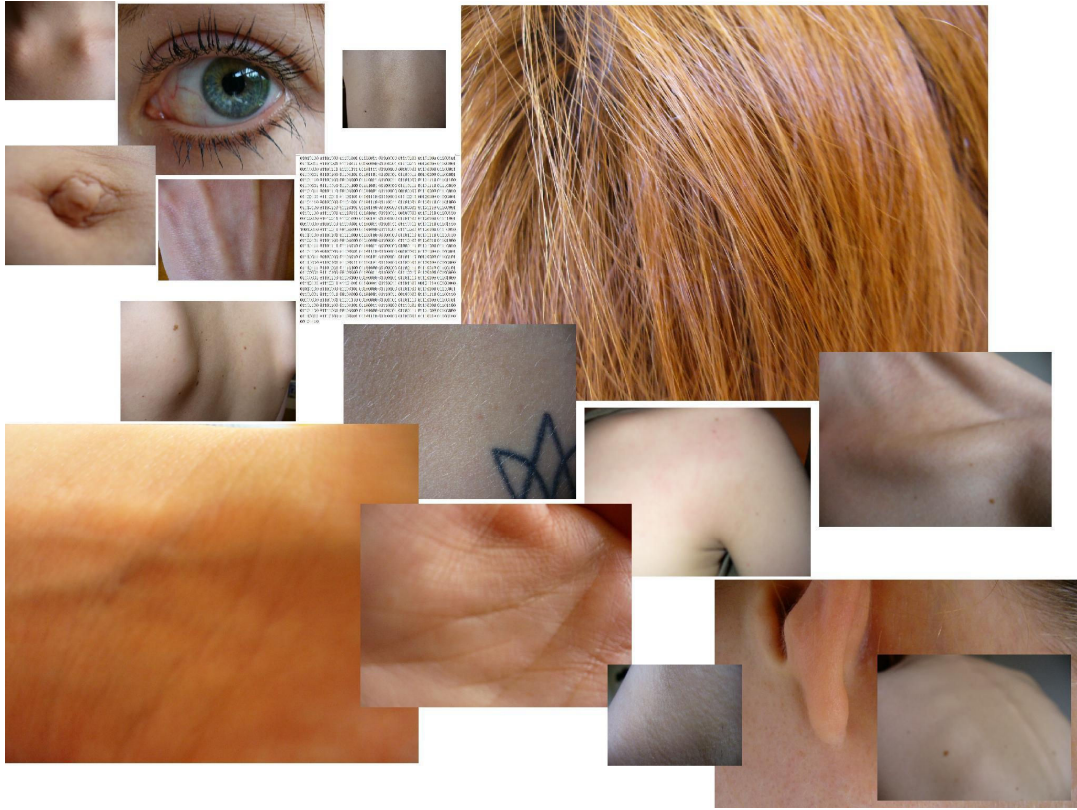


# *Stitch and Split*



## Feminist Alternatives to Frankensteinian Myths in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

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## PROLOGUE

My education at the department of Women's Studies at Utrecht University has informed, formed, and inspired me in countless ways. The task of acknowledging and thanking all people who have helped shaped my development, both academic and personal, during the roller-coaster ride of Women's Studies, is virtually impossible. However, I rest assured that my thanks and acknowledgements may have reached these people already, be they expressed via print-based, digital, RL, VL, oral, or performative paths. Notwithstanding, I would like to express, in no particular order of importance, special thanks to the (fluctuating) *Ask Annabel* team, my former colleagues at the office of the *Netherlands Research School of Women's Studies* (of whom Trude in particular!), and to Rosemarie, Rosi, Erna, Gail, Anna, Chiara, Hanneke, Jennifer, Luisa, Amy, Rozanne, Sanne, Björg, Doro, Eelco, Brigit, the entire cast and crew of the 2005 benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, Betta, Manon, Sabrina, Adelheid, and N. Katherine.

Towards the development of my thesis, in particular, I...

Thank you,

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## INTRODUCTION

The body is not one, though it seems so from up here,  
from this privileged viewpoint up top.  
(Jackson, "Stitch Bitch: the Patchwork Girl" 527)

It was in Linköping, Sweden, during the annual NOI♀SE summer school<sup>1</sup>, that I first encountered Shelley Jackson's 1995 hypertext fiction *Patchwork Girl* during a lecture and subsequent afternoon workshop by Jenny Sundén.<sup>2</sup> The multiple layers of the work, its intertextuality and intricacy inspired me to such an extent that I decided to write my thesis on *Patchwork Girl*. Upon conducting research on the text and its significance in a wider, social context, I was struck by the prevalence of the term "Frankensteinian monsters".<sup>3</sup> The legacy of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein, Or The Modern Prometheus* continues to show itself in various ways. Its themes of creating life from parts of dead humans, the blurring of the boundaries between life and death, human and animal, and nature and culture, are all mediated through a book: one of the locations where science and art meet. I continue to find echoes of "Frankensteinian creations" in various places and forms: for instance, in an exhibition currently housed at the Central Museum in Utrecht, *Genesis*, which aims to blur the boundaries between (genetic) science and art by showing how both fields cross-fertilise each other. The Frankensteinian metaphor of creation, along with its ethical implications, is rampant as it appears in multiple shapes and forms in contemporary European culture: B-horror films, scientific journals in genetic modification-techniques, and in even in porn-films. Especially in genetic science this metaphor of "unnatural" creation is always connoted as negative and unethical, and quite frequently the monster is, wrongly, identified as the "Frankenstein"; heavily laden with rage against its creator, and brimming with murderous appetite. Rather than dismissing the Frankensteinian metaphor of creation as simply negative, it can instead be appropriated as a figuration, as elaborated upon by Rosi Braidotti in her 1994 work *Nomadic Subjects*:

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<sup>1</sup> NOI♀SE is an acronym of "Network of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies in Europe". It is an ongoing annual two-week summer school, taking place in various locations in Europe; it is coordinated by the *Netherlands Research School in Women's Studies* (NOV) in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The abovementioned edition of NOI♀SE took place from the 5<sup>th</sup> until the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2005 at the *Tema Institute* of Linköping University, Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> By the term "fiction" I refer to something invented by the imagination and/or an assumption of a possibility as a fact irrespective of the question of its truth

<sup>3</sup> By the term "text" I refer to something considered as an object to be examined, explicated, or deconstructed, and/or to something likened to a text.

Such a figuration is productive for the purposes of furthering feminist ontology and epistemology since it deals with issues of science, knowledge, the body and the very core of the cultural, namely the collective imaginary and the transformative potential where these fields overlap. The work of such a figuration is thus not just indicative of the cultural and political orientations within such overlapping fields, such a figuration approached with feminist tools does also, in a modest manner, contribute to a more feminist orientation within the collective imaginary. (3)

Thus, by perceiving the Frankensteinian myth as a figuration with which to further feminist ontology and epistemology, the myth transforms itself into a powerful analytical tool to break through to the collective imaginary.

The creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, upon which Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* draws heavily, has sparked numerous debates, analyses and spin-offs, as well as having developed into an Ur-figuration, which appears in diverse sources and contexts. The common denominator in such uses of the Frankensteinian monster is its representational element of horror, abjection and "unnaturalness". The domain of analysis underlying this thesis is that of the symbolic, cultural, and imaginary level: a level of imaginary which science, practiced in society, also taps into. This is the reason why I deem it interesting to study both the "common" Frankensteinian myths of creation as well as the alternatives in the shape of hypertextual reworked stories of embodiment and ways of seeing and knowing. Moreover, Frankensteinian myths of creation inform the collective fantasy landscape that gives form and materialises into science practiced and made public, for instance in the form of popular science, which has been elaborated upon in detail in Cecilia Åsberg's PhD thesis on the cultural imaginary around the new genetics in both science media and popular science media. The monster's open-ended character allows it, in terms of a figuration, to foreground a multitude of ethical questions and developments. Frankenstein's monster has attained an almost mythic status within the realms of both the popular imagination and literary history. The monster's symbolic value has been read in terms of gender, class, "race", ethnicity, and sex through exhaustive new studies of Mary Shelley's "Ur-Text" *Frankenstein*. In various readings, the monster symbolises women's creativity, Mary Shelley herself, or literature; the monster itself is social struggle, menacing technology, bio-ethics gone awry, the danger of science without conscience, or an autonomous machine. Moretti aptly states that, like Dracula, Frankenstein's Creature is a "totalizing monster" (84): one who threatens to never be conquered, one immune to temporary restoration of order and peace. This "totalising monster", a modern invention, threatens community from all sides and from its very core rather than from a simple outside. This chameleonic nature of the monster makes it a symbol of multiplicity and indeed invites multiple interpretations.

The central question that underlies this thesis is how Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* provides a new feminist alternative to dominant Frankensteinian myths. I argue that the work indeed offers alternative approaches to linear and positivist knowledge production as it reworks the Frankensteinian mythologies that have haunted real science in society. Several factors contribute to its status as offering a new feminist alternative, namely: its certain use of technology, its portrayal of a female monster that is endowed with agency and accountability, the manner in which the work tackles master myths of Frankenstein, its open-endedness, and its (psychoanalytical) deconstruction of female subjectivity and monstrosity. Crucially, in order to analyse the extent to which Shelley's *Patchwork Girl* may be considered an alternative to dominant myths of unethical creation, the central research question is divided into two steps, and thus chapters: the first chapter, *Producing the Monster*, focuses on the manner in which the text is composed through a method of close-reading. The second chapter, *Embodying the Monster*, enters the skin of the Patchwork Girl herself, as it were, and maps possible interpretations of her monstrous embodiment through various feminist theories.

Necessarily, the scope of this research is limited, as it does not investigate the reception of the hypertext work, nor does it extensively explore the technical or labour-specific aspects inherent in its production. I am fully aware of the fact that this particular research topic is infused with privileges: even though digital cultures are an implicit and important part of contemporary North-Western geopolitical cultures, a vast majority of the global population does not even have access to a telephone, let alone a computer or network to connect to. Therefore, the strategies and processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as differences in accessibility, need to be accounted for. Keeping these limitations and privileges in mind, however, it is my opinion that a literary and materially-based close-reading of this work is anyway important, even though in the face of the socio-economic *digital divide*.<sup>4</sup>

In order to answer my research question, the specific method of my analysis takes the shape of a close reading of the hypertext work, tracing its intertextuality and materiality. As a theoretical framework, I draw heavily on the theories and concepts outlined by N. Katherine Hayles, one of the

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<sup>4</sup>The term "digital divide", coined in the 1990s, describes the growing gap between those who have access to and the skills to use ICT and those who, for socio-economic and/or geographical reasons, have limited or no access. A number of areas of specific concern have been identified, namely that people are likely to be disadvantaged by their geographic location, age, gender, culture and/or economic status. In particular, Pippa Norris has mapped the widespread concern that the explosive growth of the Internet is exacerbating existing inequalities between the information rich and poor. She argues that a global divide is evident between industrialized and developing societies, and that a social divide is apparent between rich and poor within each nation. Additionally, Norris analyses the online community and provides evidence that a democratic divide is emerging between those who do and do not use Internet resources to engage, mobilise and participate in public life. See: Norris, Pippa. *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2001.

foremost feminist media theorists, researching the relationship between literature and science. Crucial to the framework and the development of this thesis is Hayles' call for media-specific analysis (hereafter abbreviated MSA). Printed books have existed for such a long time that their format is easily taken for granted as something unquestionable. The possible ways of making the material construction of a novel as a printed medium explicit are infinite, as N. Katherine Hayles' 2002 novel *Writing Machines* shows. The primary significance of *Writing Machines* lies in the relationship between its material design and its argument for material criticism. The design of the book not only embodies, but enables its argument. For example, all quotations appear as images of the texts from which they were extracted, rather than as continuous typescript. Additionally, important passages are emphasised by imaging them as "bubble" text seen through a convex lens. On the table of contents page, vertical lines are printed which represent the page edges imaged as if one were looking at the book from the side. The number and density of the lines provide a visual map to the position in the book, with line thickness correlating with chapter length. Lastly, the actual edges of the book contain abstract black marks which when read together in one direction say "WRITING" and in the other direction "MACHINES", which emphasises the cumulative effect of the individual pages in creating a whole. In *Writing Machines*, Hayles first puts into practice what she later theorises in her most recent book *My Mother Was A Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (2005): the importance of media-specific analysis (MSA). Understanding literature as the interplay between form and medium, MSA insists that texts must always be embodied to exist in the world. Hayles argues that digital media provide an opportunity to see print with new eyes and, with that chance, the possibility of understanding how deeply literary theory and criticism have been permeated with assumptions specific to print. It is important to mention that *Patchwork Girl* is issued in CD-Rom format and requires installation on the hard-drive of the computer before it can be accessed. Additionally, the interface of the programme requires the user/reader to have access to a mouse, keyboard or touchpad in order to navigate and proceed in the narrative.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the accessibility of the text is inherently connected to the use of computer mediated technologies: one has to purchase and access *Patchwork Girl* in a certain format, and needs to be equipped with certain computer skills.

While this thesis is text oriented, the theoretical framework does also draw on visual culture, women's studies, literary studies, and philosophy; nevertheless, the dominant analytical toolbox that is deployed is that of a literary close-reading. Through the method of close-reading, the thesis explores the relation between women and technology by looking at writing and/as reproduction in

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<sup>5</sup> With the term "narrative" I simply refer to the complete framework enabling and producing a story.

an era when reproductive technologies are increasingly intervening in both works of art and human bodies. This is here done using Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* as a sort of a cultural prism, diffracting aspects of a digital re-mediation and reproduction of Mary Shelley's (1818) *Frankenstein* novel in the shape of hypertext fiction. Drawing upon the narrative of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, the hypertext twists the tale by focusing on the development of the *female* monster, instead of on that of the *male* monster, which is the focal point in the original novel. In *Frankenstein*, the female monster is denied life as she is destroyed by Victor Frankenstein, the scientist who created her. In *Patchwork Girl*, however, Shelley Jackson reawakens the female monster by having her sewn together by Mary Shelley, her original creator, herself. The scars traversing the monster's body parallel the fracturing of hypertextual links between pieces of texts/images, turning reading into needlework and the computer into a reproductive technology of monstrous bodies and identities. Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* does not only raise questions about the limits of bodies on cultural margins, but about the very limits of humanness, of life itself.

Two levels are at work in this thesis: the first level focuses on the hypertext itself, whereby the symbolic, cultural and imaginary dimensions from which *Patchwork Girl* is created are taken into account. The second level on which the thesis operates is my specific viewpoint from which I analyse the text. The act of providing alternatives is a feminist move *par excellence*: "we" who are situated at the margins not only have knowledge of what it means to be constituted as the Other (which could entail occupying a position of being gay, black, poor, disabled, female, illiterate, or old); the periphery also has an extensive knowledge of the centre. Thus, the strategy embedded in *Patchwork Girl* is an inherently feminist one: it takes a master narrative and then tackles it, thereby not creating something completely different, but *appropriating* the dominant narrative and making it different. Admittedly, providing alternatives is not exclusively reserved to feminist action, though feminism *always* provides alternatives.

The first level of analysis, that of the materiality of the text itself, presupposes that the symbolic cultural imaginary inherent in *Patchwork Girl* reflects the culturally and politically specific location of the author Shelley Jackson, as she plays with this imaginary by modifying and criticising it. Jackson blends together various written sources from divergent fields; not only does Mary Shelley's canonical novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* figure extensively, Frank Baum's children's novel *Patchwork Girl of Oz* is cited and appropriated repeatedly. Additionally, the hypertext novel includes references and quotes from various other sources, such as feminist key-texts, anatomical reference material, and fairy tales. Jackson, born in the Philippines in 1963, grew up in Berkeley, California and

received a B.A. in art from Stanford University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Brown University in the United States. Alongside *Patchwork Girl* she published two other hypertexts: *My Body* and *The Doll Games*. Additionally, in 2003 she launched the *Skin Project*, published exclusively in the form of tattoos on the skin of volunteers, one word at a time. Jackson, furthermore, has published several print-based works: the novel *Half Life*, a collection of short stories entitled *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, as well as writing and illustrating several children's books. Jackson's specific location is that of a white, educated woman, whose native language is English, and whose geo-political location is predominantly US-based.

The second level inherent in this thesis is from where *Patchwork Girl* is viewed, namely from my specific location as the author of this thesis. I am a white, educated, lesbian woman, born in the UK and living in the Netherlands and a bilingual speaker of English and Dutch. My University education includes the fields of Gender Studies, Literary Studies, Theatre Studies and Performance Studies.

*Patchwork Girl* is an important topic of research, as it taps into and draws from a certain imaginary which questions the boundaries of notions such as monstrosity and femininity as they are embedded in culture.

# 1. PRODUCING THE MONSTER

## 1.1 INTRODUCING THE TEXT

Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is a hypertext novel, issued in CD-ROM format, published by Eastgate Systems, and built using the hypertext environment-programme Storyspace. Hypertext requires a way of joining a word or image to another page, document, or another medium on the Internet or in another computer programme so that the reader is enabled to move from one to the other easily. George Landow, an early electronic literature critic and theorist, as well as a pioneer in the analysis of hypertext and hypermedia, has argued that *Patchwork Girl* truly embodies the possibilities of hypertext, as the text:

appears to fragment, to atomize, into constituent elements; and these reading units take on a life of their own as they become more self-contained, because they become less dependent on what comes before or after in a linear succession. (64)

Following the path-breaking scholarly work on hypertext conducted by Landow, especially his 1992 work *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Literary Theory and Technology*, it can be stated that hypertext enables readers to recognise the degree to which the qualities of collage, particularly those of appropriation, assemblage, and the blurring of limits, edges, and borders, “characterize a good deal of the way we conceive of gender and identity” (“Stitching Together Narrative”). Moreover, not only does *Patchwork Girl* incorporate a powerful visualisation of gender and identity-based boundaries, it allows a description of a possible figuration of the self. Landow adamantly praises Jackson's work by stating that:

*Patchwork Girl* permits us to use hypertext as a powerful speculative tool that reveals new things about ourselves, while at the same time to retain the sense of strangeness, of novelty. Best of all: It is wonderful writing - sharp, bracing, surprising, endlessly inventive. (Stitching Together Narrative)

Notably, *Patchwork Girl* has, equally, received some negative reviews: according to Ciccarello, the various elements in the work “ultimately add up to little more than an extended character sketch. This overly elaborate collage offers little substance as it unravels.” Be that as it may, the hypertext work comprises of two basic stories: one is about the female, companion monster created by Frankenstein but denied life by him at the last minute. In Jackson's rewrite, the female monster and Mary Shelley, as a character in the hypertext, interfere with Frankenstein's abortive act and give life



traditionally paradigmatic primal scenes of origin, of creation, are here abolished: the Patchwork Girl observes that her birth takes place more than once.

The emphasis on appropriation and transformation in *Patchwork Girl* begins with the main character who is reassembled from the female monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Recall that in *Frankenstein* the male creature, having been abandoned on the night of his creation and learned through hard experience that humankind finds him repulsive, returns to beg Frankenstein to create a mate for him, threatening dire revenge if he does not. Frankenstein agrees and assembles a female monster, but before animating her, he is struck with horror at the sight of her body and the prospect that she and the monster will have sex and reproduce. While the monster watches howling at the window, Frankenstein tears the female monster to bits. In Jackson's text the female monster reappears, put together again by Mary Shelley. Like the female monster's body, the body of this hypertext is also seamed and ruptured, comprised of disparate parts with extensive links between them. The main components of the hypertextual corpus are: "body of text," containing the female monster's narration and theoretical speculations on hypertextual and human bodies; "graveyard," where the stories of the creatures whose parts were used to make the female monster are told; "story," in which are inscribed excerpts from the relevant passages in *Frankenstein* along with the monster's later adventures; "journal," the putative journal of Mary Shelley, where she records her interactions with the female monster; and "crazy quilt," a section containing excerpts from Frank Baum's *Patchwork Girl of Oz*, as well as reinscriptions from other parts of the text.

Crucially, although hypertext has generated a considerable body of work on how it alters traditional textual dynamics, feminist discussions have primarily been limited to the use of discussion technologies. For example, Mary J. Flores noted in her 1990 article "Computer Conferencing" that technology can also work to reinscribe traditional approaches to "teaching, learning, authority, power, and knowledge" (107); in many ways, it can help to reproduce hierarchies in language use and culture. This view has been added weight by Cynthia L. Selfe, who argued in her 1990 article that:

[An] atheoretical perspective . . . not only constrains our current educational uses of computers, but also seriously limits our vision of what might be accomplished with computer technology in a broader social, cultural, or educational context. Until we examine the impact of computer technology . . . from a theoretical perspective, we will continue, myopically and unsystematically, to define the isolated pieces of the puzzle in our separate classrooms and discrete research studies. Until we share some theoretical vision of this topic, we will never glimpse the larger picture that could give our everyday classroom efforts direction and meaning. (119)

Additionally, the few references to gender and hypertext have primarily been cautionary ones. Carolyn Handa, for example, has written extensively about the pedagogical implications of computer classroom configuration, focusing more recently on visual/digital rhetoric and the ways in which such rhetoric is reflected on the World Wide Web. Writing in 1990, Handa expressed concern that “from. . . a female point of view, the focus on reader control might seem like yet another way to silence an author” (177). Similarly, Joel Haefner, a theoretician of computer sciences and the politics of writing, noted in a 1995 article that although almost all his students, male or female, found their collaboratively written personal hyperessay “an attack on their selves,” the way reactions were “expressed was clearly gendered” (7). The female students, in particular, discuss a lack of respect for emotions and private thoughts, and resent the “invasion of privacy” (7) opening up their personal writing to the interventions others caused. Although these concerns that female students might find hypertext a threatening textual environment are not insignificant, there remains another story of feminism and hypertext yet to be told. This story, rather than bemoaning the death of the author, would celebrate its potential to disrupt the assumption that a text should have a unified voice.<sup>7</sup> It is precisely because hypertext does not allow for the expression of an authentic feminine experience that hypertext might have significant potential for the feminist, writing, scholar. Exploring such potential, however, means shifting the conversation from one wherein the expression of self is a means to political transformation to one wherein gendered politics are inseparable from textuality. Because these forms of feminist intervention rely on deconstructing text and creating new forms of textual space, they seem ideally suited for the differently ordered writing of hypertext, which alters reader-writer relationships and allows for expression of multiple positions. It is precisely due to these textual and technological interventions that Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* provides a new feminist alternative to dominant Frankensteinian myths as it offers alternative approaches to linear and positivist knowledge production. It is important to mention, however, that “story” is not at all so easily equated with knowledge. However, Donna Haraway has postulated in her 1990 text “The Persistence of Vision,” that science, which is knowledge production, may also be envisaged as a kind of “story-telling practice” (4).

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<sup>7</sup> By the term “story” I refer to an account of incidents or events which are ordered in a certain way in a certain context, which are caused by something and/or experienced by someone. The manner of telling a story is shaped by, and crucial to recognising, genre conventions. Therefore, ways of telling stories are only successful if they can present something the audience/reader can relate to and recognise, which makes stories inherently subjected to historical and cultural change. Moreover, stories display and relate information about the conditions of contemporary culture.

The premise of *Patchwork Girl* is that the disposal of the female monster is a staged death, a way of liberating both monster and creator (that is, Mary Shelley herself, or, Mary Shelley and herself for those who prefer a psychoanalytic reading) from the constraints facing a nineteenth-century woman with young, ailing children, a husband with an overactive imagination, and a somewhat horrifying manuscript that seems to be taking on a life of its own.

*Patchwork Girl* is a monstrous text, in itself fragmented, parted, not at all coherent, but readable in many ways. Crucially, *Patchwork Girl* plays with the analogy between body and text, as can be seen from the titles of the sections: “body of text,” “graveyard,” etcetera. Thus, the “text”, the corpus of *Patchwork Girl*, becomes analogous to body. Notably, this strategy has been deployed by many others through literature, and is a highly clever manner to suggest that bodies may be read in other manners. In other words, this strategy suggests that the way we read, decode/encode bodies around us in very gendered ways, could be read differently, thus altering the gender patterns that also categorize the persons/bodies and the whole politics of culture. Jackson writes, constructing a scene in which the fictive female monster communes with its mother (Mary Shelley) in Geneva, “We celebrated my death with wine and crusty bread at the little table in the garden, overlooking the lake where fictitious bubbles rose and burst, my phantasmic epigraphs. I had my privacy – I had my life – and I had Mary” (scam). This curious scenario encapsulates the tone and gist of Jackson’s interactive



Fig. 2. “her” image, displayed before the title page appears.

novel. The image of the stitched-together monster is employed above all as a metaphor for text, with Jackson undertaking at times a form of patch writing whereby she stitches together narrative and criticism from a variety of sources to arrive at a quirky sort of tale that shifts between narrative and meta-narrative in the telling of the female monster’s love affair with its mother, her sea voyage to America, and her eventual settlement in California, where she buys an identity and struggles to keep her parts in order. Readers of *Patchwork Girl* encounter in the first instance an image of a woman, reminiscent of a diagram of the homunculus, arms outstretched and palms displayed (Fig. 2.). Subsequently, five options, like the senses, are offered in terms of ways to proceed: graveyard, journal, quilt, story, and broken accents. These paths diverge and converge, and it is therefore unlikely that any two individuals will produce the same reading.

To further develop and deepen this, of the five strands mentioned above, two are metafictional: firstly, in “quilt,” which is comprised primarily of quotations from feminist theory, *Frankenstein*, and Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Jackson employs patch writing to explore questions of, among other things, textuality and intertextuality; secondly, in “broken accents,” she explores the peculiarities of writing for the new media and follows the line of thought introduced above respecting the notion of body as/of text. Particularly, in the “broken accents” strand, the themes of space, place and geography are brought to the fore. Here, the similarity with the feminist argument of “body as situation” is particularly striking. Developed by Simone de Beauvoir and further elaborated upon through the field of phenomenology, among others, the argument resonates profoundly in Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*. Simone de Beauvoir’s comments on the body as an insurpassable “perspective” and “situation” (38) indicate that transcendence must be understood within corporeal terms. In clarifying the notion of the body as “situation,” she suggests an alternative to the gender polarity of masculine disembodiment and feminine enslavement to the body. According to Judith Butler, the body as situation has at least a twofold meaning: firstly, as a locus of cultural interpretations, “the body is a material reality which has already been located and defined within a social context”, and secondly, the body is also “the situation of having to take up and interpret that set of received interpretations” (45). Thus, following Butler, *Patchwork Girl* can be said to display precisely such a Beauvoirian “body as situation”, as the female monster’s body becomes a “*field of interpretive possibilities*” (45, emphasis in original). In the “broken accents” strand, displaying the themes of place, the opening strand is, amusingly, narrated by the text itself, which observes:

I am like you in most ways. My introductory paragraph comes at the beginning and I have a good head on my shoulders. I have muscle, fat and a skeleton that keeps me from collapsing into suet. But my real skeleton is made of scars: a web that traverses me in three-dimensions. What holds me together is what marks my dispersal. I am most myself in the gaps between my parts, though if they sailed away in all directions in a grisly regatta there would be nothing left here in my place. (dispersed)

Narrative, like monster, is stitched together, its ruptures (scars/links) plainly visible. But, as Jackson observes elsewhere, ruptures both “mark a cut” and “commemorate a joining” (cut); therefore, any point of presumed weakness might also be construed as a point of strength. The other three strands recount the story of the female monster and its mother: “journal,” set in Geneva, is told from Mary’s point of view, while “graveyard” and “story” are told from the monster’s perspective. Significantly, there is no rejection in this adaptation of *Frankenstein*; on the contrary, mother and daughter are utterly connected, even to the point of illicit sexuality, and to the point that, prior to the monster’s

departure to America, they exchange patches of skin and graft them on to one another. For this purpose the monster, whose skin does not, strictly speaking, belong to her, selects “a place where disparate things joined in a way that [is her] own” (join). Meanwhile, Mary chooses a spot on her lower calf that “Percy would likely never miss” (join).

Building on the themes introduced in *Frankenstein*, the graveyard section playfully explores the notion of identity as a socially constructed category. The female monster, like her nineteenth-century male counterpart, is a collection of used parts, some less savoury than others. And, like the male monster, she struggles in coming to terms with her identity. Unlike her brooding male counterpart, however, her musings are much lighter, bordering at times on hilarity. Matter-of-factly, she itemises her parts, including: the tongue of Susannah, a talkative pub woman stocked for drunken licentiousness; the ears of Flora, which overhear secrets; the nose of Geneva, which, should she follow it, gets her into “tight” situations; and the stomach of Bella, a glutton who was in her lifetime tried for crushing a man and who, oblivious to her fate, nibbled her way to the gallows. Add to this menagerie a bit of bovine intestine and a hyperactive left leg that has “had enough of waiting” (left leg), and the parody is complete. Through the course of her narrative, recounted in the “story” strand, the monster comes to a sort of peace with herself as assemblage, observing the rebelliousness of her frame with stoicism:

When I bathed, I sat in the steaming fragrant bathwater amidst the warm nudging bodies of my vagrant parts. They seemed companionable, they seemed to have personalities of a rudimentary sort, like small agreeable dogs. At times, my vision clouded by steam, dimmed in the candle-light, I would regret the rigour of my convictions and lie back in the warm water and they would nestle about and on me. But when the water cooled I set to work pragmatically with tape and scissors, like a nurse. (more partings)

Significantly, the female monster muses on her identity in domestic spaces: home, garden, bathroom and supermarket. Identity in this narrative is construed neither as being here nor there, nor between here and there. The linear trans-gendered model that would position individuals on a continuum between male and female is thus revealed as too restrictive. As Landow observes in *Hypertext 2.0*, “*Patchwork Girl* makes us all into Frankenstein-readers stitching together narrative, gender, and identity” (200).

## 1.2 ATTACKING ORIGINALITY

Among the many subversions of *Patchwork Girl* is its attack on the “originality” of the work. “In collage, writing is stripped of the pretence of originality,” Jackson writes in “Stitch Bitch.” “One can be surprised by what one has to say in the forced intercourse between texts or the recombinant potential in one text, by other words that mutter inside the proper names” (537). This muttering

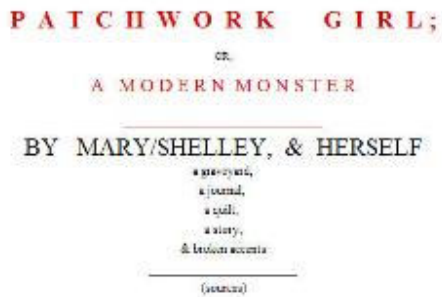


Fig. 3. Title page of Jackson's text.

becomes discernible in Jackson's playful linking of her name with Shelley's. The title page of Jackson's work performs this distributed authorship, for it says *Patchwork Girl* is “by Mary/Shelley & herself,” a designation that names Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, and the monster all as authors (Fig. 3). In a perhaps intentional irony, the Eastgate title page inscribes Jackson's name below as the “authorized” signature, along with the usual warnings about copyright infringement, even though the entire thrust of Jackson's text pushes against this view of a sole author who produces an original work. Jackson's subversions of the proprietary claims of her publisher continue in a section entitled “M/S,” a naming that invites reading the slash as both dividing and connecting Mary Shelley and Shelley Jackson. When Jackson re-inscribes Shelley's text into hers, the act is never merely a quotation, even when the referents are not violently wrenched away from the originals as in “Thanks”; witness the fact that Jackson divides Shelley's text into lexias and encodes it into the Storyspace software. Rather, the citation of Shelley is a performative gesture indicating that the authorial function is distributed across both names, as the nominative they share between them would suggest (Mary Shelley/Shelley Jackson). In addition, the slash in M/S may also be read as signifying the computer interface connecting/dividing Mary Shelley, a character in *Patchwork Girl*, with Shelley Jackson, the author who sits at the keyboard typing the words that conflate Mary's sewing and writing and so make “Shelley” into both character and writer. The computer thus also actively participates in the construction of these flickering signifiers. “There is a kind of thinking without thinkers,” the narrator declares:

Matter thinks. Language thinks. When we have business with language, we are possessed by its dreams and demons, we grow intimate with monsters. We become hybrids, chimeras, centaurs

ourselves: steaming flanks and solid redoubtable hoofs galloping under a vaporous machinery. (body of text/it thinks)

The surface of the text-as-image may look solid, this passage suggests, but the “vaporous machinery” generating it marks that solidity with the mutability and distributed cognition characteristic of flickering signifiers. Even the subject considered in itself is a site for distributed cognition, Jackson argues in “Stitch Bitch.” “Thinking is conducted by entities we don’t know, wouldn’t recognize on the street,” Jackson writes. “Call them yours if you want, but puff and blow all you want, you cannot make them stop their work one second to salute you” (Jackson, 527). Thus, *Patchwork Girl* is a co-written work: the product is inspired by Mary Shelley’s novel, appropriated by Shelley Jackson, of which the name-game Mary/Shelley stands testimony. Additionally, Jackson puts herself in a close, even intimate, relation with the 19<sup>th</sup> century authoress, and draws the theme of co-authorship even closer by making the Patchwork Girl write herself. In the hypertext the boundaries between “the writer” and “the written” are blurred. Following Haraway, agency subsumes as a property of both the non-human Patchwork Girl as both as fictive monster and a computer mediated hypertext, as well as a property of human actors; all of them contributing to the phenomena of *Patchwork Girl*. As such, the Patchwork Girl can be said to follow Haraway’s concept of “witty agent” (201) in her “Situated Knowledges”, as the fictional protagonist comprises of multiple sources as well as authors.

### 1.3 FEMALE MONSTROUS ASSEMBLAGES

From the hypertext links and metaphoric connections between these parts, a vivid picture emerges that radically alters the eighteenth-century view of the subject as an individual with a unique personality and the ability to possess his own person, a concept which Braidotti has adamantly unravelled in her *Nomadic Subjects*. For the female monster, it is mere common sense to say that multiple subjectivities inhabit the same body, for the different creatures from whose parts she is made retain their distinctive personalities, making her an assemblage rather than a unified self. Her intestines, for example, are taken from Mistress Anne, a demure woman who prided herself on her regularity. The monster’s large size required additional footage, so Bossy the cow contributed, too. Bossy is as explosive as Mistress Anne is discreet, leading to expulsions that pain Mistress Anne, who feels she must take responsibility for them. The conflict highlights the monster’s nature as a collection of disparate parts. Each part has its story, and each story constructs a different subjectivity. What is true for the monster is also true for us, Jackson suggests in her article “Stitch Bitch: the

Patchwork Girl.” “The body is a patchwork,” Jackson remarks, “though the stitches might not show. It’s run by committee, a loose aggregate of entities we can’t really call human, but which have what look like lives of a sort... [These parts] are certainly not what we think of as objects, nor are they simple appendages, directly responsible to the brain” (527). Bossy the cow, which contributed to the Patchwork Girl’s components, could also be said to refer to how in contemporary genomics, bovine DNA was used to patch up the parts of the human genome where sequences were missing, a practice which was drawn to my attention in Amade M’Charek’s lecture during the aforementioned NOI♀SE summer school. Thus, “real” science practice and the fiction of *Patchwork Girl* interestingly overlap in their use of bovine parts.

The distributed nature of the monster’s subjectivity is further performed in the opening graphic. Even before the title page appears, an image comes up entitled “her,” displaying a woman’s body against a black background (Fig. 2, above). Traversing the body are multiple dotted lines, as if the body were a quilt of scars or seams; retrospectively the reader can identify this image as representing the female monster’s patched body, among other possible referents. Cutting diagonally across the background of this image is a dotted line, the first performance of a concept central to this hypertext. As the reader progresses further into the text, a map view of the different parts opens up, displayed in the Storyspace software as coloured rectangles which, when clicked, contain smaller rectangles representing paragraph-sized blocks of text or lexias. The lexia “dotted line” explicates the significance of this image. “The dotted line is the best line,” this lexia proclaims, because the dotted line allows difference without “cleaving apart for good what it distinguishes” (body of text/dotted line). Hovering between separation and connection, the dotted lines marks the monster’s affinities with the human as well as her differences from other people. The dotted line is also significant because it suggests that the image can move from two to three dimensions, as in a fold-up that lets “pages become tunnels or towers, hats or airplanes” (body of text/dotted line). The movement out of the flat plane evokes the stacks of the hypertext, which suggest through their placement a three-dimensional depth to the screen and a corresponding ability to emerge from the depths or recede into them. Lying on a plane but also suggesting a fold upward, the dotted line becomes itself a kind of join or scar that marks the merging of fiction and metafiction in a narrative strategy that Gérard Genette has called “metalepsis” (236). Genette, a French literary theorist, associated in particular with the structuralist movement, argued in 1983 that metaleptic narration is characterised by the merging of diegetic levels that normally would be kept distinct; a kind of forced union between levels where the narrator or the narratee strangely enters the domain of the characters, or vice versa. Thus,

in *Patchwork Girl*, the occurrence of metalepsis signals the dangerous potential of the monstrous text/body to disrupt traditional boundaries in a border war where the stakes are human identity.

Linked to “her”, the opening graphic, is “phrenology,” (Fig. 1, above) a graphic that further performs the metaphoric overlay of body and text. Showing a massive head in profile, “phrenology” displays the brain partitioned by lines into a quilt of women’s names and enigmatic phrases. When the reader clicks on the names, she/he is taken to lexias telling the women’s stories from whose parts the monster was assembled; clicking on the phrases takes the reader to lexias that meditate on the nature of “her” multiple subjectivities. Thus these textual blocks are entered through a bodily image, implying that the text lies within the represented body. This dynamic inverts the usual perception the reader has with print fiction, namely that the represented bodies lay within the book. In print fiction, the book as physical object often seems to fade away as the reader’s imagination re-creates the vaporous world of the text, so that reading becomes, as Kittler puts it, a kind of hallucination. The myth of the silent inner voice that Derrida has described as foundational for the modern philosophy of the subject, appears in Friedrich Kittler’s analysis less as a philosophical hallucination than as a function of instructional practices and technologies. Far from being our natural or human condition, hermeneutics (the study of the interpretation of texts) merely results from a specifically trained coordination of children’s eyes, ears, and vocal organs. It is a discipline of the body. Kittler influentially argued in his 1997 work *Literature, Media, Information Systems* that reading functions as “hallucinating a meaning between letters and lines.” (40) In his *Discourse Networks*, Kittler notes that with the introduction of phonics in the nineteenth century, children were taught to read by sounding out words, which gave “voice” to print texts, particularly novels. The bodies populating the fictional world seem therefore to be figments of the reader’s imagination. First comes the immaterial mind, and then from it issue impressions of physical beings. Here, however, the body is figured not as the *product* of the immaterial work but a *portal* to it, thus inverting the usual hierarchy that puts mind first. Moreover, the partitioning of the head, significantly seen in profile so that it functions more like a body part than a face delineating a unique identity, emphasises the multiple, fragmented nature of the monster’s subjectivity. The body we think we have, coherent, unified, and solid, is not the body we actually are, Jackson claims in “Stitch Bitch.” Like the monster’s body, our corporeality, which she calls the “banished body,” is “a hybrid of thing and thought... Its public image, its face is a collage of stories, borrowed images, superstitions, fantasies. We have no idea what it “really” looks like” (523).

#### 1.4 CHIMERICAL BODIES IN CONTEMPORARY TECHNOSCIENCE

Although the monster's embodiment as an assemblage may seem unique, Jackson employs several strategies to demonstrate that it is not nearly as unusual as it may appear. Drawing on the contemporary discourses of technoscience, the lexia "bio" points out that "the body as seen by the new biology is chimerical. The animal cell is seen to be a hybrid of bacterial species. Like that many-headed beast [the chimera], the microbeast of the animal cells combines into one entity, bacteria that were originally freely living, self sufficient and metabolically distinct" (body of text/bio). In this view, the cell of any organism becomes an assemblage of parts, stemming even from non-species specific origin or shared by several species. Taking this assemblage to an extreme makes what in everyday life we call a person into an already complex hybrid of bacterial organisms that sustaining our metabolism, DNA from viruses, other body parts and the "outside" world. "Keep in mind," the monster warns us in "hazy whole," that "on the microscopic level, you are all clouds. There is no shrink-wrap preserving you from contamination: your skin is a permeable membrane... if you touch me, your flesh is mixed with mine, and if you pull away, you may take some of me with you, and leave a token behind" (body of text/hazy whole). Following this philosophy, the text not only normalises the subject-as-assemblage but also presents the subject-as-unity as a grotesque impossibility. The narrator satirises the unified subject by evoking visions of resurrection, when the body will be "restored to wholeness and perfection, even a perfection it never achieved in its original state" (body of text/resurrection). But how can this resurrection be performed? What about amputees who have had their limbs eaten by other creatures? Following medieval theology that held the resurrected body will "take its matter, if digested, from the animal's own flesh," the narrator imagines those parts re-forming themselves from the animals' bodies. The "ravens, the lions, the bears, fish and crocodiles... gang up along shorelines and other verges to proffer the hands, feet and heads that they are all simultaneously regurgitating whole... big toe scraping the roof of the mouth, tapping the teeth from the inside, seeming alive, wanting out" (body of text/resurrection/remade). Bizarre as this scenario is, it is not as strange as the problems entertained by medieval theologians trying to parcel everything out to a proper body. Medieval theologians theorised that eaten human remains will be reconstituted from the "nonhuman stuff" the creature has eaten, a proposition that quickly becomes problematic, as the narrator points out: "But what (hypothesized Aquinas) about the case of a man who ate only human embryos who generated a child who ate only human embryos? If eaten matter rises in the one who possessed it first, this child will not rise at all. All its matter will

rise elsewhere: either in the embryos its father ate... or in the embryos it ate” (body of text/resurrection/eaten). This fantastic scenario illustrates that trying to sort things out to achieve a unity (that never was) results in confusions worse than accepting the human condition as multiple, fragmented, chimerical.

Importantly, in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the creature pleads with its maker to construct a being who may function as a witness to its invisibility, constituting a mirror in which the monster may see itself.<sup>8</sup> It seems that in the present era in which genetics mean precisely that “there is none exactly like me”; the monster’s request is worth focusing upon. In the case of genetic modification, the question arises what might constitute a witness to *our* invisibility, as well as the creature’s, and what benefits might result from finding it. That such a monster is necessary is evident in the argument put forth by Evelyn Fox Keller, a philosopher of science, who, in her book *The Century of The Gene*, claims that the twentieth century’s pursuit of the gene was fuelled by a reductionist logic whereby it was thought that the invisible could be smoothly made visible. Mapping the genome was a project that promised to give us a visual picture of life. Fox Keller writes:

For almost fifty years, we lulled ourselves into believing that, in discovering the molecular basis of genetic information, we had found the “secret of life”; we were confident that if we could only decode the message in DNA’s sequence of nucleotides, we would understand the “program” that makes an organism what it is. And we marveled at how simple the answer seemed to be. (7)

The literally invisible genome would become the representation for everyone; science would make visible people’s microscopic selves, disclosing the process of looking as deeply intertwined with knowledge constructions (Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* 188). However, this invisibility changed when the genome sequence started to be transcribed: at that stage, the simple representational model by which the gene had been pursued was exposed to be hopelessly inadequate. Fox Keller continues: “But now, in the call for functional genomics, we can read at least a tacit acknowledgment of how large the gap between genetic ‘information’ and biological meaning really is” (7-8). Now, although literally more visible, the gene, and the biology for which it is a sign, remain culturally invisible and politically unstable. The problem of the gene shows that information and meaning are spliced

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<sup>8</sup> In Lacanian psychoanalysis it is understood that through vision and a mirror we recognise ourselves as ourselves and the other as other. This is called “the mirror-stage” by Lacan, a stage that babies around eighteen months old go through in order to create a notion of the Self, or as Lacan argues, an ideal self, an “*imago*” that actually never really correlates with the realm of “the real”. In this stage, the child leaves what Lacan called “the imaginary” (a state of consciousness) for “the symbolic” (culture, language, conventions etc); however, we never gain access to “the real”. The role of repetition of sounds, gestures and other forms of communication is a crucial procedure in the infant’s transition from “*hommelette*” to an autonomously functioning entity.

together in profoundly complex ways; the factual information (in history, law, or science) that the eyewitness testifies to having seen is not as immediately visible as one might think. Like Fox Keller, Brazilian-born artist Eduardo Kac, writing just before the turn of the twenty-first century, focuses on the distinction between that which is visible and that which is not, as he elaborates on the mission and scope of art and their overlapping fields:

More than make visible the invisible, art needs to raise our awareness of what firmly remains beyond our visual reach but which, nonetheless, affects us directly. Two of the most prominent technologies operating beyond vision are digital implants and genetic engineering, both poised to have profound consequences in art as well as in the social, medical, political, and economic life of the next century. (n.p.)

Kac here urges to not only direct attention to particular technologies of invisibility but also, like Fox Keller, to understand better both the distinctions between and entanglement of “information” and “biological meaning”. Because it is marked at the same time by the visible and by radical invisibility, genomics remains firmly beyond our visual reach. Though we may see the gene through the microscope, we can neither see it nor testify to it through our habits of thought. It could be argued that genomics remains firmly beyond our visual reach *if* visual reach entails only that what can be seen by the naked eye. Importantly, this science has developed an immense field of technologies for making the genetic visible, wherein the figure of the DNA-molecule works like an iconic sign of what used to be called a gene. Haraway helps to show the radically invisible nature of biological meaning when she attempts to define it by piling up long lists of its complex components, which include “race”, gender, sex, ethnicity, nationality, humanity, nature, pollution, hybridity, origins, lineage, legitimacy and “the drama of inheritance of bodies, property, and stories” (213). Therefore, following Haraway, the cultural conception of “the gene” is impossible to separate from its material referent: both inform each other, in a mode of material-semiotics. This implicates that activities not only take place when people interpret nature, thus denying nature or matter the status of agency, but that a highly complex and intra-active onto-epistemology is at work between knower and that which is to be known. Conversely, this in turn means that one needs to re-conceptualise what is meant by “agency” as not only the property of human individuals but also of non-humans, considering, for instance, the microscope as a “non-human actor” affecting the procedure of seeing and making known. Further in the process, knowledge production and dissemination are always embedded in a language already part of culture and the collective imaginary with its figurations. Thus, knowledge production as a collective endeavour and as story-telling practice relies on cultural conventions but is always affected by the material conditions of embodiment and economy.

The dichotomy between that which is visible and that which fails to be seen is reflected in the Patchwork Girl's body, as it is simultaneously a clear-cut site of horror, as well as a fluid, culturally-specific, temporally-specific representation. Her body is horrific as it is composed of other people's body parts; it is culturally and temporally-specific by its mediation through computer technologies, the use of hypertext and the narrative function of showing the analogy between fragmented text and fragmented body, which is patched together by the reader. Notwithstanding, the Patchwork Girl's scars are *visible* marks and markers of her creation: her "unnatural" origins are written on her body, drawing attention to the Other in us all, needing to be expelled so the boundaries of acceptability are reinstated.<sup>9</sup> Simultaneously, *Patchwork Girl* appears to incorporate a critique of vision as a primary site of knowledge production, as other senses, particularly those of hearing and feeling, are brought to the fore as valid sites of knowledge. The hypertext awakens us to the chain of stories through which we interpret biological meaning; its repetitions, multiple voices, lack of origins and hybridity teach us to look for that meaning elsewhere than in the strictly visual. The scopic regime of knowledge is, as ever, omnipresent and diverse: the struggle to make visible the invisibility in which disease, mutation, commercial manipulation, eugenics and biological hybridity lie; the invisibility (the microscopic) in which science operates and the invisibility (public unawareness) by which it often succeeds. *Patchwork Girl* echoes the invisibility of genetic manipulation, which produces monsters without clearly marked signs. It is an internal modification, which is invisible to the naked eye. Vision in the hypertext, as well as in Shelley's original novel *Frankenstein*, shapes the human sciences in a manner similar to the methods of the anatomical theatre: pieces that one needs to connect with knowledge and experience in order to perceive a total picture. Science has always been connected with vision, as well as with Enlightenment ideas and ideals: light is required to see.

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of "the Other" with a capitalised "O" here refers to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's use of the term. Spivak is an Indian literary critic and theorist, who is best known for the article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which is one of the founding texts of postcolonialism. Spivak observes that, while postmodern criticism seems obsessed with theorising the Other, it always proceeds from the assumption that the other is constitutive of (and a shadow of) the Subject and that further work to understand how that Subject produced itself: via ideology, science, law, and economics. See: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Nelson, Cary and Larry Grossberg (Eds). *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: Uni of Illinois Press, 1988. 271-313.

## 1.5 TECHNOLOGY AND WRITING: THE STORYSPACE ENVIRONMENT

As Jackson puts it in “Stitch Bitch,” “Boundaries of texts are like boundaries of bodies, and both stand in for the confusing and invisible boundary of the self” (535). As the unified subject is thus broken apart and reassembled as a multiplicity, the work also highlights the technologies that make the textual body itself a multiplicity. To explore this point, consider how information moves across the interface of the computer screen compared to books. With print fiction, the reader decodes a script to create, in her mind, a picture of the verbally represented world. With an electronic text the encoding/decoding operations are distributed between the writer, computer, and reader. The writer encodes, but the reader does not simply decode what the writer has written. Rather, the computer decodes the encoded information, performs the indicated operations, and then re-encodes the information as flickering images on the screen. The transformation of the text from durable inscription into what Hayles has called a “flickering signifier” means that it is mutable in ways that print is not, and this mutability serves as a visible mark of the multiple levels of encoding/decoding intervening between user and text (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies”, 26). Through its flickering nature, the text-as-image teaches the user that it is possible to bring about changes in the screen-text that would be impossible with print (changing fonts, colours, type sizes, formatting, etc.). Such changes imply that the body represented within the virtual space is always already mutated, joined through a flexible, multilayered interface with the reader’s body on the other side of the screen.

Crucially, Hayles uses the concept *flickering signifiers* to define the disembodiment of digital texts; when she coined the phrase “flickering signifier,” she had in mind a reconfigured relation between the signifier and signified other than that which had been previously articulated in critical and literary theory. Namely, the signifier as conceptualised by Saussure and others was conceived as unitary in its composition and flat its structure. It had no internal structure, whether seen as oral articulation or written mark that could properly enter into the discourse of semiotics.<sup>10</sup> When signifiers appear on the computer screen, however, they are only the top layer of a complex system of interrelated processes. Marks on screen may manifest themselves as simple inscriptions to a user, but properly understood they are the visible, tangible results of coding instructions executed by the

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<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that not all semiotics deal with Saussure’s conceptualisation of the sign as signifier and signified: for instance, Charles Sanders Peirce viewed semiotics as “the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis” (“Pragmatism”, EP 2:413, 1907). Furthermore, Hayles can be placed in the same material-semiotic tradition as Haraway and later Karen Barad through the emphasis on the mutual and complex constituency of what makes a sign. Crucially, Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* is a contribution in a similar vein, namely through endowing both the subject and the object of knowledge with the status of material-semiotic actors.

machine in a series of interrelated processes, from a high-level programming language like *Java* all the way down to assembly language and binary code. Hayles hoped to convey this processural quality by the gerund “flickering,” to distinguish the screenic image from the flat mark of print or the blast of air associated with oral speech. The signifier on screen is a light image produced by a scanning electron beam. The screen image is deeply layered rather than flat, constantly replenished rather than durable, and highly mutable, as for example when a writer uses *Flash* to create animation or layers that move. These qualities are not merely ornamental but enter profoundly into *what* the marks signify and, more importantly, *how* they signify. In her groundbreaking book *How we Became Postmodern* Hayles clearly demarcates the differences between human/posthuman signifying systems by suggesting that the floating signifier, a conceptual basis of literary and cultural studies, is effectively superseded in the posthuman by the “flickering signifier.” According to Hayles, the flickering signifier evolves from its Saussurean counterpart through the development and experience of information technology. If floating signification was conceptualised to explain the arbitrary interconnections between signifier and signified, then Hayles’ flickering signifier makes these connections even more precarious through the introduction of randomness and uncertainty into the signifying equation, making it possible for the individual subject to experience signifying systems that shift or mutate, an impossibility in the Saussurean model. Thus, flickering signification is one of the most crucial theoretical components of Hayles’ analysis. Unlike more traditional semiotics and theories of semiotics, in which the relationship between subjectivity and the material situation of the individual subject is more often than not an afterthought, flickering signification evolves from historical and material conditions to inform the theory of subjectivity (posthuman) which accompanies it. Hayles writes: “Flickering signification extends the productive force of codes beyond the text to include the signifying processes by which the technologies produce texts, as well as the interfaces that enmesh humans into integrated circuits. As the circuits connecting technology, text, and human expand and intensify, the point where quantitative increments shade into qualitative transformation draws closer” (46-47). By connecting the signifying process with the actual technologies of signification Hayles foregrounds the material conditions of signification and subjectivity. By suggesting that humans are moving in a direction such that the mode of semiotic transmission becomes indistinguishable from the embodiment of the transmission by the individual subject, Hayles moves from a radical critique/revision of Saussurean linguistics and into an even more radical envisioning of everyday life.

The implications of flickering signification become explicit in one of the opening graphics of *Patchwork Girl*, “hercut 4.” In this image (Fig. 4, below) the monster’s body, which was previously displayed with dotted lines traversing it (Fig. 5, below), has now become completely dismembered, with limbs distributed into rectangular blocks defined by dotted lines, thus completing the body/text analogy by making the body parts visually similar to the hypertext lexias, connected to each other in the Storyspace display by lines representing hypertext links. In addition, the upper right-hand corner of the image looks as though it has been torn off, revealing text underneath. Although fragmentary, enough of the text is visible to allow the reader to make out that it is giving instructions on how to create links to “interconnect documents and make it easier to move from place to [word obscured].” Thus the text underlying the image points to the software programme underlying the text, so the



Fig. 4. “hercut 4” image, displayed after following the link named “a graveyard”.

entire image functions as an evocation of the multilayered coding chains flexibly mutating across interfaces to create flickering signifiers.

Of course print texts are also dispersed, in the sense that they cite other texts at the same time they transform those citations by embedding them in new contexts. The specificity of an electronic hypertext like *Patchwork Girl* comes from the ways in which it mobilises the resources of the medium to perform subjectivities distributed in flexible and mutating ways across author, text, interface, and reader. Electronic text is less durable and more mutable than print, and the active interface is not only multilayered but itself capable of cognitively sophisticated acts. By exploiting these characteristics, the author (more precisely, the acknowledged author) constructs the distinctions between author and character, reader and represented world, as permeable membranes that can be configured in a variety of ways.

In *Patchwork Girl*, one of the important metaphoric connections expressing this flickering connectivity is the play between *sewing* and *writing*. Within the narrative fiction of *Frankenstein*, the monster’s body is created when Frankenstein patches the body parts together; at the metafictional level, Mary Shelley creates this patching through her writing. Within *Patchwork Girl*, however, it is



Fig. 5. “hercut 3” image, displayed after following the link named “a story”.

Mary Shelley, not Frankenstein, who assembles the monster, and this patching is specifically identified with the characteristically feminine work of sewing or quilting. The fact that this sewing takes place *within* the fiction makes Mary Shelley a character written by Jackson rather than an author who herself writes. This situation becomes more complex when Mary Shelley is shown both to sew *and* write the monster, further entangling fiction and metafiction. “I had made her, writing deep into the night by candlelight,” Mary Shelley narrates, “until the tiny black letters blurred into stitches and I began to feel that I was sewing a great quilt” (journal/written). This lexia is linked with “sewn”: “I had sewn her, stitching deep into the night by candlelight, until the tiny black stitches wavered into script and I began to feel that I was writing, that this creature I was assembling was a brash attempt to achieve by artificial means the unity of a life-form” (journal/sewn).

Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic, feminist, and writer on cultural and social issues, stresses the “creative manipulation of conventions” (228) in the art of patchwork, while the art critic Lucy Lippard elucidates that “since the new wave of feminist art began around 1970, the quilt has become the prime visual metaphor for women’s lives, for women’s culture. In properly prim grids or rebelliously “crazy” fields, it incorporates Spider Woman’s web, political networking, and the collage aesthetic” (32). In spite of the assertion by Rozsika Parker, a psychoanalytic psychotherapist focusing predominantly on issues of maternal development, and Griselda Pollock, a British feminist art historian and has written extensively on the problematic of the feminine in the fields of social history of art, cultural and psychoanalytic theory, that “any association with the traditions and practices of needlework and domestic art can be dangerous for an artist, especially if that artist is a woman” (137), Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* effectively recovers while simultaneously overturning this tradition. Her perceptive use of the quilt metaphor catapults it to the realms of postmodern discourses of fragmentation, dispersal and the vexed questions of origin and identity. Notably, the kind of quilting which is femininely associated to the domestic sphere is slightly gender-subverted in *Patchwork Girl* through high tech media, which is stereotypically coded as masculine, associated to expertise and advanced technology. Showalter further elaborates on the tradition of the patchwork quilt: the history of piercing and writing in the United States, and the literary or rhetorical history of the quilt metaphor, shows that conventions and styles that were originally associated with a women’s culture have been gradually transformed in new configurations and adapted in the service of new ideological ends. Like other US-based cultural practices and symbols, quilting has also undergone a series of gender transformations, appropriations, and commodifications within the larger culture. While quilting does have crucial meaning for American women’s texts, it cannot be taken as a

transhistorical and essential form of female expression, but rather as a gendered practice that changed from one generation to the next.

Indeed *Patchwork Girl* crucially raises the important question of the relations between texts which can include such vexed notions as borrowing, appropriation, piracy, in-breeding, parasitism, and pastiche, concepts which Jackson's narrative emphatically dramatises and magnifies. In a related postmodernist vein, Philippe Sollers, a French literary critic and writer, in his 1968 essay similarly describes the body as "That tapestry in which our form shifts and changes . . . it is the 'continuous' from which we fashion, for ourselves and for others, a visible discontinuity" (179). The body of the Patchwork Girl, indeed, will always be a visible display of fragmentation, a reminder of our always already fractured identities, longing for a unity of sorts.

## 1.6 INTIMATE FEMALE MONSTROSITIES

The feminine associations with sewing serve to mark this as a female, and feminist, production. Throughout, the relation between creature and creator in *Patchwork Girl* stands in implicit contrast to the relation between the male monster and Victor Frankenstein. Whereas Victor participates, often unconsciously, in a dynamic of abjection that results in tragedy for both creator and creature, in *Patchwork Girl* Mary feels attraction and sympathy rather than horror and denial. In contrast to Victor's determination to gain fame as a great scientist, Mary's acts of creation are filled with qualifications that signal her awareness that she is not so much conquering the secrets of life and death as participating in forces greater than she. In "sewn," the passage continues with Mary wondering whether the monster's fragmented unity is "perhaps more rightfully given, not made; continuous, not interrupted; and subject to divine truth, not the will to expression of its prideful author. *Authoress*, I amend, smiling" (journal/sewn). The self-conscious placement of herself in an inferior position of "authoress" compared to the male author is connected in Jackson's text with subtle suggestions that the monster and Mary share something Mary and her husband do not, an intimacy based on equality and female bonding rather than subservience and female inferiority. However, it may also be stated that this position of inferiority is just a consciously gendered in order to make authorship a feminine possibility. Although Mary confesses sometimes to feeling frightened of the female monster, she also feels compassionate and even erotic attraction toward her creation. Whereas Victor can see his monster only as a competitor whose strength and agility are understood as threats, Mary exults in the female monster's physical strength, connecting it with the creature's

freedom from the stifling conventions of proper womanhood. When the female monster leaves her creator to pursue her own life and adventures, Mary, unlike Victor, takes vicarious delight in the ability of her creation to run wild and free.

In her path-breaking work *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, psychoanalyst, feminist, and, most recently, novelist, describes the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system and order... [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The abject is “that which defines what is fully human from what is not” (65). By this, Kristeva refers to that which threatens the subject by transgressing the bodily boundaries between self and other, challenging bodily identity. Most of what is abject centres around the body, vomit, blood, saliva, filth, waste, pus, bodily fluids, and open wounds; those substances which are disturbing because they turn insides out. These matters are unmentionable materials which should not be represented, precisely because they cross the acceptable boundaries between what is inside and what is outside. Elizabeth Grosz, an Australian feminist academic known for philosophical interpretations of the work of French philosophers and French feminists, argues that the abject:

signals the fading or disappearance, the absolute mortality or vulnerability of the subject’s relation to, and dependence upon, the object. The abject is the impossible object, still part of the object: an object the subject strives to expel but which is ineliminable. In ingesting objects into itself, or expelling objects from itself, the subject can never be distinct from these objects. The ingested/expelled “objects” are neither part of the body, nor separate from it. (198)

This binary opposition between the inner and the outer, and between self and Other, can be stretched to include other binary divisions. Kristeva employs and analyses several other divisionary pairs, such as living vs. dead, human vs. animal, male vs. female, clean vs. defiled, and natural vs. supernatural. Kristeva says people feel repulsion and horror when confronted by images of the abject because of their ambiguity, whether the other is external or internal. Jackson’s female monster constitutes precisely such a hybrid assemblage of divisionary pairs, as her body is created through a patchwork-like stitching and sewing of body-parts of several people. These dead fragments of other people’s previously embodied lives are subsequently electrified into action through the “natural” source of electricity from thunder and lightning, hereby subverting the dead vs. living dichotomy, as well as combining the “natural” element of nature with the “unnatural” characteristic of technology. That bodily identity is a continuous back-and-forth movement between self and Other, inside and outside, “normal” and aberrant, is made explicit in Jackie Stacey’s powerful cultural study of cancer, published in 1997, in which she identifies, among other, the common elements in the way in which the categories of lesbianism and cancer are represented. Both categories fail to respect the neatly

patrolled boundaries of the norm, be it heterosexuality or “health”. Uttering the “C Word” or the “L Word” produces disgust, fear, or loathing, while simultaneously achieving an unsettling feeling of fascination. Stacey connects this fascination and repulsion with the notion of the abject, as both cancer and lesbianism deviate from the norm and include a simultaneous movement back and forth between duplication, or more of the self, as well as differentiation, other than the self. Moreover, Stacey argues that the connection between both categories, and its relation to the abject, can “thus be read in relation to cultural practices that constitute identities as “Other”, which are “integral to forms of social regulation and control” (76). In this manner, expulsion of the monster within reconfirms the boundaries of the norm: a comforting and self-preserving action. Accordingly, the Patchwork Girl can be said to function in a similar way: it constitutes the Other through its deformed figure of various body parts, signifying the monstrous and unnatural, while simultaneously retaining the characteristics of a human.

In her comprehensive survey of the status of the body in the Western philosophic tradition, Grosz has shown that there is a persistent tendency to assign to women the burden of corporeality, leaving men free to imagine themselves as disembodied minds: an observation that has been familiar to feminists at least since Simone de Beauvoir. The contrast between woman as embodied female and man as transcendent mind is everywhere at work in the comparison between Mary’s care for the female monster and Victor’s astonishing failure to anticipate any of the male creature’s corporeal needs, including the fact that making him seven feet tall might make it difficult for the monster to fit into human society. Whereas the disembodied text of the eighteenth-century work went along with a parallel and reinforcing notion of the author as a disembodied face, in Jackson’s text the emphasis on body and corporeality goes along with an embodied author and equally material text. “The banished body is not female, necessarily, but it is feminine,” Jackson remarks in “Stitch Bitch.” “That is, it is amorphous, indirect, impure, diffuse, multiple, evasive. So is what we learned to call bad writing. Good writing is direct, effective, clean as a bleached bone. Bad writing is all flesh, and dirty flesh at that... Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine” (534).

Reinforcing this emphasis on hypertext as “femininely” embodied are links that re-embody passages from Shelley’s text into contexts which subtly or extravagantly alter their meaning. A stunning example is the famous passage from the 1831 preface where Shelley bids her “hideous progeny go forth and prosper” (qtd. in *story/severance/hideous progeny*):

I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words which found no true echo in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone; and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more. But this is for myself; my readers have nothing to do with these associations.

In the context of *Frankenstein*, “hideous progeny” can be understood as referring both to the text and to the male monster. Anne K. Mellor is a feminist academic focusing on eighteenth and nineteenth century British literature, women’s writing, feminist theory, and the visual arts. In her seminal book entitled *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, Mellor places Mary Shelley in the tradition of female writers of Gothic novels who were exposing the dark underside of British society. When the monster is taken as the referent, the passage quoted above suggests that Shelley’s textual creature expresses the fear attending birth in an age of high mortality rates for women and infants: a fear that Shelley was to know intimately from wrenching personal experience. Additionally, Barbara Johnson, an American literary critic and translator whose scholarship has incorporated a variety of structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives, reads *Frankenstein* as a site where Mary Shelley is also giving birth to herself as a writer in this text, so her authorship also becomes a “hideous progeny.” The rich ambiguities that inhere in the phrase make Jackson’s transformation of it all the more striking. In Jackson’s work, the meaning of the passage is radically changed by “Thanks,” to which it is linked. In this lexia, the female monster says:

Thanks, Mary, for that kindness, however tinged with disgust. Hideous progeny: yes, I was both those things, for you, and more. Lover, friend, collaborator. It is my eyes you describe--with fear, yes, but with fascination: yellow, watery, but speculative eyes” (story/severance/hideous progeny/thanks).

The linked passage changes the referent for “hideous progeny,” so that the female monster occupies the place previously held by the male creature, the text of *Frankenstein*, and Shelley as writer. All these, the link implies, are now embedded as subtexts in the female monster, who herself is indistinguishable from the ruptured, seamed textual body that both contains her and is contained by her. “The hypertext is the banished body,” Jackson remarks in “Stitch Bitch.” “Its compositional principle is desire” (536). If desire is enacted by activating links, this linked text not only expresses the desire of the reader but also Mary’s desire for her monstrous creation. Its most subversive and erotic implication comes in changing the referent for the lost companion “who, in this world, I shall never see more.” Now it is not her husband whose loss Mary laments but the female monster, the “lover, friend, collaborator” without whom *Patchwork Girl* could not have been written.

## 2. EMBODYING THE MONSTER

### 2.1 FLESHY EMBODIMENT: SWAPPING SKIN

Rosi Braidotti, a highly influential feminist philosopher, discusses the dynamic of difference and monstrosity, observing that the category Woman has a “natural” affiliation with the category of monstrosity:

Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then we can argue that the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination and horror*. This logic of attraction and repulsion is extremely significant; psychoanalytic theory takes it as the fundamental structure of the mechanism of desire and, as such, of the constitution of the neurotic symptom. (81)

It should hence not be surprising that many female authors construct monsters as their main focal point; there is a creative pool of female monstrous representations spanning centuries for them to draw upon. In one of the climactic scenes of *Patchwork Girl*, Mary and the monster, having become lovers and grown physically intimate with each other’s bodies, decide to swap patches of skin. Each lifts a circle of skin from her leg, and Mary sews her flesh onto the monster, and the monster’s flesh onto her own human leg. This suturing of self onto other/Other reveals more than a wish of lovers to join. Because Mary is the monster’s creator in a double sense, at once sewing and writing her, the scene functions as a crossroads for the traffic between fiction and metafiction, writer and character, the physical body existing outside the textual frame sutured together with representations of the body in virtual space. Throughout, the narrator has been at pains to point out the parallels between surgery and writing: “Surgery was the art of restoring and binding disjointed parts... Being “seam’d with scars” was both a fact of eighteenth-century life and a metaphor for dissonant interferences ruining any finely adjusted composition” (body of text/mixed up/seam’d). One of the sutures that reappears in several lexias is the “intertwisted” closing that “left needles sticking in the wounds – in manner of tailors – with thread wrapped around them” (body of text/mixed up/seam’d). Thus a metaphoric relay system is set up between surgery, particularly sutures using needle and thread, sewing, the seamed body, and writing. Importantly, Sara Ahmed, scholar in the fields of feminist theory, critical race and postcolonial theory and queer studies, and Jackie Stacey, scholar in the fields of feminist cultural research, film theory, visual culture, embodiment, gender and sexuality, and health cultures, contend the substance of skin to be “dependent on regimes of writing that mark the

skin in different ways or produce the skin as marked”, thus describing the skin as a “writerly effect” (15). In a similar vein, Ahmed and Stacey suggest that even the action of writing may be an effect of skin, that it is the “touch of the technologies that produce the words” (15). Thus, “dermographia” (Stacey 84), or skin writing, simultaneously writes the skin as well as being written by it.

Jackson uses this relay system of surgery/sewing/writing to set up an argument about “monstrous” writing that reverberates throughout the text. The narrator points out that “the comparison between a literary composition and the fitting together of the human body from various members stemmed from ancient rhetoric. *Membrum* or “limb” also signified “clause”” (body of text/typographical). As the narrator notes, this body/writing analogy allowed rhetoricians to conclude that writing was bad if it resembled a disproportioned or grotesque body. But the analogy was to go only so far; writing was not actually to *become* the body. Decorum dictated that the barrier between the book as physical object and text as immaterial work be maintained intact. Joseph Addison, a seventeenth-century English politician and writer, referred to in *Patchwork Girl*, found any writing distasteful that was configured in the shape of the object it represented, such as George Herbert’s poem “Wings,” printed to resemble the shape of wings. The narrator remarks that Addison called this “visual turning of one set of terms into another” the “Anagram of a Man” and labelled it a classic example of “False Wit” (body of text/typographical). This aesthetic judgment is consistent with the assumption that the work is immaterial. Making the physical appearance of the text a signifying component was improper because it suggested the text could not be extracted from its physical form. According to this aesthetic, bodies can be represented within the text but the body of the text should not mix with these representations.

It is precisely such breaches of good taste and decorum that the monster embodies. Her body, “seam’d with scars,” becomes a metaphor for the ruptured, discontinuous space of the hypertext, which in its representations also violates decorum by transgressively mixing fiction and metafiction in the same chaotic arena. When deciding what skin to swap, the monster, with Mary’s consent, significantly decides that “the nearest thing to a bit of my own flesh would be this scar, a place where disparate things are joined in a way that was my own” (story/severance/join). Comprised of parts taken from other textual bodies (*Frankenstein* and Frank Baum’s *Patchwork Girl of Oz* among others), this hypertext, like the monster’s body, hints that it is most itself in the links and seams that join one part to another. “My real skeleton is made of scars,” the monster says in a passage that conflates body and text, “a web that traverses me in three dimensions. What holds me together is what marks my dispersal. I am most myself in the gaps between my parts” (body of

text/dispersed). The reader inscribes her subjectivity into this text by choosing what links to activate, what scars to trace. Contrary to the dictates of good taste and good writing, the scars/links thus function to join the text with the corporeal body of the reader, which performs the enacted motions that bring the text into being as a sequential narrative. Because these enactions take place through the agency of the computer, all these bodies – the monster, Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, the specificity of the electronic text, the active agency of the digital interface, and the readers – are made to participate in the mutating configurations of flickering signifiers.

## 2.2 EMBODIED TEXT

As a result of these dotted-line connections/divisions, the text has a livelier sense of embodiment than is normally the case, and the bodies within the text are more densely coded with textuality. “I am a mixed metaphor,” the monstrous text/textualised monster declares, and continues:

*Metaphor*, meaning something like “bearing across,” is itself a fine metaphor for my condition. Every part of me is linked with other territories alien to it but equally mine. . . borrowed parts, annexed territories. I cannot be reduced, my metaphors are not tautologies, yet I am equally present in both poles of a pair, each end of the wire is tethered to one of my limbs. The metaphorical principle is my true skeleton” (body of text/metaphor me).

The multilayered sense of “metaphor” here, a rhetorical trope of writing that is also a Storyspace link and a scar traversing the monster’s body, implies that the movement up and down fictional/metafictional levels is not limited to certain moments in the text but pervades the text as a whole, spreading along with the “true skeleton” of the text/monster/software. In this fluid movement between bodies inside texts and texts inside bodies, inside is constantly becoming outside becoming inside, as if performing at the visible level of the text the linkages between different coding levels within the computer. The dynamic makes real for the user that each visible mark on the screen, in contrast to the flat mark of print, is linked with multiple coding levels whose dimensionalities can expand or contract as the coding commands require.

The dynamic inside/outside/inside is vividly, hauntingly represented in “body jungle,” in which the monster dreams herself inside a lush jungle landscape comprised of body parts: beating hearts “roost like pheasants on high bone branches”; “intestines hang in swags from ribs and pelvic crests, or pile up like tires at the ankles of legs become trees”; “ovaries hang like kumquats from delicate vines” (story/falling apart/body jungle). The monster imagines passing days and nights in

the jungle: “In the morning the convoluted clouds will think about me. They will block my view of the domed sky, which I know will bear faint suture marks, the knit junctures between once-soft sectors of sky.” In time she supposes that her legs will be dissolved by the acid dripping from the overhanging stomachs:

My bony stumps will sink deep; I will shuffle forward until I tire, then stand still. I will place the end of a vein in my mouth and suck it. At last I will no longer bother to remove it... I do not know how my skull will open, or if I will still know myself when my brain drifts up to join the huge, intelligent sky. (story/falling apart/body jungle)

In this vision she becomes a body part of some larger entity, perhaps the computer that thinks/dreams her, just as her parts were once autonomous entities who/that have now been incorporated into the larger whole/hole that she is. In hypertext fiction, Jackson remarks in “Stitch Bitch,” there are especially powerful opportunities to “sneak up on reality from inside fiction to turn around and look back on reality as a text embedded in a fictional universe” (534). This “body jungle” profoundly resonates with Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the “Body without Organs”. Deleuze, a French philosopher, practicing psychoanalyst and lifelong political activist, introduced the notion of the “Body without Organs” (or “BwO”) in *The Logic of Sense* (1969); but it was not until his collaborative work with Félix Guattari, a French institutional psychotherapist and philosopher, that the BwO comes to prominence as one of Deleuze’s major ideas. In Deleuze’s work, the term initially refers to the “virtual” dimension of the body. For Deleuze and Guattari, every “actual” body has (or expresses) a set of traits, habits, movements, affects, etc. But every “actual” body also has a “virtual” dimension, a vast reservoir of potential traits, connections, affects, movements, etc. This collection of potentials is what Deleuze calls the BwO. To “make oneself a body without organs,” then, is to actively experiment with oneself to draw out and activate these virtual potentials. These potentials are mostly activated (or “actualized”) through conjunctions with other bodies (or BwOs) that Deleuze calls “becomings.”

Crucially, the focus that is placed upon the themes of othering, embodiment and subjectivity in *Patchwork Girl* results in a deep engagement with feminist theory and practice. Once again, it can be stated that this work opens up to possible reflections that reach beyond the borders of the content of the text itself. The results of analysing Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* from a feminist perspective could be extended to other domains of research; domains which, seemingly, lie outside of the realms of literary studies, namely those of gender, ethnicity, as well as on contemporary strategies of

inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, it could be argued that *Patchwork Girl* is simultaneously an artistic and popular-science-like educational device for highly advanced feminist theory.

### 2.3 CONTAINING THE MEDIUM

It is not the hypertext structure that makes *Patchwork Girl* distinctively different from print books. As *Dictionary of the Khazars* has shown, along with similar works, print texts may also have hypertext structures. Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* was translated from the Serbo-Croatian and first published in English in 1988. It discards the traditional machinery of the novel in favour of an elaborately-conceived dictionary format that reflects critically and playfully on the possibilities of "The Book". It is worth mentioning that the book also comes in two distinct editions, a male and a female one. Only seventeen lines are different, appearing at a crucial stage in the development of the novel. This difference does inflect the narrative, adding the issue of gender to its critical meditation on the place of the reader in the practice of writing. Even though print texts might have hypertext structures, *Patchwork Girl* could *only* be an electronic text because the trace of the computer interface does more than mark the visible surface of the text; it becomes incorporated into the textual body. Flickering signification, which in a literal and material sense can be understood as producing the text, is also produced *by* it as a textual effect. Thus, the construction of multiple subjectivities in *Patchwork Girl* and the reconfiguration of consciousness to body are both deeply bound up with flickering signification, constituted through the fluidly mutating connections between writer, interface, and reader.

It is primarily through the complex enactment of linking structures, both within the text and within the environment in which the text is read, that *Patchwork Girl* brings into view what was suppressed in eighteenth-century debates over copyright. Instead of an immaterial work, this text foregrounds the materiality of fictional bodies, authorial bodies, reading bodies, and the writing technologies that produce and connect them. Instead of praising originality, it produces itself and its characters through appropriation and transformation that suggest that writing and subjectivity are always patchwork quilts of reinscription and innovation. Rejecting the notion of an author's unique genius, it insists on the collaborative nature of its productions, from the monster as assemblage to the distribution of authorship between the monster "herself," Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, the reader, the computer, and other more shadowy actors as well.

With many print books, the order of pages recapitulates the order of time in the life world. Chronology might be complicated through flashbacks or flash forwards and normally this is done in episodes that stretch for many pages. There are notable exceptions, for example Robert Coover's 1969 print hypertext *The Babysitter*. Choosing not to notice such experimental print fictions, the narrator of *Patchwork Girl* remarks:

When I open a book I know where I am, which is restful. My reading is spatial and even volumetric. I tell myself, I am a third of the way down through a rectangular solid, I am a quarter of the way down the page, I am here on the page, here on this line, here, here, here. (body of text/this writing)

In *Patchwork Girl*, like many hypertexts, chronology is inherently fragile because linking structures leap across time as well as space. As if summarising the processes of fragmentation and recombination made possible by digital technologies, *Patchwork Girl* locates its performance of subjectivity in the individual lexia. Since the past and the future can be played out in any number of ways, the present moment, the lexia we are reading right now, carries an unusually intense sense of presence, all the more so because it is a smaller unit of narration than normally constitutes an episode. "I can't say I enjoy it, exactly," the narrator comments. "The present moment is furiously small, a slot, a notch, a footprint, and on either side it is a seethe of possibility, the dissolve of alphabets and of me" (body of text/a slot, a notch).

Sequence is constructed by accumulating a string of present moments when the reader clicks on links. In contrast to this sequence is the simultaneity of the computer programme. This situation reverses our usual sense that time is passing as we watch. Instead, time becomes a river that always already exists in its entirety, and we create sequence and chronology by choosing which portions of the river to sample. There thus arises a tension between the sequence of lexias chosen by the reader, and the simultaneity of memory space in which all the lexias always already exist. The tension marks the difference between the life of the narrator as the reader experiences it, and that life as it exists in a space of potentiality in which "everything could have been different and already is" (story/rethinking/a life).

When the reader seeks for the "rest of my life," therefore, the situation is not as simple as a unified subject seeking to foresee a future stretching in unbroken chronology before her. To find "the rest of my life," the reader must look not forward into the passing of time but downward into the computer space in which discrete lexias lie jumbled all together. "I sense a reluctance when I tow a frame forward into the view," the narrator says in an utterance that conflates writer, reader, and character:

It is a child pulled out of a fantastic underground hideaway to answer a history quiz. Were you brought out of polymorphous dreams, in which mechanical contraptions, funnels, tubes and magnifying glasses mingled with animal attentions and crowd scenes, into a rigidly actual and bipolar sex scene? Don't worry, little boxy baby, I will lift you by your ankles off the bed... I will show you the seductions of sequence, and then I will let the aperture close, I will let you fall back into the muddled bedsheets, into the merged molecular dance of simultaneity. (story/rest of my life)

The interjection of simultaneity into the choices made by a reader makes clear why different ontological levels (character, writer, reader) mingle so monstrously in this text. In the heart of the computer, which is to say at the deepest levels of machine code, the distinctions between character, writer, and reader are coded into strings of ones and zeros in a space where the text written by a human writer and a mouse click made by a human reader are coded in the same binary form as machine commands and computer programmes. When the text represents this process as a “merged molecular dance of simultaneity,” it mobilises the specificity of the medium as an authorisation for its own vision of cyborg subjectivity. Because electronic hypertexts are written and read in distributed cognitive environments, the reader necessarily is constructed as a cyborg, spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines. To be positioned as a cyborg is inevitably in some sense to become a cyborg, so electronic hypertexts, regardless of their content, tend towards cyborg subjectivity: following Haraway's “A Cyborg Manifesto”, the various binary structures which modernist notions of subjectivity were founded upon are to be acknowledged and subsequently altered.

Part of the monstrosity in *Patchwork Girl* is this mingling of the subjectivity that is attributed to characters, authors, and readers, with the actions of the computer programme. This aspect of the monstrous hybridity of the text is most apparent in “Crazy Quilt,” where excerpts from Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* increasingly intermingle with other sections of the hypertext and with the instructions from the Storyspace manual. Typical is “seam'd,” a significantly named lexia that stitches together the surgery/sewing/writing metaphoric network established in other lexias with the Storyspace programme:

You may emphasize the presence of text links by using a special style, color or typeface. Or, if you prefer, you can leave needles sticking in the wounds – in the manner of tailors – with thread wrapped around them. Being seam'd with scars was both a fact of eighteenth-century life and a metaphor for dissonant interferences ruining any finely adjusted composition” (crazy quilt/seam'd).

The patchwork quality of the passage is emphasised by the fact that another lexia entitled “seam’d” appears elsewhere (body of text/mixed up/seam’d), from which some of the phrases cited above were lifted.

## 2.4 EMBODIED MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE

Although memory is central within the computer, such is not the case for human readers. The “seam’ed” lexia in “crazy quilt” relies for its effect on the probability that the reader has already seen the lexias of which this is a patchwork. Because the reader has read these lines in other contexts, they strike her/him now as a crazy quilt, a textual body stitched together from recycled pieces of other lexias and texts. However, human memory, unlike computer memory, does not retain its contents indefinitely or even reliably. If human memory has gaps in it, then memory becomes like atoms full of empty space, an apparent continuity riddled with holes.

Fascinated with recovering that which has been lost, the narrator recalls a speech made by Susan B. Anthony at a “church quilting bee in Cleveland” in which the monster “was the featured attraction, the demon quilt” (body of text/mixed up/quilting). Susan Brownell Anthony was a prominent, independent and well-educated nineteenth-century American civil rights leader who played a pivotal role in the women’s rights movement to secure women’s suffrage in the United States. Anthony (or is it the monster?) remarks that “Our sense of who we are, is mostly made up of what we remember being. We are who we were; we are made up of memories.” But each of us also holds in her mind experiences she has forgotten. Do these memories, the monstrous Anthony speculates, cohere to make another subject, mutually exclusive to the subject constituted through the memories one remembers? If so:

within each of you there is at least one other entirely different you, made up of all you’ve forgotten... More accurately, there are many other you’s, each a different combination of memories. These people exist. They are complete, if not exactly present, lying in potential in the buried places in the brain” (story/séance/she goes on).

When the monster offers to buy a past from Elsie, a randomly chosen woman she approaches on the street, this lack of a past is in one sense unique to the monster, a result of her having been assembled and not born, with no chance to grow into the adult she now is. In another sense this division between the past the monster can remember and the pasts embodied in her several parts is a common human fate. “We are ourselves ghostly,” Anthony/herself goes on. “Our whole life is a

kind of haunting; the present is thronged by the figures of the past. We haunt the concrete world as registers of past events... And we are haunted, by these ghosts of the living, these invisible strangers who are ourselves” (story/séance/she goes on). On many levels, this monstrous text thus balances itself between cohesion and fragmentation, presence and absence, lexia and link, sequence and simultaneity, coherent selfhood and multiple subjectivities.

## 2.5 ACHIEVING NARRATIVE CLOSURE: READING STRATEGIES IN HYPERTEXT

How can such a text possibly achieve closure? Jane Yellowlees Douglas, a hypertext scholar who focuses on the applicability of literary theory, narratology and aesthetics to hypertext environments, offers a valuable suggestion for closure. Writing on Michael Joyce’s hypertext fiction *Afternoon*, suggests that closure is achieved not when all the lexias have been read, but when the reader learns enough about the central mystery to believe she understands it. The privileged lexia, she suggests, is “white afternoon”: privileged because its transformative power on the reader’s understanding of the mystery is arguably greater than other lexias. Although *Patchwork Girl* has no comparable central mystery, it does have a central dialectic, the fluctuation between fragmentation and recombination. “I believed that if I concentrated on wishing, my body itself would erase its scars and be made new,” the narrator confesses, an endeavour that continues in dynamic tension with the simultaneous realisation that she is always already fragmented, ruptured, discontinuous (story/falling apart/becoming whole). Importantly, in *Patchwork Girl* the argument is made that memory is what keeps embodied subjectivity together. When this oscillation erupts into a crisis, the text initiates events that make continuation impossible unless some kind of accommodation is reached. The crisis occurs when the narrator awakes one morning to find she is coming apart. As she tries to cover over the cracking seams with surgical tape, the dispersion rockets toward violence. “My foot strove skyward... trailing blood in mannered specks. My guts split open and something frilly spilled out... my right hand shot gesticulating stump-first eastward” (story/falling apart/diaspora). The tide is stemmed when Elsie, the woman whose past she bought, comes upon the monster disintegrating in the bathtub and holds onto her. “I was gathered together loosely in her attention in a way that was interesting to me, for I was all in pieces, yet not apart. I felt permitted. I began to invent something new: a way to hang together without pretending I was whole. Something between higgledy-piggledy and the eternal sphere” (story/falling apart/I made myself over). This resolution, in which the monster realises that if she is to cohere at all it cannot be through a single narrative line, leads to

“afterwards,” in which the monster decides that the only life she can lead is nomadic, a trajectory of “movement and doubt--and doubt and movement will be my life, as long as it lasts” (story/rethinking/afterwards). Thus the narrative pattern of her life finally becomes indistinguishable from the fragmentation and recombination of the digital technology that produces it, a junction expressed earlier through the metaphor of the dotted line: “I hop from stone to stone and an electronic river washes out my scent in the intervals. I am a discontinuous line, a dotted line” (body of text/hop). Connecting and dividing, the dotted line of the monster’s nomadic trajectory through “movement and doubt” resembles the lexia-link, presence-absence pattern of the screenic text. Following this trajectory, she goes on to become a writer herself.

But what does she write: the narrative we are reading? If so, then the function of the author has shifted at some undefined point from Mary Shelley to the monster, recalling the earlier distribution of authorship between M/S. Just as the reader can no longer be sure if the monster now writes herself or is written by Mary, so the monster is similarly unsure, in part because her body, like her subjectivity, is a distributed function:

I wonder if I am writing from my thigh, from the crimp-edged pancakelet of skin we stitched onto me... Mary writes, I write, we write, but who is really writing?” Faced with this unanswerable question (unanswerable for the reader as for the narrator), the monster concludes, “Ghost writers are the only kind there are. (story/rethinking/am I mary).

The larger conclusion suggested by juxtaposing *Patchwork Girl* with eighteenth-century debates and the characteristics of digital media goes beyond showing how this text makes the unconscious of the earlier period into the stage for its performances of hybrid subjectivities by exploiting the specificities of the computer. More fundamentally, *Patchwork Girl* demonstrates that despite such important critical developments as deconstruction and Lacanian theory, we continue to operate from assumptions that are grounded in print technologies and that become problematic in the context of digital media. The effect of the creative juxtapositions of *Patchwork Girl* is to shake the reader awake from the dream that electronic fiction is simply “text” that is read on screen instead of on paper.

As scholars work toward crafting a critical theory capable of dealing with the complexities of electronic texts, it may be understood for the first time the full extent to which print technologies have affected understandings of literature. The juxtaposition of print and electronic texts has the potential to reveal the assumptions specific to each, a clarity obscured when either is considered in

isolation. *Patchwork Girl* invites the reader to understand the situation differently, as it opens the possibilities of interpretation, representation and labelling, while at the same time keeping possible alternatives in full view.

## CONCLUSION

Shelley Jackson's 1995 hypertext work *Patchwork Girl* provides a feminist alternative to dominant myths of unethical creation; it offers alternative approaches to linear and positivist knowledge production as it reworks Frankensteinian mythologies, which are often foregrounded in contemporary science-practices. The hypertext work mobilises representational elements of horror, abjection and "unnaturalness" whilst operating on the symbolic, cultural, and imaginary level: precisely the level that science in society also taps into. The manner in which Jackson's work infuses the female monster with agency, results in this central character being represented as an empowered *and* empowering feminist figuration: the Patchwork Girl acknowledges the fact that many regard her as Other, but subverts this negative viewpoint into a source of personal strength. The role the technologically mediating apparatus of the Storyspace software plays in this figuration is central: *Patchwork Girl* is in each and every sense a work of hyperfiction, as it self-reflexively deploys the possibilities that the medium allows, while simultaneously allowing the reader great freedom and control to shape her own narrative. The interplay of texts stemming from various sources and dictions combined with striking images creates a quilt of multiple truths. Thus, *Patchwork Girl* is pervaded with persistent refusals of the existence of a single truth, and expresses a non-hierarchical stance between truth and untruth, as well as fact and fiction. The reader of the hypertext is confronted with anti-linear narratives, as she is propelled into questioning her own sense of time, memory and sequence. The body of the Patchwork Girl, hyped-up on digital energy, reminds the reader that in the digital age the materiality of the body does not simply disappear. It remains a crucial signifier of experience and subjectivity, even though this subjectivity never was and never will be coherent.

The conclusions drawn from analysing Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* from a feminist perspective can be extended to other domains of research. Working on a text and having these kinds of media available, allows many feminist issues to be tackled differently. Additionally, *Patchwork Girl* also provides an accessible, albeit complex, journey into the land of feminist theory, stopping at various key terms and concepts, such as human and non-human agency, text/author, body/text, and memory/subjectivity. Interestingly, the idea of constructed/constructing bodies and deconstructing monsters appears to be a so-called "hot topic" in current research practices. For instance, the interdisciplinary *Anatomical Theatre Revisited* conference, held at the University of Amsterdam from the 5<sup>th</sup> until the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2006, offered a feminist approach to unravelling the connection between

contemporary art and life from the perspective of monstrous, by grasping back to the original meaning of the word “monster”: to exhibit, to point, to show. The conference questioned, as has this thesis, how bodies in performance illustrate historically and culturally specific conceptions of “normal” embodiment, as well as theorising how artistic works contribute to new understanding of bodies, not only as objects of knowledge, but also as the site of subjectivity, thought and knowledge. Moreover, recent developments in digital and electronic media have stimulated new theoretical reflections on the nature of media as such and on the way in which they evolve across time. That these developments in the realm of electronic media are a so-called “hot topic” became apparent during the recent *Remediating Literature Conference*, which took place from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2007 at Utrecht University. The conference examined how recent technological changes have affected the “old” medium of literature, thereby focusing on multimedial and interactive texts, digitalised archives, cyberpoetics, and technological innovations. Crucially, the conference, in a manner similar to that of the *Anatomical Theatre Revisited*, was highly interdisciplinary in scope, as it included methodologies stemming from the fields of psychoanalysis, computer science, biology, history, literary studies, feminist studies, anthropology, and sociology. These recurrences of interdisciplinary approaches to the themes of monstrosity, subjectivity, embodiment, text and performativity beg the conclusion that Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* was well ahead of her time, and that her work is as timely as ever before.

Importantly, the conclusion that is begged most passionately is that *Patchwork Girl* reveals itself as an exemplary work to deal with, complicate, and enrich feminist theories on authorship, embodiment and subjectivity.

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#### A NOTE ON THE TYPE

This thesis was set in Garamond, a typeface produced by Microsoft Corporation specifically for its Office programmes. The Garamond typeface is based on roman types cut by Jean Jannon in 1615. Jannon followed the designs of Claude Garamond which had been cut in the previous century. Garamond's types were, in turn, based on those used by Aldus Manutius in 1495 and cut by Francesco Griffo. The italic is based on types cut in France circa 1557 by Robert Granjon. Garamond is a beautiful typeface with an air of informality which looks good in a wide range of applications. It works particularly well in books and lengthy text settings.

The text of this thesis was encoded and decoded by the word-processing programme Word (Microsoft Office 2003), running on a Compaq Presario R3000 Laptop (build 2004) with a Windows XP operating system.

Cover image: *A Patchworked Self*. Photographic collage by Bellanna. August 2007.