

**MONSTROUS + EXPLOSIVE JUNCTIONS:  
WORKING WITH HYBRID FORMS**

By

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## Abstract

This thesis paper addresses a personal journey into a longtime fascination with mythological hybrid characters. The studio component of my thesis work, the thesis project, entitled *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, is an interactive animation installation that depicts moments from a hybrid's life in its natural habitat. The viewer, while engaged with the animation, must remain quiet and stationary so as not to disturb the hybrid. If it is disrupted or annoyed it may respond unexpectedly, perhaps violently.

This paper also describes an interest in interactive narrative and non-linear storytelling. It uses both David Clark's *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* and my own work as primary examples, for dismantling the expectations of conventional storytelling, while also introducing ideas of *anti-narrative* and *anti-interaction*.

My method has been informed by Giorgio Agamben's theoretical interpretations of *umwelt*, as a means to illuminate visualizations of a hybrid and its actions and reasons for being. The concept of *umwelt* also helps to establish the notion of the *monster*: if the hybrid is deprived of its basic needs, or *carriers of significance* (as described by Agamben), then the monstrous side has the potential to reveal itself. I use the concept of *umwelt* as a lens through which to view Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and Alan Moore's graphic novel *Swamp Thing*, to examine the complex personality of a so-called hybrid monster and its capacity for good and evil. In addition, this paper also examines an attraction to horror and the abject, by way of using Jan Švankmajer's film, *Little Otik*, as a primary case study.

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For Mya Rose  
and Ahmon

## Interruptions

Throughout this essay there are a series of interruptions. They are excerpts of conversations I had with my then two-year-old daughter, Mya, who was having recurring nightmares of monsters. It should be known that, to my knowledge, no one has explained or described to her what monsters are. Through a process of cultural conditioning (i.e., stories, movies, cartoons, visits to the aquarium, etc.) she has invented what she believes monsters to be. My understanding of them, from her perspective, is that they are “little and wet and have bugs for teeth.” In her recollections, collected in the thesis, she is unable to distinguish reality from dreaming, and her fear of monsters is clearly noticeable. Until, the end of the last interruption, when after a few failed attempts, I am finally able to relieve her fear.

My daughter’s naive viewpoint on monsters, and how she learned empathy for them, was one of the main inspirations for the direction I took in my thesis work. It caused me to really contemplate the creation of hybrid characters in relation to understanding their motives for being.

### **Interruption #1: Fear of Monsters - 03/27/11 - 12:34am**

I'm writing at my computer and I hear crying coming from my daughter's room. When I go to check on her, I find she isn't just crying but shuddering with sad sobs. "What's wrong?" I ask. "M-M-Monsters in my m-mouth again." she whimpers. She is so sad and so scared. I snap into autopilot. I don't want to see her cry like this so I use a few borrowed phrases. "Don't worry," I assure her. "It was just a dream, it wasn't real. There is no such thing as monsters."

"R-R-Really?" she asks while wiping tears from her face. "Really." I reply with a stern, very dad-like, tone. But in my mind, I know I'm full of shit. I remember my mom using this phrase on me when I was a little boy. It never worked then, why would it work now?

She hugs me and feels better for now. But the fear is still lingering and is sure to return.





Fig. 1: Myron Campbell, *Angus*, 2012. Detail, 13 x 21 in.

## Introducing Hybrids

During the first year of the Masters of Applied Arts degree, I started to uncover a reoccurring theme in my practice of creating hybrid characters, such as *Angus* (Fig. 1), who has a bear's head and human hands. It was not a conscious decision to include them. Hybrids were just something I was naturally drawn to. This surprising realization started the process of unraveling a pre-established relationship with hybrid forms through an interest in experimental narrative.

Historically, a hybrid being is generally understood as something composed of two parts, often conjoining various species. However, the hybrid being explored in the thesis project is not limited to a compound of just two parts. In fact, the approach was to challenge the

stereotypical hybrid as composed of two entities. Additionally, the project's aim was to not simply imitate characteristics associated with the species that comprise the hybrid. For example, the hybrid is not immediately evil or deceptive, just because it is part snake. The hybrid explored in the thesis project is without any fixed identity and is representative of an emergent ontology<sup>1</sup>: one that offers a constant state of evolution, blurring the boundaries of conventional hybridity, of the human or non-human. The result is a more complex and engrossing character, that adds the potential for a more layered narrative.

For over ten years, I have been naturally drawn to animating and creating hybrid characters. I'm uncertain why this happened, but I assume that they surfaced through an interest in material wherein hybridity is operative, such as in certain myths and fairy-tales, or in science fiction and horror films. In the past, my work was influenced principally by popular culture: comics, novels and movies — but now I've broadened the field of my influences to include philosophy and critical theory (particularly as it relates to creative practice).

My methodology is newly informed by Giorgio Agamben's theoretical interpretations of *umwelt*: a concept originally developed by zoologist Jakob von Uexsküll as a way to better understand animals. Uexsküll described *umwelt* as an internal environment-world that exists conceptually from the point-of-view of the animal. Agamben, picking up on his idea, theorized that there are specific *carriers of significance*, which constitute an *umwelt*. These *carriers of*

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<sup>1</sup> The hybrid's "emergent ontology" harmonizes with post-humanism theory. According to philosopher, Rosi Braidotti, "...post-humanism does not result in anti-foundationalism. It rather stresses the need for process ontology." (Braidotti 199) Therefore, the post-human hybrid

*significance* are elements that are deemed important to the character's survival, such as food or shelter (40).

By establishing the *umwelt* as a framing device for creating hybrids, I hope to be able to better understand their actions and reasons for being, and thereby also have a clear sense of how to visualize them and their respective environments. I find this approach so effective, that it has altered the way I create all my characters, hybrid or otherwise. The process is more informed and less arbitrary. Further, the concept of *umwelt* has also set the stage for a newfound theory of mine on the notion of *monster*. If the hybrid (or any animal for that matter) is deprived of its basic needs, or *carriers of significance*, then the monstrous side of its personality is likely to appear. This potential for horrific acts is the focus of such hybrid characters as, for example, Mary Shelley's "creature" in the novel *Frankenstein*, Alan Moore's defender of the swamp in the graphic novel *Swamp Thing*, and the strange baby in Jan Švankmajer's film *Little Otik*, all of which are to be discussed later.

I would like next to consider hybrid methods that are employed in my practice utilizing interactive and non-linear narrative, or what I'm calling *anti-narrative*. My thesis project, *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, explores this type of experimental storytelling by using an interactive installation that reveals animated moments of a hybrid's life in its natural habitat. The viewer, while engaged with the animation, has a choice to get the hybrid's attention or simply observe. Either decision elicits a unique set of responses consistent with what I have designated as *anti-narrative*.



Fig. 2: Myron Campbell, *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, 2012. Still, 1280 x 720 px.

Mu, the main character of the thesis project is a hybrid (Fig.2). Questioning an anthropocentric point of view, it serves as a muse to a self-reflexive process of discovery and understanding of my current art practice. A non-gender-specific hybrid, Mu is constructed through various collage techniques. Hundreds of digital photographs are used in layers to blend seamlessly, producing a hyperreal quality within Mu and its world. Like a Dr. Frankenstein experiment, cat skin is blended with human flesh, and a dog's tongue with a dolphin's mouth. Each layer adds different characteristics to the hybrid, exemplified in the animation when it growls like a bear and hisses like a cat.

Mu's environment plays an equal role in the work and is a hybrid unto itself. It is made with a similar collage process, combining underwater elements with those found above the

surface. This is evident in the polyps of coral woven with various weeds and plants that surround a dining room table, and the entire environment is lit with a series of electric light fixtures. Mu sometimes crawls across the ground, sometimes flies, or swims from room to room. Mu is comfortably at home in its environment, suggesting that it has inhabited it for a long time.

The viewer witnesses moments in Mu's life as it carries out routines like sleeping and eating. Mu's daily activities *are* the story, delivered in a random, unrepeatable sequence. As viewers observe the hybrid, they may activate elements of the story by way of interaction and/or *anti-interaction*. In this way, the delivery of the story challenges conventions of linear narrative and introduces aspects of *anti-narrative*.

## **Anti-Narrative and Anti-Interaction**

Anti-narrative is *not* void of narrative, but it does challenge conventional narrative. The prefix "anti" is used to dispute narrative, challenging its history and tradition. The role of the standard linear format is to deliver a story in an accustomed fashion similar to reading a conventional three-act story in a book from front to back or sitting through such a movie from beginning to end. Each viewer experiences the delivery of the story in roughly the same way. Anti-narrative operates by activating a disorienting affect, displacing what is expected because of the habits of conventional narrative.

This does not mean a traditional story *has* to be understood in a linear way. For example, Christopher Nolan's feature-length film *Memento*, (2000) is sequential, but starts with the ending and moves backwards in time until it reaches the beginning. Arguably, this is not a

customary linear narrative, and can be considered non-linear because of its fragmented timeline that refuses chronological order. However, *Memento's* reverse-sequence is fixed and each viewer is led through a sequential linear structure, one with a beginning, middle and end.

Bangsø, Olav et al. distinguish the difference between linear and non-linear methods in a paper on Non-Linear Interactive Storytelling in the following way.

[A] Story is linear because all the chapters must be read in a specific order. We cannot expect a coherent narrative to result from any random order of chapters, so each chapter has some prerequisites that must be satisfied by the preceding chapters. E.g., to identify the murderer, a motive and an opportunity must have been established. In contrast, a non-linear story allows chapters to be read in different orders and not all chapters have to be read. In a non-linear interactive story the reader can influence the order of chapters. (2)

A linear method is primarily passive and does not require participation or interaction. To reiterate the example in the above quote, to understand the motives for the murder in chapter 3, you must first read chapters 1 and 2. The reader understands that these need to be read in sequential order. The type of anti-narrative employed in the thesis project combines the non-linear story with interactivity. Rather than a single path through a story, the anti-narrative has multiple entry points into, possibly, numerous overlapping stories. In this way, there is no real chronological logic to the sequence of events. The viewer can explore the so-called "chapters" out of order and, in fact, it is encouraged. A certain amount of participation is required to interpret the pieces and *find* the story rather than have it delivered in a passive experience. This

non-linear approach challenges linear conventions that break down expectations of what a story *should* be and suggests, instead, what it *could* be.

With an added element of interactivity comes an engagement that effects the direction and flow of the sequence. This arrangement relies on a participatory relationship that is rewarded with a narrative or unfolding of events. “Interaction is a relationship. It’s good sex. It’s bad conversation. It’s indeterminate behavior, and it’s redundant result. It’s many things, none of which can be done alone” (Meadows, 37). This quote by media artist, Mark Stephen Meadows recognizes the relationship that inherently fuels an unpredictable interactive experience. This is not to say that traditional narrative cannot be interactive. Interpretation while reading a linear novel or watching a linear film can be considered a form of interaction, albeit a very subtle one. Meadows continues:

An "Interactive Narrative" is a narrative form that allows someone other than the author to affect, choose, or change the plot. The author, in writing [or viewing] this narrative, allows the reader to interact with the story.” (2)

Interactive narrative *requires* a participant to activate and engage with the storytelling aspect of the work and, in the same way that anti-narrative challenges conventions; *anti-interaction* is employed to dispel expectations of interactivity. *In the Caves of Mount Ida, BC*, the story unfolds when the viewer is quiet and stationary. Much like when observing some real animals, if hand waving or shouting is detected, Mu does not appear. However, if there is no interaction Mu emerges and carries out one of several quotidian routines, including eating, sleeping, sexual-satisfaction and self-reflection. Repeat visits can result in varied outcomes, leading the viewer randomly through the routines in isolation, out of context from the other sections. This

fragmented approach emphasizes slices of narrative, putting sections of the story under a microscope. There are then 'moments of pause' for digesting these pieces of story along with their visuals. Since there is no distinguishable dialogue or explanatory narration, the role of the imagery is particularly significant, directing the narrative using an exclusively visual mode of communication.



Fig. 3: Myron Campbell, *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, 2012. Still, 1280 x 720px.

Mu may get tired and decide to rest in a bed of newspapers (Fig. 3). Without any disruption made by the viewer, it continues to sleep contently, gradually revealing a dream sequence shown from its point-of-view. Then a companion character joins its slumber, nestling into Mu's bosom. It is not clear who this new character is or its relationship to Mu. Eventually,



Mu awakens, fully rested and continues its daily activities with its companion. However, if Mu's sleep is disturbed, the second character may be in danger. Waking from a restless sleep will agitate Mu, causing it to act viciously towards the visitor, screaming and biting at them.

Paradoxically, the more the viewer tries to interact with the work, the more frustrated they may feel. Too much shouting and commotion agitates Mu, causing it to act violently and hide, thus halting an engagement with the hybrid.

Impatient spectators may witness a monstrous episode if they wave their hands or shout. In contrast, the patient viewer may uncover a gentle side of Mu through their passive (or anti-interactive) approach with the work. Either way, the reaction of the viewer is unpredictable and their interpretation depends largely on personal choices and interactions, thus the work abandons any notion of a premeditated experience. This experimental approach has been chiefly informed by the oeuvre of the artist David Clark, whose work offers a breadth of possibilities when constructing interactive narrative.

### ***88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)***

David Clark began his practice as a filmmaker approaching narrative in a very conventional way. With the introduction of interactivity, the narrative structure began to change along with how the viewer engages with the work. Viewers move through chapters of the story by choice, their experience customized to their own curiosity and interests. This approach is one that appeals to me and is also common for online interactive projects. The viewer uses the computer mouse to control the experience, pointing and clicking in the direction they wish to go.

There are many examples of interactivity within the installation context such as the work of Canadian artist David Rokeby. In this essay I focus on one artist, David Clark who has directly informed my explorations of interactivity. Clark's work and my thesis project are different in some ways: His is online, and mine is an installation; his requires use of a computer mouse, and mine requires only a body. What is similar is the role of participatory experience in directing the flow of the story. In both cases, convention is challenged and there is a desire to restructure what is expected of narrative.

*88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)* is an online exploratory experience made up of short animated clips inspired by the life and work of the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. It manifests its own unique definition of anti-narrative with short, documentary-esque, animated clips describing moments in the life of Wittgenstein, in a non-linear fashion. In fact, the narrative structure is as fragmented as the collaged visuals within.

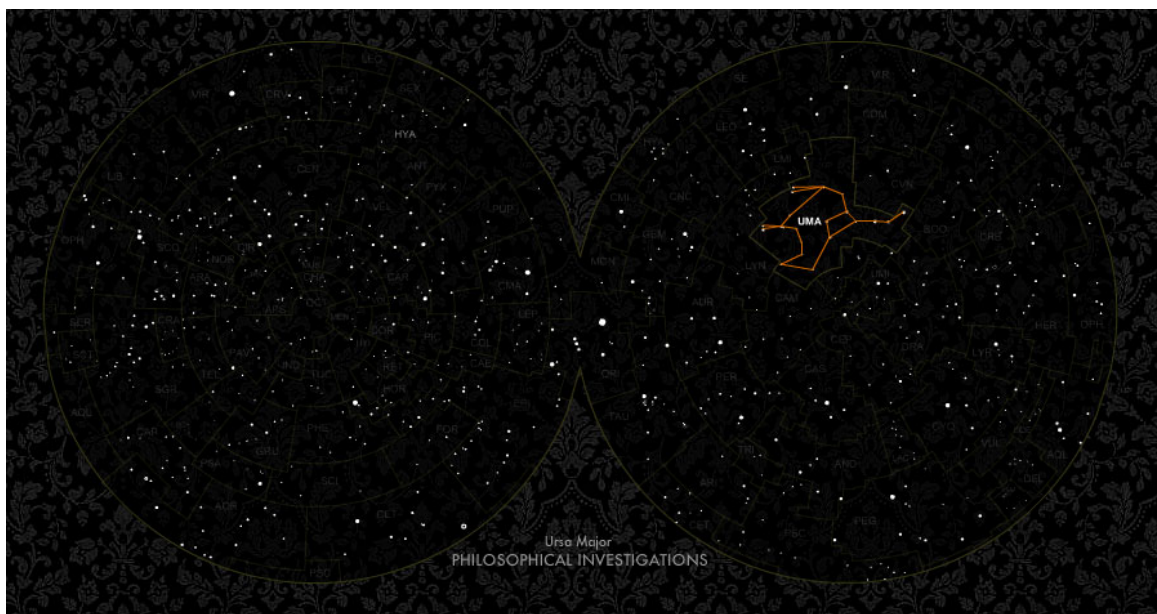


Fig. 4: David Clark, *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand)*, 2009. Still, 900 x 475 px. Used by permission of the artist.

The viewer enters the piece through a star-map navigation, (Fig. 4) and is presented with 88 stories related to the philosopher's life in the form of constellations. Each story provides connections to other stories within the project. The resulting constellation of hyper-linking pathways allows for a unique, non-linear experience that challenges thoughtless repetition.

Similarly, *In The Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, uses a system of interactivity that is also difficult to repeat. The viewer has the option of how to interact or not interact, and those choices affect the delivery of the story. Both Clark's and my own artworks feel like the uncovering of a relationship, rather than a direct telling of a story. Within interactive narrative there is a need for exploration and connecting-of-the-dots (or in Clark's case, stars). The viewer can move through the density of either works at his or her leisure, digesting a breadth of information and research embedded within their choices.

Media artist, David Jhave Johnston, describes *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* as "a consummate example of hybrid interactivity, future cinema, net-art and scholarship" (Johnston). I would agree, and I appreciate Johnston's use of the term "hybrid" in his explanation, because Clark's work does incorporate various elements to make the whole. Throughout the work, the viewer witnesses interplay between mediums of narration, imagery, music and interactivity. Johnston's description of futurity, interactivity and research informs the use of hybridity in my work, i.e., merging multiple disciplines to make up the whole.

Johnston's description of "hybrid interactivity" is crucial to *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*. It seems rather fitting that an indeterminable narrative be the setting for *Mu*, especially since I do

not pretend to have all the answers about its life. In fact, this type of narrative allows for a sort of ambiguity that enriches the story, and the open-ended experience of it.

This concept of interactive narrative helps develop the following section, where I investigate the various methods of hybridity that exist in the thesis project. Or you can go to page 18 for a nonlinear experience of this essay.

## Hyperreal Hybrid Methods

It seems natural, and a bit serendipitous, to be working with hybrid disciplines to create hybrid characters. *In The Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, is constructed completely from hybrid or transdisciplinary techniques: the assembly of multiple disciplines like drawing, digital-photo manipulation, photography, sound effects, narrative and animation with, of course, interactivity.

The act of deconstructing materials and reconstructing something new references modernist methods of art making such as collage, assemblage or bricolage. The use of digital tools in the collage work I produce allows for seamless compositing of images. These tools offer a greater flexibility than when, for example, Pablo Picasso or Hannah Hoch created their first collage work in the early 20th century. I have control over scale, orientation, colour, and can isolate details of an image using an abundance of techniques that are near impossible within the constraints of traditional mediums.

What these tools bring to the collaged hybrid character is the potential for a seamless rendering that possesses a manner of realism or *hyperrealism* that Jean Baudriallard describes as “the simulation of something which never really existed” (3). Therefore, what is rendered is

*beyond real* or even *surreal*. While I recognize my work has direct linkages to surrealist ideals, for the sake of this paper, I have limited its elaboration. What should be emphasized are the material practices present to construct the thesis project and the hyperrealistic qualities within. Surrealist artist Max Ernst described an artist using collage techniques as someone who ‘juxtaposes two apparently incompatible realities on an apparently unsuitable scale . . . and . . . it is there that the explosive junction occurs’ (Ernst 48).

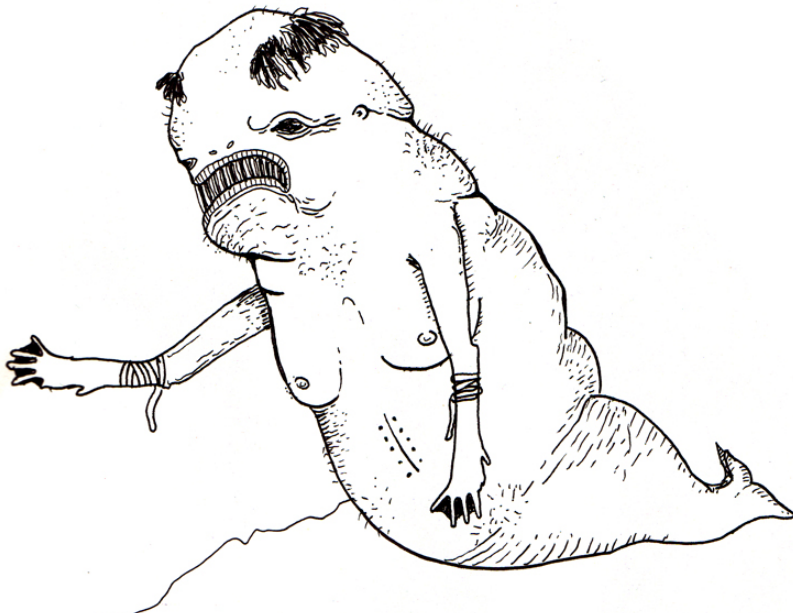


Fig. 5: Myron Campbell, *Mu study sketch*, 2011. Ink on paper, 20.32 x 25.4 cm.

This idea of *explosive junction* is one that resonates with the systems I use to produce hybrid characters and their environments. Drawing and sketching is a central component early in the process. This starts to shape the form and provides a firm basis on which to construct the character. From there, I use a combination of searching for online images and taking digital photographs to find the right elements to include in the work. This is where *explosive junction* happens. I wait for the right image to fit in the composition through a trial-and-error method within Photoshop, allowing for transformation, manipulation and exploration to occur. The original sketch (Fig. 5) produces a rough idea, but the choice of imagery is what truly defines

the form. This process allocates a space for discovery. The *explosive* element happens when unexpected images generate a certain correspondence and fit successfully together in an unexpected way.

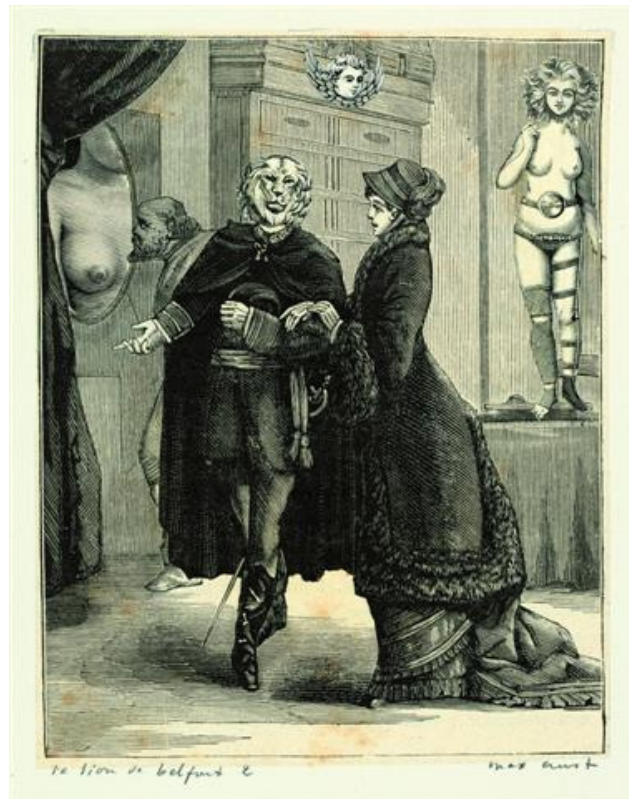


Fig. 6: Max Ernst, *Dimanche/La boue/Le lion de Belfort*, 1934. Photomontage; artist's book, 28.58 x 23.18 cm.

### ***Une Semaine de Bonté***

While there are many examples to illustrate use of hybrid methods in art making, I focus on the collage work of Max Ernst as an historical context for the thesis project. Ernst was a German artist, involved primarily with the Dada movement and Surrealism, whose work contains mythic themes and anthropomorphism. Ernst used hybrid techniques similar to my

own to create his hybrid forms, especially those presented in his collage book entitled *Une Semaine de Bonté*, (Fig. 6).

In this work, Ernst assembles clippings of woodcut illustrations from Victorian novels, encyclopedias and natural science journals. Because of the artist's decision to source only woodcut illustrations, the images blend together exceptionally well (despite the unavailability of contemporary digital tools). In its illusionary appearance, it is sometimes impossible to tell where one image ends and another begins, which gives it a 'more real than real' (hyperreal) quality.

The artist has never offered a full interpretation of the work, although art historian Malcolm Gee suggests, "each of the books projects recurrent themes of sexuality, anti-clericalism and violence, by dislocating the visual significance of the source material to suggest what has been repressed" (Gee). This quote reveals that Ernst may have been dealing with his own demons, which he expressed in his work. Among many characters, LopLop, a bird-human hybrid, was a predominant alter ego for Ernst, whom he used to manifest qualities that reflected his own instinctual drives. In this way, he was hybridizing himself through the use of an alter ego. They allowed him the freedom to visualize his unconscious and explore his repressed desires. Thus, the power of his images is not just in the juxtaposition, but also by way of the proximity they have to our own repressed desires.

It is not only the hybrid that carries out acts of cruel maliciousness amongst Ernst's characters in *Une Semaine de Bonté*, it's also the human characters. The idea of the "monstrous hybrid" is contrasted with stories depicting the loving, tender side of these creatures, while at the same time, portraying humans as monsters carrying out horrific acts of violence. In

conjunction, the human is associated with the monster and the monster with the human, thus complicating the prejudice of the hybrid as pure monster, and suggesting that both human and non-human are capable of violent acts.



Fig. 7: Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de bonté ou les sept éléments, Capitaux*, 1934. Photomontage; artist's book, 27 x 20.5 cm.

Malcolm Gee also suggests that the source material has been “dislocated” from its intended meaning. New messaging emerges by juxtaposing imagery in the form of collage, and yet I would argue that the original intent is not dislocated entirely. For example, there is a residue of a bird’s essence left with the head of the crow on the hybrid figure as it stands tugging the hair of a helpless woman (Fig. 7). Something raw and visceral translates through the head of a crow which sits on top of a human body, suggesting that the monstrous side of the



human figure has become too much and has begun manifesting a visual transformation. Like many stories that include hybrids, some of which I explore in later chapters, Ernst's use of the hybrid character can be interpreted as a metaphor for the monstrous side of humanity.

The act of collage, no matter how seamless, will leave traces of its source imagery. Each image contains residual traces, adding a layer of meaning that overlaps with other story-charged images. For example, within the face of Mu there are traces of dolphin in the mouth that also resemble a bird's beak, suggesting it could be of either (or both) the land or sea. Producing collage with dolphin or bird imagery brings a history of these animals to the composition. By association, this gives the character a more complex context. Even though it is unclear what exactly Mu is made from, the layered materiality carries and transmits narrative content that combines with the character's actions.

It is, of course, impossible to understand how the viewer interprets the imagery of *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*. In fact, this is not a concern while making the work. I wish only to allow for interpretation, the potential for narrative. A hyperreal quality in the work allows for a disorienting affect on the viewer, while at the same time inviting a comprehension of the character's complex ontology.

## **Interruption #2: Monsters are real - 03/29/11 - 7:44pm**

It's time for bed and Mya won't go into her room. She is sitting in the dark hallway with her head down, deep in her hands. Her elbows are resting on her kneecaps. Her long blonde hair is covering her face. She reminds me of Cousin It from The Munsters, which is kind of goofy, but she also looks like that creepy girl from The Ring. I let the situation grab hold of me and I feel a chill. I look behind me, nervously. Her fear is affecting me. She says the monsters are in her room and she is too scared to go in. She's so genuinely afraid that it almost has me convinced there are monsters in her room. I start to picture what is beyond the dark threshold. I head towards the door, admittedly, a little freaked out as to what I might find.

There is nothing there, visibly anyway.

I realize my last attempt at solving her monster problem was a failure. Now I feel like a liar. I told her there was no such thing as monsters and now they're back. I wonder what she thinks of me. I decide to try a different approach. I pretend they are real and I found them. Once again, in my stern, dad-like voice, I tell them to 'GO AWAY, MONSTERS, SHOO!!'

If they come back, I'll just tell Mya they aren't good listeners.

She's apprehensive at first - until she comes into the room with me and sees they are not there. She believes they are gone. However, I failed to foresee that if they have the ability to leave, they also have the ability to come back.

## Understanding Hybrids

Conventional ideas of the hybrid being (such as the Minotaur: part man, part bull or the Harpy: part woman, part bird) suggest they are often generated from merging human with animal. This is a strange designation because we, as *Homo sapiens*, *are* animals. While I recognize that we are all animals, I will, in this paper, continue with the conventional designation of human as anything that is *Homo sapiens* and animal as all other animate living entities.

### The Narrative Potential of Hybrid Forms

Watching the news, I am astounded with how dark and corrupt human behavior can be. There is never any shortage of stories about murderers, rapists, child molesters, etc. Disturbingly, this is what the human being is capable of. Within the animal kingdom, female lions do not often copulate with their lion mate while raising a cub. In this instance, male lions have been known to maul their children to death out of sexual frustration. There are also reported cases of bottlenose dolphins attacking and killing non-competing porpoises with repeated blows to the abdomen with their noses. One begins to wonder why. Why commit such horrendous acts upon another? What were these animals (humans included) deprived of to cause them to behave in this way? Could their choice to do harm have been altered had they *not* been deprived? Or is it purely in their nature? Humans and animals are complex beings, and

the hybrid blurs the boundaries between them, while still containing as much capacity for good as evil. Philosopher, Rosi Braidotti references Donna Haraway's cyborg<sup>2</sup> when she states:

As a hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg, or the companion species, is a connection-making entity; a figure of interrelationality, receptivity and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/non-oedipal). (Braidotti 200)

According to Braidotti, one cannot perceive the hybrid as securely identified. For example, Mu is indeterminable in its gender, having characteristics of both male and female (breast of a female and male-pattern baldness). Perhaps, the very essence of a hybrid is that they inhabit an evolved configuration of multiple worlds, and multiple species. There is a coalescence of ontologies in their physical makeup (a collage of sorts) that might also suggest that their range of behavior is as varied as their bodily form.

Hybrids are liminal beings. As composites they possess unpredictable natures that are intricate and convoluted. The merging of foreign species, behaviors and consciousnesses foster this complexity. They remind us of what remains of our core animal instincts and challenge the artificial, socially constructed boundary between human and animal.

In the context of humans who identify with mythical hybrids, American anatomist D.S. Lamb states, "One of the most striking and familiar qualities of the primitive human mind is the disposition to personify" (Lamb 277). With their ongoing presence as a trope in storytelling,

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<sup>2</sup> In *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway writes: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." Haraway's cyborg is a hybrid that rejects boundaries such as those that separate human from animal.

animalistic hybrids can be understood to personify certain human traits, but that is not their only purpose. In the following section I analyze options beyond anthropomorphic personification of human qualities onto such hybrid characters.

### **Hybrid Methodology: Applying Umwelt**

In the process of generating hybrid characters, I have sought to understand how they are interpreted in stories and art. In his book *The Open: Man and Animal*, philosopher Giorgio Agamben deconstructs the role of man as a superior being and the effects of distinguishing humans from animal entities. Agamben utilizes the research of zoologist Jakob von Uexküll to explore various methods of understanding animals. Uexküll proposed that in order to comprehend animals we have to first identify their *umwelt*. Loosely translated from German, this means “environment” or “surrounding world” and is a term that Uexküll describes as a being’s internal environment-world, which exists conceptually from the point-of-view of the animal. As Agamben states

There does not exist a forest as an objectively fixed environment: there exists a forest-for- the-park-ranger, a forest-for-the-hunter, a forest-for-the-botanist, a forest-for-the-wayfarer, a forest-for-the-nature-lover, a forest-for- the-carpenter, and finally a fable forest in which Little Red Riding Hood loses her way. (41)

Agamben then theorizes, “[t]he first task of the researcher observing an animal is to recognize the carriers of significance which constitute its environment”(41). These *carriers of significance* can be interpreted as elements that are deemed important to the animal. An excellent and rather gruesome description of an *umwelt* by Uexküll is revealed in a later chapter:

[T]he eyeless animal finds the way to her watchpoint [at the top of a tall blade of grass] with the help of only its skin's general sensitivity to light. The approach of her prey becomes apparent to this blind and deaf bandit only through her sense of smell. The odor of butyric acid, which emanates from the sebaceous follicles of all mammals, works on the tick as a signal that causes her to abandon her post (on top of the blade of grass/bush) and fall blindly downward toward her prey. If she is fortunate enough to fall on something warm (which she perceives by means of an organ sensible to a precise temperature) then she has attained her prey, the warm-blooded animal, and thereafter needs only the help of her sense of touch to find the least hairy spot possible and embed herself up to her head in the cutaneous tissue of her prey. She can now slowly suck up a stream of warm blood. (46)

From this description, the *umwelt* of the tick can be characterized as having three carriers of significance: first is the need for a temperature-specific liquid which happens to be blood; secondly, a particular odor that emanates from mammals that they are drawn to and, lastly, the ability to distinguish the hairy parts of the mammal with exposed fleshy areas. With these carriers of significance one can achieve a better understanding of its basic modes for survival and actions of being, allowing for insight into its unique existence.

Michael (Mickey Mouse) 18 yrs old

- anxious; takes lots of nervous shits and doesn't wipe
- fidgets, plays with fingers
- chews on arm chair while sitting on it.
- hisses at flickering light
- rides exercise bike often
- has a shopping cart full of junk: garbage.
- treats trash like a delicacy
- allergic to dairy
- lives in a renovated water culvert
- loves reality tv especially antique road show.



Fig. 8: Myron Campbell, *Michael study sketch*, 2011. Ink on paper, 20.32 x 25.4 cm.

My methodology is permeated by Agamben's proposed system, and informed by Uexküll's research. Together they help for an understanding of the creation of animal worlds and, simultaneously, inform the way in which I create hybrid characters. Before deciding on Mu, I came up with 30+ character ideas based on pre-existing hybrids in mythology and popular culture such as: Mickey Mouse (Fig. 8), Bambi, The Human Fly, Medusa, The Minotaur and Hello Kitty, along with several entirely new creations. With a rough idea of what animal components the hybrid would contain, I started drawing with the attempt to push past cute and cartoony, and consider what they would look like with actual flesh and bone. The next step was to list and define the personality and umwelt that wasn't just an evaluation of its appearance but of its body language and interior world.

Mu originally began as a re-interpretation of The Little Mermaid and was drawn by combining human parts with those of a walrus and a beluga whale. Later, by defining Mu's carriers of significance, a better understanding of both its *umwelt* and its physical appearance were developed. In the final rendering, I forced myself to disorient and further question whatever initial, biased, notions of its behavior and environment that I may have gathered, based on my original sketch and of the stereotypes that follow the various animal components that make up the hybrid. This is in an attempt to empty out any strong associated symbolism in order to create a new personality.

Once Mu was complete, I had the environment to consider. Looking at Mu's unkempt appearance, my first thought was that it should live in a run-down shack in some polluted back alley somewhere, eating garbage. The problem was that I was profiling Mu based on its appearance. I wanted to challenge my own preconceived ideas of the character with the intention that the viewer would also be challenged. There is no reason why it couldn't live in a home that was cared for and kept clean in areas like the dining room, while private spaces, like the bedroom, were left a mess.

I acknowledge that it is virtually impossible to generate a pure *umwelt* for Mu or any other being. Instead, I wish to separate initial projections from the hybrid entirely, and keep questioning its reasons for being, rather than jumping to conclusions based on its appearance. Yet, I utilize this process of understanding to disorient my own subjectivity enough to create what I hope is an objective space in which Mu can exist and retain some ambiguity. Uexküll calls this objective space where we observe other animals *umgebung* – a term which is elaborated on in the following section through the lens of animation.



## Umwelt and Umgebung

Not surprisingly, as an animator, I have been investigating hybrid forms within the realm of animation. There is a long history of anthropomorphic characters in animation, prominently seen in children's films. Through the process of attributing human characteristics to animals, films like Disney's *Bambi* fail to consider the *umwelt* of a baby deer. *Bambi* is a puppet made to carry out human actions (Fig. 9). Evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould suggests that,

Disney animators knew well that the large eyes of Bambi would elicit an emotional response from audiences more akin to the affection displayed toward a human child than if they had drawn the deer's eyes to scale. (Daston and Mitman 11)



Fig. 9: Myron Campbell, *Bambi sketch with real deer*. 2012. Drawing, 20 x 26 cm.

Through anthropomorphism, the creators of children's animations are able to evoke an empathetic response from the audience. Disney characters often hold true to stereotypes derived from human projections and exaggerations of animal behavior: the timid baby deer, the mischievous rabbit, the wise old owl, and the villainous snake. Different from an *umwelt*, this approach reflects what Uexküll describes as *umgebung*, which Agamben summarizes as,

[T]he objective space in which we see a living being moving. Every environment is a closed unity in itself which results from the selective sampling of a series of elements or "marks" in the *umgebung*, which, in turn, is nothing other than man's environment.

(40-41)

The *umgebung* is the space where an outsider can perceive the *umwelt* of another. The main difference is that considering another living being's *umwelt* is a way to understand how they *subjectively* perceive their environments whereas remaining in the *umgebung* means to *only* view the being and its environment from an objective point-of-view.

Disney's *umgebung* is limited to showing audiences classic stereotypes in many of their characters, while animation as a medium has the potential to do much more by challenging expectations, blurring boundaries between human and animal, and creating fantastical worlds where hybrids exist. There is no discernible way to understand another's *umwelt* entirely. As humans, we cannot experience the *umwelt* of a dolphin or bird without our own perspective interfering. In this way, it is impossible to completely escape anthropomorphic and anthropocentric tendencies when deciphering the behavior of another being. Yet the attempt

to apply the sensibilities of a particular *umwelt* disorients the *umgebung* enough to mitigate presumptions and projections that come with simple anthropomorphism.

Working across time and genres, I am fascinated with the ongoing fabrication of strange hybrid characters. In the following section, two classic examples of fictional hybrid monsters are discussed along with some definition of their *umwelt*. Identifying their *carriers of significance* aids in achieving a better understanding of both characters that reveals insight into their behavior and their potential for violent and monstrous acts.



Fig. 10: Universal Studios, *Frankenstein's Monster*. 1935. Drawing, 1,194 × 1,499 px.

## **Frankenstein's Monster**

The tradition of monstrosity, which is especially evident in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, continues to haunt my imagination. Standing over 8 ft tall, Frankenstein's

monster is revolting and hideous. His grotesqueness stems partly from his appearance (a slightly translucent, yellowed skin) and partly from the technological of his creation (having been constructed of chemicals and the assembly of stolen body parts from multiple corpses) (Fig. 10). However, his behavior can be read as more complicated than a straightforward monster. At the time of his birth, the creature is caring and tender and as innocent as any newborn. Unlike his mute, dull-witted behavior in the Hollywood movie portrayals, Shelley's original depiction is one of intelligence and kindness. In the following passage, Dr. Victor Frankenstein is woken with a start by the creature watching fondly over him.

...by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch— the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. (57)

The creature is undeniably perceived and treated as wild and unruly throughout the story. After numerous attempts at integration and acceptance, both society and his own creator reject him. This results in the creature's feeling disgust towards himself. Given a voice in the story, he reflects, "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (Shelley 210). This feeling of rejection fuels his rage, as he takes revenge on his unsympathetic maker, Dr. Victor Frankenstein. The monster is provoked into this vengeful state as a result of a love-less and affection-less relationship with his creator. Perhaps the monster's need for "affection" is one of his *carriers of significance*, and the deprivation of that *carrier* gives rise to a brutal temperament. Although there are numerous violent acts, the

creature's embodiment of humanity arguably outweighs his acts of monstrosity. Though the creature makes frequent attempts to gain friendship with others, the rejection he endures and the deprivation of the *carrier of significance* (i.e., affection), results in murderous actions on his part, all targeted toward Frankenstein's friends and family members. The motive for horrific acts is established and the creator's monster is unleashed.

George Levine, an editor of a recent collection of essays on *Frankenstein*, observes: "So pervasive has been the recognition that the monster and [Dr.] Frankenstein are two aspects of the same being that the writers in this volume assume rather than argue it" (Levine 15). Dr. Frankenstein denies having any involvement in the initial murders, that adds to rejection of the creature, and leads to further killings. His shame and fear and loss of social standing are obstacles to the well being of his loved ones. It is arguable that had it not been for his keeping the beast a secret, the murders may not have happened. This apparent shame, indirectly, puts the blame on Dr. Frankenstein for the bloodshed. This man, having the appearance of normality, in contrast to the beast's inhuman countenance, harbors the monster-within that grows with hatred towards his creation. I agree with Levine that it is indeed Dr. Frankenstein who is the monster, and not the creature after all.

The complex behavior of Frankenstein's creation demonstrates an infinite potential for both horror and beauty. In truth, this story could not have achieved such levels of horror had the compassionate side of the creature not been evident. It is my aspiration to achieve this quality of complexity in my own hybrid characters, and effectively destabilize the distinction between human and monster for the viewer – or at least to challenge the conventional opposition of them.

## Swamp Thing

*Swamp Thing*, a comic book created by writer Len Wein and artist Berni Wrightson is reminiscent of the *Frankenstein* narrative, but with a modern twist. In the origin story, Dr. Alec Holland, a biologist, joins with The Green, an elemental community of all living plants on earth, and thus becomes Swamp Thing, inheriting the ability to animate vegetation and communicate with all plant-life. As a result of this hideous transformation, he becomes a powerful supernatural being, but he is tortured by his 'gift' of being able to hear the voices of vegetation. For example, in the following frames (Fig. 11), he can hear the screaming of trees being strangled by other plants. He describes plant life, which appears to be beautiful, as the most vicious strain of life in existence.

In its genesis, in 1971, *Swamp Thing* appeared to serve as the perfect stereotypical hero comic: a scientist is transformed into a monstrous humanoid after a chemical explosion, and who then fights evil in a crusade to regain his humanity. Unfortunately, this was not compelling enough to sustain an audience and after a huge drop in sales, the book was put into retirement. The story lacked depth, and characterization of the Swamp Thing was an all-too-familiar revenge scenario.

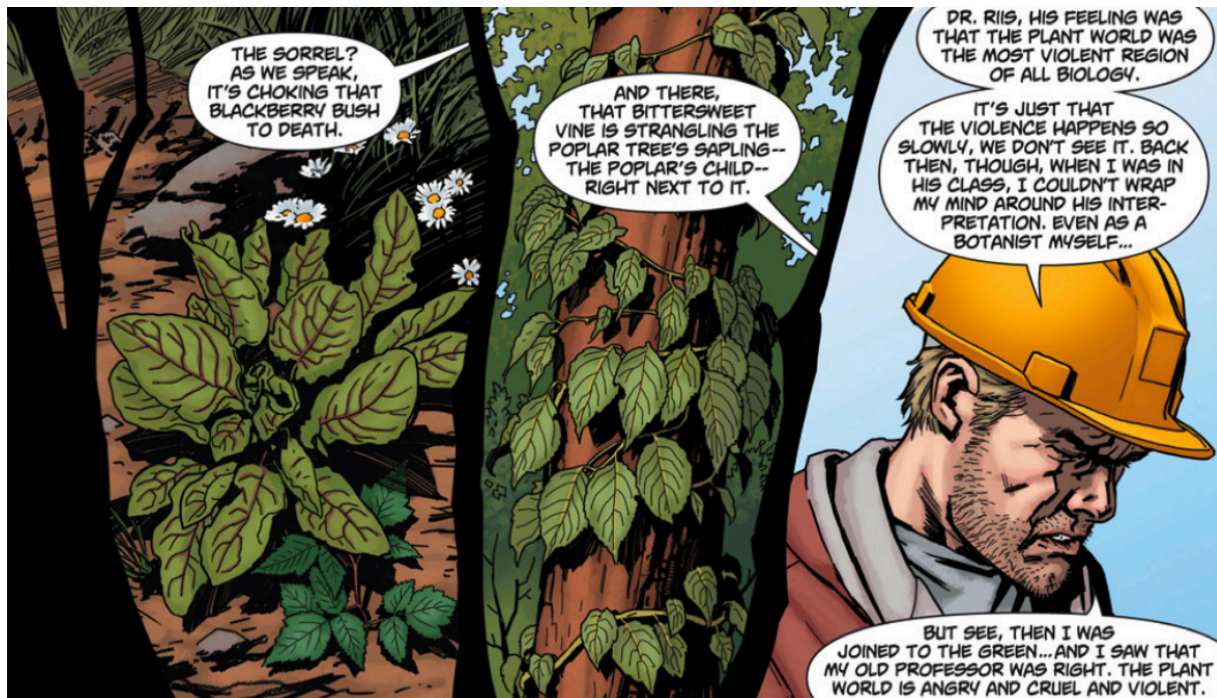


Fig. 11: Snyder, Scott (w), Yanick Paquette (p), and Nathan Fairbairn (i), *Swamp Thing* #2. 2011. Illustration; comic book, 17.15 x 8.5 cm.

Alan Moore resurrected the series in 1982, altering the origin of Swamp Thing by evoking ancient mythological folklore. Moore was influenced by traditional legends of "The Green Man" who was said to represent rebirth and "denote fertility, growth and renewal. Green leaves are symbolic of life renewed" (Varner, 192). Drawing from this rich source material, Moore began to develop a character with an enhanced and intricate behavior more conflicted about the transformation. He feels strength and power as Swamp Thing yet still longs for his human form. Moore's version inserts a degree of wisdom into the character that was previously absent, creating a riveting narrative quality that reveals Swamp Thing's unusual ontology. The creature's origin, as described by a scientist in issue #21, comes after Alec Holland's death.

[Alec Holland] decomposes [at the bottom of the swamp]. Those plants eat him. They eat him as if he were a planarian worm, or a cannibal wise man, or a genius on rye! They eat him...and they become infected by a powerful consciousness that does not realize it is no longer alive! It was a plant that thought it was Alec Holland! (Moore 11)

His newly merged consciousness begins a process of morphing bones, organs and flesh from various sources of plant-life. Interestingly, the beast in this case is not a human transformed, but instead a memory of the man restored from “supple plant fiber” (Moore 12).

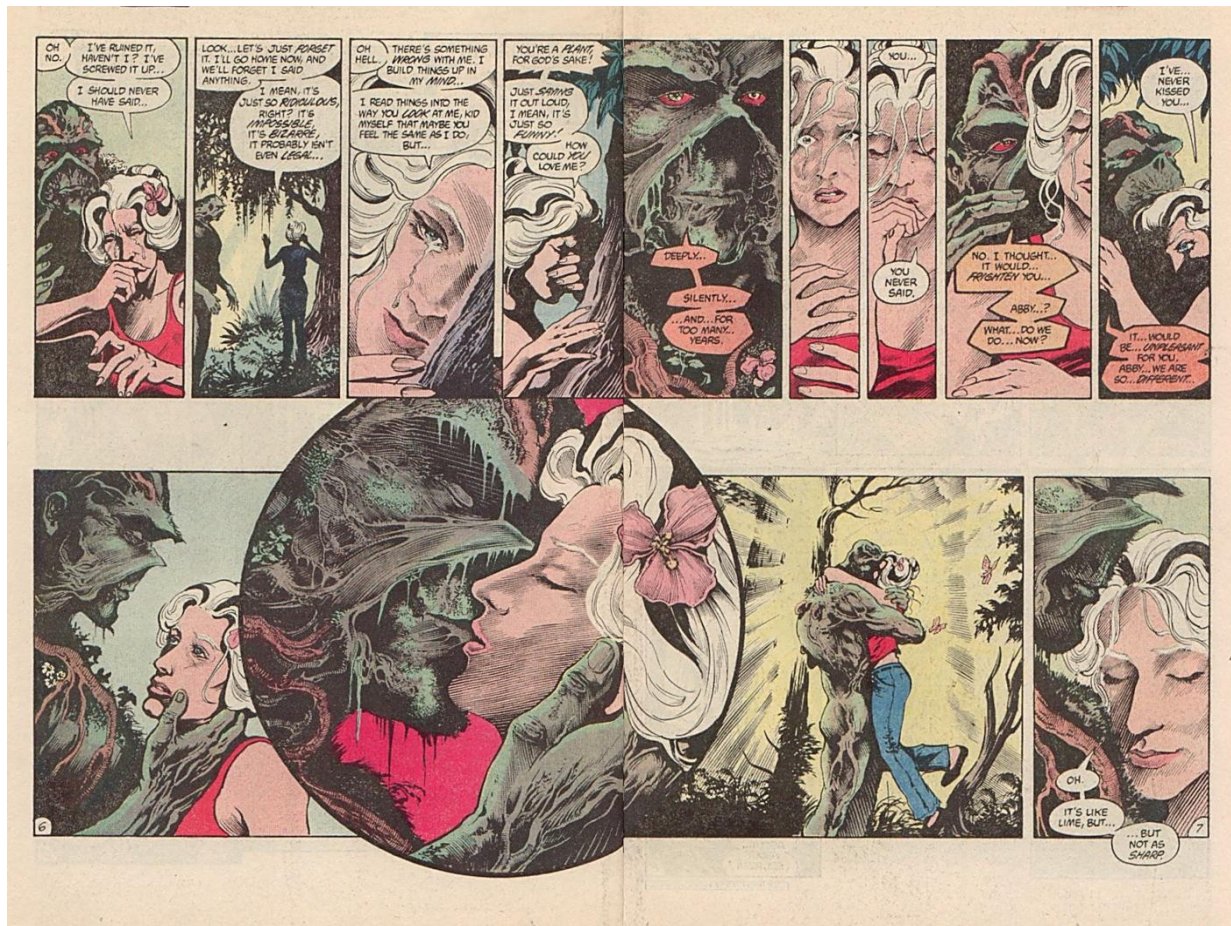


Fig. 12: Moore, Alan (w), Stephen Bissett and John Totleben (p), and Tatjana Wood (i), *Swamp Thing: Love and Death* Vol 2. 1984. Illustration; comic book, 34 x 26 cm.



Along with Holland's residual memories come recollections of a woman he loves. The female character, Abby Arcaine, is faced with reconnecting with her past lover through the transformed mess of vines and weeds that now is Swamp Thing. The plant creature is haunted by memories that are not quite his own, yet exist within him as the residue of his humanity. These memories develop into a renewed, yet transformed, love for Abby Arcaine, one that is reciprocated over time. In this relationship, the reader discovers a gentler, more humane side to the beast, one that is sensitive and caring (Fig. 12). However, his monstrosity still surfaces in the face of danger, when he rips limbs from other creatures that pose a threat to him or his loved ones.

Similar to Frankenstein's monster, Swamp Thing's makeup is constructed from torture and torment. Regardless of its monstrous appearance though, the desire to find its own humanity, while not over-powering, still remains, whether through the physical rebuilding of its human form or in acquiring the love of a woman. The creature, still filled with conflict, is tasked with administering a balance between human beings and their environment, while infected with a willful survival drive and the viciousness of plants, animals and humans. This intricacy allows for a richness of character and draws out complex emotions.

Moore seems to have understood that it was important to allow the reader to see through the eyes of Swamp Thing, aiding in the reader's experience of the creature's *umwelt*. One of Swamp Thing's *carriers of significance* could be interpreted as the maintenance of balance between human civilization and the environment. Another could be love, which he clearly benefits from. One *carrier of significance* does not outweigh the other, but rather, there exists a balance of the two that, in turn, ties intrinsically to the creature's existence.

Swamp Thing and Frankenstein's creature are both characters that can be easily perceived as fearful monsters. They are grotesque, oftentimes vicious, and murderous. However, after much reflection on the stories, I believe that this negative perception becomes harder to support. By defining their *carriers of significance*, I have to consciously ask myself: What do they need to survive? What food do they eat? What are their privations?

Deprivation is of particular interest, as it results in revealing something seemingly monstrous. For example, if someone steals a dog's T-bone steak, it could get vicious. If that dog is starving, it may even attack out of pure desperation. Yet, supply it with love, affection, food, water and a regular run in the park, and one hopefully experiences a tender side to the dog. The prospect of experiencing *fear* of the hybrid is one that must be acknowledged. In the following final chapter, an attraction to horror and the abject are examined while historicizing some common trepidations about cross-species.

## **Paradox of Horror**

### **Facing Fear of Hybrids**

For the last two centuries, the hybrid has been employed in films, literature, myths and fairytales as a metaphor for the dark, monstrous side of human nature. Works such as *Frankenstein* and *Swamp Thing* represent a general cultural conditioning to fear the hybrid, which is often represented as a disfigured beast, a monstrosity of man, and an adversary of the brave and virtuous. The monstrous hybrid must be defeated in order to secure the natural order of things and retain a triumph of good over evil. In 1900, D.S. Lamb writes in reference to the "Mythical Monster"

[W]e shall find that almost without exception the good or helpful things were personified by forms that are natural or normal and comely, and the bad or hurtful by forms that are unnatural (so-called), abnormal, and uncomely, perhaps even hideous and monstrous. (278)

Hybrid characters arguably contain projections of impurity and are therefore associated with the suggested “badness” that Lamb is referring to. As a result, the hybrid existence is usually expressed as malformation and evil, aiding in the general fear against hybridization. Freak Shows, like that of American showman, P.T. Barnum’s, began to be very popular in the mid-19th century. These spectacles showcased “unnatural” hoax creatures like the *Feejee Mermaid*, which was a fallacious mummified half-human and half-fish. Others included real-life oddities like the deformed Joseph Merrick who was coined *Elephant Man* to establish both fear and fascination in the audience with the adoption of a hybrid name. On the surface, these creatures can be terrifying. Yet the monstrosities and creatures of the freak shows like Barnum’s, according to philosopher, Christopher Cox,

can easily be read as cruel spectacles that primarily serve to affirm the normality of their spectators.” Yet historian Erin O’Connor suggests another reading, one more akin to Barnum’s own. In the freak show, ‘[m]onstrosity does not register defect as disease; instead it makes human aberration into an advertisement for a new embodiment.’ (Cox 22)

Mu explores/proposes a new ontology, a new embodiment that transcends the hybrid as malevolent, while continuing to allow for the potential of horrific acts. It has the potential to be either, depending on the interaction with the viewer. Mu’s external and internal configuration

crosses boundaries and displaces notions of purity of species, challenging thus what it means to be human, animal or hybrid. This emergent condition of being allows for an opportunity to examine what it is to be more than human or more than animal. All species are capable of carrying out monstrous acts, of being a monster. Fear can arise at the thought of losing what is deemed important in one's life, revealing the monster. The frightening notion is, on a primal level, that one might enjoy losing control.

### **Abjection and Hybrids**

Contemporary philosopher, Noel Carroll, describes a "paradox of horror" as a parallel attraction to and repulsion from the genre (160), but offers an opportunity within the said paradox to uncover attractive qualities within abject hybrids. First, what is meant by *abjection*? In *The Powers of Horror*, philosopher Julia Kristeva describes abjection as the loss of distinction of clear boundaries, stating,

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the science, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. (4)

According to this definition, abjection is not exclusively a response to filth or wretchedness; it is to filth disguised within cleanliness, or to the hero hidden within the monster. It seems that for Kristeva, an abject being contains a paradox: it does not respect known boundaries and consists of both attractive and repulsive qualities. A killer can have an initial enticing quality about him,

perhaps to lure in unassuming prey. This method of disguising evil with goodness is frightening, making the monster even more fearful, since it is initially encountered as beautiful.

On the surface, Mu is fleshy with many visible scars and blemishes on its slightly translucent, blubbery skin. It has sharp teeth and greasy hair. At first glance it is repulsive, yet it is my hope to counter or mitigate this repulsiveness with benevolent acts. For example, while eating, it may share its food with a friend. Therefore, even while Mu can be seen as abject, it demonstrates a moment of naïve pleasure. The playfulness it shows when it enjoys a flickering light counters an exclusive reading of it as abject (Fig. 13). Mu's actions are unpredictable, reinforcing its indiscernible boundaries of good and evil.



Fig. 13: Myron Campbell, *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, 2012. Still, 1280 x 720px.

It is understandable that the idea of a hybrid could evoke fear. Mu can be interpreted as abject because of an unusual appearance that is disparate from what is expected of humanity,

and that is beyond comprehension. Interacting with *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, allows the viewer to engage Mu in its own world, or *umwelt*, providing an opportunity to empathize with it. If this were to happen, it could blur the boundaries of human and animal, human and hybrid.

The elastic realm of collage, mixed with animation, allows for exaggeration within hybrid forms and their environments. It gives license to create unconventional yet empathetic characters. The strange and otherworldly are brought to life (so to speak). By way of using the film, *Little Otik*, by Czech stop-motion animator Jan Švankmajer, I have examined my own particular application of the “paradox of horror” as referred to by Carroll.

## Otik

Švankmajer's worlds are always in a state of flux: inanimate objects become animate, characters and environments constantly change and transform. What is familiar is altered and reconstituted, echoing the Surrealist motto of making the familiar strange.



Fig. 14: Jan Švankmajer, *Little Otik*, 2000. Film still, 1920 x 1080 px. Used by permission by Zeitgeist Films.

Švankmajer utilizes animation to achieve a disorienting affect for the viewer. His characters (such as a dancing T-bone steak or a disembodied head) are often situated within the context of the real world (which is also reminiscent of activating Ernst's "explosive junction"). In his feature film, *Little Otik* (2000), a man and wife care for Otik, a tree-human baby boy. An introduction to Otik shows fundamental infantile qualities like innocence and naivety that are attractive and create empathy for the creature. As he ages, his hybrid and emergent nature is revealed, becoming more inhuman, first, by eating his mother's hair (Fig. 14), and later by killing and eating the neighbours. But just when Otik is at his most monstrous, he befriends a little girl who feels sorry for the creature, and so the viewer may echo her feelings of empathy. Personally, I find myself rooting for the beast.

Like Frankenstein's monster, Otik has been forced into a human existence, but their makeup is fundamentally different. Frankenstein's monster is timid and compassionate, propelled to kill only because of a lack of affection. In contrast, a raw bestial nature resides in Otik, echoing Agamben's tick, and it shares a similar desire for blood as his *carrier of significance*. Otik becomes a predatory creature because the need for blood is part of his composition. Unlike Frankenstein's monster, he is not driven by circumstance to kill; he is born to do so. Otik is at first treated as human, but it rejects this projection in order to satisfy its wild untamed, animal needs. Certainly, he has moments of tenderness and shows human qualities, like when as an infant he is laughing with his mother. But these serene moments of Otik's youth that preface goodness are later countered with merciless acts of murder. And yet, Otik's child-like naivety still exists even during these kills, which thus compels the viewer to question the

creature's responsibility in these murderous actions. The abject nature of its conflicting drives blurs the edges between savagery and innocence.

Otik contains a blend of unquantifiable traits that I model my hybrids after, a *paradox of horror* that inhabits indecipherable amounts of good and evil. This paradox is ultimately unpredictable, and it contains an intricate configuration that is only partially revealed at any given time. What is first interpreted as evil is made questionable — however, the same could also be said of goodness.

I see it as important that I treat Mu with some sensitivity. In order to successfully present virtue within a hybrid character, I must simultaneously reveal viciousness and vice versa.



**Interruption #3: Monsters are your friend - 04/02/11 - 11:25am.**

My daughter and I are having breakfast with her Grandmother. When I mention the monster nightmares to her I can see Mya's mood shift. Her shoulders hunch and she looks down at her plate of pancakes. She is getting scared thinking about them again. Her Grandmother recognizes this and jumps in, "Mya, don't worry about monsters. They are just lonely and all they really want to do is play with you. So next time you see one, just invite it to come and play with you and it won't scare you anymore."

Mya is apprehensive about this but her Grandmother is very convincing. I jump in too. "You don't have to be scared, Mya. I think they are more scared of you than you are of them." Another borrowed phrase but it seems fitting.

Not long after, Mya tells me the name of her new monster friend, Ahmon, and then says, "Monster's nice now".

And I believe her.

## A Way Forward

My daughter Mya has become a significant component to my ever-changing methodology. Our talks and her naïve perspective on the world directly influences how I think of the characters and worlds I create. One can only speculate as to how these visions and stories affect her. I suspect because of our many conversations about monsters, Mya exaggerates her stories to amuse me, which, of course, they do.

The *interruptions* that appear so abruptly in this paper are partially an embellishment on my part to further experiment with narrative, but they also contain a fundamental link to *umwelt*. One of Ahmon's *carriers of significance*, according to my mother, is friendship. It just wants companionship, and when it was deprived of this, it got angry and scary. Of the three, the last interruption is my favorite. When it was happening, I remember thinking about how lucky Mya was for having such an enlightened Grandmother to offer her a unique assessment of monsters.

These interruptions were just three of many conversations I have had with her about monsters. And actually, while writing the first drafts of this paper, I decided to ask her about them again. "Do you ever see your monster friends?" I ask? "No", she replies. "They are mean and stinky and cry too much. And they don't listen." Hmmm. Maybe they are just not compatible.

This project, and this essay, has come to an end and yet it doesn't feel like the end. Along with Mya, the device of *umwelt*, as interpreted by Agamben, has forever altered my method of visualizing, not just hybrids, but all the characters and environments I will potentially create in the future. I see this as the start of a more focused trajectory into the creation of

hybrids and characters, with the intent to break down preconceived notions of monstrosity. I am also interested in the larger undermining of conventional approaches not just in imagery but also in all methods used. This newfound technique of creation has altered the way I develop characters, hybrid or otherwise. The process is more informed and less arbitrary. Once I determine a character's umwelt, there is a wealth of personality that can be revealed in even the most banal actions and visuals. With this addition to my development process of listing a character's umwelt, I look forward to the characters I am going to meet in the future.

My intention is to continue working on a series of interactive installations much like *In the Caves of Mt. Ida, BC*, perhaps by introducing the hybrids to each other, crossing over narratives from one character to the next. What I find endlessly rewarding about this entire process is a newfound, more informed way to consider my research *and* my praxis. It is in the space in between these two components that I intend to spend most of my time.

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