

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CLONING AND THE VISUAL FORMATION OF IDENTITY IN *DOCTOR WHO* AND *MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN*

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In *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* W.J.T. Mitchell points to the prevalence of the theme of cloning in popular culture since the early 1990s. He notes that the clone is first and foremost an “iconic concept” that

has become synonymous with images of mutants, replicants, cyborgs, and mindless, soulless masses of identical warriors, ready to sacrifice themselves in suicide missions. What might be called “clonophobia” embraces a host of anxieties, from the spectre of the uncanny double and the evil twin to the more generalized fear of the loss of individual identity.¹

Building on Mitchell’s definition of cloning, this article examines the concept of the clone in Kenneth Branagh’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (1994) and in two consecutive episodes of British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*, “The Rebel Flesh” and “The Almost People” (2011).² I exemplify how the engagement with the two visual narratives illuminates the ways in which the clone materializes the process of identity formation, while at the same time the clone’s presence in both texts dramatizes the incoherence of a unique and unambiguous identity. This paradox that constitutes the clone’s identity evokes Linda Hutcheon’s classification of parody as a postmodern form that “paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies.”³ In light of Hutcheon’s insight I argue that the clones in both texts do not merely threaten the identity of their human counterparts but rather parody the notion of a coherent individual identity by both incorporating and challenging it.

The clone in both plots is a material commodity that is constructed and used by humans for their own needs. Once given life, having been transformed into a thinking being rather than a “mindless, soulless” one, the clone voices its desire to be treated as an individual—a desire that the human characters neglect and oppose. I demonstrate that the clones in each of the plots assert their distinction from their respective creators only after an engagement with an indexical object, a visual representation that links the clone to its creator: a photograph in *Doctor Who* and a journal containing a sketch of the creature in Branagh’s production. Following an observation of the respective objects the clones claim to “remember” who they are. The clones’ configuration of their individual identities based on images—objects of consumption—presents them as agents who display outwardly the process of identity formation, and by so doing renders the concept of identity a consumable commodity much like the clone itself.

In my engagement with the concept of identity I rely on two pivotal factors: the first is that a personal identity depends on a cohesive narrative, and the second is that identity is a self-contained property which emphasizes the extent to which the thing or person under observation is visually as well as conceptually different from everything and everyone else. In other words, identity is “the condition of being a *single* individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else” [emphasis mine].⁴ However, the “singleness” of one’s identity is destabilized once the clone is introduced into the equation. Mitchell rightly observes that “[t]he logic of identity itself is put in question by the clone” since “the different arrives masquerading as the same, threatening all differentiation and identification.”⁵ Yet the real question arises when the different does not actively masquerade as the same but *is* the same. Mitchell notes that:

Cloning is not merely a specific biological process; it is a form of image-making in its own right, i.e., the production of living copies of living organisms. It is both a natural process and an artificial technology, both a literal, material event and a figurative notion, both a fact of science and a fictional construct.⁶

The production of copies has a twofold implication. Firstly it implies that we are expected to face two entities of the same kind, an outcome that calls into question the “singleness” of one’s identity and evokes ethical queries: for example, is the clone entitled to its own identity or does it share the identity of its original, its creator? Secondly, the process of cloning—creating a living being in the shape of its creator without sexual intercourse—gives rise to questions of immortality and undermines the concept of personal identity altogether, by presenting the possibility of

substituting a living organism with an exact visual and conceptual replica of him/herself. This prospect of replacement can be achieved through what Jean Baudrillard terms the “nullification of differences”, which in turn is bound to result in a lack of individuality and the transformation of the meaning of identity from an identifiable, unique subject to an object identical to and indistinguishable from certain other objects.⁷ In this context, one could argue that Frankenstein’s creature cannot be classified as a clone since he does not look like his creator. Yet I maintain that Branagh’s version of the creature as a “vividly, cruelly stitched” being illuminates the fragments that constitute an “identity” and as such, fits Mitchell’s definition of a clone as being the uncanny double that fragments and challenges the concept of identity.⁸

Before I discuss the significance of visual means to the construction of personal identity in the respective plots I will delineate a synopsis of the two visual texts, the pivotal scenes and the questions these raise. Both narratives present us with characters who answer to the title “Doctor.” In the case of Branagh’s screen adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Dr Victor Frankenstein experiments with metaphysics and electricity to create life. He ventures into cemeteries in search of the finest body parts, intending to create the perfect being. It is only when the process of creation is complete that Frankenstein, as well as the viewer, realizes the hideous result. He abandons the creature, which is forced to survive on its own. Discovering that his appearance alarms people and provokes violent reactions, the creature takes refuge in a forest. When in hiding he finds Frankenstein’s journal, in which he sees the plans for his creation, and sketches of what he recognizes as himself. This knowledge sets him on a mission to find his maker, and force him to take responsibility for the creature’s misfortunes.

The Doctor in *Doctor Who* is an alien, able to move through space and time using the TARDIS. In the said two-part episode, the Doctor, together with his companions, Amy and Rory, arrives at an island monastery which functions as an acid-pumping factory. It is the twenty-second century and the crew of the factory has scientifically created “gangers”—clones that look just like the crew members. While Branagh’s production (much like Shelley’s original text) presents the creature as physically deformed—an appearance that is met with horror and disgust—the clones in *Doctor Who* at first obtain a human form, and thus evoke sympathy in the other characters.

Neither Frankenstein’s creature nor the gangers can operate on their own initially, both needing the assistance of their human creators. However, while Frankenstein’s creature requires physical help to stand up

and operate his limbs, the gangers need no assistance in this respect. They emerge smoothly and briskly from a white fluid called “flesh,” climbing out of a tub—which iconographically resembles the tub from which Frankenstein’s creature emerges—and set about maintaining the factory. Although the gangers do not require physical help, they are controlled by humans lying securely in metal harnesses within a chamber. These harnesses look much like the one in which Frankenstein’s creature is reared. In both narratives the harness functions as a kind of resting-place, in which the body lies idly and inactively until it is animated by technological devices. Yet in both texts it also fulfils an additional role: in *Frankenstein* it functions as a veil that conceals the creature from the prying eyes of the viewers; while in *Doctor Who*, the harness can be seen as a kind of exhibition-stand that displays the human body to the public gaze.

In the same manner, *Doctor Who* exhibits the gangers through a frontal shot as they leave the tub, while Branagh’s film does not show the creature’s face as it emerges; instead we see its disfigured and stitched nape and back. The first organs that materialize from the “flesh” are the eyes of a ganger, which look straight at us. In this context I draw on Margaret Olin’s consideration of the gaze in film and visual art. For Olin, “[t]he direct address of the spectator [...] draws his attention to the voyeuristic quality of his gaze.”⁹ Following this observation, I suggest that the wide-open eyes of the ganger challenge the viewers’ gaze and urge us to become aware of ourselves in the act of looking at a construction of a being, as well as of our own constructedness. This is further stressed by a scene in which the factory commander demonstrates to the Doctor and his companions how the gangers are formed. She instructs one of the crew members, Jennifer, to enter her identification data in a harness and secure herself in it, while the Doctor observes the “miracle of life”—the materialization of the clone, ganger Jennifer, from the “flesh”.

The ganger’s visual materialization, as well as its confronting gaze, invites us to acknowledge the extent to which we rely on what we see in order to construct meaning. It would seem that no such realization is invited by Branagh’s production, as the creature never confronts our gaze. However, I propose that by moving its supposedly uncontrollable limb towards Frankenstein’s face upon its emergence from the tub, the creature might be seen as attempting to obstruct his creator’s gaze. The comparison between these two visual plots and the interplay between what can and cannot be seen invites us to observe identity as an assemblage of raw materials that eventually misleads us into perceiving it as a unified whole, a single entity. Despite the display of the gangers in *Doctor Who*, the

process by which they are created is never revealed; we see only the final outcome. This process is hidden behind the smooth façade of ganger Jennifer. In contrast, while Branagh conceals the product of Frankenstein's creation behind the harness and through camera angles, the process by which the creature is created is graphically explicit. Yet, throughout the elaborate process of creation we witness only the various body parts that comprise the creature, never at this stage seeing the creature as a whole. The comparison between these two processes underscores that the impeccable appearance of the ganger conceals the fragments which comprise it.

We are not allowed to see the creature's body until it is "born", emerging from the tub, and even then our visual access is limited. As noted above, at first we do not see the creature's front; instead we witness the scientist kneeling in front of his creation to stop the latter from falling. When we finally see the creature's front, we realize how disfigured it is. I read the suspense experienced between the exposure of the creature's back and front as another way of emphasizing its fragmented body, as well as our fragmented gaze. By fragmentizing our gaze, Branagh's *Frankenstein*, much like the gangers in *Doctor Who*, challenges the possibility of obtaining a coherent image, which in turn questions our perception of identity as a unified whole. This fragmentation is analogous to the stitches on the creature's face: our gaze allows us to stitch the creature's body, front and back. As spectators, we are transformed into mad scientists that can assemble and disintegrate lives and identities. Moreover, I suggest that the assemblage of the creature's body from dead body parts, and the visual inaccessibility that viewers experience, parallels the construction of personal identity from different elements of past events: memories, experiences and stories that we narrate to others (and ourselves) to account for the abstract and invisible identities we claim to obtain. It is worth noting that while in *Frankenstein* the creature is the passive object and Frankenstein is the active subject, in *Doctor Who* there is a reversal of roles right from the start, as the humans are the ones who lie passively in harnesses while their clones run the factory. Nonetheless, we soon realize that the manipulation of the gangers is taking place within the humans' minds, and as the factory's commander explains, once "the link shuts down, the gangers return to pure flesh." Hence, we learn that the idle postures of the humans are merely an appearance since, unlike Frankenstein's unconscious creature, the beings occupying these harnesses are very much conscious; they run the factory by manipulating their clones, which are thought to have no individual aspirations.

However, a dramatic turn takes place when a solar tsunami strikes the island. This awakens the gangers' free will. They no longer require a human counterpart to operate them; they have their own desires, but they can still obtain the humans' thoughts and memories. As a result, there are two exemplars of each crew member, one being real and the other a copy. Once the duplicates start acting independently from the humans they are based upon a conflict ensues: the gangers who possess the same memories as their human counterparts insist on being treated as the "real" people, rather than as disposable clones.

We become aware of the clones' desire to be seen as *the* "real" people when Rory, one of the Doctor's companions, follows ganger Jennifer to try and find out what happened to the human Jennifer (who was not in her harness following the tsunami). He finds the ganger sitting on a bench with her back to him and the viewer, and once she senses Rory's presence she starts telling "her" childhood memory in the manner of a fairytale: "When I was a little girl [...]." This sentence echoes the familiar "once upon a time" beginning that we learn to recognize as children. This strategy evokes Jerome Bruner, who notes "the possibility of narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality."¹⁰ He argues that "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative."¹¹ With Bruner's claim in mind, I read this scene as an exhibitionary exercise in which the clone articulates the very essence of identity construction: its narrativity.

Following the ganger's opening line, the camera's point of view shifts so that we now see her face—white and unhuman. She goes on to recount her memory using details, sensory descriptions and the present tense, which together emphasize the authenticity of the experience: "I got lost on the moors, wandered off from the picnic. I can still feel how sore my toes got inside my red wellie boots." The ganger's use of "still" brings the experience temporally closer and enhances Rory's and the viewer's empathy. Moreover, the ganger's description of small details, such as the colour and type of shoes she was wearing, stresses the reliability of her story and evokes sympathy. These details, more than anything else, call attention to the fact that the gangers' memories are similar to those of their human counterparts, and so legitimize the right of the gangers to be considered as real as the humans they are based upon.

Nevertheless, the next shot challenges the truthfulness of the memory, as we see the ganger holding a photograph of Jennifer as a child, sitting on a rock on a moor and wearing red wellie boots. We now wonder if ganger Jennifer actually remembers this experience, or if she has invented the narrative in order to evoke sympathy. The memory's veracity seems to be

undermined by the photograph since if Jennifer was actually lost, there would not have been anyone present to take it. On the other hand, according to Barbie Zelizer, pictures “materialize” memory, and the photograph could therefore have triggered the surfacing of a genuine memory.¹² Either way, it functions as an object that constructs the reality ganger Jennifer presents. After we see the photograph of the child, ganger Jennifer goes on with her story: “and I imagined another little girl, just like me, in red wellies, and she was Jennifer, too. Except she was a strong Jennifer, a tough Jennifer. She’d lead me home.” At this point we are invited to further question the ganger’s memories: did Jennifer the child actually imagine a clone of herself that could help her, or is it rather the ganger’s addition, to show that we sometimes wish to have a second self—suggesting that clones are indispensable for human lives?

Immediately after the ganger’s story, we see her gazing at her reflection in a mirror she is holding. Significantly, the mirror is the exact same size as the photograph she observes. The mirror in this scene draws our attention to the sharp contrast between a reflection and a construct, such as the photograph. This discrepancy accentuates the illusive role of photography in reflecting reality through its indexical link to the material world. Seeing the white inhuman face, ganger Jennifer panics and quickly covers the mirror with another photograph, this time of the adult Jennifer. Through this gesture the ganger rejects a self-reflective observation and turns to a semi-real representation: the photograph.

The ganger assumes that the photograph is indexical to the real Jennifer and, by extension, to the ganger herself. By covering up her reflection with a present-day photograph of the human Jennifer, she displays her reliance on an already-constructed image for the purposes of identity formation. As soon as she looks at this photograph, ganger Jennifer announces: “My name is Jennifer Lucas. I’m not a factory part. I had toast for my breakfast, I wrote a letter to my mom [...]” Despite the sympathy the ganger might evoke by mentioning the mundane actions of her daily life (which in fact were actions the real Jennifer performed, or manipulated her ganger to perform), Rory is not convinced, and he implores the ganger: “Where is the real Jennifer?” Rory’s response prompts the ganger to say: “I *am* Jennifer Lucas. I remember everything that happened in her entire life. Every birthday, every childhood illness. I feel everything that she’s ever felt, *and more*.” The ganger’s addition of “and more” renders her, as Baudrillard would put it, a “hyperreal” figure that is generated “by models of a real without reality.”¹³ This hyperreality is further stressed when the ganger’s face recovers the human appearance that she observes in the adult photograph. The re-acquisition of the human

form convinces Rory of the ganger's reality. However, the question remains: how real is this reality?

In this context I draw on Hutcheon, who states that “[p]hotography today is one of the major forms of discourse through which we are seen and see ourselves.”¹⁴ Ganger Jennifer determines her identity through an external element that, in Annette Kuhn's words, “constructs whatever is in the image as object of consumption—consumption by looking.”¹⁵ As a response to the photograph ganger Jennifer declares: “My name is Jennifer Lucas”. She asserts her right to possess the name, to own it as if it is a commodity. Ganger Jennifer consumes the photographic representation of the real Jennifer as if it was Jennifer herself, and not merely another copy. By treating the photograph as if it was the actual person, the clone ironically consumes the identity of a copy—a visual construct, “a trace,” that is often mistaken for the actual subject.¹⁶ The irony is enhanced when Rory accepts the ganger's assertion and softens towards her.

By accepting the ganger as the “real” Jennifer, Rory falls into the trap that photography has been setting ever since the invention of the camera: he perceives the ganger Jennifer just as he would have perceived a photograph—as if it was an authentic copy of the original. The irony lies within the premise itself, for copies by definition cannot be originals. This treatment of copies demonstrates the “desired relation” between reality and the representation of reality, but at the same time, it underlines that this desire can never be fulfilled, for it “is one [...] of the wildest dreams of realism, the dream according to which representation becomes embodiment, in which the text no longer stands for something but is itself a presentation of that of which it speaks.”¹⁷ This observation renders ganger Jennifer an empty signifier that is removed even further from the original, as she relies on a photograph for the assertion of her identity.

The ganger fails to recognize that she relies on a copy which lacks a stable origin. This dependence is symbolically marked by her later transformation into a monstrous creature whose head is inconveniently and unnaturally small in comparison to her deformed body, which develops at an uncontrollable pace. Her limbs and body are disproportionate and asymmetrical. As we witness her growth from afar and through a cloud of smoke, she is rendered colourless, a kind of absent presence that metaphorically (as well as physically) haunts the remaining gangers and humans alike. Her colourlessness is manifested in her ability to absorb different colours like a chameleon as her shapeless form changes colour according to the different shades around it. Although reviewers such as Dan Martin of the *Guardian* and Gavin Fuller of the *Telegraph* criticized the poor quality of the computer-generated imagery, with the latter

describing Jennifer's monstrous transformation as "something of a pity," I claim that it achieves a greater effect through its low quality, for it positions the clone as an unfinished image that has been arrested in the process of development.¹⁸

Significantly, the ganger in *Doctor Who* is not the only one to rely on an image for the purposes of identity assertion. Frankenstein's creature also relies on visual means to affirm his identity. In the stolen journal in which Frankenstein documents his project of creating life, the creature sees a drawing of what he realizes to be his own body, and thus learns about who he is. For Frankenstein's creature, the drawing and the journal play a similar role to that played by the photographs of Jennifer for the ganger in *Doctor Who*. Although a drawing bears no indexical link to the drawn object, it still functions as a method of documentation; more importantly, the journal contains the narrative of the creature's origins. Therefore, the sketch and the journal grant the creature access to his story, and by doing so, define his identity, again through a narrative.

Still, unlike ganger Jennifer, who declares her ownership of her creator's name, the creature does not claim possession of the name of his maker. When seen beside the diseased Frankenstein at the end of the film and asked "who are you?", the creature retorts: "He never gave me a name." However, this lack does not prevent him from declaring his relation to, and ultimately his possession of, Frankenstein. The creature says: "He was *my* father" [emphasis mine]. Ironically enough, while the creature does not claim ownership of his creator's name, the title "Frankenstein" is often erroneously associated with the creature rather than the scientist.

Although the creature relies on the written journal and the sketch to construct his identity, he still cannot declare who he is independently of his creator. Therefore, upon meeting Frankenstein for the first time, the creature asks the latter to define him: "Who am I?" Receiving no answer, except for an uncertain "you... I don't know," the creature asks Frankenstein to create a companion for him. The creature's inability to define himself and to construct his personal identity narrative prompts him to ask his creator for a female companion with whom he could identify. The creature wishes to "travel [with this companion] to a place where no man has been, [where] no one will *see* us again" [emphasis mine]. The creature's desire to disappear from the public sphere is reminiscent of his pre-born state when he was unseen, concealed from the viewer's gaze. In this context I draw on Richard Meyer's observation of "the individual's need not only to inhabit the space of identity but also, and even simultaneously, to get the hell out of there."¹⁹

In conclusion, through my engagement with the representation of clones in Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and in the two-part episode of *Doctor Who*, I have argued that the clone both affirms and resists the concept of a unified identity. In so doing, I have presented the parody inherent in the notion of identity, which overtly appears as a unifying quality while covertly disguising a network of fragments that are stitched to one another through a narrative. I have further demonstrated that the clone illuminates the constructed and fragmented aspects of identity through the narratives one collects, nourishes and exhibits. This demonstrative gesture renders identity a complex concept that "can never be understood as symmetrical, straightforward, or fully resolved."²⁰ Therefore, the visual narratives discussed in this article parody the notion of a unified identity through the clones' unstable and fragmented exteriors.

Notes

¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 19.

² *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, Dir. Kenneth Branagh (Tristar, 1994); "The Rebel Flesh" and "The Almost People", *Doctor Who* (BBC One, UK), May 21 and 28, 2011.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 251.

⁴ "Identity, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91004?redirectedFrom=identity&> (accessed 26 December 2012).

⁵ Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8.

⁸ J.A.W. Heffernan, "Looking at the Monster", *Critical Inquiry* 24.1 (Autumn, 1997), 133-158, 144.

⁹ Margaret Olin, "Gaze", in *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 318-329, 322.

¹⁰ Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality", *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991), 1-21, 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² Barbie Zelizer, qtd. in Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory", *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (Spring 2001), 5-37, 14.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra", in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-28, 1.

¹⁴ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 43.

¹⁵ Annette Kuhn, qtd. in Hutcheon, *Politics*, 22.

¹⁶ Hirsch, "Surviving Images", 13.

¹⁷ Christopher Prendergast, *Triangle of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁸ Gavin Fuller, "Doctor Who, Episode Six: 'The Almost People'", *The Telegraph*, May 28 2011; Dan Martin, "Doctor Who: which is the best episode of this series?", *The Guardian*, September 30, 2011.

¹⁹ Richard Meyer, "Identity", in *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 345-357, 357.

²⁰ Meyer, "Identity", 356.