



### **monstrous musings, unconscious utterances**

Frankenstein's Ghosts is a collaborative creation-research project. The aim of the project is to generate a hybrid critical discussion and performance work based on the substantive issues raised in Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, for example, creating technology without responsibility for its impact and questions around identity and difference.

### **collaborators**

Michael Montanaro, choreographer/director; Sha Xin Wei, topological media; Ann Sowcroft, writer; Jérôme De la Pierre, real-time video; John D.S. Adams, Navid Navab and Timothy Sutton, real-time sound; the Blue Rider Ensemble (Anne-Marie Donovan, voice; Liselyn Adams, flute; Pamela Reimer, piano; Beverley Johnston, percussion; Paul Pulford, cello); Christine Jamieson, ethicist and theologian.

### **project history**

In June 2007, several of the project collaborators received SSHRC funding to bring together an interdisciplinary team of academics and artists to share in a deconstruction, analysis and exploration of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This came from a desire among academic scholars to explore artistic transformations of their discourse as a way of pushing their thinking even deeper into the subject matter - working with artists who will transform their research into another "language." For the artists, the impulse came from a desire for deep understanding of the many substantive themes emerging from the novel before embarking on artistic creation.

## **time line**

The research stage of the project ends on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010. We now embark on the creation and development of an 80-minute interdisciplinary performance work. Our goal is to complete a first draft of the work by February 2011 and a final draft by June 2011. Over the course of this period, we will hold creative meetings and performance development workshops in Montreal and Waterloo.

This application is for funding to hold a ten-day development workshop in Montreal with the core creative team, performers and technical personnel.

Inter Arts Matrix (IAM) is the primary producer of the creative and development stages. IAM has been involved in the research and development from the beginning. IAM is in discussions with Glenn Buhr, AD of NUMUS and Majdi Bou Matar, AD of MT Space regarding co-producing the premiere of *Frankenstein's Ghosts* at the IMPACT International Theatre Festival in October 2011. The production will go to Montreal after its Waterloo premiere.

## **creation**

It is not our intention to build a narrative version of Shelley's novel but rather to go to the heart of the questions she raises, questions that are astonishingly relevant today:

- What does it mean to be human?
- To what extent do we create ourselves?
- How do we keep up with the ethical challenges that technological advances present?
- In that sense, is technology alive?
- What is our responsibility towards what we create?
- What is our responsibility towards the "Other"?
- What are our unconscious relationships?
- How can we integrate our shadow self?
- Where is the physical body in all of this?
- Can we ever truly escape?
- Are we part of one body?
- What is monstrous?

Victor Frankenstein reaches for immortality and then rejects his own child, his own creation. That child—that monster, that other—reaches for closeness. In order to be human, he needs to have a relationship with another human.

There are formal elements and images in the novel that we would like to use, such as the letters Walden writes to his sister, telling Victor's story as he lies dying on a ship in the arctic winter. Such as weather, which acts almost as a character in its own right in the novel. Such as the mountains, the rocky shoals of the Hebrides, the extremes in emotion and terrain. Such as the dynamic world of science that emerges in the context of the industrial revolution even while Frankenstein plays God and embraces alchemy—that reaching forward and back.

We have taken our questions, with the novel's setting as a backdrop, and begun creating

sketches, collaboratively translating them into our performative language as images and sound. We are using 19<sup>th</sup> century lighting techniques to create shadow images. Real-time video and sound portray shifting realities, memory and other possible truths. Musically, structured improvisation gives shape to concepts. Movement expresses the need for relationship. Words draw us back and forth from conscious to subconscious.

The creative team's process is truly collaborative. Michael Montanaro leads the process as director.

**We are particularly indebted to:**

- Jungian therapist Penny Norris (England) who took us on an immersive exploration of our shadow selves and whose study of Mary Shelley's life and work continue to provide a deep well of inspiration;
- Ethicist and theologian Christine Jamieson, who shares her own work and introduced us to the work of linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva;
- Also to Jean Daou who educated us on the history of medical technologies and their recent and disturbing implications;
- Suzanne Amro, whose discussions on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, French philosopher and Talmudic analyst, taught us that "our radical responsibility to the Other is primary and primal."