a resource to provide healing mechanism is central to Morrison's work as a storyteller as well as a literary critic. While her foregrounding of women's experiences can be read as feminist, her criticism of feminist politics – specifically white feminism in the 1970s – focuses on its exclusion of African American women's experiences (see "Toni Morrison"). As Audre Lorde has argued, this exclusion is systemic, ingrained in mainstream communication, to the extent that it prevents white feminism from interrogating the underlying racism of its own arguments: "Mainstream communication does not want women, particularly white women, responding to racism. It wants racism to be accepted as an immutable given in the fabric of existence" (Lorde, “The Uses of Anger” 8). These mechanisms of exclusion construct, as Elissa Washuta argues, a different, apocalyptic logic for those living on the outside of a system of colonialist white supremacy in a constant state of exception: "if you are not from a post-apocalyptic people, you may not be familiar with these strategies we use to survive" (Washuta). Washuta's article draws attention to the perspectives and (narrative) strategies of resistance from a specific Native American perspective (Cascade or Watlala, native to a territory at the cascades of the Columbia river), and it would certainly be problematic to read decolonization as a metaphor for dismantling all types of oppression. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang argue, "[d]ecolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these
contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation" (Tuck and Yang 7). Instead, "'[w]hat is colonization?' must be answered specifically, with attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the 'natural world', and 'civilization'" (Tuck and Yang 21). It must, however, also be acknowledged that there are related, overlapping issues of oppression, connecting African American and Native American histories and experiences.

As Saleh-Hanna argues concerning the historical background of Morrison's novel *Beloved*: there is a "relentless anti-Indigenous investment in colonial land-theft and a deeprooted anti-Blackness towards the victims of slavery" (Saleh-Hanna 3) – both part of the exploitative logic of white settler colonies in the US. Moreover, it is in the interest of the former colonizers to omit these parallels in the name of justifying the colonial project and maintaining its power structures. Saleh-Hanna calls this "a masculinized, heteronormative, classist system of control of the global majority so that a minority White community can achieve abusive, parasitic prosperity" (Saleh-Hanna 8) within this Eurocentric socio-political framework. Systemic injustices like racism, white supremacy, anti-blackness and the social and financial consequences of centuries of oppressive politics can only be addressed as individual cases and personal problems and never traced to their historical roots so as not to question a system and power structures based on a continuity of exclusion and exploitation.

Washuta's and Saleh-Hanna's arguments highlights the systematic omission of perspectives not rooted in European settler colonialism. Only from a European, colonialis perspective, could America be discursively constructed as a new territory to be discovered and settled on, because it was, essentially, framed as empty. Theories of race construct(ed) the native populations as inferior, so settlers could disregard their cultural systems and supplant them with their own. These views are ingrained in a wide array of historical positions. From a Marxist point of view, this spread of cultural dominance is always already tied to capitalist exploitation:

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development. (Marx and Engels 75)

In the process of converting all relationships to "exchange value", the *Communist Manifesto* asserts, "[t]he need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie
over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere." (Marx and Engels 77) While the Communist Manifesto, thus, acknowledges the expansive tendencies of European capitalist systems, its view is still focused on the situation in Europe and for European populations, disregarding the global necropolitical impact of these policies. This is not an accidental omission but a systemic one inherent in most of the grand historical narratives based on a specific idea of "the human" that historically excluded most non-European populations. This demonstrates that even progressive and largely egalitarian systems like Marxism can show a Eurocentric (and often also heteropatriarchal) bias rooted in Enlightenment humanism and silently perpetuate its categories of exclusion.

In the context of the necropolitical system of slavery the exclusion of Africans from the status of full humanity formed the argumentative basis of economic exploitation and the creation of colonialist wealth and power. Morrison addresses the inhumanity of this argument in one of the most crucial scenes in Beloved, when Sethe overhears how Schoolteacher (her new "master" and a follower of strict rational utilitarianism in his attitude towards the slaves) encourages his nephews to make a list of her human and animal characteristics. The text makes it absolutely clear that Sethe would rather see her children dead than categorized in this way, because this categorization denies their humanity: "And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. … Sethe had refused – and refused still." (Morrison, Beloved 251) It is the ethical gravity of Sethe's position, contrasted with the rational efficiency and pseudo-scientific language of the oppressive system, which creates a horrifying interpretational gap here – a gap that points to the remnants of this system in contemporary cultures, scientific discourses and economic systems. As Saleh-Hanna points out, "[p]olitically 'animal' has come to embody the dehumanizing paradigms of colonialism […] The 'animalization' of human bodies was a process pursued through the racial sciences of the late 19th century" (Saleh-Hanna 13). Instead, she suggests that the animal could be re-framed as a "shape-shifter", "reflecting spiritual practices of historicized peoples and societies around the world" (Saleh-Hanna 13) but also pointing towards the possibility of a posthumanist questioning of anthropocentrism and its legacy of White heteropatriarchal capitalism.

As Alexis Pauline Gumbs argues, there is a "theoretical imperative of attending to Black bodies in a way that doesn’t seek to prove that Black people are human but instead calls preexisting definitions of the human into question" (Gumbs no pag). Her argument aligns the criticism of anti-Blackness with critical posthumanist questioning of the exclusive legacy of humanism. Morrison foregrounds this necessity in Beloved by drawing attention to the dehumanizing effect of comparing black women to animals. Paul D's reaction to Sethe protecting her children from being taken back to "Sweet Home" and slavery at all cost raises
a seemingly insurmountable barrier between them – expressed in the metaphor of a forest: "'You got two feet, Sethe, not four,' he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet. [...] the forest was locking the distance between them, giving it shape and heft." (Morrison, *Beloved* 165) The timelessness of Morrison's work, which often traverses different time periods, draws attention to the continuity of these oppressive stereotypes in contemporary US culture and their harmful impact on the representation of black women specifically. This is not only a systemic form of oppression, it is also, as Lorde argued in 1984, a system upheld by common discursive structures in US society:

Traditionally, in American society, it is the members of oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor. For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection. [...] Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 114)

These expectations perpetuate a permanent, socially constructed sense of ignorance (of the oppressive structures) on the part of the oppressors, while the oppressed must constantly fight to be heard at all – even in the face of permanent, systemic biopolitical/necropolitical exploitation of the work power and death of whole populations.

To avoid the argumentative traps of its humanist roots, critical posthumanism must adopt a radically critical, intersectional perspective that acknowledges and challenges the exclusionary historical discourses of humanism instead of attempting to make the historically exclusive category of the human incrementally more inclusive. This can only be achieved through an equally radical reassessment of how we interact with dominant discourses; whether they are political or critical. Spivak's argument about Derrida's reading of Marx addresses this necessity: explanatory systems, "magisterial texts" must be supplemented by "documentary texts produced from the other side" (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 70) to be able to relate our reading of canonical authors like Marx to "an ancestriality that can appear as future" (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 71). For, as Spivak argues, "[t]he subaltern are neither 'nationally rooted' nor migrant; their intra-national displacement is managed by the exigencies of international capital." (Spivak, "Ghostwriting" 71) For postcolonial subjects there is no return to a pre-colonial condition. The only way is forward, but forward through the recognition of the past.

Saleh-Hannah points out similarities between interconnected systems of colonialist oppression: "it is clear how institutions of enslavement intersect with colonial land-theft and
its corollary, indigenous genocide. [...] Through European colonialism and its forced labor branch of chattel slavery, land and bodies alike were simultaneously transformed into conquered properties." (Saleh-Hanna 2) Colonialist landgrabbing and the systematic slave trade are based on the same exploitative capitalist logic, rooted in defining the outsides of humanism and the exclusionary political systems derived from it (see Saleh-Hanna). To understand and countermand this apocalyptic logic necessitates a reframing of the underlying argumentative structures that define some humans as human and others as outside of the humanist system. Critical posthumanism has the potential to provide the necessary critical framework for such reassessments, but only if it manages to address a number of seemingly stable concepts derived from its humanist legacy – and this questioning can and must concern even basic categories of making sense of the world like time and space.

In "Posthuman Times" Manuela Rossini and Mike Toggweiler suggest a reframing of the concept of time, based on the consideration that

An increasing number of researchers as well as artists are no longer interested in the taking and making time and space as human universals but in genealogies, intersections, multiple modernities and the coexistence of non-simultaneous phenomena in the era of globalization, asymmetrical power relations and technoculture. (Rossini and Toggweiler)

Rather then suggest a complete break with the tenets of humanism, and, by extension the idea of (human) progress, Rossini and Toggweiler suggest with Stefan Herbrechter that critical posthumanism offers a possibility to rethink these categories, without falling into the trap of either nostalgically glorifying a lost humanist past or imagining a glorious accelerationist future beyond the human and humanism. The latter would mean an omission of, as Rossini and Toggweiler argue, "more complex readings of all-too-real and all-too-humanist metaphysics, along with its highly effective conceptions of species, race, time, space and, not least of all, knowledge. To 'post' in such fashion would essentially be complicit with Eurocentric transcendentalism and thanatophilia." (Rossini and Toggweiler)

A radical critical posthumanist reassessment would, as Rossini and Toggweiler argue, have to embrace the multiple, relational, ambivalent, incompatible, fragmented, ephemeral, discontinuous, and dissonant in order to see, hear and feel differently. Such a heightened sensitivity produces resonances that facilitates [sic] a connectedness and tuning into other, also nonhuman tempi. In times of perpetual and unsustainable
acceleration, we need to find alternative *readings* of the dominant narratives and to create a more critical awareness of the politics of rhythm. (Rossini and Toggweiler)

Such a project would, of necessity, have to include diverse forms of narrative that allow us to imagine and represent time differently.

Morton similarly draws attention to the necessity of new, critical posthumanist paradigms to reframe humanist narratives based on exclusion – specifically for the largely egalitarian project of communism. As Morton argues, "communism only works when its economic models are thought as an attunement to the fact of living in a biosphere" (Morton 1). In other words, radical justice must be based on what Morton calls "the symbiotic real" (Morton 1), the awareness of our interactions with the non-human on a planetary scale. While critical posthumanist theory introduces the idea of kinship (see Haraway, “Symbiogenesis, Sympoiesis, and Art Science Activism for Staying with the Trouble”), of interaction with other species, to signal a necessity of rethinking how we, humans, inhabit this planet, what seems to be needed to make this project truly inclusive is a critical reassessment of the Eurocentric humanist legacy of the anthropocene, which should also be used to rethink the category of the human and it's history of excluding whole groups of human beings based on discursively constructed boundaries (like race, gender, global origin or social position).

An explicit focus on reassessing humanism's concept of the human is, thus, necessary as posthumanism might otherwise continue its troubling legacies of exclusion. Sophie Lewis, for instance, criticizes Haraway's most recent work on kinship with the chthonic non-human as not explicit enough in this context. As Lewis argues, the relatively vague approach to "non-discriminatory, friendly, collective and non-coercive" ways of "population reduction" (Lewis) Haraway describes in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) would need further explanation, so as not to smack of historical eugenic and even genocidal politics. Lewis compares Haraway's seemingly more prescriptive approach in *Staying with the Trouble* with her earlier feminist work in the "Cyborg Manifesto" which offered "a timely suggestion that political science address the fact that we are full of bubbling bacteria, inorganic prostheses, and toxic economic mythologies." (Lewis). Lewis concludes that Haraway has now abandoned her former socialist ideas, wanting "a decline in human beings more than she wants to smash capitalism" (Lewis). I will further discuss Haraway's arguments in chapter 7.

Here I would just like to draw attention to the intrinsic problem of posthumanist calls for multi-species rights and radical ecological justice from within current political power structures that privilege white people in the global north. To be truly just, posthumanist arguments would have to, as Lewis phrases it, be "wrest[ed] away from fascist mythmaking" (Lewis) about the superiority and, consequent, survival of white bodies and ask what it would take to establish
kinship across as well as within species barriers. To this end, critical posthumanism will need a non-Eurocentric focus to allow marginalized perspectives to be heard.

As Washuta argues, strategies of resistance outside the colonialist frame of reference are largely invisible to the mainstream and must be made visible to break their constant perpetuation: "Apocalypse has very little to do with the end of the world and everything to do with vision that sees the hidden, that dismantles the screen." (Washuta). Morrison's narrative project in *Beloved* visualizes the apocalyptic and dehumanizing discourse of slavery. The apocalyptic moment around which the novel revolves is framed as such by the arrival of "the four horsemen" (Morrison, *Beloved* 148) to drag Sethe and her children back to the hell of slavery. The slavecatchers' brief and bleak view of Sethe as a possession, an object which they have come to retrieve alive, because it is "not worth [its] own dead weight in coin" (Morrison, *Beloved* 148), is juxtaposed with the rich narrative of Sethe's own experiences and the central position of her emotional reactions to these experiences in the narrative. As Morrison's work shows, apocalyptic vision can thus translate into narratives of resistance and a necessary narrative reassessment of apocalypse logic. As Tiina Kirss argues with Spivak, "[i]f time is 'out of joint,' and if postcolonial hopes have turned into neocolonial realities, the ethical imperative of postcolonial 'hauntology' entails a utopic aspect, a 'future anterior' rather than a 'future present'" (Kirss 25). From the perspective of anti-colonial, anti-racist activism, new perspectives are still urgently needed at this point in time, making narratives that foreground marginalized positions more important than ever. A (re-)reading of Morrison's work is particularly interesting in this context, because, as Tessa Roynon argues, "each of Morrison's novels operates within several timeframes simultaneously. The allegorical nature of much of her writing enables her to allude to key moments in America's past, often connecting them to events set in recent times." (Roynon 105) This doubling of timelines draws attention to the many ways in which "time is out of joint" from the point of view of African American histories. Morrison addresses this directly in *Beloved*, where Sethe describes her inability to come to terms with the different interpretive frameworks she is forced to inhabit, that she experiences as differently textured memories of the past: "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay." (Morrison, *Beloved* 43) As Weinstock argues, in a hauntological context this is no coincidence: "As a symptom of repressed knowledge, the ghost calls into question the possibilities of a future based on avoidance of the past." (Weinstock 6) Moreover, Morrison often employs non-linear or circular narratives to draw attention to different perspective and experiences of time under traumatic circumstances and to shift the point of view to those living at the margins or entirely beyond the purview of Eurocentric constructions of history. Morrison's perspective is, of course, neither the only one nor universally representative, however, her work is indicative of an ongoing debate in US culture, whose urgency has only
become more pressing under the current xenophobic, racist administration. Redding summarizes this point of view as follows:

It is dangerous for me to invoke Morrison as if she were “representative”; nonetheless, as a general proposition, it seems to me that the clarification of who we are in society – and who me might have been and still may be – by finding ways of speaking to and through the dead, by inventing alternative possibilities out of silence itself, rather than the continued elaboration of a myth of flight and escape, is one crucial aspect of the way in which contemporary fiction participates in the ongoing arguments over the shape and possibility of multiculturalism. (Redding 51)

While I agree with Redding, his comment also highlights a more general problem of representation, as Black women writers have historically been excluded from canonized literature and are still struggling for inclusion in various public areas. Their perspectives are doubly suppressed based on the intersections of race and gender. Instead of the non-existent channels of official representation, Black feminist thought has, as Collins argues, always privileged individual narratives as a form of testimony concerning the position of Black women in political and cultural contexts that frequently exclude them and strive to silence their voices (Collins 14–15). As I will argue in the following, Morrison's work presents narratives of resistance against these discursive and cultural processes of Othering and privileges the individual perspectives of Black women over hegemonic discourses.
2 Haunted Narratives

2.1 Haunting as Narrative Strategy in Toni Morrison's Work

This chapter will explore the representation of hauntology in Morrison's critical, as well as her literary work, arguing that she uses meta-narrative strategies to draw attention to the necessity of reassessing and re-inventing historical perspectives of marginalized Others. Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize acceptance speech frames within the medium of narrative a far-reaching experience of Otherness and marginalization:

Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place. To be set adrift from the one you knew. What it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company. (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture”)

Morrison's work as a writer has been concerned with these questions for decades, giving voice to experiences of Otherness against a predominantly white, patriarchal and heteronormative mainstream culture, tracing specters of racism in order to destabilize historically established systems of discourse, which exclude the non-white as an abject Other. While the Nobel Prize speech's central metaphor of language as a fragile bird in the hand suggests that these experiences can never be fully captured, for Morrison, it is the task of the writer, the storyteller to come as close as possible to conveying these experiences: "Language can never 'pin down' slavery, genocide, war," she argues. "Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable." (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture”) It is this reaching towards the unsayable, which she identifies as the task of the writer: "Word-work is sublime [...] because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference" (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture”). This is a fundamental function of literature as "a privileged language that can give form to those specters of existence that resist the traditional ontological boundaries of being and non-being" (Loevlie 336). As David Punter points out in Postcolonial Imaginings, we can think of the literary as the uncanny, as the haunting and the haunted; as that which resists pinning down, that which will always squirm away and produce 'other', 'unauthorised' meanings; as that which conjures phantoms, which banishes phantoms, and which always leaves us uncertain whether or not we are alone; [...] as infected at the heart with an ineradicable absence; [...] as a phenomenon of lies and truth, of
narratives that wind and twist and go nowhere, of history and trauma endlessly and impossibly rewriting each other; (Punter, Postcolonial Imaginings 5–6).

It is in this sense of the literary as a spectral mode, as a collection of individual narratives, various perspectives and ambiguous positions, that Morrison’s Black feminist rewritings of history recreate a counter-history of haunting – most prominently in doubly-marginalized female characters, whose existence alone draws attention to the inaccuracies of mainstream historical discourses. Instead of insisting on a parallel, equally authoritative perspective, Morrison's novels focus on the power of first-hand experience, individual memories, and an oral tradition which has its roots in the systematically enforced illiterate culture of slavery, as well as in fragments of oral tales remembered from various African cultures. This view of history as a pluralistic collection of voices and narratives, rather than a universal truth, draws on Derrida's concept of hauntology and, indeed, deconstruction as an interpretive method: "If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it."

(Derrida, Specters of Marx 18) Like différance (Derrida, Of Grammatology lvii), hauntology also defers meaning and resists interpretation, because it signals a removal of the present from the (assumed) timeline of interpretable historical process.

By privileging these disruptive functions of literature, Morrison's work gives "literary voice to the dead" and "releases literature’s hauntology to express the horror that history books cannot convey, and that our memory struggles to contain." (Loevlie 336) From the bones of the past that Pilate carries around in Song of Solomon (1977), via Beloved's fragmented corporeal narrative to the haunting presence of the dead patriarch in Love (2003), Morrison’s novels present haunting as a central, highly influential concept and show how the ghosts of past trauma can create meaning in the present. More specifically, the various instances of cultural haunting in Morrison's novels draw attention to the physical and psychological immediacy of the continuous legacy of racism and the deliberate cultural Othering of African Americans in US-American history and culture. Hauntings are often inscribed on or connected to corporeal reminders of violence and inscriptions of animality onto the (female) body, which draw attention to the ways in which African Americans in general and African American women in particular are often framed as a monstrous Other in the dominant cultural narrative. These constructions, which move beyond a sense of haunting into the realm of physical presence and monstrous narrative construction (as discussed in my introduction), serve as a reminder of how historical constructions of humanity have often excluded black women and continue to serve as a powerful meta-narratively constructed counter-narrative undermining such external inscriptions.
In her storytelling, Morrison relies on a narratological approach that Gina Wisker identifies as "strategies of the literary Gothic" (Wisker, Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction 101). These include conveying sublime (in the sense of affective, not rationally graspable) experiences of existential horror, as well as a sense of haunting. As a counter-cultural genre exploring cultural transgressions, the Gothic has come to embody a number of political implications over time, which must, in turn be interrogated concerning their omissions and evasions. Where the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic focused on a newly risen bourgeoisie haunted by a feudalist past, it often failed to address the underlying horrors of slavery and the de-humanization of an African or Indigenous Other that facilitated the colonization of other continents and the capitalist exploitation of whole populations (see Punter, Postcolonial Imaginings). Morrison's creation of an African-American Gothic consequently focuses on unearthing hidden layers of haunting, beyond the Eurocentric focus of earlier Gothic texts. As a combination of monstrous medial technology and haunted narrative tradition the Gothic presents itself as a useful strategy for the visualization of presences and meaningful absences in Morrison's work. I will discuss two of these strategies – hauntology and monstrosity – in this part.

Morrison views language and, by extension, narrative as sublime and never fully sufficient to describe human experiences. Indeed, the Nobel Prize speech reiterates her view that narratives must resist any attempt at categorization within the framework of authoritative, hegemonic discourses, because those can only result in misrepresentation:

There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like paté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness. (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture”)

Still, mainstream discourses are haunted by that which they have attempted to exclude for centuries, that which "moves at the margins", a narrative presence that cannot be fully realized within a discourse that strives to categorize instead of represent varied experiences. Morrison's texts employ subversive strategies and counter-perspectives that approach the historical moment from the individual perspectives of those involved (see Raynaud 47), rather than the hegemonic point of view of a ruling (and thus history-writing) class. These might be read as part of a postmodern, theory-conscious narrative tradition. At the same time, the clear political agenda of Morrison's novels undermines the impression of ambiguity
achieved by their postmodern narrative mode (see Pérez-Torres). Her narratives are a form of writing historical truths that insist on multi-perspectivity as a method of sense-making. Neglected, abandoned, hushed-up and left behind by the dominant white culture’s historical discourse, the women in Morrison's novels represent histories (or rather ‘her stories’) in their most individual form to testify for a specific experience of marginalization. They are not so much examples of written history as lived history because writing itself, writing about them, would be treacherous, fixing them in narrow, discriminating categories that often deny their humanity – like schoolteacher’s attempt at framing Sethe as part animal in Beloved. This practice of resisting categorization reflects on the narrative aesthetics of Morrison's literary texts, which frequently employ meaningful gaps and multiple perspectives to avoid the "danger of a single story" (Adichie) or a privileged perspective. To visualize this point, the Nobel Prize speech contrasts the perspective of an old, wise woman with that of a group of young people in search of meaning. It is the juxtaposition of the two perspectives, which Morrison presents as creating meaning, the "lovely [...] thing we have done – together" (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture”).

By using postmodern narrative techniques and influences from the Gothic tradition, Morrison's texts deal with systemic racism as a form of "cultural haunting" (Brogan), a cultural presence which is often evaded but nevertheless there. In Morrison's project of exploring the ways in which racist discourse shapes our cultural reality, race is, sometimes paradoxically, constructed as an absence, an obvious, thought-provoking blank. Her novel Paradise (1997), for example, opens with the sentence: "They shoot the white girl first." (Morrison, Paradise 3) The categorization, presented from the perspective of a prejudiced Black community, evokes a whole set of racial and gendered stereotypes which are left unresolved because of the blatantly constructed absence of further references to the ethnicity of the protagonists. The impact of this sentence becomes only gradually clearer as the story unfolds: for the small utopian community of women at the center of the text skin color is not an issue and although the reader learns much about each of them, there are no further open indicators of race in their biographical tales. As Morrison explained later (in The Origin of Others [2017]), this gesture was a deliberate ploy to make readers acknowledge their own expectations:

This is meant to be an explosion of racial identification which is subsequently withheld throughout descriptions of the community of women in the convent where the attack takes place. Does the reader search for her, the white girl? Or does he or she lose interest in the search? Abandoning it to concentrate on the substance of the novel? (Morrison, The Origin of Others 51)
Evoked by the first sentence, the absence of ethnic markers haunts the text, effectively confronting the reader with their own stereotypes – as well as the question as to whether race as a category is really needed for their understanding of the narrative. The ghost of racial prejudice hovers at the margins of the text as a meaningful absence, impossible to miss, yet impossible to pin down. In *Paradise*, as in Morrison's other novels, circular narratives and evasive narrators create a meaningful absence – a monster shaped hole – at the center of the text.

*Beloved* is not only presented in a similarly indirect, circular manner, the main character and focalizer, Sethe, metanarratively reflects the circularity of her own tale: "Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down..." (Morrison, *Beloved* 163). Like the novel, Sethe herself revolves around the topic in both a direct and a metaphorical way, not quite telling what happened while literally replicating the same pattern, unable to sit down and say the unsayable. The central tale of the murder and its causes consequently emerges as a fragmentary text, as the novel's structure reflects the haunting of the house: three parts, each beginning with the same words respectively, describe the house as "spiteful" (Morrison, *Beloved* 3), "louid" (Morrison, *Beloved* 169) or "quiet" (Morrison, *Beloved* 239), evoking the ghostly presence as a personification of a haunted space. The characteristic structure of the text establishes a parallel between the house, the revenant's fragmented body and the spectral body of narrative. Barbara Schapiro observes: "Beloved's character is both the frame and center of the book." (Schapiro 209) Her hauntological presence/absence drives the events and structures remembering processes and returns of past trauma. Her appearance as "[a] fully dressed woman [walking] out of the water" (Morrison, *Beloved* 50) is described as an uncanny event, an actual 'return of the repressed', in which her not-quite-rightness is underlined by strange hollow breathing.

As Wisker argues, "Morrison uses modes of feminist Gothic writing; the body and the home are the sites which carry the pain and also the recuperation." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 96) The haunted house rebelling against its inhabitants and visitors, the scars on Sethe's back are not only recurring motifs throughout the text, they are also presented as narratives of resistance in an overall process of healing. In this complex textual system, the ghost cannot simply be read as an embodiment of Sethe's subconscious guilt, the horror of a mother killing her baby. It also reflects the much more complex underlying horror of the dehumanizing system of slavery that drives Sethe to save her daughter by killing her. To achieve this effect, the novel's telling of the horrible deed itself is intricately constructed, avoided by and, at the same time, hinted at from different perspectives. It reenacts what Melanie Anderson has termed "the forgetting of generations" (Anderson 79), which can only be overcome through memory and community. As Arthur Redding argues,
"contemporary practices of memory involve labor“ (Redding 42), but that labor is not always shown as intellectual – or even framed as verbal – in Morrison's fiction. In Beloved, only the "voices of women" searching for "the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" (Morrison, Beloved 261) can finally banish, but not completely exorcise the ghost. While the narrative foregrounds Ella's compassion based on experiences which are similar to Sethe's, it also suggests a wordless understanding between all of the women present: "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like." (Morrison, Beloved 259) The women's musical harmony creates a non-verbal, and therefore even more powerful, counter-strategy of black, female community that serves to subvert the power of the dominant culture's framings of Sethe and her children and evict the vengeful ghost from her house. The narrative also suggests that, in a cultural context that is rooted in and permanently impacted by the system of slavery, the ghost lingers on as a reminder of the past.

These meta-narrative strategies are an integral part of the hauntological re-writing of the narrative of slavery, as they draw attention to the functioning of non-verbal sounds, narrative and storytelling as counter-strategies against dominant discourses.

2.2 Black Feminist Hauntology in Beloved

Beloved is a multilayered novel that explores the possibility of narratives of resistance on a number of different textual levels. Singing, (hi-)storytelling and various embodied practices of re-membering all form part of this exploration, which revolves around the haunting presence of slavery and its cultural impact at the center of the text.

While Morrison often sets her explorations in the past, the visualization of the continuing impact of racism and anti-Blackness on US culture is an implicit critical consequence of her work. Wisker identifies this "form of ghosting" as a common strategy of "[p]ostcolonial and postmodernist writing" in which "the repressed hidden histories of the past linger […] alongside those of the present." (Wisker, Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction 108) Saleh-Hanna draws attention to the cultural context, showing how Morrison's Beloved, read in conjunction with its historical references, highlights the "consequence[s] of penal colonialism" (Saleh-Hanna 3), arguing that the capitalist system of slavery and the justice system supported by white abolitionists were flipsides of the same coin of anti-Blackness and oppression, which still impacts contemporary US culture:

Though seemingly diametrically opposed, each White side of this bloody tale stands firmly rooted in anti-Blackness driven and legitimated by their own images of White superiority. On one side of White colonialism’s coin stand slaveholders and their
plantations built on stolen lands hanging on, by any means necessary, to a White supremacist slave economy of anti-Black exploitation. On the other side of capitalism's racist coin stand White (self-proclaimed) anti-slavery abolitionists and their criminal justice system built upon a stolen sense of justice, hijacked and replaced by imperialist and racialized constructions of crime and criminality. (Saleh-Hanna 3)

*Beloved*, like the historical case of Margaret Garner on which it is based, stands between these two systemic forms of oppression. As Saleh-Hanna points out, white abolitionists were not taking Garner's side when they "advocated for her to be handed over to the criminal justice system and tried for murder." (Saleh-Hanna 3) Instead, they used her to advocate against slavery, without advocating for her. As Saleh-Hanna argues, "[t]his individualized and brutal solution stands in contradiction to their public declarations that Mary's murder was an act of resistance to the federal government's Fugitive Slave Laws and a testament to the horrors slavery inflicts upon its victims." (Saleh-Hanna 3) By presenting different perspectives on the events, Morrison's work highlights the impact of these dehumanizing structures on the people at the center of her texts. The main characters' views are juxtaposed with those of the slave-catchers to draw attention to their discursive strategies. As Wisker argues, Morrison shows how "language dehumanises and in so doing removes the need to recognise human rights" (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 100). As I have argued above, the novel describes the slavecatchers in apocalyptic tones as "the four horsemen", but it also exposes their twisted apocalyptic counter-logic that suggests the fugitive slaves had somehow robbed the slave-owners of their property by stealing themselves: "Caught red-handed, so to speak, they [the fugitive slaves] would seem to recognize the futility of outsmarting a whiteman and the hopelessness of outrunning a rifle" but "you couldn't tell" because they could "all of a sudden roar like a bull" and "unlike a snake or a bear" they "could not be skinned for profit and [were] not worth [their] own dead weight in coin."

(Morrison, *Beloved* 174–75) The animal similes draw attention to the dehumanizing power of framing another human being as radical Other while "you could not tell" suggests that the slaves motives for not wanting to be caught and dragged back to slavery are utterly incomprehensible within the logic of a dehumanizing system of necropolitical exploitation. Moreover, as Wisker argues, the juxtaposition of perspectives also "brings together into a drama and a space the horror of the interactions between those who believed themselves superior and acted only with inhuman brutality and negation of the rights of others, and those who were literally silenced (by the bit, the lack of history, the lack of education), brutalised, dehumanised." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 101) In Morrison's work, language is intrinsically connected to ethics, as Naomi Morgenstern argues. Her work shows a "repeated preoccupation with subjects on the threshold of being – emerging, protolinguistic
subjects. What does it mean to take responsibility for such beings – or to be such a being? Is there any other kind of responsibility? Perhaps ethics is always already a kind of violence." (Morgenstern 8)

Morrison's concern about the ways in which African American perspectives are constructed as a cultural absence by US-American culture also emerges in her critical work, for example, in Playing in the Dark (1992):

There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States. (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 5)

As Morrison argues, racism can manifest itself as a form of deliberate exclusion from mainstream culture by means of a hegemonic discourse, which circulates certain assumptions as established knowledge: "This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans, and then African-Americans in the United States." (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 4) In Playing in the Dark Morrison traces the constant involvement of the white American literary canon with a shadowy Africanist Other – a counterpart against which the white literary imagination defined itself through intricate strategies of rejection and exclusion: "The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination." (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 5) Morrison shows that African Americans are never actually absent from the texts – they are constantly reinvoked as a ‘dark presence’, (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 5) a shadowy Other, which constitutes a defining counterpart in a system of radical binaries.

By tracing a shadowy Africanist presence in mainstream American literature (and culture), Morrison draws the readers' attention to the ways in which both narrative and language can be haunted by a suppressed or unacknowledged presence – the ghost of an Other. This ghostly Other is neither completely present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive, and to trace its workings inside a text has a deconstructive effect on established readings. The very liminality of the specter, its position ‘between’ categories (Wolfreys, Hauntings x), not only helps to destabilize and deconstruct fixed assumptions and systems of knowledge – it can also help to create new meaning by drawing the focus of interpretation to meaningful cultural absences. Morrison's literary strategy of drawing attention to the workings of
narrative itself further highlights these absences and questions narrative constructions of hegemonic discourses. This deconstructive idea of taking a closer look at what is not there (at least on the surface), or rather, that which does not seem to be there, can be traced throughout Morrison's critical work. Her use of ghosts and haunting as a critical as well as a narratological concept could, consequently, be described as 'Spectral Criticism': "a reinvocation of a terrorizing but desired communion with the dead" (Punter, “Spectral Criticism” 260), as Punter has put it. The complex interplay of presence and absence surrounding the ghostly Other can, in Derrida's terminology, be described as a 'spectrality effect', which, he suggests, may "consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other." (Derrida, Specters of Marx 48)

Derrida's conceptualization of hauntology as a project of mourning for the Marxist left under neo-liberal capitalism, however, runs in many ways directly counter to Morrison's, as it is essentially a colonialist one (as I have argued in chapter 1 above), which consists in naming the remains and, thus, labeling the one's who are buried within existing cultural typologies. Derrida defines the project of mourning as a form of categorization of remains:

First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead [...] Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one has to know who is buried where-and it is necessary (to know-to make certain) that, in what remains of him, he remain there. Let him stay there and move no more! (Derrida, Specters of Marx 9)

The necessity to name the remains in order to make them visible takes on a different, much more problematic meaning in the context of African American literature. Beloved draws attention to this on a number of levels. The eponymous character's name is at the same time the inscription on her tombstone – an inscription her mother paid for by selling her body to the stone mason. Names are also reminders of the fact that the (former) slaves were deprived of their families, histories and identities and identified by the names of their masters like nameless objects. As Sethe finds out in the twenty-eight days between her arrival and the spilling of her daughter's blood, "[f]reeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of the freed self was another." (Morrison, Beloved 95) This becomes particularly clear in the context of Baby Suggs' liberation, the first time she dares to discuss her name with her former "owner":

"Mr. Garner," she said, "why you all call me Jenny?"
"'Cause that what's on your sales ticket, gal. Ain't that your name? What you call yourself?"

"Nothing," she said. "I don't call myself nothing."

Mr. Garner went red with laughter. "When I took you out of Carolina, Whitlow called you Jenny and Jenny Whitlow is what his bill said. Didn't he call you Jenny?"

"No, sir. If he did I didn't hear it."

"What did you answer to?"

"Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name."

"You got married, Jenny? I didn't know it."

"Manner of speaking."

"You know where he is, this husband?"

"No, sir."

[...]

"Suggs is my name, sir. From my husband. He didn't call me Jenny."

"What he call you?"

"Baby."

"Well," said Mr. Garner, going pink again, "if I was you I'd stick to Jenny Whitlow. Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro."

Maybe not, she thought, but Baby Suggs, was all she had left of the "husband" she claimed. (Morrison, Beloved 142)

In this dialogue the power structures between Garner and Baby Suggs are negotiated via the issue of naming. She calls him "sir" throughout, while he hasn't even thought to enquire if she had been married at the time he "took her out of Carolina". His suggestion to stick with the name given to her by a former owner, who didn't address her directly or ask her name, shows the cracks in the thin veneer of Garner's superficial kindness towards her.

Considering her name only in the light of how respectable it sounds omits the oppressive history of naming. Baby Suggs admission that she "calls herself nothing" addresses the issue of self-ownership, which can only be reached where freedom from slavery is granted. To name the ghosts of slavery would, this scene suggests, be an imposition comparable to the one suggested by 'kind' Mr. Garner, because it would cover rather than reveal the underlying structures of oppression. The act of naming is, as Paulo Freire observes, an act of colonization, which has to be reiterated to maintain and reinforce power structures of a dominant culture:

[T]o exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires a new naming. [...] dialogue
cannot occur between those who name the world and those who do not wish this 
naming – between those who deny others to speak their word and those whose right to 
speak has been denied them. (Freire 88)

The issue of naming and being named is closely related to the use of language – a 
treachery medium at best for the former slaves as the language of the slave owners is 
connected to inexpressible violence, exploitation and the deprivation of a voice and language 
of their own. In an attempt to express traumatic experiences beyond words, the characters in both Beloved and Love resort to a non-verbal sort of vocal communication: a humming, 
described by Dobbs as "a code of meaning that is simultaneously anterior, superior, and 
antagonistic to conventional language" (Dobbs 567). "Humming in the dark" (Morrison, 
“Nobel Lecture”), as Morrison has termed it in her Nobel Lecture, can be read as a way to 
communicate something that is too painful to be put into words and, simultaneously, as a 
mode of resistance. For L, the spectral homodiegetic narrator of Love, humming is a form of quiet protest: "My hum is mostly below range, private; suitable for an old woman 
embarrassed by the world; her way of objecting to how the century is turning out. Where all is 
known and nothing understood." (Morrison, Love 4) In a similar way, humming amounts to a 
form of nonverbal public resistance in Beloved. The men on the chain gang, who are not 
allowed to speak, the women who gather in front of the haunted house to drive out a ghost 
that is an embodiment of their own pain, they all revert to an archaic from of communication: 
"In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew 
what that sound sounded like." (Morrison, Beloved 259)

By using nonverbal sounds to communicate, the former slaves avoid the pitfalls of a 
language which they have repeatedly experienced as not being their own, but that of others – 
the white slave owners who have marked their bodies and abused them in writing. There is 
no alternative language they can use. Sethe's childhood memory of a different language, "the 
same language her ma'am spoke and which would never come back" (Morrison, Beloved 63) 
is a weak reminiscence of one of many African mother tongues erased by the dominant 
English language. Short of a common language, the humming is a form of communicating 
pain, of voicing an experience of Otherness, but it is also a way of reuniting a community on 
the basis of a collective memory – the horror of the Middle Passage which cannot be put into 
words, or, as the ghostly Beloved asks, "how can I say things that are pictures?" (Morrison, 
Beloved 210)

Castricano draws attention to this impossibility of a straightforward narrative: the "ghost 
comes back because what is buried is untellable and, therefore (necessarily) inaccessible to 
the gradual, painful, assimilative work of mourning." (Castricano 36) It is, thus, a more 
complex hauntological return that is at stake in African American literature, one which must
draw attention to the underlying structures of oppression as well as the unburied ghosts of the past. As Saleh-Hanna argues, "[m]odernity and its institutions stand haunted by the ghosts of their own victims and the descendants of those who survived serving as a constant reminder of racial colonialism's own failures" (Saleh-Hanna 5). Similarly, Chassot notes two main functions of the ghost in contemporary African American narratives:

On the one hand, the liminal, transhistorical figure of the ghost disrupts the boundary between past and present, thus challenging America's teleological myth of progress towards freedom and equality and exposing colonialism and slavery as the source of America's present racial configurations, and of the economic, social and political situation of people of African descent. On the other hand, the ghost is also the very embodiment of the suppressed subjectivity and perspective of the slaves, as their spirits return to fill in, or at least point to, the gaps in the master narrative of American history. (Chassot 185)

The Gothic seems a useful strategy in this context, precisely because this history can never be fully captured, as Arthur Redding argues: "[t]he endeavor to trace out history, we might say, is haunted, even as we are, for it involves an effort to settle accounts with a past—a multiplicity of pasts – that has been forgotten or erased". Instead literary "hauntings beckon us elsewhere, invite us to cross over the abyss, beyond the smug certainty of life as we know it, to confront that which we can only acknowledge in the abject terror of our dread: the fulsomeness and catastrophe of the incalculable blood debts we owe to the past." (Redding 40–41)

In Morrison's texts these past hauntings can manifest themselves in the shape of physical trauma – Sethe's tree-shaped scars and Beloved's grown up, impossible body – the difference is gradual, not substantial in the context of the narrative. The novel's subject matter is what Dobbs with reference to Elaine Scarry's approach has termed "black bodies-in-pain" (Dobbs 563). The text describes how, mutilated by inhuman forms of punishment, even those slaves who escaped alive are marked by the violence of slavery. For them "[t]he future [is] a matter of keeping the past at bay" (Morrison, Beloved 42). Around "the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home" (Morrison, Beloved 140), they interpret their own bodies as changeable, split open or falling apart. For them, time is physically "out of joint" (Derrida, Specters of Marx 20) as their bodies are haunted by past pain and suffering.

As Powell argues, in Beloved the process of mourning takes shape as "the simultaneous act of stitching together in order to recall – a re/membering of – the bodies constituted through an inconsolable absence of subjectivity" (Powell 60). The ghostly body
re-assembled in/as narrative memory does not possess subjectivity. Neither alive nor dead and existing almost exclusively within the perceptions and narratives of the other protagonists, Beloved haunts the text as an embodiment of past trauma. She is a ghost in the flesh, whose embodiment draws on non-Western (most prominently African) traditions of the ghost story (see Felton). Stemming from another (historical) time period, the spectral revenant is a presence that does not belong, in between categories: neither dead nor alive, and too present to be absent. The appearance of the spectral figure shows a fissure, a rip in the continuum of time and space, of linear history, as well as rational language.

A sense of temporal wrongness is further signaled via the element of water that allows border crossings and blurrings. Beloved's claims, that she spent a long time "on the bridge" (Morrison, Beloved 65), that she came "out of blue water" and her insistence that she is "not dead" (Morrison, Beloved 213) establish her firmly in the realm of the spectral. The emergence of the ghostly woman from the water is mirrored in and reiterated through a number of scenes involving the same element: Sethe's breaking water at the sight of the young woman, a scene which reminds her of giving birth to her daughter Denver in a sinking boat on the bank of the Ohio, as well as various crossings of the same river and the ocean, which are all ultimately linked back to the collective memory of the Middle Passage. Water is represented as the liminal element between several binary and therefore mutually exclusive states of existence: slavery and freedom, past and present, life and death – its very in-betweenness challenging the binary structure of these categories. The emergence of the ghost from the water is, thus, significant in terms of the liminality of the medium. As Julian Wolfreys points out: "The idea of the spectre, spectrality itself, escapes even as its apparitional instance arrives from some other place, as a figure of otherness which traverses and blurs any neat analytical distinction." (Wolfreys, Victorian Hauntings xf.) Coming out of the water, rather than crossing it, Beloved lacks a fixable place of origin – she emerges from the in-between. She is ghost-made-flesh and uncategorizable monstrous body at the same time.

In this, Beloved's ghost differs from common Western conceptualizations of haunting (including Derrida's) in a number of aspects – the most prominent of which is their lack of physicality. On the one hand, Beloved's possessing a body might be read, as I have argued above, as drawing on non-European, predominantly African traditions of ghosts as embodied entities. Read, on the other hand, in the context of hauntological questioning of the present as real and actual, a different reading of these ghosts emerges: it is precisely their physicality, which posits them as a counter-narrative to the mind-body duality in the logic of the slave-holder/colonizer. Their return as embodied ghosts draws attention to the fact that slaves were discursively constructed as animalistic, dominated by their physicality. As Saleh-Hanna argues "[t]hrough Black Feminist Hauntology we reach beyond the identity/body
forming powers of colonizers and captors" (Saleh-Hanna 3). The physical presence of the ghost in Morrison's work, thus, adds another historical component to the Derridean concept of hauntology. As Derrida points out, "[t]his non-presence of the specter demands that one take its times and its history into consideration, the singularity of its temporality and its historicity." (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 226) The ghost in the flesh possesses a physical immediacy, not accounted for in Derrida's hauntology, that highlights "the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other. And of someone other that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit, and so forth." (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 6) Thus, when the past comes back in the form of embodied revenants, rather than ethereal ghosts, its anachronistic presence draws attention to the brittle constructedness of the mind-body divide in Western philosophy and the ways in which it relies on framing the non-white, non-Western Other as pure physicality. As an element of hauntological narrative Beloved's return as a ghost in the flesh undermines these categorizations and presents a narrative of resistance against being framed as Other. Her physical, spiritual and conceptual liminality also blurs the boundaries of the spectral and the monstrous, raising questions about the function of these figures in Morrison's work. My discussion of Morrison's 2003 novel *Love* in the following will attempt to shed some light on how Morrison uses both hauntological and monstrous figures and narrative strategies related to them to present narratives of resistance.

2.3 Hauntology and Intersectional Oppression in *Love*

Like *Beloved*, *Love* is rooted in a specific context of African American history and culture, but the novel also engages with the female Gothic tradition to subvert stereotypes of race and gender. As I have also argued elsewhere (see Heise-von der Lippe, “Others, Monsters, Ghosts: Representations of the Female Gothic Body in Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Love”), Morrison adapts elements of the female Gothic to draw attention to narratives of specifically Black and female experiences of corporeality and ontology.

The female body has been at the center of definitions of the Female Gothic since Ellen Moers coined the term in 1976, describing it as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic." (Moers 90) Subsequent approaches, in accordance with theoretical reassessments of gender, focus more on the treatment of female bodies and concerns within the texts – spanning from the prototypical, or as Diane Long Hoeveler has suggested, professional victim (see Hoeveler 7) to the monstrous feminine (see Creed). While female Gothic narratives can function as narratives of resistance against patriarchal oppression, Morrison's own critical approach shows, there is a crucial difference between narrative representations of Black and white
female protagonists in North-American and to some extent British literary history: in traditional Gothic texts the white heroine's economic value in the marriage market depends on the preservation of her virtue/virginity. In comparison, the Black (slave) woman's economic value is measured by her ability to (re)produce new slave bodies. The "uncontested assumption of the sexual availability of black females" (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 23) casts her in the role of a commodity and the deviant, monstrous Other. One of the central scenes in Beloved highlights this difference as Sethe describes her inability to cope with or let go of the horrors of the past – the violation of her bodily autonomy and her role as a mother by schoolteacher's nephews who "took [her] milk" (Morrison, Beloved 17) and the news that having to watch it broke her husband Halle: "Add my husband to it, watching, above in the loft […] There is also my husband swatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind." (Morrison, Beloved 70) The narrative juxtaposes the slave owners' attempts to animalize Sethe, Halle, Paul D and the others with Sethe's narrative of resistance against their framing of her body. Contrary to the female Gothic tradition there is no escape and no happy ending for Sethe, merely resilience and survival, which the novel highlights as the main factors of her resistance. This counter-narrative to the construction of African-Americans as supporting characters or comic relief in mainstream narratives forms the center of Morrison's critical argument in Playing in the Dark, while her novels explore gender and race as intertwined categories of power, discrimination and victimization which have to be reassessed, undermined and deconstructed in various ways. As I have argued above, this reassessment frequently takes place as a foregrounding of hauntologies and monstrous returns.

Beloved may be the most prominent example of ghostly narrative in Morrison's work, but Love can also be read as an important contribution to the discussion of hauntology and monstrous narrative as a form of writing-against. Like Beloved, Love also revolves around ghostly figures whose presence/absence creates a palpable narrative gap in the text. The novel is similarly retrospective, concerned with representations of the (female) body in a complicated framework of sexual power politics. More importantly, it also revolves around a specific concept of hauntology that connects the personal experience of haunting with the impact of the socio-cultural and political background on the lives of the characters. In the following I will examine these two interlaced aesthetic strategies of hauntology and monstrous textuality in the novel.

Love presents different narrative threads, privileging the experiences of the women in the text, to establish a counter-narrative against the dominant presence/absence of a patriarchal figure – the wealthy hotel owner Bill Cosey, who steered the lives of his wife, daughter-in-law and grand-daughter in the past and continues to frame their experiences within the dominant cultural discourse he represented. While the plot hinges on his
overbearing role in the past, which is contrasted with his blatant absence in the present, he is not the only haunting figure in the text. Both L, the occasional first person narrator, and May, Cosey's daughter-in-law, are ghostly figures, whose actions haunt the other characters. While Cosey's lack of narrative voice presents him as curiously absent from the text, only reconstructed within the memories of others, the focalized perspectives of Cosey's granddaughter Christine and former child-bride Heed make up the larger part of the novel. These focalized chapters are framed by the first person narrative of their former cook, L, whose autodiegetic perspective is visually set apart from the rest of the narrative by being presented in italics. L's narrative voice, introduced on the first pages of the novel, gives way to a heterodiegetic narrative voice at the beginning of the first chapter, only to be reprised at strategic intervals throughout the text to reveal further bits and pieces of information. This deferral of the beginning of the action highlights a structural peculiarity of the text, in which important information is often withheld until a later point or, in some cases, never given, leaving the reader with a puzzle to assemble. The effect of this non-linear, shifting narrative is a hauntological sense of time being "out of joint", as the narrative focus constantly shifts away from the present towards the past events that still haunt the protagonists. This structure repeats itself on the narrative level of a number of chapters. Chapter 1, for instance, begins with the description of an anonymous "she", seemingly described by a heterodiegetic narrator in external focalization. Later, Sandler Gibbons is introduced as the main focalizer of the chapter, whose impressions of the woman are tinged by his sexualized reaction to her young, scantily clad body. This deferral of narrative perspective is underlined by the chapter titles. The first chapter's title, 'Portrait', for example, might refer to a painting of Bill Cosey which dominates his widow's bedroom, but the major part of the chapter is dedicated to describing the much more immediate physical appearance of the young woman, Junior Viviane. Cosey's absence/presence is systematically replaced by the women in the text. The other chapter titles also seem to refer to Bill Cosey at first, but often turn out to apply to other characters. On the surface, the text seems to reconstruct Cosey's spectral presence by highlighting the different roles he performed in his life – 'Lover', Benefactor', or 'Friend'. In the course of the narrative it becomes clear, that these are largely ironic, as the other characters remember their difficult relationships with the patriarch.

The novel's frequent shifts in focalization force the reader to rethink their understanding of the events, while L's comments further structure the novel, counterbalancing the longer, heterodiegetic, internally focalized chapters, foregrounding the novel's non-linearity and multi-perspectivity. While the plot hinges on this dominant figure, Cosey is, however, not the only haunting figure in the text. Like Beloved's tale, Love presents a body of narrative to be actively re-membered by the reader and L's gradual revelation of her role in the story creates new layers of meaning with every interspersed passage, only to shift and unravel itself
retrospectively, when L's presence/absence is shown to transgress the boundary between life and death. L's curiously timeless voice, self-described as "humming", straddles rather than inhabits time periods, positioning herself as a commentator who watches and judges the other characters from a temporal rather than a spatial distance. As Katrina Harack suggests, L's "practice of testimony prompts a suspension of judgment or of narrative, linear time, allowing access to a kind of timelessness or an outsider's perspective that provokes a reconsideration of the self in relation to the other" (Harack 256). L's testimony functions as a distinct form of counternarrative against the dominant (family) history and its privileging of Bill Cosey's patriarchal worldview. JaeEun Yoo points out:

Because L is a specter that oscillates between life/presence and death/absence, her voice opens a chasm in the orderly representation of reality ruled by patriarchy, and through the fissure the reader confronts another kind of 'reality,' that is, the repressed reality of African-American women's lives in the latter half of the 20th century. (Yoo 156)

As Megan Sweeney notes, L's comments are the moral barometer of the text. Her criticism of "the exhibitionism and false transparency" (Sweeney 447) of a world without secrets establishes her role as the keeper of secrets of both the plot and the Cosey's family history. L is represented as a mystery – she does not even mention her full name. It is only hinted at in her last, framing commentary that her "name is the subject of First Corinthians, chapter 13" (Morrison, Love 199).

Again, as in Beloved the ghostly presence turns out to be the eponymous character of the novel, but L is more self-aware than Beloved, whose child-mind does not distinguish between life and death. L's representational paradox – the only autodiegetic narrator in the text claiming to have shut up for good – draws attention to her hauntological presence/absence as well as her socially constructed lack of voice in the world of the well-to-do Coseys. L seems to be aware of her own death, although she interprets it as "simply more of the same" (Morrison, Love 135) and describes it as shutting up altogether back in the seventies - a period which she associates with the emergence of a new aesthetic of naked, fragmented, female bodies: "when all the magazines started featuring behinds and inner thighs as though that's all there is to a woman." (Morrison, Love 3) L's narrative is often focused on the texture and materiality of spaces and things she seems to still interact with, even after her death, drawing attention to the narratives focus on a specific way of life, now lost to the past.

The first sentence of L's framing commentary establishes the novel's central image of female sexuality as a commodity – "The women's legs are spread wide open, so I hum"
reason to stay connected and maybe figure out how precious the tongue is. If properly used, it can save you from the attention of Police-heads hunting desperate women and hardheaded, misraised children. It’s hard to do but I know at least one woman who did. Who stood right under their wide hats, their dripping beards, and scared them off with a word—or was it a note? (Morrison, Love 199)

As Sweeney points out, Love shows how women's resistance against their status as "sexual commodities" (Sweeney 455) is punished by a system which reads these acts of resistance as criminal. L's ominous "old folks' tale" (Morrison, Love 10) of "Police-heads" (Morrison, Love 5) drifting in from the sea at times of upheaval substantiates this reading. L frames this as "just another story made up to scare wicked females and correct unruly children" (Morrison, Love 10). However, L’s narrative also shows that resistance to the system symbolized by the Police-heads is possible: Celestial, long-term prostitute to Bill Cosey and glorified by Heed and Christine as bold and smart in their private code word "Hey Celestial" (Morrison, Love 188), confronts the sea and the Police-heads, uttering a sound that keeps L spellbound: "I don't know to this day whether it was a word, a tune, or a scream. All I know is that it was a sound I wanted to answer." (Morrison, Love 105) L's humming undermines and subtly challenges the patriarchal narrative. Again, as in the humming of male and female communities in Beloved, resistance is expressed in what Sweeney terms "the eloquence of not-yet-born language" (Sweeney 459). Like Beloved's tale, which has to be re-membered from scars and the fragments of corporeal narrative, this tale is represented as a Black, female countertext that has to be assembled from different narrative perspectives, as a tale of female empowerment, as L summarizes: "[s]omething better. Like a story that shows how brazen women can take a good man down." (Morrison, Love 10). By concentrating on the humming/countertext both novels manage what Helene Meyers describes as "negotiating the minefield of contemporary discourses about female victimization" (Meyers 2).

The titular theme of Love oscillates between different meanings of the word, the ambivalent Greek term for love, αγάπη (sometimes translated as charity) and the English adjective agape (in the sense of spread wide open), as well as the different concepts of emotional and corporeal relationships they denote. The unconditional, death-defying love Heed and Christine share at the end is reminiscent of strong relationships between women in Morrison's previous novels as well as Lorde's observation that "women-bonded women have always been some part of the power of Black communities," (Lorde, Sister Outsider 122)
selfless, unconditional form of love is, however, set as a counter-narrative against the cruel image of legs spread wide open by force – of rape and bodily harm – which occurs on several narrative levels in the text to draw attention to the precarious situation of Black women in any social context.

L’s liminal position transfers the dichotomy of presence and absence onto the structural level of the text, underlining the novel’s central focus on representation and intersectionality. Although, in accordance with the Female Gothic’s tradition of powerful villainy, Bill Cosey is represented as the dominant figure in the text, it gradually turns out that his power has been undermined by the subtle humming of L’s influence. As a compelling sub- or counter-text, L’s humming subverts the previously established gender roles of powerful male patriarch and devoted female servant. Her true influence on the Cosey’s family history is, nevertheless, only revealed in retrospect: L admits to having poisoned Bill Cosey to protect the Cosey-women from being disinherited.

Although, at the opening of the narrative, the patriarch has been dead for more than twenty years, Bill Cosey’s prominent absence haunts his family as well as the pages of the novel. James M. Mellard, consequently, reads the novel as highlighting the “postmodern crisis of paternal authority” (Mellard 234), but I would like to suggest that the novel’s depiction of the crisis’ historical roots and persistence suggest a reading that is generally critical of patriarchal structures and their capitalist intersections. Saleh-Hanna draws attention to the analogies of the practices of colonialist systems of White supremacy and abusive relationships (see Saleh-Hanna 9) and as Susana M. Morris points out, Love "is explicitly concerned with the lasting legacies of black male leadership and how these legacies (mis)shape African American communities throughout the twentieth century” (S. M. Morris 320) As such it "challeng[es], for example, the contention that what black communities in the post-civil rights era need is a ‘return’ to the styles of black masculine leadership seen during and before the civil rights movement." (S. M. Morris 320) In other words, the novel juxtaposes heteropatriarchal, capitalist social structures on different time levels to criticize their tenacity in the cultural imaginary as the only imaginable system of social organization.

Instead, the novel challenges historical notions of masculinity by inscribing itself into the Gothic tradition and undermines heteropatriarchal capitalist discourses of power. Its Gothic family plot harks back to Cosey’s father ‘Dark’, who accumulated some wealth by working as a police informer, snitching on the Black community. Like a Gothic villain, Bill Cosey tries to cover up this ancestral treason by inventing a more positive legend for his family and investing his father’s blood money in a hotel and pleasure resort for Black people. His personal style of seemingly benevolent patriarchal leadership involves charitable offers of employment to the local Black community – who are not allowed to use the hotel themselves – and favoritism of the (white) local sheriff, "Buddy Silk" (Morrison, Love 184). The novel
presents this inherently amoral combination of capitalist commodity culture and patriarchal leadership structures as the dominant cultural narrative, which the women have to work against in different ways. After the death of his only son – and again in line with this style of leadership and the Gothic narrative tradition – Cosey decides to marry 11-year-old Heed, his granddaughter's best friend. Initially framed as an act of charity, his role as a sexual predator becomes obvious to the reader when it emerges that Cosey has been sexually aroused at the sight of eight-year-old Heed in a bathing suit. In the wake of this first, shameful, encounter Christine, the granddaughter, sees "an old man's solitary pleasure" lurking in the curtains of her bedroom at night and feels that "his shadow had booked the room." (Morrison, Love 192) Each girl experiences this encounter with male sexuality as her private shame and dares not talk about what she saw. Presented in chapter 9 – 'Phantom' –, the secret origin of their mutual hatred emerges at the point of death and final reconciliation. Heed's early marriage coupled with her ignorance of proper behavior and the low social status of her family add a classist dimension to Christine's envy of her former friend and the hatred between the two girls is further aggravated by the fact that, instead of addressing the problematic relationship, Cosey decides to separate the girls. Christine is sent away to school – a dismissal that she blames on her friend, along with Heed's acceptance of Cosey's attentions.

A pivotal memory of Heed naively offering "to let her [Christine] wear her wedding ring" (Morrison, Love 126) uncovers the incestuous and pedophile undertones of the whole arrangement, along with the different levels of understanding the characters bring to the situation. While the girls are too young to fully grasp the sexual connotations of the ring as a symbol of marriage, L's admonition that "[t]he streets don't go there" (Morrison, Love 126) is typical of her role as a silent commentator and judge of everyone's behavior.

The conflict between the two girls is negotiated via the metaphor of slavery: "You a slave! He bought you with a year's rent and a candy bar!" (Morrison, Love 129), Christine shouts after Heed in pig Latin. In an African-American historical context, this accusation lacks metaphorical distance, but the fact that Christine encodes it in their shared secret childhood language of "idagay" (Morrison, Love 186), removing it from the understanding of the adults, adds a layer of ambiguity. As Stephanie Li argues, "Love undermines the Lacanian conflation between language and the law of the father by presenting idagay, a female-identified language developed by the two girls, as a discourse independent of the constraints of patriarchy." (Li 28) To yell "ave-slidadagay" (Morrison, Love 127) in rage suggests a complex and contradictory process that combines a spontaneously expressed emotion with a sense of taboo, Christine's understanding of what words are best not to be spoken aloud in front of others. The construction of "idagay" – creating new words by deconstructing existing ones – inscribes itself into a reading process focused on creating new meanings through Derridean
différance. Introduced at the center of the novel, this focus on language suggests a new reading of the text – one in which words and concepts may contain contradictory meanings (for example love encompassing hate) and meaning is deferred permanently, as the gradual introduction of remembered fragments of common story/history suggests the necessity of re-reading and reinterpretation. L's revelation that she is dead but still haunts the narrative space is perhaps the most blatant, but not the only example of this narrative strategy.

Based on its historically fraught past and its use in the novel itself, the word “slave” presents itself as a particularly fruitful focus for such a re-reading. There are five instances of the term in the novel, one literal – referring to Bill Cosey's background, "coming from a long line of quiet, prosperous slaves and thrifty freedmen" (Morrison, Love 134) – and four metaphorical uses. The last one in the novel, offered in Heed and Christine's final, blurred dialogue, is Heeds translation of Christine's former outburst, to which Heed adds that it "[h]urt bad" and Christine that "[i]t was meant to" (Morrison, Beloved 186). Only on the verge of (Heed's) death are they able to discuss both their feelings and the structure of their relationship, as well as their experiences tinged by their relationship with Bill Cosey. After years of replicating the kind of relationship Cosey has had with women, Christine realizes that she has been bought herself, and that most of the men resemble her grandfather in their attitude towards women. In the final dialogue she universalizes the experience, reframing it in the context of slavery:

[i]t's like we started out being sold, got free of it, then sold ourselves again to the highest bidder.

Who you mean ‘we’? Black people? Women? You mean me and you? (Morrison, Love 185)

There is no answer to this question, as the observation might apply to all of the contexts mentioned by Heed and is left unanswered by Christine. As Sweeney indicates, the novel is concerned with "women's status as property vs. women's control over property" (Sweeney 228). While I would agree with this reading, it is further complicated by the novel's background of African American history throughout the twentieth century as well as the fact that the central characters are women – further marginalizing their struggle for racial as well as gendered and financial independence. Class also plays a role, as the only women who are in command of their own fortune(s) are the servants employed by the hotel (L and Vida) who are at the same time seen to exist on a different social level – one which must be kept separate from the family at all cost. By comparison Christine, May and Heed, once she has been lifted from abject poverty, are shown as fully dependent on the financial support of
Cosey's hotel in a manner that is specific to middle-class women who have been trained for a representative household position rather than work employment. As Yoo argues,

[This is the major problem of representation that produces ghosts in *Love*: the paradoxical position in which women are placed in patriarchal society and its representational system. Women are conceived as daughters, that is, they are only perceived through their subordinate relationship to their fathers, and because of it, they owe their existence and position to the Father. (Yoo 156)

Heed's tendency to call her husband "Papa" and his attempts to raise and shape her to his will reflect this paradigm. Where *Beloved* centers the ghosts of slavery, in *Love* the spectral arises from the combined cultural complex of patriarchy, capitalism and race as categories of oppression.

The novel reflects early-twentieth-century notions of a strict social division of working and leisure class, a boundary established by birth, any transgression of which would be frowned upon. The women are defined by the strict gender roles of the bourgeoisie, which limits their participation in the workforce to unpaid domestic work or supervision and the production of offspring. As L summarizes, "[w]ord was he wanted children, lots of children, to fill the mirror for him the way Billy Boy used to. For motherhood only an unused girl would do." (Morrison, *Love* 102) In this, the novel echoes Marxist ideas to the effect that "The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production" against which the *Communist Manifesto* sets the concept of the "community of women" (Marx and Engels 89), a concept which is also frequently echoed in Morrison's novels, highlighting their focus on community, not individuality. Other than the servants, whose dependence is created by offering them better-paid or less dangerous jobs than the local canning industry, the Cosey women have been raised to be dependent on the capital of middle-class men. Trapped in their social roles, the three Cosey women are shown to struggle with making sense of their position in the world and their relationship with other women, predominantly within the local Black community, but the novel also shows that there are clear limitations for them in the more race- than class-oriented world outside, which still sees them as third-class citizens.

The novel presents Christine's mother May as the main representative of a strict segregational policy, which allowed her to preserve her social status. The fact that the three remaining occurrences of the word "slave" refer to May and her position in the household can be read as significant in this context, as May's marriage to Bill Cosey's son Billy Boy was dedicated to "making sure those Cosey men had what they wanted" (Morrison, *Love* 100). May's views on gender and power politics are firmly rooted in the segregated, patriarchal past. Her role is described by L as that of a "slave" to the hotel (see Morrison, *Love* 100), a
reading which May confirms when she warns Christine that "We will lose everything! All we
slaved for!" (Morrison, Love 163) On a personal level, May's presence/absence haunts the
family as well as the novel, anchoring the narrative in the historical past of her early
twentieth-century value system. As L suggests "she was already a minstrel-show spook,
floating through the rooms, flapping over the grounds, hiding behind doors until it was safe to
bury evidence of a life the Revolution wanted to deprive her of." (Morrison, Love 80) The
suggestion that May might be regarded as a slave and a ghost – two important categories in
the context of African American hauntology, even if only used in a metaphorical sense –
draws attention to another necessary re-reading of the novel's events focusing on her
actions.

As the third ghostly figure in the text, May fulfills a different function from L and Bill
Cosey. Only appearing in the margins of the action and presented by L, Christine and Heed
as "crack-brained" (Morrison, Love 6), laughable, a habitual kleptomaniac, spiteful towards
the lower classes and an embarrassment to her daughter, Christine, May still serves as an
important historical anchor as most of the historical context of the narrative is presented
indirectly through her reactions to various events. Like a reverse compass-needle May's
panic, her attempts at hiding the family's ill-gained fortune from "the Revolution", point away
from the important political struggles of the twentieth century. The text often hides these in
casual asides in the middle of L's narrative or Christine's focalized memories. "May reacting
in terror to Mississippi or Watts" (Morrison, Love 80), for instance, supposes a knowledge of
pivotal moments in twentieth-century African-American history to create an understanding of
how these events would have seemed threatening to May's Black bourgeoisie position. In
Christine's observation that May's "ghost [...] helmeted and holstered was alive and gaining
strength" (Morrison, Love 80) can be read as carrying both personal and political meaning.
Occurring in the context of May's fear of "the Revolution", the political reference is the more
obvious one. May's kleptomania and her tendency to hide valuables enhance the material
element in the narrative, as the decades-old love-hate relationship between Heed and
Christine hinges on the disappearance of a number of documents that May hid. The text
presents the materiality of possessions as a curse, more than a boon, suggesting that
wealth, or its absence, plays a major role in the haunting of the main characters.

As Morrison revealed in a 2003 interview, Love was specifically written to deal with an
often elided period of African American history: "before the civil rights movement there was
the necessity for a flourishing black entrepreneurial class [...] once the progress was in force
[...] such people were frequently called bourgeois; race-traitors; too many connections [...] with
the white establishment" (Manufacturing Intellect). Morrison's own story about the
genesis of the narrative, curiously, runs counter to what reviewers and critics perceived as
the central focus of the novel. Michiko Kakutani, for instance, felt that "the novel's sporadic
references to racial politics and America's evolving social mores [...] feel like gratuitous add-ons" (Kakutani). While the family history and especially the decades-old love/hate relationship between Christine and Heed certainly dominate the text, the novel's political background has a significant impact on how this relationship evolves. To repeat a second-wave feminist slogan originally coined by Kate Millet, for the women in the novel, the personal is political.

The political, cultural and, most importantly, social background of the novel influences the characters' lives to an extent that it highlights the various, intersecting types of oppression faced by African American women throughout the twentieth century. As Maria Paniccia Carden argues, "the family tragedy explored in Love is inextricable from the goals and expectations of the post-Reconstruction racial uplift movement" and Morrison's "invocation of Bill Cosby in her character Bill Cosey suggests that Love draws a correspondence between contemporary debate about the nature of the present crisis in African American communities and earlier uplift discourses, both of which join man-making rhetoric with the language of socioeconomic hierarchy." (Carden 131) The novel shows how even the position of a wealthy African American family would still be read through the lens of race in white-dominated US culture, even if class and education elevated them above the local African American population. As Morris argues, the novel depicts "Cosey as an individualist hero of American capitalism with some philanthropic inclinations. Cosey is an individual who fails at enacting social change, never fully attempting to change the destructive system of power based on racism and classism because it is his very lifeblood" (S. M. Morris 328). These structures become even more obvious in conjunction with the novel's presentation of gendered oppression in the male dominated world of the mid-twentieth century. Christine's memories of her encounters with the police tell a clear story of neoliberal bias, in favor of whiteness and money (expressed through her violent destruction of her former lover's car) and against (female) political resistance

Come to think of it, every serious affair she'd had had led straight to jail. First Ernie Holder, whom she married at seventeen, got them both arrested at an illegal social club. Then Fruit, whose pamphlets she passed out and with whom she had lived the longest, got her thirty days, no suspension, for inciting mayhem. Other affairs had overflowed and ended in dramas the law had precise names for: cursing meant assaulting an officer; yanking your arms when cuffed meant resisting arrest; throwing a cigarette too close to a police car meant conspiracy to commit arson; running across the street to get out of the way of mounted police meant obstructing traffic. Finally Dr. Rio. A Cadillac. A hammer. A gentle, almost reluctant arrest. (Morrison, Love 88–89)
Christine's wonder at not being manhandled during her only arrest for relationship-related violence is indicative of the novel's criticism of patriarchal structures and their attempts to frame the women in particular ways. But her reflections also suggest that, for African American women any act can be constructed as rebellious and held against them and once in police custody, there is a high likelihood that they would be "treated like sewage" (Morrison, Love 88), the victims of verbal abuse and physical assault. The novel contrasts this treatment with her grandfather's policy of bribing the local police with money and favors, suggesting that the historical method of avoiding this treatment hinges on a certain male complicity based on class that bridges the racial gap as long as enough money changes hands. As Morris points out this depiction of male complicity is part of "the novel's indictment of oppressive male leadership, its (re)evaluation of the era leading up to, during, and after the civil rights movement, and its meditation on the lasting consequences of civil rights struggles in African American communities" (S. M. Morris 320).

J. Brooks Bouson argues that, in Love, Morrison reprises her "role as a cultural historian" to examine "the dirty business of intraracial and class prejudice". This exploration is set "against a broad history of the black experience in twentieth-century America". By deliberately juxtaposing "the dark-skinned, lower-class Heed with the light-skinned, upper-middle-class Christine," Morrison "forces her readers to make wider sense of the larger historical and social—and also aesthetic—meaning(s) of the story she is telling" (Bouson, "Uncovering 'The Beloved' in the Warring and Lawless Women in Toni Morrison's 'Love'" 358–60). In the context of a Black Feminist Hauntological questioning Saleh-Hanna draws attention to the ways in which cultural adherence to whiteness as the standard and the omission of race in discussions that don't center race tends to obscure the intersections between these structural inequalities:

Though we discuss the social, cultural and political processes of segregation in the world, we often fail to identify how the White academy extends and naturalizes those policies in its insistence all conversations on class (or gender, or sexuality) do not need to include race; that when we study 'race' we obscure the actual power of class (if you are a White Marxist) or gender and sexuality (if you are a White feminist). (Saleh-Hanna 12)

Love explicitly foregrounds these intersections by presenting them as instances of haunting, showing how, coupled with class issues, patriarchal structures hark back to the past, rather than foreshadow the future. Patricia Hill Collins draws attention to the ways in which, historically, "Black family structures are seen as being deviant because they challenge the patriarchal assumptions underpinning the traditional family ideal" and how "the absence of
Black patriarchy is used as evidence for Black cultural inferiority." (Collins 85) As Collins argues, these assumptions are often set against a reading of Black women as "aggressive, assertive" and "unfeminine" (Collins 85). Love's Black middle class setting creates a set of structures in which Bill Cosey's patriarchal power over the women in his family and the community is based on wealth and the status that comes with it. While Cosey is aware that "every law in this country is made to keep us back" (Morrison, Love 44), this seemingly inclusive, African American "us" does not include the women in his family or his female employees.

As Christine contemplates, she can never escape the confines of institutionalization, whether at school, at home or at the brothel she briefly escapes to: "Maple Valley, Cosey's Hotel, Manila's whorehouse – all three floated in sexual tension and resentment; all three insisted on confinement; in all three status was money. And all were organized around the pressing needs of men." (Morrison, Love 92) Patriarchal structures dominate the world, even when she manages to leave the confines of her middle-class upbringing behind to join a group of revolutionaries formed "after the Till trial" (Morrison, Love 162). When another member of their group rapes a woman, the "girl's violation carried no weight against the sturdier violation of male friendship." (Morrison, Love 164) As Morris points out this depiction of male complicity is part of "the novel's indictment of oppressive male leadership, its (re)evaluation of the era leading up to, during, and after the civil rights movement, and its meditation on the lasting consequences of civil rights struggles in African American communities" (S. M. Morris 320). What Love sets against antiquated patriarchal patterns of leadership, Morris argues, is an "egalitarian ethic of care" (S. M. Morris 321) enacted through common, entangled narratives and one of the main ways of presenting the necessity for this is through liminal hauntological narrative that transgresses the boundaries of life and death. While Love uses hauntological structures to draw attention to the ways in which "time is out of joint", the narrative strategy of deferred meaning constantly shifts the focus from the central, patriarchal figure to the marginalized narratives of the women in the text, whose experiences and cultural positions would have been omitted by cultural narratives and theoretical framings alike, based on their status as appendages to a socially and financially dominant figure. A Black Feminist model of Hauntology, focused on making these intersectional identities visible, thus, allows for a different critical reading of Love in the context of Morrison's other novels privileging narratives of resistance against dominant cultural discourses.
3 Monstrous Narratives

3.1 The Patriarchal Monstrous in Love

Toni Morrison's *Love*'s is constructed out of a plurality of narrative strands (based on the memory of different focalizers and one autodiegetic narrator) that span different time periods and cultural contexts with the main part of the narrative set in recent history (the 1990s) and other perspectives harking back to the mid-twentieth century. Within this historical time frame the novel contrasts the more organized forms of resistance on the part of Black men with the ways in which intersectionally marginalized Black women push back against oppressive structures. *Love* juxtaposes the views of Bill Cosey and the women in his life, privileging the women's narrative voices and silencing Cosey in an act of narrative resistance. The main narrative strands focus on Heed and Christine's, as well as L’s memories and the impact of Bill Cosey's actions on their lives. Heed and Christine's ongoing conflict is, however, also enacted through the catalyst of Junior Viviane, whose narrative presence adds an element of physical monstrosity to the novel. Where L, Cosey and May are presented as spectral figures shaping and structuring the narrative, Junior Viviane's presence in the text is constructed as monstrous, drawing attention to the monstrosity of patriarchal control that shaped her corporeality.

From the point Heed hires Junior to help her forge a new will and force the decision over Cosey's inheritance in the first chapter, Junior's involvement drives the plot. As Bouson points out, "Junior resembles other outlaw women in Morrison's fiction" (Bouson, “Uncovering ‘The Beloved’ in the Warring and Lawless Women in Toni Morrison’s ‘Love’” 367). Depicted as self-reliant and resourceful, Junior is clearly scarred by her encounters with patriarchal control and institutionalization. As a focalized flashback from Junior's perspective reveals, as a young girl she was deliberately run over by a truck driven by her uncles, who tried to keep her from leaving the impoverished neighborhood of her childhood:

> She stepped out onto the road and had not gone fifty feet when a truckful of uncles clattered behind her. She jumped left, of course, instead of right, but they had anticipated that. When the front fender knocked her sideways, the rear tire crushed her toes. [...] In silence Junior watched her toes swell, redden, turn blue, then black, then marble, then merge. The crayons were gone and the hand that once held them now clutched a knife ready for [...] an uncle or anyone stopping her from committing the Settlement version of crime: leaving, getting out. (Morrison, *Love* 56–57)
The juxtaposition of loss (of her precious crayons) and betrayal underlines the Settlement's dominant logic of familial bonds based on violence. This brutal heritage has an effect on the young woman's evolution as a psychopathic personality, making her see herself as monstrous. L observes that "[e]ach story has a monster in it who made them tough instead of brave, so they open their legs rather than their hearts where that folded child is tucked" (Morrison, Love 4). This certainly holds for Junior, whose history of violence reveals itself as sexual dominance in her relationship with Romen (Heed and Christine's teenage help), whom she considers as "her gift" (Morrison, Love 63). Romen, in turn, is fascinated by her "sci-fi eyes" (Morrison, Love 179) and the rough sex. With her sadomasochistic tendencies Junior is cast in the role of a sexual predator, but the novel also depicts her longing for a "Good Man" (Morrison, Love 113), a father figure to replace her own absent father and counter the trauma of early institutionalization and sexual violence. From the G.I. Joe doll she steals as an eleven-year-old runaway to the realization that Bill Cosey has a "G.I. Joe chin" (Morrison, Love 27), Junior's life is focused on being comforted by fatherly approval and protection – a wish she begins to project on the portrait of Bill Cosey, whose presence she senses in the house.

Junior's quest for fatherly approval is, of course, ultimately connected to her deep sense of betrayal, of having been left at her uncles' mercy when her father abandoned her as an infant. The sight of her webbed toes serves as a constant bodily reminder of this betrayal and the real and physical impact of arbitrary male violence on women's bodies in a patriarchal system based on control, rather than compassion. Like other scarrings in Morrison's work, the hoof-like foot functions as a corporeal reminder of how physical monstrosity is often inscribed on the female body from the outside, to function as a symbol of Otherness that needs to be dissolved by a counter-narrative of resistance. In Love this resistance is presented via a glimpse of an alternative construction of masculinity to oppose the patriarchal system of control over women's bodies:

Rocking back and forth, she was remembering how Romen had raised her foot from the bathwater and tasted it as though it were a lollipop. It was when they left the tub, both wet and clean as gristle, that the slipperiness had begun. A kind of inside slide, that made her feel giddy and pretty at the same time. The solid protection she'd felt the first night in the house gave way to a jittery brightness that pleased and frightened her. (Morrison, Love 193–94)

Romen's emotional investment and his willingness to go along with Junior's wishes instead of imposing his will on her body finally soften Junior's shell and suggest to her that there could be a different kind of life – one outside of the control of the patriarchal system. Junior's sense
that "the Good Man vanished from his painting altogether" (Morrison, Love 193) supports this reading. *Love* is not a romance novel, however. And Junior's lack of compassion and her admission that she has left Heed and Christine to die at the abandoned resort sends Romen – who is driven by his own value system – to the rescue of the two elderly women: he "ran away from her. As fast as he could." (Morrison, *Love* 194) Junior's beginning "jittery feeling" can not hold its own against Romen's *agape* (charity) and his ingrained sense that trying to save the helpless and the victims of violence is the right thing to do. Romen is, thus, posed as a positive counter-example to both Bill Cosey's brand of dominant, self-serving patriarchal control and Junior's harsh childhood dominated by familial betrayal and an institutionalized patriarchal system of violence. Based on the formational influence of his grandparents, Vida and Sandler Gibbons, Romen possesses an ingrained sense of rightness and justice that asserts itself when he is confronted with the victims of violence (first a rape victim and then the injured old women) – and it does so, as the novel argues, against the easy way out, which would simply mean going along with the dominant view of violence and misogyny. Romen's decisions are unconscious in each case. "What was that thing that moved him to untie her" (Morrison, *Love* 48) – the girl that his friends have raped and that he is expected to violate in turn – "[w]hat made him do it? Or rather, who? But he knew who it was. It was the real Romen who had sabotaged the newly chiseled, dangerous one." (Morrison, *Love* 48) And it is this "realness", based on a sense of respect for other people's bodies and compassion for their physical suffering, that the novel posits as a counter-narrative for the present and a hope for the future. Moreover, in the context of intersectional African American gender politics, Romen's compassion creates a counter narrative to a highly medialized model of (Black) masculinity based on dominance and violence rather than human compassion.

As Morris argues, Morrison "insists that what links the three time periods before, during, and after the civil rights era is this brazen, socially sanctioned sexual violence against women." (S. M. Morris 332) A heteropatriarchal system of control held in place by capitalist structures lies at the heart of all evil in the novel, and finds its expression in violence against the female body. The first scene to be written, Morrison points out in the interview, was the rape scene, which fourteen-year-old Romen witnesses, and is, to an extent, complicit in, before he decides to free the victim (see Manufacturing Intellect). The novel presents a view of patriarchy in which women are imbricated along with men, as Morrison summarizes, "allowing themselves to be" controlled by the (phantom of) the patriarch, Bill Cosey (Manufacturing Intellect). In a similar vein, Missy Dehn Kubitschek reads the ominous "police-heads" of L's narrative frame as a metaphor of patriarchy, suggesting that "[p]atriarchy is even more powerful in the novel's present (the 1990s) than in Cosey's era" (in Gillespie 145). Morrison's project, like in previous novels, is not to make her characters into
super-heroines or heroes who single-handedly smash slavery, oppression and the patriarchy, but to show their immersion in systemic oppression, their learning processes and, "how hard and how necessary it is for us to become and to remain humans" (Manufacturing Intellect). Morrison's interest in haunting as a way of visualizing the racist past and the inherent racism in the present from a black feminist/womanist perspective (see "Toni Morrison") must, consequently, be read as embedded within a wider tradition of humanist thought (see Heinert 2f.) – a troubled tradition, whose exclusiveness also necessitates a critical posthumanist reframing as I have argued above.

Narrative – or rather the possibility to change dominant narratives – is the key to this in Morrison's work. As L summarizes in her final, framing comment, she wanted to give Heed and Christine "a reason to stay connected and maybe figure out how precious the tongue is." (Morrison, Love 199) To highlight the coupling of gender-specific violence and narrative effacement under patriarchal rule, the novel often focuses on bodily fragments like the rape victim's "mitten-tiny hands" (Morrison, Love 44) or Junior's "merged toes" (Morrison, Love 52). The representation is frequently metonymic, the body parts standing for a particular act of violence, which is re-evoked throughout the narrative to be framed in different contexts. Descriptions of Junior, for instance focus on her "good legs" (Morrison, Love 23), contrasted with Romen's observation that "the foot she slipped into the sock looked to him like a hoof." (Morrison, Love 152) These narratives of the monstrous, black, female body highlight a struggle with the physicality of identity construction that can, as Powell argues, be extrapolated from Morrison's work:

Extending from Morrison's literary and imaginative theorizations of (black) nonexistence, I argue that the phenomenal construction of the black body leads to the psychological anticipation of nonexistence. As such, blackness operates as an object to be radically excluded from the body, even before its inclusion, thereby constantly hailing the self into subjectivity that precedes it. Specifically for racially marked bodies, this act of becoming originates in the absent presence of abjection at the core of one’s subjectivity, which manifests through an inconsolable mourning. (Powell 59)

By highlighting processes of identity construction and narration that focus on the marginalized, suppressed and discarded subjects of institutionalized violence, Morrison challenges cultural processes of abjection focused on the Black body as ultimate other to white identity constructions. Strategies I have discussed so far include the ghost and the monster as pivotal figures of narratives of resistance. In the following I will focus on the question of how Morrison's work highlights the integration of ghostly black bodies with constructions of the US as a colonized, post-apocalyptic space to draw attention to the historical roots of discursive constructions of African Americans as other Others.
3.2 Hauntology, Monstrosity and Resistance in *A Mercy* (2008)

Morrison's Black Feminist Hauntology revolves around narratives of resistance based in communality and female kinship. *Beloved's* circle of singing women and the death-defying love of Heed and Christine in *Love* serve as examples of this function of narrative. The ghost is a "social figure" (Gordon 8) in Morrison's novels, an historical anachronism, as well as an interpretive stumbling block. It draws the readers' attention "to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life." (Gordon 8) It is precisely at this crucible of hegemonic historical discourse and individual experience that Morrison's novels uncover mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination and attempt a "recovery of history" (see Krumholz) to include otherwise omitted perspectives and experiences. As Wisker argues, "Morrison's engaged aim is a full record which revitalises history through factual testimony and a recreation of an imaginative world" (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 95). This is a particularly difficult task in the context of African American history, because, as Karla F. Holloway points out, "slavery itself defies traditional historiography. The victim's own chronicles of these events were systematically submerged, ignored, mistrusted, or superceded by 'historians' of the era." (Holloway 516) As Holloway argues, "[b]ecause slavery effectively placed black women outside of a historical universe governed by a traditional (Western) consideration of time, the aspect of their being – the quality and nature of their 'state' of being – becomes a more appropriate measure of their reality." (Holloway 517) To write these alternative stories (not histories), to write, as Avery Gordon puts it, "stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories." (Gordon 17) Morrison's work foregrounds these suppressed and marginalized perspectives and draws attention to their hauntological resurfacings in mainstream discourses.

Her work spans and connects different historical periods to highlight the prevalence of oppressive racist discourses. In *A Mercy* Morrison returns to the roots of racism in the US with a narrative set in the context of early North-American settler culture in the 1690s, employing ghosts as signs of a blatant absence of common historical discourses. The novel's central characters seem uprooted, lost without the binding elements of a common culture. The protagonists stumble about in the almost too empty, too paradisical nature of a country that seems all new – but is, in fact only borrowed from its original inhabitants. One could, in Northrop Frye's words, argue that, confronted with a lack of communal history in their new environment, the protagonists are "haunted by a lack of ghosts" (Frye 22) – but such a colonialist reading would deny the specters created by the violence of a land-grabbing settler culture and the denial of a historical position to those oppressed and exploited by it. As Bernd Herzogenrath argues, this kind of discursive emptying of an inhabited space implies...
an "imperial linguistics" as well as "a white ecology", which is "at least in the political, racial sense [...] what is silently (or not so silently) practiced as the default mode of ecology"
(Herzogenrath 1).

In *A Mercy*, Morrison explores the emergence of such a dominant narrative for US culture, suggesting that racialized discourses of Otherness played an important role in the process of identity formation for the nascent culture. Haunted by a lack of common interpretational frameworks and experience, the characters struggle with finding a coherent narrative for their new surroundings. Just as the religious fanaticism of the few dense-knit communities in existence, nature offers no salvation, no deeper meaning to their lives, because most of them have no idea how to interpret or engage with it. The central characters' blatant lack of a common culture or history, which could bind them together, is contrasted with the haunting personal nightmares they bring from their various places of origin (the slums of European cities, a tribe on the verge of extinction after the apocalyptic invasion of white settlers has destroyed their livelihood, a plantation run on slave labor, exploiting Black women's bodies to produce both work and more slaves). It is the common lack of a comprehensible explanation for these circumstances that manifests itself as an almost painful absence haunting the text, finding its central expression in Florens, the protagonist's, struggle to understand why her mother abandoned her. It seems more than ironic, almost tragic, that the reader will finally learn what Florens craves to hear but will never actually hear her mother say: "There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal." (Morrison, *A Mercy* 163) As in the earlier novels, Morrison uses the female body scarred by violence as both a metaphorical and a literary framework for the narrative, but withholds this interpretation from its central character.

Without her mother's explanation, Florens can never understand or acknowledge the seeming betrayal, which is actually an act of mercy. Similar to Sethe in *Beloved*, Florens' mother chooses what she perceives as the lesser of two evils and gives her daughter away to protect her from her own fate of rape and hard labor as a slave on the plantation, but, misunderstanding her mother's reasons, Florens is driven to violence out of sheer jealousy and impending loss, which she describes as "the dying inside" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 142). Florens' lack of understanding reflects a systemic erasure of maternal ties and the origin narratives that go with them. It is precisely this loss of narrative and its ensuing loss of cultural meaning that haunts the text. In a society based on slavery and rape, which does not acknowledge paternal ties, the only form of historical continuity rests with the mothers, who might pass on both narratives and the ability to interpret them to their children, if they are allowed to do so. Cut off from their mothers' stories by the system of slavery, both Sethe in *Beloved* and Florens in *A Mercy* result to violence to escape a situation that is unbearable and inexplicable to them.
As Rigney notes, Morrison's novels highlight the figure of the mother and women's connection to nature: "Sethe, and all the other women in Morrison's novels, are representatives of the powers of nature, no matter how subverted those powers might be by circumstance or the realities of history." (Rigney 231) These connections can be read as counter-narratives subverting the grand narratives of progress through colonization and nationalism, which has, historically been built on the necropolitical exploitation of the bodies, work and reproductive abilities of women of color. As such, Morrison's novels form part of a postcolonial project of decolonizing narratives or narratives of resistance highlighting the haunting presences behind these hegemonic discourses.

In conjunction with this project of re-assessing historical discourses, one of the central meta-narrative effects presented in the novel is the interpretation, or rather misinterpretation, of signs. As Florens points out at the beginning of her narrative, "[o]ften there are too many signs, or a bright omen clouds up too fast. I sort them and try to recall, yet I know I am missing much…" (Morrison, A Mercy 4). The image of Florens' mother and the bad omen of a dog's head in the steam of the kettle are repeated throughout the novel to underline moments of intense emotion and danger. It is, however, Florens' own body that becomes one of the central images in the text as she is framed within different discourses of Otherness. As a slave she does not own her own body, and as a stranger in the white settler culture, her dark skin marks her as the epitome of Otherness. This becomes blatantly obvious when she narrowly escapes a group of demon-hunting villagers who insist on scrutinizing her naked body for witch marks and other signs of monstrosity. Even after she walks away from their village she can still feel their eyes on her body:

I walk alone except for the eyes that join me on my journey. Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place if my knees bend backward like the forelegs of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. (Morrison, A Mercy 115)

Like Sethe in Beloved, Florens resists representations that cast her as possessing animal characteristics by drawing attention to the process of Othering in the hostile gazes of the villagers. Florens recognizes her dark skin as a sign that has been misinterpreted by others, an "outside dark" which allows them to consider her "a thing apart" (Morrison, A Mercy 115), a ghost or a monster, an abject Other.

This experience of not owning oneself, of being haunted by racist stereotypes and their devastating historical and personal consequences links A Mercy to Morrison's earlier novels,
and especially to *Beloved*. Both novels are united by their depiction of the dire consequences of treating the Black, female body as a commodity, not only in the literal sense of slave-ownership but also on the more abstract level of abjection and self-alienation. This is manifested in the figure of Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. When she is taken across the Ohio river and sets foot on free ground for the first time in her life she suddenly feels that "[t]hese hands belong to me" (Morrison, *Beloved* 141) and it is this realization which enables her to preach the love of one’s own body and soul to the Black community (see Morrison, *Beloved* 88). As Lawrence states, "the members of the community must put themselves back together – remember themselves" (Lawrence 193). Learning to speak the "body language" (Lawrence 194) of their own needs and desires, the former slaves have to let go of the traumatic experiences of the past by acknowledging their existence on their own terms. Baby Suggs’ sermon constructs this act of self-love as a radical, performative act, which runs directly counter to the violence practiced "Yonder" (Morrison, *Beloved* 88) in the country of the slave owners.

The mental consequences of not owning oneself are also a central issue for Florens in *A Mercy*. Feeling abandoned by her mother, she tells her lover, the free blacksmith, "[y]ou alone own me" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 141) but he rejects her and he tells her "[o]wn yourself, woman" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 141). Consequently, though Florens is never officially made free, she can become herself in the end and "last" (Morrison, *A Mercy* 161). Both *Beloved* and *A Mercy* confront the reader with strong images of the shared African-American experience of not only being categorized as an abject Other but also of how the constant cultural reiteration of this categorization creates a form of cultural haunting that affects not only the marginalized individual or community, but also mainstream culture itself. As Weinstock argues, the "ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events." (Weinstock 5) By fictionally resurrecting the unrepresented ghosts of North-American history Morrison's novels thus also call attention to the omissions and silencings of mainstream history. As Collins argues, "the significance of a Black feminist epistemology may lie in its ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice." (Collins 289) Morrison's work provides important contributions to a "Black feminist epistemology [that] calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth" (Collins 290). Hauntological and monstrous narrative constructions foreground Black women's experiences and present powerful counter-narratives in Morrison's work.
Conclusion

As I have argued in this first part, Morrison's novels make use of liminal figures like the specter and the monster to draw attention to cultural processes of Othering and possible narratives of resistance against them. Hauntology may be an uncomfortable critical category to work with in this context, as it leaves us stranded on an argumentative ledge, or in a liminal space without offering a definite reading or unambiguous categorization of the specter. However, as a critical concept, it offers a means to come to terms with what is already in the in-between: the blatant absences that are a significant element not only of postcolonial / postapocalyptic cultures. As David Punter points out, spectral texts "speak to us indeed all the time of the past, but the voice they use is not authoritative, it is instead minority, omenistic, it warns us of dooms past and to come and above all it reiterates our own complaint of being not at home in the world." (Punter, “Spectral Criticism” 261)

Beyond traditional conceptualizations of the spectral, Morrison's literary work introduces ghosts as ambiguous revenants, whose bodily return to the world of the living has a physical impact on the haunted. Mutilated, outcast, monstrous bodies serve as reminders of traumatic events and experiences that are always embedded in a wider cultural context of oppression. The "chokecherry tree" (Morrison, *Beloved* 16) of scars on Sethe's back is a monstrous physical reminder of the slave master's lash as well as a testimony to her resistance against the necropolitical system of slavery that cast her body as an object to be owned and exploited. In *Love* (2003) Junior's hoof-like foot (see Morrison, *Love* 152) serves as a visualization of her uncles' oppressive control over her body and her resistance against the patriarchal structures that protected them but not her. These marked bodies and embodied ghosts necessitate a broadening of frameworks of interpretation developed for European Gothic traditions, as well as the Derridean concept of hauntology, to draw attention to the ways in which historical discourses of racial difference have frequently constructed African Americans as other Others, associating them with assumed features of animalistic corporeality to justify exploitative necropolitical systems based on the assumed supremacy of white European humanist rationality.

While Gothic criticism acknowledges the historical connections and cultural chargedness of ghostly returns, they also center the liminality of the ghost. As Andrew Smith points out, "[t]he spectre is an absent presence, a liminal being that inhabits and gives shape to many of the figurations of trauma that characterise the Gothic. The spectre is also a strangely historical entity that is haunted by the culture which produced it." (Smith 147) Catherine Spooner makes a similar point about the "Gothic as a genre [which] is profoundly concerned with the past conveyed through both historical settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the present." (Spooner 9) However, in Morrison's novels the past is not an
abstract category of memory, it has a component of corporeality reminiscent of the Kristevan abject, in its focus on female/maternal bodies and the return of the repressed Other (see Kristeva 5) in identity constructions.

This is negotiated via a figuration of memory as a spatial as well as corporeal category. Saleh-Hanna draws attention to Morrison's "rewriting [of] our conceptions of memory into rememory [which] invokes the intergenerational nature of structural violence, speaking to institutional and inter-generational memory held within the bodies of enslaved Africans, European slaveholders, settler-colonists and their descendants." (Saleh-Hanna 7) In Morrison's work specifically, Gothic text and Gothic body reinforce one another in their fragmented representation of past transgressions at what Cynthia Dobbs, referring to Morrison's *Beloved*, has called the "crucial interface between body and story [...] marked by the scar" (Dobbs 575). Beloved's body, as well as her physical return from the dead present an example of this juncture, which is also reflected in the meta-narrative construction of her fragmented corporeality in and as narrative. While the ghost possesses a physical presence in the novel, Beloved exists only in so far as she sees herself narrated and re-membered by Sethe. Her body lacks corporeal integrity in Sethe's absence, as it seems to be held together solely by Sethe's attention and her narrative voice: "It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself." (Morrison, *Beloved* 133) As David Lawrence suggests, Beloved's narrative perspective reflects and reconstructs her fragmented body: "her 'word shapes' embody her tenuous physical and psychological shape" (Lawrence 196). The text deliberately blurs the materiality of bodies, objects and narratives, suggesting that the tree of scars on Sethe's back, her lost earrings and the stories she tells Beloved about the past possess the same textural qualities of preserving and passing on past experiences and memories beyond "the hurt [that] was always there" (Morrison, *Beloved* 58).

For the characters in Morrison's novels "ghosts or spirits are real", as Marsha Darling has argued in a conversation with Toni Morrison, they make "memory real" (Darling 249). The reality of memories is expressed via Morrison's concept of "re-memory", which Cynthia Dobbs has termed "a public place of haunting" (Dobbs 568). Past events continue to haunt places even if the people have long gone. As Sethe tells her daughter Denver about her life as a slave in Sweet Home, "even though it's all over – over and done with – it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all of my children out." (Morrison, *Beloved* 37) The way in which the physical presence of memory and history threatens the descendants of those who experienced the traumatic events represents the lasting cultural impact of the oppressive system of slavery. As Lawrence points out: "[o]perating independently of the conscious will, memory is shown to be an active,
constitutive force that has the power to construct and circumscribe identity, both individual and collective, in the image of its own contents." (Lawrence 189)

As a cultural text concerned with the impact of slavery, Beloved focuses on the middle passage of the millions of African men, women and children across the Atlantic Ocean, which takes a central, myth-building position in African American fictional and critical writing about memory and its cultural construction. As Gumbs argues about the importance of the middle passage for African American critic and activist M. Jacqui Alexander's work:

In Pedagogies of Crossing Alexander clarifies the middle passage of the transatlantic slave trade as an act of violence an act of violence that continues to impact the entire planet through the indivisibility of the water, wind, earth, and fire that surround and constitute our world. She also suggests that the crossing was not only a geographic transfer of millions of people but also a movement of energies and elements into a relationship that persists, a material and conceptual relationship we navigate with the potential and compelled crossings we make in each moment. (Gumbs no pag)

This conceptualization of the collective cultural memory of African American and, indeed, global culture has an impact on the present, resurfacing as what Gumbs describes as the "material traces" of this movement. Morrison's work highlights these material traces as part of Beloved's narrative construction.

Beloved's physical memory of the Middle Passage, presented as a gap-filled stream of consciousness in which "[a]ll of it is now it is always now" (Morrison, Beloved 210), brings the horrors of the slave ship to the present, merging it with her experience of loss, death and return. The lack of punctuation underlines the continuing impact of this memory that is also always present. The images of the Middle Passage are based on a model of racial, cultural memory, constructed from fragmented individual perspectives like the voices Stamp Paid hears when he approaches the haunted house: "a conflagration of hasty voices – loud, urgent, all speaking at once" (Morrison, Beloved 172). Beloved's narrative is presented as a seemingly unstructured, unpunctuated stream of consciousness, that mixes her individual past – her feeling of abandonment at the loss of her mother and her wish to reunite with her – with memories of the Middle Passage, of death and suffering under the horrible conditions on a slave ship in a monstrous narrative: "I am Beloved and she is mine. […] I am looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want to join" (Morrison, Beloved 210–11). Full of structural repetitions and marked with the self-centeredness and the lack of interpretational distance of a very young child's mind, the fragmented narrative recreates a ghostly return of the past without offering rational explanations – thus reflecting a monstrous cultural subconscious that effectively haunts the
reader. As I have argued in my general introduction Gothic physicality and textuality are frequently intertwined and reinforce each other. Gothic fiction, George Haggerty argues, "plays out a formal drama which is itself Gothic in its implications." (Haggerty 3) With its "inclination' toward formal instability and fragmentation" (Haggerty 2) the structure of the Gothic text, resembles a monstrous organism, a mutilated, fragmented Gothic body. In Morrison's novels ghostly presences influence the presentation of the narrative or even the layout of the text, foregrounding gaps and omissions that reflect the hauntological role of the specter. Gothic affect is employed in the context of a specific project, the retelling of American history from an African-American perspective.

The position of the ghost as "becoming-body" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 5) in Morrison's work functions as the narrative's pivotal point, a "spectral bridge" (Anderson 68) which connects the characters, but it also serves to connect the past to the present. More than a metaphor (see Erickson), the ghost's liminally embodied presence serves as an anchoring point from which to unravel the master-narrative of history. As Brogan argues, "[i]n contemporary haunted literature, ghost stories are offered as an alternative—or challenge—to 'official,' dominant history" (Brogan 17). Metanarrative strategies play an important role in this revision process, as they allow Gothic writers like Morrison to interrogate processes of narrative creation and textual production along with the production of mainstream discourses. Storytelling is foregrounded in Morrison's work, as it allows the characters to explore alternative discourses and interrogate processes of knowledge production in the meantime. Beloved's ghostly body serves as a narrative catalyst in this context: "Beloved's primary demand is for stories," Anderson points out (Anderson 74) The ghostly revenants' demand for Sethe to "[t]ell me" (Morrison, *Beloved* 58) is partly based on a need for explanation, but it also creates a possibility for Sethe to reflect the past, her memories of being a slave and being constructed as a radical, animalistic Other. Narrative and the possibility to reconnect with the community are presented as cathartic for Sethe, as only the act of remembering can exorcise the ghosts of the past. They have to literally re-member Beloved, as well as their own community, before she can be "disrememeberd" again. (Morrison, *Beloved* 274) "This is not a story to pass on" (Morrison, *Beloved* 275), the last chapter of the novel repeatedly proclaims. The ambiguous phrasing recalls the (necessary) process of communal history through passing on stories as well as the African American practice of "passing" in a white cultural context. For this particular disruptive tale and the ghost inhabiting and haunting it, neither seems possible. More importantly, perhaps, *Beloved*, also is not a story to pass on, in the sense of avoiding it altogether (see Smith 153). The novel is, as Anderson argues, "a time-shifting, liminal space transmitting cultural information" (Anderson 81) Beloved's haunting presence triggers a reconstruction of memories which – impossible as this may seem – can only be exorcised by re-evoking them. As I have argued above, community plays
an important role in this context, as it simulates, and thus, also furthers the idea of affective identification where uninterrogated racialized concepts of Otherness might hamper reader identification. The "conflagration of hasty voices" (Morrison, Beloved 172) has to be acknowledged, the word order restored to read the tale of unspeakable horror and to incorporate the ambiguous narrative perspectives of Sethe's lurking re-memory into a broader cultural memory, that can no longer exclude or silence the material traces and presence of the African American Other.

Instead, Morrison's novels create an Other point of view that favors individual experience and narrative over systemic thought, resistance to being categorized over the proclamation of hegemonic ideology. As Anderson points out: "Morrison privileges the liminal power of spectrality that illuminates personal memory and cultural history while concurrently 'unghosting' silenced individuals who are disconnected from that transformative space where personal experience, memory, and history merge." (Anderson 67) Juda Bennett even goes so far as to read "the spectral sphere" in Morrison's work as "always already queer, a provocation and challenge to heteronormativity" (Juda Bennett 2). These queerings of hegemonic discourses through individual narratives of resistance necessitate, as I have argued above, a supplement to Derridean hauntology, which does not account for their role in identity constructions beyond the mourning of the familiar other towards other Others, oppressed and silenced in specific contexts. Narratives of resistance – in Morrison's work and elsewhere – highlight the necessity of supplementing dominant theoretical discourses as well as common cultural framings of "normality" and Otherness. In a critical posthumanist context the emergence of other Others signals the necessity to overcome the human/non-human binary to allow posthuman becomings to emerge in critical thought. I will return to these troublings of alterity and resistance in part II and III.
II: A Female Monster Larger Than Life

Introduction

There has been, as well, a carnival of theory at the discursive level, in the poetics of postmodernist criticism and feminist writing. It has included all manner of textual travesty [...] tight-rope walking, and verbal aerialisms of all kinds. (Russo 327)

In a 1986 article on the "Female Grotesque" Mary Russo describes a "reintroduction of the body and categories of the body [...] into the realm of what is called the political" (Russo 319). Corporeal narratives have, as Russo argues, found their way into "the poetics of postmodernist criticism and feminist writing" (Russo 327). What Russo is interested in specifically is a "feminist semiotics" (Russo 320) that explores "strategies in approaching the questions of difference and the reconstruction or counterproduction of knowledge" (Russo 319) from a feminist perspective. Rather than reading feminist literature as anchored in bodily difference, the article explores the ways in which feminist criticism and writing were, at the time, re-appropriating discourses of corporeality to explore how to write Otherness differently and inhabit a subject position that is different from the historically male model of human personhood without re-inforcing the problematic hegemonic assumptions, hierarchies and exclusions such subject positions have traditionally entailed.

This reintroduction of the body and its "putative power to disrupt" (Shildrick, "Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body" 3) is, as Margrit Shildrick argues, an indicator of an ongoing crisis of humanism in continental philosophy: "[t]he issue, as I understand it, is one of leaky boundaries, wherein the leakiness of the logos – that failure to hold the still centre of meaning and authority against its margins – is mirrored by the collapse of the human itself as a bounded category." (Shildrick, "Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body" 1) Rather than read this as a conscious, argumentative reintroduction of corporeality, it might, therefore, be more accurate to read the process described by Russo and Shildrick as a reappearance of the monster pointing towards a "category crisis" (Cohen, Monster Theory. Reading Culture 6) of the human and indicating the necessity of new epistemologies beyond the humanist paradigm. Writing a decade later than Russo, Shildrick traces a line of posthumanist questioning rooted in earlier feminist discussions of how the human subject position has traditionally excluded women and shirked discussions of embodiment beyond the gender binary. To consider these questions from a critical posthumanist perspective, as Shildrick does, offers a different lens on historically often hierarchical processes of identity construction. Instead of broadening the category of "the human" to include another, once
again limiting set of identities, a re-introduction of the body signals a (necessary) reassessment of the category of the human and its history of excluding other Others.

As I have argued for the exclusionary tendencies of racialized discourses in part I, second-wave feminism itself has been implicated in the reiteration of binary constructions that exclude other Others in an attempt at achieving equality for a narrowly defined group of women. These exclusionary "white feminist" politics were and continue to be criticized by, for instance, Black and indigenous feminist critics and activists like bell hooks (see hooks), who have pointed out that important steps in gender equality (like the right to vote) were often achieved by and for white women on the basis of the explicit exclusion of people of color, Black people, indigenous people and disabled people, to name only a few. As Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston argue "[t]he privilege of blindness to these contradictions is part of the arrogance of entrenched power" (Halberstam and Livingston 9), which is deeply rooted in Enlightenment humanism's white, patriarchally structured legacy.

While most attempts at creating a linear history of the complex systems of feminist resistance against these issues – particularly those of the third wave – tend to create oversimplifications, I would like to suggest that Russo's article marks a crucial moment for feminist literary criticism – namely the shift from second-wave feminist politics to third-wave feminist troubling of the heteronormative binaries of sex and gender, as well as other, intersecting forms of oppression – a moment which acknowledged the fluidity of such categorizations and called for a reassessment of their narrative dominance.

It could, moreover, be argued that Russo's "reintroduction of the body" and the ensuing renewed focus on how various forms of embodiment challenge and disrupt binary constructions of gender identity and humanity had wider theoretical ramifications, especially were posthumanist thought emerged from earlier feminist positions (e.g. in Rosi Braidotti's or Donna Haraway's work). To reintroduce the (female) body into the discussion suggests a reappraisal of what Shildrick terms "the non-subject other, the excluded, the embodied, the monstrous" (Shildrick, “Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body” 1) – a line of enquiry that leads into critical posthumanist questioning of the exclusiveness of the humanist subject position (which I will discuss further in chapter 8) as well as a queering of mainstream discourses of human embodiment as biologically and not socially determined. In one of the first attempts to theorize posthuman bodies in 1995, Halberstam and Livingston, for instance, read the posthuman body as "queer: not as an identity but because it queers" (Halberstam and Livingston 14), it "challenge[s] and disrupt[s] the terms offered to it for self-definition" (Halberstam and Livingston 15).

In this part I will, therefore, attempt a framing of narratives of non-normative, monstrous embodiment at a specific moment of feminist criticism that not only saw a reintroduction of the body but also an opening towards non-binary and posthumanist discussions of
embodiment. I will draw on Russo's assessment of this historical shift because its particular phrasing lends itself to a critical framing of the meta-critical monstrous narratives I discuss below.

Russo's central figure of the female grotesque draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's work on carnival (see Bakhtin) and the possibilities of "making a spectacle out of herself" (Russo 318) as a form of feminist resistance against the categorizing gaze. Russo's focus on the grotesque bodies of carnival and the specific imagery she uses to frame these as feminist narratives of resistance are of primary importance for my argument here, as they highlight how the necessary re-introduction of corporeal discourses the article speaks of could be framed as a critical counter-narrative or narrative of resistance in the sense I discussed in my general introduction. On a meta-critical level, Russo's article draws attention to the ways in which predominantly male critics at the time (specifically Derrida) framed feminist criticism as angry "raging" (Russo 332), showing how even otherwise progressive patriarchal structures often dismiss women's work – whether literary or cultural – as emotional and, therefore, dismiss it as irrational and how these affects are framed as typically female and rooted in female biology. To read the resistance against systemic oppression as irrational undermines the validity of such arguments based on an assumption of difference that actually was (and continues to be) a problematic binary construction. Russo's text is, thus also a reminder that feminist criticism is always already writing against a dominant patriarchal standard, a form of monstrous textuality that undermines ingrained epistemological systems. The meta-critical literary texts I will discuss in the following, thus, inscribe themselves into a tradition of feminist writing that could be framed as monstrous textuality, blurring the boundaries between narrative and theory.

Russo's article reflects both narrative and theoretical discourses as "tight-rope walking, and verbal aerialisms" (Russo 327), clarifying later that feminist uses of the laughter of carnival include strategies like "intertext and multiple identifications" to undermine "coercive" discourses (Russo 333). Russo's reference to carnival evokes both Bakhtin's reading of carnival as a celebration of corporeality, as well as second-wave feminist critical engagement with Bakhtin's approach in the context of women's writing (most prominently Hélène Cixous' and Julia Kristeva's work). Russo comments on Bakhtin's failure "to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic", which leaves "his notion of the Female Grotesque [...] repressed and undeveloped" (Russo 325–26). Feminist criticism latched onto Bakhtin's central figure of the "senile pregnant hags" (Bakhtin 25) as an image of productivity and becoming, as well as the questioning of (gendered) binaries that accompanied the emergence of third-wave feminist and queer methodologies. As Russo argues with Lévi Strauss "the grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change." (Russo
By "making a spectacle" (Russo 318) of themselves, Russo argues, grotesque female bodies challenge the objectifying and categorizing male gaze and resist being "circulate[d] as signs" instead of being "theorized as sign producers" (Russo 328). It is this uncategorizable body out of bounds, uncontrolled by conventions or cultural standards and challenging narratives of essentialist femininity that functions as a central transgressive figure for feminist critics to draw on. What I am interested in here, specifically, is how narrative explorations of such transgressions of corporeality work to destabilize and subvert cultural narratives of femininity and heteropatriarchal power structures and can, therefore, be read as narratives of resistance.

While Russo's article describes an understanding of (female) corporeality that is still somewhat rooted in second-wave feminist criticism, it foreshadows third-wave feminist questioning of more complex, intersectional forms of social oppression and the problem of framing them as feminist concerns if the focus of identification and activism lies on how patriarchal systems oppress the female(ness of the body) in particular. Rosi Braidotti's "female embodied self" as an interconnected, political "nomadic subject" seems to provide a useful subject position for such questioning. As Braidotti argues, "that one be socially constructed as female is evident, that the recognition of the fact may take place in language is clear, but that the process of construction of femininity fastens and builds upon anatomical realities is equally true", however in Braidotti's work, "being-a-woman" is not "the predication of a prescriptive essence, it is not a causal proposition capable of predetermining the outcome of becoming of each individual identity" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 186–87). Individual identity constructions in this sense are complex, discursive and rely on embodiment as well as language and cultural situations, which are performative, complex and multidimensional. They are, however, necessary for what Braidotti calls "grounding" – the necessity to "speak from somewhere", in order to achieve "a critique of universalism without falling into relativism" (Braidotti, "Posthuman Knowledge"). For Braidotti, "the opposite of universalism" is a network of "multiple grounded perspectives" (Braidotti, "Posthuman Knowledge"). Feminist criticism consequently needs to rely on individual narratives instead of generalizations to make sense of such experiences in a manner that does not impose categorizations or binaries. Rather than present unified systems of understanding the world (and often framing women as the Other to a normative male ideal), feminist counter-narratives rely on "speculation and imagination as forms of queer and feminist knowledge production." (Grusin xi) Moreover, as Luce Irigaray argues, women's utterances can be understood as always in a state of becoming that resists categorization: "It is useless, then, to trap women in the exact definition of what they mean, to make them repeat (themselves) so that it will be clear; they are already elsewhere in that discursive machinery where you expected to surprise them." (Irigaray 29)
tactic undermines prominent discourses by resisting categorizations and framings and by drawing attention to their instability and obsolescence.

As I have argued above, the Gothic offers a unique mode of literary production in which to explore such narratives of resistance – especially because, as Steven Bruhm has argued, "[l]ike the queer episteme itself, the Gothic disrespects the borderlines of the appropriate, the healthy, or the politically desirable. It resists the authority of the traditional or received" (Bruhm 94). Feminist Gothic criticism, as Bruhm summarizes, traditionally focused on "gender in the Gothic as explorations of power inequities" (Bruhm 93) and, consequently, tended to "mak[e] visible the violence underpinning the sexual norms that our culture (including a culture imagined by feminism) holds most sacred." (Bruhm 94) As both Bruhm and Ellis Hanson argue, this kind of feminist questioning can and must be fruitfully supplemented with a queer critical lens, because, as Hanson suggests

Queer theory, thus, supplements the Gothic to further undermine binary modes of identity construction and make sense of such disruptions where they occur in literary texts.

My focus here is, however, not on queer theory itself, nor on its intersections with the Gothic, but on the moment in feminist discourse at which such questioning emerged as a meta-critical element in narrative. In this part I will mainly focus on two texts whose representations of female embodiment draw on the critical context suggested by Russo's article. While the novels were published in the decade before Russo's critical assessment, they seemingly take the cultural metaphors Russo discusses at face value, revolving around the grotesque bodies of physically large female freak performers and reading their uncontained corporeality as undermining categorizations of what a female body should look like. Moreover, both novels reflect feminist discussions of embodiment and representation on a meta-narrative level, engaging with Gothic aesthetics to frame this questioning. As I will argue, the nameless fat lady on the tight rope in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) and the giant aerialiste Fevvers in Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) can both be read as figures of transgression and resistance. They undermine conventional tropes and stereotypes for the representation of female embodiment and challenge conventional categorizations and framings of female corporeality and behavior by evoking and consciously rejecting various discursive attempts at categorization.
Both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* present body size and taking-up space as feminist issues and, somewhat ironically, engage with the cultural representation of unusually large female bodies as carnivalesque spectacle, transgressing norms of embodiment. As Patricia Duncker points out, this association with the performative as transformative can also be framed within the queer history of the Gothic tradition, for which

> even within the prose narratives the important unit of meaning is the scene. The narratives of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Gothic fiction and melodrama often hinge upon transvestism, seeming, and disguise. Transformations are in themselves revelations. Who you are depends upon the role you are playing at the time. Identity becomes a stage property; it is changeable, fluid and unstable. (Duncker 58)

Postmodern Gothic novels often draw on this aspect of the Gothic tradition, adapting performative elements for their own narrative purposes and critical context. The discursive context of the freak show as a space to perform non-normative embodiment plays an important role in both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus*, but Carter and Atwood also chose to deliberately engage with central feminist approaches – most prominently in their presentation of monstrosity and Otherness and the structuring of the texts in a manner that reflects the multi-dimensional corporeality of the main characters as a narrative of resistance. As meta-critical texts, aware of contemporary feminist theorization, the novels explicitly reflect crucial discussions of female embodiment and femininity at the time.

My discussion will draw on a number of critical frameworks: feminist theory, fat studies, disability studies – most prominently the discussion of the representation of non-normative bodies as freaks – as well as the Gothic, whose negative aesthetics both Carter and Atwood engage with to represent the horrors of female embodiment as abject Other in patriarchal cultures. What I am particularly interested in here, is how the two novels navigate the slippery slope of representation for bodies perceived or presenting as female, which are, as Russo argues, more often read as "signs" than as "sign producers" (see Russo 328). The monster, the freak and the madwoman have been used as critical metaphors to frame unruly women, but it is the active engagement of narratives with these ideas, the deliberate challenging of these categories, which posits these texts as feminist narratives of resistance against representation, in the sense I have presented in the introduction.

The three chapters in this part will focus on:
1. the feminist background the novels engage with and the use of mirrors and frames as narrative devices to draw attention to the novels' meta-critical engagement;
2. the use of corporeal discourses of monstrosity and freakishness in both texts and
3. the function of fat bodies and performativity within the critical argument of both novels and in more recent narratives of fatness.
4 Reframing Narratives

4.1 "The Laugh of Medusa": Second-Wave Feminist Theory and Narratives of Resistance

The textual examples I discuss in this part present female protagonists who actively struggle against categorization. Moreover, *Nights at the Circus* and *Lady Oracle* also engage with feminist theorization of such resistance strategies. As both Carter and Atwood draw on her writing, Hélène Cixous' work – particularly "The Laugh of Medusa" – must be addressed as an important source of their meta-critical literary production.

Medusa functions as an ambiguous figure, as her various mythological manifestations seem profoundly Gothic, revolving around rape, jealousy, transformation, revenge and death. Feminist reassessments of Medusa as a figure of revenge and resistance against patriarchal framings hark back to early-twentieth-century Greek mythologist Jane Ellen Harrison’s work, which describes the Gorgon's "lovely, terrible face [that] had power to turn men into stone" (Harrison 187). Medusa can be read as a figure of female power, whose "potency resides in the head", not the body – a head which probably existed first as a ritual mask before "the monster [was] begotten to account for it; and the hero [was] supplied to account for the slaying of the monster" (Harrison 187). As Harrison’s observations suggest, Medusa's narrative of monstrous femininity is older than the tale of Perseus’ containment and colonial appropriation of her monstrous powers. Medusa is a human-animal hybrid in most narratives – with some stories describing wings or tusks as well as the famous snake hair, and her dead body gives birth to the winged horse Pegasus (suggesting flight as well as the animalistic power for new beginnings). Medusa's laughter can, thus, be read as a metaphor of resistance against the male narratives inscribed on her body and her power remains a subtext in the many depictions of her severed, monstrous head throughout art history as well as feminist criticism.

In "The Laugh of Medusa" (1976), Cixous draws on Medusa's power as a figure of revenge and subversion to explore the possibilities of inscribing feminist writing into a patriarchal/capitalist tradition of literature. Narrative, she suggests, can figure as a form of resistance to omission and suppression in language:

there is such a thing as marked writing: that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has
grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak – this being the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (Cixous 879)

Against these oppressive structures Cixous' argument posits self-advocacy and a focus on individual narrative as transformative strategies. While Cixous 1976 text is focused on "woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and [...] a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" (Cixous 875–76), her critical discussion of writing signals a shift in understanding concerning the importance of discursive and narrative constructions of embodiment. Cixous' concept of "signify[ing] with her body" (Cixous 881) is precisely what the feminist texts I discuss here engage in, as they attempt to come to terms with the problematic task of representation and signification raised by patriarchal cultural structures but also perpetuated by second wave feminist theory's focus on essentialist differences between gendered bodies. As I will argue in this part, Atwood's and Carter's work presents a narrative reflection of these feminist theoretical discussions in the 1970s and 1980s, addressing specifically the problem of the female body and femininity as cultural stereotypes. Writing against an ingrained narrative tradition that reinforced these cultural stereotypes, presents, in second-wave feminist poet Adrienne Rich's words an act of "re-vision" (Rich 18) that challenges the male gaze as well as cultural narratives based on its subject/object opposition. As Rich argues in "When We Dead Awaken", first published in 1972, this re-vision is

the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction [...] A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh. (Rich 18)

Rich's re-vision suggest not merely a re-reading but a critical reassessment of literary as well as social narratives surrounding women's lives. She sees the present time (the early 1970s) as critical for the work of women writers in particular – "a challenge and promise" but also "a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into, and with little in the past to support us." (Rich 18) Rich's view of this difficult process is more optimistic than Joanna Russ's assessment of the
systematic omission of women's work in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (which I discussed in the introduction) published a decade later in 1983. Both Rich and Russ agree, however, that the differences here are socially constructed, based on what is culturally associated with women's work and position in society. Rich's reassessment of literature is focused on the role men and women have played in each other's lives, how these differences emerge in writing as well as how they are perceived by the (predominantly male dominated) literary establishment and how this might change in the future. Being perceived as unreasonably "angry" – like the writer-protagonist Joan Foster in Atwood's *Lady Oracle* – is part of this reassessment, as women writers navigate a system of literature and criticism dominated by heteropatriarchal expectations and a focus on the (historically male) genius of the poet or writer. Pitted against this tradition, Cixous' concept of *écriture feminine* undermines and challenges "the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system" (Cixous 883) and "un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces" (Cixous 882) blending "personal history [...] together with the history of all women" (Cixous 882). While *écriture feminine* relies on the assumption that writing is based on a (gendered) body and differences in writing are essentially linked to gender, her observations on reclaiming writing from a marginalized position form an important cornerstone for feminist explorations of the possibilities of writing against the dominant hegemonic structures. Cixous' argument about writing as "the possibility of change" centers on the way society constructs the expression of women's creativity and productivity as monstrous Other – also suggesting that women frequently internalize this assessment: "Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a …[sic] divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick?" (Cixous 876) Cixous argument seems to hark back to Mary Shelley's introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* (which I discussed in my introduction) and the "question, so frequently asked [her]—'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?'" (Shelley 165) Shelley's question reveals the historical policing of women's artistic expression as either too radical (and therefore unfeminine) or too feminine (and therefore artistically inferior and unimportant), when the true question, as Wendy Lesser suggests, should actually be, how anyone would come up with a tale like *Frankenstein* (see Lesser). The example of *Frankenstein* and its adaptation- and reception-history discussed in the introduction suggests that the discourse of monstrosity, which presents itself as a metaphor of women's abnormality, can be reframed as a powerful narrative of resistance.

The literary examples I discuss in this part harness the powers of monstrosity and freakishness by depicting their female protagonists as deliberately "making a spectacle of
[them]sel[ves]" (Russo 318) to draw attention to the confining binaries of heteropatriarchal systems and present deviant forms of embodiment as narratives of resistance against narrow cultural categorizations. Prefiguring Russo's article they draw on the disruptive potential of carnival and grotesque performances as a critical model, which, thus, presents all of these texts as rooted in a specific cultural and critical moment. By comparison, more recent literary examples tend to engage with the metaphors of second-wave feminist theory in a much more distanced, ironic manner that perhaps owes its cynical stance to the decades of critical exploration in between and the sense that there is still much work to do. Shelley Jackson's 1995 hypertext-novel *Patchwork Girl*, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 7, for instance, offers an example of this kind of ironic distance, as it presents a patchwork of literary and critical sources alike to make a point about the complexity of contemporary identity constructions. The hypertextual structure of Jackson's *Frankenstein* adaptation reflects the palimpsestic, chaotically assembled structure of the monstrous body and narrative while also drawing on a number of feminist theories (among them Cixous' work) as well as feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* (Barbara Johnson's work, for example). The text inscribes itself into a meta-critical feminist tradition that ironically clashes traditional cultural positions for women and Derrida's reaction to feminist critics, for instance: "My fingers will write sonnets in the family bible and political tracts in my embroidery hoop. Derrida will come home mumbling about a she-monster who beset him in the woods." (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "mementos")

In the lexia (hypertext window) "left breast", that forms part of the literary monster's fragmented body, Cixous' concept of the mother writing in "white ink" is evoked as an image of female creativity and productivity (in giving birth as well as in writing), albeit as a Gothic image coupled with the memory of loss and death:

Charlotte nursed eight children, buried six, and felt each loss in her swollen breasts. [...] She filled a quill-pen at her nipple and wrote invisible letters to her dead babies. Then she held a match under the page and watched her words come back. When I write my left breast sometimes dribbles the milk of invisible children. (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* “left breast”)

The female monster in the text, a meta-narratively commenting writer herself, retains the physical memory of each of her body part donors' traumatic experiences and the hypertext presents these as individual narratives, stitching them together in a network of linked text windows that reflect the palimpsestic quality of the monstrous body. Jackson's literal use of Cixous' metaphor complicates the writing process, coupling it with the birth of children (often read as the primary productive process of the biologically female body in patriarchal
societies), whose seemingly almost inevitable death, sense of loss and trauma on the mother's part are reflected in the disappearance and "fiery" return of the milky ink on the page. The narrative also draws on the work of predominantly feminist critics on the biographical context of Frankenstein – a referential framework documented by the hypertext novel's footnotes and bibliography (see S. Jackson, Patchwork Girl). The text incorporates the physical reminder of writing as a motherly process (the dribbling left breast) into the patchwork body of the female monster as well as its hypertext network. I will further explore this form of monstrous textuality and its posthumanist implications in chapter 7, but in the context of my argument here, Jackson's Patchwork Girl presents a more recent, ironic and self-reflexive example of a contemporary meta-critical narrative. Rather than a narrative of resistance in itself, the text functions as a meta-critical comment on the usefulness, possibility and argumentative use of such narratives for third-wave feminist and post-feminist contexts.

Like Atwood's and Carter's work it inscribes itself into a tradition of feminist critical and literary production since the 1970s, which has been concerned with questions of embodiment providing a narrative framework for the exploration of such subject positions. Both Carter's and Atwood's work, produced in the 1970s and 80s, not only engages with French feminist writing (Cixous' and Julia Kristeva's work, for instance), but also with questions raised by grassroots feminist activism. Carter's novels revolve around the troubling of gender roles and female gender identities in particular, and Atwood's work, which has frequently been read as feminist, takes an ironic stance, troubling traditional gender roles and identity constructions. Gina Wisker, discussing Lady Oracle alongside Atwood's earlier novel The Edible Woman (1969), describes Atwood's work as "writing the body", where society values part of the construction of the body as an item for consumption" (Wisker, Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction 38). This focus situates the narrative historically within second-wave feminist debates, but also signals an ongoing relevance to contemporary intersectional feminist discussions of gendered, sexualized, racialized and necro-politically commodified bodies in the highly dehumanized, consumption-oriented context of late neoliberal capitalism.

The protagonist of Atwood's Lady Oracle – a writer herself – struggles with being defined as an "angry" member of "Women's Lib" (Atwood, Lady Oracle 237), simultaneously anchoring the novel in the 1970s and drawing attention to the different ways in which (perceived and performed) gender impacts an author's reception in the media. Atwood's dystopian novel The Handmaid's Tale (1985) similarly presents the protagonist's struggle with her radical second-wave-feminist mother. The text is currently seeing an increased popularity as well as a feminist re-assessment, as The Handmaid's Tale has been adapted for television (and, recently, opera) and a new generation of readers is engaging with
Atwood's work and its feminist themes, but the television adaptation's focus on torturing female bodies also raises questions on contemporary viewing practices focused on spectacles of body horror that are often disempowering to women. Like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the representation of female embodiments and the struggle against cultural role models is shown from an inside perspective in *Lady Oracle*, allowing the narrator to present an individual view on what she perceives as her failure to adhere to these cultural standards. The Gothic – and particularly the monster narrative – presents itself as a fruitful meta-narrative mode for the reflection of these questions. As Gina Wisker argues,

> [i]n the hands of women writers, the contemporary Gothic often has a deliberately comic, parodic and popularist edge which does not undervalue its critique. Simultaneously, it has a radical aesthetically inventive edge which problematises ways in which women are represented, controlled and considered in contemporary society. (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 5)

Wisker's framework of the contemporary Gothic encompasses texts from the 1960s (beginning with Jean Rhys' and Angela Carter's work) until the early twenty-first century. While this seems to be a fairly broad definition of the contemporary, this framing facilitates a reading of Gothic literature alongside the crucial theoretical texts and civil rights movements that developed alongside and influenced these texts, as well as their impact on the current cultural moment. Meta-narrative, theory-conscious texts like Carter's and Atwood's work reflect these developments and invite theory conscious critical readings.

Carter's work is often described as more openly feminist than Atwood's, but it also employs irony as a narrative strategy. While *Nights at the Circus* is set at the fin de siècle, the novel reflects contemporary (1980s) feminist discussions on various narrative levels. As Wisker argues,

> Carter sets her masterpiece *Nights at the Circus* at a Gothic moment, the turn of the century, a gap in possibilities, a moment of change for women in Europe in particular. It is a novel of liminality and of threshold crossings, of troublesome contestation between what seems real or possible and what is fantastic. (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 54)

The choice of historical period is certainly no coincidence as it highlights the shift from "the 'Victorian regime – one that forced anyone who was not bourgeois, white and heterosexual into closeted silence" (Haefele-Thomas 2), towards a modernist questioning of Victorian standards. *Nights at the Circus* highlights this shift by reading the fin de siècle as a moment
of radical change, which is expressed through Gothic corporeality, as Kelly Hurley argues:

the fin-de-siècle Gothic offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality; in place of a unitary and securely bounded human subjectivity, one that is both fragmented and permeable. (Hurley 3)

Carter's choice of genre echoes that of Victorian authors of the Gothic, but also inscribes itself into a postmodern Gothic tradition working towards a feminist/posthumanist questioning of the human subject position. As Ardel Haefele-Thomas points out, the "strength of Gothic rests upon its being a liminal genre; it allowed many nineteenth-century authors to look at social and cultural worries consistently haunting Victorian Britain even as official discourse worked tirelessly to silence those concerns." (Haefele-Thomas 3) Carter's use of the "new woman" is, thus, clearly not accidental, as the text's historical focus roots its contemporary critical debates in the fin de siècle as a moment of radical change. Nights at the Circus is, as I will argue in the following, a novel whose meta-critical engagement with feminist questioning and the troubling of gender norms undermines gender stereotypes and works as a narrative of resistance against conventional framings of the feminine as a passive, beautiful object of the male and medico-scientific gaze.

4.2 Mirrors, Gazes and Frames as Textual Strategies

Both Lady Oracle and Nights at the Circus introduce the gaze as an important mechanism in establishing but also in challenging power structures. Mirrors and frames that reflect the female body – or blatantly fail to do so – function as structuring devices in both novels and will therefore be addressed as textual strategies in this part.

The objectifying (male) gaze has been at the forefront of feminist critical enquiry into the representation of women in popular culture, not least since Laura Mulvey's seminal "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1999), but the gaze also plays an important role in how we perceive and construct difference beyond the gender binary. As Rosemary Garland Thomson argues in Staring: How We Look (2009), late capitalism is not only dominated by the "ocularcentricty" of what she calls "consumer vision" (Garland Thomson, Staring - How We Look 29) but also rooted in the categorizing, 'clinical gaze' of modern medico-science (see Foucault quoted in Garland Thomson, Staring - How We Look 28). While, as consumers, we are focused on novelty as interesting, our judgment is based on "rationalization", "[t]hings and people must fit into preexisting patterns and templates for
modern information systems to process them." (Garland Thomson, *Staring - How We Look* 30) This rationalization does not reduce variety in human forms, but it shapes our reaction to it: "The description of average has led, largely under the pressure of medicalization, to a prescription for normality. The standard model of human form and function that has come to be called normal shapes our actual bodies and the way we imagine them." (Garland Thomson, *Staring - How We Look* 30) The gaze (or staring, as Garland Thomson argues), thus, plays a central role as we are both drawn to novelty and difference as exciting and categorize it as pathological at the same time.

This gaze can also be internalized and self-directed, reiterating external regimes of beauty and representation (as I will argue in the context of fatness below). As Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, Western cultures have undergone a shift from "a society of surveillance" (Foucault 195–96), as described by Foucault to what Deleuze terms "societies of control" (Deleuze 3). Today, rather than being observed from without, "we monitor and control our own bodies." (Mirzoeff 10) The institutionalized gaze on "docile bodies" described by Foucault (Foucault 135) has become an internalized system of self-scrutiny and personal as well as cultural body policing in contemporary culture. This is even more obvious in early-twenty-first-century fitness culture, where the quantified-self movement (see Singer) is now a mainstream cultural trend and personal fitness a social standard to adhere to (see Mackert 13–14). While not as technologically advanced, a trend of personal fitness and self-improvement was already emerging in the 1970s and -80s, merging with a focus on female beauty rooted in the male gaze of patriarchal societies. More precisely, as Bernadette Wegenstein clarifies, while the body has been under constant surveillance from the ‘cosmetic gaze’ for centuries, it is only through recent medical and technological developments that radical changes to it have become possible:

The cosmetic gaze is [...] transfixed by a plane of potential that lies below the skin and is accessible only via the cutting (with old-fashioned scalpels or the less invasive ways enabled by digital technology). This plane is far from a mere voluntaristic fantasy. It is always a platform for projections that are limited by a special moment in a body’s history when the self was perceived as truly ‘good and beautiful.’ The cosmetic gaze thus perceives the body in light of some potentially transformative completion, while at the same time transfixing that potentiality on the phantom remnant of a ‘true’ self that is fixed in time. (Wegenstein X)

The cosmetic gaze goes along with an internalized necessity of self-perfection that seems to have found its epitome in twenty-first century social-media narcissism. As Braidotti points
“Visual regimes of representation” are at the heart of postmodern culture and the “dis-embodied gaze” of television and surveillance dominates postmodern culture, defining our “techno-teratological imaginary” (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 157).

Both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* draw attention to the workings of the gaze – of who perceives whom as what – by offering a complicated maze of mirrored readings and looks – sometimes embodied as actual sometimes as metaphorical mirrors and narrative doublings. For those perceived as Other by society, the mirror is a treacherous surface of reflection, as internalized cultural stereotypes may lead them to perceive their mirror image as monstrous or different from cultural as well as their own expectations. Like a perverted Lacanian mirror stage, the introduction into the symbolic order through the acquisition of language and cultural discourses may trigger a process of Othering directed towards the self that does not allow for a subject position of self-acceptance and recognition. Luce Irigaray summarizes from a feminist perspective the impossibility of inhabiting a subject position built on being constructed as the Other to the heteropatriarchal norm: “Their properties are our exile” (Irigaray 212). As Patrick Brantlinger argues *Frankenstein* reflects this impossibility of an Other subject position in the monster's reaction to his own mirror image after he has come in contact with human society (see Brantlinger 471) and the novel invites feminist readings of Otherness via its framework of discourses, as I have argued in my general introduction. Both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* draw on earlier models of monstrous textuality to undermine the mirror's mimetic function and to draw attention to its troubled relationship with cultural beauty standards and the male gaze.

In *Nights at the Circus* the gaze is not only crucial to the question of who is a monster and who is not. The novel also explicitly creates extra-textual references to postmodern culture and theory. It is in this sense that *Nights at the Circus* can be read as a comment on the historical roots of constant visibility in late twentieth-century surveillance societies. As interpretations of Carter's text have argued, the central importance of the gaze as a normative instrument is corroborated by the Panopticon episode in the second part of the novel (see Macpherson, “Prison, Passion, and the Female Gaze”). Drawing on Foucault's reading of Bentham’s model prison (Foucault 200–01), the text describes a correctional facility for female murderesses. The structure of the building with its central watchtower, from which the inmates may or may not be watched at any time, can be read as a symbol of “mechanical order” (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 255), reinforcing cultural norms and categorizations through an automation (and a resulting internalization) of the gaze. When the inmates finally manage to escape, replacing the normative gaze of the penitentiary with a direct gaze of love that bridges the gap between inmates and guards, the women set out together to found a feminist utopia, taking with them “a pint or two of sperm, which […] could be stored away […] so they could use it, when they got settled, to impregnate such of them
as were of child-bearing age and so ensure the survival of this little republic of free women." (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 284) Taken at face value this episode with its triumphant tone of a literal "women's liberation" might be read as crucial evidence of the novel's feminist political agenda (in spite of its blatant irony). Lizzie's critical comment, however, reinstates the skeptical undertone of the text: "'What'll they do with the boy babies? Feed 'em to the polar bears? To the female polar bears?'” (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 284) After all, the women's hope of finding freedom from the normative gaze in the society of other women is a fragile one. As a part of society they necessarily also form part of its hegemonic system and have internalized its normative narratives. Moreover, a strict separation of binary categories, empowering women to the detriment of men is not a viable solution, the novel suggests, as such a separation would simply serve to further cement the binary categorizations at the heart of gendered power-inequalities.

In *Nights at the Circus* gazes and mirrors are part of an intricate system of visual narratives. From Fevvers' first glance at the young reporter Walser in "the ambiguity of the mirror" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 5), gazes probe, question and reinforce different assessments. They can be used to establish an ambiguous sense of monstrosity, but they also have the power to change this assessment to an unstable sense of humanity, or reverse the perspective. The mirror serves as a prominent narrative strategy in Carter's novel as it frames gazes and introduces a mutual process of looking and being looked at and every "warped reflection" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 102) in the glass, triggers a different set of reflections and interpretations. Walser's focalized narrative underlines this impression, as he is introduced as "a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 7), offering further refractions of Fevvers' ambiguities.

Meta-critical elements, further emphasize a contemporary reading of *Nights at the Circus* as commentary on the unreliability of visual interpretations, for example when, describing the reality of the pleasures available in the brothel she grew up in, Fevvers points out that "we knew we only sold the simulacra" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 42). Highlighted by italics in the original, the anachronistic theoretical term (evoking Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, [1981]) draws attention to the central question of authenticity in a culture dominated by visual representations that have lost their referents in reality. The narrative draws attention to the theoretical background of Fevvers' deliberate ambiguity. As a true performer, Fevvers begins her career by posing as cupid in a whorehouse where she "exist[s] only as an object in men's eyes" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 42), serving her "apprenticeship in being looked at" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 23) as a visual rather than a sexual commodity – a sign rather than a sign producer in Russo's sense quoted above. As her Foster-mother, Lizzie, points out in uncharacteristically theoretical terms, "[a]ll you can do to earn your living is to make a show of yourself. […] For you, it's always a symbolic
exchange in the marketplace;” (Carter, Nights at the Circus 217). In other words: Fevvers needs an audience to exist, but the gazes of her audience will always already turn her into a symbol of whatever individual reading they bring to the interpretation of her body.

Helen Stoddard highlights the parallel between the normative qualities of the gaze in both the theatre and the Panopticon of surveillance culture, drawing the conclusion that “[f]emale theatrical performance, […] cannot be exempt from this pervasive authority which means that performers always tread a fine line between empowerment and entrapment.” (Stoddart 25) This distinction is highlighted in the way Nights at the Circus narratively frames the performers of Madame Schreck’s museum exhibiting "prodigies of nature" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 66) like "Dear old Fanny Four-Eyes; and the Sleeping Beauty; and the Wiltshire Wonder, who was not three foot high; and Albert/Albertina, who was bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either; and the girl we called cobwebs." (Carter, Nights at the Circus 66) The display of the "monsters" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 73) follows rigid performative rules including both visual and auditory cues, as well as an element of surprise, as the women remain hidden behind curtains to be revealed as "spectacle[s] of the freakish and unnatural" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 69). The true spectacle, however, lies in the customers, the novel argues, as "Madame Schreck, she catered for those who were troubled in their … souls" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 63). Fevvers, the narrator, describes how the performers "never could get used to […] the sight of their eyes, for there was no terror in the house our customers did not bring with them" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 70). The museum, thus, introduces the idea of the monstrous female body as spectacle but this reading is at the same time undermined by Fevvers’ narrative, and the spectacle of the freak show is reversed by the fact that the women gaze back at the customers, making their own judgments about “the monstrous ugliness of mankind” (Carter, Nights at the Circus 76). Carter's notebooks in the British Library show that she did extensive research on both freaks (taking notes on Fiedler's Freaks, 1978) and Bentham's panopticon and the controlling function of the gaze for Nights at the Circus (Carter, Angela Carter Papers: Writings and Literary Material). The notes, like the careful construction of the novel, demonstrate a deliberate engagement with continuing theoretical and cultural concerns. They show that Fevvers' ambiguity and resistance to the categorizing male gaze are not only deliberately created, but also carefully draw attention to the underlying theoretical questions.

Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson points out that “[i]n all aspects, […] and in all arenas where Carter’s women perform (the circus of the title, the brothel, the freak show, and, in particular, the prison), power is central to the narrative.” (Macpherson, “Prison, Passion, and the Female Gaze” 206) The novel describes the gaze as reciprocal, allowing the performers a sense of agency beyond the objectification of being stared at. While the performances in Madame Schreck's museum mostly cater to the male gaze (and heterosexual appetite),
Fevvers' role as the protector of the Sleeping Beauty (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 79) is a more active one from the start, undermining the museum's prescribed narrative of the silent and immobile tableau vivant (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 66). Macpherson's reading highlights the novels' central connection between the performance and the gaze, which plays an important role in Fevvers' project of resisting categorization. The novel's solution (or rather dissolution) of this interpretive dilemma is the laughter of carnival that heralds the collapse of categories and temporality. Deprived of their interpretive powers by the carnivalesque whirlwind at the end of the novel, the characters are, thus, ultimately forced to create their own meanings or no meanings at all.

Stranded in the Siberian wilderness, Fevvers and the other displaced protagonists are faced with a sort of interpretational 'tabula rasa', as the region and its natives are presented as lacking a concept of history. The narrative seems to take a colonialist perspective here – one which has been frequently imposed on indigenous cultures whose traditions and concept of history colonizers had no interest in studying. In Carter's work the idea of the "savage" is often used to express a fascination with a figure untainted by cultural narratives (e.g. in *Heroes and Villains*), in a manner that is glorifying rather than deprecating but still imposed from the outside. In *Nights at the Circus* the Siberian "wilderness" offers a chance for a fresh start untainted by cultural assumptions and hierarchies. Without the ability to interpret symbolic meaning on the basis of historical precedents, the natives make “no categorical distinction between seeing and believing.” (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 308), "between fact and fiction" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 308), forcing the protagonists to read reality as a form of "magic realism" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 308) which points to the carnivalesque dissolution of categories towards the ending of the novel. The mirror disappears as a framing device, along with all other cultural trappings, leaving the newly freed characters to explore their selves beyond predetermined visual categories.

Rather than show a direct reflection, mirrors, thus, function as tools, gateways or traps in both Carter's and Atwood's work, triggering a reexamination of the mirrored gaze. In *Lady Oracle* the mirror offers an entry into the obscure psychological depths of the writer-protagonist's mind, her fears and hopes of discovering further clues for a Gothic manuscript in the mirror of automatic writing that leads to the production of a lengthy prose poem, the eponymous *Lady Oracle*. The novel reflects the (predominantly male) Canadian book market at the time, as everyone tries to frame the author in terms of prominent male writers: the critics observe that the poem sounds "like a cross between Kahlil Gibran and Rod McKuen" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 224) and the publisher's plan to photograph the author for the cover "as a sort of female Leonard Cohen" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 225). The novel is, as Hilde Staels argues, "a funhouse that multiplies reflections to infinity, a side show in which characters are enlarged or shrink to absurdities. It is a distorting mirror-maze, a narrative
labyrinth, in which diverse tales mirror one another, effecting a self-reflection *in perpetuum.*” (Staels 69) This description not only draws attention to the central imagery of the carnival sideshow, with its focus on corporeal distortions, it also aptly captures the complex structure of the text, which reflects these ideas on various levels.

Joan Foster, the autodiegetic narrator, far from being a feminist icon, is a writer whose severe body insecurity reflects years of internalized criticism and hatred of her (formerly) fat body, impacting her perception of her embodiment as a normatively thin, professionally successful woman. Instead of identifying with her public self, she sees it as an uncanny doppelgänger:

> I felt very visible. But it was as if someone with my name were out there in the real world, impersonating me, saying things I’d never said but which appeared in the newspapers, doing things for which I had to take the consequences: my dark twin, my funhouse-mirror reflection. She was taller than I was, more beautiful, more threatening. She wanted to kill me and take my place, and by the time she did this no one would notice the difference because the media were in on the plot, they were helping her. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 251)

The fear of being swallowed by her “evil twin” evokes, as Margery Fee argues, one of the central terrors of the Gothic: “the loss of identity” (Fee 63) of the usually “[y]oung, innocent, ignorant, and protected” (Fee 63) heroine of the Gothic at the hands of an overpowering male figure. Gina Wisker draws attention to the way Atwood's work adapts this Gothic trope to reflect the internalized threats of a patriarchal society based on female (self-)scrutiny:

> Atwood gets inside the behaviour of women and shows their toxicity, exposing split selves and sisterly, seemingly friendly destroyers. Traditional Gothic usually has male persecutors, but not in work by Atwood; the self, the mother and female friend are the brutal assassins. She exposes the ways in which women internalise gendered narratives which infantilise, disempower and caricature, and exposes the need to fit, look right, behave correctly, and marry Mr Right, as myths which ask far too much of everyone, and leave women stranded and emptied out. (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 76)

For Joan Foster, these internalized fears and repressions return in the shape of her formerly fat body. The evil twin described above reflects Joan's fear of public scrutiny which is inseparable from her fear of being discovered as a “fraud” – a former fat person who might burgeon out of control again at any moment: "The outline of my former body still surrounded
me, like mist, like a phantom moon, like the image of Dumbo the Flying Elephant superimposed on my own. I wanted to forget the past, but it refused to forget me; it waited for sleep, then cornered me." (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 214) As Wisker points out Joan "always lives in a made-up version of herself, a liminal space between how people see her and how she sees herself: a construction and a performance." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 78) As her fear of "creeping fatness" reflects Joan's sense of not being herself, she invents multiple personalities – among them an evil, fat "Aunt Deirdre" who "was a bitch" and "just ate too much", creating a new personality for her "own shucked-off body" in "self-defense" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 91) when her husband asks her about a picture of her former fat self. This is her first, and possibly most important act of compulsive identity construction – one that will be followed by the additional personas of Louisa K. Delacourt, author of Costume Gothics and Joan Foster, the poet and author of "Lady Oracle". “I was more than double," Joan claims, "I was triple, multiple, and now I could see that there was more than one life to come, there were many." (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 246) As Wisker argues, "Atwood’s Gothic […] dramatises the dangers of internal fracture and entrapment in a socially and culturally woven set of myths, showing that potential is actually curbed by both context and self-delusion." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 77)

Two of the protagonist's personalities are writers who struggle with concepts of femininity and their narrative expression, lending the novel a meta-narrative dimension that not only challenges cultural constructions of corporeality but also their literary reiterations on several diegetic levels. Joan's final breakdown reflects her fear of being stalked – which also finds expression in her fiction – with her fear of becoming her former fat self again:

Below me, in the foundations of the house, I could hear the clothes I’d buried there growing themselves a body. It was almost completed; it was digging itself out, like a huge blind mole, slowly and painfully shambling up the hill to the balcony … a creature composed of all the flesh that used to be mine and which must have gone somewhere. It would have no features, it would be smooth as a potato, pale as starch, it would look like a big thigh, it would have a face like a breast minus the nipple. It was the Fat Lady. She rose into the air and descended on me as I lay stretched out in the chair. For a moment she hovered around me like ectoplasm, like a gelatin shell, my ghost, my angel; then she settled and I was absorbed into her. Within my former body, I gasped for air. […] Obliterated. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 320–21)

The expansion of fat serves as a reminder of the female body's role within the context of a heteropatriarchal paradigm that celebrates female smallness and socially condemns female bodies that take up too much space. The messiness of a body spreading beyond socially
constructed limits is also reflected in the presentation of the novel with its frequent ana- and pro-lepses, interspersed fragments of genre fiction and fragmented structure. *Lady Oracle* 's ending in particular blurs Joan's reality and her writing as well as the different diegetic levels, as she struggles to come to terms with a sense of being haunted by her (fat) past. As Staels points out,

> [a]t first glance, the text looks ‘messy’; it gives the impression of being as chaotic as Joan's life. The narrative seems sloppy and superficial, the product of the undisciplined mind of a protagonist who does not stick to essentials, but who is distracted by insignificant, irrelevant details. Yet on closer inspection, the text proves to be a spectacular narrative. On all levels of narration, Joan Foster reiterates *n* times her perspective on the central events of her life. (Staels 69)

The central figure of the Fat Lady of Joan's imagination (which I will discuss in more detail below) functions not only as a recurring motif, but also as a connector of the novel's different narrative levels, as she crosses the boundaries between the different time levels of Joan's narrative as well as the different narrative layers of her life and fictions. Reading *Lady Oracle* through the prism of Joan’s fat-lady fantasy lends a subversive quality to the text and offers an inroad to reading the novel as a theory-conscious text “undercutting of controls and constructs” (Wisker, *Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* 9) – namely those of a model of heteronormative femininity and female corporeality predominant in Western culture.

As Staels argues, “[i]n her writings, Joan also compulsively repeats the story of her life. The tension between life and art, between process and product, is an important metafictional issue in *Lady Oracle*, as in all of Atwood's novels.” (Staels 69) The Costume Gothics written under a pseudonym and interspersed in the text of the novel, not only reflect the main narrative's fears of losing oneself, but Joan also describes her own life as having "a tendency to spread, to get flabby, to scroll and festoon" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 7) like a monstrously expanding fat body. While the Costume Gothics at first glance seem to offer a form of escape (both psychological and financial) to the narrator, her automatically-written prose poem, *Lady Oracle*, seems to open up the possibility of “being taken seriously” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 286) as a writer. But this hope is a treacherous one, once society begins to construct its own version of the text and its meaning: “‘Modern love and the sexual battle, dissected with a cutting edge and shocking honesty.’ I didn't think the book was about that, exactly.” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 233–34) Like Atwood herself, Joan Foster is immediately identified as a feminist virago, even if she does not identify as a feminist herself and sees *Lady Oracle* as a somewhat upside down Costume Gothic:
Meanwhile the galley proofs of *Lady Oracle* had come form the publisher. I corrected them, with growing apprehension. On re-reading, the book seemed quite peculiar. In fact, except for the diction, it seemed a lot like one of my standard Costume Goths, but a Gothic gone wrong. It was upside-down somehow. There were the sufferings, the hero in the mask of a villain, the villain in the mask of a hero, the flights, the looming death, the sense of being imprisoned, but there was no happy ending, no true love. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 232)

Joan’s attempt at automatic writing exposes the treacherousness of formulaic genre fiction and its insistence on the happy ending as a heteropatriarchal social standard.

While the connection to Joan's costume Goths suggests a framing of *Lady Oracle* (the novel) as a Gothic parody similar to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, the comment could also be read as a fictional reflection of Atwood’s own position towards feminism in the late 1960s and 70s, summarized by Wisker:

> Although she is seen as a feminist writer, starting as early as *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood questions this limitation: ‘Every woman who appeared in the early seventies was called a feminist writer. Suddenly we noticed women in a different way than they'd been noticed before – as neurotic, with their heads in the oven or strange spinsters. I am a writer who writes for people who read books.’ (Wisker, *Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* 5)

While Atwood’s position seems to reflect a certain resistance to being framed as a feminist, *Lady Oracle* specifically mocks this kind of cultural framing in the form of a TV interview on a show called *The Afternoon Hot-Spot*: the interviewer greets Joan Foster as the "author, I guess that's authoress of the runaway bestseller *Lady Oracle"* (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 237) and attempts to suggest a connection to “Women’s Lib”, while at the same time pointing out that “[i]t seemed like a very angry book. If I were your husband, I’m not sure I'd like it.” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 237) Writers, the novel suggests, somewhat autobiographically, must also resist categorization – especially when they are perceived as female, feminist or woman writers – all problematic terms at one time or another.

Rather than accept a label within the (anti-)feminist discourse of the day, Joan Foster negotiates a complicated set of multiple identities within a tangled network of cultural narratives, that does not offer an easy way out of questions of identity and cultural representation. As Wisker points out, "Atwood’s extensive use of the Gothic and her version
of postcolonial writing enable an undercutting of controls and constructs, the ‘grand narratives’ which maintain constrained versions of identity, power and culture.” (Wisker, Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction 9) This allows her to “critique [...] common-sense constructions of identity and power” and reveal “the power structures which control language, sexuality and identity” (Wisker, Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction 9).

Lady Oracle’s structure presents this dissolution of narrative and conceptual boundaries as the narrator’s seemingly uncontrolled merging of different narrative levels, as Joan is no longer able to keep her Costume Gothics, her poetry and her various fictional versions of herself in their narrative paths at the end of the novel and imagines herself threatened by the hero of her Costume Gothic novel: “She pictured herself whirling slowly across a ballroom floor, a strong arm around her waist … ‘No, she said. ‘I know who you are.’ The flesh fell away form his face, revealing the skull behind it, he stepped towards her reaching for her throat. … ” (Atwood, Lady Oracle 343) Ellipses in the text mark the inexpressibility of the experience – which is reminiscent of the death and the maiden trope – as well as the heroine’s struggle which ultimately reflects the (fictional) writer’s unease at being forced back into the heteropatriarchal gender roles of the Costume Gothic. The central figure of the dizzying maze, which lies at the heart of the Costume Gothic’s mystery, is also a crucial comment on Joan’s fragmented sense of the surrounding society and its power structures. The secret lurking at its center is the discovery that all her other selves are also trapped within the maze of a conventional love story and have somehow merged into one grotesque female figure:

Suddenly she found herself in the central plot. A stone bench ran along one side and on it were seated four women. Two of them looked like her, with red hair and green eyes and small white teeth. [...] The last was enormously fat. She was wearing a pair of pink tights and a short pink skirt covered with spangles. From her head sprouted two antennae, like a butterfly’s, and a pair of obviously false wings was pinned to her back. … ‘We are Lady Redmond,’ said the middle-aged woman sadly. ‘All of us,’ the fat woman with the wings added. (Atwood, Lady Oracle 342)

In this late appearance in Joan’s writing, the fat lady signals a blurring of the boundaries between Joan’s escape fiction and her escape fantasies – as well as between different narrative levels – as Joan loses control over the various threads of her own life. As Wisker points out, “[a]s a Gothic writer, [Atwood] uses strategies such as irony, horror and myth to upset and undercut social complacency and highlight how people, values and events can be
vulnerable and threatened.” (Wisker, *Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* 2) While the Costume Gothic strives towards closure, towards the dissolution of the Bluebeard tale's mystery at the center of the maze, Joan's own narrative remains open-ended as a comment on the irreconcilable difference between the socially prescribed and the individual narratives of women's lives and corporealties. In the final chapter of the novel, Joan imagines herself in the eyes of her suspicious Italian neighbors "a female monster, larger than life [...], striding down the hill, her hair standing on end with electrical force, volts of malevolent energy shooting from her fingers" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 336). J. Brooks Bouson reads this as a sign that Joan has already begun to imagine herself as a writer of Science Fiction rather than Costume Gothics, "a powerful, oppositional goddess-artist" (Bouson, *Brutal Choreographies* 82) I would, however, like to suggest that Joan's narrative specifically draws on the pop-cultural figure of the *Bride of Frankenstein* (from James Whale's iconic 1935 film version), signaling awareness of the limitations society has historically put, and continues to put, on women. The female monster from *Frankenstein* presents, as I have argued in the introduction, a figure of resistance against literary, cultural and scientific discourses that tend to construct women as monstrous Others and objects of a predominantly male, medico-scientific gaze. Destroyed before she is even fully completed in the novel, the female creature is frequently presented as rebellious but silenced by her creator in various film versions (*Bride of Frankenstein* [1935], *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* [1994], *The Bride* [1985]) and seldom shown to possess agency of her own, beyond an often self-directed and self-destructive rage. Joan's view of herself as a "female monster large than life" and the association with electricity eerily echo these filmic explorations of the female creature, suggesting, in my opinion, that Joan sees herself as the female monster rather than a goddess. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of Haraway's observation that she'd "rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 316), as it suggests a narrative of resistance and subversion against "the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 316) – in line with Joan's earlier associations with the monstrous as promising an escape from the narrow cultural categorizations threatening to stifle and eradicate her.

Reflecting her assumed monstrosity in the eyes of society, Joan Foster contemplates that her mother could definitely not have named her after Joan of Arc – after all, "didn't she know what happened to women like that?" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 336) – an observation that echoes Russo's views on the social limitations placed on women who are perceived as mad or unruly quoted above: "hysterics and madwomen generally have ended up in the attic or in the asylum, their gestures of pain and defiance having served only to put them out of circulation." (Russo 329). Atwood's narrative strategy seems, thus, more ambiguous than Bouson suggests, evoking and refuting narratives of female power and monstrosity at the
same time and allowing the reader to question cultural concepts of how a woman should behave in the process. While Lady Oracle puts a finger in the (argumentative) wound, the novel does not offer a general solution to the dilemma of being categorized as Other – merely allowing its protagonist to ease up her self-scrutiny and face the future with an open mind towards her own identity constructions.

At first glance, Nights at the Circus seems to take a slightly more optimistic view than the open-ended Lady Oracle, employing the carnivalesque dissolution of structures to frame its heroine as the figure of the New Woman heralding a new century, “the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground” (Carter, Nights at the Circus 25). While the “spiraling tornado of Fevvers' laughter” spreading “across the entire globe” reflects Cixous' "Laugh of Medusa" as a liberating feminist myth, the novel suggests in the same instance that a different reading might be possible, adding, almost as an afterthought that it at least "seemed [so] to the deceived husband" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 350) who originally interpreted her as a monstrous figure, "twice as large as life" (Carter, Nights at the Circus 13), his description creating an eerie echo of Lady Oracle. The laughter of Carnival, thus, remains a temporarily and spatially limited one – a strategy of resistance against patriarchal narratives, which will continue to frame women from the outside rather than read them as "sign producers" in charge of their own narratives. Centuries of patriarchal art history have done this and continue to do so, as Cixous points out ironically, "[h]old still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away." (Cixous 892) As I will argue in the following, both Lady Oracle and Nights at the Circus draw on the tradition of monster texts focusing on female "bodies out of bounds" (see Braziel and LeBesco) to offer a counter-narrative, a form of resistance against these strategies of containment and being framed as an object rather than presenting oneself as a subject possessing agency and taking up a space of one's own.
5 Corporeal Discourses

5.1 Monsters, Freaks and Narratives of Resistance

The heteropatriarchal gaze frames female- (and other non-binary) presenting bodies as objects imbued with Otherness based on discursively constructed markers of physical difference from a culturally perceived male norm. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, this kind of narrative framing must be read as an integral part of discussions of the body, whose parts are only "given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization [...] through their physical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality." (Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" 243) In this sense, the body becomes a human body, "through the intervention of the (m)other, and, ultimately, the Other or Symbolic order (language and rule-governed social order)." (Grosz, "Bodies-Cities" 243) Where the symbolic order is phallocentric, as Cixous, for instance argues, this inscription into the symbolic order will entail being read as and seeing oneself as an Other. Both Lady Oracle and Nights at the Circus engage with these discussions in contemplating possible representations of female bodies that deliberately present as monstrous or freakish. This part will, therefore introduce a framework of monstrous and freak embodiment as a basis for my discussion of the two novels below.

The Gothic's "negative aesthetic" (Botting, Gothic 1) has a tendency to foreground the Other(ness) in these processes, exploring the fault lines of identity constructions where the female or non-gender-conforming body is perceived as a monstrous deviation from the male norm. As Barbara Creed points out the notion of the monstrous feminine is complex, multifaceted and often read as abject (especially in conjunction with female sexuality) but it also "challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity" (Creed 151). Similarly, Russo's article quoted above explores the possibilities of the female grotesque, drawing on Bakhtin's concept of carnival that reads grotesque bodies as fertile, growing and filled with "a brimming-over abundance" (Bakhtin 19). The potential of such representations of uncontained female bodies has historically been limited to feminist spaces and narratives: Women's "gestures of pain and defiance" have, as Russo argues, a tendency "to put them out of circulation" (Russo 329) as they can be reframed as mad or sick and institutionalized appropriately.

A cultural concept of monstrosity or deviance presupposes a diametrically opposed figure of "normality" – which is not only discursively constructed, but also subject to constant change – reflecting on what is considered "monstrous" in the process. As Jack Halberstam argues, "[t]he monster's body [...] is a machine that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any [...] trait that the reader feeds into the narrative." (Halberstam, Skin
These fears are generally connected with what the surrounding culture constructs as monstrous. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, the monster's "cultural body" (Cohen, Monster Theory. Reading Culture 4) can take on a number of meanings. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, and especially in contemporary popular culture, the ubiquity and ostensible domestication of Gothic monster figures (see Botting, Gothic) and self-proclaimed freaks seems to signal a shifting of the boundaries that separate culturally accepted bodies from abject, monstrous bodies. This pop-cultural shift towards "enfreakment" – a term originally coined by David Hevey – (see Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error” 10; see Hevey) does, however, not signal an increased permeability of the boundaries between a culturally acceptable "Us" and a frequently Othered "them", but merely a shift of who is included into the "Us" to signal inclusivity, tolerance or even coolness by association with a temporarily acceptable Other. Conceptually, the monster and the freak still function as "projection[s] of what culture fears most about itself" (Peterson 291). They provide a "dialectical Other" (Cohen, Monster Theory. Reading Culture 7) against which normative humanity defines itself as "human" and "normal" (both contested terms) and, thus, still stand as figures of cultural Othering. Feminist narratives drawing on Gothic imagery and motifs often evoke and engage with these concepts as a form of "cultural critique" (Wisker, Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction 5) to draw attention to the binary construction of gendered discourses, which posit women as the Other, but they still do so against mainstream discourses that celebrate normative cultural standards of embodiment and often re-inscribe the very patterns and power structures they wish to resist. Against this background, queer theory "interrogates", as Ellis Hanson argues, "the oppositions that have traditionally characterized sexual politics, in particular such familiar oppositions as heterosexuality/homosexuality, masculine/feminine, sex/gender, closeted/out, centre/margin, conscious/unconscious, nature/culture and normal/pathological" (Hanson 175–76). As Hanson argues, the interest of central figures of queer theory like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the Gothic is no coincidence, as their readings of "modern homophobia" are frequently based on Gothic texts like The Picture of Dorian Gray or Frankenstein (see Hanson 177). Queer readings of Gothic texts have, consequently, played an important role in uncovering and challenging binaries of self and Other, normal and abnormal, human and monstrous.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, resistance to cultural norms of what Foucault terms "docile bodies" (Foucault 135) has been increasingly perceived as pathological, as health and able-bodiedness came to be associated with industrial productiveness and the sick and disabled came to be regarded as in need of medicalization and institutionalization within the emerging framework of scientific medicine. Robert McRuer describes the resulting cultural expectations of health and fitness as "compulsory able-
bodiedness" (see McRuer) – an expectation of an individual focus on optimal health and fitness that is constantly reiterated and policed by society – regardless of how well or even if an individual is able to conform to its mandate. As Nina Mackert argues, this is "a hegemonic project that governs essentially everyone" (Mackert 19). These norms are generally based on how fit and healthy someone appears when compared to the governing cultural standards, not on the tasks they may or may not be able to perform, extending expectations well beyond the field of medically or culturally recognized disabilities. The expectation of rehabilitation leads, as Mackert argues to "the abjection of disabled bodies" (Mackert 20), which are constantly perceived as in need of treatment or a cure. However, as Patricia MacCormack summarizes, "[h]uman sciences' study of and quest for cures for monstrosity is less about monstrosity and more about preserving the myth and integrity of the base level zero, normal human." (MacCormack 293)

As Robin Larsen and Beth A. Haller argue for the first decades of the twentieth century and the end of the public exhibition of non-normatively embodied people as freaks, "[t]he social construction of disability was beginning to shift […], not to a more positive representation, but to another stereotype that was taking on cultural power." (Larsen and Haller 170–71) This resulted not only in the institutionalization of non-normatively embodied people but the medicalization of discourses surrounding disabilities also led to a shift in power structures that deprived people of agency and participation in mainstream discourses. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Smarasinha points out, looking back from a twenty-first century point of view that works to reinstate agency and a public voice to people with disabilities and chronic illnesses:

Disability justice allowed me to understand that me writing from my sickbed wasn't me being weak or uncool or not a real writer but a time-honored crip creative practice. And that understanding allowed me to finally write from a disabled space, for and about sick and disabled people, including myself, without feeling like I was writing about boring, private things that no one would understand. (Piepzna-Samarasinha 17)

Non-normative bodies are abjected, precisely because they are living proof of the "permeability of the boundaries that guarantee the normatively embodied self" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 1). The discursive construction of achievable and maintainable "normality" is challenged by confrontations with the underlying vulnerability of the human body. And this perceived "normality" has to be upheld, re-established and defended against intrusion, leading to an effective silencing of non-normatively embodied perspective. Indeed, this discursively established difference is, as Garland Thomson argues, "essential to the cultural project of […] self-making. […] Constructed as the embodiment of corporeal
insufficiency and deviance, the physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity." (Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 5) This historical shift in the cultural framing of extraordinary bodies, from "freak show" to medical narrative also marks, as Robert Bogdan notes (Bogdan 1), a loss in autonomy for the freak performers who were no longer perceived as autonomously working individuals (however problematic their working conditions in the circus side show), but rather as medical problems to be treated and hidden from the eyes of "normal" society in an attempt to re-inscribe a specific cultural discourse of normality that excludes various forms of physical deviance from the norm. Shildrick similarly comments on a sense of agency for freak performers as "[r]elatively few of those displayed were passive objects; they were performers engaged not only in showing off their anomalies, but in singing, sewing, dancing, feeding children, conversing in foreign languages" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 24). Bogdan's classic definition of freaks highlights the role of representation and perception in this process, as it relies less on any kind of outstanding physical deformity than on performativity: "'[f]reak' is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about presenting people [...] the performance of a stylized presentation." (Bogdan 3) While monstrous bodies where, historically, read as portents or omens, freak performances add a component of agency that runs counter to simply framing the freaks as signs.

"[S]hifts in the social construction of disability" (Larsen and Haller 165) from a pre-scientific to a medical model at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a rejection of freaks, as viewers increasingly experienced "aesthetic anxiety" – "the fears caused by someone who diverges from the typical human form" (Larsen and Haller 169). Larsen and Haller's argument links "the rejection of people with physical differences" with the "pursuit of superhuman bodily perfection" (Larsen and Haller 169), suggesting that "the notion of physical impairment's representing sin, evil, or weakness" (Larsen and Haller 169–70) is deeply rooted in historical narratives of monstrous or non-normative bodies and reflected in the way a physical disability is often constructed as "a social deficiency" (Larsen and Haller 171). This is tied to a shift "from seeing the disabled performer as 'freak' to seeing the person as having a 'medical problem'" (Larsen and Haller 170) which would entail a form of treatment and a possible cure, as well as a shift from performer/subject to patient/object. While, as Larsen and Haller argue, this kind of performativity depends to some extent, on audiences' willingness to engage with narratives of disability, freak performances also challenge normative narratives of embodiment by presenting audiences with something that is both un categorizable and framed as possibly unbelievable. Even in the wake of these changes in perception, the freak still functions as an emblem of non-normativity that gives the spectators pause, as it troubles their perception of the normal. As Leslie Fiedler argues in
his 1978 classic *Freaks* "[o]nly the true Freak challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth." (Fiedler 24) The freak "stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand [...]" (Fiedler 24) While the monstrous body is often read to represent the radically different, "an incorporation of the Outside and Beyond" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*) into the familiar, the freak brings Otherness closer to home. The freak's corporeal alterity is part of a teratological continuum that challenges perceptions of the self and the other, but it does so as a self-styled performance rather than an externally assigned categorization.

While Fiedler's work is now regarded as outdated in the field of disability studies, it reflects the cultural position towards non-normative bodies and performativity in the decade between the publication of *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* and Carter's notes in the British Library show that she had used Fiedler as a source text for her novel. Moreover, it draws attention to the critical discussion of shifting social and cultural standards in the wake of a number of emancipation and liberation movements in the twentieth century (from women's liberation to black power) and presents the freak as a non-normative subject position to actively explore from the perspective of feminist writing. This is especially important as deliberate performances of the "freakish" became the norm after the medicalization of the non-normative body put an end to the era of the freak show after the first decades of the twentieth century. By drawing attention to their performativity, freak performances offer a number of possibilities to explore and resist external categorizations of the grotesque, unruly, abject female body. Both Atwood's and Carter's novels explicitly draw on the earlier model of the freak show performance as an element of wonder and a means of drawing attention to these discourses of representation and perception of non-normative bodies.

*Nights at the Circus* actively engages with the tradition and theorization of the freak show marking it as one of the instances in which Fevvers' extraordinary embodiment triggers a struggle against being categorized by various gazes. Her resistance is framed as a metaphor of the shifting discourses surrounding differently abled bodies throughout history, as disabilities and obvious physical disfigurements were also frequently read as monstrous portents and signs. Fevvers' ambiguous status between woman and animal posits her as an example of traditional teratological uncategorizability.

The narrative presents a collection of situations in which Fevvers has to resist narratives of her body, which would turn her into an object, a "marvellous and unnatural artefact" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 220) to be collected and exhibited, rather than a person...
in charge of her own narrative – a "sign producer", rather than a "sign", as Russo argues (Russo 328). *Nights at the Circus* actively engages with the subversive potential of the freak show narrative by presenting the freak show from the inside – in a narrative told by one of its performers – rather than from the perspective of the audience. In this, the novel engages, as Catherine Spooner argues, with Tod Brownings film *Freaks* (1932) as an important foil for the representation of monsters and freaks from their own perspective in the twentieth-century Gothic (see Spooner 68–70). By juxtaposing the performativity of the freak show scenario with the private life of the performers, both Carter's novel and Browning's film achieve a (temporary) shift in focus that lends the freak performers an air of normality and allows the audience to indentify with them, shifting the dominant narrative subject position towards the margin.

Beyond the enfreakment of culture, the monster and the freak offer powerful subject positions for narratives of resistance that do not contend with Othering readings and deliberately reclaim the position of the Other. These are not easy positions to inhabit, as I will argue in the following, but rather require a constant discursive engagement with cultural acts of framing and categorization.

5.2 "Twice as Large as Life": Ambiguous Monster/Freak Embodiment in *Nights at the Circus*

In *Nights at the Circus* Fevvers' ambiguous embodiment is both established and contested by a complex system of narrative perspectives, which offer different readings of her hybrid body. Contested as a possible fraud from the beginning, the description of Fevvers' appearance on stage suggests an ambiguous reading, focused on her presentation as a performer:

She flung off her mantle and cast it aside. There she was. In her pink fleshings, her breastbone stuck out like the prow of a ship, the Iron Maiden cantilevered her bosom whilst paring down her waist to almost nothing, so she looked as if she might snap in two at any careless movement. The leotard was adorned with a spangle of sequins on her crotch and nipples, nothing else. Her hair was hidden away under the dyed plumes that added a good eighteen inches to her already immense height. On her back she bore an airy burden of furled plumage as gaudy as that of a Brazilian cockatoo. On her red mouth there was an artificial smile. Look at me! With a grand, proud, ironic grace, she exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience as if she were a marvelous present too good to be played with. Look, not
touch. She was twice as large as life and as succinctly finite as any object that is intended to be seen not handled. Look! Hands off! LOOK AT ME! She rose up on tiptoe and slowly twirled round, giving the spectators a comprehensive view of her back: seeing is believing. Then she spread out her superb, heavy arms in a backwards gesture of benediction and, as she did so, her wings spread, too [...] (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 12–13)

The repetition of the command to "Look at me!" and the suggestion that "seeing is believing" both reiterate and undermine the described features which are further called into question by phrasings like "ironic grace" and "as if". Fevvers' performance relies precisely on this ambiguity and is designed to raise questions about her status as a hybrid creature (a bird-woman), an unnaturally large woman and a stage act. Her sheer size undermines normative concepts of femininity – but she also challenges a number of other cultural binaries (real/fake, human/animal...).

While the narrative is set at the fin de siècle, Carter's *Nights at the Circus* is a postmodern text, in terms of narrative structure and themes as well as in terms of the sheer abundance of intertextual references to various cultural, literary and theoretical texts (see Stoddart 21). As Carter suggests in the Afterword to *Fireworks*, the function of such a narrative is that of "provoking unease" (Carter, *Fireworks* 133). This is underlined by the novel's narrative structure which, for the greater part of the text focuses on the young journalist Walser as a focalizer, foregrounding his "professional necessity to see all and believe nothing" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 6), as well as the "unfinished" quality of his character, "as if his habit of suspending belief extended even unto his own being" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 7). Contrary to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" that assumes a reader's willingness to accept fantastic elements in a text for the sake of engaging with the narrative, Walser's habit of "suspending belief" suggests a resistance to easy categorizations that foreshadows his later development in the novel.

Walser observes Fevvers' unreliable and frequently ostentatious narrative with general skepticism, planning to include her in "a series of interviews tentatively entitled 'Great Humbugs of the World'" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 8) but at the same time driven by curiosity about the ambiguity of her performance. This skeptical framing along with a number of other disruptive (meta-)narrative strategies underlines Fevvers' critical function as an ambiguous figure and an embodiment of "category crisis" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 6) that reflects both the last decades of the nineteenth- and the twentieth century. A dissolution of Fevvers' ambiguity in any attempt at explanation would result, the novel argues, in positioning her as a figure of radical Otherness which could no longer garner the audience's sympathies:
She would no longer be an extraordinary woman, no more the Greatest Aerialiste in
the world but – a freak. Marvellous indeed, but a marvelous monster, an exemplary
being denied the human privilege of flesh and blood, always the object of the observer,
ever the subject of sympathy, an alien creature forever estranged. (Carter, *Nights at
the Circus* 188)

What the text suggests here is a figure of monstrosity, which serves as the human's radical
Other, not an indicator of possibility and becoming, but "an alien creature forever estranged"
from human sympathy. In this, Fevvers would lose her subject position and become "the
object of the observer".

Mariaconcetta Costantini comments on Fevvers' "liminal existence poised between
animal and human, female and male, hoax and truth." (Costantini 16) The "marvelous
giantess" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 46), as Walser describes her, makes the skeptical
journalist wonder, "[i]s she really a man?" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 37) Her voice, which
sounds like "the clanking of [...] dustbins" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 11), induces him to
speculate about her essential artificiality, contemplating the possibility that she might actually
be a "marvelous machine" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 29). This discourse of artificiality
is later taken up by Colonel Kearney, the circus director, who spreads a rumor that Fevvers is
actually a mechanical creature – "a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone,
india-rubber and springs" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 171). This narrative of mechanical
monstrosity, of cyborgization if you will, is revealed as another too narrow category, which
cannot contain Fevvers' body. As a "marvellous and unnatural artefact" (Carter, *Nights at the
Circus* 220) she is almost turned into a rare collector's item, a real bird-woman to be kept in a
tiny gilded cage by a Grand Duke in St Petersburg. Fevvers, however, contests the Grand
Duke's mechanical assumptions about her body: by mechanically satisfying him sexually –
and meanwhile plotting her escape – she confronts the would-be collector with an equally
narrow reading of his own corporeality. The Grand Duke incident mirrors a similar episode of
misinterpretation in the first part of the novel. This time, Fevvers is abducted by the esoteric
Mr Rosencruetz who mistakes her for Azrael, the Angel of Death, addressing her as "Queen
of ambiguities, goddess of in-between states, being on the borderline of species [...] creature
half of earth and half of air, virgin and whore, [...] reconciler of opposing states through the
mediation of your ambivalent body, reconciler of the grand opposites of death and life"
(Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 92–93). Although Rosencruetz' reading is at least partly correct
– she is after all an ambiguous figure – the conclusion he draws from this assumption is
disastrous: he wants to turn Fevvers into an offering in a pagan ritual, which is supposed to
grant him eternal youth. Fevvers’ narrow escape from being sacrificed is, thus, also another narrow escape from categorization. As Wisker argues:

Fevvers is not merely flying in the face of patriarchal dominance, as I would have observed years ago, but she is also constructing her own narratives in escape mode. [...] She is not trapped in her appearance, like someone else’s version of her, and so she is an expression of libered thinking, flexible, inexplicable, self-empowered. Hers is a Gothic tale not just because of the circus trappings and the darkness of the threats, but because as a woman with wings she troubles complacencies and fixed categories. (Wisker, Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction 56)

As a meta-critical narrative, Fevvers' resistance to categorization in Nights at the Circus can be read as a literalization of Cixous' warning to “[b]eware […] of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified! Beware of the diagnoses that would reduce your generative powers. ‘Common’ nouns are also proper nouns that disparage your singularity by classifying it into species.” (Cixous 892) Categorization (or conceptualization in any language) would be problematic, as it would undermine Fevvers’ revolutionary potential to challenge all attempts at framing her within a single narrative of her body.

As I have argued above, the novel explores this mutual structure of the gaze, in the use of mirrors and various other filtering and framing devices, but also by employing different narrative perspectives. While the first part of the text is framed by Walser’s skeptical focalization, the second and third part, feature a variety of narrative perspectives, which are only distinguishable by a change in tone, when Fevvers takes over narrative control in various instances. The subtle shift between a hetero-diegetic, extra-diegetic narrator and Fevvers’ autodiegetic narrative contributes to the general impression of dissolving boundaries. While the text, thus, loses its focalized distance, Fevvers becomes both more human and less spectacular – “turning from a freak into a woman” (Carter, Nights at the Circus 336). However, this change of perspective is a treacherous one, as the text still offers various readings of her body, and some will turn her “from a woman into an idea” (Carter, Nights at the Circus 343).

In the Siberian wilderness, removed from any cultural readings of her body, Fevvers loses her symbolic meaning or meanings. In an instance of the Bakhtinian carnival, the remains of culture and civilization are blown away in the chaotic whirlwind conjured up by the clowns’ performance. In her discussion of Nights at the Circus Spooner argues, “[c]ombining a wholly modern notion of the individual subject with the openness to the other found within the carnivalesque, one of the most prominent features of the new ‘Gothic-Carnivalesque’ is sympathy for the monster” (Spoon 69). Unlike recent monster narratives, in which the
monster is ultimately labeled and domesticated (Young-Adult vampire franchises come to mind), *Nights at the Circus* specifically remains open-ended and ambiguous, using narratives of kinship as a strategy of creating sympathy while allowing the monstrous to remain in a monstrous state of becoming. As Wisker points out, in Carter's work the "contradictions are always in tension. The reader will find neither final answers nor morals or homilies. They will have to work it out for themselves, never forgetting the importance of irony and ambiguity in Carter's work." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction* 59) There is no resolution, precisely because a resolution would mean a categorization – being circulated as a sign, not becoming a sign producer, as Russo argues in the article quoted above (see Russo 328).

In this sense, *Nights at the Circus* and *Lady Oracle* establish similar strategies, foregrounding non-normative bodies, which deliberately fail to submit to narratives imposed on them from the outside and/or undermine attempts at defining their corporeality. Monstrous textuality serves as a field of exploration for new, as yet uncategorized concepts and ideas, creating, as Fred Botting argues, "a challenge to think in innovative and radical terms and engage with questions of time and futurity [...] The uncertainty of "[s]uch a future would indeed be monstrous" (Botting, *Gothic Romanced* 155). Botting's argument draws on Derrida's description of the monstrous as a "that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name" (Derrida, "Passages - From Traumatism to Promise" 386) The monstrous future imagined in *Nights at the Circus* is, thus, one of suspended uncategorizability and continued resistance which the novel pits against the heteropatriarchal urge to frame women as Others to the dominant male cultural norm.
6 "A Female Monster Larger than Life": Fatness and Resistance

6.1 Fat as a Feminist Issue

Both Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and Carter's *Nights at the Circus* reflect a specific time in twentieth-century culture, a cultural moment that was defined by a reemerging focus on the body – especially the female body. As Sue Thornton summarizes, for 1970s feminist critics "the body [was] to be wrested from the control of a male-dominated and misogynist medical practice so that, no longer object of the male medico-scientific gaze, the experiencing self and the knowing self may become one." (Thornton 160) This "desire to reclaim what is seen as a 'natural' female body, a body undistorted by patriarchal constraints" projects a tendency to "identify female subjectivity with the body" (Thornton 162). However, as Thornton argues, such attempts at naturalizing the female body did not take into account that the female body was always already an object of discourse: "studies of the disciplining of women's bodies" have in common "a focus on the ways in which discursive practices intersect with social, economic, medical, legal and political structures to produce meanings about the female body which are embodied not only in representations but in cultural practices" (Thornton 171). As Thornton points out, these reiterate a historical dualism of male mind vs. female body, as well as other dualisms (e.g. racial, colonialist or ableist – see my discussion of race and class as intersecting categories in part I), that preclude those on the Other side of the scale from participating in discourses of power or to be heard at all. This mind-body dualism that casts women, people of color, disabled and chronically ill people, black people and people identifying as non-binary or transgender as Other, is often accompanied by the desire to return to a romanticized 'natural' or pre-scientific state of binary normality, which, as feminist critics like Haraway have pointed out, is no longer discursively tenable – and never was in the first place.

The romanticizing focus on the female body as natural and mythical existed alongside, and sometimes intersecting with, an emergent fitness culture based on the optimization of individual bodies and amplified by a growing medialization and automatization of surveillance apparatuses targeted at the docile body of the self-optimizing citizen. As Grosz summarizes,

[i]t seems as though 1980s culture exploded around a celebration of the body(-beautiful): the gym (or at least talk about it), body piercing, dance culture, and safe sex…. Just pick the body you want and it can be yours (for a price). Such a conception never questioned the body's status as an object (or reflection, intervention, training, or remaking), never even considered the possibility that the body could be understood as subject, agent, or activity. This pliable body is what Foucault […] describes as 'docile,'
though with an unforeseen twist: this docility no longer functions primarily by external regulation, supervision, and constraint, as Foucault claimed, but is rather the consequence of endlessly more intensified self-regulation, self-management, and self-control. (Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*)

Coupled with the above-mentioned pathologization of physical deviance through the medico-scientific gaze, this internalization of cultural beauty standards also led to a shift in cultural assumptions concerning the responsibility of each individual to conform to these standards – a tendency which tends to create further categories of marginalization based on what is perceived as self-inflicted physical non-conformity. In a 1980 article, Robert Crawford defines this "assumption of individual responsibility" as "healthism", arguing that "for the healthist, solution rests within the individual's determination to resist culture, advertising, institutional and environmental constraints, disease agents, or, simply, lazy or poor personal habits." (Crawford 4). This moralization of illness (see Crawford 14) reinforces and is, in turn, exacerbated by existing hegemonic structures thus resulting in a stronger policing of already marginalized bodies that do not conform to the white, male, able-bodied social standard.

Looking back at her seminal *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978) Suzie Orbach summarizes the conflicting situation women found themselves in at the time:

> *Fat Is A Feminist Issue* talked about our lived experience: how preoccupied we could become with eating, not eating and avoiding fat. Emotionally schooled to see our value as both sexual beings for others and midwives to their desires, we found ourselves often depleted and empty, and caught up in a kind of compulsive giving. Eating became our source of soothing. We stopped our mouths with food, and I proposed we could learn to exchange food – when we weren’t hungry – for words. (Orbach)

Orbach’s position reflects the entangled narratives of feminism, food, heterosexual relationships, beauty standards and self-perceived embodiments, which found expression in the charged relationship many women had – and continue to have – with their own bodies and food. Looking back at 1978, a time at which "it looked like the world was changing" (Orbach), Orbach concludes that the past 40 years led to an institutionalization of "Obesity Inc." and that her contemporaries in 1978 did not foresee a "pathologi[zation of] people's relationship to food and bodies [which was] so successful[...] that vast industries would grow up to treat problems that these industries had themselves instigated." (Orbach) *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, thus, reflects a historical period, which was only beginning to be affected by the institutionalization of diet culture and the beauty industry.
As fictional narratives reflecting women's experiences at the time, *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* present the emergence of these complex issues within the framework of feminist theorization as well as the lived experiences of women in such diverse and entangled cultural contexts as second-wave feminism, neoliberal market capitalism and the beginnings of mainstream fitness culture (with its focus on perfecting individual bodies and the commercialization of physical fitness and beauty), as well as the now more prevalent medical and bio-scientific surveillance discourses.

Fat in particular highlights a cultural paradox of representation: it may be highly visible (both in terms of size and in terms of being marked as a distinct Other to the dominant cultural ideal) and at the same time culturally invisible (i.e. in the media and in political contexts of power). Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refer to the former as “a stigma that could never be hidden because it simply is the stigma of visibility.” (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon 305) The body thus stigmatized by fat disappears from certain contexts, as it is read within a very narrow set of narratives, mainly circulating around its assumed bad health, excessive food intake and ridiculous appearance, which serves as the butt of countless fat jokes. Excess flesh also makes the fat female body disappear in cultural contexts that value a certain aesthetic ideal focused on the female body as a sexual object.

Joan Foster, the narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* discovers this paradox of visibility as a fat teenager when her corporeality places her firmly on the outside of the heterosexual dating pool: “Though immersed in flesh, I was regarded as being above its desires, which of course was not true.” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 94) *Lady Oracle* comments on the very concrete way in which fat bodies challenge cultural notions of what female bodies should look like, also discussing the ambiguous ways in which fatness is linked to visibility. Trying to situate her own fat teenage body in a cultural context, which does not know what to do with it, the narrator observes:

I was quite fat by this time and all fat women look the same, they all look forty-two. Also, fat women are not more noticeable than thin women; they're less noticeable because people find them distressing and look away. To the ushers and the ticket sellers I must’ve appeared as a huge featureless blur. If I’d ever robbed a bank no witness would have been able to describe me accurately. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 82)

This ironic observation highlights the position of the fat body in a mid-twentieth-century culture intent on seeing women as beautiful or non-existent. But the ironic tone of the narrative also highlights its imbrication in a complex network of aesthetic cultural narratives and economic interests.
6.2 "Revolting Bodies": Fat Studies and Discourses of Fatness

Both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* discuss strategies of escape from and resistance to the panoptical dilemma of the female body, which is restricted by various strategies of body policing and social scrutiny. The texts inscribe themselves into a number of discourses of reading the physical presentation of female bodies as a sign of their sociocultural status, engaging with the emerging critical resistance to these readings at the time.

More recent theoretical texts have further framed the structural inequalities underlying gendered categorizations of visual representations and the cultural expectations they engender. Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990), for instance, explores the socially suppressive effects of the commodification of cultural beauty standards for women, arguing that they uphold an oppressive patriarchal system:

"Beauty" is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (Wolf 12)

While these standards are impossible to fulfill for all women, female bodies at the margins of age, appearance, size, physical fitness are especially at risk of being read as representations of negative character traits (see for instance Mackert 14). I have discussed the different standards for non-white female bodies and narratives of resistance against these in part I. Non-normatively large female bodies present another form of social Other in this context, which has begun to be theorized in the relatively recent field of Fat Studies.

Charlotte Cooper argues that "Fat Studies is different to dominant obesity discourse" in that it takes a critical lens to texts that define "fatness as a pathological medical, psychological and social phenomenon" (Cooper 1020). While Fat Studies has only recently emerged as a distinct critical field of enquiry within cultural studies, Cooper argues that the "critical explorations of fatness as a social position and embodied identity have at least a 40-year history" (Cooper 1021) As Mackert argues, "fatness has embodied very different meanings over the course of history" (Mackert 14) and the fatphobia prevalent in western cultures is rooted in historical developments beginning in "the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century", which Mackert reads "as an era of crucial change in the politics of fat" (Mackert 15) The changing cultural perception of fatness intersects and is in some regards deeply
enmeshed with the shifting of discourses of embodiment that I have briefly described above. As Mackert summarizes, "[f]at scholars usually point to the decades between 1860 and 1920 as the timeframe of a crucial shift in the meaning of fatness from a symbol of wealth to a marker of immobility and self-indulgence." (Mackert 15) The contemporary view of "obesity" as a global epidemic is rooted in these historical shifts, drawing, as Mackert argues "on Enlightenment ideals of self-government and willpower" (Mackert 16) associated with cultural conceptions of the "ideal citizen [as] white, heterosexual, middle-class, and male" (Mackert 17). The intersectional implications of reading fatness as a health issue, are further complicated by the problematic nature of agency, which extends, as Mackert argues, not only to acts of resistance, but may also mean acting within the expectations of "the neoliberal imperative of agency" (Mackert 21). Gender plays an important role in this context, as the expectations towards women's bodies are largely driven by the heteropatriarchal male gaze. As Samantha Murray argues, "what underpins the current 'panic' over 'obesity' in contemporary Western culture is a moral anxiety about the preservation of fixed gender identities and normative female sexuality and embodiment." (Murray 2) Racism and the normalization of able-bodiedness are intersecting factors, which I will, however, not address in detail here.

Both Lady Oracle and Nights at the Circus draw attention to how the large female body is culturally framed as monstrous – as resisting normative gender expectations. Before losing weight Lady Oracle's protagonist, Joan Foster, contemplates her (fat) body's strength in the context of everyday sexism and rape culture: "I knew I would be able to squash any potential molester against a wall merely by breathing out" (Atwood, Lady Oracle 140). This observation creates a combined sense of self-deprecation and self-empowerment as well as a sense of monstrosity. As Brooks Bouson points out, "[t]he obese female body [...] is a complex psychocultural symbol used by the narrative not only to register protest against the social construction of femininity, but also to express anxiety about the uncontained femininity that becomes subject to social control." (Bouson, Brutal Choreographies 69) Joan's later decision to lose weight only underlines the impression that she wishes to conform to cultural stereotypes. The grotesque female body has to be contained in the context of heteropatriarchal power structures, as its embodiment signals a bid for power.

Fat Studies research traces how, in contemporary culture female bodies are not only under constant scrutiny but also constantly rejected as failures if they fail to conform to dominant beauty standards that are perpetuated by the representation of female bodies in mainstream media. Fatness, in particular, is associated with a set of negative stereotypes, drawing on images of animality, monstrosity and freakishness. As Angela Stukator points out, "the obese woman violates the cultural ideal of femininity and is therefore represented as an object of fear, pity, or ridicule" (Stukator 199); she “functions as a metaphor for
uncontrolled hunger, unbridled impulses, and uninhibited desire" (Stukator 199) – an embodiment of ‘otherness’ in a culture which values slenderness as a symbol of self control. Cecilia Hartley similarly reads western culture's approach to fat female bodies in the light of the conflicting narratives of feminism and the desire to reassert patriarchal control over the female body:

when a woman’s stature or girth approaches or exceeds that of a man's, she becomes something freakish. By becoming large, whether with fat tissue or muscle mass, she implicitly violates the sexual roles that place her in physical subordination to the man. [...] The male need to establish superiority, undermined by the relative success of the feminist movement, has reasserted itself by inscribing inferiority onto the female body. (Hartley 62)

Hartley's reading is based on Wolf's argument that, “[a] cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience.” (Wolf 187) Non-conformity to the dominant beauty standard is, in turn, interpreted as disobedience or active resistance, which can and must be punished by society to reestablish and maintain predominant power structures.

In an ironic piece on writing male characters Atwood observed in 1982 that the statistically more frequent unequal distribution of physical strength in heterosexual relationships leads to an unequal distribution of fears: men are afraid that women will laugh at them while women are afraid that men will kill them. Laughter would "[u]ndercut their worldview" (Atwood, Second Words 413) and, thus, threaten ingrained power relations as men perceive them. Laughter is read as destabilizing, as undermining power relations – it is the 'laugh of Medusa' described by Cixous. Atwood concludes that there is no easy way around this representational problem: "for women to define themselves as powerless and men as all-powerful is to fall into an ancient trap, to shirk responsibility as well as to warp reality. The opposite also is true; to depict a world in which women are already equal to men, in power, opportunities and freedom of movement, is a similar abdication." (Atwood, Second Words 429) In contemporary culture equality is often assumed based on improvements to the legal status of women, leaving it for women – especially those experiencing intersectional forms of oppression – to point out where inequalities remain unaddressed. Moreover, in the age of online dating, curated profiles and technologically enhanced best-angle selfies this set of gendered fears described by Atwood manifests as a common internet meme: nowadays, women's greatest fear is still that of being killed by their date, while men's greatest fear is that their date will be fat in real life (see Petri). With the added insecurity of the online medium men are, in other words, afraid that they will not receive a return value for their
financial investment in a date if the woman does not seem to conform to socially accepted beauty standards. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon observe, the fat (female) body has little to no market value in itself in contemporary consumer culture (see Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon 294). And Murray summarizes a similar point: “In the mainstream sexual marketplace, ‘fat’ bodies are not marketable commodities. The ‘fat’ body stands as a symbol of gluttonous obsessions, unmanaged desires and the failed self.” (Murray 124) Apart from being largely viewed as a non-commodity on the market of heterosexual as well as, to a certain extent, homosexual relationships, the fat female body also quite literally occupies a blank position in the symbolic order of capitalism. As Petra Kuppers points out:

Size, like sexual orientation, class, race, or disability, has clear connotations of value. Size, fat, and their concomitant attributes slide toward the black hole of the abject. The fat body is the body without rule of the mind: the body let loose, animalistic, instinctive, out of control. Thus, sexual voraciousness, stupidity, and helplessness are all associated with the fat body. (Kuppers 280)

If fat is ascribed a monetary value, this is usually attached to its loss, as Hannele Harjunen summarizes: “[t]he value of fat lies in the consumerism of those that strive to lose it, but rarely do” (Harjunen), but, like the beauty products targeted at the ageing body, this is a consumerism which sells fear and self-loathing, rather than actual products. Measuring weight loss in kilos and centimeters or malapropriated formulas like BMI (see Nordqvist; see Ahima and Lazar) further suggests a scientific quantifiability of embodiment (and its normative desirability) that overrules and marginalizes individual experiences of being in the body. Contemporary Western societies, thus, associate fatness with greed and gluttony, as well as a lack of willpower (ascribing both an economical and a moral value to what is first and foremost an external physical presentation).

For the fat body the cosmetic gaze (see Wegenstein) is often enacted as an abject position towards one’s own fatty tissue, which is seen and represented as evil, alien and in need of purging through dieting, exercise or, more radically, surgical methods like liposuction. This process of abjection fragments the body, by rejecting certain parts (or cells in the case of fat) and declaring them to be unwanted or disgusting. An example of this would be the narrator’s assessment of her own thigh in Lady Oracle, which personifies the limb in an attempt at detaching it from the perceived self:

I didn’t usually look at my body, in a mirror or in any other way; I snuck glances at parts of it now and then, but the whole thing was too overwhelming. There, staring me in the face, was my thigh. It was enormous, it was gross, it was like a
diseased limb, the kind you see in pictures of jungle natives; it spread on forever, like a prairie photographed from a plane, the flesh not green but bluish-white, with veins meandering across it like rivers. It was the size of three ordinary thighs. I thought, That is really my thigh. It really is, and then I thought, This can’t possibly go on. When I was up and around again I told my mother I was going to reduce. (Atwood, Lady Oracle 121)

The thigh seems to take on a life of its own, “staring [her] in the face” while the narrator assumes the "cosmetic gaze", judging what she will have to change about her body in order to make it graspable within her understanding of herself and, thus, less overwhelming. In Atwood’s narrative, whose publication date places the novel at the beginning of feminist explorations of fatness, this cosmetic gaze is presented as an explorative, colonialist stance, surveying the thigh from an entirely externalized position, as if it weren't part of the body the narrator inhabits. The novel replicates the cultural narratives of denial and self-disgust at a fat body part that is recognized as an abject substance to be externalized in a process of identity construction, while attributing to the narrator the ability to reduce her size on the basis of willpower (suggested by both the "going to" future and the fact that she follows up this decision with the required radical diet to lose weight). The novel does, however, not present the culturally dominant before-and-after weight loss narrative as a 'happily ever after', as the protagonist is continually haunted by her formerly fat body and its cultural ramifications. Even as a thin person in later life, the protagonist still identifies as a (former) fat person, reflecting a cultural conception of fat people internalized as a teenager. The novel, thus, challenges the common weight-loss-commercial narrative promising a bright future of social acceptance and self-love with a narrative of confusion and loss of control clearly rooted in the unattainability of social standards of feminine perfection.

Lady Oracle introduces the fat lady (the narrator's ambiguous alter ego and fat nemesis) as a figure of becoming and unraveling. The first edition cover presents a unified before and after image, reflecting the concept of a slender woman "trapped" in a fat body, so common in diet narratives. A contested Weight Watchers commercial starring Oprah Winfrey (see Oprah’s New Weight Watchers Journey - YouTube) features the same narrative, while Oprah also made headlines when she dragged the (equivalent) amount of fat she had lost on one of her diets into a TV studio on a handcart – presenting a spectacular image of abjection. Far from being universally revolutionary, representations of the fat body, thus, oscillate between challenging and reinforcing existing stereotypes of fatness. Both Nights at the Circus and Lady Oracle highlight the difficulties – specifically for women – of successfully performing social categories like "femininity" and "normative embodiment" by drawing on representations of non-normatively large female bodies that challenge these stereotypes.
6.3 Bodies out of Bounds: Fat and Femininity in *Lady Oracle*

While the conceptualization of non-normative bodies and performances of gender is based on (shifting) cultural standards, the failure to adhere to these standards is often socially constructed as an individual “failure of self-protection, that opens the self to the potential of harm” (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*) or a lack of self-discipline. “[A]ccess to subjectivity itself” (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*) has been historically denied to those who have found themselves without access to prominent discourses – or framed within discourses that denied or ran counter to their own identity constructions. To critically challenge these normative discourses, could, as Halberstam argues, harness the disruptive potential of individual underachievement: “failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods.” (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*) Halberstam's argument points to the possibilities of failure as a means of imagining new ways of thinking outside of normative disciplinary or even cultural categorizations. I would like to suggest that *Lady Oracle* presents its protagonist's failure to adhere to female beauty standards as a subversive narrative. While most of Joan's bulk is deliberately acquired by overeating in a battle of wills with her controlling, constantly disappointed mother, she also reiterates her position by taking up more space: "The war between myself and my mother was on in earnest; the disputed territory was my body." (Atwood, *Lady Oracle*) The text presents Joan's mother as a representative of the surrounding culture's attitudes towards women's bodies using derogatory (and ableist) language to describe her opinion of her "sulky fat slob of a daughter" (Atwood, *Lady Oracle*), "the fat mongoloid idiot, the defective [...] throwback, the walking contradiction of her pretensions to status and elegance." (Atwood, *Lady Oracle*) By contrast, Joan's failure to adhere to both her mother's and society's high standards for women are presented as an underlying narrative strategy framing both her physical existence in the world and her work as a writer. Joan's reflections of her childhood encounters with her mother are imbued with her constant awareness of her inability to conform to the required social standards. The pivotal moment – her mother's refusal to let Joan participate in the butterfly-winged ballet performance – is, thus, expressed (and later remembered) within the cultural stereotypes associated with the fat (female) body:

The problem was fairly simple: in the short pink skirt, with my waist, arms and legs exposed, I was grotesque. I am reconstructing this from the point of view of an adult, an anxious, prudish adult like my mother or Miss Flegg; but with my
jiggly thighs and the bulges of fat where breasts would later be and my plump upper arms and floppy waist, I must have looked obscene, senile almost, indecent; it must have been like watching a decaying stripper. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 46)

The narrator's detached, almost ironic use of terminology like "grotesque" and "senile", which echoes Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque bodies of the "senile pregnant hags" quoted above, add an additional layer of meaning to her deliberately foregrounded use of "the point of view of an adult" on her seven-year-old body. In a manner typical for Atwood's narrative style, there is no unbiased, heterodiegetic position to present a coherent reading of the situation. Instead, the text pits the child's straightforward wish to participate in the performance against the opposing view of an "anxious" and "prudish" adult and their adherence to the cultural standards of the (internalized) male gaze. The fat lady of Joan's later escape fantasy – clad in no less than "pink tights with spangles, a short fluffy pink skirt, satin ballet slippers and, on her head, a sparkling tiara," (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 102) – deliberately undermines this strategy of conformity. It is, thus, not simply Joan's "negative self image" (Staels 71), which is at stake here, but rather a deeper cultural meaning, that is negotiated via the mother-daughter relationship and revealed as highly problematic in its impact on women's self-image and position in society.

Joan Foster's conflicted relationship with her own body draws attention to the internalization of the male gaze. Torn between different cultural narratives of her own body, Atwood's narrator contemplates how her husband would react to her childhood dream of participating in the ballet performance:

I knew how Arthur would analyze this fantasy. What a shame, he'd say, how destructive to me were the attitudes of society, forcing me into a mold of femininity that I could never fit, stuffing me into those ridiculous pink tights, those spangles, those outmoded cramping ballet slippers. How much better for me if I'd been accepted for what I was and had learned to accept myself too. Very true, very right, very pious. But it's still not so simple. I wanted those things, that fluffy skirt, that glittering tiara. I liked them. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 103)

Taken at face value, Arthur’s comment, albeit imagined, seems to represent the sobering voice of ‘common sense’ and an enlightened outside view towards the problematic role of cultural gender stereotypes. Arthur's attitude is, however, also steeped in stereotypes of maleness as rationality and the cultural default position from which it is easy to ignore the ingrained criticism and self-hatred that is a dominant part of beauty- and femininity-oriented
female embodiment. Contrasted with his lack of empathy and general disinterest in Joan, "acceptance" seems like a hollow concept, which assigns the work of shifting patriarchal power structures to women. The text suggests that Joan’s upbringing has steeped her in the value system of a particular culture, and her desire for a “fluffy skirt” and a “glittering tiara” also reflects a wish of being “accepted for what [she] was”. As Hilde Stael’s points out, “[s]he wants to incarnate the one ‘right’ identity and be the final, perfect image, in the mirror that would make everyone happy. […] Joan is torn between wanting to be different and fearing incorporation on the one hand and yet desiring to look like and therefore to be ‘that’ which she is expected to be.” (Staels 72) This difficulty of overcoming stereotypes reflects one of the main problems of fat body politics in an unaccepting environment. As Samantha Murray argues, the fat person is “always already embodied” in a world which rejects the fat body as grotesque and monstrous (Murray 6). Existing in a fat body is often already read as an act of deliberate, rebellious non-conformity.

The prevalence of cultural stereotypes of fatness and femininity is highlighted by at least some critics’ reiteration of these assessments in the discussion of a novel that frequently challenges and ironically undermines these conceptualizations. An example of this tendency would be Macpherson’s casual plot summary:

Atwood’s protagonist starts life as Joan Delacourt, the overweight child of an unhappy mother, a girl who loves the spangle and sparkle of life and refuses to see that it sits uneasily on someone who does not embody the ideal of girlhood. Joan eventually transforms herself secretly into a successful Gothic novelist, so she can inhabit her fantasies mentally and peddle them to others. (Macpherson, The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood 35)

The choice of vocabulary is interesting here, as it suggests a seven-year-old would not only be fully aware of such cultural standards but also able to consciously “refuse” an assumed essential truth that the “spangle and sparkle of life […] sits uneasily on someone who does not embody the [cultural] ideal of girlhood” – a dubious concept in itself, that is, however, not further questioned here. The novel’s position towards the female body seems, however, to be more complicated than this summary suggests, as the narrator is more interested in presenting the difficulties of inhabiting a body that is perceived as different, than in achieving the kind of conformity suggested by Macpherson’s comment. As Staels points out, “Joan’s grotesque body stands for her mobile, split, multiple identity. It signals the presence of an unruly, licentious, rebellious body, the ‘mess’ which is the ‘kind of thing’ her mother wishes to exclude from her existence.” (Staels 73) Contrasted with her mother’s decorous adherence to the standards of early-twentieth-century femininity, Joan’s ‘messiness’ evokes the
complications of female identity constructions under strict hetero-patriarchal power structures. The narrator's struggle with these different figurations of feminine identity and her own corporeality is often negotiated via the ironic tone of the narrative. As Joan comments: “Decorous weeping was another of those arts I never mastered, like putting on false eyelashes. I should’ve had a governess, I should have gone to finishing school and had a board strapped to my back and learned water-color painting and self-control.” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 10) Joan's clearly ironic view of how an ideal woman should look and behave is further reflected on a meta-narrative level in her assessment of the Italian *fotoromanzo* and its representation of female characters:

The stories were all of torrid passion, but the women and men never had their mouths open and their limbs were arranged like those of mannequins, their heads sat on their necks precise as hats. I understood that convention, that sense of decorum. Italy was more like Canada than it seemed at first. All that screaming with your mouth closed. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 184)

This inability to express one's inner self, visualized in the image of “screaming with your mouth closed” seems symptomatic of Atwood’s concept of women, writers and Canadians at the time. The analysis of this ‘foreign’, surprisingly formal kind of fiction also makes a strong case for the meaningfulness of genre conventions and formal aspects in the analysis of Atwood’s own writing. The novel contrasts these formalized and, ultimately, confining genre conventions with its own open ending that highlights a meta-narrative lack of closure. The grotesque, fat body serves as the dominant signal of this lack of closure throughout the novel, as it evokes images of resistance to classification and categorizations that attempt to frame women as stereotypes of femininity and monstrosity rather than individuals. By presenting the fat body as both imaginative and performative, the novel draws on the deliberate disruptive potential of fatness as a critical category undermining cultural gender norms.

6.4 *Shadow on the Tightrope: Coming Out as Fat on Stage*

While the unusually large, fat woman is always already visible and as such seen in a specific light by the culture surrounding her, this perception can change drastically once she decides to actively inhabit this subject position – i.e. when she becomes a performer of fatness. Kathleen LeBesco describes such representations of resistance as ‘revolting bodies’:
Viewed [...] as both unhealthy and unattractive, fat people are widely represented in popular culture and in interpersonal interactions as revolting – they are agents of abhorrence and disgust. But if we think about 'revolting' in a different way, we can recognize fat as neither simply an aesthetic state nor a medical condition, but a political situation. If we think of revolting in terms of overthrowing authority, rebelling, protesting, and rejecting, then corpulence carries a whole new weight as a subversive cultural practice that calls into question received notions about health, beauty, and nature. (LeBesco 1–2)

LeBesco's 'revolting bodies' present an interesting concept for the context of my argument, as they specifically embody the disruptive potential of fat / physically large female bodies both Atwood's and Carter's novels draw on.

In Moon and Sedgwick's analogy between homosexuality and fat femininity a fat person performing fatness (on or off stage) can come out as fat, i.e. actively take up a fat subject position by rejecting the tenets of normative culture. As Sedgwick points out, this is "a way of staking one’s claim to insist on, and participate actively in, a renegotiation of the representational contract between one’s body and one’s world." (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon 306) Moon and Sedgwick draw on the example of Divine’s performance of fat female embodiment, that troubled narratives of the gendered body along different tangents (most prominently narratives of femininity and body size). Divine’s self-described "loud and vulgar" (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Moon 297) drag performances highlight the disruptiveness and subversiveness of gender troubling parody of a "normal" gender performance that is an exclusionary narrative in itself. As Judith Butler argues,

[...] as much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanisms of their fabricated unity. (Butler 137–38)

This kind of "parody" Butler argues, "does not assume that there is an original", but it is a parody of the narrative (or "notion" as Butler puts it) that there is an original (see Butler 138).
As Butler argues, this kind of "parody has been used to further a politics of despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and real" (Butler 146). Butler directly comments on Cixous' "Laugh of the Medusa", "which shatters the placid surface constituted by the petrifying gaze" (Butler 103), but she is clearly critical of the essentialist gender duality established by Cixous. Instead Butler sees a "subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects." (Butler 146)

The aspect of performativity as evoking and at the same time undermining seemingly fixed narratives of gender (and other oppressive categories) is particularly important in the context of socially ingrained narratives of Otherness and identity constructions based on the performance of Otherness. Sharon Mazer discusses the difference of being fat and performing fat in terms of the fat lady freak show performer Katy Dierlam (going by the stage name of 'Helen Melon'), a "talker". Borrowed from the historical freak show, this term suggests a "distinction between those who speak and those who are looked at" (Mazer 285–86) – that is sign producers or signs, in Russo's terminology introduced above. 'Talkers' have the potential to actively participate in the creation of their own identity – in Dierlam's case that of the fat lady, but also to engage with audience expectations and to counter stereotypical associations as part of the performance. As Garland Thomson points out, fat lady freak performers historically "mocked feminine scripts" (Garland Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error" 10) by wearing explicitly girly costumes and performing under stage names like "Captivatin' Liz, and Winsome Winnie" (Garland Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error" 10). As historical posters suggest, talking fat ladies were not uncommon in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century freak show. This is an important distinction, as a narrative element of a performance could potentially shift the focus from the presentation of the performer's body as an object to be gazed at to a more ambiguous, potentially even an autonomous form of presentation. Both Nights at the Circus and Lady Oracle engage with this question by presenting freak show performers who either gaze back and make their own assumptions about the audience (see my discussion of Nights at the Circus in 4.2 above) or are imagined as stepping out of character and performing improbable feats (as I will argue for Lady Oracle in below).

These issues must, however, still be assessed within the cultural frameworks defining fat women on stage. Kuppers associates performing the fat female body with "[w]alking the tightrope" (Kuppers 282) – an image illustrating the complexity and ambiguity of performances that must negotiate a narrow framework of cultural stereotypes. A possible source for this recurring image is the first fat-activist essay collection Shadow on a Tightrope, edited by Lisa Schoenfelder and Barb Wieser. While the volume only appeared in print in 1983, some of the essays in the collection, as well as the original title were conceived of in
1976 and distributed as photocopies (see Schoenfielder and Wieser XV), potentially influencing contemporary feminist discussions of fat female embodiment like Russo's article quoted above.

Lady Oracle, also published in 1976, introduces the narrator's recurrent fantasy of a fat-lady tightrope act that serves an image of rebellion for the narrator who struggles with performing normative femininity – even after losing a substantial amount of weight. The narrator's ambiguous description of the fat lady's imagined tightrope act oscillates between fascination and repulsion, reflecting her struggle to come to terms with her own body image and personality:

It was dark, something was about to happen, the audience was tense with expectation. I was eating popcorn. Suddenly a spotlight cut through the blackness and focused on a tiny platform at the top of the tent. Upon it stood the Fat Lady from the freak show at the Canadian National Exhibition. She was even fatter than I had imagined her, fatter than the crude picture of her painted on the hoarding, much fatter than me. She was wearing pink tights with spangles, a short fluffy pink skirt, satin ballet slippers and, on her head, a sparkling tiara. She carried a diminutive pink umbrella; this was a substitute for the wings which I longed to pin on her. Even in my fantasies I remained faithful to a few ground rules of reality. The crowd burst out laughing. They howled, pointed and jeered; they chanted insulting songs. But the Fat Lady, oblivious, began to walk carefully out onto the high wire, while the band played a slow, stately melody. At this the crowd stilled, and a murmur of dismay arose. It was obvious this was a dangerous thing for her to be doing, she was so enormously fat, how could she keep her balance, she would topple and fall. Gradually, inch by inch, the Fat Lady proceeded along the wire, pausing to make sure of her balance, her pink umbrella raised defiantly above her head. (Atwood, Lady Oracle 102–03)

The image of the fat lady draws on the advertisement for a fat lady at the freak show at the Canadian National Exhibition, who Joan wants to see but isn’t allowed to as a child, reflecting the narrow set of possible representations of fat female bodies in mainstream culture. The daydream of the fat lady's tightrope act, defiant of the crowd's reactions to her fat body, seems to offer an escape route, a sense of freedom and accomplishment as a daring performer. The performance is both empowering and improbable, framed as subject to cultural expectations, as the audience reactions suggest, and while she does not fall, her tightrope act is greeted with "dismay" rather than admiration. The fat lady's grotesque body and audacious behavior mark her as a carnivalesque and therefore potentially subversive
figure, but the fact that this whole performance is part of Joan's daydream suggests a deep engagement with these conflicting cultural discourses – not an act of abjecting her formerly fat self.

While the novel presents the fat lady as an ambiguous figure, some feminist literary critics read her in the light of more recent weight-loss narratives. They reiterate cultural stereotypes of fat female bodies in their reading of *Lady Oracle*, framing the fat lady as a clear-cut expression of the protagonist's "negative self image" (Staels 71), a radical 'before' to Joan Foster's 'after'. I would, however, like to argue that Joan's recurring fat lady fantasy works as a tentative exploration of the cultural boundaries surrounding fat embodiment precisely because she associates fatness with social ostracism and the paradox of visibility. The image is also related to the monstrous double function of fear and desire, in the sense that Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests: "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 16). The fact that Joan "long[s] to" give her fat lady figure wings and that she actively conjures up the fat lady and repeatedly describes her tightrope act as a “fantasy” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 103) – rather than an involuntary nightmare – supports this reading.

The fat lady is Joan's alter ego in the text, embodying both her hopes and her fears of uncontained, monstrous femininity spiraling out of (social) control, a subject position Joan desires and fears, but also dismisses as unrealistic: “As for the Fat Lady, I knew perfectly well that after her death-defying feat she had to return to the freak show, to sit in her oversized chair with her knitting and be gaped at by the ticket-buyers. That was her real life.” (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 103) However, by allowing the fat lady to walk the tightrope in her imagination the narrator has already narratively framed the act, suggesting that the image can no longer be contained in the semblance of normality suggested by the fat lady's return to her knitting. Moreover, for the fat lady knitting in front of her tent is already a performative act, to be "gaped at by the ticket-buyers" in the context of the circus freak show, challenging viewers to make sense of her monstrously large body.

Negative stereotypes of fat performers can, as Murray argues, be traced back to the medical literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Commenting on a 1924 article from a medical journal, she points out: "McLester suggests that, for example, a ‘fat’ actress could not possibly communicate to an audience ‘the real depths of the human soul’. In this way, Dr. McLester casts the ‘fat’ woman as less-than-woman, less-than-human; unable to truly access her ‘inner self’” (Murray 2). This assessment is reflected in *Lady Oracle's* meta-narrative observations on the representation of female bodies in popular culture. As the narrator suggests, it takes a particularly embodied 'damsel in distress' to perform as the counterpart of a (Gothic) villain in the common popular imaginary:
If Desdemona was fat who would care whether or not Othello strangled her? Why is it that the girls Nazis torture on the covers of the sleazier men’s magazines are always good-looking? The effect would be quite different if they were overweight. The men would find it hilarious instead of immoral or sexually titillating. However, plump unattractive women are just as likely to be tortured as thin ones. More so, in fact. (Atwood, Lady Oracle 52)

As Kuppers suggests, however, it is nigh on impossible to liberate fat female performance from categorizing views, because “[f]at’s association with the grotesque enables every action, every dressing up to be reclaimed as carnivalesque masquerade. Each performance becomes just another sign of the excessive nature of the fat body.” (Kuppers 282) Similarly, Stukator argues that “the paradigm of woman as comic spectacle is one way in which the threats posed by the unruly fat woman are contained. This strategy is linked to the tradition of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body, which is redeployed in mainstream comedies to comply with dominant misogynist attitudes toward female obesity.” (Stukator 198) This non-subversive use of the carnivalesque is possible because, as Stukator points out, “carnival is no more intrinsically radical than is comedy. Carnival culture can be appropriated to sustain marginality or it can be used to subvert and challenge the dominant official culture and its representations.” (Stukator 201) Only if the performance manages to resist a framing within these narrative contexts, in Stukator’s words if “the obese female character functions as an unruly woman who is able to lay claim to her desire and pleasures”, can she release “the ‘laugh of the medusa,’ breaking down the institutionalized hierarchies and conceptual categories by which social identities are ordered and defined.” (Stukator 198) This is the central metaphor of resistance in Nights at the Circus, described by Russo as the "laughter of carnival" (Russo 333), "a dialogical laughter, the laughter of intertext and multiple identifications." (Russo 333)

It is precisely this carnivalesque laughter, which heralds the beginning of a new century with Fevvers as its symbolic figure:

The spiraling tornado of Fevvers’ laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing. Or so it seemed to the deceived husband, who found himself laughing too, even if he was not quite sure whether or not he might be the butt of the joke. (Carter, Nights at the Circus 350)
As a true performer, Fevvers does not laugh privately, but her liberating laughter spans the globe, staking a claim for feminist theory to "smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (Cixous 888). Laughter does not create a new interpretation or teleological narrative – as Fevvers points out, "I'm not in the mood for literary criticism" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 289) – but rather posits a resistance to interpretations and a dissolution of categories.

In all her performances Fevvers refuses to be read as a symbol of anything but herself. The act of interpretation, which Fevvers asks Walser to undertake, is, thus, not represented as a rational one. Loosing his memory in the train crash, he becomes first a birdlike creature (he crows like a cock, flutters around and there are frequent references to hatching), and then assumes the appearance of a "wild woman" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 296), overcoming gender stereotypes and, thus, retracing Fevvers' own embodiments in order to become her mate, "the New Man" (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 334). This is a deliberate staging of ambiguous tension, which is not resolved for the reader in the end. As Wisker points out, "Carter moves beyond the time-limited radicalism of carnival. There is no need to put the circus away at the end of the show. Everything changes." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 67) The female freak performer's position at the center of the text suggests that this continued adherence to the chaos of carnival should be read as a feminist gesture of possible liberation.

The novel's complex engagement with the culturally abject in the form of the deliberate freak performance underlines this reading. The inherent uncategorizability of its main character also makes the novel particularly hard to stage. To omit the corporeal framework of body size – as a 2006 theatrical adaptation of the novel by Emma Rice and Tom Morris did in casting normatively thin and relatively short actress Natalia Tena in the role of Fevvers – strips away the political dimension and reduces the narrative's grotesque critical potential to the performative spectacle of a freak show without critical dimensions. The play's complete omission of any kind of critical meta-commentary, as well as its elision of the embedded monster-narratives surrounding Mme Schreck's museum of female monsters and the theory-conscious Panopticon episode shifts the focus away from the politically charged monstrous ambiguity of its heroine and towards a performative approach of grotesque bodies as empty signifiers, appropriated and domesticated by mainstream culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the spectacle of the monstrous female body ostensibly boils down to a stage direction commenting on Fevvers "feeding herself like an animal" (Rice and Morris 13), reducing her ambiguous freak performance to a mere show effect in a world populated by stranger creatures than her and creating a "touch of Sham" (Rice and Morris 15) in the place of the novel's critical ambiguity. The practice of overindulging on "jellied eel" (Rice and Morris 14) echoes representational confluences of fatness and overeating in contemporary culture,
which tends to construct body images along the lines of rigorous regimes of decorous and ortorexic food consumption and the disciplining of unruly (female) bodies. As Susannah Clapp, Carter's literary executor, comments in *The Observer*, "[i]t's pointless to pretend that the actress Natalia Tena, 21 and radiant, is a dead ringer for Fevvers, who is huge and battered, with a face 'as broad and oval as a meat dish'. Tena was, says Emma Rice, exactly who she wasn't looking for. But fat actresses have been 'drummed out of the business years ago'." (Clapp) Sage Martin and Maggie Rogers draw attention to the vicious cycle of fat representation on stage that is perpetuated by typecasting and stereotypes: "It feels like an endless cycle: casting directors don't see fat bodies as leads so fat people don't audition for leads resulting in, you guessed it, a lack of representation on stage." (Martin and Rogers) While Martin and Rogers point the finger at casting directors, Rice herself also commented on her choice, arguing that "[p]artly it's political […] If you're trying to find a woman actor in her 40s who's voluptuous to the point of being fat, they don't exist." (T. Jackson) To call the casting choice 'political' is an interesting statement to make in view of the original text's political impact relying precisely on the representation of Fevvers' grotesque body size and ambiguous take on stereotypes of femininity. The interview draws attention to how, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, discussions of embodiment are more than ever entangled with heteropatriarchal/capitalist concerns over representation. In the following I will, therefore, broaden my discussion to a contemporary example of meta-narrative on fat.

6.5 "Fat": Contemporary Feminism and *The Melancholy of Anatomy*

Fat is, if anything, a central issue in contemporary media. Mainstream narratives often focus on the necessity of purging fat, fatness and fat people but fat activism and the body positivity movement have begun to make inroads on the fashion and beauty market – albeit reluctantly when it comes to more complex issues like intersectionality, disability and the techno-scientific framing of the (female) body. Despite these efforts, fat is not a neutral adjective, but a highly charged substance, doubling as a descriptor of abject embodiment that carries a variety of usually negative associations in diverse discursive environments (medicine, the law, popular culture, the job market etc.). Fictional narratives of fatness reflect these conflicting cultural approaches to the fat body at the beginning of the twenty-first century, often including meta-narrative discussions of the possibilities of representing fat in contemporary culture. In "Fat", the concluding short story of her 2002 collection *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, Shelley Jackson, for instance, introduces an ancient, "traditional" wedding ritual which revolves around the mutual consumption of the bride's and groom's body fat:
Like Carnival, the cataclysm of marriage occasions a temporary inversion of values; the private is publicized, the unspoken spoken, the degraded is raised up. The bride and groom are left alone to fast. They allow fat to form on their naked bodies; [...] Our modern kiss was once the first bite of spousal fat. Bride and groom are swept off to a private chamber, where they lick each other clean, a process that may take hours. (S. Jackson, “Fat” 168–69)

This description, the narrator observes, comes from "an article” (S. Jackson, “Fat” 168), which also highlights the bride and groom’s "mutual embarrassment" as the decisive binding factor of a marriage ritual "seldom performed these days” (S. Jackson, “Fat” 169). The article’s focus is presented as historical and critical, describing the ritual's function and commenting on its cultural meaning by comparing it to "Carnival" and it's (temporary) upheaval of categories like the private and the public. It posits the text as theory-conscious and engaging in meta-level reflectivity of its own theoretical premises. The description can be read as a metaphor of the marriage ritual as a moment of vital, physical change. Its description of the performativity of wedding rituals and preparations – including the now more than common theme of pre-nuptial dieting – would seem familiar to contemporary readers, especially to women, who are often pressured into dieting so they can look their best on their "big day” (see Miller). But it is also deliberately estranging in the way the narrative foregrounds the almost cannibalistic consumption of constantly accumulating body fat, a substance that conjures the abject. The narrative, thus, ultimately undermines the cultural meaning of the wedding ritual and its traditional gender distribution when the narrator eats the "Fatman" figure built from the accumulating fat and "find[s her]self married to nobody” (S. Jackson, “Fat” 178) at the end of her tale.

In "Fat" it is not just the unfamiliarity of the ritual and the somewhat cannibalistic consumption of abjected body fat that sets the story firmly in the realm of the negative aesthetics of the contemporary Gothic, but even, more prominently, the description of the all-encompassing, smothering body fat itself, which has transgressed the limitations of the body and developed a tendency to accumulate around spaces and objects. Read as cultural commentary, the text seems to suggest that fat is everywhere and we need to be vigilant so it can't take over further discursive contexts. This impression is underlined by the text's almost cathartic denouement, which describes the narrator's, "exceedingly fat" (S. Jackson, “Fat” 178) body melting in the sunlight, producing a cataclysm of hot oil until "[w]e moved our limbs in wonder like cripples faith-healed.” (S. Jackson, “Fat” 179) Jackson's use of this ableist phrasing seems deliberate, placing the story in the context of contemporary narratives about the culturally desirable transformation of non-normative bodies but also harking back to earlier depictions of physical disability as an affliction to be healed by religious ritual. The
narrative also picks up on popular before-and-after dieting narratives, which describe body fat as a purely external substance to be shed or melted away from the body of the perfectly formed thin person hidden inside. Body fat is seen as ultimately abject – an external Other, that has to be shed/abjected in the process of becoming and identity construction (similar to Oprah’s handcart full of fat cited above). In this context, Jackson’s story seems to highlight literary tropes typically associated with gender politics and the experiences of female embodiment: the woman left alone in the traditional sphere of the house after her husband has gone away and her struggle to free herself from the confines of the house/body, filled with fat, evoke a sense of feeling trapped, that is typical of Female Gothic narratives (see Moers 155). As a highly meta-critical and theory-conscious literary mode, the Female Gothic also revolves around questions about how gendered bodies are expressed and represented in writing (see Smith and Wallace 1–3). By externalizing the production and distribution of fat, the narrative draws attention to these tropes in an ironic manner and posits the female body as possessing an (admittedly useless and abject but nonetheless potent) productive agency, as "the fat … piles and piles" (S. Jackson, “Fat” 170) until both the protagonist and her house are "[f]rosted all over with fat" (S. Jackson, “Fat” 171) and she is able to construct an igloo from bricks made of the gelatinous substance. The cataclysmic melting away of the externalized fat in the sunshine can be read as a narrative of liberation from the traditional marriage plot introduced at the beginning of the story.

While Jackson’s story inscribes itself into a literary tradition of ‘writing on the body’ – specifically the unruly female body – harking back to Carter’s and Atwood’s earlier work, “Fat” also highlights a set of complex contemporary attitudes towards body fat as an abject, alien substance constantly threatening to accumulate on and take over the female body. Here, taking up space through sheer body size is not read as a purely transgressive act, as fat is, ultimately, read as a substance to be abjected and purged in finding one’s true identity. Instead, the narrative’s critical angle is based on evoking a number of possible cultural contextualizations of fat – from the grotesque bodies of carnival, via the concept of abjection, to narratives of disability, as well as the issue of visibility of fat bodies in twenty-first-century culture. As Jackson’s autodiegetic narrator observes, “they saw me, I guess, and at the same time didn’t see me. Who notices the fat lady?” (S. Jackson, “Fat” 176)

"Fat", thus, draws on a critical tradition also present in Lady Oracle and Nights at the Circus, but the two earlier novels’ cultural background allows for a more productive reading of female body size itself as transgressive that has been supplanted with a more meta-critical, materialist focus on fat as a substance in Jackson’s work. While both Atwood and Carter tend to use an ironic approach, their texts can, as I have argued above, also be read as narratives of resistance against cultural discourses of gender and embodiment. In both novels the concept of liberation is associated with the idea of taking flight – a concept that is
echoed in Jackson's "Fat", which ends on the image of "birds [trying] their wings" (S. Jackson, "Fat" 179), but not for the protagonist herself. 

Like the wings that Joan Foster longs to give her fat lady fantasy, Jackson's birds can be read as a metaphor of liberation and wish-fulfillment in the context of the novel. *Nights at the Circus* uses a similar imagery, the texts evoking Cixous' argument of flying as "woman's gesture" (Cixous 887). Flying remains a metaphorical gesture, however, as the fat lady's wings are ultimately flimsy and fake in *Lady Oracle*. Similarly, readers never directly see Fevvers take flight within the main narrative of *Nights at the Circus*. Both texts, thus engage with Cixous' argument, which suggests that in women's writing flying occurs "in language [...] making it fly" (Cixous 887). Joan Foster's various attempts at writing as a form of escape as well as Fevvers' narrative reinvention of herself could be cited as examples of this in the novels. Moreover, Fevvers' narrative seems directly connected to her (potential) ability to fly. With the loss of her audience and one wing broken in the train wreck, Fevvers also loses her narrative edge, as if her ability to invent herself in a metaphorical 'flight' of the imagination was directly connected with her physical ability to fly. Lizzie (her motherly confidante) blames Fevvers' decline on the loss of her audience; "You're fading away, as if it was only always nothing but the discipline of the audience that kept you in trim. You're hardly even a blonde any more." (Carter, *Nights at the Circus* 332) Performance and narrative performativity are, thus, central to Fevvers' subversive potential.

Jackson's work, by comparison, reflects an ironic distance that is typical of the complex network of conflicting discourses of third-wave feminist and post-feminist positions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The collection of stories in which "Fat" was published, *The Melancholy of Anatomy* (2002), is clearly aware of these critical framings. Its title creates an intertextual connection to Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and the stories juxtapose Burton's account of the melancholic mind with a number of narratives of the melancholia of the (female) body, thus commenting on the mind-body divide contested by feminist critics. Moreover, the collection also visualizes the connections between textual production and bodily states and emanations evoked by second-wave feminist theory – most prominently Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection (see Kristeva) and Hélène Cixous' concept of *écriture feminine* (see Cixous). The collection's penultimate story "Milk" describes the bodily fluid as a ubiquitous liquid that comes "from all around" (S. Jackson, "Milk" 157), making up rain and seawater and creating milk-based songs and literature like the "Sky Writers Phrasebook" (S. Jackson, "Milk" 156). "Milk" echoes Jackson's earlier *Patchwork Girl* (quoted in 4.1 above) in its focus on feminist theory and embodiment. These references evoke Cixous' description of "women's speech, as [well as] their writing" as connected to the figure of "mother", who "writes in white ink." (Cixous 881) Jackson's post-postmodern, ironic narrative mode ostensibly seems to take this metaphor at face value, to explore Cixous' call
for "female-sexed texts" (Cixous 877) and a "writing that inscribes femininity" (Cixous 878).
"Fat", thus, offers an ironic, post-feminist take on an earlier tradition of theory-conscious
writing focused on the expression of (female) embodiment and feminist theory. Like the
earlier texts I have discussed in this part, the story engages with the narrative representation
of women's bodies on an ironic meta-level that engages with the theoretical background, but
it also reflects the more complicated cultural stance towards fat bodies in contemporary
culture.
Conclusion

As Marina Warner argues, images of metamorphosis, of physical transformation occur "at moments of cultural clash and conflict between one intellectual hegemony and another" (Warner 18) Both *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* can be read as narrative expressions of an emerging shift in feminist ontological constructions of what it means to be human, as well as of the related question of gender beyond the binary and the ways that gender intersects with other categories of oppression. These issues would, as I have argued above, eventually move towards queer theory and posthumanist criticism, but in the texts I have discussed here their expression remains teratological. Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Lady Oracle* use figures of monstrosity and category-defying freakishness based on the Derridean monstrous, something which is as yet uncategorized and, thus, points towards the future signaling a "constant condition of becoming" (Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster* 1). By foregrounding monstrous or grotesque "bodies out of bounds" (see Braziel and LeBesco) the texts draw attention to the fragility and mutability of scientific, medical and cultural narratives of the (female) body, without offering clear counter-narratives to these culturally ingrained discourses.

As I have argued above, it is the indeterminacy and uncategorizability of the monster and the freak, which present them as useful figures to undermine confining cultural identity constructions. Rather than present a positive counter image, the texts draw on the Gothic's negative aesthetic and meta-narrative exploration of strategies of representation to challenge cultural stereotypes of femininity. As a counter narrative to cultural discourses of the female body, the reading of Gothic monstrosity and its meta-narrative reflections I have proposed in this part demarcates, as Benjamin Brabon and Stéphanie Genz summarize in their preface to *Postfeminist Gothic*, "a new space for critical enquiry that re-invigorates previous debates on the Gothic, in particular the notion of the Female Gothic and its relation to second-wave feminism, as well as shedding light on the contemporary postfeminist conundrum." (Brabon and Genz 1) Such a diachronous reading of Gothic texts across different literary and cultural periods can contribute to an understanding of how monstrosity has evolved as a critical framework of exploration and, potentially, how it can be used to reframe narratives of female bodies which emerged alongside changing views of corporeality. As Botting argues, historically "the feminized monstrosities of gothic fiction rendered various romantic and domestic freedoms imaginable at the same time as they were configured as an imagined threat to familial and social values." (Botting, *Gothic Romanced* 153–54) While traditional cultural and social values would demand a suppression of the monster and a return to order in the end, Female Gothic narratives often reveal this order to be as brittle and temporary as the treacherous promises of the happily ever after of the heteronormative marriage plot. Postmodern Gothic texts like *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* draw on this disruptive
tradition. Much like Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, "*Lady Oracle* is parodic Gothic but the warning is just as acute nonetheless." (Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* 79) In this sense, monster narratives in the Female Gothic tradition often resist a sense of closure, to represent the fact that the underlying questions of patriarchal, capitalist society have not been resolved and continue to influence the basic tenets of knowledge production and discourse.

Carter's and Atwood's work, which I have discussed in this part, captures a specific moment in Western culture – a time at which feminist writing (both critical and fictional) attempted to establish a new political and cultural position for women in Western societies – a position which included a critical framing of women "as sign producers" (Russo 328) instead of circulating them as objects or signs to be looked at. As I have argued above, the two novels use different but related strategies of irony, meta-narrative commentary and a focus on performative framings of excessive, monstrously large female bodies to explore the problematic position of female embodiment in a culture which scrutinizes, categorizes and devalues female bodies as constantly in need of containment and improvement. As I have argued in part I, the marginalization of female bodies becomes more pronounced and takes on different connotations once race is added as an oppressive category, and it has to be noted that none of the texts I have addressed in this part acknowledge this specific form of oppression or its impact on those affected by intersecting forms of marginalization and that this exclusion is and continues to be, in all likelihood systemic to white feminist literature. Fatness – and female fatness in particular – is an especially troubling category in this context, as, in addition to skin color, it is the distribution of body fat which often marks bodies as racialized Other and aggravates their oppression and perception as objects. The exhibition of Saartjie Baartman as the "Hottentot Venus" and the continued objectification of her remains after her death presents a well-documented historical case (see Parkinson), but there are also indicators that gender, skin color and fat intersect as troubling categories of oppression in many sectors of contemporary culture (from medicine to the job market).

In the decades since the publication of *Nights at the Circus* and *Lady Oracle*, the rising tendency of self-policing of postmodern 'docile bodies' under advanced technological surveillance seems to have led to even stricter body regimes surrounding the female body than the novels envisioned and to a further internalization of such expectations. Visibility is (still) a trap – perhaps more than ever – and continues to influence female-embodied individual's self-perception while further technological involvements point towards seemingly limitless possibilities of perfecting the body. Jackson's "Fat", discussed above, reflects these trends by revisiting theoretical framings of the female body. The story presents a meta-narrative focus on fat as an abject, structuring substance that has begun to take on a cultural presence beyond the body itself. As I have argued above, fatness, or rather the avoidance of
fat has become a central obsession in contemporary popular culture to the point where (not) being fat or becoming thin have become central structuring principles of contemporary cultural narratives. As Botting argues with regard to the film industry, the female actresses’ "continued employment depends on turning the body into an image, reducing it to the thinness of celluloid two-dimensionality." (Botting, *Gothic Romanced* 150) The resulting effects of predominantly thin bodies as beauty standard and attempts at prolonging an impression of youth and beauty with the help of plastic surgery contribute to the climate of hostility towards embodied Otherness in a culture that revolves around infinite simulacra instead of representations of individual experiences of diverse corporealities. Counter-narratives against and critical discussions of these mechanisms are, thus, more important than ever.

As Haraway argues in the "Cyborg Manifesto", we need to understand "how fundamental body imagery is to world view, and so to political language" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 310). In Haraway's feminist writing storytelling and theory are intertwined in a manner that highlights the ways in which feminist writers are always already writing against a dominant cultural discourse prone to omit, silence or disregard their work. To resist those narratives, write against them or around them to find one's own voice is a balancing act that writers from the margins have no choice but to engage in. In Haraway's work

> [w]riting has a special significance for all colonized groups. Writing has been crucial to the Western myth of the distinction between oral and written cultures, primitive and civilized mentalities and more recently to the erosion of that distinction in 'postmodernist' theories attacking the phallogocentrism of the West, with its worship of the monotheistic, phallic, authoritative and singular work, the unique and perfect name. (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 311)

As I have argued in my first two parts, such narratives of resistance can be used against race and gender as frequently intersecting categories of oppression. Beyond the anti-colonialist and intersectional feminist focus, Haraway adds a technological component to these narratives of resistance. In "A Cyborg Manifesto", her ironic myth about a post-gender world, Haraway identifies these narratives of resistance as "cyborg writing", which must be "about the power to survive [...] on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other." (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 311) Haraway's argument echoes Russo's point about women's representation as sign producers rather than signs. This kind of "writing against" that tries to reclaim and subvert the tools of oppression has a meta-critical component to it; it is "writing, about access to the power to signify" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 311). As I have argued above, this kind of narrative of resistance not only resists
ingrained forms of categorization, it also undermines the underlying category of the human as a fixed and stable construct on which such distinctions can be based. I will further discuss cyborg reading- and writing-practices and the critical potential of posthuman narrative in part III below.
III: Hideous Progeny

Introduction

"You could say that all bodies are written bodies, all lives pieces of writing." (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "all written")

"See, I am showing you. This is the Book, these are the Pages, here is the Writing." (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 385)

Monstrous narratives shaped around the disruptive Gothic figures of ghosts, monsters and freaks possess a powerful potential to function as narratives of resistance against hegemonic discourses of oppression. By disrupting processes of categorizations based on race, gender and other, intersecting corporealities, they make room for marginalized subject positions from which to speak and highlight the narrow readings traditionally imposed on the Other by mainstream cultural discourses. While my focus has, so far, been somewhat historical (using historical narratives and critical positions from a specific cultural period to highlight critical omissions and forms of oppressions), the current imbrications of the human in various technological discourses and contexts call for a further opening of my argument towards critical posthumanist discussions of the monstrous as a component of the techno-scientific discourses that permeate all aspects of contemporary globalized cultures. In these, the monstrous emerges in a number of functions, most prominently in its traditional aspect as a warning, a "harbinger of category crisis" (Cohen, *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* 6) but also in the form of "the promises of monsters" (Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters" 295), the possibility of future, monstrous becomings. These are not mutually exclusive interpretations, but rather indicators of the monster's critical potential. As Rosi Braidotti argues, "[t]he monstrous refers to the potentially explosive social subjects for whom contemporary cultural and social theory has no adequate schemes of representation. It expresses a positive potential of the 'crisis' of the humanist subject." (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 171) Braidotti's posthumanist reconceptualization of the monster as a contemporary critical position draws on her understanding of post-millennial culture as being "in the grip of a techno-teratological imaginary" (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 161) that draws on earlier disruptive figures like the monster to come to terms with our technological involvements and how they re-shape our understanding of what it means to be human and, potentially, become posthuman.

While there is a wide range of conceptions of the posthuman from a variety of perspectives, for critical posthumanist approaches – especially from a feminist point of view
like Braidotti’s – the posthuman functions not so much as a concept, but rather as a perspective for the critical evaluation of categories that are becoming increasingly untenable. Human entanglements with technology and posthuman developments form the basis of somewhat polarized critical and cultural discussions about what it means to be human and what we might be becoming. While transhumanists and accelerationists regard these technological developments as a positive opportunity for humanity to solve contemporary problems through technological developments, critical posthumanists are more invested in mapping posthuman becomings and seeing them as an opportunity to reconsider the historically flawed category of the human and the limitations of ethical tenets derived from it. This discussion also, to an extent, pitches STEM-based methodologies and belief systems against approaches from the humanities, raising questions about posthuman epistemologies. Firmly rooted in a humanities tradition of critical thought, Braidotti reads the posthuman as "a cartographical tool that allows us to illuminate aspects of the present" and specifically those aspects of it that we are and should be "opposed to" (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminism”) if we are speaking from a perspective traditionally marginalized by humanism. As Rosi Braidotti points out, drawing on Cary Wolfe,

[n]ot all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history. Not if by 'human' we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: 'The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian 'community of reasonable beings', or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on.' (Braidotti, The Posthuman 1)

For Braidotti 'human' is a term that has undergone – and is continuously undergoing – historical and cultural fluctuations, and the challenge to humanity's sense of wholeness and conceptual stability is, consequently, not an entirely new one. Wolfe's definition of the posthuman draws attention to how our interactions with and connections to technology have highlighted these processes to the point that they can no longer easily be ignored:

posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (Wolfe xv–xvi)
Wolfe’s call to develop new modes of thinking has been taken up by feminist approaches to critical posthumanism that challenge the historical exclusiveness of the humanist paradigm and aim to visualize and criticize its legacy in the present. As Braidotti argues, the posthuman “allows an engagement with the present operationalized through strategic readings” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminism”). Braidotti’s work draws on a Deleuzean conceptualization of corporeality, which, as Ella Brians argues, brings “the central question of the body, its materiality and its relation to identity” (Brians 117–18) back into focus for cyberculture and, thus, counters its tendencies to see the (human) body as a disposable husk to be shed in the quest for the technologically embodied immortality of the rational mind. Where “[f]uturists like Ray Kurzweil and the AI and robotics researcher Hans Moravec” predict a more radical cybernetic future in which we might be able to "'download' human consciousness and save it on a computer" (Brians 128), feminist criticism draws attention to the fact that this uncoupling of human consciousness from the body is based on "the mind-body dualism that has typified Western philosophy and science" (Brians 129) and has a tendency to reiterate its problematic binaries and exclusionary tendencies. N. Katherine Hayles, for instance, argues against Kurzweil’s and Moravec’s fantasies, pointing out that "human being is first of all embodied being, and the complexities of this embodiment mean that human awareness unfolds in ways very different from those of intelligence embodied in cybernetic machines” (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 283–84). The body is a similarly central concept to Donna Haraway’s ironic cyborg myth, which is based in a rejection of the binary taxonomies of "white humanism" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 300) in favor of "a network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 307). In Haraway’s work, this emerging feminist cyborg subject position is always already connected to an idea of writing that is about "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" and claiming "access to the power to signify" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 311). While I have applied this argument to two texts from the white feminist canon in part II, Haraway’s point is actually more inclusive, commenting on the oppression of non-white women and the exclusiveness of the category "woman" as it was and is sometimes still used by white feminists (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 297).

Taking Braidotti’s argument about posthuman reading practices and Haraway’s point that "[w]riting is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs" (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 312) at face value, this part will focus on fictional texts which highlight posthuman reading and writing practices, interpreting them as narrative interventions in a critical discussion that blurs the boundaries between fiction and theory to present counter-narratives that disrupt hegemonic discourses and present speculative explorations of the future. As I will argue,
they do so based on a reintroduction of the body into posthumanist narrative structures, which places them in the context of both monstrous textuality and feminist theory. This part will focus on

1. posthuman reading practices in response to new, non-linear forms of textuality, i.e. hypertext narratives, and how they can adapt the critical potential of earlier Gothic narratives by drawing on a model of monstrous textuality – or fail to do so;

2. posthuman writing practices revolving around the biomediated body as text and the critical potential of the cyborg as a feminist, counter-narrative figure in Donna Haraway’s work;

3. posthuman narrative and the critical potential of meta-narrative in a self-reflexive framework of anthropocene writing.
7 Posthuman Reading Practices

7.1 Reading Hypertext

Gothic texts like *Frankenstein* possess a meta-narrative structure that not only draws attention to the cultural and techno-scientific criticism of the processes of "making monstrous" (Botting 1991) but also to the critical potential inherent in the underlying narrative construction of the monster text. Christopher Keep in his discussion of Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* reads the Gothic "not so much [as] a literary genre", than as "a recurring moment within the history of modernity, that point in which the material substrate of signification, whether it takes the shape of the book or a computer-mediated network, is momentarily visible, when it has not yet become so much a natural fact of our reading practices as to disappear from view" (Keep 2006, 12). As Shane Denson argues, with regard to early film adaptations of *Frankenstein* (see Denson 2014, 23) these structural innovations often concur with cultural paradigm shifts, reflecting a sense of interpretational instability as well as technical innovation. Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* – a similarly meta-narrative adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – uses the possibilities of the relatively recent medium of hypertext to visualize a number of questions raised in Shelley's original text. By emphasizing the complicated structure of the multiply-embedded monster narrative and its abundance of intertextual connections, Jackson's hypertext novel foregrounds questions about humanity, authority and creation raised by Shelley's novel connecting them to the critical context of twentieth-century feminist readings of the text and its monster.

The medium of hypertext, at its best, offers a non-hierarchical, explorative way of conveying knowledge by involving the reader in the creation and piecing-together of narrative elements. As such, it lends itself to feminist explorations of alternative epistemologies that do not rely on top-down hierarchies of power. To approach these possibilities, it will first be necessary to briefly discuss the functions of hypertext – specifically in terms of reader involvement – before they can be applied to examples of Gothic hypertext narratives. In a very basic but functional definition, hypertext can be

defined as a form of non-linear, interactive screen-based textuality, in which the reader chooses the structure and unfolding of the text in her reading actions – clicking on certain areas of the screen to activate and follow hyperlinks to other screens and segments. Usually, each screen will have multiple possible links, and each reading can produce a different sequence of signs (Goody 122).
This is, of course, the basic structure of the internet, resulting in a high familiarity of most readers with this mode of structuring information, but literary texts presented in this non-linear way are relatively few and far between. The 1990s can still be considered the most interesting period for experimental hypertext narratives, resulting in a number of attempts at defining their common features. Espen Aarseth, for instance, describes what he calls “cybertext” as any text in which “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (Aarseth 1). This necessary participation, “constantly remind[s] the reader of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken” (Aarseth 3). Stuart Moulthrop makes a similar point about the disruptive effect of hypertext, claiming that an interest in “primary disturbance[s]” which result in a “significant perturbation of the cognitive field” is a predominant feature of the form – both on a narrative as well as on the structural level (see Moulthrop). Both approaches resonate with Keep’s point about the Gothic as visible structure – especially in the context of Gothic hypertexts like Patchwork Girl (see Keep 12) and highlight the disruptive potential of hypertext beyond the individual text towards cultural processes of knowledge production and dissemination.

Most definitions of hypertext highlight reader involvement, drawing attention to the collective nature of narrative production in literary hypertexts. In his Literary Machines (1963), Ted Nelson first describes an existing phenomenon of ‘branching and responding text’, which he calls hypertext (see T. Nelson). N. Katherine Hayles clarifies this definition by distinguishing between printed texts with a complex but nevertheless linear structure and printed or digital texts that require the reader to abandon linearity and jump between pages or screens:

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However complex a narrative sequence is in a conventional print novel, with convoluted time lines, different trajectories for different characters and so forth, the reader still follows a set sequence of pages in a given order […]. By contrast, most literary hypertexts are multicursal. It is not only the narrative sequence as it is related within the represented world that has branching points, but the actual order of reading lexias. (Hayles, “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext” 22)
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Consequently, Jackson's Patchwork Girl would qualify as a hypertext according to Hayles’ definition, as it creates choices for the reader and involves multiple possible plot-lines, while Frankenstein’s linear presentation would exclude it from this category – regardless of its multiple diegetic levels and complex structure. Of course, hypertexts can be realized in print – consider for example the popular Choose Your Own Adventure series of children’s books or, a more Gothic example, Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves (2000). Computer-
generated hypertext, however, facilitates both the production of such narratives and reader involvement in them (see Landow). This necessity to materially engage with the text in a manner that goes above and beyond turning pages in order, lies at the heart of Hayles' suggestion, that hypertext demands and creates "Cyborg Reading Practices". As Hayles claims, text presented in a non-linear manner, whose navigation requires decision-making processes on the part of the reader has the power to "transform human subjectivity" (Hayles, "Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl" 13), effectively turning the human reader into a posthuman one. For Hayles, "the prospect of becoming posthuman evokes terror and excites pleasure" (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 238). While the terror is related to questions of being overtaken and overruled by the technological ghosts in the machine we have created ourselves, Hayles also argues for the potential of seeing "the human [...] as part of a distributed system" (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 290), which would enhance rather than limit our capacities. I will discuss this approach in more detail below, but I would like to point out here, that Hayles' concept of a posthuman reader influenced by and connected with technology resonates more with a sense of narrative invention than critical analysis, pointing towards a reading of her "cyborg readers" that is similar to Haraway's argument abut cyborg writing practices.

Hayles is not alone in ascribing a liberating potential to hypertext structures: as Keep points out, hypertext "is something more than a novel way of organizing textual materials; it is a means of liberating the reader from the linear determinism of the codex book" (Keep 2). Similarly, Landow argues, "[r]eaders of large bodies of informational hypermedia create the document they read from the informed choices they make" (Landow 9) i.e. the links they choose to follow. While internet hypertext connections create a seemingly endless network, readers of fictional hypertext are limited by the premeditated structure of the literary hypertext. This can be a relatively open structure, like that of Patchwork Girl, which gives the reader free range over an unhierarchical, rhizomatic spread of possible narrative elements without suggesting possible paths through them, or it can be a premeditated structure of linked pages leading the reader to a fixed point of closure. As Carrie Noland suggests, the reader’s contribution to the unfolding of a hypertext narrative is limited by the possible routes and branching points offered in the text: “Choices made during the process of reading (or interacting) are partially determined by features of the programming; they are not realizations of a unified subject’s autonomous and individual desires” (Noland 220). In this context, Hayles' argument that "[e]lectronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices" (Hayles, “Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl” 13) shows itself as somewhat dated as it is clearly based on a more experimental type of hypertext narrative.
The hypertext examples I will discuss below fall into two distinct categories: 1990s experiments and early twenty-first-century hypertext-based apps. As I will argue below, the latter present reader involvement as a simulacrum of choice that no longer registers as disruptive or revolutionary to the constantly clicking and swiping users of smartphones and tablets. If hypertext reading practices can be said to “transform human subjectivity”, with these apps they seem to be doing so in a rather negative way, by shaping it to the structure and functionality of the text. A common practice in this context is the simulation or withholding of choice, which forces the reader to follow the programming or give up on the reading process. Hayles' argument that “[w]hen we read these hypertext narratives […] we are the medium and the medium is us” (Hayles, “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext” 37) certainly rings true in this aspect: human subjectivity and reader autonomy are almost seamlessly integrated with the programming / technology as readers have become more and more used to interacting with both the link-based presentation of information and the frustration of hitting a dead end or losing a connection.

Beyond the kind of link-based hypertext I have discussed above, Gérard Genette’s model of transtextuality describes hypertextuality as one of five ways in which a text can interact with other texts. As Gerald Prince summarizes in the foreword to the English edition of Genette’s *Palimpsestes* (1982, English 1997), according to Genette “any text is a hypertext grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates and transforms” (Genette ix). In Genette’s terminology, a text “in the second degree” (Genette ix) may “speak” about a previous text, or be “unable to exist, as such, without” (Genette 5) the previous text. A hypertext is, thus, “any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation […] or through indirect transformation” (Genette 7), which he refers to as “imitation”. Hypertextuality in Genette's sense would, thus, also be a question of degree, as texts can be deliberately open to connections and interpretations – as I have argued for *Frankenstein* in my general introduction. While hypertextuality is, as Genette argues, “obviously to some degree a universal feature of literarity” (Genette 9), his definition also suggests a degree of reader interaction, as the reader needs to make the connection between hypertext and hypotext.

The type of multicursal hypertext described by Hayles presents a special case of reader involvement, which charges the reader with the production of meaning in that their decisions influence the unfolding of the narrative structure and that the reader has to return to the text to create meaning. Reading (and writing) could thus be read as a cyborg practice in Hayles' sense based on its use of (basic) technology as well as reader involvement in the creation of connections to other reading and writing processes, suggesting that it is only the relative unfamiliarity (in Keep's sense) of hypertext reading that marks it as a specifically technology-related posthuman practice.
As Mohammad Ali Najafipour and Farideh Pourgiv argue for contemporary computer based hypertext, the non-linear structure creates a sense of spatiotemporal unmooring for the reader, while loops and repetitions are experienced as particularly disruptive and disconcerting (see Najafipour and Pourgiv 119). Moreover, as Irina Averianova and Nataliya Polishko point out, hypertext demands new critical practices: "[t]here is no given text anymore for all the critics to analyze; there are only its possible variations, which means that critical analysis of fiction has to develop new techniques and approaches when dealing with hypertext." (Averianova and Polishko 35) Hypertext, thus, comprises a meta-textual component, as for the critic, returning to the text to "attempt realization of all possible versions", "each reading becomes a criticism of the pervious one and its interpretations; thus, hypercriticism, like hyperfiction, is characterized by metatextuality." (Averianova and Polishko 37)

While Averianova and Polishko's argument is focused on the critical process, their observations are also relevant to a broader argument about the kind of non-hierarchical and collective production and dissemination of knowledge that might be described as posthuman. To come back to Hayles' argument about cyborg reading practices: what is at stake is, thus, not the conversion of every reader of hypertext into a cyborg upon contact with the new medium, but rather a cultural evolution of interaction that involves new, technologically-involved processes of knowledge production, storage, dissemination and retrieval (including hypertextual structures like the internet, but also algorithms and machine learning), whose impact on cultural power structures we are only just beginning to research in the humanities. Hypertext narratives, in the most experimental sense of the term, aestheticize these challenges allowing the reader to experience their affective impact and experiment with their posthuman critical potential.

7.2 Hypertext as Posthuman Gothic Textuality

Posthuman integrations of the human body with technology (and the theoretical and ethical implications these entail) signal a shift in narrative patterns towards what Micheal Sean Bolton calls a "conflation of subjectivity and narrative" (Bolton 8). He traces this narrative pattern in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, an intricately constructed, paper-based hypertext, Gothic narrative, in which the threatening and monstrous seems to emanate from the materiality of the texts itself as well as the house at its center. Consisting of a number of interlaced narratives, which reflect the concept of the shifting, labyrinthine structure of the house on several textual levels in various type-scripts, wild layouts and collected documents, Danielewski's novel is "obsess[ed] with the materiality, the machinery, of the texts that
narratives inhabit" (Bolton 8) in a manner that is typical of experimental hypertext narratives but infused with an even more haptic component on paper.

The monster at the center seems to emanate from the text itself, demonstrating the metaleptic ability to traverse narrative levels and threaten the reader-narrators of the novel's frame narratives. One of the narrator/editors in the text, wonders, if it would not be better to "get rid of this thing [the text], which [...] should put an end to all my recent troubles" but at the same time if his "attacks are entirely unrelated" to the manuscript he is working on, "attributable in fact to something entirely else, perhaps for instance just warning shocks brought on by my own crumbling biology" (Danielewski 325). In the narrator's mind, "the body" (Danielewski 326) of the text and his own physical discomfort are situated on the same level of materiality, threatening his sanity:

As I recheck and rebolt the door – I've installed a number of extra locks – I feel with the turn of each latch a chill trying to crawl beneath the back of my skull.
Putting on the chain only intensifies the feeling, hairs bristling, trying to escape the host because the host is stupid enough to stick around, missing the most obvious fact of all that what I hoped to lock out I've only locked in here with me.
(Danielewski 326)

As Bolton argues, "[t]his shapeless ‘nonhuman creature’ is a manifestation of a monstrous other, an unrepresentable presence generated from the conflations and permutations of the various material texts of and in the novel." (Bolton 10) This unnamable threat can be read as a reflection of humanity’s fears of an Other that is no longer external but rather an internal challenge to the perceived integrity of the human body (see Bolton), the genetic structure and imagined biological givens of what humans perceive as human. House of Leaves, Bolton argues, marks a shift from the postmodern to the posthuman Gothic, which locates the threat to human integrity within or integrated with the human rather than perceiving it as emanating from an external other (see Bolton).

This shift from the postmodern to the posthuman is also visible in recent Gothic criticism and linked to the specific effects of hypertext and House of Leaves: In the 1996 edition of his introduction to the Gothic Fred Botting described the postmodern Gothic as "a new darkness of multiple labyrinthine narratives" which heralds what he described as "[t]he End of Gothic" (Botting, Gothic 177). This is juxtaposed in the second edition (2014) with a discussion of the destabilizing, innovative effects of Gothic hypertext in Danielewski's experimental text:
Disorientation: multiple interlinked networks of signs, images, bits, flows. Disruption: all spatial, temporal, physical and subjective coordinates diffuse, conflate, expand and enmesh. Where does it begin and end? How is it animated? What can it mean? In digital and virtual contexts, what are its frames, anchors, material supports? Who – or what – writes, reads, projects, imagines, perceives? Are the ghosts it generates actual, hallucinatory or medial? Are they effects of unconscious, textual or technical processes? (Botting, *Gothic* 197)

As Botting’s (as well as Bolton's) reading of *House of Leaves* suggests, textuality can no longer be framed as limited, stable or inanimate in any way. What’s more, it is no longer perceived as separate from materiality / corporeality, as the text itself can and has become “animated” through various processes and technologies and functions as an object of terror in these Gothic narratives. The postmodern Gothic’s creation of ‘narrative anxiety’ is, as Botting argues, "[u]nstable, unfixed and ungrounded in any reality, truth or identity other than those that narratives provide, there emerges a threat of sublime excess, of a new darkness of multiple and labyrinthine narratives." (Botting, *Gothic* 181)

Botting reads postmodern Gothic textuality as an expression of Baudrillard’s fourth order of simulacra, in which “the image […] has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.” (Baudrillard 6) For Baudrillard postmodern culture is firmly in the grip of the hyperreal, or “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (Baudrillard 1). This is the source of a cultural unease, which finds its expression in Gothic texts: a terror of the ‘sublime excess’ of narratives, which refer back to other narratives and labyrinths of images which only refer backwards as ‘semiotic ghosts’, images that do not stay in archives but […] pop up as dissensual autonomous phantoms in a real world already suffering from an over-saturation of images, signs and information and a general sense of spatial and temporal disorder” (Botting, *Gothic* 193). While posthuman Gothic narratives retain the instability of concepts troubled by postmodernism, they are marked by a reintroduction of materiality and corporeality as threats emanating from and interwoven with hyperreal media surfaces and shiny technological devices. Some of these uncanny intermingleings of image and object stem from non-European narrative traditions, as I have argued for the context of ghost narratives in part I. The central image of the ghostly Sadako climbing from the TV image with murderous intent in the Japanese medial horror film *Ringu* (1998) serves as an example of this shocking materiality and the metaleptic abilities of medial monsters in the posthuman Gothic, which also shifts the responsibility for creating and perpetuating the horror medium onto the protagonists. As Bolton argues, “the posthuman Gothic finds instances of terror and horror arising from the interfaces and integrations of humans and technologies;” (Bolton 2)

The development from the postmodern to the posthuman Gothic
indicates a shift in concern from external to internal threats to subjectivity and human agency. […] Whereas subgenres coupling the Gothic and the postmodern often derive horror and/or terror from fear of the eradication of humanity at the hands of monstrous technologies, the posthuman Gothic finds instances of terror and horror arising from the interfaces and integrations of humans and technologies; specifically, in the inevitability and exigency of these unions as a matter of the continued existence of the human subject reconstituted as posthuman. (Bolton 2)

While Bolton’s argument concerns “monstrous machinery” (Bolton 1), the shift towards internal threats works as an equally compelling argument for the many ways in which we can imagine the human body to be integrated with and impacted by bio-technologies. The posthuman Gothic instigates a blurring of the already permeable boundaries between the categories of person and object, the human and the “non/human” (see Griffney and Hird), which queers binaries and raises a number of ethical as well as representative and discursive questions. Rather than propose answers to these questions or a sense of closure for the reader, posthuman Gothic (hyper)texts like *House of Leaves* tend to meta-textually foreground these issues aesthetically as well as in terms of their narrative structure. As Botting argues, “[k]nowledge and understanding do not constitute the primary aim of gothic texts: what counts is the production of affects and emotions, often extreme and negative” (Botting, *Gothic* 6). While Botting’s argument seems to suggest a sense of transgression for the sake of thrill, posthuman Gothic narratives also trouble the reader’s understanding of what it means to be human, undermining traditional discursive constructions of the human and its others along with the often equally binary categories associated with this concept (male-female, organism-machine, life-death, etc.). In this sense, posthuman Gothic narratives can be read as (monstrous) narratives of resistance against such categorizations. Hypertext monster fictions in particular use labyrinthine structures and reader immersion in an attempt to undermine authority and recreate narrative production as a communal, posthuman process involving not only reader and writer but also a component of technological mediation specifically highlighted in this form of textuality. As I will argue below, however, it is only in their most meta-textually productive incarnations that hypertexts draw attention to the parallels between monstrous corporeality in the text and as text, producing a mutually influential and intertwined strategy of textual production that is specific to certain forms of hypertext narratives engaged with critical posthumanist and feminist narratives of resistance.
7.3 (Re-)Framing *Frankenstein* as Hypertext

Gothic texts in general, and tales of monstrous creation in particular, lend themselves specifically to the medium of hypertex. This may, in part, be due to the Gothic’s often already palimpsestic structure, which seems to invite rewritings and retellings, but also to its tendency towards excessive themes and disruptive structures. As Botting argues,

> [t]he rise of Gothic forms and their current cultural persistence functions as a curious knot in the formations of modernity, figures of excess, monstrosity and sublimity around which reason, progress and knowledge cohere or collapse (Botting, *The Limits of Horror* 154).

Drawing on mythological and medieval monster narratives in various cultures, monster texts in their current shape originate in the nineteenth-century Gothic, but their textual structure is pre-figured by the deliberately fragmented, meta-textual structure of the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century. The presentation of ostensibly ‘real’ documents and the plot device of the found manuscript, popular in eighteenth-century Gothic texts (see Tracey) are often used to establish an aura of narrative credibility or, as in the case of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), serve to distance the author from his narrative experiment. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* draws on this tradition, but the novel’s structure is even more complicated, using a Chinese-box system of interconnected frames and locating the found manuscript at the center of a framework of narratives rather than at its margin. The intricately constructed textual framework of the novel not only uses ostensibly ‘real’ documents (letters, a journal), it also turns the ‘found manuscript’ device on its head by letting the monster discover Victor Frankenstein’s “journal of the four months that preceded [its] creation” (Shelley 90), using it as documentation in the monster’s identity quest rather than in the justification of narrative credibility. This construction underlines the novel's proto-posthumanist critical project of blurring the boundaries between the human and the monstrous. The fact that the monster is cast in the role of the reader in the text foregrounds the creature’s personhood as it allows readers to identify, or at least sympathize, with the monster (see Britton 8) – a clear shift in perspective from the first chapters of the novel, which mainly focus on the narrative perspective of the creator, Victor Frankenstein. The odd positioning of the discovered manuscript in the hands of the monster, rather than a fictional editor, draws attention to the novel’s central themes of authority and creation which hinges on questions of autopoeisis, narrative voice and the narrative creation of identity central not only to the post-enlightenment period but also to Shelley's position as an early feminist writer. As I have argued in my general introduction, Shelley’s acknowledgement of her own creation, her “hideous progeny” (Shelley 169) is particularly important in this context, as the
1831 *Frankenstein*, published after Percy Shelley's death, revokes some of the editorial changes made by him to the 1818 edition – as a comparison of an 1831 edition with Mary Shelley's original 1816-17 draft shows (the 1816-17 draft is published in Charles E. Robinson's edition of *Frankenstein* [2009]). This editing process and the addition of a longer autobiographical introduction for the 1831 edition can be read as a reclaiming of authority but also draw attention to the meta-narrative and critical aspects of the original *Frankenstein*.

Later adaptations of *Frankenstein* and narratives about the production of the text itself draw on this meta-textual apparatus and its critical potential, as they are often concerned with similar issues of creation and the juxtaposition of humanity and monstrosity. Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*, for instance, picks up the question of textual production by involving the reader in the process of ‘stitching together’ the corpus of the text from a loosely connected network of textual fragments. Moreover, *Patchwork Girl* provides a number of hypertextual links in the sense of Genette’s definition, not only drawing on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1913), but also on a number of critical approaches to Mary Shelley’s novel. These hypotexts, in Genette’s terminology, include classic feminist readings like Gilbert and Gubar’s chapter on "Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (see Gilbert and Gubar) and Barbara Johnson’s "My Monster/Myself" (see Johnson), which make the construction and reconstruction of the monster text particularly interesting to academic readers familiar with *Frankenstein* criticism. The innovative potential of the text, thus, also relies on a level of meta-textual interpretation that has its roots in Shelley's original text. The monstrous *Patchwork Girl* shows an awareness of her literary heritage:

> My brother monster was like a botched resurrection, under a god for whom the unity of the body had lost its cohesive force, its moral necessity. [...] Looking for some new ideas, he tried to open up another space, one between life and death, pushing that pair to the margins, but ends up instead with this aching mixture. (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* “botched bro”)

This interpretation of the original monster reverberates with posthuman potential by pointing out the monster's unique position, straddling the boundary between life and death and thus drawing attention to the posthuman's necro-political aspects. As Braidotti argues, the necro-political turn of our cultural imaginary reflects political tendencies in the age of late neoliberal capitalism: practices of dying are also linked to biopower, as "the bodies of the empirical subjects who signify difference (woman/native/earth or natural others) have become disposable bodies of the global economy." (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 111) *Frankenstein*’s creature, who has frequently been read as a manifestation of alterity, can also be interpreted
as an early representative of a narrative of necro-political exploitation of the other and its corporeality. The monster's origin in bio-scientific exploration certainly bears uncanny similarities to the contemporary global trade in organs and the ways in which various globalized economies (from the military to the cheap production of consumer goods to various service industries) rely on a constant supply of disposable bodies and body parts.

The seemingly eclectic structure of hypertext reflects and reiterates the imagery of cutting up and reassembly involved in the creation of monstrous bodies, as Patchwork Girl demonstrates: the first lexia (text fragment) of the first narrative thread "graveyard" reads: "I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself" (S. Jackson, Patchwork Girl "graveyard"). The text includes its own meta-narrative commentary by offering the different creative processes of writing as well as sewing together 'resurrected' body parts to make a monster. At the same time, the local ("here") and personal ("I", "you") references create a sense of intimacy and disorientation, reflecting a high degree of reader involvement. There is no "here", as the "graveyard" the text speaks of only exists in the text itself, and the "you" simultaneously refers to the (implied) reader as well as the creator of the monster in the text. Akin to Shelley’s original Frankenstein, which provides both the monster’s and the scientist’s perspective, Patchwork Girl also allows the reader to try on different roles and identify with different characters but full identification is thwarted by the structural instability of both bodies and text: "I do not know what metaphor to stick to; I am a mixed metaphor myself, consistency is one thing you cannot really expect of me." (S. Jackson, Patchwork Girl “blood”) There is an abundance of discursive clashes and critical questioning, for instance when a meditation on the perfect body is triggered in the context of the religious concept of resurrection:

The human, more than human resurrected body is a body restored to wholeness and perfection, even to a perfection it never achieved in its original state. There is some disagreement as to what exactly this involves. What is the age of the resurrected body? Is perfection at twenty years old, at thirty, at forty? Plastic surgeons must ask themselves the same question. (S. Jackson, Patchwork Girl “resurrection”)

The hypertext novel’s meta-textual focus draws attention to these disruptive elements, as the claim of multiple authorship on the title page, which suggests that the text was written by “Mary/Shelley & Herself”, highlights the role of readers – both in and outside the text – in the creation of hypertext narrative. Frequently meta-narrative comments also draw attention to a meta-critical awareness of the functions and effects of writing hypertext:
Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but because of some myopic condition I am only familiar with from dreams, I can see only that part most immediately before me, and have no sense of how that part relates to the rest. When I open a book I know where I am, which is restful. My reading is spatial and even volumetric. I tell myself, I am a third of the way down through a rectangular solid, I am a quarter of the way down the page, I am here on the page, here on this line, here, here, here. But where am I now. I am in a here and a present moment that has no history and no expectations for the future (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* “this writing”).

While these observations underline the feeling of being lost in a textual maze, they also draw attention to contemporary reflections on electronic texts that have gained traction with the introduction of e-readers since the publication of Jackson's novel. As recent studies have shown, the feeling of being lost in an indefinable space is typical of on-screen reading and reading on e-readers, which lack both the haptic solidity and the spatial orientation on the page provided by the traditional codex book (see Grate). This is especially true for longer texts or those with a complicated structure like *Patchwork Girl*. Moreover, an e-reader does not seem to possess the same materiality status as the codex book, providing fewer possibilities of connecting or even identifying with the object itself (see Hunter). Jackson’s reflection of textual production also underlines the disruptive potential of hypertext, which destabilizes the position of the reader by destroying any sense of coherence and linearity along with the concepts of pages or chapters.

What may seem an idle postmodern experiment in textual disorientation to the casual observer carries a more important critical impact for the critical posthumanist, intersectional feminist questioning of traditionally hierarchical and hegemonically controlled systems of knowledge production. Jackson's experiment in combining narrative, meta-narrative and critical discourses at the same level of textuality, thus, not only draws attention to the possibilities of hypertext but also comments on the possibilities of challenging power hierarchies and creating critical feminist epistemologies – based on a blurring of narrative and criticism.

This focus on experimenting with different discourses and structures is very visible in early hypertextual experiments like *Patchwork Girl* – most prominently when they coincide with the critical potential of earlier feminist Gothic texts like *Frankenstein*. More recent, popular examples in the genre, however, seem to draw on the aesthetics but not the experimental structure of Jackson's early example of Gothic hypertext. While there seems to be a certain revival of hypertext fiction in the context of recent technological innovations, as
developers of apps and story-based games for various platforms are exploring hypertext as a mode of textual presentation, these do not necessarily aim to represent the same kind of experimental exploration as early examples from the 1990s – nor do they tend to be concerned with the same kind of critical posthumanist questioning. Frequently developed on a tight budget and an even tighter schedule (see Neagu) to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding market, these texts are predominantly targeted to blend in with the other apps on today's ubiquitous mobile media devices. “Gestural interfaces” (Saffer 6) which respond to touching and swiping, have replaced the more ponderous mouse-click navigation of earlier hypertexts, making reader interaction more intuitive – and, thus, potentially less structurally noticeable in Keep's sense quoted above. Augmented reading programs allow developers to explore new ways of presenting information that go beyond linear textuality (see Montuschi and Benso 64) and to simultaneously engage a wider market. In this climate, adaptations of Gothic texts for both popular and more highbrow audiences abound as Mary Shelley's hideous progeny has spawned a whole new generation of multimedia adaptations and re-imaginings. A simple search for *Frankenstein* in popular online media stores like iTunes or Google Play returns various apps and e-books with the name “Frankenstein” in the title. These include augmented texts, games, graphic novels and educational titles but also numerous e-book-versions of Shelley's novel and its adaptations. While this is, of course, only anecdotal evidence and individual apps differ immensely in terms of purpose, elaborateness and actual connections to the original *Frankenstein*, the sheer abundance of titles still suggests that Gothic texts in general, and Mary Shelley's novel in particular, seem to lend themselves to this kind of textual experiment. *Frankenstein's* basic plot of scientific hubris, monstrous creation and revenge is familiar even to audiences who have never read the book – to the point that “Franken-” has become a prefix describing various cultural phenomena from genetically modified crops to botched plastic surgery (e.g. the term “Frankenfood” coined by Paul Lewis in 1992). Moreover, as Andrew Burkett points out, this also seems to be true on the level of critical discussion: “Over the course of the last two decades, Romanticism scholarship addressing interactive hypertext environments has relied heavily on Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818, 1831) in an almost uncanny manner” (Burkett 579). Burkett also points out that researchers frequently “understood Shelley's novel itself in terms of the logic of hypertext”, reading it as “a deeply intertextual (or potentially 'hypertextual') novel” (Burkett 581). In view of the fact that Shelley's novel is still a linear narrative – and thus, by definition, not a hypertext in Hayles' sense, one can only assume that professional readers do indeed themselves bring these hypertextual connections (in Genette's sense) to the novel by reading it in specific cultural or critical contexts (see Botting, *Making Monstrous*).
In popular culture, countless filmic adaptations of the novel and its monster have further paved the way for a wider range of textual experiments. As Botting argues, the myth of Frankenstein's monstrous creation has expanded far beyond its original literary context to influence scientific and other contemporary cultural discourses:

*Frankenstein*, an inaugural and persistent myth of modern monstrosity, continues to inform and disturb popular fascinations and scientific research: its currency, its monstrous metaphorical resonance, when associated with genetics and technology, raise far-reaching questions concerning the imbrication of human norms, esthetic productions, scientific power and any vision of a future (Botting, “Metaphors and Monsters” 339).

The ubiquity of Frankensteinian references in techno-scientific and other cultural discourses may also be one of the reasons why *Frankenstein* lends itself particularly well to reader-centered hypertext adaptations, as the readers take over some of the responsibility over the monster – which has become a representation of various cultural functions – as well as in the creation of the monster text.

While the *Frankenstein* myth is very much alive, its hypertextual adaptations have lost some of the critical potential of earlier texts like *Patchwork Girl*. I would like to take a closer look at two more recent hypertext productions based on *Frankenstein* in the following, to highlight the differences to Jackson's earlier example: an illustrated electronic edition of Margaret Atwood’s early poem cycle *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* (1966, 2013), which is loosely based on the novel, and a visually elaborate, interactive adaptation of *Frankenstein* for the iPad and iPhone by Dave Morris, which recreates the general plot but very little of the original text of *Frankenstein*. These texts interact with the original novel and other textual sources on different levels, but, as I will argue below, they do so within a different critical context than *Patchwork Girl*.

Presented in the form of an e-book for various mobile devices, Atwood’s poems show her “Doctor Frankenstein” as a “performer in a tense arena” (Atwood, *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* i) who is interacting with an audience, as he imagines “the air filled with an ether of cheers” (Atwood, *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* i). The audience, however, is comprised of applauding “specimens ranged on the shelves” (Atwood, *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* iii), casting the reader in the role of the monster, both questioning and tormenting its creator. The scientist and his creature evoke the lab scene from various adaptations more than Mary Shelley's novel, creating a hypertextual network in Genette's sense. While the poems are presented in a linear manner, the paratextual framework and added media (texts, images and videos offering comments on textual creation and further
hypertextual links to the Frankenstein myth) offer some reader interaction and at least broadly place this e-book in the category of hypertext. The presentation of the numbered poems and the accompanying illustrations is actually more linear in its e-book format than it was on the printed but unbound quarto pages of the original book, but the e-book visually reproduces the poems on a background image of the original rough paper and accompanied by Charles Pachter’s illustrations, as well as a more recent foreword and interviews with the author and illustrator. There is a curious sense of material reproduction at work here, which becomes fully apparent in one of the video-clips in the appendix, in which Charles Pachter shows an original copy of the printed book and explains the genesis of the illustrations:

When you are illustrating poetry the big challenge is to take one or two details and amplify them rather than merely illustrate what she is saying. It’s a choice, and when you make the right choice, the poem gets amplified in a unique way that does not take away from the text itself but makes it even more attractive (Atwood, Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein appendix, video 4).

Pachter’s explanation of the laborious process of making the paper out of rags, some of Atwood’s discarded clothes and even some of his own hair, printing and folding the copies by hand, has a definite resonance of assembling a monster from various body parts, but what the reader holds in hand is, effectively, not this monstrous creation itself but a simulacrum of it, reproduced on a technological device associated with its own affective ties and potentially posthuman integration with the reader.

By including this detailed discussion of its original production the text, like Shelley’s Frankenstein, draws attention to issues of authority and creativity, not to mention sheer haptic materiality, but the digital reproduction can only hint at and not reproduce these connections. The collaborative process behind the production of the e-book remains hidden behind the sleek surface of the text, which undermines the critical potential of such a collaborative work in favor of highlighting Atwood’s authority as an established literary figure. The reader’s role is limited to observing the original creative process, which is staged as a dialogue between writer and illustrator. Emerging only in the bonus materials, Pachter, by choosing certain details from the poems to illustrate, constructs himself as a reader in the text, as his illustrations offer different entry points into, and ways of reading, the poems. One example of this is the full-page image accompanying the opening poem: “I, the performer in the tense arena, glittered under the fluorescent moon. Was bent masked by the table. […] My wrist extended a scalpel” (Atwood, Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein i). Pachter’s image picks up on the figure with the knife but shows the monster (clearly identified by a long, shaggy coat of hair) in this position, thus blurring the two characters introduced by the text.
This interpretation is well within the range of the poem, which does not specify whose hand is holding the scalpel, as well as the canon of Frankenstein criticism. Critics have frequently read Victor Frankenstein and the monster as dark doppelgangers or "each other's double" (Mellor 23) and interpreting Frankenstein's and the monster's roles as interchangeable from the start refers the reader back to the complicated relationship of the two characters in the original novel. Pachter's subversive image creates a more ambiguous reading of the poem's tale of monstrous creation, pointing at the instability of categorizations like "human" and "monster".

By choosing an ambiguous poetic form, Atwood's Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein adds a layer of readings and possible interpretations to her text. In the foreword, she comments on Shelley's creative work, inscribing her own adaptation into the same critical framework: "[o]ur literary and artistic monsters are ours, [...] they are what we make them" (Atwood, Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein "author's note"). Drawing on the ambiguous construction of monster and scientist as "aspects of each other, both things of darkness that must be acknowledged by the other" (Atwood, Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein "author's note") also allows Atwood to place her poems in the context of the original novel's interpretation as a tale of human monstrosity and monstrous creation (as well as a larger literary canon of monsters and their makers evoked by the reference to Shakespeare's The Tempest and the relationship between Prospero and Caliban). Moreover, this image of the monster as its own creator draws attention to questions of narrative authority and literary creation raised by Shelley in her 1831 introduction to Frankenstein and re-constructed by Jackson's Patchwork Girl and a number of other Frankenstein adaptations. James Grant, for example, comments that "a differentiation between creator and created is increasingly difficult to sustain" (Grant 116) in James Whale's Frankenstein (1931). Similarly, the 2011 National Theatre production of Frankenstein reiterates this impression of interchangeability by letting the two actors who played Frankenstein and the Creature (Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller) alternate the parts between performances, creating complementary versions of the play and highlighting the novel's original entangled questions about humanity and monstrosity.

Literary hypertext has the potential to aggravate this confusion by creating what Botting describes as the "disorientation" of "multiple interlinked networks of signs" (Botting, Gothic 197). This sense of confusion and disruption, already existent in more linear electronic forms of textuality, is particularly strong in hypertextual experiments like Patchwork Girl or House of Leaves – less so in hypertextual reproductions of an original multimedial experiment like Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein, which might still be dismissed as not multicursal and interactive enough to count as a hypertext in terms of Hayles' definition (see Hayles, "The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext" 22). In its early-twenty-first-
century revival *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* does not require cyborg reading practices beyond the now almost ubiquitous and therefore largely unremarkable ability to engage with contemporary handheld electronic devices. Maybe we have already become posthuman in the sense of one of the "posthuman view[s]" described by Hayles, that "there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism" (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 3). By incorporating interactive and hypertextual structures on smart devices into our daily lives to the extent that they have now become an important or even the predominant source of information and communication for a majority of people across the global north (see Newman), hypertext structures may simply not register as a marked form of textuality any longer.

I would like to illustrate this with another recent example of hypertext fiction: Dave Morris’ *Frankenstein*, developed on Inkle Studios’ game engine (Inkle), presents itself as an interactive literary hypertext adaptation of the *Frankenstein* myth, which allows the reader to make choices and follow different paths throughout the narrative. Like *Patchwork Girl* and most filmic adaptations of *Frankenstein* it draws on the storyline and characters of Shelley’s original tale without reproducing it. Accompanied by elaborate illustrations of the dark anatomic kind that create the look and feel of a ‘real’, elaborate book, the app seems to be designed with the intent to involve readers in the creation of the text by making them accomplices to Victor Frankenstein’s sinister work and fellow sufferers of the monster's plight. Reader involvement and choice is, however, curtailed by the structure of the text and the choices that are available often seem somewhat dull and repetitive. The reader is, for instance, forced into the role of an external observer of Victor Frankenstein's actions in the first part. The only options for interaction are simple questions like “[w]hat is your work?” (D. Morris 1:1). Another example is the circularity of choices: a paragraph which discusses Victor Frankenstein’s urge to confess what he has done to his father ends with two choices: “[c]onfess all.” and “[h]e will never understand.” If the reader chooses the “[c]onfess all.” option, the next screen contains a lengthy meditation on what might happen if Victor did, indeed, confess everything he had done. At the end of this passage there is only one more choice – which is [h]e will never understand.” For the reader, this repetition of the same outcome after only one page creates a sense of futility and circularity, which disrupts the flow of reading for no apparent reason. Compared to *Patchwork Girl*, which definitely creates disruptions both deliberately and with a specific meta-narrative purpose in mind, disruptions in Morris’ *Frankenstein* seem to have no conceivable textual purpose other than to maintain the illusion of giving the reader a choice. More importantly, Morris’ *Frankenstein* uses reader interaction to create what is essentially a linear narrative with a fixed outcome – another important difference from *Patchwork Girl*, which gives the reader free range over its entangled labyrinth of links. Morris’ *Frankenstein* consists of six parts, each of which is
divided into three chapters, forcing the reader to return to the table of contents to navigate to the next chapter. This means, each chapter must, necessarily arrive at the same ending, regardless of the reader's choices, to ensure a logical connection to the next chapter. The app, thus, may at first sight create the impression of a collection of narrative fragments, connected by reader decisions and the needle graphics connecting the text blocks certainly underline this impression. Reader autonomy is, however, substantially limited by a lack of choice as the text frequently offers only two or three very similar options or options with largely interchangeable outcomes. These are a necessary result of the rigid chapter structure of the whole text, which guarantees that, whatever choices are made within a chapter, the reader must necessarily arrive at the same point at the end of each chapter, as there is no possibility of jumping between chapters or choosing different chapters based on previous choices. While this may seem like a minor deviation from the model of hypertext established by early examples like *Patchwork Girl*, the linear structure nevertheless undermines the meta-narrative of monstrous textuality, of stitching together the limbs of the text, so carefully established by the app’s elaborate graphic background of vintage anatomical drawings. While *Patchwork Girl* recreates the Gothic horror of assembling an uncategorizable creature from body parts, both on the level of content and in its textual structure, casting the reader in the role of the monster’s creator, Morris’ *Frankenstein* limits Gothic effects to surface aesthetics. Multi-cursality is a simulation in the later text and freedom of choice has been subordinated to the logic of usability and, by extension, marketability. This degree of simulation (feigned reader interaction in this particular case) is a typical feature of postmodern Gothic texts, which may evoke but no longer fulfill the transgressive potential of the Gothic. Botting suggest that “[w]ith postmodernity, […] terror becomes endemic and transgression is both limitless and exhausted, ceaselessly used up in playful circulations of aesthetic games that interrogate less than nothing” (Botting, *The Limits of Horror* 157). Moreover, much of the critical potential of Shelley's original stems from its interrogation of the different creation processes – that of the monster as well as that of the narrative – a tangent of thought which is completely lost in Morris’ attempt to make the narrative more readable. This aesthetic choice on the part of the app designers has far-reaching consequences for the meaning and function of the hypertext, which, in comparison with more open, experimental examples like *Patchwork Girl*, constitutes not only a return to linear narrative but also a turn from the critical possibilities of the medium in general and the *Frankenstein* narrative in particular. The moment of innovation, of visible structure, achieved, as Keep argues, in *Patchwork Girl* is definitely not at work in Morris’ *Frankenstein*. Here, the labyrinthine structure of monstrous hypertext, which originally had the potential to hint at a deeper connection between monstrous body and monstrous textuality has been reduced to an empty, aesthetic surface gesture produced for a mass market and reiterating discursive
structures derived from and compatible with the mainstream. This is a step back from the posthuman Gothic's critical potential (still visible in *Patchwork Girl*) to a postmodern simulacrum of a Gothic text. Hypertext, this example suggests, is no longer necessarily a form of visible structure, a formal stumbling block to draw attention to important issues of the posthuman Gothic, but has blended with the technological background of contemporary technologies and devices to become a simulacral surface aesthetic. The technological monster of hypertext has, in Derrida’s terminology, been “domesticate[d]” (Derrida, “Passages - From Traumatism to Promise” 386).

To return to Hayles' argument about the critical functions of hypertext: in the examples she discusses (most prominently Diana Slattery's "Glide") computer-based hypertext is imagined "as a medium capable of transforming our sense of how language functions". As such, "hypertext initiates and demands cyborg reading practices that transform human subjectivity even as they are transformed by it" (Hayles, “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext” 37). What Hayles describes here, in accordance with Keep’s argument about Gothic (hyper)text as visible structure, is the critical potential of specific, experimental hypertexts, like Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, which actively construct parallels between monstrous bodies and monstrous textualities in order to inscribe themselves into a critical posthumanist, feminist tradition of challenging hegemonic epistemologies. Posthuman Gothic hypertext, in its most experimental sense undermines the boundaries between monstrous body and monstrous textuality. As Jackson's monstrous narrator points out,

> our infinitely various forms are composed from a limited number of similar elements, a kind of alphabet, and we have guidelines as to which arrangements are acceptable, are valid words, legible sentences, and which are typographical or grammatical errors: 'monsters.' We are inevitably annexed to other bodies: human bodies and bodies of knowledge. We are coupled to constructions of meaning; we are legible, partially; we are cooperative with meanings, but irreducible to any one. The form is not absolutely malleable to the intentions of the author; what may be thought is contingent on the means of expression. (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "bodies too")

For Hayles, as for Jackson, hypertext has the ability to draw attention to these parallels between bodies and texts, to become visible structure. This connection between body and text can, however, also be approached from the corporeal side, as the body is increasingly being read as a form of textuality in various discourses.
8 Posthuman Writing Practices

8.1 The Biomediated Body

Contemporary anxieties about the impact of technology on the human body are historically rooted in an understanding of the body as a fragmented narrative, which emerged from eighteenth-century anatomical perceptions of the organic body as automaton, a collection of exchangeable machine parts. As Stefani Engelstein argues,

> Once the body is formulated as an amalgam of organ systems, each of which plays a specific role in the body, then the body itself can no longer be seen as the smallest meaningful organic unit. At this point, the body ceases to belong to an individual whose rational control it serves and becomes an assemblage with a multitude of purposes or drives of its own that threaten to usurp the identity of the human. (2008: 2)

*Frankenstein* with its interlaced narrative structure and monstrous creation by assemblage functions as a prime example of this view of the body. The novel draws on contemporary anatomical discourse to describe the monster's body in gory detail and prefigures twentieth-century medical possibilities and narratives of anatomy. Moreover, once animated, the monstrous body's patchwork structure becomes a source of horror for its creator:

> His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips (Shelley 35).

The body Victor Frankenstein sees (the result of his own creation now detached from his control through animation) is not only fragmented (eyes, teeth, hair) but, more importantly, its machinery, the “work of muscles and arteries” beneath the skin is also visible and highlighted in this description, reflecting an early nineteenth-century model of the human body in motion as ‘working’ analogous to machinery.

Shelley's *Frankenstein*, thus, presents an early example of this understanding of the body as an assemblage of operative parts inscribed into various discursive practices, which Patricia Clough refers to as the ‘biomediated body’. Heralding changes not only to the
genetic composition of our bodies but also to the narratives we use to constitute them. The "biomediated body" posits a "challenge to autopoiesis of the body-as-organism" (Clough 208), along with the basic understanding of the human as a fixed category.

While the view of the human body as comparable to machinery can, thus, be traced back to eighteenth-century philosophy (most notably Descartes) and the role of "docile bodies" for various projects of industrialization and standardization in the nineteenth century (Foucault 135), this view has been further secularized and become more dominant in the modern life sciences, gaining further traction with the increased data collection and visualization power of modern computers. Around the turn of the millennium scientific efforts to fully describe the makeup of the human body contributed to this cultural understanding of what Braidotti calls "a text written by the unfolding of genetic encoding" (Braidotti, "Teratologies" 159). Between 1995 and 2000, the visible human project and the human genome project, which had both been collecting data since the mid 1980s, released some first results to the public. Both projects can, in Alison Muri's term, be read as part of an extended "metaphor of the human as text" (Muri 241). As Hilde Lindemann Nelson argues critical approaches to bioethics "either naturally take a narrative form or must be given a narrative structure if they are to have moral meaning" (H. L. Nelson ix). Moreover, as R. C. Lewontin argues, these narrative structures are determined by other cultural factors like scientific interests or research funding: "science is molded by society, because it is a human productive activity" (Lewontin 4) and "modern biology is characterized by a number of ideological prejudices that shape the form of its explanations and the way its researches are carried out" (Lewontin 41). Lewontin's main example – the problematic reliance on the human genome project as a singular explanatory system for "everything that is worth knowing about us" (Lewontin 51) – draws attention to the discursive construction and cultural dominance of certain scientific discourses in contemporary popular and scientific culture. His use of the term "story" for scientific attempts to describe genetic causes and effects draws attention to the narrative aspects of such projects, which need to make sense of, formulate and disseminate observations, construct models and present coherent narratives of progress to secure (further) funding. Within these discourses, human corporeality is constructed as decipherable text whose states and developments can be traced back to isolated causes. This also relies on the normalizing idea that all human bodies are not only the same and genetically unchangeable, but it also ignores the "social power of biological information" (Nelkin and Tancredi quoted in Lewontin 75). Lewontin, writing in 1992, attempted to draw attention to how the scientific projects focused on human DNA would further ingrain these views in science and popular culture – and his position was certainly justified in retrospect. His view that DNA is just one possible way and not the only, exhaustive way to describe the human did not catch on and it is now frequently left to the humanities to point out fault lines...
and problems in this specific mode of representation – especially with regard to omissions
and misrepresentations surrounding the representation of marginalized bodies in the
dominant bio-scientific discourse, as well as the question of how the category of the human
holds up under scrutiny. As Braidotti argues,

[i]n such a historical, bio-political and geo-political context, there is no question
that what, even and especially in feminism, we go on calling, quite nostalgically,
'our bodies ourselves' are abstract technological constructs fully immersed in
advanced psychopharmacological industry, bio-science and the new media. This
does not make them any less embodied, or less ourselves, it just complicates
considerably the task of representing to ourselves the experience of inhabiting
them. (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 160–61)

Braidotti’s approach consequently includes a feminist reassessment of corporeal narratives
within a posthumanist context that takes into account how technologies shape our
understanding of the body. As I have argued above, feminist discourses of (monstrous)
corporeality can be read as strategies of resistance where they explicitly or implicitly write
against patriarchal, techno-scientific omissions and suppressions of female narratives. The
monster, as an embodiment of the Other that arises out of and in identity-constructing
opposition to the self, raises important questions about and allows us to critically "reevaluate
our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference" (Cohen,
Monster Theory. Reading Culture 20). As I have argued with Braidotti above, contemporary
culture is "in the grip of a techno-teratological imaginary" (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 161) which
complicates how we read and understand bodies and frame narratives about them.

As Braidotti argues, there is an inherent moral component to how we use and interact
with technology and how it shapes our interactions with others, which has become more and
more visible throughout the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first):

If one considers the scale of the major issues confronting the contemporary
world, from the financial crises and their consequences for employment and
structural economic inequalities, to climate change and the ensuing
environmental crises, not to mention geo-political conflicts, terrorism and
humanitarian armed interventions, it is clear that the posthuman condition has
engendered its own inhumane(e) dimension. (Braidotti, The Posthuman 110)

This inhuman(e) dimension is directly connected to the exclusiveness of the human as a
category (see Braidotti, “Posthuman Knowledge”), which suggests that for contemporary
culture, these concepts must necessarily also be thought through from an angle which avoids or even overthrows "humanistic patterns of representation" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 165) to at least permit the possibility of less harmful epistemologies. From Braidotti's Deleuzean perspective this is, most prominently, a question of adequate representation, of "new figurations [which] are needed to help us to think through the maze of techno-teratological culture" (Braidotti, "Teratologies" 169). These figurations are, as Braidotti argued around the turn of the millennium, inextricably linked with stories about monstrous Others in their capacity as sense-producing, world-making narratives:

Myths, metaphors, or alternative figurations have merged feminist theory with fictions. It is precisely this mixture of the techno-scientific with the fictional or fantastic that also triggers the contemporary fascination with the monstrous, both among feminists and in mainstream culture. The monstrous refers to the potentially explosive social subjects for whom contemporary cultural and social theory has no adequate schemes of representation. It expresses a positive potential of the 'crisis' of the humanist subject. (Braidotti, "Teratologies" 171)

While more recently, Braidotti's arguments have re-framed these narratives as posthuman forms of knowledge production, her earlier teratological argument highlights important connections between monstrous narratives of embodiment as a critical category and the narrative roots and inclination towards narratives of resistance as an integral part of intersectional feminist and critical posthumanist thinking. These are further underlined by Braidotti's open acknowledgment of kinship with Haraway (see, for instance Haraway and Braidotti), for whom "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 291).

### 8.2 "A Cyborg Manifesto" and Posthuman Narrative

Donna Haraway's approach to critical thinking challenges the strict delimitations between theory, political activism and narrative, naming a number of feminist science-fiction writers (James Tiptree Jr., Octavia Butler, and others) as "theorists for cyborgs" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 310). First published in 1985, that is at the outset of the late twentieth-century high-tech boom, Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" creates an ironic counter-myth, which urges us to reconsider the human involvement with technology as a potentially liberating possibility for subaltern women employed as cheap but highly skilled labor in the high-tech producing industries in the global south. As Haraway argues, by becoming cyborg, "women in the integrated circuit" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 291) are enabled to
achieve a productive subject position that arises from "[c]yborg unities" between human, animal and machine which are both "monstrous and illegitimate" but at the same time "potent myths for resistance and recoupling" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 295). In this counter-narrative to the traditional association of women with nature as well as their exploitation as cheap labor by the tech sector Haraway suggests that "[t]he cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century." (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 291) The cyborg, "a hybrid of machine and organism" is "a creature in a post-gender world", which will end the "border war" between "organism and machine" over "territories of production, reproduction and imagination" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 291–92). As a metaphorical as well as an ontological figure, the cyborg is invested with what Haraway calls "the promises of monsters" (Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters" 295), a combination of fear and awe induced by the potential of posthuman becomings.

Writing is, as Haraway argues, "pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs", a mediation through text that allows women to "subvert [...] the force imagined to generate language and gender, and [...] the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 312). By reclaiming the authority of writing for the Other, Haraway inscribes her myth into a feminist tradition of writing-against (see my discussion of Cixous' "Laugh of Medusa" in part II) but she also draws on postmodernist theoretical approaches that challenge binary constructions of the human and of gender whose alignment with nature-culture or human-technology dichotomies threatens to reiterate traditional categorizations:

It is certainly true that postmodernist strategies, like my cyborg myth, subvert myriad organic wholes [...] In short, the certainty of what counts as nature – a source of insight and promise of innocence – is undermined, probably fatally. The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding 'Western' epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'meaningful political action' by the 'text'. Who cyborgs will be is a radical question. The answers are a matter of survival. (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 294)

Haraway's cyborg myth, thus, imagines a space for alternative developments not based in traditional epistemological patterns but in the radical questioning of what an open future might look like. Narrative – especially the type of feminist speculative fiction Haraway references in the "Cyborg Manifesto" – presents an opportunity to imagine such future
developments. Cyborg writing practices, thus, not only produce narratives of resistance against traditional framings of the (gendered) human, they also do so from the distinctly Other perspective of a monstrous human-machine hybrid that allows us to envision new ways of framing knowledge.

More recently, Haraway has further situated her intersecting narrative/critical approach as *Staying with the Trouble*, and creating new narratives to understand what it means to be human in the current geological period, for which she has suggested capitalocene and even Cthulhucene might be better terms than anthropocene. This is not an idle play on names. As Myra Hird points out, what she describes as the current "anthropocene aesthetic" has an impact on how we envision the possibility of change: "while writing on the Anthropocene purports to identify a new epoch that demands new ways of thinking about ourselves and the environment, an Anthropocene aesthetic fundamentally reinforces familiar ideologies and discourses" (Hird 255). Moreover, the focus on "capital" in the term "capitalocene" points towards capitalist structures and their impact on climate change as the most destructive factor in humanity's shaping of the planet.

Haraway's counter-approach, outlined in the term Cthulhucene, revolves around the idea of "sym-poiesis" (in the sense of 'making together'), which, for her, is always linked with the idea of coexistence with other species and with storytelling:

> For me performing sym-poiesis or performing storying is also about constantly looping back and interrupting. I work to tell stories sym-poietically out of those things I really care about. And those things almost always involve non-human critters. They almost always involve scenes where biologies are intimately part of worlding, where naturecultures can't be separated. (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhucene" 260)

On the surface, Haraway's approach to storytelling as a form of political activism presents itself as a metaphor of rethinking, or re-assessing the ways we narrate as well as the kinds of stories we tell to make sense of and shape the world. It can, however, also be read as a poetical re-assessment, a radical re-vision of our views of narrative structures to include what she calls "non-Euclidean ruffled tales, studded with tentacles for risky tangling" (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhucene” 268). While the reference to tentacles – to the chthonic deep-sea creatures older than mankind – provides the reference to the awe-inspiring Lovecraftian "old ones" and the renaming of the anthropocene as Cthulhuscene, her approach is unconnected to Lovecraft's brand of terror in the face of the ungraspable. Instead, Haraway draws on her work on companion species (see Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*) and suggests that a sense of kinship with the other species that inhabit
this planet might be a better way to counter humanity's destructive impact on our common habitat. Sym-poiesis, the concept of making stories together, relies on non-linearity and interactivity, as well as a resistance to closure that challenges hegemonic, hierarchical epistemologies. As Haraway argues,

[o]ngoing caring requires that we work with figures of re-mediation that are risky and also fun, that we work, play, live, die, that we are at risk with and as mortal critters, that we don’t give in to the techno-tragic story of self-made final death of the Anthropocene, but that we do inhabit the realities of excess mass death so as to learn to repair, and maybe even flourish without denial. (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhuocene” 268)

While Haraway’s play-oriented approach may sound somewhat weird and off-putting as a reaction to serious questions like climate change and the capitalist exploitation of the planet’s resources – especially in view of the fact that critical thinking has traditionally been considered the exact opposite of playful narrative – other critical posthumanist and feminist critics like Braidotti have expressed a similar need for new narratives and the fusion of narrative and theory in Haraway’s work might actually speak to an impact beyond the academy.

Wary of the concept of narrative, Claire Colebrook still argues for a necessary change in our understanding of climate change in Death of the Posthuman: “the experience of climate change reveals multiple and incongruent systems for which we do not have a point of view.” (Colebrook, Death of the PostHuman 11) To counter our flawed understanding of our own effects on the planet,

we need to embark on a notion of climate change that includes the radical alteration of knowledge and affect that accompanies the very possibility of climate. It is only possible to think of climate change in the meteorological sense – with humans now bound to volatile ecologies that they are at once harming and ignoring – if some adjustment is made to the ways in which we think about the relations among time, space and species. A necessarily expansive sense of climate change encompasses a mutation of cognitive, political, disciplinary, media and social climates. (Colebrook, Death of the PostHuman 10)

Instead, we still seem to be, as Braidotti puts it, "clinging to the hierarchical power relations determined by the dominant politics of the anthropomorphic subject" (Braidotti, The Posthuman 112) and denying humanity’s entanglement with the non-human. As Cohen
suggests, this denial of the non-human "believes a complicated reality, an intertwined environmentality. Inhuman forces and objects ultimately refuse domestication, refuse reduction into familiar tales as ancillaries and props" (Cohen, “Introduction: Ecostitial iv).

Haraway's insistence on kinship with "the tentacled ones" (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulucene” 257), thus, inscribes itself into a framework of critical posthumanist thought focused on permitting and producing non-human (and posthuman) counter-narratives to the destructive powers of the anthropocene (or capitalocene), the age of "fossil-fuel-burning humanity" (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulucene” 259).

As I have argued above, Haraway's position suggests a re-imagining of cultural criticism and political activism as narrative – a stance which carries strong implications for the critical potential of speculative fiction. In this sense, narrative approaches – nomadic and deterritorializing in the Deleuzean sense put forth by Braidotti – can accommodate a plurality of individual voices and ideas, empower marginalized and subaltern cultural groups as well as favor oral storytelling, often associated with non-Western cultures. An example of such a narrative exploration would be Ursula LeGuin's multifaceted, experimental novel *Always Coming Home* (1985), which not only combines several narrative threads but also other text fragments and forms to trace the various modes of expression of an imagined, post-apocalyptic indigenous culture. First published in 1985 – at the same time as Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" – LeGuin's multilayered text includes a meta-critical contemplation of knowledge production, access to knowledge and its misuses from a posthumanist perspective:

> Who controls the storage and retrieval? To what extent is the material there for anyone who wants and needs it, and to what extent is it "there" only for those who have the information that it is there, the education to obtain information, and the power to get that education? How many people in your society are literate? How many are computer-competent? How many of them have the competence to use libraries and electronic information storage systems? How much real information is available to ordinary, non-government, nonmilitary, nonspecialist, nonrich people? What does "classified" mean? What do shredders shred? What does money buy? In a State, even a democracy, where power is hierarchic, how can you prevent the storage of information from becoming yet another source of power to the powerful – another piston in the great machine? (LeGuin 315–16)

These questions draw attention to the connection between power and the access to knowledge, even in societies that do not ostensibly censor or limit access to it, and, one might add from a more recent perspective, how the access to and categorization of
knowledge is expressive of cultural power structures. A standard Western alphabetic arrangement of books in a library may, for example, make it harder to access them for people from marginalized groups used to arranging knowledge geographically (see Worth). The perspective from which these questions about the control of and access to knowledge are, ostensibly, raised in the novel is that of an “archivist”, a member of a post-human indigenous community, who is in charge of providing access to the community’s library of knowledge, but also of deciding what is kept in it and what is destroyed. As the archivist points out, “[a] book is an act; it takes place in time, not just in space. It is not information, but relation.” (LeGuin 316) It is not the knowledge itself that is at stake here, but the central question of its hegemonic control and potential instrumentalization: “[h]ow do you keep information yet keep it from being the property of the powerful?” (LeGuin 316)

There is, however, yet another meta-narrative dimension to the exchange, as the archivist points out that “this isn’t utopia […] This is a mere dream dreamed in a bad time, an Up Yours to the people who ride snowmobiles, make nuclear weapons, and run prison camps by a middle-aged housewife, a critique of civilisation possible only to the civilised” (LeGuin 316). LeGuin’s gesture of identifying herself as the authorial figure in the text and, at the same time, denying her qualifications to raise these important epistemological questions is reminiscent of Shelley’s brand of monstrous textuality as a stitched up body of various discourses and issues. This kind of theory-conscious narrative explores how a critical posthumanist perspective might be imagined – not by reading the posthuman from the outside, from an essentially humanist perspective, but rather by framing reading and writing as posthuman(ist) activities beyond the rigid focus of the anthropomorphic subject position. Such re-imaginings are necessary, because, as Braidotti argues,

[t]he relationship between the human and the technological other, as well as the affects involved in it, including desire, cruelty and pain, change radically with the contemporary technologies of advanced capitalism. [...] the technological construct now mingles with the flesh in unprecedented degrees of intrusiveness. (Braidotti, “Teratologies” 109)

While the idea of taking up a truly posthuman subject position and "reading as a posthuman" has been challenged by Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (Herbrechter and Callus 96), fictional texts from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to Atwood’s *Maddaddam* trilogy (2003-2013) have long been concerned with the possibility of the non- and post-human as a source of narratives of resistance to undermine and challenge the dominant anthropomorphic subject position. As Herbrecher and Callus argue:
for a “posthumanist reading” these moments in which humanism is threatened and the posthumanist other is unleashed need to be taken seriously (maybe even “literally”) and forced back onto the texts. In fact it is a kind of ethical demand that confronts texts with their own liberal humanist conservatism. The aim is not in any way to “overcome” the human but to challenge its fundamental humanism, including its theoretical and philosophical underpinnings and allies (e.g., anthropocentrism, speciesism, universalism). (Herbrechter and Callus 100)

By imagining posthumanist subject positions that retain a connection to the human the novels I will discuss in the following explore how texts can structurally accommodate and reflect these alternative positions and reflect how posthuman reading and writing practices might be imagined as alternative structures to a dominant humanist paradigm. I will read Haraway’s conceptualizations of sym-poiesis – of collective human and non-human narrative production – as a posthumanist poetics for the creation and exploration of new forms of narratives and attempt a reading of posthuman bodies in and as texts in light of Haraway’s approach to writing as a posthuman practice.
9 Posthuman Bodies in/as Narrative

9.1 Narratives of the Body at the Turn of the Millennium

The critical impact of Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" became more obvious around the turn of the millennium, as bioscientific discourses about the human body gained visibility in various media and posthumanist questions also began to emerge more frequently in contemporary popular culture. While my focus lies on literary examples, I would like to illustrate this cultural questioning of what it means to be human with a visual example first:

Patricia Piccinini: "The Young Family", 2002 (Courtesy of the artist, Tolarno Galleries, and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery) Silicone, fibreglass, leather, human hair, plywood 85cm high x 150cm long x 120cm wide approx.

"The Young Family", a sculpture, created in 2002 by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini, depicts what can be described as a posthuman family group, the mother and her children firmly dwelling on the boundary between, human and animal, ‘us’ and ‘them’, drawing attention to the artificiality and permeability of such boundaries in the age of genetic manipulation. The sculpture predates the human-pig chimera embryos created as part of the research into alternatives to organ donation by fifteen years (see Gallagher) but was created around the same time as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), a novel which also describes genetically modified pig hosts that grow donor organs from human tissue. As Piccinini explains on her website, "I imagine this creature to be bred for organ transplants."
...That is the purpose humanity has chosen for her. Yet she has children of her own that she nurtures and loves." (Piccinini) Although not fully human, the mother, as Piccinini envisions her, is clearly shown as possessing consciousness, watching anxiously over her children and, presumably, contemplating their fate. Her vulnerable, cowed position and downcast face create pity, while her human features present her as a potential reflector for the human audience's compassion.

With their intelligent eyes and human-like skin, the posthumans depicted in Piccinini's art take up a position at a lower point in the uncanny valley (see Mori), (associated with a high degree of uncanniness and usually reserved for life-like prostheses). The sculpture invites, or maybe even forces, a challenging of discursive categorizations, the biomediated narratives, which form the center of discussion for critical posthumanist theory. "The Young Family" invites viewers to change perspective and contemplate the possibility of becoming other while retaining some humanity. It triggers a direct visceral reaction, which, oscillates between compassion and revulsion or even horror, creating not only a fear of the other but also a fear of becoming other, confronting the viewer with their own conception of categories like 'self' and 'Other', 'human' and 'non-human' – here, "[t]he issue of the boundary of identities raises its monstrous head" (Braidotti, "Teratologies" 163). At the same time, their posthuman ambiguity, which resists a realization of either a full human or a clearly identifiable animal identity, evokes the Kristevan abject as a now unrealizable project of identity construction through rejecting the other.

Their liminal status sets the creatures apart from "humanity" – an ambiguous term in the context as it carries connotations of the humane as well as the human and raises questions about the creation, legal status and potential personhood of such beings. As Daryl J. Wenneman argues in *Posthuman Personhood*,

> [o]ne obvious consequence of a posthuman condition is that the term ‘human’ inevitably undergoes a change in meaning that can alter the way we categorize things in the world. Could a cyborg or a robot be a person, and therefore morally ‘human’? What standing, if any, should transhuman objects have? Traditional Western ethical reflection has depended upon a clear division between persons and objects. Persons are to be treated with respect and objects are to be used, and it is a moral flaw to confuse these two realms. (Wennemann 5)

Poised on the boundary between human and animal, person and object, the sculpture visualizes a concept of genetic hybridity which usually tends to remain hidden – in the body, in the lab, in the small print of product labels – allowing contemporary culture to hold on to the myth of humanity as a stable, permanent category and the human body's boundaries as
seemingly non-permeable for a little while longer. Pramod K. Nayar reads this form of corporeal narrative as a posthuman “species Gothic” (Nayar 116), which hinges on humanity's tendency to refuse “acceptance, recognition, and the forging of a relationship” (Nayar 117) between the human and the Other. According to Nayar, the horror of the posthuman Gothic lies less in its depiction of the monstrous other than in the human's “intolerance for this Other and [its] refusal to recognize the Other-which-is-us” (Nayar 117).

This visualization of posthuman liminality and its effect on our understanding of what it means to be human is also a central theme in Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy, which I will discuss in the following.

9.2. Posthuman Narrative in Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* Trilogy

Posthuman art and textuality visualize the cracks and breaches in the surfaces of a stable sense of human identity based on biology and embodiment, by establishing signs of strangeness that are uncomfortable to look at or evoke the abject by destabilizing the border between the self and the abjected Other. Recent posthuman fictions like Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam* trilogy, frequently establish a meta-narrative or meta-critical dialogue with these cultural issues in an attempt to come to terms with what it means to be human at a time at which the human can longer be upheld as a stable and clearly demarcated ontological category. By imagining a future after an extinction event has eradicated (most) human beings the three novels in the trilogy draw attention to the human perspective as Other to a genetically improved, posthuman species whose non-violent and sustainable way of life seems much less threatening to the planet. By shifting the narrative hierarchy from the human as the dominant species to the human as the external observer, the first volume in the series, *Oryx and Crake*, allows readers to take up a critical posthumanist perspective towards a posthuman alternative. The text draws attention to the arbitrariness of categories like ‘human’ and ‘non-human’. Being "human" is, as Braidotti argues, very much a question of definition, of epistemological categorization; a kind of reading "empathetic" with other species, which “urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming.” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 12)

*Oryx and Crake* achieves this through a complex network of narratives set on different time levels. While the novel's main timeline is set in a post-apocalyptic present, there are frequent flashbacks to a dystopian past (somewhere in the near future of our own timeline) and the novel's main focalizer, Snowman, draws parallels between his current situation and the past circumstances that led to it. Malnourished and living in a tree, Snowman contemplates his perceived isolation as the last human being – or the last representative of the historical category "man" – in a world now populated by genetically enhanced
posthumans:

He feels excluded, as if from a party to which he will never be invited. […] On some non-conscious level Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and not a pleasant one: he's what they may have been once. I'm your past, he might intone. I'm your ancestor, come from the land of the dead. Now I'm lost, I can't get back. I'm stranded here. I'm all alone. Let me in! (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 123)

The specific, often repetitive phrasing of Snowman's contemplations draws attention to the constructedness of his position. He is an outsider precisely because he perceives himself as "stranded", "alone" and an "ancestor, come from the land of the dead". His way of life, shown as not sustainable and predatory on the pre-apocalyptic narrative level of the text, is blatantly incompatible with the artless and, from Snowman's perspective, overly literal kinship of the posthuman Crakers, who he assumes "would bore the pants off him" (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 160).

Stuck in endless conversations with past voices in his head, Snowman imagines the responses of the Crakers to simple, but now obsolete human concepts like 'toast':

Toast is when you take a piece of bread – What is bread? Bread is when you take some flour – What is flour? We'll skip that part, it's too complicated. Bread is something you can eat, made from a ground-up plant and shaped like a stone. You cook it … Please, why do you cook it? Why don't you just eat the plant? Never mind that part – Pay attention. You cook it, and then you cut it into slices, and you put a slice into a toaster, which is a metal box that heats up with electricity – What's electricity? Don't worry about that. While the slice is in the toaster you get out the butter – butter is a yellow grease made from the mammary glands of – skip the butter. So the toaster turns the slice of bread black on both sides with smoke coming out, and then this "toaster" shoots the slice up into the air, and it falls onto the floor… […] Toast cannot be explained by any rational means. Toast is me. I am toast. (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 98)

The passage draws attention to the over-complicated structure of what we commonly refer to as civilization by juxtaposing it with the simpler view of a posthuman species whose main source of nourishment is grazing. Figurative language is a useless concept for the Crakers who seem to live in the here and now and struggle with remnants of the past like Snowman or the trash from before the apocalypse that is occasionally washed up on the beach near
their habitat: "They'd struggled with pictures, at first – flowers on beach-trash lotion bottles, fruits on fruit cans. Is it real? No, it's not real. What is this not real? Not real can tell us about real." (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 102) Told through Snowman's focalized perspective, the novel nevertheless raises the question of how a genetically modified posthuman species might view the world and the remnants of a human civilization.

This intricate construction draws attention to the question of perspective, or rather, how a posthuman perspective might be assumed from a human subject position. Assuming that we have, indeed, not (yet) become and may never become fully posthuman Herbrechter and Callus argue,

[It]o read in a posthuman way is to read against one’s self, against one’s own deep-seated self-understanding as a member or even representative of a certain 'species.' It is already to project an otherness to the human, to sympathise and empathise with a position that troubles and undoes identity while struggling to reassert what is familiar and defining. (Herbrechter and Callus 96)

Reading as a posthuman would, consequently, depend on how we read the posthuman. More specifically, that is, on processes of interpretation which depend on how we discursively construct and regard the concept of "humanity" – and of course who this "we" assumes to encompass. As Braidotti suggests, previous exclusion from the category of the human might make us disinclined to cling to its perseverance (see Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminism”). Even if, strictly speaking, reading as a posthuman may not be possible from a human subject position, posthuman narrative experiments – especially meta-critical texts like Atwood’s speculative fiction – present a possibility to contemplate critical posthumanist questions. In his introduction to Posthumanism, Herbrechter concludes that

there is no alternative for 'us' humans, in the face of both the uncertainty and the inevitability of our own 'end', except to attempt to 'reinscribe' our anthropomorphism – our narcissistic projection onto the representation of 'others' – within our posthumanity, thus hoping at least to leave a human 'trace'.

(Herbrechter, Posthumanism 76)

In Oryx and Crake this is precisely what Snowman seems to be intent on – to educate the Crakers to the point that they can cope with whatever traces of humanity they might encounter, but also to keep the traces of human culture alive in an endless memory loop of now useless information and obsolete words in his head. In the Maddaddam trilogy especially, visible, meta-narrative structures are closely linked with the issue of language
(both narrative language and the language used in the narrative) and the representation of
the posthuman species' different use of linguistic structures and thought patterns. It is,
however, perhaps in its focus on meta-narrative and the functions of language in mediating
and preserving knowledge beyond the existence of the human that the Maddaddam trilogy
most prominently contemplates language as a form of visible structure in the sense of the
posthuman Gothic discussed above.

Published over a decade and consequently reflecting a developing position towards the
posthuman from different perspectives, Oryx and Crake (2003), The Year of the Flood (2010)
and Maddaddam (2013) not only introduce two posthuman species, the novels' complicated
narrative structure also draws attention to the cultural contexts of these scientific creations.
The textual emphasis on discourses of transgression and liminality underlines Atwood's
dystopian criticism of both the loss of humanist values in contemporary culture and the
selling out of the humanities to an open-market capitalism that is fuelled by humanity's fear of
ageing and death. The protagonist Jimmy/Snowman's subject of study at the dilapidated
"Martha Graham Academy" illustrates the novel's focus on a dystopian decline:
"Problematics [...] for word people [...] Spin and Grin was its nickname among the students.
Like everything at Martha Graham it had utilitarian aims." (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 188)

Humanity, the novel seems to suggest, was in decline even before mad-scientist Crake
decided to wipe it out and replace it with a more sustainable post-human species. As
Christina Bieber Lake argues, Oryx and Crake offers a warning that, if we continue on the
same path, all it would take to replace humanity with a more sustainable posthuman species
is a highly functioning sociopath with the necessary scientific knowledge, like Jimmy's
childhood friend Crake (see Bieber Lake 111). But, while Crake is described as the trigger of
the apocalyptic event, the novel's dystopian criticism is actually directed at the pre-
apocalyptic culture as a whole – our culture in the wealthy countries of the global north – that
not only facilitates Crake's rise to power but demonstrates its loss of basic principles of
humanity in numerous ways. As Bieber Lake points out, "[f]or Atwood, reliance on technique
and process has been concomitant with a disintegration of language that can be seen in the
degradation of the arts." (Bieber Lake 111–12) The main factors of this development, the
novel argues, are medialized violence, which makes it impossible to distinguish between real
violence and its simulacra, and the aesthetic privileging of the young and beautiful, which, in
turn, boosts biotechnological industries to a point at which these corporations have become
the most powerful political agents in the world. Neologisms like the ubiquitous
"CorpSeCorps" police surveillance and the numerous health- and beauty-oriented company
compounds ("NooSkins", "BeauToxique") underline the grating dystopian strangeness of
these familiar developments (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 175).

Narrative perspective also plays a role here, as focalization seems to shift between
young Jimmy’s wide-eyed contemplation of his parents’ world and the much more critical retrospective voice of Snowman commenting on the dystopian decline of a society that has clearly abandoned its brains for a focus on bodily hedonism:

When did the body first set out on its own adventures? Snowman thinks; after having ditched its old travelling companions, the mind and the soul, for whom it had once been considered a mere corrupt vessel or else a puppet acting out their dramas for them, or else bad company, leading the other two astray. It must have got tired of the soul’s constant nagging and whining and the anxiety-driven intellectual web-spinning of the mind, distracting it whenever it was getting its teeth into something juicy or its fingers into something good. It had dumped the other two back there somewhere, leaving them stranded in some damp sanctuary or stuffy lecture hall while it made a beeline for the topless bars, and it had dumped culture along with them: music and painting and poetry and plays. Sublimation, all of it; nothing but sublimation, according to the body. Why not cut to the chase?

But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance. (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 85

While the passage is introduced as Snowman's thoughts at the beginning, the narrative voice seems to move altogether away from Snowman/Jimmy's perspective, offering instead a sense of cultural criticism directed at the reader's own culture of medialized sex and violence. Dystopian criticism is clearly directed towards the readers – presumably the generation of Jimmy's parents or grandparents – who might still be prevailed upon to stop these trends before they reach the level depicted in the novel.

*Oryx and Crake* juxtaposes text and image as opposed concepts, as the body's mindless escapades are closely linked to the consumption of a flood of images without context and rational framing. Atwood's dystopian criticism aligns itself with Colebrook's position in *Death of the Posthuman*. As Colebrook argues, the oversaturation of contemporary culture with images can be interpreted as an element of humanity's decline. We are "seduced by a culture of stimulus" (Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman* 12) that forms a central factor of the anthropocene's self-destructive tendencies:

It is as though our excessive gluttoning on images—from the seduction by media labels and visual stimulus to the voyeurism of disaster porn—evidences the brain’s fragility to be nothing more than itself, a mere screen rather than a properly self-organizing whole. The thousands of years of evolved complexity can
fall away through overconsumption. [...] the darting eye that stimulated the brain into becoming a reading and interpreting animal, may also be at the forefront of the human species’ cognitive atrophy. (Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman* 20–21)

Atwood’s narrative argument hinges on this sense of decline of a (human) culture, which is unable to assess and interpret a flood of images that is essentially of its own technological creation. Atwood’s narrative in the *Maddaddam* trilogy focuses on the dehumanizing effects at the center of late humanist/capitalist culture rather than an external threat to humanism and the human. The way forward out of the destructive patterns of the capitaloscene (see Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulhucene”), imagined by both Atwood and Haraway, seems to be a focus on narratives that go beyond the human to include the wider systems of kinship and coexistence humans are and have been involved in.

As Bieber Lake argues, “[t]he insistence that the ethical self is constituted in narrative and in community is what makes *Oryx and Crake* more than a sci-fi recapitulation of fears of biotechnology gone amuck.” (Bieber Lake 130) Bieber Lake is not the only critic to see a connection between the novel’s dystopian criticism and its meta-narrative comments on language and storytelling. J. Robert Lennon calls the *Maddaddam* trilogy “a manifesto about the power of language” (Lennon) and Gina Wisker comments on “the novel’s focus on preservation of the species and preservation of language” (Wisker, *Margaret Atwood - An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* 147). Similarly, Hannes Bergthaller argues, “[b]oth *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) are principally concerned with the question of what role language, literature and, more generally, the human propensity for symbol-making can play in our attempts to deal with the ecological crisis.” (Bergthaller 729) Indeed, the novel establishes this critical position early on, in the pre-apocalyptic world’s favoring of “numbers” people, like Jimmy’s parents and Crake, over “word” people, like Jimmy, whose cultural purpose is limited to advertising the products created by the numbers people. One of the most striking examples of this cultural decline of the arts and humanities is the change of motto of the arts-oriented Martha Graham Academy: “Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills, ran the motto underneath the original Latin motto, which was *Ars Longa Vita Brevis.*” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 188) Jimmy’s limited career prospects in advertising manage to call even this revised motto into question. This decline of the arts and humanities is contrasted with a focus on rapid development in much better funded STEM institutions which bid for the most promising high school graduates (see Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 174). Crake’s posthuman species is only one of the spectacular and often ethically questionable or even highly dangerous inventions put forth by researchers, who, as the novel argues, completely lack the ethical standards commonly put forth by the humanities.
Reading humans as a bunch of faulty “hormone robots” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 166) whose violent tendencies are intricately connected to their sexuality, Crake’s solution to humanity’s tendencies of overpopulation and destruction of the planet is presented as that of a typical numbers person: he decides to change human biology. While Crake sees art merely as “an amplifier. A stab at getting laid.” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 168), comparable to “the male frog, in mating season” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 168), the juxtaposition of pre- and post-apocalyptic scenarios suggests that it is the elimination of art and the humanities in the pre-apocalyptic culture that led to its decline into violence in the first place. The novel does, however, not propose Crake’s plans to curb humanity’s destructive behaviors as the only one, or even a viable solution. While Crake suggests that Jimmy should “[w]atch out for art” in the Crakers and that “[s]ymbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 361), the text also introduces the possibility that Crake might have been wrong: the Crakers, who used to struggle with images, do, in fact, create a scare-crow-like image of Snowman to call him back, which they cheerfully, and seemingly without further ramifications, dismantle when it has fulfilled its purpose.

The third novel in the trilogy, *Maddaddam* takes this argument about the return of the human imagination even further, when Toby, one of the main focalizers of *The Year of the Flood* and *Maddaddam*, teaches the young Craker Blackbeard how to read and write. Blackbeard even takes over her role as narrator and chronicler of the new species’ developments, introducing the possibility of a posthuman narrative. The novel’s penultimate chapter is a meta-narrative commentary on the preservation and continuation of writing among the Crakers, suggesting that the written word will continue to be used to pass on the Craker’s cosmogony as well as the stories of the people who contributed to it. Compared to Snowman’s earlier assessment of the Crakers as unimaginative, Toby’s perspective seems to make an argument not only for storytelling but also for its crucial role in a humanities-based education. Whether gender distribution is deliberate here or not, Toby’s more survival-oriented feminist position is certainly juxtaposed with Snowman’s yearning for an easier, patriarchal past. It is Toby’s careful explanation of the concept of writing and her willingness to pass on her knowledge that ultimately leads to Blackbeard’s writing “I am Blackbeard and this is my voice that I am writing down” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 376) in her diary.

While one could read Blackbeard’s acquisition (and later appropriation) of storytelling as an instance of posthuman narrative, this reading also raises a number of questions concerning the possibility of what A.J. Rice terms “Posthumanist Style”. Rice argues, in accordance with Herbrechter’s argument about reading from a posthuman perspective quoted above, that posthuman language and style would on the one hand "push language to its own limit" (Rice 156) but on the other hand, it would also, of necessity, have to move beyond the grasp of human language and understanding. Reading the posthuman as post-
rational or post-intentional, Rice posits "posthumanist writing" as "a series of random inscriptive events [...] an irreconcilable accident that connects a rhetor's choices and the nomadic moments of style's specific, iterable capacity" (Rice 157). Rice, thus, reads posthuman communications with the human as a paradox, suggesting that "[i]f effective communication endures, it is only because writing has not properly accomplished its task" (Rice 157) of becoming posthuman. In the context of the novel's world this would suggest that the Crakers are, in fact, not a fully posthuman species (in the sense of Rice's and Herbrechter's arguments) and that what the text explores here is a thought experiment about the possibility of humanity evolving beyond our dystopian, self-destructive tendencies.

In their attempt to envision such a posthuman subject position the novels reintroduce a humanist point of view marked most prominently by insisting that human knowledge is not only worthy to be passed on but that the passing on of human knowledge presents a spark of utopian hope in an otherwise dismal, post-apocalyptic scenario. The reintroduction of written narrative for the Crakers aligns itself with the novel's focus on language and narrative as humanity's saving qualities. The essence of the Crakers' narrative is, after all, not their (superior) genetic code but a narrative of their own experiences in the world and the knowledge passed on to them by their human predecessors: "I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here – Blackbeard – the way Toby first showed me when I was a child." (Atwood, Maddaddam 390) For Blackbeard, writing is a mimetic gesture, imitating what he has learned from Toby, not an expression of his own views. Moreover, the text's insistence that the Crakers' narrative must be preserved in writing (rather than orally or, even more posthumanly but well within the novels argument, in the Crakers' unearthly singing voices) privileges a traditional Western, humanist system of historiography and knowledge production. I would like to argue that this assessment of human knowledge and human methods of knowledge transfer must be read in conjunction with the novels' dystopian criticism of the pre-apocalyptic society – our society – serving as a reminder that we should not give up on the humanities in the pursuit of dazzling biotechnological possibilities. It is in this sense that the text can be read as a comment on another meta-level, that of the development of the Posthumanities.

Optimistic posthumanist critics like Rosi Braidotti suggest that these are already being established at various humanities departments around the world (see Braidotti, "Posthuman Knowledge"), researching everything from transhumanist possibilities to critical posthumanist ethics. As Herbrechter argues, the Posthumanities will have to take an interdisciplinary approach which “depends on significant transgressions of boundaries by which new and usually hybrid forms of knowledge are produced” (Herbrechter, Posthumansim 174). In this, “the necessary reminder of the linguistic condition, the analysis of fictionality with all discourses, including scientific ones” (Herbrechter, Posthumansim 176) is a central factor of
interdisciplinary work in the Posthumanities. The *Maddaddam* trilogy inserts itself into this discussion by drawing attention to the crucial role of narrative, art and the humanities in the preservation and passing on of knowledge. By shifting the task of narrative from the human to the posthuman characters, the text achieves a foregrounding of the process of narrative itself that draws attention to its basic epistemological function. As Blackbeard writes, "[i]f you look at this writing I have made, you can hear me (I am Black Bord [sic] talking to you, inside your head. That is what writing is" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 376), the narrative focus is shifted from the content to the visible structure of the text, the bare bones and awkward, posthuman body of someone new to the concept of narrative. By setting them in the context of posthuman language acquisition and learning how to write, the text foregrounds the mechanics of the familiar processes of storytelling, reading and writing, making them appear as visual posthuman Gothic structure in Keep's sense.

Blackbeard's discovery of the power of written language is reminiscent of the framed narrative of *Frankenstein*'s creature, thus echoing the assessment of one of the human survivors, who describes the genetically hybrid Crakers as “Frankenpeople” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 19), liminal creatures who are neither fully human nor fully something else. The narrative focus on these monstrous posthumans leads to an unraveling of the understanding of writing itself as it is described as a process by Blackbeard:

> this is the Book that Toby made when she lived among us. See, I am showing you. She made these words on a page, and a page is made of paper. She made the words with writing, that she marked down with a stick called a pen, with black fluid called ink, and she made the pages join together at one side, and that is called a book. See, I am showing you. This is the Book, these are the Pages, here is the Writing. (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 385)

Blackbeard's self-conscious way of narrating, not only visualizes the process of recording knowledge in writing, his narrative also draws attention to one of the main functions of storytelling – the archival preservation and passing-on of cultural knowledge. His audience is as posthuman as he is and unfamiliar with the concepts he explains. Repetition and a defamiliarization of familiar processes and objects not only visualize the structure of this passage, but also draw attention to the textuality of the text as a whole and its metanarrative, critical implications. As Noreen Griffney and Myra Hird argue in their introduction to *Queering the non/human*, queering is a fluid and multifaceted term, useful as a critical theory to “challenge and break apart conventional categories” (Griffney and Hird 5). In the context of the “non/human” or posthuman it serves as a reminder that the human perspective is not the
only possible perspective while, at the same time, drawing attention to the issues and processes that lead to the formation of subject positions.

In the Maddaddam trilogy, the introduction of Toby's narrative (in the second novel, *The Year of the Flood*) already hints at a shift of focus beyond the human by adopting the structure of the militantly ecological God's Gardeners' feast days (from *The Year of the Flood*) celebrating various non-human animal species and recording changes in the environment and ecological strategies. Moreover, Maddaddam also proposes the necessity for a posthuman re-appropriation of language – albeit in a humorous way drawing on the Crakers' difficulties with abstract concepts and swearwords like "fuck" (a term repeatedly used by Snowman). When the Crakers inquire about the meaning, rather than explain the concept of swearing, Toby decides to integrate "Fuck" into their cosmogony as a kind of good spirit:

>'This Fuck is helping him?' says one of the women.
>'Yes,' says Toby. 'When something goes wrong Snowman-the-Jimmy calls on him for help.' Which is true in a way.
>'Fuck is in the sky!' says Blackbeard triumphantly.
>'We would like to hear the story of Fuck,' says Abraham Lincoln politely. 'And of how he has helped Snowman-the-Jimmy.' (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 147)

Beyond its Atwoodian surface humor, this re-appropriation of language also effectively strips the term of its previous cultural connotations of sexuality and violence – central concepts to the pre-apocalyptic world – and draws attention to a process that could be read as a posthumanization of language and narrative.

As the novel's main focalizer Toby not only records but also has a major influence on these processes. Her role as narrator and educator is also reflected on a meta-narrative level, as she describes narration as, "[t]here's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too." (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 56) Her comment suggests a more pluralistic, community-oriented approach to storytelling and possible subject positions. Toby's approach is contrasted with Snowman's who, convinced that he is the only human being left on earth, cannot imagine a human addressee for his thoughts (see Atwood, *Maddaddam* 10). For Snowman, language is, consequently, becoming slippery, losing meaning as he clings to lists of obsolete words: "Rag ends of language are floating in his head: mephitic, metronome, mastitis, metatarsal, maudlin." (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 148) His loss of language reflects the loss of the pre-apocalyptic culture as words have lost their referents in the real world, but it also expresses a specific "word person" affliction of no
longer being able to communicate meaning through a wide range of terminology, that suggests that to Snowman – as well as for the novel in general – language is more than a means of communication.

Rooted in the idea of his own humanity and unable to adapt to his new circumstances, Snowman casts himself in the role of the “Abominable Snowman”, the monstrous/abject Other to a whole new species of posthumans. He frequently comments on his physical inferiority to the perfectly and sustainably designed Crakers, who, he thinks, must see him as “so unlike them” (Atwood, Maddaddam 7), a reminder of his position as an obsolete anachronism.

While Toby's counter-narrative of kinship with the Crakers draws attention to the humanist exclusiveness of Snowman's position, the issue of discursively constructed otherness is also negotiated via the second posthuman species in the trilogy – the pigoons. The genetically modified pigs bred for the single purpose of producing human organs, reflect contemporary bio-scientific endeavors in a manner similar to Piccinini's work discussed above. While similarly hybrid as the Crakers, the pigoons are depicted as much less glamorous than the more human-shaped species. Their biomediated bodies are human-bred for a single purpose:

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host […] A rapid-maturity gene was spliced in so the pigoon kidneys and livers and hearts would be ready sooner, and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. […] The pigoon organs could be customized, using cells from individual human donors, and the organs were frozen until needed. It was much cheaper than getting yourself cloned for spare parts. (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 22–23)

The text draws attention to the presence of human tissue in the pigoons' bodies, which are essentially designed for consumption. The glossy advertisements claiming that "none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages" are contrasted with the scarcity of meat in the wake of climate change and the frequency of "back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies […] on the staff café menu" (Atwood, Oryx and Crake 23–24). This juxtaposition of different (both culturally sanctioned and taboo) forms of consumption draws attention to the pigoons' liminal status and their human-like intelligence as a side effect rather than a planned part of their genetic make-up. The introduction of the pigoons resembles Piccinini's 'Young Family', by focusing not on the inherent “human-ness” of the pigoons but on the way their hybridity challenges these boundaries. The first description of the pigoons is, once again, focalized through Jimmy's eyes:
When Jimmy went in to visit the pigoons he had to put on a biosuit that was too big for him, and wear a face mask, and wash his hands first, with disinfectant soap. He specially liked the small pigoons, twelve to a sow and lined up in a row, guzzling milk. Pigoonlets. They were cute. But the adults were slightly frightening, with their runny noses and tiny, white-lashed pink eyes. They glanced up at him as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 26).

The repetition of “saw” draws attention to the role of the gaze in the construction of Jimmy’s identity – which, as the text suggests, manifests itself alongside and in conjunction with the pigoons. On the one hand, Jimmy sees the pigoons “as creatures much like himself” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 23), mostly powerless and unable to influence his environment, on the other hand his position as a human being, if generalized, is the defining feature justifying and at the same time threatening the existence of organ donor pigs. The mixing of human and animal organs in the bodies of the pigoons draws attention to the role of the abject in this process of identity construction: designed to grow and regrow human organs at an accelerated pace but outside the bodies of the organ’s recipients the pigoons are a constant reminder of the boundaries between inside and outside, the body and the abject, drawing attention to the fragile concept of human identity which can no longer establish itself via an abject that has been displaced from the human body.

In terms of visual perception and narrative the categories (human and animal) remain the same throughout much of the text, however. Although smarter than the human-shaped posthumans in many ways, the Pigoons still register as animal to the human gaze, rather than posthuman or even human. Even the formerly vegetarian God’s Gardeners resort to killing and eating pigoons after the food-supplies have run out. Only Toby begins to have some qualms after an encounter with a seemingly intelligent pigoon (see Atwood, *Maddaddam* 263). While the awareness of possibly eating human tissue (religious debates on transubstantiation aside) registers as a vague uneasiness, this is at first dismissed by the protagonists in a no-questions-asked manner typical of human omnivores in contemporary society: “It was a pig, for chrissakes!” (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 263) However, after communicative channels are established between the humans and the pigoons with the help of the Crakers (see Atwood, *Maddaddam* 268), it becomes clear that the categorization of the pigoons as animals, which was solely based on their pig-like outer appearance can no longer be maintained and the relations between humans and human-hybrids need to be re-assessed. In this, the third novel in the trilogy not only moves beyond the range of argument of the first one, it also seems to suggest a different, more consolatory argument that
envisioned kinship between human and non-human species as a possible way forward – a solution not available to Snowman's more apocalyptic mindset in *Oryx and Crake*. Where the first novel seems to suggest that the extinction of humanity might be a necessary prerequisite for saving the planet, the third one seems to introduce a gentler approach based on talking it out. As Blackbeard translates for the pigoons, "'they ask that you must no longer make holes in them, with blood, and cook them in a smelly bone soup, or hang them in the smoke, or fry them and then eat them. Not any more.'" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 270)

The ability for inter-species communication not only suggests a strong similarity or genetic bond between the two posthuman species, which was neither foreseen nor planned by the people who designed their genetic makeup, it is also introduced as completely outside the humans' range of experience:

They kneel so they're at the level of the pigoons: head facing head. The Crakers stop singing. There's silence. Then the Crakers start singing again.

'What's happening?' says Toby.

'They're talking, Oh Toby,' says Blackbeard (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 269).

The pigoons are established by Blackbeard as "Children of Oryx and Children of Crake, both" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 268), which, in terms of Craker cosmogony, makes them human-animal hybrids. While they still look like animals, they are shown throughout the trilogy to possess an intelligence usually associated with human beings – like the ability to communicate, coordinate and plan strategically, as well as compassion and a certain social awareness that manifests itself most clearly in the planning of assaults on their enemies and a complex set of rules and rites concerning funerals which also involve symbolic acts like putting flowers on the carcasses of their deceased (see Atwood, *Maddaddam* 267–68). None of these are easy to understand for the humans who attempt to frame these acts within their own experiences. When the pigoons give the humans a piglet that has been killed by another group of humans, Toby wonders about their "'[c]urious funeral rites [...] You strew the beloved with flowers, you mourn, and then you eat the corpse. No-holds-barred recycling. Even Adam and the Gardeners never went that far.'" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 271)

While the humans struggle to make sense of the pigoons, the pigoons' strategizing against the "bad men" – the former "pain ballers" out on a killing spree – suggests a certain kinship with the humans that excludes the more peaceful Crakers who only serve as translators between the two more violent species. As Blackbeard translates, "'[t]hey want you to help them with the sticks you have. They know how you kill, by making holes. And then blood comes out. They want you to make such holes in the three bad men. With blood.' He looks a little ill: he isn't finding this easy." (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 270)
The pigoons and the Crakers approach the issue of hybrid posthumans and the increasingly unstable concept of otherness from two different directions based on their appearance and their ability to use human language. As the Crakers are human-shaped and use human language it is easier to read them as at least partly human and, thus, at least potentially entitled to human rights. The pigoons, however, do not possess this advantage and are consequently read as animals by the humans in *Oryx and Crake*. *Maddaddam*'s more inclusive narrative perspective, which gives more room to the posthuman view and often challenges the strictly biomediated perspective of the earlier novel, establishes a connection between the two posthuman species via their ability to communicate through both telepathy and the Craker's unearthly singing, thus drawing attention to the fact that human language is not the only way to communicate, as well as to the difficulties of communicating with other species. As Toby, the narrative focalizer of this passage realizes "Of course. We're too stupid, we don't understand their languages. So there has to be a translator." (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 270) From this perspective, the text seems to suggest, posthuman narrative might already exist. Maybe we're just too stupid to understand it.

Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy, like Piccinini's "Young Family", explores a scenario of posthuman hybridization that raises important ethical questions and destabilizes our understanding of the human as the dominant species on the planet. The novels' focus on language and narrative as basic determinants of humanity aligns itself with the feminist and critical posthumanist positions I have discussed above – most prominently Haraway's concept of sym-poiesis, of making together, which can almost be read as programmatic for the consolatory ending to Atwood's trilogy. The novels' suggestion for a possible solution of humanity's violent and destructive tendencies, however, takes a different route than Haraway's admonition to "make kin, not babies!" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 103) It is precisely the making of babies – of human/posthuman hybrid babies that the final pages of *Maddaddam* seem to suggest as "a thing of hope" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 390). While Blackbeard, who has taken over the narrative after Toby's assumed death, indicates that he is "very happy to have been chosen for that mating" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 390), the (human) women's consent is not depicted as an actual priority throughout the novel. When Toby contemplates Amanda's possible pregnancy earlier on, she seems to distinguish between what amounts to only gradually different kinds of non-consensual sex:

Poor Amanda. Who could expect her to give birth to a murderer's child? To the child of her rapists, her torturers? Though there's another possibility, as far as the father goes. Toby recalls the flowers, the singing, the enthusiastic tangle of Craker limbs in the light from the campfire on that chaotic Saint Julian's evening. What if Amanda is harbouring a baby Craker? (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 215)
Amanda is decidedly not a female Craker and, thus, lacks the physical makeup to sustain a Craker-style mating "marathon" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 165). The Crakers' mating rituals are explored in a lengthy contemplation from Snowman's perspective in *Oryx and Crake*. Genetically designed to only occur "once every three years per female", the mating is triggered by hormonal processes signaling the female's "condition" to her male suitors through "the bright blue color of her buttocks and abdomen" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 164). As Snowman observes, in the style of a nature documentary, courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males presenting flowers to the females – just as male penguins present round stones, said Crake, or as the male silverfish presents a sperm packet. At the same time they indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 165)

While the description itself is tinged with comic undertones, Snowman's contemplation of Crake's reasons for genetically implementing this strange process is much more serious: "No more No means yes, [...] No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape." (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 165) These contemplations are put in the context of Snowman's memory of earlier conversations with Crake about "imperfectly monogamous" humans (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 166) and the fact that "[t]heir sexuality was not a constant torment" to the Crakers (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 305) as well as Crake's plan to alter "the ancient primate brain" and edit out "its destructive features, the features responsible for the worlds current illnesses" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 305). All three novels construct a direct narrative link between sex and violence, backing Crake's simple biology-centered explanations with the other characters' personal experiences. Read in the light of this argumentative connection, the non-consensual conception of the human-Craker hybrid babies seems less like an expression of kinship than both Toby's and Blackbeard's positive tone at the end of the novel suggests.

If the novels can be read as a meta-critical counter-narrative, it is one that pitches a general humanities-based favoring of language, narrative and critical thinking against a seemingly overwhelming onslaught of capitalism-fuelled, ethics-defying STEM
experimentation in the service of human greed that is threatening to destroy the planet. While the ecological thought processes of the God's Gardeners are the main focus of the middle novel, *The Year of the Flood*, all three texts seem to suggest that sustainability is humanity's most pressing problem. As Bergthaller has argued, in the *Maddaddam* trilogy the posthuman species draw attention to the larger context of humanity and sustainability, which challenges humanism's romantic notions of going back to nature in order to secure sustainability (see Bergthaller). The trilogy takes an interesting stance in this debate by introducing the Crakers as simultaneously the most sustainable and the most unnatural species – if one reads "natural" as not the product of genetic manipulation. Combining the near-eradication of mankind with the Craker's survival and sustainability, the original open ending of *Oryx and Crake* as a stand-alone novel seemed to come much closer to Haraway's idea of kinship instead of reproduction, which is backed by her observation that she is a "composist, not a posthumanist, we are all compost" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 101) and should, presumably, bend our efforts towards decaying with as little impact on the planet as possible.
Conclusion

The texts I have discussed in this part draw attention to posthumanist challenges to the humanist paradigm by meta-narratively foregrounding reading and writing as posthuman strategies. This self-reflexivity is a necessary feature of "writing the anthropocene", as Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall argue. Artistic and theoretical framings of the ongoing anthropocene (or capitalocene) must acknowledge what is properly at stake in the self-naming by a species of an epoch of geologic time, often in a language unavailable to other forms of scientific discourse. The task for scholars of the humanities, then, is a crucial one, given the reflexive access to species self-definition that any humanist scholar holds as a burden and privilege. (Boes and Marshall 60)

As Boes and Marshall point out, our impact on the planet can be read as a form of writing, "of inscribing a message for posterity" (Boes and Marshall 62) – even if that message is rarely a good one, nowadays. They suggest that both this "ecodiegesis" (Boes and Marshall 64) and the question of mediation – as well as the question of the earth itself as a medium in and of the anthropocene – must be taken into account in the analysis of anthropocene writing (Boes and Marshall 65). In this sense the type of medium, its production and ability to record, store and reproduce the changes of the anthropocene plays a role in the interpretation of media in and of the anthropocene.

To take this argument at face value for posthuman narratives emerging from and impacting our understanding of the anthropocene suggests a necessary self-reflexive questioning of the role of media in the media under discussion, or, to connect this back to my original argument, if posthuman Gothic/monstrous textuality expresses itself as visible, meta-narrative structure in which the text often comments on questions of narrative authority and textual production, what does it say about its medium?

I have analyzed several examples of meta-narrative textuality above and analyzed its connection to the monstrous/posthuman narrative elements in the text. To frame this self-reflexivity within the context of anthropocene writing suggested by Boes and Marshall meta-narrative questioning would, consequently have to be supplemented by an exploration of the wider impact of the production and consumption of the medium and the role of the reader in these processes.

One of the ways in which Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy addresses these questions is by drawing attention to the way in which humanity's current lifestyle relies on a planetary network of resources – and it does so by showing what might happen if access to these resources were suddenly and deliberately removed: "'All it takes,' said Crake, 'is the
elimination of one generation. One generation of anything. Beetles, trees, microbes, scientists, speakers of French, whatever. Break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it's game over forever." (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 223) The phrasing of Crake's argument not only highlights the deliberateness of his plan of mass extinction, it also suggests an understanding of this event as a game move — a deliberate action which is designed to trigger other events and actions in the future — highlighting the scenario's function as a thought experiment. *The Year of the Flood*, by contrast, highlights the God's Gardeners chaotic, piecemeal efforts to save the planet through urban recycling and ecological mindfulness. *Maddaddam*, the final volume in the trilogy, comments on both efforts by bringing the leftover members of the God's Gardeners and of Crake's scientific team together in their efforts of community rebuilding after the apocalypse. Their comments on the things they scavenge for or can no longer get — coffee, indoor plumbing, female hygiene products — draw attention to the impossibility of accessing such products without industrial processes and global supply chains. Most importantly in the context of anthropocene writing, they also highlight how the use of specific media may shape the way we tell stories. Parts of the novel's narrative consists of Toby's oral storytelling targeted towards the Crakers, in which she progresses from explaining concepts like "Thank you" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 84) and "Good night" (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 165) to telling them a simplified version of Zeb's life story. While this is done to frequently humorous effect, the simplified narrative voice also highlights the difficulties of preserving and passing on language-based abstract knowledge without a common frame of reference:

Thank you for binging me this fish.

*Thank you* means… *Thank you* means you did something good for me. Or something you thought was good. And that good thing was giving me a fish. So that made me happy, but that part that really made me happy was that you wanted me to be happy. That's what *Thank you* means.

No, you don't need to give me another fish. I am happy enough now. (Atwood, *Maddaddam* 84)

Toby's attempts at explaining the world to the Crakers foregrounds the pitfalls of creating oral narratives for a literal-minded group of listeners (the parallel to children is clear here) and having to stick to one's previous explanations and concepts. Like *Frankenstein*'s self-taught creature, the Crakers take every piece of information at face value, asking numerous questions, requiring Toby to justify concepts and ideas usually taken for granted in human communication. Toby's interactions with the Crakers and especially with the inquisitive Blackbeard might lead to a questioning of some of the underlying concepts of human
communication and culture through a process of decontextualization and emphasis through repetition, but the privileging of Toby's, generally benevolent perspective also effectively veils the fact that the human survivors' treatment of the Crakers mirrors processes of colonization through language teaching and the privileging of the colonizers' cultural heritage and epistemology. The Crakers are, of course, genetically modified posthumans whose whole cosmogony is based on what they have been told by Oryx, Snowman and Toby – not a centuries-old indigenous cultural tradition – but it could be argued that their creation is already based on a colonialist understanding of ownership of the bodies of Others and their subjugation to a scientific thirst for knowledge. The gesture of teaching (and the artificial hierarchy it is based on) also mirrors a colonialist stance, that is only substantiated by the kind of knowledge that is being passed on (from writing to the Gardeners' blatantly obsolete system of feast days marking the passing of time). As I have argued in part I (in the context of slave names) naming plays an important role in establishing a hierarchical relationship and it is telling that Crake amused himself by naming the Crakers after important figures from human history – Madame Curie, Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth, Empress Josephine (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 157) – making a joke out of the clash of borrowed identities and the Crakers' carefully designed ignorance of human history.

While *Maddaddam* fails to draw this argumentative connection, the colonialist context is evoked as one of the discourses of obsolete knowledge from Snowman's fragmented memory in *Oryx and Crake*:

"It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity," he says out loud. He has the feeling he's quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another. [...] Rubber plantations, coffee plantations, jute plantations. (What was jute?) They would have been told to wear solar topis, dress for dinner, refrain from raping the natives. It wouldn't have said raping. Refrain from fraternizing with the female inhabitants. Or, put some other way… [sic]. (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 4–5)

The gesture of pastness, of obsolete discourse is treacherous even in this instance early in the novel, as Snowman sees his role as that of a protector of the Crakers, establishing a hierarchy of knowledge and power that is later taken up by Toby in *Maddaddam*. Snowman's position is shown as morally justified as he is trying to protect the 'innocent' Crakers from potential dangers (see Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 366), with the added bonus of not attempting any 'fraternizing', but this dichotomy masks a simplified understanding of colonialist violence as rape and murder (see Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 366) that glosses over the continued
systemic violence and oppression upheld by hegemonic colonial epistemologies. When Maddaddam, thus, shows the processes of teaching through oral communication and historiographical record-keeping through writing, the novel does so based on a historical background of colonization through the privileging of certain types of knowledge and ways of conveying it that the text ultimately fails to address.

As an ecologically-minded post-apocalyptic narrative the trilogy directs its focus towards posthuman sustainability, which is contrasted with human wastefulness. The text explicitly comments on how Toby acquires the means of writing again when Zeb finds some paper and pens on a scavenging expedition, highlighting how outdated they were in the electronics-obsessed pre-apocalyptic world: "'Got you some paper too. Couple of school notebooks, drugstore still carried them, I guess for pleeb kids who couldn't afford the Wi-Fi tabs. Couple of rollerball pens, pencils. Felt markers. [...] Figured you'd want to be keeping track of the days.'" (Atwood, Maddaddam 159) This proves difficult to do in a scenario of post-apocalyptic timelessness: As Toby contemplates, her guesses "may not be accurate, time wise – she's probably out by a day or two – but it will have to do because how can she check? There's no central authority any more for days of the month." (Atwood, Maddaddam 202) Toby is, in this instance, the person to start the process of reckoning time again, and she does so by referencing the Gardener's ecologically oriented feast days, the moon phases and weather – linking her writing with an earlier humanist tradition of keeping time (and structuring knowledge as temporal/historical). As I have argued above, the novel's critical posthumanist meta-narrative comments on writing are focused on Blackbeard's acquisition of writing as a means of narrative expression. But the text also comments on the medium of writing itself, as Toby answers Blackbeard's questions about the processes involved:

This is paper, it is made from trees. Does it hurt the tree? No, because the tree is dead by the time the paper is made – a tiny lie, but no matter. And this is a pen. It has a black liquid in it, it is called ink, but you do not need to have a pen to do writing. Just as well, she thinks: those rollerballs will run out soon. (Atwood, Maddaddam 202)

The contrast of Toby's words and thoughts, highlighted by the use of italics for speech, draw attention to the ways in which the underlying processes of media production are often hidden or edited in terms of their global ecological ramifications. Paper production from wood may not be as significant a factor in deforestation as the growing need for agricultural spaces, but it is certainly not "tiny" or of "no matter". Moreover, Blackbeard's potentially more eco-centric voice is blatantly omitted from Toby's narrative as his questions only appear as parts of her answers. The novel's posthuman meta-narrative, thus, also draws attention to the ecological
impact of its own medium in a manner that could be read as self-reflexive anthropocene
writing in Boes and Marshall's sense.

By contrast to the paper-based codex book, computer-based hypertext presents itself
as the much more recent and more technologically imbricated medium. As I have shown
above, Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* comments on the destabilizing potential of reading and
writing hypertext, which creates a feeling of disorientation, of being lost in "an electronic
space" which creates a sense "as if the entire text is within reach, but [...] I can see only that
part most immediately before me, and have no sense of how that part relates to the rest." (S.
Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "this writing") While the materiality of a printed book anchors the
reader in space (both on the page and in terms of location in the book), with electronic text "I
am in a here and a present moment that has no history and no expectations for the future"
(S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "this writing"). Reading unfamiliar electronic text, thus, has the
potential to trigger a process of reflection that goes beyond the meaning and function of the
text itself. For Jackson, this is an inherent quality of all matter: "[m]atter thinks. Language
thinks. When we have business with language, we are possessed by its dreams and
demons, we grow intimate with monsters." (S. Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* "it thinks")

As I have also shown with the more recent example of Morris' *Frankenstein* above, this
self-reflexivity is no longer prevalent in familiar electronic media oriented towards easy
usability. Moreover, it could be argued that the chaotic interconnected quality of early
hypertext networks with multiple in-text links and possibilities to go off on unexpected
tangents has, for most contemporary users of smart handheld devices and social media,
been replaced with a ubiquitous mono-directional scrolling motion through media snippets
vetted and arranged by algorithms. The almost organic familiarity of the swiping motion
seems to create a form of linearity that is largely based on users' comfort and has become
an important part of usability design (see Babich) and this does not even take into account in
what ways the "computational infrastructure is transforming the very task of knowledge
production" (Parisi and Hlavajova 89).

Beyond its potential self-reflexivity, hypertext – at least computer based hypertext –
raises questions about the sustainability of electronic text, which is both ephemeral and
durable, depending on its medium of storage and, as opposed to the traditional codex book,
uses substantial amounts of energy in its consumption as well as its production. It is,
however, not the text itself but the media necessary for its production, storage and retrieval
that have a significant destructive impact on the planet and the species inhabiting it. The
production, recycling and (lack of) decomposition of computers and smart devices is
implicated in toxic mining methods, exploitative production circumstances and the creation of
toxic waste – all taking place out of sight of the consumers of these devices. As Jennifer
Gabrys points out,
it is not just through the making but also through the breaking of electronics that particular worlds come into being. Electronic waste is the fastest growing waste stream, since given the rapid obsolescence of electronics the number of discarded technologies proliferates in equal measure to the new devices introduced. (Gabrys 108)

To draw attention to these processes may be in the interest of critical, experimental hypertexts like *Patchwork Girl* but is, as I have argued above, becoming increasingly less desirable once hypertext is integrated into the commercialization processes of different electronic platforms. Where electronic media address their own problematic production and consumption processes, they usually have a hard time accessing or remaining on popular distribution platforms. The fate of the satirical game *Phone Story*, that let users explore the deadly hazards of the iPhone's production chain, and its swift removal from Apple's iTunes store served as a warning to game developers not to cross the invisible line of criticism the electronics giant has set up for interactive apps on its platform (see Dredge).

There is something distinctly Gothic about the ways in which these connections often remain out of sight under a thin veneer of high-tech consumer marketing. The production and consumption processes associated with contemporary electronic devices are based on a colonialist apocalypse logic that pits an unsustainable lifestyle mostly centered in the rich global north against the necro-political exploitation of whole populations under dismal working and living conditions in the global south in a late-capitalist attempt to squeeze the last resources out of the planet. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Young describe this as "external colonialism", arguing that "[i]n external colonialism, all things Native become recast as 'natural resources' - bodies and earth for war, bodies and earth for chattel." (Tuck and Yang 4)

As Jeffrey Mantz argues, the production and consumption processes connected with electronic devices have led to a double process of zombification in which the exploitative capitalist system relies on the consumers of this technology in the global north to actively remain ignorant of the necro-political exploitation of populations in their production and recycling processes in the global south (see Mantz 186–87). The zombie is not an arbitrary metaphor borrowed from the horror canon but acknowledges its roots in critical posthumanist, feminist thinking. As Mantz argues with Lauro and Embry (see Lauro and Embry),

[i]f the cyborg is a hybrid of the divide between subject and object, the zombie basically disrupts this distinction in its entirety by simultaneously rejecting both subject and
object. Zombii thus represents the ultimate expression of human fears about our own decay and the accompanying decay of our own consciousness. (Mantz 186)

What is at stake in the production and consumption of electronic media is, thus, nothing less than the question of how, that is in what way and with what impact on ourselves and our environment, we are becoming posthuman.

As Heather Davis argues, acknowledging the problematic connotations of the term, "the Anthropocene […] is an aesthetic event" which, "marks a period of defamiliarization and derangement of sense perception", creating a "sense of rapid reorientation to the world" (Davis 63–64) One of the ways to interact and come to terms with these changes is art. As Davis points out, "[t]he arts are part of the emergence of narratives about the ways in which we live in the world, narratives that can be damaging or visionary, which can connect or dislocate us from the earth." (Davis 65) As I have argued above, critical posthumanist writing has the ability to draw attention to such processes and, especially in its literary form as meta-narrative speculative fiction drawing on the negative aesthetic of the Gothic, can think through and project forward the dangers of and our involvement in contemporary developments. This kind of narrative of resistance and criticism still needs to be, as Braidotti argues, grounded and accountable to a localizable tradition of critical thinking and becoming with other species and the rest of the planet (see Braidotti, “Posthuman Knowledge”). Critical posthumanism as “a cartographical tool that allows us to illuminate aspects of the present” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminism”) can and must acknowledge these localities and specificities, so as not to erase them.
Conclusion

"The time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational principles."

(Tsing vii)

My arguments in the three parts above has been based on a reading of *Frankenstein* as a model of monstrous textuality that is supported by Shelley's use of self-reflexive and meta-narrative strategies and a network of intertextual connections to various texts and discourses. These are built into the structure of the multi-layered text and its paratexts, suggesting a reading of *Frankenstein* as an example of non-authoritative textuality that undermines and avoids fixed meanings and stable interpretations. These structural particularities, read within the added framework of Shelley's 1831 introduction, position the text as one of the key sources of a tradition of narratives of resistance that explore strategies of writing against omissions and exclusions by drawing attention to how marginalized writers have traditionally been excluded and by exploring alternative ways of presenting narrative as knowledge and vice versa. While this writing against does not necessarily have to be gendered (as, for instance, Cixous suggests with the concept of *écriture feminine*) it predominantly occurs in gendered, racialized, ableist and other contexts of oppression, suggesting that it can and should be read within the framework of theoretical and critical discourses concerned with mapping these forms of oppression (like feminist theory, disability studies, postcolonial and indigenous studies, fat studies and critical posthumanist studies focused on challenging the exclusions of the humanist paradigm etc.) and based on a discussion of the reemergence of discourses of corporeality within these narratives and theoretical frameworks.

Toni Morrison's, Margaret Atwood's, Angela Carter's and Shelley Jackson's texts discussed above inscribe themselves into the tradition of narratives of resistance modeled by *Frankenstein*, but from a twenty-first century, critical posthumanist perspective they can also be read as explorations of strategies of resistance against the authoritative positioning of dominant humanist epistemologies and their tendencies to exclude other Others. As I have shown above, textual strategies of resistance include the privileging of minority discourses, multi-perspectivity and the meta-narrative questioning and challenging of discursive production processes and narrative authority. Atwood's Crakers and the shift in perspective to the genetically modified posthuman figure Blackbeard at the end of *Maddaddam*, which I discussed in part III, serves as an example for such a reading. Hypertext narratives like Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, also addressed in part III, add the further dimension of exploring non-hierarchical, networked perspectives on a structural level. *Frankenstein* foreshadows these critical discussions not only by presenting a proto-posthuman man-made creature
whose liminality draws attention to the problematic binary structures that separate the human from various non-human others, but also in its textual structure. The novel's unreliable, contradictory narrative perspectives draw attention to the problem of narrative authority and the ways in which traditional humanist forms of knowledge production and discourse often frame the (non-human) as unreliable. Following a model set by the eloquent account of the creature in *Frankenstein*, Morrison's, Atwood's, Carter's and Jackson's texts foreground perspectives rooted in Otherness or draw attention to the possibilities of such narratives as alternative forms of knowledge production.

Monstrous narratives that interact with critical and theoretical frameworks – the ones I have focused on above specifically – draw attention to oppressive systems of representation and present strategies of resistance against being framed as Other, but they often also highlight necessary supplementations to theoretical and critical positions that do not account for other Others. From a posthumanist critical point of view that blurs the boundaries between narrative and theory there is no critical distinction between the representation of these issues in narrative or meta-critical texts (see Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”) and my reading above has highlighted such blurrings in both fictional and critical texts. One of the examples I discussed in part I is the necessity to supplement Derrida's concept of hauntology for an African American context to counterbalance the representational exclusion of African Americans in general, and women specifically, in a US cultural context built on the capitalist exploitation of Black bodies. By highlighting ghostly absences and monstrous embodiments Morrison's work draws attention to this necessary supplementation and presents alternative figurations of historical narrative. Omissions and exclusions become even more pronounced – and continue to do so in contemporary culture – where intersectional forms of oppression (see Crenshaw) come into play. Morrison's work on Black female perspectives draws attention to the exclusion of women not only from white but also from patriarchal African American structures and *Love* in particular uses a monstrous narrative structure to draw attention to these processes of exclusion. In Morrison's work, the non-corporeal (ghosts, re-memory) appears as embodied or tied to a specific location, highlighting the traumatic experiences of the former slaves and the impact of the oppressive system on their bodies. These hauntological figures emerge as a return of repressed corporeality, challenging the artificial boundary between mind and body along with a number of related binaries. To highlight these figures not only brings them into a (necessary) historical focus but also draws attention to the strategies underlying their omission from mainstream cultural discourses.

Part II, similarly, revolves on a return of the corporeal in the shape of monstrous narratives of resistance against being framed as Other – in the examples discussed above, a non-normatively embodied female Other. The textual focus in part II – Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and Carter's *Nights at the Circus* – foregrounds body size and taking up space as a
structuring principle of resistance against the categorization and objectification of women through the (frequently culturally internalized) male gaze. This is achieved through a narrative connection to the context of the freak show and the circus that also suggests a framing of these texts within fat studies, disability studies and feminist theory – Cixous’ “Laugh of Medusa” in particular, which proposes that women could and should reclaim narrative to make a space for themselves in an otherwise patriarchal society. The narrative texts inscribe themselves into this theoretical context at a specific historical moment that is marked by the shift from second-wave feminist criticism and activism for the cultural liberation of women to the more complex questioning of various binaries by third-wave feminist criticism. As I have argued above, *Lady Oracle* and *Nights at the Circus* draw attention to the ensuing troubling of binaries by presenting a monstrous ambiguity that is reflected on the narrative level through strategies like multi-perspectivity and the highlighting of various textual forms and narrative structures. The foregrounding of representations of female bodies beyond cultural norms frames these texts as narratives of resistance against cultural categorizations and misreadings. While the two novels are rooted in a specific cultural moment and can be read within its critical framework, the current cultural focus on narrow standards of feminine beauty draws attention to the continued necessity of such narratives – especially were they intersect with a focus on the medial and technological possibilities of enhancing or preserving youth and beauty. The feminist reading I have presented in part II is related to my argument in part III, as feminist criticism moves towards the posthumanist questioning of the exclusive enlightenment category of "Man" and its hegemonic tendencies (see Braidotti, “Posthuman Feminism”).

Part III revolves around reading and writing as posthuman strategies that draw on a number of meta-narrative effects to create a sense of making strange that invites reflection and questioning. While the texts may not fully achieve posthuman perspectives – if that is even possible – they foreground some of the issues that a posthuman form of narrative would have to contend with and draw attention to the ways in which posthuman writing and reading would have to occur outside of a humanist paradigm of representation. As Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus argue,

> a posthumanist reading spells out the anxieties and represseds that inform the text’s desire. It aims to show that another and less defensive way of thinking about the human in its posthuman forms and disguises, and in its implication within the posthumanising process, may be not only possible but pre-inscribed within texts. (Herbrechter and Callus 97)
It is in this sense that posthuman reading and writing strategies foreground a self-reflexive
form of anthropocene writing that has the potential to decentralize the humanist subject and
focus on how human activity inscribes itself in a profoundly horrific way on the planet as a
medium. This medialization of matter becomes visible through self-reflexive and meta-medial
Gothic structures. As Botting argues,

the [Gothic] genre offers more than exciting subject matter: its associations provide a
means of reflecting on the technical and subjective effects of new media, its spectres
and monsters, and undead provide figures for the processes and effects of
apparatuses, encoding emotional responses to the arrival of new technologies.
(Botting, The Limits of Horror 127)

Gothic textuality – in whatever medium – has a tendency to draw attention to its underlying
production techniques and technologies. This self-reflexive structure is, as Keep argues, a
central element of Gothic aesthetics (see Keep) and it parallels the representation of
monstrous Gothic bodies that blatantly flaunt their anatomical makeup and resists
authoritative readings. Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl presents an example of such a
hyperaware text that foregrounds structure and makes it an integral part of narrative and plot
construction. A narrative turn towards monstrous corporeality in the twentieth- and twenty-
first century examples I have discussed, thus, signals not only an awareness of emerging
posthuman paradigms, the texts also negotiate a non-authoritative response towards the
necessary questioning of the humanist subject position that arises from these developments.

Monstrous textualities, thus, have the potential to move beyond the humanist subject
position and question its hegemonic grip on the planet as a whole in an attempt to present a
paradigm shift, not towards a widening of the exclusive category of “the human”, but towards
critical representational frameworks that undermine its privileged position and present more
open and diverse narratives that do not steer towards the ultimate goal of mastering the non-
human and – if we are not very careful – destroying the planet in the process. Anna Tsing
summarizes this critical position at the beginning of The Mushroom at the End of the World –
a text that is geared towards a non-human perspective on a number of different levels:

[e]ver since the Enlightenment, Western Philosophers have shown us a Nature that is
grand and universal, but also passive and mechanical. Nature was a backdrop
resource for the moral intentionality of Man, which could tame and master Nature. It
was left to fabulists, including non-Western and non-civilizational storytellers, to remind
us of the lively activities of all beings, human and not human. (Tsing vii)
As Tsing summarizes, "[s]everal things have happened to undermine" this position towards nature: "[f]irst, all that taming and mastering has made such a mess that it is unclear whether life on earth can continue. Second, interspecies entanglements [...]" are now being taken seriously "among biologists and ecologists, who show how life requires the interplay of many kinds of beings" (Tsing vii). Moreover, Tsing's third point focuses on the other Others frequently excluded by the humanist paradigm's too narrow subject position of "Man" with a capital M: "women and men from all around the world have clamored to be included in the status once given to Man. Our riotous presence undermines the moral intentionality of Man's Christian masculinity, which separated Man from Nature." (Tsing vii) These critical inclusion have led to a – frequently slow, but nevertheless perceptible – realization that "[h]umans cannot survive by stomping on all the others." (Tsing vii)

Jane Bennet presents a similar argument in Vibrant Matter, suggesting a parallel reading of human and non-human actants:

[to attempt, as I do, to present human and nonhuman actants on a less vertical plane than is common is to bracket the question of the human and to elide the rich and diverse literature on subjectivity and its genesis, its conditions of possibility and its boundaries. The philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature; and even where it is not, it remains an aporetic or quixotic endeavor. (Jane Bennett ix)

Both Bennets and Tsing's project revolve around the exploration of new, posthuman (in the sense of questioning the privileged human subject position) ways of understanding, framing and narrating our sense of being in the world. As Tsing suggests: "[t]he time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational principles." (Tsing vii) These include, at least for her own project in The Mushroom at the End of the World, new ways of researching "in collaboration" (Tsing ix) and presenting this knowledge in more rhizomatic than linear structures, in an attempt "to know the world without" the "progress stories [that] have blinded us". To this end, the "book sketches open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life" (Tsing xiii) that resemble the rhizomatic, non-hierarchical mushroom structures that form its subject matter. This textual network blurs the boundaries between narrative and criticism, evoking a sense of monstrous textuality that resembles the model I have presented above.

As I have argued in my introduction, critical posthumanism presents itself as a theoretical framework for the monstrous narratives of resistance that form part of my analysis precisely because it does not strive to widen the humanist epistemological paradigms that have traditionally excluded women as well as other Others. Instead critical posthumanist
feminists like Rosi Braidotti argue that "[f]eminism is not a humanism" (Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism” 21) and suggest what amounts to a dissolution of the dominant humanist subject position:

[d]ifferent and sharper analyses of power relations become possible once the obstacle of the dominant subject's delusions of grandeur has been removed. Feminist politics of location, reelaborated through the standpoint of feminist theory and the analysis of the racialized economy of science, produced situated knowledges as the method for grounding micropolitical analyses of power. A more adequate self-understanding emerges once it has become clear that no-body is actually in charge of the course of historical progress. (Braidotti, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism” 22)

Braidotti suggests that Enlightenment humanism – and exclusionary white feminism (see Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 297; see Colebrook, “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual” 19) – might successfully be replaced with a critical posthumanist approach rooted in "feminist epistemology, with its emphasis on the situated and accountable nature of knowledge" (Braidotti, “Critical Posthuman Knowledges” 83) and the challenging of hierarchical networks of knowledge production and control. Narratives that include a posthumanist questioning of the dominant human(ist) subject position – like the ones I focused on in part III – explore such scenarios, but their meta-narrative, self-reflexive structure also draws attention to the underlying epistemological questions of how knowledge could be productively understood outside the humanist framework. Braidotti's view on critical posthumanist knowledge pits "dominant vision[s] of knowledge production" against a possible "actualiz[ation] of the virtual insights and competences of marginalized subjects" (Braidotti, “Critical Posthuman Knowledges” 85). Such a posthumanist framework of thinking, consequently, lends itself to and has already been adopted by a number of otherwise marginalized critical approaches. As Braidotti summarizes,

[f]eminist theory, notably ecofeminism, has long struck an imaginary alliance with science fiction to support the insurrection of women—as the others of “Man,” and of other “others,” like nonwhites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous, and native subjects) with nonhuman agents (animals, insects, plants, trees, viruses, fungi, bacteria, and technological automata). Never quite certain as to the human rights assigned to their sex, LBGT+ seize the opportunity of exiting the binary gender system and taking the posthuman leap. There is no question that contemporary feminist theory is productively posthuman. (Braidotti, “Critical Posthuman Knowledges” 85)
Instead of proposing to create stable subject positions, critical posthumanism produces questions and allows for connections. As Braidotti argues, "it may be wise for posthuman feminist theory to work toward multiple transversal alliances across communities: many recompositions of the human and new ways of becoming-world together." (Braidotti, "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism" 48)

This is no idle contemplation of a possible, brighter future but a question reaching back through historical layers of oppression whose imminence is becoming more pressing through current issues like climate change that demand new epistemologies and ontologies, as well as new narratives to frame and convey them. It is also a practical question of the more or less sustainable individual behaviors that might lead into a more ecological mindset and necessary change away from unsustainable, anthropocentric, late-capitalist behaviors of consumption. As recent research into ecological consumer behavior suggests, toxic masculinity – a mindset ultimately rooted in a belief in the dominance of "Man" – might be less conducive to sustainable behavioral changes, because ecological mindfulness and caring are associated with femininity (see Brough et al.). To save the planet it will not suffice, however, to simply present ecologically sustainable behaviors as more "macho". To stop our rapid decline into climate change chaos and destruction we need different ways of thinking through and narrating humanity's position towards and within the context of survival on a planetary scale. As Claire Colebrook summarizes,

[i]f the notion of the human species' emergence in time requires new forms of narrative, and imaginative and ethical articulation, then the intensifying sense of the species' end makes a similar claim for rethinking 'our' processes of self-presentation and self-preservation. [...] not only does the Anthropocene – as did Darwinian evolution – require us to shift our scale of narration away from human generations and history to species' emergence and deep time; it also raises the problem of intersecting scales, combining the human time of historical periods (late capitalism, industrialism, nuclear power) with a geological time of the planet. This, in turn, requires us to open the classically feminist question of the scale of the personal. (Colebrook, "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual" 1)

Instead of authoritative, teleological narratives, critical posthumanism rooted in feminist thinking pursues strategies of accountability and localization, which may, however, be scaled to a planetary level to produce networks of understanding and acting beyond the humanist subject position. To frame these as narrative, rather than theory or political axiom draws attention to an affinity between theoretical and narrative textual production that is central to
Haraway's cyborg theory (see Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 310) but also presents posthuman-monstrous narrative as a valid tool to explore such epistemological questions beyond the framework of enlightenment humanism, as I have attempted to do above. There may not be a clear answer to Braidotti's question what it would mean if “these unprogrammed-for others were forms of subjectivity that have simply shrugged off the shadow of binary logic and negativity and have moved on” (Braidotti, “Posthuman, All Too Human - Towards a New Process Ontology” 205). But it is quite clear that a different, less hierarchical, epistemological framework would have to be rooted in questions, ambiguity and uncategorizability and foregrounding monstrous figures of becoming that point towards possible futures.
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