



Tove Solander

“Creating the Senses” Sensation in the Work of Shelley Jackson



Umeå Studies in Language and Literature 18
Department of Language Studies
Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, Graduate School for Gender Studies
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To Shelley Jackson, for writing stuff (and encouraging others to steal it).

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviated Titles of Jackson's Works

Introduction	9
Primary Material	10
Theory	13
The Literary Sensorium	17
Minor Writing for Queers to Come	20
Visual Realism	26
Object Writing	30
Body Writing	37
Disposition: The Sensorium of Shelley Jackson	45
Smelling Sense: The Stink of the Real	49
Undead Smells	54
Odor di Femina	60
The Smell of the Beast	65
Rank Fecundity	73
Reading as Becoming	85
Tasting Texts; or, "I can't say it, I won't chew it"	87
Tasting as Knowing	91
Eating Books or Licking Language?	97
Dilation	103
An Aesthetics of Distaste	109
Phantom Tastes of Fat and Sugar	115
Reading as Licking	123
Touching Thoughts: The Heft of Writing	127
Doll Games	129
Tactile Metonymy	134
Exquisite Corpses	139
Conceptual Intimacy	147
Reading as Playing	154
Seeing Sight: The Anatomy of Vision	157
Auto-anatomisation	161
Anatomising the Eye	165

Anatomising Sight	173
In the Virtual Museum of Writing	181
Reading as Auto-anatomisation	187
Hearing Voices: Writing as Ventriloquism	191
Hearing Voices	194
The Stuttering of Language	201
Body Language	205
Singing Language	211
Reading as Singing Along	219
Coda: A Phantom Tail	225
Sammanfattning	233
Works Cited	235
Works by Shelley Jackson	235
Works on Shelley Jackson	236
Other Works Cited	238

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Abbreviated Titles of Jackson's Works

Angel: "Angel"
Body: *My Body*
Cat: "The Cat's Meow"
Church: "Here is the Church"
Consuetudinary: "Consuetudinary of the Word Church"
Doll: *The Doll Games*
Early: "Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead"
Flat: "Flat Daddy"
Friend: "My Friend Goo"
Gallows: "(the gallows)"¹
Hagfish: "Hagfish, Worm, Kakapo"
Half: *Half Life*
Hook: "The Hook"
Husband: "Husband"
Ineradicable: *Shelley Jackson's Ineradicable Stain*
Interstitial: *The Interstitial Library*
King: "King Cow"
Melancholy: *The Melancholy of Anatomy*
Memorial: "Short-Term Memorial Park"
Musée: "Musée Mécanique"
Moth: "The Moth Duchess" (*Front Page Stories*)
N: "N"
Original: "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin"
Patchwork: *Patchwork Girl*
Pollen: "The Pollen Letters" (*Front Page Stories*)
President: "The President's Mouth"
Putti: "The Putti"
Stitch: "Stitch Bitch"
Swan: "The Swan Brothers"
Tour: *Tour Diary*
Word: "Word Problem"

¹ The actual title of this short story is a picture of a gallows.

Introduction

[A]rt forms take shape around our ability to perceive beauty, but our ability to perceive beauty also takes shape around what forms become possible. Hypertext is making possible a new kind of beauty, and creating the senses to perceive it with. (Stitch)²

How does the contemporary American author and multimedia artist Shelley Jackson achieve her “body writing,” which not only deals thematically with the body but employs a “bodily” style and seems to address the body of the reader (this reader, at least) more than most forms of writing? This is the driving question behind this dissertation, and in order to answer it I turn to sense impressions and the literary techniques used to evoke them. I argue that references to the senses and to sensory qualities work to create what I term “phantom sensations” contributing to the experience of the written work as a sensible material object. Thus, I do not consider literary representations of the senses primarily *as representations* but as linguistic performances potentially rewriting and prosthetically extending the sensing body of the reader. Devoting a chapter to each of the Aristotelian five senses in turn, I consider the literary techniques used to evoke sensations and the specific functions of such sensations in the literary work, but also how they relate to, interplay with and differ from sensations in other sensory modalities. I briefly compare literature to art in different media and discuss how the relative sensory poverty of the literary medium (the visual uniformity of linguistic signs compared to for example paints or musical notes) relates to the phantom sensations it can nevertheless produce. By “phantom” I do not mean to imply a phantom *of* something; literary phantom sensations as vague and disembodied echoes of “real” sensations. Rather, I wish to indicate the intense realness of phantom limb phenomena in spite of the absence of a concrete limb to provide the sensory stimulus. Drawing upon Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on literature, I argue that literary phantom sensations are virtual sensations which could only exist in literature, being dependent upon the material of language as actual sensations are dependent upon sensory stimuli. As such, they cannot be disconnected from the referential aspect of language, from cultural discourses or literary traditions surrounding the senses, although they ultimately exceed and elude these.³

² I henceforth refer to Jackson’s works by abbreviated titles; see the list of abbreviations and the reference list for full bibliographical information.

³ Other art forms produce their distinct kinds on phantom sensations, related in similar ways to their respective materials.

Primary Material

I think more about literature than art, not just because I love it, but because it needs me more. I want to force its borders open, and so I call myself a writer, and will probably keep on doing so even as I get further and further from what most people would call writing. Because literature is so tightly circumscribed, one can import just about any question from conceptual or performance art and get something new in response: (Jackson in Rettberg, "Written")

Jackson's literary works consist of the hypertexts *Patchwork Girl* (1995), *My Body* (1997) and *The Doll Games* (n.d.; co-authored with her sister Pamela Jackson), the short story collection *The Melancholy of Anatomy* (2002), the novel *Half Life* (2006), three works of illustrated children's fiction and numerous short stories published in various anthologies and magazines. My dissertation treats Jackson's oeuvre as a whole and posits her experiments in different forms and media such as hypertext as part of her larger artistic project. It deals with all of her major works, apart from her children's books, and with most of her short stories and essays.⁴ Besides body writing, I would characterise Jackson's work as a form of "object writing" in which the distinction between literature (conventionally perceived as a narrative art form) and the visual arts is troubled. Jackson's prose resembles poetry in that it experiments with objects, juxtapositions and perceptions rather than being plot-driven, although what she terms "story" is important to it too.⁵ Using Jackson's literary works as my primary sources, I consider questions imported from her experience with art in other media: language as the artist's material and the literary work as a conceptual piece.

Jackson's writing may be characterised as postmodernist metafiction drawing attention to its own fictionality, playing with literary conventions and borrowing the styles of non-fictional genres such as manuals, pamphlets, encyclopaedias and articles. Her stories have also been categorised as "fabulism" and included in anthologies for new fabulist fiction, that is, non-realist literature influenced by magical realism, gothic horror, science fiction and fantasy without fully conforming to the conventions of any of those genres. What sets Jackson's writing apart from most other work within either fabulism or postmodernist metafiction is the sensory vividness and intimate ambience of her writing. I do not mean that

⁴ The exclusion of the picture books is partly a pragmatic limitation and partly due to the distinct genre conventions in writing for young children. I have not aimed for completion but for an overview of Jackson's oeuvre, and have selected the works most relevant to my inquiries.

⁵ Jackson celebrates the multilinear structure of hypertext because it allows for a different kind of literary work than the codex format which tends to support the (mono)linear narrative form of the (realist) novel. In "Stitch Bitch," she argues that "[t]he novel has become the golem, the monster that acts like everyone else, only better, because the narrative line is wrapped like a leash around its thick neck" and that "[p]lot chaperones understanding, cuts off errant interpretations." While critiquing narrative conventions for creating predictable and conventional texts, however, she still promotes telling stories (in the plural) as a way of reanimating historical facts and working against the "death" of closure.

these genres are minimalist, clinical or hardboiled by definition, but in my experience many other contributions to anthologies for fabulist and experimental fiction, for example, are. That Jackson's are not is a question of style in the Deleuzian sense. Even in the shortest and most overtly, ironically paper-thin piece of fiction, she manages to make her fictional universe vividly, palpably convincing. Partly, this has to do with stylistic devices such as writing in the first person (singular or plural) and directly addressing the reader, thereby infusing the text with a strong presence and sense of intimacy. Like many feminist authors and contemporary writers of "auto-fiction" she mixes fiction and autobiography (or auto-ethnography) in works such as *My Body* and *The Doll Games*, and employs autobiographical rhetoric in several of her other works as well. In particular, she uses precise descriptions of physical sensations in order to make the most fantastic settings and circumstances appear recognisably real. Thus, the reader identification which makes her fiction engaging is not so much emotional as sensory, based upon the phenomenological experience of perceiving and relating to things, which I term "conceptual intimacy." This ties back to my characterisation of her fiction as object writing and motivates my sensory approach.

Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster by Mary/Shelley, & Herself, is a hypertext created in the program Storyspace and published on CD-ROM. Its unnamed protagonist, referred to as "the patchwork girl" in my dissertation, is the aborted female mate to Frankenstein's monster. In Jackson's version of the story, she is both written and stitched-together by Mary Shelley, with whom she has a sexual relationship before moving on into the world on her own. The text consists of five parts: "a graveyard," telling the stories of some of the previous owners of the patchwork girl's body parts, "a journal," Mary Shelley's journal entries about the patchwork girl, "a quilt," a version of the story made up entirely of quotations from other texts spanning from L. Frank Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* to H el ene Cixous' "Coming to Writing," "a story," the main narrative of the patchwork girl's life from creation to the present day (or rather narratives, as part of it is split into the parallel storylines "mistress" and "monstrous"), and "broken accents," where the patchwork girl reflects metatextually on the hypertext, which is conflated with her sutured body.

My Body & A Wunderkammer is a freely available online hypertext.⁶ Its title page is a nude self portrait in black and white, hot-linked to lexias about different body parts, including a tail and a phantom limb. On her website, Jackson refers to this work as an "autobiography, plus lies." It repeats the concretisation of the body of text as the narrator's own body from *Patchwork*

⁶ The title is usually given as "*My Body: A Wunderkammer & -*," but I interpret the ambiguous placement of the ampersand on the title page differently.

Girl, and adds to that the figure of the body as a cabinet of curiosities to be explored.

The Doll Games is an autobiographical collaboration between Jackson and her sister Pamela Jackson, freely available on Jackson's website. The work is structured like an online archive of doll games, featuring for example transcribed conversations between the Jackson sisters, journal entries where they reflect on their relation to each other and to their dolls, presentations of the dolls and other toys used in their dolls games, a glossary and "photo essays" – thematically arranged series of Polaroid photographs of dolls. It also includes a, presumably now defunct, invitation to readers to contribute their own doll game memories, and a few such contributions. Parts of the text are provided with mock-academic commentary by the fictional editor "J. F. Bellwether."

The Melancholy of Anatomy is a short story collection paraphrasing the title of Robert Burton's 1620 treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton attempts to encyclopaedically anatomise melancholy but finds that everything is related to melancholy somehow and that there is an overwhelming wealth of conflicting information about its types, causes and treatments. Jackson picks up on Burton's eccentric early modern mixture of medicine and magic, science and folklore, nature and culture, body and soul, in stories externalising, inflating and animating various body parts and fluids. Few of the stories are conventional short stories with a clear plot; many of them imitate the style of manuals, textbooks, newspaper articles, pamphlets, ethnographic studies or legends, often switching between registers within the same story for example by including fictional clippings or appendixes. The collection consists of thirteen stories, apart from the opening story "Heart" arranged in threes under the headings of the four humoral temperaments: "Egg," "Sperm" and "Fœtus" under "Choleric"; "Cancer," "Nerve," and "Dildo" under "Melancholy"; "Phlegm," "Hair" and "Sleep" under "Phlegmatic"; "Blood," "Milk" and "Fat" under "Sanguine."

Half Life is a novel set in an alternative present or future where radioactive pollution has caused a sudden upsurge in the number of conjoined twins, specifically ones with two heads sharing one body. These are called "twofers" and form a minority group with their own political movement.⁷ The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Nora, has a conjoined twin, Blanche, who has been dormant since their teens. Nora wants no part in twofer identity politics but only wishes to be normal and fears that Blanche will awaken so that she will no longer have a body and a life of her own. Attracted to an illegal underground movement promising the surgical removal of the additional head, she travels from the US to the UK and back again. Along the way, she is increasingly troubled by tics and hallucinations

⁷ Non-twins are called "singletons."

she attributes to Blanche's unconscious influence. This narrative is interspersed with childhood memories from when Blanche was still conscious and with various political, philosophical, and religious documents on twofers.

Previous research on Jackson deals almost exclusively with *Patchwork Girl*, treating it as exemplary of literary hypertexts, or more specifically of early and/or feminist electronic literature. The most notable example is N. Katherine Hayles' article "Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*," later partially integrated into her *My Mother Was a Computer*, in which she draws upon *Patchwork Girl* to argue for a "media-specific analysis" taking the materiality of the literary medium into account, and against the notion of the immaterial work. Other examples include Astrid Ensslin's "Women in Wasteland," Elisabeth Joyce's "Sutured Fragments," Michael Joyce's "Nonce Upon Some Times," George P. Landow's "Stitching Together Narrative, Sexuality, Self," Jaishree K. Odin's "Embodiment and Narrative Performance," Jo Alyson Parker's "Ejected from the Present and its Certainties," Jenny Sundén's "What If Frankenstein('s Monster) Was a Girl?" and portions of Jay Clayton's *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*. Most of these works are introductory in nature, providing a guide to reading hypertext in general and *Patchwork Girl* in particular rather than a sustained close reading of it. To my knowledge, the only research on Jackson which does not focus on *Patchwork Girl* is Jessa Lingel's reading of *The Melancholy of Anatomy* as a "narrative of community" in her article "The Body Indivisible." Thus, my dissertation fills a research gap in that it covers Jackson's oeuvre and treats hypertext as one formal experiment among others used to stretch the boundaries of literature.

Theory

I look at the mirror and say, "What does it mean?" But it is not an interesting question. (Moth)

In order to work out a methodology which may help to explain how sensation functions in Jackson's oeuvre, I draw upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as that of feminist theorists inspired by them such as Elizabeth Grosz, Dorothea Olkowski and Claire Colebrook. According to Deleuze and Guattari, art does not mimic or represent an external reality but instead creates what they term "percepts" and "affects" specific to its medium or material. Importantly, percepts and affects are not to be understood as expressions or representations of the artist's perceptions and affections. While perceptions and affections are subjective, percepts and affects have an objective existence in the artwork as otherwise imperceptible forces made perceptible through art (Deleuze and Guattari, *Philosophy* 182). Deleuze and Guattari provocatively claim that "no art and no sensation have ever been representational" (*Philosophy* 193). This is not only true for less

obviously representational art forms such as music or abstract painting but also for literature, though language in its everyday use is burdened by commonsense communication and signification (Colebrook, *Gilles* 106). Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between journalistic novels, which are content to remain on the level of communication and representation, and literary novels, which “extract from the perceptions, affections, and opinions of their psychosocial ‘models’” the material composed into unique literary percepts and affects (*Philosophy* 188). Artistic composition makes all the difference, in literature as well as in other arts. Authors must try to attain a nonsignifying use of language, creating intensities or sensations rather than sense or signification (Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* 114).

Deleuze defines the project of writing as creating a new language within language which pushes language towards its outside: “outside” meaning not an external, extralinguistic realm but the non-linguistic outer limit of language itself (*Essays* IV; 113). This means that literary percepts are unique to literature in the sense of being dependent upon the material of language, but not in the sense of being mere semblances made up of linguistic signs. For Deleuze, linguistic simulacra, like all other forms of simulacra, are not to be understood as appearances *of* something but as appearances *as such* (Colebrook, *Gilles* 6-7). Deleuze’s thinking does not belong to the linguistic or semiotic turn which has come to dominate cultural theory and which can be summed up in the view that “there is no outside to language” or that “everything is text.” As Brian Massumi points out, linguistic constructivism is inherently humanist even when displacing agency from the human subject to the discursive structure as such, since language and discourse are viewed as essentially human (38-9).⁸ Important work has been done by for example Judith Butler, Vicki Kirby, Donna Haraway and proponents of Actor-Network Theory to complicate linguistic constructivism and redefine “language,” “discourse” and “signification” to include non-linguistic and nonhuman forms of coding (see Kirby). For Deleuze, however, signs are not primarily representational but intensive (Colebrook, *Gilles* 107-9). Intensities and forces such as artistic affects and percepts should not be understood as signifying but as productive, so that the scholar’s task is to determine their function and not interpret their meaning. I accept the Deleuzian notion of “positive difference,” that is, the existence of qualitatively different intensities and modalities (Bray and Colebrook 41). This means that reality cannot be reduced to language, discourse or signification, however broadly defined. Matter is neither discursively constructed nor an inaccessible outside to discourse, but a distinct modality

⁸ To make an explicit critique of humanism would take me too far from the topic of this study. With its focus on the human senses, my dissertation is inevitably anthropocentric. However, I attempt not to overemphasise human agency or contribute to the categorical distinction between (human) subjects and (nonhuman) objects.

co-existing with it in the constant virtual-actual interplay making up the world.

Before I move on, I need to explain what Deleuze means by the virtual. It is not to be confused with “virtual reality,” which is merely a simulation with a weaker link to the Deleuzian virtual than most other arts (Massumi 137-8). Neither is it to be confused with the possible, which is lesser than and determined by the actual (Colebrook, *Gilles* 96-7). The virtual exceeds the actual: it is real but not actualised in space (Olkowski 110). Objects and events are both real but objects are actual and events virtual (Olkowski 214-7). In Massumi’s terms the virtual is something happening too quickly to have actually happened (30-1). While the realisation of the possible follows the rules of representation, the actualisation of the virtual follows the rules of difference, dissociation and creation, that is, of evolution according to Deleuze’s reading of Henri Bergson (Olkowski 122). The virtual is unrepresentable but can be intuited as a succession of images given all at once in such a way that the linear conception of time is undone (Olkowski 180). Such intuitions of the virtual can then be figured by writers and artists as a series of images approximating its flux (Massumi 133-6). It is important to point out that images are not the same as symbols or metaphors, which operate according to a representational logic of analogy (Olkowski 185-9). There is not an actual world which is then represented by virtual images unique to the human mind (Colebrook, *Gilles* 87-8). The world is already made up by images, which are more than representations but less than things (Olkowski 95-8). This undoes the false dichotomy between reality and representation: literary percepts are images created to make the virtual perceptible and as such made of the same stuff as the world. When successful, they make the virtual emerge into the actual (Olkowski 140-5).

Equipped with a Deleuzian understanding of language and literature, I approach Jackson’s writing as the experiment of importing insights from the visual and conceptual arts into literature and treating language as an artist’s material among others. Such literary experimentation is by no means unique to Jackson but a major feature of modernism. However, it has too often been limited to formal experimentation with verbal sounds and graphic signs, by artists as well as by scholars. Hypertheory, as exemplified by Hayles’ emphasis on the materiality of the medium, has tended to focus almost exclusively upon the formal differences between electronic media and the codex (book) format, to the detriment of close readings of individual hypertexts. The insights borrowed from Deleuze’s work on literature allow me to take seriously what is going on at the referential level as part of the same literary experimentation. Despite his critique of representationalism, Deleuze is not simply a formalist. His understanding of language as a nonsignifying artist’s material paradoxically *includes* the referential level, so that literary experimentation upon language implies experimenting with

things as well as with words. Deleuze has a pragmatic, performative view of language according to which language *does* rather than *means*, but its “doing” involves the referential aspect usually thought of as its “meaning.” In a conventional understanding of language, literary percepts could either have a real existence on the formal level, in the material qualities of language, or be located on the level of content or reference and as such be essentially unreal. But according to Ronald Bogue, literary percepts “come into being when commonsense distinctions between inside/outside, subject/object, words/things, and so forth, collapse” (*Deleuze on Literature* 186). I see a radical potential for literary studies in this approach to language, which takes its concrete intervention in the world into account without reducing literature to material configurations of letters, syntax, binary code, electronic circuits, ink and wood pulp.

Perhaps due to the difficulty of reconciling his theories with the dominant view of language and literature as essentially representational, Deleuze has had little impact on literary studies. To develop a working method, I instead turn to film scholars concerned with the sensory aspects of film, such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks and Jennifer M. Barker. Sobchack insists that “all our senses are mobilized” in the film experience, as shown by the often highly sensual language used to describe it by film critics and other spectators (80). However, since film is conventionally understood as a strictly audiovisual medium, references to other senses are retrospectively reconsidered as metaphorical (see also Marks, *Skin* 222; Barker 88). Sobchack draws upon the linguistic category of catachresis (that is, originally metaphorical expressions which have become naturalised and for which there are no “literal” synonyms, such as “arm of a chair”) to suggest that the film spectator “engages in a form of *sensual catachresis*.” That is, both in the immediate, bodily film experience and in the linguistic description of it, sensual figurations are applied literally, as in catachresis. As a result, the sensual encounter with the film “is experienced and described as *both real and ‘as if’ real*” (Sobchack 81-2).

I do not borrow Sobchack’s term “sensual catachresis” but offer metonymy as an alternative to metaphor which similarly confuses the hierarchical distinctions between figurative and literal, fictional and real.⁹ The point is that literary phantom sensations, like the filmic sensations described by Sobchack, are experienced as simultaneously real and unreal. They are not the same as literal sense impressions but that does not mean that they are just figuratively sensory. Sobchack and Massumi stress that all the senses are active even in apparently monosensual perception, correlating against each other in order to make sense of impulses. Hallucination happens all the time

⁹ Olkowski makes a similar distinction between “index” and “icon” in relation to Mary Kelly’s art: an index stands in a material relation to the thing it refers to, while an icon represents it by resemblance, 207.

as part of normal perception and cannot be categorically distinguished from it, but usually does not reach consciousness due to the continuous crosschecking and filtering of perceptions (Massumi 155). Literary phantom sensations can be considered a form of conscious, controlled hallucinating triggered not by sounds and visions, as in film, but by language.

The Literary Sensorium

I think in things: complicated ideas come to me in flesh, concrete metaphors with color, heft, stink.
(Jackson in Amerika, "Stitch")

My dissertation is situated within the growing field of sensory scholarship, the foundation of which was laid around the turn of the millennium with historical, anthropological and ethnographic studies of different arrangements of the sensorium than the contemporary western one. As part of this, there is work addressing the senses in relation to literature, such as *Sensual Reading*, edited by Michael Syrotinski and Ian MacLachlan, Ralf Hertel's *Making Sense*, Sara Danius' *The Senses of Modernism*, William A. Cohen's *Embodied*, Kerry McSweeney's *The Language of the Senses* and Susan Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. These works deal with sensation mainly on a thematic level, with Danius going farthest in outlining the implications of shifting modes of perception upon literary aesthetics. Overall, the work in literary studies does not match the impetus in film, art and performance studies to develop new sensory methodologies. Closer to this strand of research are works dealing with the power of literature to evoke mental images, such as Ellen J. Esrock's *The Reader's Eye*, Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* and Peter Schwenger's *Fantasm and Fiction*. Esrock defends imaging as an important aspect of the reading experience, against established scholarly views of it as a subjective activity merely detracting attention from the text as such, and calls for future "phenomenographical" studies of literature taking virtual sensing into account (204). Her call is answered by Scarry and Schwenger, who both describe the imagination as inherently vague and ghostly. Although these authors use "images" or "pictures" in a more or less extended sense to include senses other than sight, their discussions are heavily biased towards specifically *visual* imagining which limits their usefulness for dealing with other senses.

My dissertation also has affinities with the so-called affective turn within cultural studies, which has a greater emphasis on new theoretical and methodological approaches following from new understandings of affect. Percepts are sometimes treated as a subcategory to affects, or as more or less interchangeable with them (see Colebrook, *Gilles* 21-5). I would like to maintain the distinction by emphasising the relation of percepts to *perception*, as opposed to affective states. Nevertheless, there are

correspondences between my approach to sensation and Massumi's treatment of affects as pre-coded, corporeal intensities, distinct from more critical analyses of affects culturally coded into emotions, such as Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. However, work on affect and emotion both tend to be included in the affective turn. Individual works such as those of film scholars Sobchack, Marks and Barker often try to strike a balance between Deleuze's affects and phenomenological or even psychoanalytical theories of emotion. Similar compromises are made with regards to perception, which reflects my own struggle to make Deleuze's work on percepts practically applicable.

I have chosen to read Jackson's body of work through the lens of the senses for several reasons. First, because embodied perception is so central to it, by which I mean a drawing attention both to the perceiving body or organ in its specificity and to the material specificity of the object perceived. This would stand in contrast to a more abstract style of description in which it is unclear or irrelevant who or even which senses gathered the information, and in which the particular properties of the object described are clearly subordinated to the plot or narrative. Second, because the senses have an obvious bodily basis while at the same time pointing away from "the body" as a static object of description. Since Jackson often presents the body in pieces, it might seem closer at hand to structure a thematic exploration of her body writing around commonly appearing body parts or body fluids. The advantage I see with choosing the senses instead is that they invite consideration of sensing as a relational process by which the bodies sensing and sensed are constituted, including the body of the reader sensing the body of text. Additionally, a sensory approach invites interdisciplinary comparisons between literature and other art forms addressing different senses, which suits a study of the multimedia artist Jackson.

The five senses are all part of literary history, but not equally so. In line with the general audiovisual dominance of western culture, literary references to sight and sound far outweigh those to touch, smell and taste, although the exact balance varies between authors, genres and periods. The audiovisual bias in literature might seem natural, given that on a factual, material level, language is predominantly auditory (oral language) and visual (written language). Writers can certainly work with the sonority and visibility of language as other artists work with the sensual qualities of their respective media. However, language inevitably has a representational aspect which complicates matters. On the one hand, Deleuze describes literary creation as a nonsignifying use of language, a bringing out of the musicality of language in direct opposition to sense. On the other hand, by the musicality of language Deleuze does not exclusively, or even primarily, refer to the actual sound of words when pronounced (Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* 164-6). As Bogue explains, Deleuze cancels the commonsensical distinction between

form and content, including the semantic aspect of it in his consideration of experimentations upon language (*Deleuze on Literature* 114).

Deleuze speaks of literary percepts almost exclusively in terms of “visions” and “auditions,” but these visions and auditions stand in no straightforward relation to the actual audiovisuality of language. Indeed, literary visions and auditions cannot be heard or seen as such. It is here that my feminist intervention into Deleuzian literary theory takes place. Since linguistic signification complicates the issue of literary visions and auditions, I venture that it is also possible to think literary tactitions, gustations and olfactions. As feminist scholars and historians of the senses have amply demonstrated, the denigration of the so-called proximity senses is intertwined with the denigration of the body and of the feminine. Although my aim is not to elevate the proximity senses to the level of the distance senses (a goal comparable to that of egalitarian feminists wishing to claim the position of universal Man for women) I see a point in reversing the hierarchy and starting with smell, taste and touch.

It can be – and has been – argued that there is no language of touch, taste and, especially, smell. However, it does not follow from the actual audiovisuality of language that there is a language for the kind of visuality or sonority Deleuze discusses. In fact, it is part of his point that literary visions and auditions are invisible and inaudible and impossible to describe in standard language. They are visualities and sonorities unique to literature and therefore, as I read it, not dependent upon the existence of terms to denote them. Thus, a writer should be able to use language creatively to create literary tactitions, gustations and olfactions as well. Historically, sound and vision have been especially privileged for the conveying of sense (perhaps because language, the conveyor of sense par excellence, is an audiovisual medium). However, since Deleuze considers literature primarily as a nonsignifying use of language, this is no reason to perpetuate the privileging of sight and hearing.

Another objection can be made against combining Deleuzian literary theory with an approach centred on the five senses, an objection based in Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of phenomenology (*Philosophy* 178-9). However, as Olkowski argues, this does not necessarily entail a rejection of the “lived body”; instead Deleuze’s theory of perception might provide an alternative take on it to that of phenomenology (98-9). Rather than rejection, Colebrook speaks of a “radicalisation” of phenomenology (*Gilles* 6-7). Deleuze’s strongest criticism of phenomenology is that, like psychoanalysis, it is normative and validates the stable subject, which prohibits thought of change and fluidity (Olkowski 59). Deleuze’s percepts are importantly not “subjective,” which distances his writing on literature from any kind of “reader response” theory (Colebrook, *Gilles* 29). Even perceptions occur *between* the perceiver and the perceived, on a more immediate level than

any subjective considerations (Massumi 90-92). Although percepts are not first and foremost sensory, and rarely occur in a form strictly confined to one sensory modality, they are made perceptible to the reader by way of the human sensorium. Rather than of literary percepts as such, this is a study of the specific ways they are made perceptible as phantom smells, tastes, touches, sights and sounds.

My separation of the senses might be more compatible with phenomenology than with Deleuze's take on perception. This is because sense organs, like other organs, are a sort of materialised habits, colluding with mental habits to reduce difference and novelty (Olkowski 116, 148). In this way, the organism is maintained at the expense of expansion and change. Because Deleuze's main concern is change, he is less concerned with specific forms of perception determined by the human sensorium. However, because my approach to literature is more practical and less philosophical (that is, more applicable to the discipline of literary studies) I need to operate on a more concrete level and divide my topic into workable subcategories. It is my hope that this can be done without locking the "sensible singularities" (Colebrook, *Gilles* 70) released by literature back into commonsense categories.

Minor Writing for Queers to Come

I'm a feminist writer, emphasis on writer. Those two things aren't at odds, of course. (Jackson in Ley, "Women")

In the chapters that follow, I read Jackson's oeuvre against that of other authors working within a literary trajectory I have chosen to term "minor writing for queers to come." Although their literary treatment of the senses is the main criterion for inclusion, I feel that these authors share wider aesthetic concerns with Jackson, including the conviction that aesthetics is a political issue. Among the writers I discuss alongside Jackson are Djuna Barnes, Neil Bartlett, Leonora Carrington, Brigid Brophy, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Dorothy Allison and Nalo Hopkinson.¹⁰

My choice of the designation "queer," used in the deliberately undetermined way it is often used within queer theory, corresponds to the indeterminacy of minor writing.¹¹ It indicates an unspecified deviation from heterosexism which necessarily involves a feminist sensibility.¹² Instead of

¹⁰ Dianne Chisholm remarks in a note to her article "Obscene Modernism" that she reads Barnes' *Nightwood* as a case of queer minor literature in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, as opposed to previous identificatory readings of it as lesbian minority literature, 198-9, note 19.

¹¹ For an outlining of the tensions and affinities between Deleuze and queer theory, see Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, especially the introduction.

¹² Deviations from heterosexism necessarily entails feminism because by "heterosexism" I mean the interconnected norms of sexed identities and sexual orientations. I am not saying any deviation from *heterosexuality*, though the two often coincide, because deviations from heterosexism challenge the idea that there is such a thing as "heterosexuality." To define as queer any deviation from heterosexuality risks tying

the literature of a predefined political minority, Deleuze and Guattari use the concept “minor writing” to designate a revolutionary potential in all literature, a minor use of a major language which constitutes a political, collective enunciation (*Kafka* 16-20). As Deleuze clarifies, such a collective enunciation invents a minor people to come rather than speaking for an already established group (*Essays* 4). Hence, the phrase “queers to come” emphasises that the type of minor writing Jackson performs is not a literature “representing” queers or catering to their “identity politics” in any straightforward way. Indeed, to a great extent it may not seem to be “about” queers at all. This is part of the indeterminacy of minor writing, which must continually struggle against its own tendency to become major – the major literature of, by and for queers, defined once and for all.¹³ (I should point out that the distinction between minor and major literature stands in no direct correlation to either popularity or canonisation.)

There are obvious affinities between minor writing and *écriture féminine*. *Écriture féminine* has often been criticised as essentialising womanhood, for example by Monique Wittig, who warns that to connect writing to the female body is to figure it as “a secretion natural to ‘Woman’” instead of a “material production” (60). While I think that Wittig is right that Cixous’ equation of writing with gushing body fluids tends to occlude the work involved in literary creation as well as its situatedness in a cultural and historical context, I do not believe that either the “body” or the “feminine” are as simply essentialised or essentialising. As Verena Andermatt-Conley shows, Cixous’ thinking was developed in the same historical and political milieu as Deleuze’s and they influenced each other. They share a critique of representational and realist literature, of clichés, of identity and of the psychoanalytic notion of desire based upon lack and the phallus. In lieu of such notions, they both suggest multiplicity, creative innovation, desire as productive and a notion of the body in constant becoming (Andermatt-Conley 22-32).¹⁴ In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous writes that “[i]t is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain” (Cixous, “Laugh” 340), a formulation suggesting that *écriture féminine* might be understood as a minor literature for women to come.

queer down to normative identity categories such as “homosexuality,” while the point of queer as a theoretical concept is precisely to elude these.

¹³ Lesbianism is no longer “the love that dare not speak its name” but a subculture with its own clichés and conventions. That is one reason why this is not another study of “lesbian literature,” though indebted to such studies.

¹⁴ Similarly, Olkowski points out connections between Luce Irigaray’s critique of representation and Deleuze’s, emphasising Irigaray’s conviction that there can be an improper language which, unlike representational language, might express multiplicity and fluidity, 124.

Rather than originating in a preexistent feminine identity, then, *écriture féminine* would be a “becoming-woman,” another term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari. In the essay “Literature and Life,” Deleuze writes:

Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible. [...] Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization. The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write? Even when it is a woman who is becoming, she has to become-woman, and this becoming has nothing to do with a state she could claim as her own. To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule – neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form. (Essays 1)

I quote this discussion of literary becomings in full because it is central to my project. In Deleuze’s understanding, writing is “doing” rather than “saying,” and minor writing is a becoming directed away from “Man” but not directed towards any predefined goal – it will never “have become.” Becoming-woman is only the first step away from the identity position of universal man (incidentally the very identity position from which Wittig’s lesbian subject speaks). *Écriture féminine* might then be understood as addressing the question of the becoming-woman of women. Cixous suggests that becomings will be initiated primarily by women since they have less to lose than men by abandoning the order of things (Andermatt-Conley 25). The woman speaking in her *écriture féminine* is a woman in constant becoming: “I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation” (Cixous, “Laugh” 345).

Neither the feminine nor the body are stable essences in Cixous’ thinking. When she describes feminine sexuality in terms of “sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area” and a “thousand and one thresholds of ardor” (“Laugh” 342), her formulations echo Deleuze and Guattari’s concept “the body without organs” (BwO), which I explain further in the section on body writing. When Cixous claims that unlike feminine sexuality, “masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts” (“Laugh” 345), she describes the ideal body and sexuality of universal man. The contrasting feminine sexuality is part of the becoming-woman directed away from this subject position, a becoming by no means reserved for women, though perhaps more open to them due to the weaker expectations on women to inhabit the universal position.

I propose becoming-queer as a becoming likewise directed away from universal man, but more specifically away from the heterosexual binary of

man *and* woman as majoritarian identity positions, and the heterosexual/homosexual binary that follows from it.¹⁵ My minor literature for queers to come overlaps with Terry Castle's "lesbian fiction," Mary E. Galvin's "queer poetics" and Elisabeth A. Frost's "feminist avant-garde," although it is identical to none. Castle argues that lesbian fiction is an "undertheorized" category (67) and presents a definition of it as not only dealing with "a sexual relationship between two women" but as breaking up the kind of male-female-male homoerotic triangle described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men* (74). While this specific definition is not very useful for me, it does make an important connection between queer sexuality and feminist politics, which Castle furthermore associates with a resistance to literary realism:

By its very nature lesbian fiction has – and can only have – a profoundly attenuated relationship with what we think of, stereotypically, as narrative verisimilitude, plausibility, or "truth to life." Precisely because it is motivated by a yearning for that which is, in a cultural sense, implausible – the subversion of male homosocial desire – lesbian fiction characteristically exhibits, even as it masquerades as "realistic" in surface detail, a strongly fantastical, allegorical, or utopian tendency. (88)

In a similar vein, Galvin argues that queer sexuality and formal innovation go hand in hand because "the mind which can imagine other sexual orientations and gender identities can and must also imagine new ways of writing" (6). I want to retain Galvin's emphasis on literary innovation, but without her assumption that a queer or lesbian identity precedes and informs the writing. Frost proposes her feminist avant-garde as an alternative to either identity politics or *écriture féminine*. She is solely concerned with female-authored American poetry, but her definition of feminist avant-garde writing as combining radical formal innovation with radical utopian politics applies to my material as well (Frost xiv).¹⁶

Central to all these forms of minor writing is a rejection of mimetic realism. Unlike radical writing driven by identity politics, radical writing in the utopian mode is by definition non-realist, as it does not aim to represent

¹⁵ In the sense that becoming-woman is always already a becoming away from phallic (hetero)sexuality, it too can be described as a becoming-queer. However, I want to distinguish my becoming-queer from the becoming-woman of Cixous which in my view retains too much of the majoritarian identity of woman as heterosexual child bearer. Cixous tries to tap into the forces and powers of reproduction and unleash them into becomings, which is a different strategy than Jackson's.

¹⁶ Galvin and Frost both draw upon Wittig, but as Diana Fuss and Butler have demonstrated, Wittig bases her lesbian writing upon a liberal humanist notion of the subject, see Fuss 39-53 and Butler 151-74. Despite her avowed anti-essentialism, for example in her critique of Cixous cited above, Wittig essentialises the lesbian as a utopian point of origin existing before language and before sex or gender, the point where resistance to the system of heterosexist oppression originates. What sets Wittig apart from Deleuze is her stress on the strategic *universalising* of the minor point of view, which in Deleuze's terms would make it major. However, there are interesting resonances with Deleuze's work on literature in Wittig's insistence that language be treated as an artist's material and made to resist commonsense "meaning" and in her refusal to separate form from content, see Wittig 65-73. Although Wittig is not one of the authors I discuss at any length in this study, her fiction, if not her essays, could be read as minor literature for queers to come.

but to rewrite reality. As Castle puts it: “It dismantles the real, as it were, in a search for the not-yet-real, something unpredicted and unpredictable. [...] As a consequence, it often looks odd, fantastical, implausible, ‘not there’ – utopian in aspiration of not design” (91). All linguistic and literary conventions cannot be abolished at once, though, or the result would be white noise with zero intensity. Minor writers may employ various different styles and strategies, choosing which rules to comply with and which to bend or break. While Deleuze favours writers who can be described as minimalist in different ways, such as Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and Virginia Woolf, the authors I study tend to be more maximalist. Their departure from realism takes slightly different forms, such as Barnes’ antiquarianism, Carrington’s surrealism, Brophy’s operatic picaresque and Carter’s Gothicism, but they can all be described as fantastic or fabulist writers. Regardless of the style chosen, it can in no way be separated from the story or subject matter. Daniela Caselli writes of Barnes that her style is “not ornamentation” since “there is no bare flesh to be found once the finery has been stripped away” (14). Even more radically, Winterson argues in her essay “A Work of My Own” that style “frees the writer from the weight of her own personality [...] so that what she can express is more than, other than, what she is” (*Art* 187). This resounds with the importance Deleuze puts on literary style as particular but not personal (see Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* 39; Colebrook, *Gilles* 106). In sum, style is crucial to what I term minor writing for queers to come.

According to a Deleuzian understanding, minor writers resist clichés not for the representationalist reason that they are negative stereotypes (of oppressed minorities, for example), but because conventionalised forms and expressions stand in the way of intensive, that is creative, language use. Conventional forms are mental habits encouraging easy recognition at the cost of thought. Olkowsky makes a biting critique of the “universal story” lauded by literary critics: the idea that readers are supposed to recognise themselves in universal human traits and feelings even though external circumstances may differ (130). According to her, and I agree, this is simply to reduce lived feelings to readymade labels in order to *not* have to think or feel. Minority literature is by no means exempt from this tendency, although its common stories may be presented as local rather than universal. When catering to identity politics it draws upon realist recognition, mirroring its audience as a clearly defined minority group.

This critique of literary convention is recognisable as a modernist standpoint. The aim of modernist art is often described as estranging perception and jolting the audience out of commonsense assumptions (if only to perceive more clearly the world as it really is – or as it appears immediately to the senses, without the order imposed by cultural conditioning). Danus’ description of high modernism as “a crisis of the

senses” is interesting in this regard (1). According to Danius, modernism entailed a shift from idealist to materialist aesthetics, meaning that technological extensions of the human senses were incorporated into art (2). As periodisation is not really my concern, I simply use the term (post)modernist with the prefix in brackets to indicate that Jackson’s writing has strong affinities with modernism without belonging to the modernist era in a strict sense. I choose not to speak of postmodernism as a stylistically distinct era superseding it, but consider minor writing for queers to come a continually renewed continuum.

Jackson and the other authors I discuss in this dissertation recycle various genres in order to reinvent literary forms. For example, Jackson, Winterson and Hopkinson flirt with science fiction, while Carter, Bartlett and Carrington rework fairy tale motifs. The author in many ways closest to Jackson is Barnes, who likewise found inspiration in early modern authors such as Burton, paraphrased various literary and scientific genres in a sort of literary collage technique and illustrated her own texts with black and white drawings. In Caselli’s words: “By not being ‘of her time’ Barnes performs an unmodern, unfashionable, unconventional, and inopportune modernism: a queerly anachronistic modernism” (4).¹⁷ Winterson argues that modernist authors were interested in the Renaissance as a period of genre crossing, invention and experimentation (*Art* 190-1). While many literary critics view modernism as a deviation from the realist essence of fiction which produced great work but which has nevertheless reached a dead end, Winterson finds modernism to be close to the core of literature: “To say that the experimental novel is dead is to say that literature is dead. Literature is experimental” (*Art* 176). This does not mean, of course, that contemporary authors should repeat the experiments of modernism, which may in turn have stagnated into conventions. Neither does it mean, however, that innovation is dependent upon the literary-historical context in the sense that each new thing becomes old as it is superseded by the new: minor literature remains eternally new, retaining its power to move new audiences (Colebrook, *Gilles* 63-4).

Wittig writes about Barnes that her “text is also unique in the sense that it is the first of its kind, and it detonates like a bomb where there has been nothing before it. So it is that, word by word, it has to create its own context, working, laboring with nothing against everything” (63-4). Paradoxically, Barnes – as, I would argue, Jackson – achieves her novelty through working with obscure intertextual echoes of literary history. Minor writers repeat the past as something new: the virtual emerging into the actual (Olkowski 140). As Grosz explains, while the possible is identical to the real except lacking in

¹⁷ Although Caselli does not reference Deleuze, her formulations echo his concern with “the untimely” and “the eternal return,” concepts borrowed from Nietzsche, see Colebrook, *Gilles* 62, 120-2.

reality, the virtual does not resemble the real it actualises through a process of creative innovation (Grosz, “Deleuze” 227-8). Art provides virtual realities which act directly upon the actual in unpredictable ways, not blueprints for social change. Thus, Ian Buchanan describes the literary becoming-woman as “a machine for releasing utopia, not a representation of it” (113).

Visual Realism

I went to the window, which was round, its smooth wood frame pleasant to touch. I turned to see the boy stroking the cloth cover of my book with a quickly withdrawn finger. (Patchwork [story/seagoing/chancy])¹⁸

Visual realism is a mode of description common to most narrative fiction, including non-realist genres. As Jackson’s work mainly conforms to it, I devote this section to explaining visual realism and its implications for literary phantom sensations. In order to describe how senses other than sight are invoked through visually realist literature, I draw parallels with the term “haptic visuality” used in art and film studies. My discussion of a tactile writing style in the visually realist mode leads up to the following section on Jackson’s object writing.

I base my outline of visual realism on Scarry’s article “On Vivacity.” Although Scarry never uses this term, I find her visual bias to be in line with what Rebecca Scherr, applying perspectival realism in visual art to literature, describes as visual realism (198). Within this common mode of literary description, all other sense impressions (except perhaps sounds) are secondary to, and indeed often mediated through, visual perception. Scarry’s basic assumption is that the imagination is naturally (audio)visual (“Vivacity” 7). Using a simile, she suggests that sight and sound can be reproduced by the imagination, just like they can be technologically, while touch can only be reported verbally or conveyed audiovisually (Scarry, “Vivacity” 14). Without accepting her categorical distinction between various phantom sensations, I take seriously Scarry’s effort to outline a “phenomenology of imaginary objects” (“Vivacity” 12). I think that she is right that literature, for various historical and cultural reasons, works mainly through virtual visuality – the tradition Scherr refers to as visual realism.

Scarry distinguishes between “immediate sensory content,” like sight in a painting, “delayed sensory content,” like sound in a musical score, and “mimetic content,” like touch in a novel. It is however not the case that each art form works through only one of these modes:

Each of the arts incites us to the practice of all three acts: immediate perception, delayed perception, and mimetic perception. But painting, sculpture, music, film, and

¹⁸ When referencing Jackson’s hyperworks, I indicate the *lexia* (text window) in square brackets. For *Patchwork Girl*, I give the relevant section and subsection, if any, separated by a slash, while for *My Body* and *The Doll Games* I give the unique ending of the html address.

theater are weighted toward the first, or (perhaps more accurately) they bring about the second and the third by means of their elaborate commitments to the first; whereas the verbal arts take place almost exclusively in the third. (Scarry, "Vivacity" 2-3)

I find Scarry's division helpful because it facilitates comparison between literature and other arts, and suggests that what I term phantom sensations (Scarry's mimetic perception) is present even in art forms featuring a high degree of immediate sensory content. Via a discussion of haptic visuality, I shall return to the question of how different literary phantom sensations such as touch and sight may be produced and organised in relation to each other.

In its most basic sense, haptic visuality indicates a sort of synaesthesia commonly involved in vision: the ability to see the tactile quality of texture (Massumi 157-8). Deleuze picks up a more specialised version of this concept from art historian Alois Riegl, who distinguishes the haptic from the optical in order to describe two different styles of visual art. The haptic-optical distinction is not synonymous to a tactile-visual distinction; both terms in the first pair apply to vision. While optical visuality "sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space" and "depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object," haptic visuality "tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture" (Marks, *Skin* 162). Perspectival realism in painting is characterised by optical visuality.

Marks and, following her, Barker, saves the audiovisual film medium from the "critique of visuality as bent on mastery" (Marks, *Skin* 190) by displacing this critique onto optical visuality, while haptic visuality is described as inviting a mutual, intimate engagement with the artwork (*Skin* 184-5; Barker 32-4). To ascribe tactile qualities to visual art is hardly new; art critics from the 19th century onwards have described how painters tease out what Maurice Merleau-Ponty terms "the tactile within the visible" (Paterson 83-6). For example, Michel Serres discusses touch in the painting of Pierre Bonnard (29-38), as does David Trotter in the painting of Edgar Degas (*Cooking* 316-8), both positing their tactile readings against visual readings of these painters' nudes bound to either indulge in or critique voyeurism. More recently, some female painters inspired by *écriture féminine* have emphasised "the fluid, tactile and sensual properties of paint" (Betterton 92).

Most relevant to Jackson's writing is the aim of the surrealist avant-garde to imbue their art with tactile qualities of "reciprocity, decentralization, contact, and multiplicity" (Mileaf 3). The surrealists' interest in tactility was distinct from the "tactilism" of the futurists, in which the artworks were aimed directly at the sense of touch. Surrealist object art often juxtaposed found objects with interesting tactile qualities and sometimes let them move

against each other, but according to Janine Mileaf the works “largely eluded actual tactile contact.” Instead, they relied on visual impressions of for example volume, texture and friction to produce tactile sensations (Mileaf 16-7). Mileaf’s discussion of tactility in surrealist object art accords with Mark Paterson’s argument that even sculpture, ostensibly the tactile art form par excellence, appeals to a tactile sensibility mainly via *vision* (Paterson 94). However, the visuality of object art fades into the background as an implicit result of art world conventions privileging sight over touch and of practical considerations of durability. These three-dimensional pieces more explicitly address the sense of touch, although they do so in a visually mediated form.

Applying Scarry’s distinction to Mileaf’s discussion about surrealist object art, it can be argued that the surrealists were more interested in mimetic perception than in immediate perception. This is why much of their object art was not aimed directly at the sense of touch. Instead, they employed immediate visuality to trigger mimetic tactility, such as when the sight of two surfaces moving against each other suggests touching. But what exactly is mimetic perception and how does it work? For Mileaf, the virtual tactility of object art appears to be synonymous to a *desire* to touch, aroused by the visual presentation of alluring textures (189). Following Scarry, I would redefine it as a compulsion to experience phantom touch, prompted by visual cues instead of verbal instruction. That the driving force behind the art experience be defined as desire is acceptable if understood as a productive desire for virtual sensation, not a frustrated desire for actual sensation. Thus, I do not agree with Marks’ understanding of virtual tactility as fundamentally mournful because “as much as [haptic images] might attempt to touch the skin of the object, all they can achieve is to become skinlike themselves” (*Skin* 192).

Scarry’s argument that art (specifically literature) does not mimic perceptual qualities but the “deep structure of perception” (“Vivacity” 4) is useful for getting around such conceptions of virtual sensations as lesser versions of actual sensations. According to Scarry, the successful production of literary phantom sensations depends upon the text providing its reader with a set of instructions for “perceptual mimesis” (“Vivacity” 3). The authorial instruction lends the process an air of “givenness” which makes the phantom perceptions more vivid than in the case of for example daydreaming (Scarry, “Vivacity” 17). If art’s “object” is perception as such, one does away with the need for any external perceptual object. Mimetic perception is as real as immediate perception, though the perceptual stimulus is virtual, not actual.

Writers working within the dominant mode of visual realism will instruct readers to construct predominantly visual perceptions, which in my opinion is why Scarry finds the human imagination to be inherently visual. To complicate matters, however, other phantom sensations may be mediated by

sight. Thus, the production of tactile mimesis in visually realist literature can occur as a specifically literary form of haptic visuality. The difference between literature and the visual arts is that in writing the visuality is virtual too. This virtual visuality is not necessarily explicit in the text; it is rather that visual realism posits sight as the default mode of gathering information about objects described and of imaginatively (re)creating them. In most of Jackson's work, as in most narrative fiction in general, sight implicitly provides a point of view from which to survey the surroundings, in accordance with perspectival realism. This means that although tactility is central to Jackson's work, as I shall detail in the following section on object writing, it often takes the form of haptic visuality

To clarify how the literary form of haptic visuality differs from tactile writing unmediated by visual realism, I turn to Scherr's analysis of Gertrude Stein's tactile aesthetics. By rendering objects as they are *felt*, that is, in a partial, fragmentary fashion unfolding over time without ever achieving the overview of perspectivalism, Stein performs an implied critique of the dominant visual realism in the arts (Scherr 198). "While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image," Marks writes (*Skin* 163). Analogously, Stein privileges the materiality of language above the referentiality drawn upon in literary realism, and treats words as things to be manipulated. Her tactile style may appear cryptic and frustrating since, as Scherr explains, "we don't yet know how to 'see' or 'understand' in a tactile manner, thus lending 'tactile' prose, at least on a cursory level, the semblance of non-referentiality" (199). Stein's writing is not non-referential but referential in a mimetic fashion: it mimics tactile interactions and impressions instead of representing visual knowledge. Jackson's writing is similarly concerned with tactility and texture, but her departure from the visual paradigm is much less radical. The difference is partly that between poetry and prose: Stein's experimental poetry directly mimics tactility on a formal level, while Jackson's experimental prose employs the conventions of visual realism to describe tactile objects. If Stein's textural writing presents the text as a richly textured two-dimensional surface, the tactile writing practised by Jackson presents the reader with a perceptibly solid three-dimensional milieu.

Object Writing

I think what I have is less a "view" than a feeling, a sort of itch. I feel that language has a relationship to my body, and I want to make that relationship more literal. Spatializing text makes it more like a body, or an environment for my body, or both, which gives me something to scratch my itch on. Coming from the other direction, I think literal bodies and spaces can strain toward a wordless sort of syntax or story. I love that stretch, and the gap that never quite closes between thingy word and wordy thing.
(Jackson in Rettberg, "Written")

Object writing might be described as Jackson's attempt to concretise language to the point that, like the founder of the Word Church in one of her stories, she might emit "*mouth objects*" in place of words (Consuetudinary 145). Unlike in realist fiction, she tends to foreground the tangible world-building over narrative, creating works which are like verbal museum exhibits. One important aspect of object writing is its spatiality, formally reflected in the multilinear structure of Jackson's hypertexts, which lends them a three-dimensionality absent from monolinear narratives. Another important aspect is texture, which is not simply offered up for the reader to traverse with phantom hand and eye. Instead, different textures move against one another, giving rise to specific tactile sensations of itching, nudging, prodding and so on.¹⁹ Similarly, surrealist object art presents not just a lush texture, like a textile or canvas, but particular juxtapositions of shapes and textures, sometimes in motion. The detail and specificity of these juxtapositions provide the viewer with visual instructions for the experience of phantom touch, just like the literary text provides verbal instruction in Scarry's model. Like the surrealists, Jackson has an interest not just in making her art real enough to be touched, but in (virtual) tactility as such. Instead of employing Scarry's techniques as a means towards writing stories set in convincingly concrete milieus, she often reduces narrative to a minimum, emphasising the milieu and the tactile configurations of objects making it up.

Jackson applies Scarry's techniques metatextually, to the abstract elements of literature itself. For example, the construction of fictional objects might be explicitly related to the creative process of writing. Furthermore, Jackson draws attention to the "instructive" quality of literature noted by Scarry by imitating the style of manuals, as in the excerpts from "*The Sky Writer's Phrasebook*" featured in "Milk" or the passages detailing taxidermy techniques interspersed throughout "Husband." If literature is like a manual instructing the reader to mimic the perception of touch (and other sense impressions), literal manuals tend to, true to their name, detail how to do things *manually*, by touch. Thus, Jackson's metatextual device concretises

¹⁹ In the chapter "Touching Thoughts" I further detail the significance of contact and connection in Jackson's work.

the process of literary construction. Instead of allowing the construction process to recede into the background, discreetly lending the fictional universe an air of concreteness, she foregrounds it and asks the reader to experience literature itself as a tangible object. This is not a case of (post)modernist shattering of the narrative illusion, but a stretching of the limits of fiction to the utmost. Jackson picks the mechanism of fiction apart in order to see how it works, but importantly while keeping it going, since destroying it altogether would defeat the purpose.

By employing realist techniques for making literature tangible in an experimental, metatextual fashion, Jackson confuses aesthetic categories. When foregrounded instead of receding into the background, a technical device becomes what Naomi Schor terms an “in subordinate detail”: a feminine threat to a masculine hierarchy of principal versus incidental (15-6). In “Stitch Bitch,” Jackson makes a distinction between supposedly good (masculine) and bad (feminine) writing which resonates with Schor’s analysis: “Good writing is direct, effective, clean as a bleached bone. Bad writing is all flesh, and dirty flesh at that: clogged with a build-up of clutter and crud, knick-knacks and fripperies encrusted on every surface, a kind of gluey scum gathering in the chinks.” Jackson chooses not to “weed out the inessentials,” instead privileging the “clutter” and “knick-knacks” of fiction to the extent where they become the essentials (Stitch). I do not wish to overstate the novelty or revolutionary feminist politics of this reversal, which as Schor points out is characteristic of modernism in general (69-70). However, I am interested in the connection to tactility suggested by Jackson’s highly textural language. Presumably, when Scarry’s techniques for concretisation are used in “good writing,” they are subordinated the narrative or larger “vision” guiding the work: “The noun trumps the adjective, person trumps place, idea trumps example” (Stitch). “Bad writing,” on the other hand, may be overloaded with an excess of tangibles serving no particular narrative purpose. As the above quotation from Jackson demonstrates, however, verbal excess does serve the purpose of “texturing” the text. If “good” writing is “clean” and streamlined, facilitating the smooth passing of the narrative, then “bad” writing offers a “dirty,” tacky, crusted, crumpled surface, maximising tactile perception.

In order to clarify Jackson’s tactile (meta)textuality, I now move on to some close readings of examples from her work. First of all, she likes to draw attention to the actual tactility of the text; what Scarry terms its “immediate sensory content.” Scarry argues that texts “are almost wholly devoid of actual sensory content” and that the sensory attributes they do possess “are utterly irrelevant, sometimes even antagonistic, to the mental images the work seeks to produce” (“Vivacity” 2). While I agree with Scarry in principle, I shall investigate some complicated cases where the “image” made tangible is that

of the text itself.²⁰ In “My Friend Goo,” a story intensely preoccupied with the sensory and asignifying aspects of language, the protagonist tries to capture her experience of the unspeakable with the following statement: “A book in Braille (I can’t read Braille)” (57). Braille is not only a tactile form of language, it is, for the majority of seeing readers, *nothing but* tactile: asignifying sensation. For those who can read it, on the other hand, its tactility is likely to recede from consciousness in the same fashion as the visibility of print does for seeing readers. Only when one does not understand a language it is perceived as pure sensation. The more it starts to signify *as language*, the more its immediate sensory qualities fade. Thus, Jackson’s reference to Braille confirms Scarry’s argument, although it may at first glance gainsay it by drawing attention to the tactility of language.

“My Friend Goo” does not argue its point by being printed in Braille, and paradoxically could only do so if aimed at non-Braille-readers. The case is different when the text is actually or immediately made tangible. *The Melancholy of Anatomy* and *Half Life* both feature textured covers appealing to the reader’s sense of touch as well as sight.²¹ Of course it is in the nature of the book as artefact to be literally tangible, but by increasing the tactile interest of her books Jackson moves them a small step closer to artists’ books meant to be sensually experienced rather than read. This too can be understood as an attempt to bridge the gap between word and thing, or specifically between object writing and object art. Moving from the other direction, surrealist artists’ books can be understood as object art approaching literature. Mileaf describes how “the linear reading” of such a book is “interrupted by [its] aggressively palpable presence” in a disturbing oscillation between art experience and reading experience far from the harmonious Gesamtkunstwerk (19). Again Scarry’s argument is confirmed: when the actual tactility of a text is augmented to the point where it impinges on the reader’s consciousness, it conflicts with the virtual tactility of the reading experience. This is not to say that the conflict is not productive; on the contrary, Jackson, the surrealists and other creators of artists’ books experiment with putting it to creative use.

While Jackson’s choice of textured covers draws attention to the actual tactility of her books, she more frequently employs the *virtual* tactility of books as part of her metatextual experimentation with literary tangibility. Partly, this may be because most of her writing is published online or in literary magazines and anthologies where she cannot affect the actual tactile properties of the medium. Partly, however, I think this is because virtual tactility gives more leeway for uniquely literary experimentation: it allows

²⁰ Scarry’s choice of examples shows that the “image” need not be visual and may indeed be tactile.

²¹ With regards to *Half Life*, I am referring to the hardback edition, which features a ridged dust jacket. The paperback edition has smooth covers. I assume that Jackson has been involved in the choice of textured cover designs based on her interest in the book as object.

her to have the tactile object behave in ways unrestrained by the physical laws governing actual tactility. In “The Swan Brothers,” Jackson’s rewriting of a fairy tale, she has a second-person character encounter a book with shifting physical properties:

You are drawn to the shape, the color, the design of the book before you have made out the title. It is a durable old Dover paperback, its thick cover leathery with use and still bright red, except for a pink band along the top where a shorter neighboring book allowed sunlight to hit it. It is a small, fat, leather-bound book with marbled edges, its morocco binding glove-soft and chipped at the spine. It is a vintage pocket paperback with a keyhole on the spine, a map on the back, and a still life on the front: a quill pen, a bottle of ink, and a spindle.

When you flip through the book, more to feel the thick pages ruffle smoothly across your thumb, like an old deck of cards, than to check the contents, you find, pressed between two pages, a feather. It is white, it is black with an iridescent sheen, it is pigeon-gray, in any case you pin it to the left-hand page with your thumb as you begin reading, walking on. (Swan 84-5)

According to Jackson’s comment to the story, the alternate descriptions of the book and the feather found within it are part of her attempt to capture “the confused sense [...] of a compulsive repetition with variation” given by all the different versions of the fairy tale she encountered as a child (Swan 103). Even the second-person form reinforces this variability, on the one hand referring to a character within the story and on the other suggesting the author’s direct address to the reader. The sense that one is meant to identify with this “you” adds yet another variation to those listed by Jackson: that of reading the paperback anthology entitled *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me* in which “The Swan Brothers” is printed. This adds an extratextual dimension to Jackson’s metatextual play with variations, especially since the anthology includes two additional rewritings of the same fairy tale by other authors. The actual tactile properties of the volume remain fixed, however, while Jackson is free to alter those of her virtual collection of fairy tales.

By offering alternative descriptions of the book in quick succession, Jackson tests the limits of Scarry’s techniques for making literature tangible. She instructs the reader to mimic the perception of a book and then immediately to restart the process. The effect is to ask of the reader and the text how little it takes to initiate perceptual mimesis and how abruptly the narrative illusion can be shattered without interrupting it. In order to make it work in a minimal amount of words, it is essential that Jackson give quite specific tactile cues, such as “its thick cover leathery with use” and “its morocco binding glove-soft.” Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the aspects of the scene which do not change are tactile in nature: the pleasure of ruffling the pages and the act of pinning the feather to the book. These

phantom touches ground the scene and allow Jackson to shuffle other tactile and visual impressions without giving up the basic sense of fictive solidity. As a final comment on the tactile effects in the excerpt from “The Swan Brothers,” I would like to point out the centrality of *wear*. That the book is old and worn stays consistent throughout the different tactile descriptions: it is either “leathery with use” or “glove-soft and chipped at the spine” and its pages “ruffle smoothly [...] like an old deck of cards.” As I shall discuss further in the chapter “Touching Thoughts,” wear invites a sense of conceptual intimacy intensifying the phantom touch of the book.

Besides the tactility of the book (and other text media) as object, there is a tactility to oral language which plays into written language as well. Karmen MacKendrick finds it “evident that to think of the touch of words must be to attend to their sound” and goes on to detail the tactile sensations involved in speaking and listening. Drawing upon these, she promotes what I would term the virtual hearing of silent reading, and correspondingly, the virtual vocalisation of writing (MacKendrick 57). Scarry draws a sharp distinction between poetry and prose, arguing that in poetry unlike in prose there is not only mimetic perception but also delayed perception (the verbal signs functioning, like a musical score, as instructions for the production of sound) and even immediate perception (the distribution of signs on the page producing visual rhythmic patterns) (4). I do not think that her distinction holds, since the actual sensory properties of language may play an important part in prose too. As Marks insists, the sensual, indexical aspect of language remains inextricably intertwined with its symbolic, representational meaning, even in writing (*Touch* 141-2). However, it is still the case that Jackson’s experimental technique has more in common with the visual realism described by Scarry than with Stein’s poetic privileging of sonority above descriptive content.

Jackson thematises the materiality of language in her Word Church stories, “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” and “Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead,” in which the ritual use of oral and written language emphasises its perceptual qualities. Language is not stripped of symbolical meaning, but gestural and indexical meaning takes precedence over lexical meaning, which is often obscured. The aim of the liturgy is to “unspeak” or speak backwards, swallowing oneself along with one’s words and thus enter the land of the dead.²² The following example highlights the oral tactility of language: “the letters are minute and bristle with serifs like little hooks (inducing a half-conscious discomfort in the throat-clearing reader)” (Consuetudinary 133). Paradoxically, the language described is written, not verbal, recalling MacKendrick’s insistence on the virtual orality involved in

²² In the chapter “Tasting Texts” I discuss the ingestion of language in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” from a different angle.

reading and writing. In a synesthetic conflation of sensory modalities, the fictive reader experiences the visual spikiness of the words as a tactile prickling in the throat, as though uttering them. In a further twist, the reader of Jackson's text may experience the same phantom touch triggered by the phantom sight of letters, not by the actual look of the printed text.

In "Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead" disciples of the Word Church who have successfully "unspoken" report their experiences. The central concern of this piece is also the central concern of fantastical and experimental writing, namely, the inadequacy of language to describe experiences exceeding the commonsensical. Thus, this text provides an exceptionally clear example of Jackson's techniques, summing up what I have touched upon so far. It explicitly addresses the concretisation of abstractions characteristic of Jackson's style:

What I would previously have regarded with fair certainty as thoughts – speculations, deductions, predictions, opinions, dreams, passing fancies: all that ilk – recommended themselves to my senses instead, especially the haptic. They had scratchy bits, slippery bits, bits clotting in a thin whey, bits like a stirrup or syrup, flocked bits, beveled bits, bits that bent and moved against each other with a distasteful grating, bits that swished, other bits. (Early 92)

In accordance with Scarry, tactility is highlighted as the most crucial sensory modality involved in concretisation. The narrator reports on the specific tactile qualities of abstract entities which remain unspecified as "bits." Thus, a sort of non-entities difficult to visualise are nevertheless involved in complex tactile interactions. Since they do not adhere to the rules governing physical objects, they exhibit an excess of tactile sensations governed by the "both/and"-principle defining feminine style according to Jackson. For example, the equalisation of "stirrup" and "syrup" draws upon the virtual tactility of linguistic sounds rather than any resemblance of actual tactile qualities.

In "Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead," even negations work according to the principle of both/and, not either/or or neither/nor. This is because the principal abstractions made concrete are negations: the land of the dead is a concretised negative to the land of the living. One of the narrators describes it in a Beckettian manner as: "Not flicked. Not cinched. Not ruched. Not fluted. Not cocked. Not felted. Not toothed. Not notched. Not ribbed" (Early 90). The list goes on. Despite the negations, the amassing of tactile terms cannot but lend a sense of tangibility to this non-world. The simultaneous offering and rejection of one tactile term after another creates the impression of a very specific tactile sensation, although one that cannot be captured in language, at least not in one word. Instead of describing nothingness as the absence of sensation, nothingness itself is conjured up as sensible, and especially tangible: "Nothing was plunged to the pommel in no

chafed whyever-not; no string dangled out of anywhere” (Early 94). When a narrator states: “I summarized, ‘It is not,’ and it, it, *it* was not, a plug of fibers, little seeds, mud, chaff, spit, what you will” (Early 94), “it is not” is not a negation of “it” but a summoning of “it” into existence, the particular (non-)existence of fiction. Again, Jackson experiments with reduction: interrogating the possibilities of fiction to make tangible even such abstract nonentities as “it” and “not.”

The Word Church stories draws upon the unique capacity of literature to concretise linguistic abstractions. “Feel the *o* in *no* pursing around your skull” (Early 93) makes tangible the round shape of the written letter O, drawing upon the roundness of the lips articulating it, the round feeling of forming it in the mouth and possibly even the round sound of it. By conflating verbal and written, actual and virtual, senses of tactility, Jackson draws attention to the indexical, non-arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. In the land of the dead, which is also the world of writing, language performs the indexical function of simultaneously pointing out and creating a thing. While for actual writers, the tactility of their creations is mainly virtual, the narrators of “Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead” stand in direct tactile contact with every aspect of their verbal inventions. Thus, they may feel a word “cozying up” to the tongue, the moon as a lump in the throat or a road make its way out past their tonsils (Early 100, 94). To visit the land of the dead is to be literally in touch with everything: a conflation of categories such as virtual/actual, fictive/real and abstract/concrete. To die is to become everything: not nothingness but total un-differentiation (Early 97).

As Schor points out, a propos the blind protagonist of Jorge Luis Borges’ “Funes, The Memorious,” who is “unable to see [...] the tree for the leaves,” touch unlike sight does not allow for stepping back and taking in the whole by sorting out irrelevant impressions (xlv). “Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead” mimics the non-hierarchical and non-generalising organisation of touch, but ultimately conflates the distinction between sensory modalities too:

Even the farthest objects could be touched – could not *not* be touched. The faraway spire of a church was a sting in the palm of my hand. A tree in the medium distance was all over me, and while the trees I remembered were a stippled fog on a stick, here I felt every leaf. There were 629,533 of them, of which twenty-three were just at that moment letting go, and when those leaves fell I felt the absence of leaves just as keenly. (96)

In Jackson’s story, unlike in Borges’, the narrator can take in the tree at a glance *and* perceive every single leaf. This reflects the realm of pure potential which is the utopian starting point for literary creation. Just like the narrators of “Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead” could not relate their experiences if they were fully dead, the writer could not work with

language if it was fully undifferentiated. The word needs a tactile tether to the world in order to mean.

Body Writing

The banished body is not female, necessarily, but it is feminine. That is, it's amorphous, indirect, impure, diffuse, multiple, evasive. So is what we learned to call bad writing. (Stitch)

Jackson's work can also be described as a form of body writing akin to body art. However, this is a kind of body writing which does not express, describe or represent an extratextual body. Rather, it creates a BwO for queers to come by making new connections, new intensities, new organs. Despite what the name suggests, the BwO is to be understood as organs without a body rather than a body without organs. More precisely, it is a provisional assemblage of parts which does not form an organic whole and does not sustain a notion of the subject. However, as Grosz is careful to point out, the BwO still requires "a minimal level of cohesion and integration" and "small pockets of subjectivity and signification" in order to sustain its intensities and not obliterate itself (*Volatile* 171).

Butler describes how in Wittig's novel *Le corps lesbien* "language figures and refigures the parts of the body into radically new social configurations of form (and antiform)" (170). Similarly, in Jackson's *Patchwork Girl, My Body* and *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, body parts, bodily substances, inanimate things and abstract concepts are juxtaposed into assemblages which may look mostly human but which are not recognisable as unitary subjects or organic wholes, in short, into BwOs. The political impact of such literary BwOs is not that they represent possibilities which may then be realised outside the text. Rather, such BwOs are already real, though virtual instead of actual (see Colebrook, *Deleuze* 60).

The specific forms the BwO takes in Jackson's writing are informed by the humoural body of early modern anatomy. Gail Kern Paster suggests that the humoural body may be considered a BwO in the sense of an assemblage provisionally involving various meteorological and other natural phenomena in its functions (*Humoring* 21-2). In this understanding of the body, the affects and desires interiorised within the psychoanalytical paradigm are instead "dispersed and redistributed to a sympathetically answering object world" (Paster, *Humoring* 42-3). Paster is careful not to conflate the early modern conceptualisation of the body with the BwO, pointing out that the humoural body is a body with organs fulfilling specific psychophysiological functions (*Humoring* 149). I would add, as an even more central distinction, that the humoural body (and each of its organs) has an essence and is ruled by a system of natural correspondences between essences, while the BwO is a temporary assemblage based on nonessential affinities. Crucially, however, both differ in a similar way from the modern psychoanalytic body, viewed as

a vessel for an interiorised individuality generating affects and desires. The humoural body was a precariously balanced, open-ended system which did not have a psychological “interior.” Jackson picks up notions of dispersed agency, magical correspondences and a body opening onto the world from humouralism and integrates them into her body writing. She presents a body which is intimately familiar in all its strangeness and which never really belongs to the human subject.

More specifically, Jackson’s body writing takes its cue from the blazon genre. The standard meaning of “blazon” is a formalised, verbal description of a coat of arms, considered to be a more accurate representation of it than any individual pictorial rendering. An “anatomical blazon,” sometimes spelled “blason,” is a genre of poetry devoted to the description of usually female body parts. While originally celebrating the beauty of the part, there are also “counter-blazons” condemning the ugliness of less than ideal parts. Jonathan Sawday connects the Renaissance fashion for poetical blazons to a larger “culture of dissection” also evident in the emerging anatomical science (191-3). This culture of dissection in turn goes back to an older Christian tradition of partitioning the body in such practices as dispersed burial, the adoration of holy relics and the worship of Christ’s sacred heart and wounds (Sawday 99-100; Vickers 7). In the following, I shall discuss how the body parts frequently appearing in Jackson’s work relate to the blazon genre and to the larger anatomical and religious traditions of partitioning. I use the term blazon in an extended sense to refer to any literary renderings of body parts. *My Body*, *Patchwork Girl* and *The Melancholy of Anatomy* all use a body in parts as their central structuring device, and like traditional poetry collections of anatomical blazons (see Vickers 7-9), the two former works include illustrations.

Blazons of female anatomy have often been compared to the mapping, dividing and colonisation of “virgin” territory (Sawday 22-8, P. Parker 150, Harvey 315-6). In Jackson’s work, blazoning spatialises the body and turns it into a terrain for the reader to explore, but as the terrain is animate and moving any definite mapping is impossible. As a case in point, the patchwork girl’s naked body portrayed on the cover page of *Patchwork Girl* (Patchwork [her]) reappears in randomly shuffled pieces as frontispiece to each different section of the work (Patchwork [hercut], [hercut2], [hercut3], [hercut4]), except the “broken accents” or “body of text” section, which is illustrated by her head divided into phrenological sections (Patchwork [phrenology]). The use of phrenology evidences a cartographic drive and a fascination with the literalness of mapping abstract mental traits onto concrete areas of the skull. But a phrenology chart is not a legitimate mapping of the body within contemporary science and cannot produce adequate knowledge of the patchwork girl’s body or mind. There is no discernible system to the named areas of her head and only a few of them are linked to specific lexias. Most

take the reader on to a lexia titled “this writing” in which the patchwork girl narrates:

Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but because of some myopic condition I am only familiar with from dreams, I can see only that part most immediately before me, and have no sense of how that part relates to the rest. (Patchwork [body of text/this writing])

The protagonist does not have a complete overview over the story of her life, and neither does the reader. The figure of anatomical mapping and partitioning fails to provide the text with any clear and coherent structure. Instead of demonstrating the body’s systemic integrity – and analogously that of the body of text – the anatomisation carried out in *Patchwork Girl* shows the body as a reconfigurable assemblage of parts mirroring the hypertext.

In “Musée Mécanique,” the topography of the body is similarly impossible to map. The assertion that “[y]ou never see any of the girls whole and separate” may suggest the blazon genre’s partitioning of interchangeable female bodies (Musée). However, here the girls’ collective anonymity means that they elude any controlling masculine gaze. The “neat, surgical parts in their hair” indicate that they may figuratively dissect themselves as they please (Musée). Thus, the protagonist Herman Godfrey is powerless to observe them other than in pieces. He describes intimate details of their anatomy in terms oscillating between the “neutral” language of science and the lyrical language of the blazon genre: “He saw the downy brown hairs stand up on the tender bulge below the navel. The skin was darker there. Where it stretched over her hipbone it was white with red and blue sigils” (Musée). The allusion to court culture and heraldic blazons implicit in the colour notations and choice of the word “sigils” notwithstanding, Herman is in no position to authoritatively blazon the female body. Being a diminutive mechanical toy created by the genius girls, his field of vision is overwhelmed with confusing glimpses of their anatomy:

[T]he big girl thighs came churning closer, affording glimpses of furred chalets and fuzzy dells, downy towns and hairy ingles – such was the confusion of scale that one moment he thought he saw innocent alpine meadows and desert peridot mining operations, a cottage industry here, a potato crop there, and the next moment the bitter slits of aphids or the prehensile cloaca of those ill-tempered dust mites. (Musée)

The confusing particularities of scale and point of view prevent Herman as well as the reader from assuming the surveying view from nowhere of the anatomist or blazon author.

Throughout Jackson’s work, the body of text is presented not as a flat geographical or anatomical chart to survey visually, but instead as a labyrinthine architectural structure, such as a cabinet of curiosities. Sawday

describes how allegorical depictions of the body as a house into which one might enter to discover its divine design were common before the Cartesian mechanistic model separated body from soul and deprived such allegories of their didactic credibility (160-8). Thus, when Jackson reinstates the body as an architectural space into which the reader enters, she subtly gestures back toward a pre-Cartesian union of body and soul. Viewed as a landscape rather than a building, the body in her work is not the conquered territory of the anatomist-as-colonialist, but the animate nature of humouralism, in which the borders between human and inhuman, matter and spirit, are not distinctly outlined. As in such Renaissance works as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the body Jackson blazons is not strictly the body of anatomical science, but a humoural body with agencies, consciousness, history and a host of cultural meanings attached to it.

Unsurprisingly, the blazon genre has been critiqued by feminist scholars as part of a more general male objectification of women. Patricia Parker describes the rhetorical techniques it employs to commodify the female body: dividing and itemising it in order to increase its value and displaying it as merchandise (128). Likewise, Sawday gives a highly negative view of the blazon genre as part of a misogynistic male court culture. According to him, the artfully blazoned female body provided a legitimate object of male sexual desire thinly veiling the homoerotic competition for which it was a mere excuse. In some rare cases a male or, even more rarely, female poet blazoned a male body, while rather more often male poets anatomised their own literary personas, but Sawday treats all such variations as exceptions proving the general rule (191-212). Generally, Sawday depicts the Renaissance culture of dissection as a matter of male anatomisation of female (or feminised male) bodies, but his empirical evidence provides a somewhat more nuanced image. Anatomists and poets were overwhelmingly male, but it is not at all clear that the paradigmatic anatomised body was female or feminine. That assumption, apparently based on a later period's rigid active-passive and subject-object dichotomies, has nevertheless come to dominate feminist accounts of the anatomical science.

When feminist authors take on the blazon genre, they tend to redeem the blazoned female body in all its particularities and imperfections, rather than return the favour by blazoning the male body.²³ One such example is

²³ When the male body is blazoned in my sources, the blazoner tends to be male as well. A case in point is *Skin Lane*, where the relation between male anatomist and male anatomised body is explicitly eroticised. Mr F. "stares at the hair curling over the nape of the boy's neck, and at the exact way the individual vertebrae show through the skin just above his collar, and the way that the corded muscles on the side of his neck are just beginning to show as he cranes it forward and slightly to one side" with a simultaneously admiring and anatomising gaze, as though in preparation for a nude study, 122. The authority Mr F brings to the encounter is that of a furrier and not an anatomist, which tints his observations with an particular interest in "the exact colour and texture, the density and lustre, of the dark hair curling on the back of the boy's neck," Bartlett, *Skin* 123. Like an anatomical illustrator lavishing loving attention upon muscles and tendons, Mr F focuses his desiring gaze upon the hues and qualities of skin and hair are to the extent that gender and even species

Winterson's *Written on the Body*, which has been critiqued for adopting the language of anatomical conquest and discovery. Elizabeth D. Harvey argues against this critique, claiming that Winterson effectively infiltrates the blazon genre (337). Instead of conquering the body of the female lover, the indeterminately sexed narrator proclaims her/himself conquered by and lost within it. Winterson turns to the technical language of anatomy in order to explore the female body in intimate detail, individualising and eroticising those interior aspects of it known only to anatomical science (Harvey 339-41).

The blazoning of the entire body, including interior aspects left out of traditional blazons such as the viscera and skeleton, invites comparison with Wittig's *Le corps lesbien*. In an article about Wittig and Cixous, Diane Griffith Crowder emphasises the wholeness of the female body as a corrective to the fragmentation of the blazon tradition. She berates Cixous for writing the female body piecemeal if at all, and for sharing the male blazon writers' (and, I might add, anatomical illustrators depicting women only in order to illustrate the female reproductive organs) preference for the most thoroughly sexed parts of female anatomy (Crowder 133). Wittig, on the other hand, eroticises the entire female body down to the viscera and other parts traditionally considered ugly or disgusting (Crowder 120-2), a strategy shared by Jackson. Crowder, however, goes on to applaud Wittig for refusing the metaphorical language of the blazon genre, since according to her metaphor denies the material reality of the female body, replacing it with something it is not (121). Against this, I would argue that there is more to the body than crude materialism, and that the archaic, mythological settings of Wittig's body writing remove it from any clinical naturalism, even if she abstains from overt similes. Like Winterson (see Harvey 341), Jackson applies the metaphorical language of the blazon genre to body parts not traditionally blazoned: "Their feet looked like fruit, like fleshy tropical flowers" (Body [feet]). Contrary to Crowder's argument, such similes do not cancel out or detract from the physicality of the feet, but invites the reader to view these "ugly" parts in a new way.

In another reading of Wittig, Kym Martindale argues that "Wittig's project is to dismantle the authority of Vesalius and the myth of the empirical body of medical discourse." Wittig's method for doing so is universalising not the female but specifically the *lesbian* body like classical anatomy universalises the male. To Crowder's observation that Wittig deprivileges the reproductive organs (a strategy shared by Winterson, see Harvey 338), Martindale adds

become secondary. In Hopkinson's "Something to Hitch Meat To" (a reference to the skeleton), the anatomising gaze of the protagonist Artho is instead coloured by his profession as a retoucher of pornographic photographs. Used to staring at the intimate details of naked bodies all day long, his first thoughts about a man with a shaved head are: "There was something sensuous about the baldness, like the domed heads of penises. Cute," Hopkinson 28.

that she instead privileges the clitoris as an organ of non-reproductive sexual pleasure (Martindale 349). However, Martindale finds it problematic that Wittig repeats the authoritative gesture of the male anatomist, replacing the normative ordered, desexualised male body with a normative disordered, sexualised lesbian body (351). For her it is a regrettable mistake that Wittig should present an authoritative, universalising view of the lesbian body, denying plurality in the sense both of individual self-definition and inclusion of non-lesbians (Martindale 353-4), while for me this is at the core of Wittig's project. This is not denying the particularities of lesbian – or female – existence but creating a utopian vision in which lesbianism is naturalised as permeating every fibre of the body, in the same way as the reproductive function was seen to permeate the entire female body in classic anatomy.

While the above readings of Winterson and Wittig highlights the feminist reconstruction of a conscious and complete female body out of the objectified fragments of a male tradition, Jackson tends to move in the opposite direction and take the fragmentation even further. The patchwork girl is sewn together out of disparate body parts which fall apart again at the end of the story. *My Body* is a self-portrait in pieces which more or less add up to a whole, while the body parts lending their names to the individual stories in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* would make a strange anatomy indeed, something like the photographic composite bodies created by Connie Imboden using reflections and darkroom techniques.

In her appropriately titled essay "The Body Indivisible," Lingel describes the structure of *The Melancholy of Anatomy* as "a parallel to the objectifying gaze of the male view" and a "disturbing abstraction of bodies." What saves Jackson as a feminist author, according to her, is the thematic concern with the "femininity" and "repressed potency" of the body, which places Jackson alongside Cixous in the tradition of *écriture féminine* (Lingel 79-80). Thus, as in Crowder's critical reading of Cixous, the femininity of the body permeates its parts. Annabelle Dolidon presents an alternative reading of the political implications of fragmentation, which I think can be fruitfully applied to *The Melancholy of Anatomy*. Analysing filmic close-ups of bodies, she argues that they can be used to "abstract bodies, not in order to dematerialize them, but, instead, in order to extract them from the 'Straight Mind,' by depriving the viewer of the certainties offered by vision" (Dolidon 80). In other words, fragmentation can be used to queer the body by liberating body parts from their sexed context. Here, "abstraction" is not used in Lingel's negative sense of generalisation or objectification, but indicates the liberation of bodies from (hetero)sexist recognition. In *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, Jackson works with a similar technique of zooming in on body parts and denying the reader the overview of conventional understandings. Many of the body parts and fluids blazoned are sexed, and

most of those feminine, but their femininity is queered by their removal from the body of a woman.

I disagree with Lingel's view that a feminist recuperation of the blazon genre necessarily entails a concern for the integrity of the body and a critique of scientific "objectification" of its parts. The feminist critique of such objectification assumes a natural bodily integrity violated by fragmentation, but this is not the view of the body presented in Jackson's work. Instead, the body appears as an assemblage of parts each with their own agenda, mostly inaccessible to consciousness. Jackson might more properly be accused of anthropomorphising body parts than of objectifying the human body (which never did belong to the subject). Thus, hands are compared to dogs trained by their human masters, showing through "their essential bewilderment and their willingness" a "soul" or "humanity" impossible to detect in the whole of the socialised, subjectified body (Body [hands]). Even more radically, the organs and fluids appearing in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* act as separate entities with no indication that they result from the fragmentation of a larger organism. Lingel's negative use of the word "abstraction" to indicate their separation from a human subject is inappropriate to describe their concrete particularity and agency as characters.

Generally, it appears that queer and feminist rewritings of the blazon genre take their cue from anatomical science and include parts of the body not normally seen. Instead of selecting body parts conventionally considered beautiful or sexually alluring, they explore and eroticise the entire body including its insides. This tends to make feminist blazons more brutal in tone than their traditional counterparts, in which the violence of severing a part from the rest of the body is obfuscated. As an example, Jackson employs clinical language to blazon a leg seen from underwater:

My eyes never tired of looking into that luminous space into which objects were abruptly born from above, sometimes only piecemeal: a leg punched in up to the knee seemed amputated, sutured to the elastic blanket of the undersurface, which was an oily, undulating sheet, a pewter-greasy blue. (Body [feet])

The surgical references underscore the physicality of the leg. By detailing the visual conditions under which it appears severed from the rest of the body, Jackson denies the abstract partitioning of the classical blazon form. At the same time, the beauty of the passage makes it closer to poetry than a medical textbook.²⁴ In a similar way, the description of the patchwork girl's guts as "pretty pink coils unwinding like streamers" and blood as "rich triumphal spurts, [...] generous parabolas, sublime verticals, optimistic horizontals, and

²⁴ Again, Jackson's writing recalls the eerie beauty of Imboden's photography. In Imboden's photographs of bodies partially submerged in water, the water's surface appears as thickly material as in Jackson's description, functioning to amputate, double (through mirroring) and suture body parts into strange new anatomies.

devious spirals” combines anatomical carnage with the language of courtly poetry (Patchwork [story/falling apart/diaspora]).

While actual dismemberment is a violent and fatal affair, the same rules do not apply in fiction. The patchwork girl disintegrates but somehow goes on living, like the “bodies which should be dead but which ‘live’ in a perpetual state of fragmentation” in Wittig’s *Le corps lesbien* and in Renaissance anatomical illustrations (Martindale 350). What is remarkable about Jackson’s work in relation to this tradition is the agency of separate parts. Even in the original blazon genre, body parts tend to take on a life of their own, being addressed and not just described by the poet (Vickers 4), but Jackson takes their animation further. The patchwork girl somehow lives to describe her disintegrated body parts: “They looked relaxed and casual, in good taste. They looked relieved. Disposing themselves in varying patterns, as if trying to reassemble someone, trying a foot on a neck, with the good will of dogs humping the wrong end” (Patchwork [story/coda/falling apart]). Again, human body parts are compared to dogs, which in Jackson’s work is not demeaning as dogs are rather nobler than humans. The death of the human subject liberates the inhuman agencies of the body.

Catherine Waldby describes Frankenstein’s creation of the monster as a “reverse anatomization” in which a body is assembled instead of disassembled. Grave-robbed body parts are viewed as only provisionally dead, awaiting a new infusion of life. Frankenstein sees the value in this human offal, carefully selecting the most beautiful parts to put together into a superman, but runs screaming from the mismatched monstrosity of his finished creation (Waldby 31-33). When Jackson picks up this theme in *Patchwork Girl*, it is in order to redeem the reanimated monster and remind the reader that all bodies are recycled from fragments of other bodies. Although Mary admits to “a fleeting horror on beholding in intimate quarters the details of her anatomy” (Patchwork [journal/scars/shy]), she admires the variegated beauty of her creation:

I noticed what I could not have seen in the dim light of my laboratory, that the various sectors of her skin were different hues and textures, no match perfect. Here a coarser texture confused the ruddy hue of blood near under the skin, there smooth skin betrayed a jaundiced undertone, there a dense coat of fine hairs palely caught the light. Warm brown neighbored blue-veined ivory. (Patchwork [journal/she stood])

This blazon of the patchwork girl’s skin(s) suggests that she embodies a collection of anatomical blazons: a loose assemblage of beautiful parts making up a rather grotesque whole (see Vickers 8-9). By stitching together the raw matter of blazon into a body and animating it, Mary literalises the blazon writer’s transformation of the dead matter of language into poetry (see Harvey 338-9). Metatextually, it posits Jackson’s piecing-together of the hypertext as a stitching-together of a living body where the seams never heal.

In Deleuzian terms, the desiring connections keeping the BwO together are not permanent: at any moment the assemblage might rupture and reconfigure itself. Thus, I do not consider Jackson's flirt with anatomical blazons a partitioning of "the" body, as if it were ever whole, but a making and unmaking of new desiring connections.

Disposition: The Sensorium of Shelley Jackson

Meanwhile those sensations I had once consigned to my body, sometimes calling them "lower," as if I personally cleared my own head by some inches, appealed now to my reason: referring and negating, proposing and refuting, and changing from moment to moment. (Early 92)

The analysis chapters which follow are structured around the Aristotelian five senses, devoting a chapter each in turn to smell, taste, touch, sight and hearing. On the one hand, applying the five senses as a structuring device to Jackson's sprawling body of work is imposing an order alien to it. On the other hand, the quaint rigidity and neatness of the five senses as a structuring device resembles Jackson's own formal devices, such as structuring her short story collection around the four humours. In other words, the very gesture of applying a structuring device alien to Jackson's work is anything but alien to it. The choice of the five senses is somewhat arbitrary and risks suggesting a subject – predetermined, unitary, able-bodied – at odds with my Deleuzian theoretical framework. My intention is not to naturalise these five when in fact there are other ways of perceiving, more senses, complex multisensory interplays and beings doing without one or more of the five. I understand the five senses as a cultural and literary tradition (just think of the common writing workshop advice to make a text come alive to "all five senses") shaping, though not determining, human perception. In order not to conform too closely to this tradition, I have stood the hierarchy of the senses on its head, starting with the undertheorised proximity senses smell and taste. In this way, I hope to avoid some preconceptions about perception based on the audiovisual bias, and to arrive at the dominant senses of sight and hearing from an unexpected angle. I conclude each chapter by tentatively outlining a more general, sense-specific model for reading based upon Jackson's work. Hopefully, these may be of interest and use to other scholars looking for theoretical work on literary sensations.

In "Smelling Sense" I argue that Jackson tends to use generic terms such as "smell" or "stink" to designate what she terms "the banished body," consistently enough to evoke a uniquely literary phantom smell of the feminine, composed of both olfactory and non-olfactory components. Throughout the chapter, I trace different aspects of this phantom smell through a Deleuzian becoming starting with becoming-feminine and moving on to becoming-animal and becoming-vegetable, arguing that literary

phantom smells have the potential to draw the reader into literary becomings, since the affective and bodily response to smell creates a pornographic proximity between reader and text.

In “Tasting Texts” I draw out the implications of taking seriously gustatory figures such as aesthetic taste, reading as consumption, and of learning as suckling the Alma Mater. Jackson’s various concretisations of edible language emphasise the printed text as consumable object, on the one hand, and play a part in what I term her aesthetics of distaste, on the other. Like Barnes, Jackson draws upon the rhetorical figure of dilatio, associated with dilated female bodies and bodily orifices, to develop a feminine aesthetics of distaste. Stylistic dilation and texts saturated with sugary and fatty phantom tastes create a distaste of surfeit, where the visceral feeling of distaste draws the reader in close to the text. Aesthetic distaste is not a simple matter of rejection (as in spitting or vomiting); it may instead lure the reader in to savour its many different flavours. The reader is invited to lick language and taste dilation, a uniquely literary phantom taste made piquant and compelling by distaste.

In “Touching Thoughts” I draw upon the phenomenology of doll games outlined in *The Doll Games* to argue that the doll functions as a prosthetic extension of the playing girl, literally putting her in touch with fiction. Though the discrepancy of scales prevents her from being fully immersed in the doll world, she enters into it through what I term “tactile metonymy.” I then go on to argue for a virtual form of tactile metonymy by which the reader makes prosthetic connections with the fictional universe of literature. Jackson’s works invites such an approach because they are often structured as a box of toys or cabinet of curiosities filled with linguistic objects for the reader to manipulate. The virtual tactility is enhanced by “conceptual intimacy,” a notion borrowed from visual art, where it denotes an impersonal yet intimate form of tactile relating to objects. As the central form of touch in Jackson’s work is play, understood as a hands-on model for creative experimentation, the resulting model for reading is doll games.

As vision is such a dominant sense with a wealth of material related to it, I devote the chapter “Seeing Sight” to a specific instance of sight in Jackson’s work. Based on the overview of anatomical blazons in this introduction, I describe how the anatomising gaze turned back upon itself, taking the eye as its object. Jackson resists the abstraction of the gaze by drawing attention to its specific embodiment in two eyes combining their slightly different perspectives into a three-dimensional image. She details the idiosyncrasies of sight such as visual impairments and optical illusions, dwelling especially upon the rare occasions when the eye sees (parts of) itself directly. Imagining has often been understood as imaging with the “mind’s eye,” an example of how sight is abstracted into a general model of cognition, but Jackson specifies even phantom sight as eyesight rather than vision. In her

comparison of writing to taxidermy, the taxidermical displays provide a mirror in which the viewer sees her own mortal body. More broadly, the reader is encouraged to turn the anatomising gaze back on her own anatomy.

In “Hearing Hallucinations” I employ ventriloquism as my guiding figure in order to narrow down the scope of the most privileged sense after sight. I argue that writing can be understood as ventriloquism in several different ways: as the reader, the author and language itself throwing their voices and speaking through the mouths of one another. Like language may erupt in senseless sonorities, so the body may erupt in non-linguistic sounds ranging from more to less communicative, expressive or voluntary, such as sighs, laughter, hiccups and digestive noises. Biological and mechanical body noises provide an important part of the soundscape in Jackson’s work and can be described as the inhuman, asubjective voices of the body speaking in another form of ventriloquism. Through a close reading of a musical performance in *Half Life*, I discuss singing as a machination, queering and becoming-animal of the voice, and as an additional form of ventriloquism in which music itself sings through the singer. Furthermore, Jackson’s intertextual incorporation of an actual piece of music into a virtual musical performance works as a form of ventriloquism or sampling. In conclusion, I argue that Jackson’s introduction of nonsense sonorities, body noises and music into the text instigate what Deleuze and Guattari term a deterritorialisation of language away from its communicative function and invite reading as singing along.

Taken together, these sensory models for reading suggest that all literary genres are potential “body genres,” that is, genres intending to bodily affect the audience, such as pornography, horror and melodrama (see Dennis 97-8; Williams 5). Erotica and pornography only bring out what is true for literature in general: that phantom sensations are not neatly contained within fiction but spill out onto the reader. This “pornographic potential” of literature is too often bracketed in literary studies concerned solely with linguistic *meaning*, despite being what makes literature *meaningful* in the sense of engaging and worthwhile.

Smelling Sense: The Stink of the Real

Speech is a wind produced by a body, and thus may be called a body odor; likewise odors may be considered a kind of speech. (Consuetudinary 147)

Within literature, smell commonly figures extratextual reality: that which escapes or exceeds words. Jackson consciously employs the power of smell to signal realness when she has the narrator of “The Putti” say: “No doubt I will speak strangely at times. It is my conviction that if I do so, it will not hobble my presentation, but add to it that stink of the real which makes of fact, understanding.” Here, the “stink of the real” is ironically provided by strange speech and not by an actual smell. Keeping to one sensory modality, Jackson might have expressed a similar notion with “that noise of the real.” That she chose smell instead is, I argue, telling of the particular position smell has as representative of the non-signifying, non-discursive aspects of sensation. Being posited furthest away from the more heavily symbolised and codified senses of sight and hearing in the sensorium, smell is a good place to start a Deleuzian exploration of literary sensations as intensities exceeding signification.

In Jackson’s work, smell tends to stand in not only for reality in general but more specifically for what she terms the “banished body.” In her paper “Stitch Bitch” she claims that the “real body” is “denied representation” but “knows stories we’ve never told” and “reports to us in stories, intensities, hallucinatory jolts of uninterpreted perceptions: smells, sights, pleasure, pain.” She describes the project of writing as the project of dissolving the “tumor” of the mind which shuts out the excess of embodied experience. Jackson’s concept of the banished body can be connected to the tradition of *écriture féminine* via her definition of it as “not female, necessarily, but [...] feminine” (Stitch). It clearly recalls Cixous’ call for a writing which “will give [woman] back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (“Laugh” 338). While Jackson’s and Cixous’ formulations both suggest giving voice to a prediscursive body or feminine unconscious which has been culturally repressed, I am more interested in how their writing *creates* this feminine body. Understood in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming, the banished body is not simply a material thing, but rather a tendency to become-body which the masculine-coded mind guards itself against.

Smells are particularly suited to play a part in a literary becoming due to their liminality, pervasiveness and contagiousness. They are difficult to contain, able both to travel through the air and to cling to things. Like viruses, they are airborne and transmittable from one object or living being to another. They even permeate the boundary between material and immaterial, being made up of invisibly small particles evaporating from

various substances. A quotation from *Half Life* captures the perceived semi-substantiality of smells: “The smell was a rectangular solid, more or less the dimensions of the shed, but ambitious, straining against the walls” (Half 263). Jackson further describes the intuitive reluctance against breathing in such strong smells, a reluctance connected to historical conceptions of smell as “vapour” or “miasma,” present in her work through intertextual connections to Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and other older literature. While in the contemporary west smells are believed to have mainly psychological effects, causing nausea or arousal at most, scholars from Antiquity up to the Renaissance debated the materiality of smells and argued that food smells could actually nourish and bad smells cause illnesses (Palmer 63). I connect such conceptions of smell as substantial and contagious to Marks’ Deleuzian understanding of smell as a sense of chemical contact and interspecies affinities (*Touch* 135).

In order to capture Jackson’s literary phantom smell of the feminine, I trace an olfactory becoming throughout this chapter from becoming-dead via becoming-woman and becoming-animal to becoming-vegetable. This division also provides something of a historical overview of smell in literature, as corpses, women, animals and flowers have often been described as particularly smelly. There is no wealth of smell references in Jackson’s work, but I have identified the most important functions smell plays in her writing, specifically in *Patchwork Girl*, “Angel,” and selected stories from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. To flesh out my discussion of these functions, I turn to other sources: most prominently Barnes’ *Nightwood*, Bartlett’s *Skin Lane*, Carrington’s *The Hearing Trumpet*, Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and Hopkinson’s *Skin Folk*. As previously indicated, what I term minor writing for queers to come often revises older genres. In this chapter the emphasis is on fairy tales, a genre abounding with transformations which might be read as becomings. Carter pioneered feminist revisions of fairy tales with her take on for instance *Bluebeard*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Feminist versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* have almost become a genre of their own, much thanks to Carter; an additional example is provided by Hopkinson. While there are fairy tale elements in Bartlett’s previous novels, *Skin Lane* is an outright queer revision of *Beauty and the Beast*. Gabriele Griffin has identified fairy tale themes in Carrington’s short stories (96), though *The Hearing Trumpet* draws more upon religious legends and folklore. Apart from an overt reference to *Little Red Riding Hood* (Barnes, *Nightwood* 71), *Nightwood* implicitly parodies *Sleeping Beauty*, according to Judith Lee (210). Jackson participates in this tradition with “The Swan Brothers,” her contribution to *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me: Forty New Fairy Tales* (which I shall however not discuss in this chapter) and with various fairy tale references scattered throughout her oeuvre.

The devaluation of smell in contemporary western culture makes it suitable as a metonymical stand-in for the body and the feminine. Smell is not unrepresented, however; it does have a cultural history and a literary tradition, as outlined in Hans J. Rindisbacher's *The Smell of Books*, Janice Carlisle's *Common Scents* and in Hertel's *Making Sense*. In his chapter on smell in the contemporary novel, Hertel suggests that "smells introduce an archaic, preverbal principle into texts" and that "the nose, with all its inexpressible smells, exemplifies the role the senses play in literature: it creates a resistance to representation." He cites findings from cognitive science to support the idea that smells are inherently resistant to verbalisation and conceptualisation because smell perception operates on an immediate, instinctive level. Because of their subconscious, affective immediacy, smells also escape all aesthetic expression or judgement, which require a certain disengagement (Hertel 128-9). Trotter similarly describes smell perception as immediate and invasive, destroying the boundaries between smeller and smelt and giving rise to intense sensations like nausea. He argues that the literary genre of naturalism draws upon this power of smell and that "[b]ad smells were Naturalism's great contribution to world literature" (Trotter, *Cooking* 210). Smell was also important to symbolist authors, who were interested in synaesthesia and mystical correspondences between sensory qualities such as odours, colours and musical notes:

While the naturalists and realists used detailed descriptions of smell as a literary device to imbue the environment with a moral atmosphere or to enrich the verisimilitude of their works, the Symbolists used smell in suggestive, mysterious, and expansive ways to dissolve barriers between subject and object, individual and environment. (Fleischer 105).

What the symbolists valued about smell (and the other proximity senses) were basically the same qualities drawn upon by writers in other genres: their evocative power and evasiveness to rationalisation.

Without accepting the naturalising and universalising aspects of Hertel's and Trotter's arguments, I concur that smell currently fills the function of evoking preconscious, instinctive immediacy. As Constance Classen points out, smells are perceived as "more physically intrusive than visual presentations," so intrusive, in fact, that the olfactory reality effect is rarely employed except mediated by non-olfactory art forms (*Color* 152). According to classic aesthetic theory, literature might draw upon intense sensations such as the stench of carnage to attain the sublime, while in unmediated form the proximity senses of smell, taste and touch are necessarily excluded from the realm of exalted aesthetic experience (Korsmeyer, *Making* 59). Recently there have been some attempts to transgress this tradition and involve *immediate* olfactory elements in art (see Banes), but such experimentation mainly takes place on the fringe of commercial perfumery

and fashion, leaving art galleries mostly deodorised even when exhibiting explicit and provocative visual art.

Brief references to proximity senses like smell have a much stronger power to evoke phantom sensations than references to the distance senses. Consider the difference between “I could *smell* it” and “I could *see* it.” While the latter requires a qualifying description of what exactly is seen, the former can stand alone. In the literature on olfaction, smells are often said to defy description, either because they cannot be consciously retained and scrutinised at all, because smell experiences are so idiosyncratic that there is no common frame of reference, or quite simply for lack of an olfactory terminology (see Carlisle 30; Classen, Howes and Synnott 3; Hertel 126; Rindisbacher 10; Miller 67-8). I am suspicious of the frequently repeated claim that there is no language for smell since it risks precluding any serious scholarly effort to discuss smells. As Rindisbacher points out, unlike the senses of sight, hearing and, to some extent, taste, the sense of smell is not generally educated (12) and this lack of olfactory training is reflected in scholarly assumptions about the impossibility to conceptualise and verbalise smell. Odours might not have many words of their own, but a qualifying term metaphorically transferred from a different sensory register is not necessarily vaguer or more idiosyncratic than a term originally meant to describe the sense in question; i.e. the meaning of “strong” or “bitter” scent is as evident as that of “loud” noise or “sweet” taste. While verbal descriptions of scents might be inexact and dependent upon comparisons, so are verbal descriptions of for example sounds and music, despite the specialised terminology.²⁵

Furthermore, I agree with Classen that “although an explicit olfactory vocabulary is lacking in the west, olfactory codes are nonetheless in place” and that such codes need to be studied (*Worlds* 10).²⁶ As Christopher Looby points out, the “repression of olfaction” does not preclude the fact that smell is simultaneously “elaborately cultivated and socially constructed, with different smells marked as pleasant or unpleasant, disgusting or exalted, pure or filthy – or some double-binding combination of such antithetical values” (292). Carlisle explores the unspoken olfactory codes of the Victorian era and historicises the assumption that smells are difficult if not impossible to convey in language by drawing attention to the Victorian conviction that words and pictures do trigger sense impressions, including smells (Carlisle 7, 21). This notion is confirmed by Looby, who writes that 19th-century authors like Walt Whitman and Herman Melville actively attempted “to produce olfactory sensations in the reader’s body in seeming defiance of the nearly

²⁵ “The problems of language in describing sensations or works of art and the difficulties in communication so readily admitted for odours and perfumes, generally apply to all forms of fine art,” as perfumer Edmond Roudnitska points out, 9.

²⁶ For an extended version of this discussion, see Solander, “Signature” 302-5.

odourless nature of the printed book” (295). I take their lead instead of that of scholars like Hertel insisting on the unconscious and unrepresentable nature of smell.

To me, the relative absence of olfactory art and aesthetics suggests intriguing possibilities for the virtual olfactions of literature. While smells at this point in the history of western art might appear too real and immediate to be creatively employed to any great extent, language on the other hand is often conceived as too abstracted and mediated. Literary references to smell can be interpreted as signifying “realness” on a strictly textual level. However, I am more interested in how smell references function to gesture towards the unsayable and open up the text to the non-signifying. In this, I am inspired by Marks’ multisensory approach to film. Marks argues that film, despite strictly speaking being an audiovisual medium, engages all the senses. Analogously, I argue that language can be used in such a way as to create phantom sensations relatively independent of the actual sensory modalities of the literary medium.

Intriguingly, the abundance of words to describe visual, auditory and tactile sensations might stand in the way of what Deleuze terms an intensive usage of language (see Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* 165). Even when they do not actually coin neologisms, creative writers constantly have to invent words anew in order to create literary intensities. What is unsayable about sensations is not necessarily made more sayable by the existence of established terms with conventional connotations. Such terms might rather work to obscure non-signifying intensities with commonsense meanings, though they may also be creatively employed against their own communicative function. While the idea that there is no language to signify smells can be questioned, Deleuzian percepts really do defy linguistic signification. Literary percepts are created in and through language, used as an artist’s material, but they are not “described,” “represented” or “referenced” in the text. What I term phantom smells are not pure percepts but the sense-specific forms literary percepts take in order to become perceptible, and as such partake of the cultural meanings attached to sense perceptions and to the words used to describe them.

When Barnes writes that Jenny in *Nightwood* “seemed to be steaming in the vapours of someone else about to die; still she gave off an odour to the mind (for there are purely mental smells that have no reality) of a woman about to be *accouchée*” (59), she directly describes what I would term a phantom smell. Jenny does not actually smell of death or birth; her odour is purely virtual (though in my terminology, it does have reality). Still, something about the atmosphere surrounding Jenny makes its presence felt specifically *as smell*, even if it is a “purely mental smell.” Barnes is at pains to make the reader perceive this phantom smell, so it would be unfair to reduce its olfactory component to an arbitrary metaphor for something essentially

abstract and non-sensual. Furthermore, she insists that phantom smells exist outside of literature as a sort of non-linguistic, olfactory concepts which may be attached to things lacking a smell as such. I think that this is the case and that a phantom smell of the feminine, for example, is not confined to Jackson's work although it may take a specific form there.

While Jackson does not use detailed or original descriptions of smells to create "smell pieces" on a par with the tactile and visual text-objects in her works, simple but strong words like stink, stench and reek have an important function as metonymies for what she calls the banished body or the feminine. My argument is not that Jackson employs smell as a metaphor for the feminine. There is not an abstract idea of the feminine first which is then compared to a concrete smell in order to make it clearer or to give it greater impact. Rather, the feminine is always already bound up with the smell of the feminine and the femininity of smell. Ideas are not abstract at all but charged with affects and perceptions of which they cannot simply be purified. Smell stands in a metonymic rather than a metaphoric relation to the feminine, in which each is part of the other. Jackson employs this metonymic relation to make the feminine smellable in her work, not as some actual, particular smell associated with the female body but as a phantom smell of the feminine itself which has a virtual existence in literature.

Undead Smells

You go for the morbid stuff, don't you, the fetid breath of the beyond? I thought so. Bleeding bowls, leech jars, cupping kits, fleams, lancets, saws, you gotta love it. (Half 240)

In this section, I shall introduce the liminal function of smell in Jackson's work by way of discussing the literary phantom smells of death and decay. In Hertel's words, there is "a long tradition of linking smell to decay – death stinks" (127). While Hertel's examples of authors working within this tradition are relatively recent – Thomas Mann and Ian McEwan – it can be traced back to the Renaissance belief in infectious miasmas exhaled by rotting bodies and culminated in the "Romantic fascination for the odors of excremental and cadaverous putridity," as Alain Corbin puts it in his paradigmatic study of the history of smell (200). Within humoral pathology, smells were ascribed great powers to heal as well as harm since they were believed to carry actual qualities of the substances from which they emanated directly to the brain through the nostrils (Palmer 63-7; Classen, Howes and Synnot 60-1). Miasma theory was based upon a conception of "smells as vapours emanating from bodies in a state of change, putrefaction, liquefaction or evaporation" (Palmer 65). Thus, smells occupied a liminal position between the substantial and the insubstantial, and miasmatic smells in particular occupied a liminal position between life and death. In Deleuzian

terms, carcasses might be said to emit molecules of death, infecting others with their becoming-dead.

The connection I make between early modern beliefs and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming is inspired by Paster's connection between the permeable body of humoral pathology and the BwO. Paster forcefully argues against metaphorical readings of the ascriptions of affect to inanimate objects or the identification of humans with animals in early modern literature, insisting that passions and humours were perceived as elemental forces permeating humans and nonhumans alike (*Humoring* 24-6). The mind-matter distinction did not apply in its contemporary fashion: humours were both temperaments and body fluids, extending outside the body through affinities with elements, climates, celestial bodies, animals, plants, minerals and so on. For example, the miasma generated by stagnant water was mirrored by a form of inner miasma in which the stagnant fluids of the spirit engendered pathogenic vapours (Paster, *Humoring* 72-6). The object world, including bodily organs, was animated by character traits and agendas not uniquely human. As such, the humoral body is the opposite of the Cartesian machinic body, which is finite and logical in its operations. I am interested in how the concept becoming can be related to humoralism's affective affinities crossing borders between species and kingdoms.

Traditionally, the smell of death already occupies a liminal position between the physiological and the psychological due to its intimate connection with the "stench of sin," a Medieval Christian concept surviving its counterpart, "the odour of sanctity" (Classen, *Color* 45-60).²⁷ In Gothic novels, contagious and nauseating smells of death can hardly be told apart from equally dangerous smells of sin and evil. For example, in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a demonic figure has breath "like the airs from a charnel house" (90) and in Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*, the Satanic evil of the plot is shrouded in a "pestilential air of corruption" (205) and "poisonous vapour of the dungeon" (19). Bram Stoker's *Dracula* might serve as the epitome of this Gothic olfactory convention in that the foul smell surrounding the monster in this novel is so obviously material and immaterial, literal and metaphorical at the same time: "But as to the odour itself, how shall I describe it? It was not alone that it was composed of all the ills of mortality and with the pungent, acrid smell of blood, but it seemed as though corruption has become itself corrupt" (304-5). The very battle over the vampire victims' lives and souls

²⁷ While smells of corruption might figure less prominently outside of Gothic literature, I would argue that the association between bodily and moral corruption persists. Within contemporary crime fiction, the intolerable smell of human remains serves to emphasise the intolerable evil of murder. Body odour tends to be considered a moral affront in the west, and idioms such as "I smell a rat" and "there's something rotten in the state of Denmark" (a slight misquotation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, act 1 scene 4) serve to reinforce a more general association of bad odour with moral badness.

are fought with smells: Professor Van Helsing's therapeutic garlic flowers versus Count Dracula's horrible stench of death and blood.

Frankenstein, the Gothic intertext in *Patchwork Girl*, does not partake in the Romantic fascination with putrid smells. The smells of decaying matter involved in the creation of the monster are left entirely to the reader's imagination, and neither Frankenstein nor his creation are described as tainted by the stench of sin for the crime against God as sole creator of life. That the monster's foul smell is not just decorously left unmentioned is demonstrated by the fact that he is able to befriend a blind man (Shelley 152-3). Obviously, when the monster's horrid visual appearance is unseen, no other sensory attributes get in the way of sympathising with him. It is a cliché of modern culture that appearances can be misleading, while on the other hand smells, as demonstrated by the "stench of sin," are commonly perceived to convey essences. Thus, the silence surrounding smells of death and evil in *Frankenstein* is a speaking silence, conveying the essential innocence hidden beneath the monster's horrifying appearance.²⁸

With *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson makes a gesture of correcting the scentlessness of *Frankenstein*. She lets the patchwork girl comment upon the character of her author Shelley:

[S]he embeds her tale in a double thickness of letters and second-hand accounts, as if every precaution were needed to secure the monster behind those locks and screens, or as if she placed a soiled cloth in an envelope and then a reticule so that it should not graze her fingers, pretending that smeared rag did not reek of her private parts. (Patchwork [story/M/S/real M.])

The rag reeking of Shelley's private parts which she hides inside a Chinese-box structure of narratives is supposedly the true story of her and the patchwork girl, who is portrayed as her illegitimate offspring and illicit lover. On the meta level, the smeared rag is also *Patchwork Girl*: the smelly text about a smelly monster that Shelley never wrote. While this metatextual assessment might be true in comparison to the deodorised *Frankenstein*, it does appear somewhat self-congratulatory: *Patchwork Girl* is hardly a text reeking of private parts.

Rather, despite her critique of Shelley for disguising and disowning her "reek," the patchwork girl too struggles to cover up her scent. She describes having any body odour at all as a failure to live up to a feminine ideal: "My actual body was damp, even gooey or gummy, and at times it smelled. My

²⁸ The monster's innocence is not just conveyed by the absence of smell but also by the novel's few smell references: his enjoyment of "a thousand scents of delight" from budding spring flowers (Shelley 132) demonstrates that he shares the refined sensibilities of his maker, who inhales "the most delightful scent of flowers and hay" from the picturesque shores of Lake Como, Shelley 132, 225. Monster and maker both partake in the Romantic cultivation of subtle sensual pleasures derived from nature described by Corbin, 77-85.

imagined body was dry, except for a water-thin, odorless slick of neutral fluid in its two mouths” (Patchwork [story/falling apart/craft]). It is typical for the majority of smell references in *Patchwork Girl*, as in Jackson’s work in general, that the unwanted body odours are not specified. Instead, the generic “smell” is put up against non-smell and aligned with what Jackson calls the banished body. I shall discuss how this relates to the feminine in the next section, but for now I read the patchwork girl’s struggle against her body odours in light of another statement she makes: “The past was like a smell. You could ignore it, you could cover it up, you could try to outdistance it, you could go to the source, rip up the rotten linoleum, douse it with toxins floral and citrus” (Patchwork [story/falling apart/cut and paste]). What starts as a simple comparison between smell and the past gradually turns into their conflation. Since the patchwork girl’s past is embodied in her scarred and stitched-together body, it is literally smelly. Specifically, it is the odour of corruption surrounding the undead monster. Her efforts to erase it entail acts of covering up her undead body (with clothes), ripping it up (with scissors and files) and dousing it (with more or less toxic beauty products).

Unlike in the Gothic tradition, the smell of death is not associated with evil in *Patchwork Girl*. Rather, it is odourlessness and adversity to smells that are negatively figured. In both of the diverging “mistress” and “monstrous” storylines, the patchwork girl loses a foot in a carriage accident. The incident gets press attention and the foot is given a public burial. In “monstrous,” the patchwork girl digs up her foot and remarks upon opening the child-sized coffin that it smells “of tobacco, of flowers, and faintly of corruption” (Patchwork [story/séance/patchworking]). The smell of corruption informs her that she needs to hurry with sewing it back on, while the inclusion of the other two smells indicates her composure and provides a rare example in Jackson’s work of atmospheric smells to set the 19th century scene.²⁹ In the “monstrous” storyline, the patchwork girl accepts her monstrous heritage and simply tries to get by, and accordingly the horror commonly associated with the smell of corruption is strongly played down. In “mistress,” on the other hand, the patchwork girl tries to control herself and pass as a proper woman, and in this storyline she responds to the trauma of losing a foot by ripping the leg off a robber and claiming it for her own. Here, the only smell reference is an interjected “(the *stench*)” serving as motivation for burning the clothes bloodied by the stolen foot (Patchwork [story/séance/repairs]). The brevity, italics and choice of the word “stench” instead of Jackson’s preferred “smell” all emphasise the patchwork girl’s affect. Unlike in “monstrous,” she is too desperate to register any other smells than that of the severed foot. Importantly, however, it is not the smell

²⁹ Flowers and tobacco are the most frequently mentioned odorants in Victorian novels, so the choice of these particular smells is a rather clichéd specification, see Carlisle 14.

of corruption as such that is so negatively connoted, even in “mistress.” On the contrary, it is the patchwork girl’s failure to accept her undead nature and the smells of corruption it entails which drive her to a morally corrupt deed, and this is why the smell of blood haunts her in an olfactory variation of the literary tradition of Lady Macbeth’s bloodstained hands.

By the end of *Patchwork Girl*, as the patchwork girl has come to terms with her undead body, she is more tempted than repulsed by the thought of affirming her own smelly corruption. She sometimes feels an urge to rip herself apart and “dry into hard shreds of jerky with an insinuating stink, divvied up by ants” (*Patchwork* [story/rethinking/afterwards]). As the patchwork girl was never quite alive she can never die: she is an undead assemblage embodying the idea that life precedes and exceeds the individual organism. Jackson affirms this idea by reconfiguring the “smell of death” into a “smell of undeath.”

The lure of dead smells is also present in *Half Life*, where the protagonist Nora finds the smell of animal carcasses “not unpleasant, just stirringly rich and brown” (177). Ignoring her conjoined twin Blanche’s complaints that “[i]t smells funny,” she lies down among the carcasses collected for their “Dead Animal Zoo” and plays dead (*Half* 182). When later in the narrative the twin sisters disguise themselves in the hide of a dead cow, Nora does not want to come out from “its thick, sour, berry smell” since there is “a lot to think about in that smell” (*Half* 381). Through inhaling the smells of dead animals she enters into a becoming-dead which should not be confused with simply dying since it is essential that she remains alive to experience it. When the smell of the cow hide attracts a vulture which might mistake the sisters for a cow carcass and devour them, the threat of literal death prompts Nora to abort the experiment (although it is unclear whether she simply fails to stop a terrified Blanche from moving). Thus, similar to the smell of undeath in *Patchwork Girl*, the smell of death in *Half Life* marks a liminal state of heightened awareness rather than the cessation of life.

In “Angel,” a short story about a taxidermist’s encounter with the body of a dead boy in a park, the smell of death stands in for the banished body in art. Sight, associated with abstracted artistic vision, is juxtaposed with smell, associated with visceral responses. The taxidermist practises the artistic vision taught to him by his father and sublimates the sight of the dead body into an aesthetic experience: “He unfocused his eyes to the point that the complications did not show, and sat at peace in the dark with only a tangy smell to offer specific information, information in this case about substances that had leaked from the shape, as substances will” (*Angel* 20). As is evident from the quotation, he cannot, however, abstract or sublimate smell. While visually a corpse might be reduced to a “shape,” the smell of it insists upon the particularities of its state of decomposition. The taxidermist struggles to reconcile the mind/body dualism and accept the material aspect of human

subjectivity: “How strange, he thought, that we are meat, and that meat rots, and so we begin to stink when we die, like anything left out too long” (Angel 30). Smell is firmly associated with death, as bodies are only described as smelling when “left out too long,” that is, when being reduced to meat upon the departure of consciousness.

By the end of the story, after the protagonist has used his dubious taxidermy skills to turn the dead body into an angel by attaching a pair of chicken wings to it, he accepts that his art will not magically transform the object. Abstraction is impossible: the corpse remains a corpse, with all the material particularities this entails. However, the story ends on a note of celebration of the capacity of the creative imagination to take available materials and rearrange them into works of art. The taxidermist muses: “If the angel flew, he was going to have to fly with the available equipment, raising his untranscended flesh on chicken wings, dropping bugs on the faces of the faithful. There would be a smell” (Angel 32). As in *Patchwork Girl*, a generic “smell” is used metonymically to invoke material particularity. In both cases the unspecified smell emanates from dead bodies, simultaneously drawing upon the visceral intensity of the stench of decay for, and wresting it away from, its negative connotations.

The stakes involved in reclaiming smells of death and decay for feminist body writing require some explanation. As I shall discuss at length later on, the smell of the feminine tends to be figured – and abhorred – as a smell of natural fecundity as well as natural decay. Within the Christian tradition, the bodies of virgin saints “uncontaminated by the corrupt fluids of coitus” are the only female bodies preserved from the foul smell of corruption (Classen, *Color* 51). In *The Hearing Trumpet*, Carrington mockingly conflates the smell of death, the stench of sin and the odour of sanctity in the scene of the Abbess Doña Rosalinda’s death in supernatural childbirth after congress with a heathen god or demon. According to the priest witnessing her death by explosion, “[p]ungent fumes so heavy as to resemble a thundercloud, and with a most dreadful stench filled the death chamber.” Ironically, these fumes are then “turned into a heavy and most exquisite perfume, like Musc and jasmine” which is taken for an “Odour of Sanctity” and contributes to the abbess’ canonisation (Carrington 99). As it turns out that the lascivious abbess is not really dead but an immortal fertility goddess, Carrington writes these archetypal smells into a feminist refusal of the static, incorrupt, virginal ideal of Christianity. Although the patchwork girl temporarily tries to attain this timeless, odourless feminine ideal, Jackson affirms the smell of undeath in her feminist body writing.

Odor di Femina

I was mostly struck by the smell of blood, which was strong and old and weakened my legs and brought the feeling of Sally close at hand. (Melancholy 152)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-woman is the first step away from a majoritarian identity as Man. This is true even for women, as becoming-woman does not imply a naturalised female or feminine identity (such a majoritarian female identity might rather be described as Woman, a special instance of Man partaking in some of its privileges). In this section, I shall discuss “odor di femina,” or the smell of female body fluids, as part of the olfactory becomings in Jackson’s work. Specifically, this section deals with smells of milk and menstrual blood, most centrally in “Blood” from *The Melancholy of Anatomy*.

By naming a short story “Blood,” Jackson aligns herself with humouralism in which blood was one of the four main humours of the body. However, the kind of blood Jackson generalises as part not only of the human body but of the earth itself is a specifically sexed form: menstrual blood. Due to their liquid state and excretion from the body, body fluids are already liminal, and the *smells* emanating from body fluids are doubly liminal. Thus, while menstrual fluid leaks out of the female body, smell leaks out from the fluid, further reinforcing a conception of the feminine as becoming-woman.

The history of smells in literature is largely a history of smelling men and smelly women. According to the Victorian “osmology” Carlisle delineates, male protagonists are ideally scentless, while female characters are associated with floral fragrances. Many of the works Rindisbacher and Hertel discuss, such as Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume*, Italo Calvino’s “The Name, The Nose” and Roald Dahl’s “The Bitch,” deal with men obsessed with the smell of women. The association of smell with women is not confined to literature but reflects a more general cultural conception of women as simultaneously the more fragrant and the fouler-smelling sex (Classen, *Worlds* 87-90). In its latter aspect as rank, ripe body odour, the odor di femina harks back to the smell of corruption discussed in the previous section; thus, the menstruating Nora in *Half Life* attracts a fly and asks: “Do I smell *dead*?” (Half 344).

Freud speculated that “man” had renounced the olfactory sexual stimulation of female genital smells in favour of visual attractions when he began to walk upright (cited in Gallop 26-8). The sexologist Havelock Ellis placed this renouncing at the turn of the eighteenth century, when women in the west ceased wearing heavy, musky perfumes to accentuate their body odour and instead began masking them (cited in Corbin 73-74). Psychoanalyst Michèle Montrelay used the term “odor di femina” (mentioned in passing by Jacques Lacan) to describe the intense body odours of the mother, the memory of which must be repressed and replaced with less intense visual representations in order for the subject to function

socially (cited in Gallop 27). More generally, *odor di femina* has been used to denote the smell of women, specifically the smell of the female sex but also a supposedly effeminate atmosphere surrounding someone or something. While I am not using the term in its psychoanalytical sense, I recognise that psychoanalytical notions inform *écriture féminine* and that Jackson's banished body conforms to the model of the repressed feminine. Hence, "*odor di femina*" captures the smell of the feminine, figured as culturally repressed.

A version of *odor di femina* which emphasises fertility rather than sexuality is the smell of milk. While historically perceived as impregnating women's bodies whether they had given birth or not (Corbin 36), in contemporary literature it is mostly confined to nursing mothers. In A. S. Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia," the "suppressed, furtive-seeming birth-smells, milky and bloody" of his wife's delivery make the protagonist William feel "huge, dirty, bloated, *wrong*" (70). She is portrayed as being in her natural element when surrounded by the smells of birth, while he finds them alluring yet alienating. In Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, a woman suffering from postpartum depression rages against men for putting women in this position: "This is just how they want you, an animal, a bitch with swollen udders lying in the dirt, blank-faced, surrendered, reduced to this meat, these smells..." (287). The feminist critique in this quotation is based upon an association of birth smells, implicitly including the smell of milk from "swollen udders," with animality, and a rejection of this animality as a subhuman existence. Being reduced to smelly meat means being deprived of human agency and rationality, as women have been throughout history.

Jackson employs the opposite strategy of reclaiming the association of women with nature and the animal in her feminist politics. This reclamation does not, however, take the form of a celebration of a femininity permeated with the smells of childbirth and nursing, as in Cixous. When Jackson figures the smell of the feminine as a milky smell, she tends to displace it from female bodies and denaturalise the connection between women and motherhood. This is the case in "Milk," where milk replaces water and the landscape is permeated with its smell, from a "pleasant tang in the air" to the "stench of sour milk" (*Melancholy* 157-8). This is also the case in "Here is the Church," where the phantom smell of the story is a "thick sweet smell of evaporated milk" which the protagonist associates with her father (90, 93). Milk is also associated with fathers in "Flat Daddy," one of Jackson's "front page stories" written using only the words found on the cover of a newspaper. The narrator's body odours of milk and cheese (along with blood on the toilet paper and lack of beard growth) tell her that she is not the son her "Flat Daddy," an animate cardboard cutout replacing a father found lacking in masculinity, wants her to be. Her Flat Daddy threatens to discipline her with a "father smell," but she replies that being a cutout, he

has no father smell, and eventually goes to live with her “milk father” in the “Milk Zone.” I have used the female pronoun to designate the narrator, but this is assuming too much from her being described as “not a boy” (Flat 278). In “Flat Daddy” there is only masculinity and its negation, milk. The representatives of masculine authority are odourless and literally flat characters speaking in slogans, while milk and its odour suggest *écriture féminine*: a more substantial and nourishing kid of writing.

Like she does with milk, Jackson displaces menstrual blood from the female body and turns it into an autonomous feminine element. “Blood” humorously depicts a battle between masculine, deodorised civilisation and feminine, smelly nature in which menstrual blood replaces sewage as the waste matter accumulating in the sewers of Victorian London. The protagonist of the story is a so-called “blood-lark,” who used to work mopping up the blood before it scabbed to make room for next month’s flow. In the present time of the story, however, town planners have come up with the radical solution of sealing the earth underneath the city, rendering her occupation obsolete.

Although set in a fantastic version of Victorian London, “Blood” draws upon the early modern medical beliefs of Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton’s humouralism is echoed in the arrangement of the stories into sections named after the four temperaments corresponding to the four humours. According to humoural pathology, it is of vital importance to rid the body of excess fluids, for example through blood-letting and menstruation. Corrupt menstrual blood accumulating in the body is the chief cause of melancholy in women (Burton 1:414-9). However, by placing “Blood” under the “Sanguine” heading and characterising the blood larks as bold, hearty and amorous to match the sanguine temperament, Jackson subtly overthrows the sexed hierarchy of humouralism. Sanguinity was conventionally perceived as a masculine temperament, and the blood associated with it as hot and quick, while the dark and clotted menstrual blood was explained as mixed up with phlegm. Jackson instead gives the blood epitomising sanguinity the specifically feminine form of menstrual blood.

When it comes to smell, “Blood” relates to Burton’s work via the notion of miasma. Fetid smells were believed dangerous to inhale before Pasteur’s germ theory was generally accepted by the end of the 19th century, including smells of organic decay such as faeces, vegetation, earth and stagnant water (Corbin 33-46). Corbin describes how the earth was perceived as a dangerous repository of pathogenic vapours which it was of vital importance to seal in order to keep the vapours from rising and waste from seeping into the ground, corrupting it further (23-4, 90-1). Jackson draws upon such beliefs in her descriptions of the Londoners’ decision to seal the earth in order to stop the blood flow, and subtly alludes to the related association of

the underground with forces of evil. While unlike in *Dracula*, the combined smells of blood and earth are never described as horrible, their Gothic connotations are present in horses who “spook at the smell of blood” and people who find the blood rising “devilish” (Melancholy 149-50).³⁰ The protagonist, however, redefines miasmas which according to Burton are unwholesome and likely to cause melancholy (1:237-41) as vitalising: “The first whiff of the blood smell always struck hard, but after that we didn’t notice it, it was not a bad smell anyhow, but strong and natural, like horses or a good clean pond with plenty of crawlies living in it” (Melancholy 143).

In Deleuze and Guattari’s scheme, becoming-woman is followed by becoming-animal, which is just one step further away from a majoritarian human identity. In “Blood,” femininity is associated with animality: the blood-larks lie “snug as grubs under the city rubbing all its secret passages clean, working in the dark because we knew where the blood was just by the sticky feel of it and the smell” (Melancholy 145). The image of “grubs” may have been suggested by “grubbers,” a slang term used to describe scavengers in the sewers of London, just like “blood-larks” alludes to the “mudlarks” scavenging the banks of the Thames. Although grubs might seem almost comically harmless, the image of them crawling in blood resonates with the Gothic imagery via the description of *Dracula* as a “filthy leech” sleeping in the earth (Stoker 72). The animality of the blood-larks is emphasised by their reliance on the “animal” senses of smell and touch and their capacity to work in the dark, like blind worms. Confirming the common association of smell with natural instinct, the protagonist of “Blood” states that “most of us could sniff out when a period was coming after just a few months on the job, we had such a feel for it” (Melancholy 142).

In *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller suggests that “Freud’s theory of the final devaluation of smell depended upon putting sewers under ground” and that “[u]nderground sewers were not an emblem of the repressed but the repressed itself, a burying of dangerousness” (78). I am sympathetic to this suggestion, which historicises psychoanalytical theory and corresponds to my Deleuzian theoretical framework. As a technology, sewers structure the repressed as bodily waste hidden from sight (and smell!) underground. This is not just a metaphor for purely psychological processes of repression. Rather, it is a metonymy linking immaterial ideas with very material sewage in the common concept of the repressed. Jackson draws upon the history of sanitation to metonymically replace sewage with menstrual blood and create a literary phantom smell of the feminine.

³⁰ The fact that the blood is menstrual adds to its evil since folk belief used to ascribe destructive magical powers to the smell of menstruation, “for example, the ability to render fields barren, mirrors dim, iron rusty, and dogs mad,” Classen, *Worlds* 87. More generally, there is a cross-cultural “conception of menstrual fluid as a kind of putrid blood, combining the danger associated with blood with that associated with excrement,” Classen, Howes and Synnott 137.

Menstrual blood is relegated to the sewers along with other forms of bodily waste, and analogously banned from literature. I would argue that as a literary topic, it is more repressed than any other bodily substance, probably due to its sexed nature. While excrement might be considered obscene, there is still a strong literary tradition of scatological humour. The same is not true for menstrual humour, although some jokes about embarrassing bloodstains may be acceptable.

As part of the *odor di femina*, the smell of menstrual blood repulses rather than attracts. Freud claimed that the distaste for menstrual odour was more universal and profound than that for the odour of excrement.³¹ However, he considered the repulsion to be part of the civilising process, replacing an animal attraction to the scent. Hopkinson plays with this animal attraction in “Riding the Red,” a rewriting of *Little Red Riding Hood* in which the girl lures the wolf with her blood smell. The blood is blood in general – the protagonist recalls being “drunk on the smell of [her] own young blood flowing through [her] veins” (Hopkinson 2) – but the title of the story and the theme of sexual awakening suggests a connection to puberty and menstruation. However, the bestial coupling of woman and wolf does not follow the pattern of straight sexual awakening: menstrual smells do not attract man but unleash a becoming-animal.³² Reinforcing the queer connection, the indeterminately sexed narrator of Winterson’s *Written on the Body* performs one of the few literary odes to the beloved’s menstrual smell: “When she bleeds the smells I know change colour. There is iron in her soul on those days. She smells like a gun” (*Written* 136). The reference to a gun is positively connoted as part of a hunt in which the narrator is her willing sexual prey and firing equals orgasm. While Winterson unconditionally celebrates a menstrual *odor di femina*, Jackson affirms it without denying its historical connection to foul-smelling miasmas. Rather than denying that the smell of menstrual blood may be repulsive, she shows that repulsion need not rule out attraction. The sanguine blood-larks get over their initial repulsion and compose carols combining blood and lewdness into a concoction so strong it brings up the “green bile” for those not used to it (*Melancholy* 139). Many of them find lovers among the all-female community of blood-larks, developing a queer sexuality intimately related to their smelly, bloody work.

³¹ As Miller points out, the comparison is unfair since Freud assumes a male subject, meaning that the imagined faeces may be his own while the menstrual blood must always be another’s, and other people’s bodily waste is generally perceived as more disgusting, 72-4.

³² The song “Wolf Moon” by the metal band Type O Negative describes a man involved in a becoming-animal triggered by the smell and taste of menstrual blood. The singer, either a werewolf or simply like a werewolf in his periodical blood thirst, describes how upon each full moon he enjoys drinking the menstrual blood of his lover. The song goes beyond mere obscene provocation in its celebration of the romantic symbiosis between woman and werewolf.

By the end of the story, a phallic tower flooded with blood leaking up through its insufficiently sealed basement is left “stinking and pink” by the blood-larks called in to drain it (Melancholy 153). The menstrual flow will never stay completely buried out of sight or smell, but returns to stain and impregnate civilisation. The juxtaposition of the rhyming words “stink” and “pink” captures the body as feminine and the feminine as body. “Pink” has an obvious connection to femininity through being slang for “vagina” and conventionally designated as a girly – and gay – colour, but it is also the flesh colour of whites. “Stink,” being less neutral than “smell,” suggests body odours and the *odor di femina*. Though both words share a connection to the body *and* the feminine, “stink” reinforces the corporeality of “pink” while “pink” in turn reinforces the femininity of “stink.” In another short story, Jackson makes the picture of the banished body clearer by adding animality and decay in her description of the body as a “pink, stinking animal coffin” (Consuetudinary 137). In the following section, I shall follow the scent trail on to an olfactory becoming-animal in the work of Jackson, Barnes, Bartlett and Carter.

The Smell of the Beast

When he bent over to greet us, he put one big, hot, damp hand on the small of our back, and I smelled his goatish armpits and his rank breath and screamed up into his smiling face. (Half 165)

As already seen, the olfactory domain is generally associated with animality, and this is especially true for body odours and sexual smells. In this section, I shall discuss animal smells in relation to the masculine counterpart to *odor di femina* – the “aura seminalis” supposedly surrounding pubescent and celibate men in particular (Corbin 36-7). It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that the *aura seminalis* is not simply the sexed opposite of the *odor di femina*, and to not construct a feminine-floral and masculine-animal dichotomy. As seen in the previous section, the *odor di femina* is strongly associated with animality too, while the *aura seminalis* might be conceptualised as part of a becoming directed away from an ideally scentless masculinity. In the works I shall discuss, *aura seminalis* is distinctly queer and bestial. The protagonist of *My Body* relates how in puberty her “dry, stainless, odorless child body had shivered all over and metamorphosed into a stinking, sweating, oozing hulk sprouting hair” (Body [armpits]). I do not read this as an instance of *odor di femina*, as she is contrasted with her female classmates who do not stink. Rather, I read her “reek” as part of her queer otherness, more specifically what Judith Halberstam terms “female masculinity.” Although it is not quite an *aura seminalis*, it is similarly associated with bestiality, as the sudden transformation into a hairy hulk suggests werewolf lore.

The olfactory becoming-animal merely hinted at in *My Body* is brought out much more strongly in Bartlett's *Skin Lane*, where the middle-aged protagonist Mr F goes through a sort of belated puberty or queer sexual awakening wrapped up in a becoming-beast. In some senses, he fits the description of the masturbating bachelor typically associated with an aura seminalis in 19th-century literature, who "can't stand the nighttime smell of himself" (Bartlett, *Skin* 136). In an article on the aura seminalis emanating from 19th-century anti-masturbation tracts Looby suggests that literary phantom smells refuse to be contained within their rhetorical functions (300-3). Even when intended as warning, they introduce a pornographic element into the text, in the sense of provoking physical reactions in the reader. I take Looby's lead in considering the animalic phantom smells in the texts I discuss throughout this section as potentially transmittable and able to draw the reader into an olfactory becoming-animal.

Since smell is deeply connected to animality and fairy tales are full of beasts and animal transformations, it is unsurprising that rewritings of fairy tales should provide unusually smelly texts. This is true for Hopkinson's "Riding the Red" as well as for *Skin Lane* and Carter's various rewritings of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in *The Bloody Chamber*. In several of Carter's tales there is a becoming-animal of the heroines, who instead of transforming the cursed beasts back into princes shed the skin of civilisation and join them in bestiality. *Skin Lane* is a male queer addition to a long tradition of feminist revisions of fairy tales. It is primarily a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, but it also has elements of *Bluebeard*, most clearly in a scene where Mr F's hand is "stained scarlet" by the light shining through a stained-glass window as he turns the key in his lock (Bartlett, *Skin* 15). In Bartlett's merging of the two tales, Mr F unlocks the door to his own becoming-Beast. However, this becoming-Beast is always already mixed up with a becoming-Beauty. As a child, Mr F loved having his father read *Beauty and the Beast* to him as a bedtime story, after which he would lie in the position of Beauty in one of the illustrations and wait for the Beast to come: "Waits, for the first sound of snuffling in the dark. For the first touch of bristle or guard-hair on his cheek. For the first hot, stinking breath to brush against his neck" (Bartlett, *Skin* 6). When this scene is later played out, Mr F instead takes the position of the Beast, while the young man he has designated as Beauty "could feel Mr F's slightly foul breath on his cheek" (Bartlett, *Skin* 293-4). Recall that becoming-woman comes just before becoming-animal in the movement away from a majoritarian (masculine) identity.

Throughout *Skin Lane*, smells figure as ineradicable stains clinging to skin and allowing others to sniff one out. Mr F worries about mundane smells like boot-polish and rubbish sticking to his hands (Bartlett, *Skin* 276, 338), but most of all he worries about the distinct odour left by his profession as a

furrier: “At the end of the working day, and before he starts to prepare his evening meal, he wants to get rid of the faint but distinctive smell that clings to them. It isn’t a particularly unpleasant smell, but it is unusual; dusty, pervasive, oddly animal – hard to place until you realise what it is” (Bartlett, *Skin* 30). The reason the smell is so worrying is that it is contagious: transferred from (dead) animal skin to skin it invites a becoming-Beast. But again the smell-stained hands also involve Mr F in a becoming-Beauty where he is the fairy tale heroine marked by her transgression.

The fairy tale theme of the stain plays a similar role in Jackson’s “Cancer,” where the protagonist experiences the half animal, half vegetal cancer growing in his living room as a telltale stain on his life left by some unknown sin. Without even having touched the “disturbingly womanly” cancer growth, he feels a need to wash its stain off his hands: “I looked at it, you could almost say lovingly: what lawless circus beauty. The stink of the big cats, the glare of the lights! I forgot myself, brought my hands close, almost petting the hairy fringe. But afterwards ran scalding water on my palms” (Melancholy 59-60). The simultaneously attractive and repulsive, feminine and animal other with its specific association to the circus recalls Barnes’ “Tamer smelling like her Beast” (*Ladies* 60). The cancer exudes a virile vitality infecting the protagonist and invigorating every part of his physique including sweat and oil glands so that a “smell of bacterial abandon hung in [his] armpits” (Melancholy 60). Thus, his smelly and leaky body gradually comes to resemble the cancer, which leaks a “purple ichor” with a “strong and sweet” smell (Melancholy 63). The cancer presents the whole line from becoming-woman via becoming-animal to becoming-vegetable. Like Mr F, Jackson’s protagonist takes on the role of fairy tale heroine, with the cancer cast as Rumpelstiltskin: “No matter what I said, stomp stomp and through the floor he plunged in a brimstone stink, but he’d be back again another day, the hairy nymph” (Melancholy 61). The “brimstone stink” is of course the hellish stench of sin, while the description of Rumpelstiltskin as a “hairy nymph” suggests queer sexual transgression. Ultimately, however, the protagonist of “Cancer” refuses the becoming offered by the cancer.

Mr F’s attempt to refuse becoming-Beast is more ambiguous. While he tries to contain the animalic smell of fur by thoroughly washing his hands after work, the washing as such is part of his becoming-Beauty. After washing, he uses a perfumed lotion which he rubs in by wringing his hands in a “strangely intent and melancholic gesture” (Bartlett, *Skin* 16). This wringing of the hands, explicitly described as feminine and archaic, picks up the stylised gestures of fairy tale grief. Furthermore, it replaces the animal odour with a “faint night-time perfume,” a formulation connoting not only femininity but vegetal sexuality: the seductive scents of night-blooming flowers which I shall return to in the following section. By masking his animalic odour with the sexual smells of flowers, Mr F performs a variation

on a theme from Carter's "The Tiger's Bride," in which the Beast masks his "reek of fur and piss" (Carter 66) with a "reek of purplish civet" (Carter 53), a perfume ingredient "obtained from the scent gland of the civet cat" (Classen, *Worlds* 91). Thus, the perfume used to mask his odour of the Beast is itself a telltale sign of it, which is true in a more subtle way for *Skin Lane* as well.

Animalic perfumes may be used to mask or replace body odours, but they inevitably gain their sexual appeal from being the (refined and diluted) body odours of animals. In Carter's "Wolf-Alice," a girl raised by wolves delights in "the ancient yet still potent scents of musk and civet" lingering in the fabric of ball gowns, sensing her affinity with these animal smells (124). Thus, animalic perfumes might as well induce a becoming-animal in those wearing or smelling them. This is the case in Carter's "The Bloody Chamber," where the Bluebeard character's "opulent male scent of leather and spices" betrays instead of masks his bestial nature (8). The heroine finds "the source of his habitual odour of Russian leather" to be the library where he keeps his sadistic pornography, which aligns it with a masturbatory aura seminalis (Carter 16). It also forebodes the fate of his bride, which is sealed as she is forced to show him the bloodstained key to his secret chamber. She describes how she "felt there emanate from him, at that moment, a stench of absolute despair, rank and ghastly, as if the lilies that surrounded him had all at once begun to fester, or the Russian leather of his scent were reverting to the elements of flayed hide and excrement of which it was composed" (Carter 35). The Russian leather perfume, suitable for a polished gentleman, is only a fraction away from the "hide and excrement" (or "fur and piss," as in "The Tiger's Bride") of the Beast. It is as though his perfume itself is becoming-animal and sweeping him along with it despite himself.

An olfactory becoming-animal is not just about acquiring an animalic odour, but also an animal keenness of the nose. As Carter puts it in "Wolf-Alice": "Two-legs looks, four-legs sniffs" (119). It is a not entirely accurate commonplace that humans have a poor sense of smell compared to other animals. Most humans are not used to orienting themselves in the world by smell, at least not consciously, but it is possible to develop a discriminating sense of smell if necessary. William, the naturalist protagonist of Byatt's "Morpho Eugenia," has done so on his travels to collect specimen:

The hunter in him, now in abeyance, had a highly developed sense of smell. There were jungle creatures whose presence he sensed with all sorts of senses undeveloped in urban Englishmen, he supposed – a prickling in the skin, a fluctuation in the soft nasal lining, a ripple in the scalp, a perturbation of his sense of balance. These had tormented him in London streets, where they had over-responded to fried onions and sewage, to the garments of the urban poor and the perfumes of ladies. (Byatt 96)

The quotation suggests that a keen sense of smell is redundant and even burdensome in so-called civilised society, where one is expected to politely

ignore most smells. William uses the keenness of his nose mainly to smell the different body odours of the two women he is torn between: the lady Eugenia and the governess Mattie. The connection between smell, sexuality and animality is reinforced by his transformation from a hunter of animals to a hunter of women.

Mr F develops keen senses as part of his becoming-animal. While his sense of smell is not explicitly singled out, it is highlighted by the references to smells and sniffing. The youth referred to as Beauty and the girl he is secretly dating feel exposed by Mr F and wonder: "*Smell us, can he?*" (Bartlett, *Skin* 97). As in "Morpho Eugenia," the protagonist's keen nose is mainly used to sniff out the object of his desire. Mr F is described as an animal in a cage sniffing for the prey it has never tasted (Bartlett, *Skin* 275), or as the Beast unable to enjoy his fragrant garden for the missing scent of Beauty: "*Beast that he is, when he lifts his muzzle to the air, it is never to catch the perfume of the jasmine, or a rose. Every night, he hopes the wind may bring him fresh news of the one whom all of this has been so cunningly constructed to lure*" (Bartlett, *Skin* 149). Mr F is imprisoned in a fairy tale castle of his own making, and like a caged beast knows the world outside through the smells carried to him by the wind. As in "Morpho Eugenia," the urban environment overwhelms his animal sense of smell in a scene where he gets lost and ends up in a meat market: "That thick sweet smell which is just beginning to make itself apparent is the smell of meat: cut meat. Something about this smell feels very wrong; there is too much of it" (Bartlett, *Skin* 115). The smell of meat is associated with Beauty, generally as the scent of prey and as specifically because Mr F's becoming-animal starts with a nightmare about a beautiful dead youth hung upside down like a carcass in the slaughterhouse. Being confronted with it in the daytime bothers Mr F who, as already shown, wants to compartmentalise and contain smells.

A heightened sense of smell is associated with animality and with forms of sexuality regarded as regressive or bestial. Rather than denying this connection as prejudiced and demeaning, the queer writers I am discussing draw upon and explore it. The scent trail connecting animality to lesbianism in *Nightwood* especially has been discussed by previous scholars. Bonnie Kime Scott was among the first to observe the many animal affinities and hybrid creatures in Barnes' work (71-122). Dana Seitler reads the "bestiality" in *Nightwood* as engaging with degeneration discourses in which "sexual perversion" was seen as a form of atavistic lapse into animal behaviour, and briefly suggests that Robin's becoming-animal contests sexual identities such as inversion or lesbianism (530). Carrie Rohman combines Deleuze with Derrida in a more sustained argument about Robin's becoming-animal as a form of posthumanism radically questioning human identities and subject

positions (80-2). Finally, Alex Goody makes a more general claim for the animal becomings recurring throughout Barnes' oeuvre (164-73).

Robin in *Nightwood* is repeatedly associated with animals and with the evolutionary past, a connection made partly through smell. Doctor O'Connor expresses regret that humans have rejected the keenness of their noses in order to differentiate themselves from other animals but this is not true for Robin, who still orients herself by smell (Barnes, *Nightwood* 107, 50). Her abandoned husband Felix describes her as having "a sort of 'odour of memory,' like a person who has come from some place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall." This is uttered in response to Doctor O'Connor's comment that "[m]an is born as he dies, rebuking cleanliness" and that a certain lack of cleanliness in life is attractive, "a sort of earth on which love feeds." (Barnes, *Nightwood* 106). Robin's body odour attracts precisely because it is not washed clean of any traces of dirt and therefore harks back to the filthy business of birth as well as to the unhygienic history of the human race. This reflects Freud's characterisation of the sense of smell, body odours, and especially female sexual smells as "atavistic throwback[s]" (Mavor 282). However, although the association of smell with a "primitive" past may be commonplace, Barnes' use of it is not. According to Rohman, Robin is "figured as a prehuman organic body" refusing the "organic repression" of the olfactory and of animality ordained by Freud, and with it the "impermeable and distinct" human subjectivity that is achieved through such repression (66-7). This resonates with the Deleuzian argument Marks makes for the films of the brothers Quay: that they use references to smell to decentre human subjectivity and appeal to other forms of organic and inorganic life (*Touch* 127-8).

Using the scientific terminology of the times, Robin's association with animality can be characterised as atavism, an evolutionary throwback to an earlier developmental stage. Seitler is certainly right that Barnes draws upon available discourses of degeneration and modernist primitivism, though she is wrong to ascribe a devaluation of the non-, de- or inhuman to the novel (544). Applying a Deleuzian theoretical perspective, Robin's becoming-animal is a flight from human subjectivity directed not backwards in time but towards an unknown future. Importantly, becoming-animal is neither evolution nor "bestial devolution," as Seitler puts it (550), but, as Goody points out, *involution* (172). Like evolution, involution is directed forwards in time, but unlike evolution, it does not develop through predictable steps and stages. Involution is creative and has more to do with the symbiotic relation between species than the descent of a species. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 263). Seitler's reading of *Nightwood* as a "degeneration narrative" resisting the progress and closure of the traditional romance plot is interesting in light of this, as her description might as easily fit an "involution narrative" (555).

Perhaps too much has been said about the becoming-animal of Robin, at the expense of other becomings in Barnes' work. Even her most Deleuzian readers, such as Rohman, tend to describe Robin's becoming as an individual affair and to focus upon her identification with animals and her interaction with a dog in the final chapter. But as Goody is careful to keep in mind, Deleuze and Guattari define becoming as an involuntary, impersonal process involving a multiplicity "within" the self straining towards a multiplicity "without" it, with the self being only a provisionally stable threshold. Rather than a human subject wilfully engaging in an inhuman becoming, Robin functions as what Deleuze and Guattari term a "demon" or "anomalous," the exceptional member of a pack or swarm catalysing becomings (*Thousand* 268-9). In an article on the Gothic in *Nightwood*, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik note influences from horror film in the imagery of the novel and interpret Robin as a modernist reworking of the vampire (89). I would argue that Robin is vampiric in the Deleuzian sense that she resists reproduction (refuses to be a wife, mother or child) and instead proliferates her becomings by infecting those coming into proximity with her (see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 266-7).

In a fantasy sequence in *Skin Lane*, Beauty takes on the role of demon or anomalous. Mr F imagines that the stuffed animals in a natural history museum, which are also the animals whose furs he expertly selects and matches at work, come alive and gather around him:

Fur flies, guard-hairs sparkle, teeth are bared; the rich, animal stink rises around him. Then something in him senses another presence in the room. The animals can evidently feel it too, because they all begin to stir. Hackles rise. Muzzles and snouts are lifted to the air, scenting for clues. (Bartlett, *Skin* 254)

The animals' strong odour and keen sense of smell are both highlighted, alongside other characteristics such as the colours of their coats and the noises they make. What they sense and scent for is Beauty approaching as a sort of fairy-tale king of the beasts:

The smell and the heat are overpowering, but he doesn't care; down he comes, with his arms outstretched and a strange, gentle smile beginning to flicker across his face. Oh yes, here he comes, with his superb arms, his dark hair and his never-so-black eyes; with his lips, parting in welcome; with his outstretched hands, offering to gently lead his guest of honour forth into the magic kingdom of everything he has never had. (Bartlett, *Skin* 254)

Although not endowed with animal characteristics, Beauty is posited as the one standing out in the swarm of animals.³³ This role corresponds to that of the Beast, who is posited in between human and animal and thus provides a

³³ On other occasions he is more explicitly identified with animals, as Mr F compares the textures and hues of his hair to that of various furs.

link to the animal kingdom. Thus Beauty is here cast as Beast, just as Mr F is sometimes cast as Beauty. While in the original fairy tale the Beast is returned safely to humanity, in *Skin Lane* as in Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" he instead initiates the becoming-animal of Beauty.

Jackson does a more humorous take on this theme in "Angel," where the protagonist's landlady is portrayed as a crazy cat lady and "compulsive masturbator" (Angel 22). The link between her as demon or anomalous and her flock of cats is sexual and olfactory: "The smell of cat pee that permeated the hall seemed to intensify when she became excited. He imagined, and gagged imagining, a physical object, something like a cotton wad soaked with musk and sulphuric acid, tamped into the back of his throat" (Angel 21). In this the most vivid evocation of smell in Jackson's work, its substantiality is emphasised. The smell is thick enough to gag on, forcing its way down the protagonist's throat. It corresponds to the landlady's dispersed excitement as atmospheric phenomenon. That it is described as revolting is irrelevant; it nevertheless infects the protagonist. He too becomes a masturbator, fantasising about his landlady and her cats: "He imagined cats in coitus on his landlady's vanity, stuck together and bawling among bottles of unguents, male cats standing with stiff legs and vibrating tails in the bathroom, hosing down her towels and dressing gown with musk, female cats crying invitations from her closet" (Angel 23). The conventional undesirability of the crazy cat lady brings out what is slightly less clear in *Skin Lane*: that the encounter with the demon drawing the protagonist into a becoming-animal is not about erotic wish-fulfilment.

With regards to Robin's role as anomalous in *Nightwood*, there is a tendency for Barnes criticism to turn into a polarised ethical debate where Robin is either condemned for failing to reach full human subjecthood or celebrated for eluding this oppressive humanist imposition. Related to this, her abandoned lover Nora is either described as maltreated by the irresponsible and immature Robin, or as confining her to the role of pet or child within an oedipal family structure (see Rohman 68). As a result of the need to align becomings with ethics, Robin has been positively revaluated while other characters remain neglected. No scholarly attention has been awarded the becomings of the notoriously unlikable Jenny, Robin's lover after Nora. Yet she is, similarly to Robin, entering into an animal becoming via the "smell about her of mouse-nests." This does not simply amount to an unflattering character description of her being "like" a mouse in her penchant for pilfering and hoarding, rather, she is becoming-mouse through her smell (notably not of mice but of their nests), her behaviour (nervous twitching) and her appearance (the face of a comedy jester) (Barnes, *Nightwood* 87-8). She does not imitate or resemble a mouse, but her proximity to a series of things that are not necessarily as such mouse-like or mouse-related launches her becoming (see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*

301-3). Similarly, there is in Barnes' work a becoming-animal of gossips, who move in packs to sniff out sexual transgression. In *Ladies Almanack*, they are described as "Blowing inland for Trace, and out-ocean for Scent, and nosing to Ground for Spoor of her want" (70) and in *Ryder* their leader calls out: "Muzzles to Windward! Is there not a Stench of the matter in every Breeze, blow it East, West, North or South?" (24). These flocks of vicious gossips are certainly not celebrated, but neither is the animal imagery a simple condemnation of their brutishness. Rather, it is a description of the mechanism of being swept up in a collective becoming-animal.

Becoming does not stop at becoming-animal: Deleuze and Guattari list becomings-vegetable, -mineral, -cellular, -molecular, -elementary and -im-perceptible among others (*Thousand* 274, 300). It is easy to morally judge a becoming-animal since animals are evolutionary close to humans and have traditionally been used as moral examples, but who would think to moralise about the behaviour of plants? Becoming-vegetable is a further step away from human agency and human ethics, and as such might better exemplify becomings. In the following section, I shall trace the scent trail further on to a becoming-vegetable in the work of Jackson, Barnes, Carrington and Tom Robbins.

Rank Fecundity

Reek of pine disinfectant, and she is in the forest. (Swan 92)

In this section I discuss the part played by smell in a literary becoming-vegetable which is always on the verge of other becomings. The expression "rank fecundity" captures the force of water and vegetation to spawn life and death equally in smelly excess, and ties smells of nature to the feminine. As Miller explains the shifting meanings of "rankness," the word began by denoting "force and vigor in growth," soon sliding into "excessive growth" in a pejorative sense, and then "the smell of such excessiveness and the rot and decay that are its consequences." Miller sums up its shift in meaning as reflecting the vital process it captures: "the sense of the word is born in vigor, health, and forcefulness, flourishes, and then begins to choke itself in luxury before it sickens amid odors of rot and decay" (167). The disgust associated with rankness is the disgust of feminine fecundity in its indiscriminate excess. Like teeming life itself, the rank smells it generates tend to increase and spread across ever larger areas.

Smell functions as a metonymy for fecundity, being equally pervasive and difficult to contain. Smells tend to spread out from the thing emitting them, be carried even further with the wind or with materials they cling to, seep through barriers, mingle with other smells and linger even after their source is gone. Furthermore, as Carlisle among others points out, smell perception is an involuntary and sometimes unwelcome effect of smell molecules

invading the body (Carlisle 43). Strong or unpleasant smells tend to be experienced as overwhelming and disintegrative, as exemplified by sanitary reformers' accounts of the stench of poverty (Trotter, "New" 38). While I do not agree with Trotter that this is because smells necessarily elude conceptualisation and even conscious recollection, I am interested in how the disintegrative and irrational aspects of smell play into literary becomings.

As previously mentioned, the early moderns believed smells to be carried directly to the brain through the nostrils, and to share a natural affinity with the vital spirits. Therefore, smells had the dangerous as well as therapeutic power to directly affect moods such as melancholy (Corbin 62). But the brain was not the only organ susceptible to smell. The womb, for example, was believed to be drawn to some smells and repelled by others, as demonstrated by olfactory treatments of hysteria (Palmer 65). The miasma theory discussed under the heading of "Odor di Femina" is based upon this understanding of smells as affecting not only moods but the very fabric of the body. Miasma was especially associated with muddy soil or stagnant water teeming with life believed to be spontaneously generated by it, in other words, with rank fecundity. Even though the belief in miasma has been abandoned, the smells of mud and stagnant water tend to be associated with disgust and decay. This is shown by John Banville's description of the "greeny, fleshy smell" of the stale water in a vase of flowers (101) and by Woolf's contrasting of the mainly audiovisual beauty of a seaside garden with the "gusts of dead smells" from the ground below it in *The Waves* (41). Woolf's description of the "sticky mixture" of moist, slithery creatures such as worms and slugs, "rotten fruit," "swollen things," "excretions" and oozing fluids "too thick to run" (41) perfectly captures the loathing of rank fecundity going back in literary history at least to Shakespeare and surviving miasma theory. It is clear that what disgusts in Woolf's text is not so much death as such as what Miller calls "life soup":

Death thus horrifies and disgusts not just because it smells revoltingly bad, but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of a cycle of eternal recurrence. The having lived and the living unite to make up the organic world of generative rot – rank, smelling, and upsetting to the touch. The gooey mud, the scummy pond are life soup, fecundity itself: slimy, slippery, wiggling, teeming animal life generating spontaneously from putrefying vegetation. (Miller 40-1)

The Waves expresses a horror of "dead smells" and a wish to compartmentalise life into the clean, bright, airy, impressionistic beauty of the perceiving and reflecting mind on the one hand, and the dirty, dark, viscous life and decay of the body on the other. Furthermore, this compartmentalisation roughly corresponds to the traditional division between "higher" distance senses and the "lower" proximity senses.

Unlike Woolf, Jackson affirms the becomings unleashed by miasma and rank fecundity. However, as smell references in her work are relatively few and the connection between smell and becoming is brought out more clearly and consistently by Barnes, the key source for this section is *Nightwood*. After making a comparison with Jackson's use of vegetal and marine smells, I then flesh out the discussion with a consideration of floral fecundity in Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* and Robbins' *Jitterbug Perfume*. As I shall argue, the sexual allure of floral smells draws humans into a becoming-vegetable comparable to the sexual symbiosis between flowers and bees.

While Jackson's "Blood" presents smell as a metonymy for the banished body or repressed feminine relegated to the sewers and the subconscious, Barnes' *Nightwood* presents a different olfactory map. In place of a vertical organisation where smells seep up from underground, the smelly "nightwood" of the novel's title permeates its urban spaces in a lateral topography.³⁴ I take issue with Horner and Zlosnik's reading of the beast prowling the nightwood as a figure for the dark unconscious of psychoanalysis and the Gothic: while there are prominent Gothic elements in *Nightwood*, the novel is not structured according to the symbolic topography of the Gothic novel. Extending the comparison with *The Waves*, I would argue that Woolf's novel is: not only does it relegate rank fecundity to the undergrowth, as previously noted, it also, as Robin Hackett observes, implicitly figures lesbian sexuality (though not male homosexuality, which is explicit and bathed in the sunlight of classical antiquity) as absence, darkness and submersion (73-4). In "Blood," Jackson literalises the symbolic topography of the unconscious as sewers and celebrates the power of rank fecundity and lesbian sexuality to burst out of its subterranean containment, but nevertheless repeats the vertical division she mocks. Barnes, on the other hand, does not figure the night world of queer sexuality as a separate subterranean space corresponding to the unconscious or the repressed. Night and day exist on the same level of visibility and seep into each other seamlessly in a shifting topography. Seidler claims that the night in *Nightwood* is atemporal and aspatial (548) and this is true in the sense that night and day occupy the same spaces simultaneously. A related claim can be made for the novels' characters, who do not possess the hidden depths projected onto them by fellow characters and critics alike (see Singer 55-6). Robin is elusive not because she carries some psychological secret or mystery but precisely because, contrary to expectation, she does not: she is quite simply *of* the night in the same fashion as Nora is of the day.

While Robin appears as a somnambulist in the world of day and Nora is unable to follow Robin into the night world, some can pass between the two.

³⁴ See Pike 55-6 for a critique of reductive vertical mappings originating in the Victorian bourgeois obsession with the subterranean and reproduced in Foucauldian accounts treating bourgeois ideology as unified and dominant.

As with Robin's "odour of memory," the strategy for doing so is olfactory and related to (moral and bodily) hygiene. According to Doctor O'Connor, Americans are afraid of losing themselves completely to the night if they let go of their diurnal cleanliness and sobriety. Instead, he recommends being like a Frenchman, who "can trace himself back by his sediment, vegetable and animal, and so find himself in the odour of wine in its two travels, in and out" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 76). The French are not afraid to smell of wine, neither freshly drunk nor processed by the body and expelled as vomit or urine, while such smells threaten the American's identity.³⁵ What the French realise, in Rohman's words, is that "the elements that make up the vegetable and animal, for example, the particles of wine that enters one's nose to produce smell, are the same elements that compose human bodies." The "sediment" left by the Frenchman "implies a dispersal of that which composes the body" and troubles "the hermetic sealing off from other objects of the human person required to produce the Cartesian subject" (Rohman 73). In order to travel between night and day, one has to acknowledge that one is of the world, a temporary assemblage of vegetable and animal particles, and be open to the becomings of these particles. Instead of scrubbing away the body odours reminding one of one's animal and vegetable belongings, one can use those odours as scent trails to follow to prevent getting lost in a complete dissolution of the subject. Thus, smell functions both as a catalyst for the becomings necessary to enter into the night, and as an anchor chain enabling one to return. Of course, Barnes precedes Deleuze and Guattari and thus cannot be influenced by their theories, but she takes the humoural model of the affinities embedding humans in the world and transforms it into something that can fruitfully be read as becomings.

In the novel's most elaborate description of Robin's smell (indeed, of any smell), diverse attributes are brought together in such a way as to confound scholars of a symbolical bent: "The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 31). For Catherine Whitley, the combination of fungi and amber exemplifies the excess of conflicting meanings characteristic of Barnes' style: "One image has been substituted for another so disparate (the only aspect in common is an appeal to the olfactory sense) that they could seemingly refer to entirely different characters in the novel" (91). However, fungi and amber are only disparate when seen as representative of two

³⁵ The description of these two attitudes to smell as "French" and "American" is Barnes' or O'Connor's, but it roughly corresponds to an existing difference in perfume tastes: in France it is more common to use classic fragrances, often heavy, animalic or otherwise "difficult," from the great old perfume houses, whereas in the US the fragrance market is dominated by lighter, fresher and more synthetic-smelling scents.

disparate sets of imagery – jungle and ocean – employed to shed light upon Robin’s character. In my view, readings of Barnes concerned with signification or symbolism impoverish the perceptual richness of her texts. Such analyses inevitably find that her imagery is obscure and incoherent, and either go on to analyse this obscurity as a rhetorical strategy, as exemplified by Whitley, or condemn it as derivative stylistic posing devoid of substance.

Instead, I agree with Rohman’s argument that “Robin ultimately transgresses the symbolic as a limit upon her phenomenality” (58). The point of Barnes’ description of Robin is not to present a metaphorically mediated idea of her character, but to create a literary percept, made perceptible partly as olfaction. Instead of assuming that Barnes connects two incongruous sets of imagery with the common signifier “smell,” I propose that she composes a literary phantom smell. Whitley’s relegation of the olfactory to a parenthesis is telling of her reluctance to engage with fungi and amber as smells rather than as symbols. But if the smells of fungi and amber are seriously considered it may turn out that they have more in common than both being smells. For example, they might quite simply smell similar: damp and dry at the same time, vaguely decaying, organic and difficult to place along the animal-vegetable spectrum. Barnes’ juxtaposition invites the reader to recall (or imaginatively recreate), compare and combine the two into a phantom smell. A phantom smell does not “mean” in a symbolical sense, yet it is meaningful as part of the literary work. Being virtual, it does not simply refer to or represent an actual smell, but is a composite sensation involving non-olfactory and non-sensory aspects, so that Robin’s smell of fungi and amber is coloured by the surrounding descriptions of her, including apparent metaphors.

In order to explain how literary phantom smells are neither literal nor metaphorical, I turn to Alan A. Singer’s original take on Barnes’ use of metaphors in *A Metaphorics of Fiction*. While in traditional narratives, a stable referential level takes precedence over a variable figural level, Barnes does not use metaphors to reproduce pre-existent meanings (Singer 60-1, 51). Instead, she employs techniques such as digression to confuse the referential and figural levels until denotation is destabilised into a variable of usage (Singer 54, 66). I connect this confusion of narrative levels to the virtual topography of *Nightwood*: just as night and day are not separate realms but shift and seep into each other, so Barnes refuses the categorical distinction between literal and figurative. Although Singer does not reference Deleuze and Guattari, his understanding of how metaphor functions in *Nightwood* resonates strongly with their discussion of metaphor and metamorphosis in *Kafka*. Singer exemplifies Barnes’ repudiation of narrative levels with a dog appearing first as a figure in the speech of Doctor O’Connor and then as a literal dog in the last chapter (72). Similarly, according to

Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka does not employ language in the ordinary way “where the word dog, for example, would directly designate an animal and would apply metaphorically to other things (so that one could say ‘like a dog’).” Like Barnes, Kafka works to destroy metaphor, symbolism, signification and designation so that “[t]here is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense.” Instead, his images and words are becoming-dog in a process of (real) metamorphosis opposed to (figurative) metaphor (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 22). This opposition applies to metaphor in the traditional sense, but hardly in Singer’s sense, which has much more in common with what Deleuze and Guattari term metamorphosis. The processes Singer describes as taking place in *Nightwood* can be understood as linguistic becomings not merely reflecting on a formal or stylistic level the novel’s previously noted thematic becomings-animal, but actually metamorphosing into them. Of special interest here are the olfactory becomings involving the becoming-smell of the text itself, just as in Deleuze and Guattari’s description of Kafka’s writing “the words themselves are not are not ‘like’ the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects or mice” (*Kafka* 22).

The olfactory becomings in Barnes’ work involve the metamorphosis of words into phantom smells, but also (on a more “thematic” level) vegetable and animal metamorphoses following scent trails between species and kingdoms. Barnes connects fungi and amber through smell, but the elements making up Robin’s phantom smell are not incongruous as much as consistently ambiguous. According to Scott, fungi fascinated Barnes as an intermediate species (74). Scott defines fungi as parasitic plants such as orchids, an understanding shared by Whitley (90) as consistent with the artificial jungle setting surrounding Robin and with her flesh being “the texture of plant life” (Barnes, *Nightwood* 31). However, I find that Barnes’ description of “earth-flesh” with a damp-dry smell (Barnes, *Nightwood* 31) supports an interpretation of “fungi” as referring to moulds and mushrooms: life forms belonging neither to flora nor fauna and as such even more intermediate than parasitic plants. Understood as parasite, mould or mushroom, fungi share an air of morbidity and decay with the description of amber as a “malady of the sea” (Barnes, *Nightwood* 31). They suggest a malady of the earth, or a malady of the flesh in death and decay: the mingling of the human body with “low” life forms such as worms and fungi meditated upon in the genre of graveyard literature (see Hamlin 13) and summed up by Miller as “life soup.”

Like fungi, amber or ambergris has an intermediate belonging, being an aromatic substance excreted by sperm whales and found in the sea or on the shore. Whales themselves are ambiguous creatures, eluding early taxonomists as an intermediate species between fish and animal (Ritvo 46-8), or as mammals in the wrong (marine) element, just like the

somnambule Robin is in the wrong element. Ambergris not only originates in an ambiguous creature but adds to the ambiguity. Although animal in origin, it requires maturing in the ocean in order to develop its attractive, ambiguously animalic/marine/earthy/floral fragrance. In *Moby Dick*, Melville describes the precious perfume as foul in its raw form and considered by some “to be the cause, and by others the effect, of the dyspepsia in the whale” (426), a belief illuminating Barnes’ use of the word “malady” to describe it.

Barnes’ contemporary readers would be familiar with the use of ambergris in perfumery (now largely replaced by poor synthetic substitutes). Along with musk and civet, it belongs to the animalic base notes common in early 20th-century perfumes but now gone out of fashion in favour of “cleaner” scents. Whether Robin’s smell is to be understood as a perfume is unclear; the word “perfume” used to describe her body odour captures the natural/artificial and literal/metaphorical drift of the passage. One possible reading is that she has anointed herself with “oil of amber” on top of her naturally fungal smell (Barnes, *Nightwood* 31). Whether her smells of fungi and amber come out of a perfume bottle or not, they are denaturalised and deterritorialised smells of rank fecundity. As previous scholars have observed, Robin is not identified with nature in the essentialising fashion of primitivism, but rather presented as an artistic arrangement of nature with reference to film and painting (see Scott 101; Whitley 90; Goody 172). She creatively deterritorialises smells, sounds and colours from nature as part of her becomings, surrounding herself with potted plants, caged birds and perfume bottles (Barnes, *Nightwood* 30-2). When the transgendered Doctor O’Connor borrows some of her perfume, her smell is deterritorialised once again as part of the novel’s mutating, contagious becomings (Barnes, *Nightwood* 32).

The smell of the sea as such transcends boundaries between kingdoms, being at the same time animalic (fish, crabs, molluscs), vegetal (seaweed, algae), mineralic (salt) and elemental (water). It is furthermore feminine, in that it is traditionally designated a female element and in that the female genitals are often described as fishy-smelling. Again, the authors I am discussing do not refute this olfactory association as misogynist, which would only maintain the denigration of fish and their smell and the human border-policing behind it. Winterson appropriates the notion of female sexuality as tidal and oceanic in *Written on the Body*, as part of the narrator’s ode to her/his lover’s sex: “She smells of the sea. She smells of rockpools when I was a child” (*Written* 73). Hopkinson gives the theme a queer twist in “Fisherman,” where the smell of fish is not a natural female body odour. Instead, the butch (or trans) protagonist carries it with her from her work as a fisherman and is afraid to spread it to the sumptuous furnishings of the local brothel: “I can’t get my fisherman stink all over this

lady [sic] nice bed!” (131). However, the Madame, who does not have to earn her living at sea, has romantic notions of it and is attracted to the faintly fishy smell clinging to the protagonist despite her scrubbing. Thus, the smell of the sea is still involved in female sexuality, but with a difference.

In *Patchwork Girl*, the divergence of the parallel storylines “mistress” and “monstrous” is marked by a matching polarisation between sea and sky: “The ship commenced wallowing on the way out of harbor, rocked by the wake of another ship, so that I was confronted in alternation with the roiling, scummy surface of the reeking bay and a high, aristocratic sky of a frivolous powdered blue” (Patchwork [story/seagoing/ revised]). While both sea and sky are femininely connoted, the sky mirrors the immaculate surface of conventional feminine beauty where body odours are kept in check, while the sea mirrors the smelly feminine or banished body of Jackson’s *écriture féminine*. The patchwork girl’s affinity with the sea is further brought out in a scene of nocturnal swimming humorously drawing upon the Gothic tradition of “malodorous depths” swarming with sea monsters (see Corbin 48). She describes how the sea “stank and sloshed and threw up fragments of recognizeable [sic] things, fish and furniture,” a description aligning it with the unformed and boundless element of chaos, in which the finite categories of civilisation are undone (Patchwork [story/seagoing/swimming]). The sea is not a metaphor for chaos but rather a metonymy for it, a part of the smelly wilderness designated as chaos. Neither is the sea symbolic of the patchwork girl’s inner turmoil. Rather, she is *of* the smelly sea in the same fashion as Robin is *of* her indoor jungle. Instead of interpreting them as characters with a psychological “interior” rhetorically reflected in an “exterior” setting, I read character and milieu together in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari term “haecceities”:

It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. (*Thousand* 289)

Becoming is not an individual affair but one in which subject, object, space and time together form a singular event. This ties back to Paster’s claim that affective states in early modern literature exceed individual characters: haecceities resemble humours or elements in their dispersal. To carry the smell of an atmosphere is to be part of a haecceity, like the fish vendor in *Ryder* with her “odour *tout le temps* of deep-sea matters and changes” (91). The smell alone (re)creates the atmosphere in a very real way, but it also stands in metonymically for the semi-material, distinctive yet elusive, nature of haecceities.

The haecceity captured by Robin's scent is composed by elements from two milieus commonly associated with rank fecundity: the sea and the jungle. The sea can be understood as a quintessential instance of what Miller terms "life soup": a chaotic feminine element spreading dangerous miasmas. The same thing can be said of the jungle and its artificial counterpart, the hothouse, teeming with life and redolent with alluring, potentially overwhelming, smells of flowers and rotting vegetation: "For this reason, in Victorian novels scenes of seduction were often placed amid the concentrated scents of the exotic flowers of the hothouse" (Classen, *Worlds* 92). Floral smells are already sexual, meant to attract pollinators, and have traditionally been borrowed by women in order to increase their sexual allure. From a human point of view, floral perfumes are more subtly sexual than animalic ones and largely replaced them in the 19th century. However, even among floral fragrances there is a division between the innocently virginal scents of the cultivated kitchen-garden and the sultry, seductive scents of more "exotic" flowers (Corbin 185-6). In Victorian literature, only faint flower scents naturally clinging to women were considered innocent enough to make them marriageable while floral perfumes reek of artificial seduction (Carlisle 44-7, 85-6). Even inhaling the heavy odours of certain flowers too deeply was thought to make young women lascivious or to suffocate them in their sleep (Corbin 81, 166; Carlisle 87). Thus floral fragrances are not as innocuous as they might seem compared to the body odours dealt with in previous sections.

Carter perverts the lily and rose, symbols of the holy virgin within the Christian tradition, by emphasising their seductive scents and flesh-like textures. The roses in "The Lady of the House of Love," Carter's rewriting of *Sleeping Beauty*, gain "their swooning odour, that breathes lasciviously of forbidden pleasures" from growing on the buried corpses of vampire victims (Carter 105). The vampire and her roses live in a symbiosis where the roses become-vampire through feeding off human flesh and the vampire becomes-rose through surrounding herself with their intoxicating odour. Together they compose a haecceity, so that the vampire cannot be removed from her rose garden, and the "glowing, velvet, monstrous flower" carried off by the hero as a souvenir carries something of the vampire with it in its "corrupt, brilliant, baleful splendour" (Carter 108).

Similarly, in "The Bloody Chamber," white lilies are associated not with the virginal heroine but with the sexually predatory Bluebeard character. The heroine is both repulsed and aroused by their "lush, insolent incense reminiscent of pampered flesh" and by their "toad-like, clammy" texture which reminds her of her husband's skin (18, 22). The white lilies and the reference to their scent as "incense" brings to mind a (Catholic) church atmosphere, such as that captured by Banville's "smell of incense and of candle-grease, the fleshy stink of lilies" (61). As in Carter (and as in the

previous quotation from Banville), the floral smell is described as “fleshy,” rendering the supposedly virginal fragrance of the lilies oddly animalic. The smell of Banville’s church is richly reminiscent of body odours: grease and flesh. Carter installs this corrupted church atmosphere in the bedroom where the heroine’s virginity is sacrificed on her wedding night. Again, this is not simply an atmosphere in the sense of a setting, but in the sense of a haecceity, in which the Bluebeard character takes on the “white, heavy flesh” of the lilies (Carter 15) and they in turn are animated into exhaling “the odour of their withering” the moment his Russian leather turns rank (Carter 37). The heroine is drawn into the becoming-vegetable as the “perfume of the lilies weighted on [her] senses” (Carter 18) and as her hands are stained by their pollen (Carter 15).³⁶

In the Victorian setting of Byatt’s “Morpho Eugenia,” Eugenia forms a haecceity with the “ghosts of jungle smells and the sweet, thick breath of gardenias” in her hothouse (55). As in the Victorian novels analysed by Carlisle, the overly seductive scent of hothouse flowers marks her as unsuitable for marriage. Unable to resist it, William marries her despite being her social inferior and is “buried in the smells of her fresh sheets and her fluid sex, her hot hair and her panting mouth,” that is, her odor di femina (Byatt 96). When it turns out her family was eager to marry her off because she has an incestuous affair with her brother, William’s discovery of them is also olfactory: “The room was full of an unmistakable smell, musky, salty, aphrodisiac, terrible” (Byatt 149). William literally sniffs them out and despite his abhorrence is drawn into their arousal by the “aphrodisiac” effect of their sexual smells. However, Eugenia’s irresistible odor di femina is more than a smell, as William finds himself “inside the atmosphere, or light, or scent she spread, as a boat is inside the drag of a whirlpool, as a bee is caught in the lasso of perfume from the throat of a flower” (Byatt 53). The descriptions of flowers as breathing and throwing lassoes anthropomorphises them and invests them with agency, while conversely Eugenia is identified with flowers passively spreading their seductive scents. Her becoming-flower, in which she unwittingly attracts not only men but butterflies, incites a becoming-bee in William.

Bees are already becoming-vegetable, as flowers are becoming-animal, in their symbiotic interspecies sexuality. Robbins’ *Jitterbug Perfume* and Carrington’s *The Hearing Trumpet*, two surreal novels in which smell plays a prominent part, feature supernatural swarms of bees associated with floral fecundity and olfactory attraction.³⁷ In *Jitterbug Perfume* a mysterious

³⁶ This variation of the stained-hands theme is also used by Bartlett in his novel *Mr Clive and Mr Page*, where the protagonist gets pollen stains on his hired suit while waiting for his male date and feels like everyone can see that he does not fit in, 71-2.

³⁷ Classen, *Color* 135-6, and Griffin, 95, have observed the unusually prominent position of smell in Carrington’s work particularly as part of her rejection of human (western) civilisation. However, Griffin only

vendor of perfume essences is surrounded by a bee swarm doing his bidding, and in *The Hearing Trumpet* the goddess Hecate is incarnated as a bee swarm forming one giant queen bee. The king or queen of bees functions as the anomalous or demon through which human characters enter into a becoming-bee involving the smells of flowers and honey. Carrington's rebellious old ladies inhale the vapours of the traditional magical herbs stramonium (datura) and vervaine (verbena), along with musk, to enter into a trance and summon the goddess (Carrington 155). When the bee swarm forming her body is dispersed she leaves a "delicious scent of wild honey" and a "most delicious perfumed stickiness" behind (Carrington 118, 156). The smell of honey captures the mutual becoming of bees and flowers, into which humans attracted by its sweetness are drawn. Carrington makes a feminist point of the correspondence between the female bee community and the old women in the retirement home to which the protagonist Marian Leatherby is confined. "The place creeps with ovaries until one wants to scream. We might as well be living in a bee hive," one of the inmates complains, but Marian feels happiest among the bees in the garden. At the end of the novel, after the onset of a new ice age, the group of old ladies belong to the few surviving humans and hope that things will improve for Earth when "the planet is peopled with cats, werewolves, bees and goats" (Carrington 33, 158).

Jitterbug Perfume puts more emphasis on the pollen gathered and eaten by bees. The plot revolves around a marvellous perfume combined of jasmine and the unorthodox perfume ingredient beet pollen – the only fragrance powerful enough to mask Pan's body odour of rutting goat. That is, the smell of vegetal sexuality has the potency to cancel out the smell of animal sexuality. Pollen might be characterised as floral semen, so that "the pollen-stained teeth of the floral Earth, the sexual planet" (Robbins 313) suggests oral sex between flowers. Robbins highlights the evolutionary history of smell and its interspecies attraction: "Lasciviously colored, scandalously scented blossom after blossom flaunted its genitalia openly, enticing with visual and heretofore unknown *olfactory* charms any who might be inclined to sample its pleasures" (224-5). This accords with Marks' observation that smell is a basic mode of communication based on chemical contact and shared by plants and animals alike. For example, pine cones share their odour with a male sex steroid, transcending the species barrier between vegetal and animal sexuality (Marks, *Touch* 135). Barnes' description of the virile Ryder as having "the heavy odour of pine that was his body's smell thick about him" is thus no arbitrary smell designation

briefly mentions animalic smells in Carrington's short stories and Classen's main focus is on her surrealist cooking and the role played by food and taste in her writing.

(*Ryder* 223).³⁸ The interspecies affinities created by smell are underlined by Robbins as well as Carrington: the sweet smells of pollen and honey and the musky smell of the horned god all have the potential to draw humans into becomings.

Bees and pollen recur throughout Jackson's work, for example in *Half Life* (417-8) and in "Word Problem" (145-7), but most importantly in her clearest reference to rank fecundity, in "Sleep": "Out of care and duty leaps the shocking blossom of the new: vibrant, imperious, reeking of pollen" (*Melancholy* 131). The choice of the word "reek," more often used about body odours, brings out the sexual nature of pollen: pollen as seminal fluid. "Reeking of" also suggests an amplification corresponding to "bursting with," "weighted-down by" or similar formulations, but one which specifically emphasises smell. Among smell words, "reek" is one of the strongest, suggesting a smell so heavy as to be almost visible as smoke or vapour in the air. This corresponds to and augments the substance of pollen itself, which like smell is airborne and often dispersed enough to be invisible, but which thickens the consistency of the air and makes itself felt in the nose and throat. In the presence of the cancer, which as already shown embodies animal and floral fecundity alike, the protagonist of "Cancer" feels "sunk in a fog of pollen" (*Melancholy* 60), and when excited the animate Nefertiti bust in "Musée Mécanique" emits a substance referred to as "the Bloom" (historically a euphemism for vaginal discharges) or as "pollen." This hangs like a stain in the air, similar to the pollen stains in Carter, Robbins and Bartlett.

In Jackson's front page story "The Pollen Letters," pollen infects language, including the language of DNA, rewriting the genes so that teenagers "mutate into strange bee women" and "[s]traw' and 'yeast,' 'honey' and 'herbicide' will soon be all you can say" (*Pollen*). The only one taking the threat seriously enough to propose peace negotiations with the bees in their pollen language is a schoolgirl named Daphne after the nymph transformed into a laurel. The intertext of the nymph becoming-tree in order to escape her would-be rapist, and the teenagers becoming-bees (specifically female bees) suggest pollen language as a form of *écriture féminine*. "The heavy guns of language have historically and conventionally been reserved for strong men, honey," says the male military leader who refuses to negotiate with the bees (*Pollen*). Daphne retorts that he is already infected with pollen but "not house-trained for the beehive. Writing the future must be reserved for those who speak the language" (*Pollen*). There is no explicit mention of smell in "The Pollen Letters," but the pollen contaminating language and inducing a becoming-bee is an apt figure for the olfactory becomings of

³⁸ In perfumery, vegetal smells of woods and herbs, rather than conventionally feminine flowers, are frequently used to increase masculine sexual allure.

literature. Like the pollen, smell infiltrates language, introducing an extralinguistic sensory dimension: what Jackson in “Stitch Bitch” refers to as the “banished body.”

Reading as Becoming

One day, when I fished out the slippery wad, laid it on my desk and teased its folds open with a pen, I noticed that some of the words seemed changed. I took the stinking page to the library and confirmed my discovery in the echoing stacks. My vagina had rewritten Joyce. (Body [vagina])

Throughout this chapter, I have traced an olfactory becoming from becoming-woman via becoming-animal to becoming-vegetable. I have argued that smell, being conventionally conceived of as immediate and unrepresentable, introduces a nonlinguistic element into literature. Although there are olfactory codes assigning various meanings and values to different smells, smell is not abstracted and conceptualised to the same degree as the other senses (with the exception of taste). Therefore, smell remains closely aligned with the body and is particularly suited to stand in metonymically for extradiscursive material reality.

However, the materiality of smell is complicated. Smells carry particles of the substance they emanate from, but they do not (re)present their point of origin in the way sights or touches do. Instead, as with sounds, the sensation is airborne and cut off from its source. Smells figure materiality as differentiation by demonstrating the permeability and mutability of the solid bodies giving off and receiving these semi-substantial chemical phenomena. A scene from *The Hearing Trumpet* serves to illustrate this point: “They saw Rosalinda and the Bishop inhaling *Musc de Madelaine* and by some process of *enfleurage* becoming so saturated with the vapours of the ointment that they were surrounded by a pale blue cloud of aura which apparently acted as a volatile element on solid bodies.” Inhaling these potent vapours renders solid bodies vaporous and capable of levitating. Entire living bodies stand in for the fat traditionally used in perfumery to absorb the scents of flowers (*enfleurage*), and become so fragrant that “the nuns swooned with the overpowering vapours” they exude (Carrington 79). Though the nuns do not inhale the *Musc de Madelaine* directly but only smell it on their abbess, they too are affected by its aphrodisiac powers. Odours are transmitted from body to body like a contagion, transforming them in the process. Smelling, in both the active and the passive sense, is already halfway to becoming.

The semi-substantiality of smell is best captured by the word “reek.” Etymologically, “reek” means “smoke” (sharing its roots with the Swedish “*ryka*” and “*rök*”) and it suggests a smell so thick you can (almost) see or feel it, such as the smelly steam given off by hot living bodies. Although a chemical reek is conceivable, “reek” tends to be used more about natural, and especially animal, smells. It has appeared sparsely throughout this

chapter, under the headings of “Odor di Femina,” “The Smell of the Beast” and “Rank Fecundity.” Tentatively, it seems especially to suggest excrements and sexual secretions, if the association between sea smells and female sexual odours is taken seriously, and pollen understood as floral semen. Thus, “reek” can be taken to indicate not only the olfactory border-crossing between substantial and insubstantial, but also the erotic crossings between natural kingdoms incited by this shared system of chemical communication. Without explicit reference to vapour or miasma, the word “reek” nevertheless conveys some of the ideas about smell present in miasma theory.

The liminality of reeks also captures the part played by smell in literary becomings. Developing her figure from *Patchwork Girl* of writing as stitching together a Frankensteinian monster, Jackson writes in *Half Life* that “all our words are resurrected, though some are whiffier than others (*whiffy*, for example)” (354). The word “whiffy” is quite literally whiffy because its referential meaning carries with it a phantom smell, however faint. This phantom smell may be intensified by previous associations and current usage, as may the smelliness of other words, including those not directly related to the olfactory realm. Jackson imbues language in general with a stench of death spreading its miasma so that the reader may come to perceive language as smelly. The affective and bodily response to smells such as Jackson’s smell of undeath, Bartlett’s smell of the beast and Barnes’ smell of rank fecundity creates a pornographic proximity between reader and text. This may draw the reader into becomings answering to those occurring in the text.

Becomings generate intensity, which is why readers might wish for literary becomings to play out even when they result in conventionally negative consequences such as the death of characters. That the intensities released may be violent and destructive is no ground for ethical judgments of characters or plots. The reader’s becoming does not mimic that of a character but goes off on its own tangent – or not at all, as the case may be. There is a greater risk that the reader guards her established identity against literary becomings than that she runs all the way towards self-annihilation. The one ethical thing about becomings is their movement away from majoritarian identities.

Tasting Texts; or, “I can’t say it, I won’t chew it”

Both sides could digest spring leaves, a thorny question, branches of early Christianity. (N 123)

Like smell, the sense of taste is rarely awarded theoretical attention. While various aspects of orality have attracted philosophical and psychoanalytical interest, taste is rarely among them. Consequently, previous research such as Hertel’s chapter on taste in *Making Sense*, Sarah Sceats’ *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women’s Fiction* and Maggie Kilgour’s *From Communion to Cannibalism* focus on food culture and symbolical aspects of ingestion rather than on taste as such. Deleuze and Guattari too have little to say about taste. In an interview, Deleuze professes his profound disinterest in food and eating, with the exception of disgust-eliciting offal (cited in Shukin 144). “When Deleuze exposes an exclusive taste for brain, tongue and marrow, he aligns his physical appetite with a philosophical appetite for forces,” Nicole Shukin argues (145). She shows how the taste for particular organs corresponds to Deleuze’s philosophical rejection of the organism in favour of the BwO and, more problematically for feminists, how his choice of foodstuffs connotes masculine virility. Furthermore, she discovers a general preference for the raw over the cooked in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which entails a simultaneous dismissal of and dependence upon women’s domestic labour (Shukin 146-8). This is a relevant critique of Deleuze’s inevitably masculinist brand of modernist elitism. Deleuze is not interested in “dining well” or other mundane sensual pleasures, as they do not attain the heightened sensation of art. Instead, he is interested in the ingestion of powerful substances.

This is an interest shared by Jackson, who in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* describes the magical effects of ingesting milk, fat, sperm, cancer, sleep and blood. I shall draw upon Elspeth Probyn’s Deleuzian account of eating as a transformative experience in my reading of this theme. Adding to this, I shall argue that Deleuze might be overhasty in excluding taste from the senses which may contribute to artistic percepts. Deleuze’s own interest in disgusting foodstuffs hints at the aesthetic potential of taste inherent in *distaste*. The power of disgust also fascinates Jackson, as expressed in what I term her aesthetics of distaste. Distaste, considered as a special instance of taste, generate intensities which may be harnessed in art. Part of my aim with this chapter is to put taste back into theoretical and aesthetic treatments of eating. In so doing, I follow Carolyn Korsmeyer in insisting that taste has well established, although rarely acknowledged, philosophical implications. By way of introduction, I draw out some of these implications.

First of all, the sense of taste brings out the essentially multisensory nature of perception. While other sensations are possible to isolate and experience one at a time, tasting necessarily involves smell and touch. Taste is involved with smell to the point where the two can hardly be told apart: without smell, only a few basic tastes can be recognised. However, it is not simply a question of adding smells to the taste experience since smelling without tasting does not release the same aromas as when something is smelt from inside the mouth (see Korsmeyer, *Making* 3-4). In some research, the term “mouth sense” has been used to refer to the combination of “taste, olfaction, chemical sensitivity, temperature, and touch” (Korsmeyer, *Making* 83). The touch involved in taste can be further specified as texture, moisture, weight, irritation and even pain, to which can be added the sound of the food when sucked or chewed. Even though sight might incite one to taste, in the actual tasting sight is precluded, since the object tasted is hidden inside the mouth or at least too close to be in focus. One might close one’s eyes while savouring a taste in order to shut out irrelevant sense impressions, but stopping up one’s ears or nose or numbing one’s tongue would rather detract from the taste experience. In sum, taste is inextricably intertwined with smell, touch and to some extent hearing. Rather than attempt to artificially isolate taste as such, I want to make a point of this multisensory interplay.

Taste is also obviously intertwined with ingestion, which makes it the most intimate and invasive of senses. As such, it is potentially erotic, violent and disgusting; three themes that will run through this chapter. The erotic aspect of taste lies in the fact that the only thing tasted by adults besides food tends to be sexual partners. While infants explore all kinds of new and unknown objects through taste (that is, through their full “mouth sense”), adults learn to restrict tasting mainly to edible substances. As Korsmeyer puts it, “taste is not a convenient means to explore most objects” (*Making* 99), partly due to the risk of contagion or poisoning. She further observes: “The objects of taste are taken into one’s own body: they *become* one. Because tasting and eating alter one’s very constitution, their exercise requires trust” (Korsmeyer, *Making* 189). Sexual encounters are about trust and about wanting to intimately know the other to the point of merger, which opens up for mutual tasting. The sensual pleasures of the “mouth sense” also makes it particularly suited to be involved in erotic enjoyment.

While erotic tasting is generally benign, involving mutual licking, sucking and playful biting but no actual chewing and swallowing, there is a strongly violent side to taste as well. Many feminist writers have critiqued masculine scopophilia and detached visual mastery, and often proposed the intimate involvement of touch as a feminine alternative. Seen from another angle, however, knowing by seeing is benignly non-interfering, leaving the object seen intact, while touch can, but need not, entail doing violence to it. On the

opposite end of the scale from vision, taste requires not just mutual contact but non-mutual incorporation and even destruction (Kilgour 6-7), which is perhaps why it has been a less attractive model of knowledge for feminists. What is tasted is possessed, transformed and often destroyed, rendering it difficult to share or re-experience sensations of taste. Tasting involves particularly invasive forms of touch and smell and puts the taster as well as the tasted at risk, though not equally so. The taster has to open up to the object tasted, allow it inside, or at the very least stick out the tongue, a mucous membrane and part of one's insides, in order to taste it, risking poisoning, nausea or discomfort in the process.

The risk involved in tasting leads me to the third and final aspect I want to highlight: disgust. Disgust may act as a safety precaution, causing indigestible substances to be spat out or vomited. However, disgust is much more than a reflex. What elicits a disgust reaction is not necessarily harmful on a physiological level, or vice versa. Often disgust is a moral response to a religious or social taboo. Even though disgust makes itself felt as an immediate gut reaction, it is only rarely provoked by the actual content of the guts. It may come as a belated response to what is already "irretrievably chewed, swallowed, and become part of one's own physical fabric" (Korsmeyer, *Making* 191). Although disgust may be elicited by other sensations than taste, particularly intense disgust reactions result from the fact that taste involves such intimate contact with and even incorporation of the disgusting substance. However, as I shall argue more extensively later in the chapter, disgust is not simply a matter of repulsion and rejection. There are degrees and varieties of disgust, some of which are willingly endured. For example, disgust may be part of aesthetic enjoyment or add a thrilling flavour of nastiness to sex.

Paradoxically, disgust is cultivated within gourmet culture, alongside other aesthetic qualities which would seem to detract from rather than heighten the pleasures of the palate. In the early modern banquet, as described by Denise E. Cole, food was dyed unappetising colours and visually transformed into surprising shapes such as monsters and human beings. A roast might appear to be covered in worms, or live animals could be trapped in coffin-shaped pastries. Some artworks made of foodstuffs were hardly fit to be eaten, and were instead given as gifts to be preserved, or distributed to the starving poor. In their surrealist recipes, Carrington and Remedios Varo picked up the tradition of composing food dishes which were more conceptually interesting than necessarily delicious (Classen, *Color* 136). Contemporary high cuisine may be more concerned with visually appetising and tasty food, but many of its flavours and textures nevertheless require cultivation of the sense of taste in order to be properly appreciated. Gourmands need to get over any initial food aversions and learn to distinguish between subtly different aromas. Pain or discomfort caused by

hot spices, bitter herbs, tart juices, fermented aromas and rough or slimy textures may add to the taste experience. This suggests that taste, like smell, is infinitely more complex than a simple matter of like or dislike. Different kinds and degrees of distaste may be relished as part even of ordinary eating habits. Few eat their favourite foods every day and the appetite for variation drives people to leave their gustatory comfort zones and seek out new taste experiences not immediately pleasing (see Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 61-85). Furthermore, there is “a cognitive dimension” to taste which is often denied or neglected even in the writings of gourmet culture (Korsmeyer, *Making* 4).

Thus, the mundane necessity of eating already involves an aesthetic component of choosing, combining and savouring tastes. However, no matter how complexly cultivated taste is within food culture, the aesthetic potential of actual taste is limited by factors such as availability and cost of foodstuffs, hygiene restrictions, toxicity, individual tolerance, appetite and hunger. Here is where literary phantom tastes come in. Within literature, where no actual ingestion – or indigestion – is involved, there is a greater freedom to explore the aesthetic component of taste. Authors can go further than chefs in their experimentation with conceptual tastes and distastes, leaving concerns of edibility behind (see Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 57). The phantom tastes I discuss in this chapter are not all strictly speaking tastes, but involve other perceptions and conceptions surrounding food and eating.

In the first section of this chapter, I explore the notion of tasting as an intuitive, intimate form of knowing through Jackson’s short story “Egg.” This discussion then leads on to a special instance of tasting as knowing in the second section: that of devouring books. Jackson picks up the idea of language as mother’s milk from *écriture féminine* and gives it a twist by adding other, less tasteful body fluids such as vomit. While Cixous emphasises the flow of oral language, paradoxically in printed form, Jackson is preoccupied with language in the “stagnated” form of textual artefacts. By describing books made of cheese (the stagnated, processed product of milk) and the ingestion of paper and ink, she toys with the conception of books as ephemeral objects of consumption.

In the final three sections, I draw upon Patricia Parker’s discussion of the rhetorical figure of dilation and Korsmeyer’s discussion of aesthetic disgust to propose an aesthetics of distaste. I argue that Jackson, like Barnes before her, finds inspiration in Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* for her development of a dilated and distasteful form of feminine writing. The aesthetics of distaste implies a lack of taste in the abstract sense created, among other means, through an excess of taste in the concrete sense, especially such tastes as are considered in especially bad taste, such as fatty and sugary tastes. This aesthetics function by drawing attention to distasteful subject matters which affects the reader viscerally and disturbs the Kantian ideal of detached aesthetic appreciation. As Korsmeyer argues,

evoking disgust is a particularly effective means of “bypassing the paradox of fiction” and making the reader react as strongly to the virtual stimuli of literature as to actual sensory stimuli (*Savoring* 56). Thus, the reader is made to taste – if only through a sensation of disgust - greasy and syrupy phantom tastes making “reading as eating” more than metaphor. However, the aesthetics of distaste creates a friction which qualifies the figure of reading as eating into a reading as tasting: instead of swallowing there is a virtual licking of the text.

Tasting as Knowing

It was a bit like chewing on my own tongue. It tasted like I tasted, tasting it, like the taste of taste itself, before it had anything specific to taste. But imagine you had never tasted that before. (Friend 57)

Despite, like smell, being commonly considered a “lower” proximity sense giving rise to immediate, idiosyncratic reactions rather than aesthetic satisfactions or intellectual considerations, taste has at least two established abstract meanings besides the literal one. The first and most obvious is that of aesthetic taste, the second lies in the figure of tasting as knowing. Etymologically, the Latin root of the words sapience and sage, *sapere*, means both to taste and to know (Classen, *Worlds* 59). Although in contemporary English, visual and tactile words for cognitive processes by far outweigh gustatory ones, the notion of tasting as knowing appears quite frequently in English literature. As in the case of smelling as knowing, this knowledge is usually figured as intuition reaching beyond deceptive appearances, rather than as conscious reflection. An example is Don DeLillo’s *Ratner’s Star*, where a scientist after drinking from an underground river feels “no special need to see it, photograph it or take samples home to study. He had *tasted* it, after all” (373). Tasting the river gives him a deeper knowledge of it than normal scientific procedures of documentation and laboratory analysis could, since in tasting the river it becomes part of him on a molecular level. Tasting can of course give concrete information about the properties of a substance and has been part of earlier scientific practice, but here the information conveyed deals with the abstract nature of the river. The taste of the water is not specified; the concrete qualities emphasised are instead its temperature, the pain caused by its cold and the factual ingestion. I argue that such multisensory involvement and hovering between metaphoricity and literalness is typical of the notion of tasting as knowing. On the one hand, it is an expression for a deep, intuitive understanding which does not necessarily have anything to do with the actual taste of the object understood (which may even be an abstract phenomenon, as in “a flavour of phony” (Body [fingernails])). On the other hand, literal tasting of inedible substances

is part of infants' oral exploration of the world and as such a basal, bodily form of knowledge.

Adults learn not to taste anything but food, except in erotic encounters where a mutual tasting may occur. Therefore, tasting as knowing is particularly relevant for the archaic sexual meaning of the word "know." In Jackson's "Angel," it takes the concrete form of cunnilingus, after which the protagonist "imagined he could tell her youth (she was nineteen) from the taste of her, and that she ate well and was not much of a drinker" (Angel 27). While the information gathered through this tasting keeps to the plausibly physiological, the erotic form of tasting as knowing is more often simultaneously abstract and concrete, involving physical properties which can actually be experienced via taste as well as secrets of the psyche. In Pynchon's *Vineland*, for instance, two men taste each other erotically via the woman they both sleep with. "You were coming in his face and he was tasting me all the time," one of the men tells her, referring both to the literal taste of his semen and to a more abstract essence of him which her body somehow communicates to his rival (214). This quotation already brings out the more sinister connotations of tasting as (erotic) knowing, made even more explicit in Richard Powers' *The Gold Bug Variations*, where a sexual encounter is described in terms of "tasting, achieving her, pressing, infecting, taking, joining, learning what she is" (258). In all of these examples, the knower is male and the known female (or in one case male, with the female reduced to medium), which invites feminist critique of tasting as knowing.

Indeed, taste has often been figured negatively as consumption, for example as a masculine devouring of feminine bodies or as the cannibalistic appetite of capitalist society, consuming ethnic diversity in the form of exotic foods (Probyn 82). Probyn shows how in Carter's analysis of de Sade, the sexual transgressions which have influenced the contemporary western view of sexuality at large are built upon the idea of treating bodies as meat and "eating the other" in a fashion which ultimately only serves to "reinforce the inward-looking, isolated and alienated subject." This model of sexuality is reinforced rather than questioned by Carole Adams' radical feminist vegan critique of meat consumption as allied with the patriarchal consumption of female flesh. According to Probyn, Adams's stance is not ethical since her "no" to flesh is as puritan in its policing of borders as de Sade's "yes." Instead, Probyn proposes a Deleuzian model of eating and sexuality as "practices that open ourselves into a multitude of surfaces that tingle and move," in which "flesh confuses the limits of what we are and what we eat, what or who we want" (70-3).³⁹

³⁹ Probyn provides a convincing critique of Adams' moral stance, but does not offer an alternative solution to the ethical dilemma of carnivorousness. Her Deleuzian ethics of openness and transformation remains vague about the exploitation (of humans, nonhuman animals and the environment) involved in food production and

I take Probyn's Deleuzian model of eating as the starting point for my consideration of the tasting as knowing motif in Jackson's "Egg." In an interview, Jackson expresses a similar interest as Probyn's in eating as a liminal process troubling the boundaries between subject and object: "If consumption is a particularly strong theme in my stories, that's because swallowing and being swallowed literalize this metaphor of crossing a boundary between self and other. What we eat becomes us. What eats us we become" (Jackson in Nunes, "Written"). That consumption is a "strong theme" in Jackson's work is no exaggeration: eight of the stories collected in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* feature ingestion of the title substance, and all thirteen feature some reference to food or eating. In "Sperm," "Cancer," "Sleep," "Blood," "Milk," and "Fat" eating entails a quasi-mystical incorporation of the eaten substance's qualities. But it is in "Egg" that the themes of eating as becoming and tasting as knowing are most prominently explored and problematised.

The central premise of "Egg" is that (human) eggs mysteriously appear outside bodies and grow to enormous proportions. Going by food-related names such as "God-pudding," "the Great Pumpkin," "the Cheese Ball" and "the Vegetable Meat" (Melancholy 22), these eggs, like food in general, are both mystical and mundane. They are made of a unique substance that cannot be simulated by "a haunch of beef" or "blood and barley" but which can be put to any purpose from "very passable sandwiches" to fitting nourishment for convalescents (Melancholy 17, 22, 16). Through eating the egg, the characters ingest some of its mysterious vitality and come to increasingly resemble it, becoming plump and rosy and bald. So far, "Egg" confirms the idea of eating as a merger in which the eating subject takes on qualities of the object eaten.

However, when looking closer at the protagonist Imogen's quest to merge with her egg, the notion of eating as becoming is troubled. Imogen is not content to resemble the egg; she wants to know it in the intimate sense of tasting as knowing. Provoked by the fulfilment the egg seems to promise yet withhold, she is "jealous of the flies that licked its crown, the ants that were already tasting its effluvium" (Melancholy 21). But when she finally, ceremoniously, cooks and eats a piece of the egg herself, the taste proves "lainty" (Melancholy 21-2). The answer she seeks is not to be found in the taste of the egg, or if it is, the message is that there is nothing special about the egg as such, that it is all in the desires she projects upon it. The tasting changes nothing for either Imogen or the egg: "The missing piece grew back. I was unchanged" (Melancholy 22).

consumption. While Jackson's work does not directly address these ethical concerns, it problematises Probyn's account of eating as a transformative experience opening up the eater to the other.

Prior to her encounter with the egg, Imogen used taste to demarcate her identity. The reference to a “veggie burger” (Melancholy 10) suggests that she was a vegetarian, in Probyn’s terms a person saying “no” to certain kinds of food and struggling to uphold boundaries between edible and inedible, good and bad. In eating a piece of the egg’s flesh “the size and shape of a minnow,” which “spat and flung itself about like something cooked alive,” she transgresses her own boundaries of taste (Melancholy 21-2). However, this transgression is not enough to transform her ingesting body into the kind of mutating Deleuzian assemblage Probyn describes (17-8). Kilgour notes that the trope of tasting as knowing often entails a dream of absolute separation transformed into absolute unity: a subject engulfing an object and making it part of itself (9). This is Imogen’s dilemma: tired of being a subject relentlessly defending her identity against influence, she tries to become a passive object for the egg’s divine manipulations.

Not only does Imogen wish to know the egg; more than anything, she wants it to know her – to acknowledge her, accept her, transform her, respond to her efforts, in short, to taste her in turn. She forcibly tries to have it engulf her by crawling inside it in a gesture resembling a sort of rape or reversed birth. The erotic connotations of tasting as knowing are evident in this scene – prior to crawling inside the egg, Imogen even sees it as “a bride in a beautiful dress” (Melancholy 24). While she is inside the egg, there is an “intermission” in the narrative in which two films presenting alternative visions of the engulfing egg are described. In the first, a loathsome old *femme fatale* egg devours a little girl, and in the second, a fair maiden is carried away into the sky in a benign egg. Here, the erotic devourer is feminine: implicitly the fantasised vagina dentata which is only the flipside of the same coin as the masculine sadist.⁴⁰ Imogen takes on the masculine role of tasting, probing and penetrating the egg in order to know it, and then of throwing herself at its mercy and begging it to act the cruel mistress and devour her: “I would drop my bones in an instant to leap to your mouth in one soft, elated blob. I could be yolk, albumen, and water; I could be the most delicate syllabub, scented with rose water and cardamom. I am Turkish delight. I am marzipan, taste me, take me!” (Melancholy 30). But to Imogen’s great disappointment, the egg does not taste her, or if it does, it does not find her taste enough to its liking to digest her. If there is a response, it is inscrutable, perhaps imperceptible, to human consciousness. In this, the egg embodies “the inert, the unproductive, and the radically *different*: that which cannot be comprehended, enlivened, rendered fertile or dynamic,” which Colebrook argues has been ignored by feminists eager to reclaim the body and celebrate material agency (“Becoming” 59).

⁴⁰ The devouring feminine will be discussed further in the section on dilation.

“Egg” brings out the spiritual as well as the erotic aspect of tasting as knowing. The description of the egg as a bride suggests an alchemical “marriage” of substances, at least in light of a later, overt reference to alchemy: “oh how our alchemists must coax and wheedle the thing to kindle spirit in it, and then whoosh goes the vapour out the chimney, leaving behind a bit of treacle in a jar” (Melancholy 29). Imogen forcefully tries to “marry” herself to the egg, but no alchemical transubstantiation or sublimation of matter occurs. According to Kilgour, “[s]ublimation aims at transforming a material base on the premise of a division between a lower, outside, bodily and material form and a higher, inside, mental or spiritual content” (17). Thus, the concrete experiments of alchemy were still based on a division between matter and spirit according to which material qualities were clues to spiritual essences. Similarly, Imogen reads the material qualities of the egg as clues, hoping to find the secret of transcendental union.

A central form of alchemical sublimation is the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (Morrison 112). Imogen’s ceremonial ingestion of the living flesh of the egg recalls the ingestion of the Eucharist. Just like Imogen transgresses her own prohibition against eating meat for the sake of spiritual union, the Christian dogma of the Eucharist cancels the taboo against cannibalism (see Morrison 79). The symbolical cannibalism of the communion, as well as literal cannibalistic practices, aim to sublimate matter into spirit (Kilgour 17). “While the appearance, ‘the accident’ of the bread, may seem unchanged by the words in the mass, in fact the ‘substance,’ the ‘real’ essence of the accidental dough, becomes God’s body. Our physical body tells us one truth, but the truth of faith teaches us another reality” (Morrison 80). The point of eating God is to know Him in a visceral way which leaves no room for doubt, as David Hillman explains:

Christ’s offering of himself as bread, to be incorporated physically *into* the bodies of the believers, is the central symbol in Christianity of the mutuality of access to the interior of the body of the other, whether this other is human or divine. The absorption of Christ’s body into ours (in the Eucharist), and vice versa – human access [...] to the interior of the *Corpus Christi* – together obviate the problem of the other, preempting any skeptical doubt about the possibility of access to the interior: there is literally no room no space within, for doubt. (Hillman 85-6)

Imogen attempts this with the egg, but in her case the physical proximity cannot abolish her skepticism and transform her into a believer. While for some saints, faith might turn the bland taste of communion wafer into the sweetest flavour, for Imogen, the egg remains linty.

Imogen might have had better chances at a transformative experience if she had taken the sensual qualities of the egg at face value rather than as signs to be interpreted. “Egg” can be compared to a passage in *The Story of Mary MacLane* where Mary MacLane’s autobiographical persona enjoys an

olive. Here, tasting as such is an intense aesthetic experience. MacLane does not look for meaning beyond the “bitter, salt, delicious” flavour of the olive but attends to it so intensely that “[t]he fair earth seems to resolve itself into a thing oval and crisp and good and green and deliciously salt.” What makes this exercise in gourmandise stand out is MacLane’s description of her tongue being ravished by the olive, her stomach singing its praise and her gastric juices kissing it (60-2).⁴¹ In Jo Croft’s formulation, as MacLane tastes the olive, it “also somehow ‘tastes’ her insides,” rendering her conscious of her inner organs (222). While for Croft this operation is carried out by language, with the olive as a linguistically mediated focal point for MacLane’s autoerotic self-tasting, I rather see it as the kind of transformative eating experience Probyn advocates. Eating is for MacLane a meeting and mingling of substances: morsels of olive and her digestive organs. These substances are not demarcated as strictly material, however: the olive enters her “body and soul.” More importantly, body and soul are not distinct parts of the process, as in alchemical transubstantiation; instead she claims to have “conscious chyme” in her stomach (MacLane 63-4). This can be compared to Imogen’s quest for transcendence, which leads her to dismiss the subtle physical changes offered by the egg as a “spa treatment” while nevertheless being resentful of others who show signs of them (Melancholy 30, 32).

“Egg” drives tasting as knowing to its logical conclusion. Imogen tries to make Probyn’s move from eating as “a confirmation of identity” to eating as losing oneself in “a wild morphing of the animate and the inanimate” (8) but this proves to be easier in theory than in practice. Probyn might be right that eating entails physiological processes of expansion and change, but the question is how such facts work to alter a firm sense of identity. As Jackson puts it, humans are by nature “curious and fond” and “built to slump, trickle and run,” but taught to practice obduracy and permanence from an early age. Imogen is so successful at the encouraged imitation of a stone that can pass through the digestive system unchanged that she remains “gnarled and dense, like the pit of a peach” inside the “sweet flesh” of the egg (Melancholy 29). Ultimately, the only way Imogen can have the egg transform her life is by accepting that it will remain an unknowable other.

Jackson’s achievement in “Egg” is to give the reader a phantom taste of Imogen’s existential dilemma. By insistently foregrounding the sensual qualities of the egg, Jackson counteracts the allegorical or metaphorical interpretation of it. The egg is explicitly presented as an allegorical symbol, but Jackson tests the limits of allegory by dwelling on the concrete details of this physical manifestation. She treats the egg’s material properties as non-

⁴¹ As a foretaste of the connection I am later going to make between (dis)tasting and queer sexuality, this scene can be compared to the protagonist of Winterson’s *Written on the Body* describing the clitoris in cunnilingus as a “pungent and green” olive, 137.

arbitrary and meaningful, which produces a different effect than allegories concerned only with ideational content. The procedure may not make the abstract concepts more *comprehensible*, but it makes them *perceptible* as the fleshy, rubbery, resilient, tepid, slick and sticky texture of the egg. This is a literary phantom taste in the wide, multisensory sense of taste, heavy on tactile qualities. The way the egg yields its clear liquid or a piece of its bland flesh and then heals without a trace gives a phantom taste of Imogen's frustration.

Eating Books or Licking Language?

Little by little, the pages of books were removed and replaced with slices of cheese. (Cat)

A special instance of tasting as knowing is the related figures of tasting language and incorporating texts. The connection between oral language and taste is brought out in the common expression "to taste a word." Although words have no actual taste, I would argue that this expression is more metonymical than metaphorical, since the movements of the tongue common to speaking and eating are part of the mouth sense. While written language does not have this close relation to taste, the act of reading is frequently figured as consumption. This figure may simply refer to voracious reading, but is often used negatively to denote a mindless incorporation of negative stereotypes, as in Jackson's reference in an interview to "those women who have swallowed the notion that they had better devote themselves to the fuzzy or edible arts" (Jackson in Ley, "Women"). This statement might seem to echo Wittig's dismissal in her essay "The Point of View" of *écriture féminine* as being "like the household arts and cooking" (60). However, while Jackson may share Wittig's lack of enthusiasm for the "edible arts," she is very concerned with literature as edible. In her work, "swallowing a notion" is not used dismissively but interrogated with fascination as a physiological process. There are at least three facets to this theme, to which I devote this section. The first is the notion, obviously inspired by Cixous, of language as mother's milk. The second is the idea of writing or speaking as a tasting of language. The third is the figure of eating books as a literalisation of the consumption of literature.

In "Coming to Writing," Cixous writes that she was "raised on the milk of words" and that if she "tasted anything, it was the stuff of speech" (Cixous, *Coming* 20). She describes writing as breastfeeding her mother tongue as well as herself with "the milky taste of ink" (Cixous, *Coming* 12, 31). Jackson clearly echoes this rhetoric in the patchwork girl's statement that "[w]hen I write my left breast sometimes dribbles the milk of invisible children" (Patchwork [graveyard/trunk/left breast]). However, rather than simply repeating Cixous' ecstatic celebration of writing as giving birth and having breasts overflowing with milk, she problematises it in the story of the

breast's former owner, Charlotte, who lost six of her eight children and "filled a quill-pen at her nipple and wrote invisible letters to the dead babies" (Patchwork [graveyard/trunk/left breast]). For Charlotte, the "overflowing" of milk comes at the expense of the dead children, and the writing she does with it is limited to private letters of mourning, while for the patchwork girl, the mere "dribble" of milk plays only a minor part in her writing.⁴² Clearly, then, Jackson does not simply endorse Cixous' model of writing as a natural emanation from the maternal female body.

When milk appears as a figure of maternal abundance in Jackson's work, it tends to be displaced from the female body, as I showed in the previous chapter. In "Here is the Church," the nursing relation is denaturalised as a daughter feeds her sick father milk, and even more denaturalised as the smell of milk mingles with his body odour so that "she could not now taste evaporated milk without the feeling that she was taking her own father into her mouth" (Church 93). "Here is the Church" reads like a condensed, successful version of the scenario in "Egg": the protagonist first takes in her father metonymically through breathing in his smell of milk and then enters another world through a mouth-like orifice in his side.

"Flat Daddy" is a more obvious rewriting of *écriture féminine*, in which milk retains its association with language but not with the maternal body. Here, the figure of feminine abundance with "milk [...] running from his paper heart" is the narrator's father, who is described as "a small white father, a milk father, no big cheese" (Flat 275). Language is figured as milk in the image of "a mouth running with milk" (Flat 279). This nourishing, substantial milk language is contrasted to the impoverished masculine language of power, embodied by the "Flat Daddy" who speaks only in clichéd catchphrases. The protagonist escapes the Flat Daddy and rejoins her milk father by squeezing herself "through the hole in the hedge in the hole in the sentence" of her own writing (279). Since language is figured as milk in the story, entering an orifice in language implies being swallowed in turn by what you swallow, the pattern familiar from "Here is the Church" and "Egg."

Apart from associating milk with the father instead of the mother, "Flat Daddy" adds a further twist to the milk language of *écriture féminine* in its treatment of cheese. "Milk messages run through me, my ABCs are thick and white. I will spit cheese, eventually," the narrator states (Flat 275). By adding cheese to the milk, Jackson emphasises the processed nature of literature and problematises the idea of language gushing like a body fluid. The narrator does not just see a mouth running with milk, suggesting oral language, but also "a page like a slice of cheese, intimate and culinary" and "a block of cheese called a book," suggesting written language and especially the

⁴² In my MA by research thesis I develop the comparison and argue that Jackson performs a clear critique of *écriture féminine* in this passage.

artefact of the book (Flat 279). Cheese is more densely material than milk and a more distasteful figure for language, especially when conceived of as *human* cheese. James Joyce, whom Jackson references with her mention of kidney and of a “portrait of the artist as a young cheese” (Flat 278, 280), wrote of cheese as “[c]orpse of milk” (J. Joyce 110), which fully brings out its distasteful potential.⁴³ Thus, when Jackson adds cheese – and “goop” – to the milk of language, she makes it part of her aesthetics of distaste.

“Egg,” “Here is the Church” and “Flat Daddy” all describe the difficult passage through the tight orifice capable of expanding to encompass something seemingly much too large, like a bodily sphincter. The passage may resemble a (reversed) birth but equally other forms of expulsion or penetration and is not reducible either to psychoanalytical notions of returning to the womb or to Cixous’ imagery of feeding the nourishing mother in turn, though doubtlessly informed by both. I see in Jackson’s repeated reconfigurations of the engulfment theme a Deleuzian fascination with what a body can do, with its untested capabilities for sensation and action. This is no individual, psychoanalytical body with its organs and erogenous zones clearly mapped out but a provisionally assembled body with orifices opening anywhere (in language and in the world at large) to taste and take in. However, Jackson’s experimentations are no simple celebrations but equally explore the pain and frustration of failed attempts to produce intensities, such as in Imogen’s encounter with the egg.

Even in a subverted form, the milk of *écriture féminine* is not the most prominent form Jackson’s concern with the tasting of language takes. In “Consuetudinary of the Word Church,” Jackson reverses Cixous’ figure in two ways: instead of language being described as a bodily emission, bodily emissions are described as language production, and the nourishing milk is replaced by considerably less tasteful substances. In Jackson’s take on the obsolete consuetudinary genre, urine and excrement are defined as “forms of concrete speech” and vomiting as an “early form of writing” (Consuetudinary 138-9). Similar to Cixous’ milk, this body language is both secreted and ingested: eating is described as “inward speech” which “should be pronounced carefully” (Consuetudinary 136). Tasting this body language is not limited to ingestion, however, since in vomiting it can be tasted in the emission, like words are tasted when uttered rather than when absorbed. When Jackson describes how the patchwork girl’s tongue “stirred up a rich and fishy stew of folly, poetry, gossip, heresy, and the news,” she reverses this image of vomit as language into language as vomit, although in a more

⁴³ The references are to the famous scene in *Ulysses* where Leopold Bloom enjoys kidney for breakfast, and to Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. See also Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 64, for a discussion of how disgust is cultivated as part of the gustatory appreciation of fine cheese: “The process of becoming-cheese releases bad smells, some of them resembling bile, vomit, urine, or even feces – all exemplars of the disgusting. Moreover, this is not just an unpleasant stage in the process, the traces of which disappear. The finished product often retains residues of those smells and tastes in all their mordant immediacy.”

covert form (Patchwork [graveyard/tongue/head]). Susannah, the former owner of the patchwork girl's tongue used to regurgitate language in exchange for food: one form of nourishment for another. The characterisation of this regurgitated language as "a rich and fishy stew" emphasises its taste rather than its meaning, creating a literary phantom taste of language. However, Jackson's phantom tastes are a great deal less tasteful than Cixous' maternal milk, more in the vein of Allison's "River of Names." "Dirty water rises in the back of my throat, the liquid language of my own terror and rage," says Allison's narrator in a similarly distasteful reconfiguration of Cixous' theme (13).

"My Friend Goo" is an elaboration of the idea of language as something to be tasted, not understood. The narrator tries to explain her understanding of language to her lover:

"Mr. Fox, sir, I won't do it," I said, "I can't say it. I won't chew it."

"Wha-hic?"

"Say it, chew it – as if they were the same thing. The tongue twister is, like, *stuff*."

"What stu-hic-uff?"

"Goo. You have to chew it." You were steering me backwards into your room. "Like the Goo-Goose," I added, as you pushed me onto your bed.

"So chew it," you said, and put your tongue in my mouth. (Friend 52)

The narrator equates speaking and chewing, emphasising the mouth feeling of language and comparing it to "stuff." Her lover unwittingly proves her point by having her speech interrupted by nonsignifying hiccups, and silences her by giving her something else to taste – a tongue. The tasting of words gives way to an erotic tasting but to the narrator the two are not really separate since she conceives of language too as material. The scene resonates with an erotic encounter between a female and a parasitic male of a species of marine worms in "Hagfish, Worm, Kakapo": "She stammered around me like an epileptic mouth. She spoke me in: I became Fred Ted Ed, a counting rhyme or riddle song, the chaff of unmeant words" (Hagfish). The opposite movements of emitting words and ingesting food are conflated in the figure of speaking *in*. The female does not speak the male; she unspeaks him: stripping him of his individuality and absorbing him as part of her. Language ceases to signify and becomes stammering, rhyme and riddle, a theme I shall return to in the chapter "Hearing Hallucinations."

Through her complex reconfigurations of the relation between language and taste (vomiting as writing, eating as speaking, saying as chewing),

Jackson performs a deterritorialisation of language. In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari argues that “language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth” from the activity of eating (19). Deterritorialised from the sense of taste, language is reterritorialised as “an instrument of Sense” in its representational use (20). Jackson again deterritorialises language by replacing signification with mouth feeling and other sensory qualities. She also deterritorialises the technology of writing in her experimentations with putting it to different uses than as a vehicle for linguistic communication. When discussing how questions from conceptual art might be imported into literature in an interview, she speculates: “What if we focus not on the denotative qualities of language but on its mouth feel? The taste of ink? The properties of paper?” (Jackson in Rettberg, “Written”) Ironically, most of her experimentation with such questions is virtual, happening on the denotative level of language in her literary works.

In *My Body*, the protagonist describes how she took being “a voracious reader” literally, tearing off the corners of pages and chewing them while reading. Having a taste for books, as for other substances considered inedible, is diagnosed “a nervous ailment,” but she refutes this diagnosis. She simply enjoys the taste of books and becomes “quite a connoisseur of the different flavours and textures” of paper, some of which are lovingly detailed. While she understands her urge to ingest books as a token of her affection, the more sinister aspect of ingestion is brought out by her being labelled “a vandal and a hooligan” for eating books (Body [vagina]). While a book can be re-consumed in the figurative sense of being reread, literally consuming it prevents further consumption in both senses. The protagonist’s urge to consume books in both senses at once allows her a fuller, multisensory reading experience, but destroys the idea of the immortal work of literature surviving in the enduring artefact of a book. The sensory engagement with the book necessary for reading (holding the book, turning the pages, tracing the rows of letters with the eyes...) is ideally supposed to leave minimal traces. While the occasional food stain, dog ear or margin note may be forgiven, tearing off and ingesting pages is definitely crossing the line. *My Body* tests the limits of reading as consumption and draws attention to the tension between the approved consumption of the immaterial and therefore inextinguishable work, on the one hand, and the inappropriate treatment of books as consumable objects, on the other.

An additional tension is created by the fact that *My Body* is an electronic hypertext published online, barring the reader from repeating the gesture and ingesting Jackson’s words in turn. Even if the reader were to print the text and eat it, the significance of the book as a unique art object with a history would be lost and the taste experience reduced to the monotony of fresh printer paper and barely dry toner. Instead of actually tasting the text, the reader is left to taste it virtually through reading. Jackson explains in an

interview how she employed the electronic hypertext form in *My Body* to prevent the reader from getting a clear overview of the work, forcing her or him to follow links from lexia to lexia in a “blind burrowing,” a “kind of sexual encounter, in which you are too close to get a view of the whole.” She calls this “[r]eading as licking,” a figure which emphasises how taste precludes sight, as the object tasted is either obscured inside the mouth or at tongue’s length, too close to be in focus (Jackson in “Writing”). Literally tasting literature prevents reading it, but in *My Body* Jackson tries to invent a form of reading-as-tasting by drawing the reader in close to the lexia – or body part – currently read and prevent her from stepping back and using the distance sense of sight. The erotic encounter between reader and body of text staged by Jackson is parallel to Stewart’s description of the “melting words” of erotic poetry which imply “taste as incorporation” and aim to keep the beloved “beyond compare,” that is, too close for visual comparison and accessible to the proximity senses of taste, smell and touch (*Poetry* 32). In *My Body*, the protagonist’s intimate encounters with books do not stop at the mouth, as she wishes to “taste” books through her anus and vagina too, reasoning that “[i]t wasn’t a big leap from eating books to sticking them up me, a page at a time” (Body [vagina]).

While in *My Body*, the protagonist consumes both the content and the material of the book as part of her reading experience, in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church,” the two forms of consumption are severed. The book appears as a ritualistic fetish object to be chewed, not read. The “Founder” of the Word Church shares with the protagonist of *My Body* the juvenile habit of tearing off corners of books and chewing them to pulp (and the scorn of librarians), a practice which “primed her for the passage of spirits” (Consuetudinary 143). In the Word Church, the passing of material messages through bodily orifices is worshipped and ritualised in ways deprivileging conscious communication. The bodies of disciples are made to perfect the pronunciation of incomprehensible syllables, sometimes swallowed as inward speak, and to materially absorb language. Ink is “placed with eyedropper on the tongue,” the letters of the alphabet “swallowed with water every day, like a vitamin” and books “chewed into spitballs” (Consuetudinary 147, 143). The consuetudinary stipulates:

The School shall masticate any book (exclusive of its binding) supplied by members of the Cheesehill community without regard for content, and shall return to the members a bolus or spitball from any designated page or, if unspecified, a page of the chewer’s choice, of no less than one half inch in diameter, to be delivered moist. (Consuetudinary 149-50)

Such spitballs are significant objects signifying nothing. They draw their significance from the book’s status as a cultural artefact yet in the chewing redefine this significance to emphasise physical characteristics (size,

moisture) and disregard “content” (the immaterial work, rendered illegible). What is brought out by this quotation is not “reading as eating,” as eating the book precludes reading it, but rather “eating as reading”: the body’s largely unconscious “reading” of the sensory data and chemical properties of the pulp and the transformation of the material masticated.

Throughout her work, Jackson shows a fascination with the physiological processes attached to experiences of art and language but not normally considered part of them. She explores phenomena such as forming sounds without communicating or eating books instead of absorbing their content. Simultaneously, she relies on the communicative function of language to perform these explorations, as the majority of them take the form of literary texts rather than for example performance pieces or conceptual art. I believe this is because an artwork consisting of the performance of eating a book would bring the issue out of the literary sphere altogether and lose the paradoxical charge of simultaneously challenging and employing denotative language. The challenge is directed to literature and would be made irrelevant in an art form already concerned with other, often more overtly sensual, ways of engaging with a work than reading it. Jackson’s treatment of the literal ingestion of books is an experiment in importing insights from taste to literature. By literalising literary consumption, Jackson brings out the perishable nature of the book as material artefact and contests the notion of the immortal, immaterial work. This move brings literature a step closer to the highly transient culinary art, and suggests that actual taste need not be excluded from high arts and aesthetics just because it does not conform to the standard of the durable work.

Dilation

Here’s what I think: she’s buried treasure, tricky with ghyphs and gold. She’s salt of the earth, sugar and spice; she’s a brick outhouse, with curtains; she’s a long stretch of unmarked beach where something great has washed up. She’s ridged like a palate, and her wet parts are tongue colored, but she’s not just a rubbery friend for the mouth. Name your pleasure: gobs of boneyed poppyseed, form-flattering swimwear, aviaries, a radiant plastic bag flouncing in a tree, rumps being cornholed, sardines: that’s her. You have no idea how big she is. Even naked she never unfurls all the way, though you curry her till she purrs. (Gallows)

While dilation has more to do with the result of taste upon the body than with taste itself, I find the figure of dilatio crucial to Jackson’s and Barnes’ particular aesthetics of distaste. Barnes and Jackson both draw upon Burton’s dilated treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in order to create a style which is distasteful in its dilation. Lingel does not comment on Jackson’s allusion to this previous literary anatomy in her article “The Body Indivisible,” to my knowledge the only previous study of *The Melancholy of Anatomy*. Instead, she interprets the title as “an emotional response to an abstraction of the body,” that is, as melancholy caused by the reductive

anatomical mapping of the lived body (81). I understand the title as, besides playfully reversing the order of Burton's, paying homage to his humouralist understanding of melancholy as a temper or affect residing not only in human psyches but in bodies themselves and even in their anatomised parts. Rather than viewing Burton as the masculine anatomist whom Jackson necessarily critiques, I view him as an inspiration for a feminine, dilated style.

According to Patricia Parker, the Renaissance rhetorical figure of dilatio was used to capture an assemblage (my term) of textual expansion, digression, deferral, fecundity, voluptuousness and seduction coded as feminine. Although dilation was considered a useful tool for "fleshing out" one's arguments when used with moderation, it also posed a danger of an effeminate style; rhetorical handbooks advised readers to put "swelling" texts on a "diet" and rid them of "grossness" (P. Parker 14). A dilated style was associated with dilated – fat or pregnant – female bodies with dilated – unchaste or talkative – orifices.

Within the Christian tradition, women's appetites for food and for words have been connected since Eve, who literally ingests forbidden knowledge, and frequently takes the form of women greedily munching on juicy gossip (see P. Parker 33; Trotter, *Cooking* 247). Michèle Roberts provides an example with her servant women gossiping while preparing food: "They took any subject and made it manageable. They sucked it and licked it down to size. They chewed at it until, softened, it yielded, like blubber or leather, to their understanding" (*Daughters* 70). The abovementioned Susannah, former owner of the patchwork girl's tongue, is Jackson's take on this figure; her mouth a dilated orifice promiscuously taking in food and drink and letting out words. The suggestion that she has sexual relations with women makes her "dilated" in the sense of being sexually promiscuous too (Patchwork [graveyard/tongue/head]). These characters are not simply fat gossips with a taste for food and words alike. The specific figuration of words as food connects to the idea of tasting language discussed in the previous section and suggests a linguistic style as rich as the food and as dilated as the women. In descriptions of women munching, sucking and chewing on gristle, fat or blubber, aesthetics of distaste and dilation are combined.

Patricia Parker briefly maps how the female embodiment of dilation has survived the rhetorical figure associated with it, appearing later in literary history for example in Wallace Stevens' "Fat girl," Beckett's female "Mouth" and Joyce's Molly Bloom, whose concluding monologue in *Ulysses* resists narrative closure. She also notes how in *écriture féminine* the misogynist idea of female speech as dilated has been turned into an object of feminist celebration (P. Parker 32, 34). Writers of *écriture féminine* have celebrated dilation in the sense of voluptuousness and fecundity but not, I would argue,

the “grossness” of fat female bodies. Barnes and Jackson, however, explicitly draw upon Renaissance rhetoric to do just that.

As Kilgour demonstrates, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is a hugely dilated text, full of rambling sentences and digressions, aiming to incorporate all knowledge on melancholy, that is, all knowledge, since everything is melancholy. Burton’s relation to his myriad sources is one of eating rather than stealing: by digesting and incorporating the work of others he allows them to “have their cake and let him eat it too” (Kilgour 164). The incorporated material “dilates his own mind and that of his readers” so that they do not have to feed on themselves (Kilgour 165). But ultimately, after “having subsumed everything and digested it to a single undifferentiated lump,” the melancholy mind still revolves around itself (Kilgour 154). Kilgour sums up the oscillating tendencies of the work thus:

It describes a vision that is intensely incremental, that denies change and refuses loss, adding more and more material as if it could get everything inside of itself. Yet its only hope, a hope which it fears is vanishing, is that there still is something it cannot know and contain, some genuine image of alterity outside the self with which it cannot be identified, and which has not been contaminated and consumed by melancholy. (Kilgour 166)

While Jackson and Barnes draw upon Burton, Burton in turn draws upon the already somewhat outdated genre of the literary anatomy, making his work similarly eccentric and untimely. Rather than mimicking a clearly delineated body with its parts explained in logical order, however, he writes an anatomy “that is huge, open, and structured on a basic ambivalence” (Kilgour 152). Kilgour describes Burton’s work as “almost medieval, a recreation of a grotesque body that attempts to recapture an oral tradition” (Kilgour 166), a description confirmed by Susan Signe Morrison’s assertion that “[t]he book, like the body, was not seen as ‘closed’ in the Middle Ages.” The marginalia of medieval manuscripts tended to depict grotesque bodies defecating or urinating, conflating the borders of the book and the borders of the body spilling over with waste matter (Morrison 104-5).

Kilgour does not make a connection between the dilated, grotesque anatomy of Burton’s text and the feminine, but other scholars such as Paster have shown how the open, leaky body tends to be feminised (*Body* 23-63). For Kilgour, Rabelaisian grotesque in Burton’s work functions as a positive antidote to the melancholy “desire to plug up holes and, effectively, to idealize the grotesque body” of the book (160). As Paster points out in her critique of Bakhtin’s influential reading of Rabelais, however, the grotesque body in Rabelais’ *Gargantua* is sexed according to Renaissance medical understandings, and the active, carnivalesque force of *Gargantua* is celebrated at the expense of his mother Gargamelle’s passive pain and humiliation (*Body* 208-14). In a similar vein, Sheryl Stevenson has shown how Barnes in

Ryder performs a critique of the Rabelaisian-Bahktinian effacement of sexual difference as an effacement of women and their suffering, while at the same time harnessing the powers of the carnivalesque to feminist ends (90-1). I would add that the multiplication of fat and/or pregnant female bodies in *Ryder* not only thematises Rabelaisian grotesque but also dilation.

Several scholars have noted Barnes' eccentric recycling of historical forms and genres. Caselli employs a discussion of *Ladies Almanack* to "reconsider the often-mentioned influence on Barnes of sixteenth-century drama, seventeenth-century comedy of manners, and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*" (41). She argues that Barnes "fabricates tradition as a ragbag, by referring to *L'Imagerie Populaire*, chapbooks, and almanacs" and uses this genealogy of low, popular genres as "the means to resist the centrality of author and plot" (Caselli 57, 46). Various mechanisms of the text "point somewhere else: outside the text (context), towards other media (woodcuts, music), and towards other genres and historical periods" (Caselli 57), or, as I would put it, incorporate these "elsewheres" into an open-ended, dilated work paying homage to Burton's anatomy. While according to Caselli, *Ladies Almanack* refers to historical intertexts which "fail to be the sources of explanations or revelations" (57), Whitley finds similar mechanisms at work in the stylistic excess of *Nightwood*, in which "complex imagery often seems to point at nothing" (85). Alternatively, they "offer a plethora of signification, meanings in excess of the reader's ability to digest them" with much the same result (Whitley 81). I take this stylistic excess to indicate an aesthetics of distaste working through dilation in order to create a plethora of sensations exceeding signification.

Unlike Whitley, Dianne Chisholm explicitly connects Barnes' visceral style to the Renaissance discourse of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The connection is made primarily through the character of Doctor Matthew O'Connor, a transsexual gynaecologist and obstetrician without a licence who "dispenses a radical heterodoxy, compiled of a multitude of folk wisdoms – Irish blarney, queenly drollery, anecdotal gossip – mixed with loose allusions to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and other textual sources, most of them 'obscene'" (Chisholm 191). As Chisholm observes, the doctor's "dilatatory meditations" do not represent authoritative knowledge and do not present medical or sexological diagnoses of his fellow characters (176). He might be read as a critique or subversion of masculine medical authority, but I view him rather as a fond caricature of Burton's dilated textual persona. Just as Burton is carried away by digressions and fails to provide an orderly anatomy, O'Connor is intensely invested in the bodies he studies. Analogously, the anatomy of *The Melancholy of Anatomy* is an interested, animated and fragmented one.

Jackson tends to describe the excessive, hybridic style of writing she appreciates and wants to practice in terms strongly reminiscent of the

feminine figuration of dilatio. In an interview, she characterises Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as "a gone-to-seed belle of letters wobbling voluptuously in the shadow zone between literature and nonfiction, original and plagiarism, science and religion," while her own *The Melancholy of Anatomy* "aspires to the same territory, though it's a lot skinnier." She further reinforces the implicit association to dilatio by describing sentences as "mouthfuls" (Jackson in Grant, "Shelley"). Similarly, in her paper "Stitch Bitch," she compares "good writing" to "the infamous 'thin person struggling to get out'" while "bad writing inspires the same kind of distaste that bad grooming does" and is "[l]ike flaccid beauties in a harem" (Stitch). In this figure, Jackson captures the whole assemblage of dilated style: "flaccid" suggests bodies that are too large and too loose, while "beauties" suggests that they still have the dangerous power to seduce, underscored by the sexual promiscuity suggested by "harem," and finally the harem of beauties in the plural suggests a general excess. An idea of the feminine as other can furthermore be read into the orientalist notion of the harem. The feminine style she describes is certainly other to conventional standards of taste.

Although "skinny" in scope compared to Burton's three volume treatise, *The Melancholy of Anatomy* dilates itself through its intertextual relation to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. It also dilates visceral figures and expressions from Burton into stories. "Dildo" figures dilation as a dilated orifice, that is, as an expansion around an emptiness rather than as stuffing or filling out. Posing as "Excerpts from: A DISCOURSE CONCERNING DILDOES," allegedly published in 1678, it consists of bibliographical information, an "epilogue" and an "index" to the fictional publication (Melancholy 84). Although only eight pages long, "Dildo" is stylistically excessive with its paragraph-length title promising "THOUSANDS OF EXAMPLES," its archaic, mock-scholarly style citing real and fictive authorities, its longwinded sentences and its oddly juxtaposed series of examples. A short actual text dilated around a much more extensive, virtual treatise, it thematises the dilation of real bodily orifices around the virtual desire of the dildo. This is not to say that actual dildos are not real or to set up a real/unreal opposition between the organic and the prosthetic, only to say that in "Dildo," dildos function as placeholders for all kinds of fantasies, pleasures and desires. According to one of its characteristic lists of attributes:

A doll may be a dildo, or a pillar of salt; there are dildoes of wrought iron, of brick, of water, of stitched horsehide packed with straw, of knotted string, ink, and ice, of gears turned by a tiny water wheel, of hint or innuendo, tar, sugar, and sal ammoniac, of vanity, of lamb's wool, of pig's bladder, of giant blocks of sandstone smoothed by the passage of time, of stuffed tapirs, sundials, mirrors, or bridges. (Melancholy 86)

Again, as in my reading of Barnes, the dildo does not represent the endless deferral or disavowal of lack but a dilation of desire to encompass more and more objects, real or virtual. The hole in the middle of a dilated orifice is not psychoanalytical but phenomenological, an absence of flesh making the inside walls into a surface for sensations.

In “Egg” the figure of dilation is a gargantuan egg with “each cell wall [...] healthily distended around a fat globule” (Melancholy 21), encapsulating feminine fecundity in its perfectly dilated, spherical shape. But the egg also has more sinister connotations to the engulfing female. Imogen, whose ambivalent relation to the egg I have already discussed, has a nightmare in which her friend Cass turns into the egg:

I dreamed Cass grew fat, shiny, red. As she waxed, the egg waned. At last she was almost spherical, a powerful figure, staring like an idol. The egg was the size of a malt ball, and she picked it up and popped it in her mouth. Then she turned toward me and opened her arms. Her sparse hair streamed from the pink dome of her skull, her eyes rolled, her teeth struck sparks off one another, and her hands were steaks, dripping blood. Now I knew her. She was the egg. I turned to run, but her arms folded around me, and I sank back into her softness, and awoke pinioned by my comforter, on the side of the bed. (Melancholy 33-4)

The dream reflects Imogen’s secret passion for Cass and fear of having her individuality obliterated by her. Cass asserts her dominant personality through arbitrary expressions of taste which Imogen conforms to. The egg presents a welcome alternative of indiscriminate, wholesale engulfment which Imogen is afraid that Cass will appropriate. But as the dream indicates, there is also a lurking fear that the egg is not an alternative at all but merely another version of Cass, as in Kilgour’s pessimistic view of dilation as subsuming all differences under sameness.

Imogen’s mixed fear of and fascination with the engulfing female might be read as masculine, in line with Jackson’s tendency to contrast feminine dilation with masculine loathing or restraint. Examples of such masculine figures are Boney in “Fat” with “his knees a-clacking, his ribs going rat-a-tat-tat, and an oboe for a nose” (Melancholy 171), the anorectic George in “Nerve” who wants to “carve off [his] own flesh in strips, leaving only the nerves” (Melancholy 79) and the Flat Daddy warring “against milk and mouths, fat and goop” (277). However, to this sexed dichotomy Jackson adds male figures of dilation such as seeds “thrusting from a happily split waistcoat (proud fat men of America!) the pale prong of progress” (Patchwork [story/seagoing/America]) and “Fatty the Fatman,” a snowman made of fat whom the female protagonist of “Fat” sinks into and later devours (Melancholy 170). The most elaborate example is Jackson’s description of Harvey, a former *Little Red Riding Hood* doll whom the Jackson sisters transformed into a lecherous would-be Casanova in their doll games. Jackson devotes a long journal entry to this doll and particularly to

musings on how his grotesque baby doll proportions inform his new character and vice versa. In a dilated meditation upon his oversized head she describes it as a “pregnant fleshy pod or sporiferous cap,” a single swollen testicle,” a “maternal head great with child,” “a big cyst,” an “egg sac,” “the dry paper balloon of a puff ball,” “a bubble of sour gases, probably poisonous, or a boil full of toxic fluids,” and, finally, as being “full of helium or laughing gas” (Doll [fungal]). With such figures of fatness and fertility who are neither clearly masculine nor clearly feminine, Jackson also queers dilation.

An Aesthetics of Distaste

It's interesting, though, that there are aesthetic satisfactions to be had in, loosely speaking, crap: the rattle of phlegm in the throat, the shine and firmness of some turds, much nicer than the raggedy look of others, and fat, too, that offal, is sometimes, oh, marvelous – a trembling, fragile, cream-colored gateau – while sometimes, I'll just say (to spare your sensibilities), less marvelous. (Fat 172)

As has been noted in previous research, the works of Jackson and Barnes deal to a great extent with subject matter considered distasteful and in bad taste, such as bodily waste. Lingel reads Jackson's *The Melancholy of Anatomy* as a version of écriture féminine working primarily through abjection and uncanniness (85) to create “sympathetic disgust and confrontational queerness” (77). According to Lingel, Jackson thematises the political oppression of queers and queerness by alluding to the related “tendency towards rejecting what appears to be illegible because it is distasteful” (87). While I do not wish to dispute Lingel's description of *The Melancholy of Anatomy* as a form of queer feminine writing, I find her reading of the function of distaste in the work overly reductive to the symbolical. In order to understand how Jackson employs distaste in a way not reducible to dominant contemporary models of interpretation, textual or psychological, it is crucial to consider how she, like Barnes before her, draws upon historical forms and genres.

Studies of Barnes tend to mention her allusions to historical intertexts as well as her tastelessness. Jane Marcus, for example, connects the two in proclaiming Barnes “the female Rabelais” (249). She argues that Barnes combines Rabelaisian scatology with “the morbid, uncanny grotesque of Hoffmann” into a form of feminist body writing later taken up by Joanna Russ in *The Female Man* and Carter in *Nights at the Circus* (Marcus 240, 235). Chisholm similarly characterises Barnes' style as “ejaculations of libertine gourmandise,” “excremental speech and unconsumable images” (186-7), descriptions echoing Whitley's formulation cited in the previous section. Apparently, something about Barnes' style – what I describe as her aesthetics of distaste – elicits such critical gut responses and alimentary modes of description. Her writing is commonly described as both dilated –

“in excess of the reader’s ability to digest” (Whitley 81) – and distasteful – “scatological” or “excremental.”⁴⁴ In order to elaborate upon the aesthetics of distaste, I first discuss how distaste and its sibling sensation disgust are related to art and aesthetics via taste in its abstract as well as concrete sense.

It is my conviction that “taste” used in the aesthetic sense will always recall, however vaguely, the concrete meaning of “taste,” and that this is true for “distaste” as well. “Disgust” too is haunted by taste through its shared etymological roots (from the Latin “gustus”) which, although not necessarily recognised by English speakers, nevertheless informs the conceptualisation of disgust. Miller argues that taste has been overemphasised in the theorisation of disgust due to this etymology (1-2). However, this assumes a “pure” physical disgust which may be disentangled from its conceptualisation. While I do not believe that affects such as disgust are determined by the terms used to designate them, I view affects and language as mutually constitutive. Therefore, although I agree with Miller that there is much more to disgust than literal distaste, I think that taste plays a special role in the constitution of disgust. As a case in point, facial expressions of disgust tend to mimic the refusal or disgorging of food. In this section, I use the term “distaste” to isolate the gustatory component of disgust and show how Jackson and Barnes emphasise it in their aesthetics of distaste.

According to Miller, the notion of “disgust” emerged in tandem with “taste” in the abstract sense during the Renaissance. The cultivation of taste is really the cultivation of disgust at “the easy pleasure of the senses” in favour of more demanding aesthetic pleasures. Thus, taste in the sense of aesthetic discrimination is dependent upon the visceral sensation of disgust (Miller 169-70). In “The Endgame of Taste,” Denise Gigante makes another connection between aesthetic taste and disgust by demonstrating how the Romanticist cultivation of taste was turned into a modernist existential disgust in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre and Beckett. Kilgour argues that the development of aesthetic taste, with its “emphasis on choice and discrimination” serves to protect against the vulnerability of being dependent upon external nourishment to survive (9-10). The price of this protection of individual integrity, however, is a self who incorporates and assimilates everything, making it palatable (Gigante 188). Sartre and Beckett maximise the disgust with this all-encompassing self already present in Romantic poetry, evident for example in John Keats’ distaste for the “cloying” or “mawkish” sweetness of his own *Endymion* (Gigante 191-2). Beckett’s *Molloy* further satirises the cultivation of taste in Molloy’s connoisseurship of his “sucking stones” which all taste the same (Gigante 194-5), a satire which can be compared to the protagonist of *My Body’s*

⁴⁴ Caselli, on the other hand, insists that Barnes’ intertextual loans are not “specimens resulting from that ‘rank digestion’ satirized by Donne in a passage (marked by Barnes) mocking the poet as meat beggar,” 86.

connoisseurship of the different textures and flavours of paper discussed in the previous section (Body [vagina]).

Trotter, on the other hand, argues that for Sartre disgust, or rather nausea, is “the very taste of contingency” (*Cooking* 15-16) and opposes the sensation of nausea, the idea of mess and the figure of metonymy to the sensation of horror, the idea of waste and the figure of metaphor in 19th century literature (*Cooking* 198-9). For Trotter, disgust is associated not with symbolisation or meaning, but with the experience of mess, contingency and metonymical relations. He critiques the psychoanalytical understanding of disgust as standing in or covering up for desire, and instead proposes a phenomenological understanding of disgust as a purely negative affect (Trotter, “New” 40). Sianne Ngai shows a similar understanding of disgust as pure negativity and posits an aesthetics of disgust based on rejection against an aesthetics of desire based on inclusion. She cites Derrida’s understanding of disgust as the absolute other to the system of taste, an avant-garde negation of beauty which paradoxically partakes in the aesthetic it contests through its sublimity (Ngai 334). As Probyn points out, “[d]isgust is understood to violate the abstraction or distance that philosophies of aesthetics have long privileged” (133). Because of the immediacy and intensity of the disgust reaction, “it is as if representational distance vanishes when it comes to writing of the disgusting” (Probyn 138). This is true also for other immediate, sensual responses to art such as desire or appetite (Probyn 133). Without sharing Trotter’s and Ngai’s naturalising evaluation of disgust as purely negative, I agree that it is not best understood as a sign of desire, and that an aesthetics of disgust draws upon the asignifying, visceral intensity of the affect. In Jackson’s and Barnes’ work, this intensity is a positive force in the sense of being generative, not a lack or negation.

I base my understanding of distaste mainly upon Korsmeyer’s nuanced and serious consideration of aesthetic disgust in *Savoring Disgust*. Instead of viewing disgust as an extreme reaction of outright rejection, she argues that disgust, like any other emotion, “has many degrees, gradations, and subtleties,” though these may not be recognised by language, and that aesthetic disgust “can be confrontational, disturbing, pathetic, funny, gross, erotic, curious, and all manner of additional qualifiers” (Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 97, 100). While a lot of art, especially in genres such as horror, deploys disgust to cause a powerful gut reaction, varieties of disgust can also be part of a more cognitive art appreciation involving beauty, attraction and even tastiness (Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 9). Previous research on contemporary art suggests that female artists and writers especially tend to turn to food and eating in order to create artistic effects of taste and distaste. Rosemarie Betterton, for example, analyses feminist body art dealing with food and appetite as an investigation of specifically female forms of abjection (138). In her study of food in women’s writing, Sceats similarly describes the fat

female body as a cultural abject employed for its disruptive potential, though not unproblematically celebrated, by writers such as Margaret Atwood and Carter (91).

Sceats as well as Hertel single out Roberts for her gustatory fiction. According to Sceats, Roberts invokes “a particular female physicality, sensuousness and sensibility, all profoundly related to food” (129). Interestingly, Sceats argues that food is connected to a specifically female form of mess or contingency in Roberts’ work, thus making a similar connection as Trotter between visceral feelings (disgust or nausea in Trotter; the sensuousness of cooking and eating in Sceats) and contingency (127-9). Taken together with Probyn’s argument that gut reactions of appetite or disgust preclude aesthetic detachment, this suggests that neither taste nor distaste “means” in the consciously metaphorical way of traditional aesthetics, or at least that they exceed such meanings. The specific form of sense they make is of a different, metonymical and contingent, order.

Hertel cites Roberts’ “aim of creating a culinary text whose pages have the graininess of porridge, or polenta, or purée of chick peas” (144). Sceptical about the possibility for authors to “evoke gustatory experiences in the reader,” he suggests that the “gustatory reaction” of disgust is more easily accomplished through writing than any taste experience (Hertel 161, 149). He concedes to “a writing informed by the gustatory,” exemplified by Roberts’ “hungry” syntax with breathless commas replacing conjunctions or full stops, and colons opening up to engulf the following sentence (Hertel 161, 142-4). Due to the “jumpiness, free association, and sensuousness” of Roberts’s style, he characterises it as an example of *écriture féminine* (Hertel 136). While I do not find Roberts’ style more “jumpy” or associative than many other contemporary mainstream novels incorporating modernist stream-of-consciousness techniques, I agree with Hertel and Sceats that she dwells to an unusual degree upon sense experiences and sensory qualities such as the taste of food, and that this can be characterised as a form of feminine writing. Her preoccupation with cooking and eating borders on the so-called “food porn” of cooking shows and cookbooks, a genre which, like pornography, has the intention of sensually arousing the reader or viewer. Although it works in a slightly different way from what I term aesthetics of distaste, arousing more pleasant sensations, it similarly contests the Kantian high art ideal of aesthetic detachment.

Jackson’s aesthetics of distaste is amply represented in *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, as brought out in this diary excerpt from her book tour:

A woman said after my reading, “That was the most beautiful writing about something completely disgusting I have ever heard.” I was surprised. I am always surprised when I am reminded that my stories are disgusting, though obscurely pleased. I have misplaced my own sense of disgust writing this book. Or, I have come to see disgust as a reservoir of sensation I can use to power my stories, like a battery. (Tour [Day 3])

Jackson shows a similar appreciation of the aesthetic potential of disgust as Korsmeyer. In their view as well as mine, the visceral intensity of disgust may “power” a work without overpowering it and literally repulsing the reader. As suggested by the reader reaction cited, Jackson successfully employs disgust as part of an aesthetics which may also be characterised as “beautiful” without completely sublimating the former into the latter.⁴⁵ What I term aesthetics of distaste entails the aesthetic appreciation of various nuanced sensations while crucially retaining the visceral intensity of disgust.

While the most extreme example of aesthetic disgust in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* may be “Phlegm,” where people express their emotions through phlegm bubbling out of a vent in their throats, “Fat” stands out as the story most obviously joining distaste with dilation. Its protagonist defies her husband’s notion of taste through wearing a dressing gown he hates, with roses “big as cabbages, shameless as a beaver shot” (Melancholy 171). Everything about this image is dilated: the roses blown up out of proportion, the cabbages too large to bite and the beaver shot depicting a shamelessly spread-open vagina signalling voracious sexuality. Besides being tasteless in the sense of vulgar, the floral pattern resists the aesthetic sublimation of sensual appetites in its emphasis on food and sex. Jackson does not merely draw upon bad taste for shock value but performs an earnest literary interrogation into the possible aesthetic values of substances and phenomena deemed distasteful.

“Husband,” Jackson’s most sustained and serious experimentation with an aesthetics of distaste, does however not belong to *The Melancholy of Anatomy*. The protagonist of the story describes herself as “a lady drone and a big eater” defending her “tribe” against the mass of food welling in and threatening to cover their land (Husband 158). Vaguely humanoid, the features of her anatomy highlighted are those functional in her task of “chowing”: her flawless digestive system, muscular jaw, vomit pouch and sets of prosthetic teeth. In the all-female universe of the story, girth is a badge of honour showing great chowing skills, and the protagonist looks up to a retired “chowhound” called “The Doberman” and rumoured to have saved a whole borough from the “floods of food” (Husband 160). Secretly, however, she dreams of a “husband,” a sort of skin worn to perform “husband functions” and preventing its wearer from performing the task of chowing since its “small mouth cannot admit food that is not first chowed and spit up to him by a wife” (Husband 164). As in “Fat,” the husband appears as an embodiment of a masculine principle opposed to feminine fat and (dis)taste, animated by the female protagonist rather than possessing any agency of his own. The protagonist of “Husband” resolves the conflict

⁴⁵ Korsmeyer affirms that “in some cases, even disgust itself lies at the heart of an experience of beauty,” *Savoring* 177.

between her secret desire and her devotion to chowing by stuffing her husband skin with food like “a sort of haggis” and presenting it as a sacrificial food offering to The Doberman (Husband 166), a gesture which hardly dispels the tension between conflicting tendencies or provides narrative closure.

What resonates in the reader upon reading the story is a world almost entirely made up of the distasteful yet dignified task of eating through masses of assorted food. The reader is made to marvel with the protagonist “at the way the body does things on its own,” how it might “imperiously unfold even further, like a flower in its season” (Husband 165). Her moment of doubt comes when chewing “a thick mass of gristle” which nauseates her and makes the bones of her head ache. At first she feels like she is “eating [her] way toward something,” but the sheer material mass of the gristle wearies her and prevents her from investing the task with meaning (Husband 161). Her moods are physical and digestive: moments “swollen-bellied and gray” contrasted to a feeling of anticipation “as still and heavy as a hamper of food on the hatch at dawn awaiting the imprint of a new tooth” (Husband 164, 159). “Husband” encapsulates the aesthetic deployment of unsublimated distaste in a specifically dilated form.

In *Nightwood*, Barnes combines dilation and distaste in an especially Burtonesque or melancholy fashion. A character in *Nightwood* who finds Doctor O'Connor's speech obscene and disgusting attributes his disgustingness to melancholy (Chisholm 177). This attribution makes sense in light of Miller's description of melancholy as a disgust with life, including of oneself, which is indulged in rather than feared and avoided. According to Miller, this misanthropy especially takes the form of misogyny and loathing of the feminine fertility associated with dilation: “Disgust with sex and women, with generation, with mutability and transience prompts a black humor, both in our sense of the term and in theirs as the black bile of melancholy” (Miller 28-30). In a sense, then, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* partakes in a particular form of aesthetics of distaste, disgusted with its own dilation while dilating itself endlessly in order to perpetuate the disgust proper to melancholy. Like *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, *Nightwood* is in some sense a melancholy text, and as such a dilated anatomy of distasteful subject matters. Like Merrill Cole, I resist reading the novel as melancholy in the contemporary, psychoanalytical sense of loss or lack, although I also resist Cole's recuperation of it in terms of Lacanian jouissance (400). In my view, the stylistic excess functions as dilation, not deferral, creating plenitude rather than covering up for lack. It may be that the plenitude is a plenitude of distaste, but distaste understood as positivity, not as the negative opposite or absence of taste.

Importantly, neither Barnes nor Jackson employ distaste for shock value only. For them, distaste does not repel or push away but draws the reader in

close to the matter at hand through sympathetic distaste, close enough to marvel at the workings of the body and its sensations. Barnes' tender treatment of distasteful body matters is perhaps best exemplified by Timothy's dilation upon the virtues of his "Light-O'-Love": "Thy sickness and thinness, thy fat and thy lean, thy gristle and gravy, thy blood and thy bone" (Barnes, *Ryder* 133). At such moments, Barnes writing approaches Wittig's declaration of love for lesbian anatomy in all of its gory details in *Le corps lesbien*. If Barnes' and Jackson's aesthetics of distaste is successful, it succeeds in doing away with representational distance in favour of a direct sensory engagement with the text. In the following section, I shall investigate their aesthetics of distaste more closely through a focus on the tastes of fat and sugar.

Phantom Tastes of Fat and Sugar

When he could not help himself but eat, when it was someone's birthday and everyone sang and there were cupcakes with candles on them, he learned how to make himself vomit up the sweet sludge before it stuck. (Melancholy 74)

As part of their aesthetics of distaste, Jackson and Barnes employ tastes which are in especially "bad taste": those of fat and sugar. Some may argue that fat is not (or does not have) a taste, but Massumi cites research showing that its perceived "lack is a surfeit" and that it in fact (unlike the basic taste sugar) stimulates a vast majority of taste buds. This leads Massumi to name fat "the actual double of the virtuality of taste, its empirically appearing phantom" (153). Rather than a no-taste, fat is the exemplary phantom taste. More specifically, fat and sugar suggest feminine (over)indulgence and lack of control over the body's appetites and contours: a dilation of the mouth leading to a dilation of the body. However, it was not until (trans) fat and (refined) sugar became commonly available and part of a working-class diet that they were consistently devalued. In the early modern intertexts to which Jackson and Barnes turn, fat and sugar were valued signs of prosperity, if also criticised as sinful luxuries.

Fat and sugar are distasteful in a phenomenological sense: by being tasty they incite to overeating which in turn incites distaste (see Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 63-4). As with all foodstuffs, texture plays into the taste experience, and the textures of fat, when greasy, and sugar, when syrupy, belong to the distasteful category of the viscous. The viscosity of honey or syrup is reminiscent of the viscosity of oil or grease, and the richness of both substances tends to produce fat bodies. Jackson's expression "honey-fattened water" (Melancholy 129) captures the perceived greasiness of sweet substances. Grease has, on the one hand, the connotation of being slippery, of sliding down too easily, and on the other hand, the connotation of being sticky, of sticking too hard to the body. "Greasing" or "sugaring" something

makes it easier to swallow, but once swallowed it sticks and is hard to get rid of. As Miller argues:

Fat, oil, and syrupy sweetness structure the concept of cloying. [...] We believe our system not to be particularly efficient as a self-purifier with things that cloy, the very word attracted by alliteration to sister concepts of “clinging” and “cleaving unto” that make things hard to get rid of. Fat and sweet stick like glue and like the host of other nauseating things we think of as greasy and sweet. (Miller 121-2)

In Miller’s account, the literal stickiness of fat is deeply intertwined with the metaphorical stickiness of the disgusting, a point which Ahmed picks up on in her analysis of stickiness, arguing that “the sticky surface and the sticky sign cannot be separated through any simple distinction between literal and metaphorical.” Unlike Miller, and unlike Sartre who describes slime as inherently disgusting *because* sticky, Ahmed is careful not to ascribe a quality of disgusting stickiness to anything. Rather, she argues that the stickiness of signs as well as surfaces is created through contact with other sticky signs or surfaces. As an example of a sticky sign, she mentions “disgust,” which sticks to the thing designated as “disgusting” with more or less success depending on that thing’s previous stickiness (Ahmed, *Cultural* 90-4). Applying Ahmed’s argument to fat and sugar, these substances are disgusting because they are sticky and sticky because they are disgusting, in a mutually reinforcing loop between the conceptual and the experiential.

Moreover, the particular variety of disgust or distaste sticking to fat and sugar is intertwined with dilation and with the feminine. The connection between fat and dilation should be obvious, while sugar comes into the picture through the cloying sweetness of sexual seduction leading to the dilation of bodily orifices (and potentially of the female body in pregnancy). Furthermore, like “sweet-talk” slips in through the ears, the sticky and slippery fluids of sexual arousal function like grease to facilitate penetration. According to Grosz, Sartre and Mary Douglas both associate “clinging viscosity with the horror of femininity, the voraciousness and indeterminacy of the *vagina dentata*,” a figure clearly recalling the feminine embodiment of dilatio. Like Ahmed, Grosz is careful not to essentialise the connection between viscosity and femininity, pointing out that “it is the production of an order that renders female sexuality and corporeality marginal, indeterminate, and viscous that constitutes the sticky and the viscous with their disgusting, horrifying connotations.” She cites Luce Irigaray’s claim that viscosity, fluidity and femininity are all unrepresentable within a dominant ontology concerned with self-identical and solid substances (Grosz, *Volatile* 194-5). Viscosity is not the same as fluidity, however.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Indeed, this point could be part of Irigaray’s argument about fluidity not being self-identical but encompassing a sliding scale of differences. However, my point is that viscosity is more “other” than liquidity to dominant ontologies. This can be transferred to the discussion of femininity: while for Irigaray, femininity

While fluids might contest clearly defined boundaries between entities, fluidity has a fairly well-defined conceptual position as the opposite of solidity. Viscosity is more troubling in being in-between the binary opposition of fluid and solid. The purer and more liquid a fluid, the less distasteful it is. Water does not stick, stain or contaminate, as more viscous fluids tend to do. Cixous' interchangeable fluids milk, ink and language *flow*, they do not stick or cling like Jackson's fat or Barnes' syrup. If fluidity is feminine, viscosity queers the feminine.

As my discussion of stickiness and viscosity suggests, I understand the phantom tastes Jackson and Barnes create as part of their aesthetics of distaste as tastes in the multisensory sense including tactility. The different textures of lard, suet, honey and syrup play into the literary phantom sensations at least as much as fatty or sugary tastes in the strictest sense. In Jackson's "Fat", for example, fat accumulates like dust on every surface, gradually filling up space unless cleared away, presenting a problem of stickiness and viscosity rather than of taste as such. Jackson dilates the matter of fat until it takes over and fills the protagonist's entire milieu, popping out her windowpanes and coating her garden. The result is an intensified sensation of fattiness combining visceral distaste with the shame of being fat in a fat-phobic society and the defiance developed in response to the shaming. Crawling around her house "frosted all over with fat, like a despairing cake," the protagonist feels "a dog's satisfaction at obeying orders" mixed with "spite" at the thought of wilfully overdoing her husband's projected image of her as a fat lady (Melancholy 171). She becomes what he projects, but her becoming exceeds submission and provides her with a certain pleasure in the abundance of fat, which coats her and leaves her "shining like a gold medal" (179). "Fat" does not celebrate or reclaim fat in any easy way, but its amplification – or dilation – of this distasteful subject matter has the performative effect of drawing the reader into its fat-filled world. It produces a phenomenological experience of fat in all of its different cultural, symbolical, affective and sensory aspects.

The reader is made intimate with fat through the gut reaction of distaste. Neither Trotter's and Ngai's description of disgust as producing simple rejection and distancing nor psychoanalytical descriptions of the dual pull of desire and disgust are very helpful in describing the aesthetics of distaste at work in the story. Instead, I agree with Korsmeyer (*Savoring* 37) and Probyn

is the unrepresentable other to masculinity, represented only as a negation of masculinity and never as true otherness, I take a more Deleuzian interest in the multiplication of differences in-between. Deleuze and Irigaray agree that within dominant philosophical traditions there is only difference *from* (humanity, masculinity, heterosexuality etc.), but I find Irigaray's emphasis on the difference between *two* – masculine and feminine – limiting. In my view, it mirrors too closely the heterosexual binary it critiques, figuring the encounter with absolute otherness in the familiar terms of a sexual encounter between human subjects. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the feminine is the other closest to home, the first step of a process of becoming-other involving all kinds of inhuman and nameless differences.

(133) that disgust in itself, rather than an underlying or conflicting desire, pulls the reader in close to the disgusting through a form of visceral affinity with it. Disgust or distaste need not be pleasant, exactly, in order for the reader to affirm the intensity of the affect as part of the aesthetic experience. Michelle Meagher, drawing on Probyn, argues that the painter Jenny Saville employs an “aesthetics of disgust” to produce a visceral reaction in the viewer which alerts her to her own embodiment and precludes viewing the “disgusting” bodies in her paintings from a safe distance (38). Similarly, “Fat” reminds the reader that fat is not safely contained in those bodies designated as “fat.” The audience response Meagher describes works via identification, however: in being made aware of her own body and of the fat-phobic self-disgust experienced by most women, the viewer becomes sympathetic to the fat bodies portrayed (38). I would argue that in “Fat,” the aesthetics of distaste works less through identification with its fat protagonist (though it certainly does not preclude it) and more through a phenomenological immersion in fat. The text is saturated with fatty words and figures: “Yes, my fat hat is as tall as your saguaros! Yes, my gown is oleomargarine and hydrogenated!” (Melancholy 169). A similar, less identificatory, reading could be made of Saville’s painting, as Saville tries to make paint behave like flesh (cited in Meagher 37) and thus could be said to directly confront the viewer’s flesh with the sensation of flesh, rather than present her with a disturbingly fleshy object of identification which then in turn prompts her to reflect upon her own flesh.

Burton writes that all authors are thieves who “lard their lean books with the fat of others’ works” (1:23), and Jackson lards “Fat” with the fat of Burton’s dilated work through the intertextual connection. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* sticks to her story, dilating it and making it fatter than any text could be on its own, no matter how extensive. But more importantly, Jackson dilates rhetorical figures such as Burton’s into stories, amplifying their visceral intensity. When the protagonist of “Fat” addresses her missing husband: “you who took me for better or for worse, for saturated or unsaturated, who reveled in the ineffable textures of my lard, and whispered foul words to me: *buttery, oleaginous, pinguid, adipose,*” fat accumulates on the level of form as well as on the level of content (Melancholy 169).

In order to explain how “Fat” is a fat text in more than a figurative sense, I turn to Ahmed’s definition of sticky signs as both literally and metaphorically sticky. Fat sticks, as Trotter observes in his discussion of the “phenomenology of slum textures” presented in the work of George Gissing (*Cooking* 255). The fried food emblematic of the (British) working classes is distasteful not because it tastes bad, but because its grease sticks to people and become part of them (Trotter, *Cooking* 243). Of course, the stickiness of grease is not the *cause* of the distaste; rather, stickiness and distaste mutually reinforce each other. Analogously, fatty words are sticky by virtue

of being distasteful. They stick to each other, to the things they refer to and to anything coming into contact with them, such as the reader, who may experience it as a greasy, bloated or nauseated sensation. It is this visceral encounter with the text that makes it fat in a more than metaphorical sense. I would add that stickiness is a textual effect, not a literary technique, though it can be harnessed as part of an aesthetics of distaste. Sticky signs tend to amass other sticky signs and generate their own dilation, as in this example from Jackson's "Hagfish, Worm, Kakapo":

Between breeding seasons is the time to drill into one fat flank after another and gorge ourselves to fuel our transformation. With fat globules popping out the sides of the mouth, we chew from the inside out, and do not neglect to scour the skin of the buttery layer this side of the scales or suck the bones clean, but we ignore the dribs, drabs and loose ends, that's how you get fat, dealing in gross profits and leaving the peskily evasive snippets for the small fry to go after, abandoning the deflating skins without regret. (Hagfish)

Jackson says in an interview that she prefers "writing that's a little hard to swallow" (Jackson in Amerika, "Stitch"), a statement pointing back to the "visceral difficulty" Meagher identifies in Saville's painting (Meagher 24). Although by "hard to swallow," Jackson indicates any kind of formal resistance drawing attention to the materiality of language, stories such as "Fat" are "hard to swallow" in the specific sense of sticking in the throat. An aesthetics of distaste involves the risk that the reader refuses to swallow, disgorging the text through the speech act "That's disgusting!" which according to Ahmed functions as a form of vomiting constituting the disgusting object by separating it from the incorporating subject (Ahmed, *Cultural* 94). I would like to point out, however, that the stickiness of the distasteful prevents the separation from being completely successful. The reader will have a hard time unsticking herself by sticking the label "disgusting" onto a text already constituting itself as distasteful.

What I argue about the stickiness of fatty texts is true for some sugary texts as well, especially those in which the sugary substance is also sticky. When the protagonist of "Egg," describes how the "syrup" secreted by the giant egg hangs from it "in sticky cords" (Melancholy 35), the aesthetics of distaste at work in the text is very similar to that of "Fat." However, sugariness has its own nuances. First of all, sweetness as such is not distasteful, although it can easily become cloying. In Jackson's work, it is positively associated with feminine bounty via the sweet taste of milk. The milk is however not located in a maternal body, but in the "sweet, clean, milky-mild" taste of a girlfriend's sex in "Angel" (27), in the buffalo-sized sperm producing "thick and sweet" "sperm milk" in "Sperm" or in "sweet white rivers" in "Milk" (Melancholy 43, 156). In all of these stories, sweetness is positively connoted. It is only in "Cancer," where the protagonist wants to

resist the feminine bounty of the cancerous growth in his living room, that sweetness becomes distasteful. Upon waking up to find a branch of the cancer growth stuck in his mouth, he relates:

A sweet taste was in my mouth and there was some sediment on my tongue, granular and faintly chalky, which made my teeth feel unfamiliar. I was breathing peacefully through my nose. I took the branch out of my mouth. I had hollowed out the cut end with sucking. Crumbling and dissolving bits like tea-soaked sugar tumbled out of it. The smooth skin was shiny with my saliva.

I set the branch down on the bedside table and carefully extricated myself from the bedcovers. In the bathroom I brushed and flossed, penitently, punitively, with a swollen heart. (Melancholy 67)

While the distaste in this description is mild, it is reinforced by the surrounding descriptions of the cancer as an alien, hybridic entity, part woman, part animal, part plant and part disease. The description of the protagonist sucking on the cancer while sleeping and “breathing peacefully through [his] nose” positions him as a child in relation to the “disturbingly womanly” (Melancholy 60) cancer providing comforting sweetness. He is disgusted with himself rather than with the cancer, feeling guilty and ashamed of its appearance. As the above passage shows, he cannot allow himself to indulge in the sweetness the cancer offers, but disciplines his taste for it through dental hygiene. Presumably, this action restores his teeth to their familiar state and eradicates the alien sweetness from his mouth.

The comparison of the sweet substance to sugar brings it a step closer to the distastefully cloying. As an amplification of sweetness, sugariness closes in on distaste without partaking in the stickiness of syrup. The sugary, or even worse, the saccharine, is an excessive – and artificial – form of sweetness. If fat carries connotations of sloth, sugar carries connotations of “sugar high” and “sugar buzz,” of particularly feminised forms of comfort food and bulimic behaviours. In the short story “Candyland” by Trinie Dalton (one of the writers mentioned by Lingel as Jackson’s fellow practitioners of *écriture féminine*, 79), the witch protagonist Candy foresees dying by “sweetheart attack, a.k.a. sugar overdose” after eating her gingerbread house. Dalton cleverly ties feminine binging on sugary candy to the witch luring children with sweets and fattening them up in order to cook and eat them – another figure of dilation. Candy resents her mother’s cannibalism but cannot resist the sugar addiction that comes with being a witch: “I hated the house, but I loved its sugar,” she says, “[s]ugary strings attached us” (Dalton). In its overdose of crumbling sugar, crunching candy and aching teeth, the story is quite likely to leave the reader feeling sugar-sick, even without the sinister connection to cannibalistic witches luring children with sweets and fattening them up. As such, it presents a sugary aesthetics of distaste complementing Jackson’s fatty one.

Sweetness is generally associated with beauty, the lower, feminine correspondence to the higher, masculine sublimity within classic aesthetic theory (Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 169). According to Winfred Menninghaus, a surfeit of beauty is sickening, just like a surfeit of literal sweetness: disgust thus functions as a regulator of aesthetic beauty, keeping it within the limits of good taste (Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 50). To describe a style of writing as sugar-sweet is thus to accuse it of being tasteless: exceedingly, femininely beautiful. When one of Roberts' protagonists describes her own voice as "[c]utesy-pie, gushy and silly," she sums up a compound of sweets, gushing body fluids and feminine frivolity to emphasise her self-disgust (*Playing* 153). Roberts' formulation is meant mainly to repel, but other authors such as Jackson, Barnes and Dalton work with a surfeit of sweetness in order to align their aesthetics of distaste even more closely to the feminine. While aesthetic disgust in horror and tragedy often borders on the sublime, the aesthetic disgust produced by a surfeit of sweetness is firmly aligned with the feminine frivolity of "low" genres such as romance novels.

As suggested by the reference to romance, sugared speech is suspect because sweet-talking is a method of seduction. As Sidney Mintz explains: "The Indo-European root *swad* is the ultimate source of both 'sweet' and 'persuade'; in contemporary English, 'sugared' or 'honeyed' speech has been supplemented with 'syrupy tones' and 'sweet-talking'" (116). In a notorious passage from *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes maximally exploits the connection between sweetness and sexual seduction in describing the style of love-letters between lesbians:

Nay – – I cannot write it! It is worse than this! More dripping, more lush, more lavender, more mid-mauve, more honeyed, more Flower-casting, more Cherub-bound, more downpouring, more saccharine, more lamentable, more gruesomely unmindful of Reason or Sense, to say nothing of Humor. Nowhere, and in no Pocket, do such keep a Seed of the fit on which to sneeze themselves into the fitting, they be not happy unless writhing in Treacle, and like a trapped Fly, crawl through cardinal Morasses, all Legs tethered and dragging in the Gum of Love!

And just as some others are foul of Tongue, these are sweet to sickness. One sickens the Gorge, and the other the Heart. For what can you, an a woman thus leans upon the purple, and so strews Blandishments that the clear Nature of Facts are either so candied and frosted to a Mystery, or so bemired that they are no find. Surely it is admirable to have a Fancy and a Fancy when in Love, but why so witless about a witty Insanity? It would loom the bigger of stripped of its Jangle, but no, drugged such must go. As foggy as a Mere, as drrenched as a Pump; twittering so loud upon the Wire that one cannot hear the Message.

And yet! (Barnes, *Ladies* 45-6)

Ironically, in her critique of the saccharine style, the narrator herself succumbs to it.⁴⁷ This is hardly surprising – sugar is a sticky sign even though not a sticky substance (unless melted). Once the narrator has started, the sugary words accumulate as though on their own accord: “dripping,” “honeyed,” “saccharine,” “candied,” “frosted”... She describes lesbian lovers as flies enjoying being trapped in treacle, though it appears that she is quite happy to writhe in treacly language herself. Ultimately, she has to pull herself loose, cut the sugary strings attaching her to the text like Candy to her gingerbread house, through interrupting herself with an abrupt exclamation. Yet this “And yet!” does not put an end to the saccharine speech but rather points towards its perpetuation. It can be read as an exasperated “And yet it goes on!”, despite being in such bad taste. More crucially, merged with this meaning, I hear “And yet it works!” The lesbian language of love goes on because it works, because it sticks to its recipients and pulls them in. It traps them like flies in treacle and they enjoy being stuck even when, as in the case of the narrator, the enjoyment is mixed with a sensation of distaste.

Scholars disagree on whether Barnes celebrates or critiques a specifically feminine language with this passage. Susan Sniader Lanser views it as pervaded with “[s]exual innuendo” providing an alternative model of female sexuality not based upon castration and lack (162), a reading supported by the connection between syrupy speech and gushing vaginal fluids. According to Frann Michel, “[i]rony and parody generate a (feminine) surplus which cannot be fully reassimilated to any (masculine) system; but the direction of this surplus in *Ladies Almanack* seems primarily affirmative; it becomes a feminist feminine.” The feminine surplus is exemplified by the narrator’s “And yet!” which exceeds and undoes her criticism of women (Michel 181). Caselli, on the other hand, resists such celebratory readings, which she argues overlook the ambiguous position of the narrator, “caught between the virile rigour of an empiricism which she cannot trust and a lavender sentimentality, which she cannot avoid reproducing” (52). In my view, Barnes’ – and her narrator’s – opinions on feminine or lesbian language are quite beside the point, the point being that the above quotation affirms such language in performing it. That she performs it in the form of a (self-)critique matters less to my argument than the fact that the critical, supposedly “masculine voice” identified by Caselli (50) is just as stylistically overwrought as the rest of the text. Much like Burton affirms melancholy by dilating endlessly upon it in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Barnes affirms the treacly language of lesbianism in *Ladies Almanack*.

The passage from Barnes suggests a connection between lesbian sexuality and the disgust of surfeit, as though two female bodies making love

⁴⁷ I perceive the narrator as an insider to the lesbian community she describes, and therefore use the female pronoun.

automatically implied a sickening excess of beauty.⁴⁸ This connection is strengthened by Nora in *Half Life* “throb[ing] with a sickening sweetness” when she and her conjoined sister Blanche are made love to by a woman (Half 42), and later describing the same lover’s sex as “silk and syrup” (Half 185). In Allison’s “A Lesbian Appetite,” the protagonist’s taste for women, marking her as sexually deviant, is intertwined with her taste for unhealthy, fatty and sugary food, marking her as “white trash” from the American South (162). In a scene of mixed cooking and lovemaking, the sex of her female lover is described as “slicker than peanut oil” and tasting “like fry bread – thick, smoked, and fat-rich on my tongue” (Allison 166). In another, more sinister, sex scene two lovers force each other to taste and swallow various body fluids such as vaginal discharge, urine and tears (Allison 169-70). While erotic tasting is a common literary theme, I bring up these examples because they are so clearly about what Korsmeyer would term “savouring disgust.” Unlike Winterson’s protagonist in *Written on the Body*, who claims that “[t]here is nothing distasteful” about the body of the beloved woman (*Written* 124), these lesbian lovers do not suspend or sublimate distaste.⁴⁹ Instead they allow it to intensify the sexual experience and indulge in an almost aesthetic appreciation of its nuances. An additional example from *Half Life* brings out the subtlety of erotic distaste(s): “Her sticky lips resisted, then yielded to my tongue, and I tasted stale smoke and sleep and salty butter and sardines and peppermint and her breath like a thought passing back and forth between us” (Half 184). These texts by Jackson, Barnes, Allison dwell on the cloyingly sweet and sickeningly fatty phantom tastes of femininity, forcing the reader to (dis)taste them.

Reading as Licking

I saw something no-coloured shining and flexing way back down, like a second, deeper tongue. The better to eat you with. Could it taste? (Friend 58)

This chapter started out with tasting as knowing, a trope with erotic as well as cannibalistic implications closely connected to engulfment. I used “Egg” as an example of the complex variations on the ingestion theme running throughout Jackson’s work. The simultaneous fear and desire of being devoured by the maternal body points forward to dilation, a concept especially related to fat or pregnant females with gaping, greedy orifices. Jackson and Barnes both draw inspiration from Burton’s dilated style in their creation of an aesthetics of distaste. This aesthetics break barriers of literary tastefulness by drawing upon visceral responses closely connected,

⁴⁸ After all, “purple prose” and “lavender love” share the same hue.

⁴⁹ To further emphasise the contrast between Winterson’s style and an aesthetics of distaste, the protagonist dismisses an unwanted female suitor with the words: “I thought of treacle. What would it be like to be caught in the wallow of Gail Right?”, *Written* 143.

though not limited, to the sense of taste. In particular, it draws upon an aesthetics of surfeit, where the text is dilated by fatty and sugary phantom tastes. Through working with aesthetic distaste resulting from an excess of (bad) taste, particularly an excess of sweetness, rather than with aesthetic disgust related to horror, death and gore, Jackson and Barnes further align their aesthetics of distaste with the feminine. Fat and sugar are doubly degraded as feminine and as working class, which is strongly brought out by Allison. The aesthetics of distaste I have outlined conflates the cloying sweetness of trashy genres such as romance novels with the cloying sweetness of trashy foods into a queer erotics powered by the disgust surrounding dilation.

The conflation of reading with eating goes much farther back than to *écriture féminine's* figuration of language as mother's milk (which in turn draws upon the older tradition of *Alma Mater*). When Cixous writes that she "nourished [her]self with texts" (20), she takes part in a tradition of regarding "knowledge as the food with which we feed our egos" going back at least to the Bible (Kilgour 9). As Kilgour suggests, the concrete act of taking something in to taste it serves as the basic model both for the taking in of less tangible sensory data and for the taking in of abstract knowledge, from Renaissance *imitatio* to Freudian introjection (9-10). In medieval literature to "eat a work, chew the cud" was portrayed as an alchemical transubstantiation analogous to that of the Host in Christian doctrine, but as Susan Signe Morrison points out, "chewing suggests at the same time the final product – excrement" (114-5). If reading is described as ingesting, it is only logical to describe writing as excreting, as does the narrator of Brophy's *In Transit*: "I cruise, my jaws wide to snow-plough in the present tense, the plankton of experience. This I then excrete rehashed into a continuous narrative in the past tense" (13).

In connection with reading, the idea that "you are what you eat" gives rise to anxiety, since it is so difficult to control what the mind absorbs (Kilgour 10). Abigail Bray and Colebrook trace a "Cartesian anxiety about the corruption of mind by an alien matter" in feminist theorists' pathologising descriptions of women's reading practices as passive incorporations of phallogentric representations. Unfortunately, their critique of "derogatory alimentary metaphors" for reading does not revise but rather reinforce what they critique through the repeated use of phrases such as "mindless incorporation" and "passive consumption" (Bray and Colebrook 53). I would instead like to propose a non-derogatory alimentary model of reading inspired by the various configurations of this figure discussed throughout this chapter. Incorporation might be mindless, but it is not unthinking – even when the conscious mind is unengaged other intelligences are at work, reading the incorporated matter. Some parts of a text may be rejected, some cause indigestion, some may be assimilated and some transformed into

creative output. Brophy even reverses the threat of mindless incorporation, as it is the narrator who is menaced by voracious readers: “That delicate tongue you palpate me all over with is hollow: a mini-pipette: a drinking or, to be precise, spitting straw. Down it you dribble on to my flesh droplets of corrosive enzyme” (221). Readers are addressed as flies dissolving and absorbing the body of text, in an even more elaborately distasteful figure than Barnes’ fly trapped in treacle. Instead of the text being sticky enough to trap the reader, the reader is greedy enough to masticate the text and leave only crumbs of language: “You suck up my fatty adjectives, ingest my interjections. You even gobble an adverb” (Brophy 221). Similarly, in Jackson reading as eating is reconfigured into the ritual chewing of a book into illegible pulp or a vagina rewriting Joyce.

These authors employ an aesthetics of distaste to complicate the alimentary model of reading. Confronted by distaste, the reader pauses and may refuse to swallow. However, aesthetic distaste should not be confused with the “nonappreciative disgust” (Korsmeyer, *Savoring* 88) which make readers reject a text (which would be figured as spitting or vomiting in the alimentary model). The gut reaction employed in an aesthetics of distaste is much more complex than a simple rejection or condemnation. Disgust is a sticky affect involving the one disgusted in a visceral relation to the disgusting in such a way that one almost becomes it, or becomes disgusted by oneself. Furthermore, disgust is not categorically avoided. I follow Korsmeyer in defining aesthetic disgust as “the arousal of disgust in an audience, a spectator, or a reader, under circumstances where that emotion both apprehends artistic properties and constitutes a component of appreciation” (*Savoring* 88) and further as “a response that, no matter how unpleasant, can rivet attention to the point where one actually may be said to *savor* the feeling” (*Savoring* 3). Distaste can function as affirmation rather than negation: as a difficult phantom taste to savour. By creating a certain friction – or frisson – it invites reading as licking: an erotic rather than culinary tasting of the text.

Touching Thoughts: The Heft of Writing

We are cleaner than any age before us, and the surfaces we touch are smoother. We know more about how the world works but less about how it feels. Our hands are, I think, a little starved for the touch of the world – for its nap, its grain, its tooth. (Original 338)

More than any other sense, touch confirms the reality of the thing touched. If “seeing is believing,” touching confirms the belief, and if “I saw it with my own eyes” proves the existence of something, touch-related expressions such as “tangible” or “solid truth” affirm it to be more than a flat image or vaporous illusion. I believe that even the frequently criticised ocularcentric regime of modern western culture is based upon commonsense assumptions about the primacy of touch. Second-hand information presented in symbolical, most often visual, form, is posited against and above the direct evidence of the senses, especially touch. However, this dichotomy does not deny the importance of touch for more mundane or practical forms of knowledge such as handicrafts, which continue to exist alongside visual information. Rather, the visual regime transfers or extends the “solidity” and “realness” of concrete, tactile knowledge to abstract, visual knowledge. Critiques of ocularcentrism, from surrealist manifestos to feminist theory, tend to turn to touch as the favoured alternative to visual abstraction, and in doing so risk reinforcing the visual-tactile dichotomy and confirm the association of touch with the supposedly more “grounded” and “genuine” lives of women, children, manual workers and cultural others. Thus, my assessment is that the notion of tactility as the primary mode of orienting oneself in the world and gathering reliable knowledge about it, with visuality providing an additional, more refined source of information, underlies both ocularcentrism and the critique of ocularcentrism.

Scarry argues that to make literature feel real is first and foremost to make it feel tangible, since touch confirms the reality of a thing. She lists a number of literary techniques specifically aimed at producing what I term phantom touch. The first is to describe not a finished object but the construction of it, thereby providing the reader with instructions for virtually constructing it. The second is to draw upon what Scarry considers to be the phenomenological properties of imaginary objects themselves, namely to be “thin, dry, filmy, two-dimensional, and without solidity” (“Vivacity” 11-3). The ease with which the reader can imagine such a thing, like a ghost or a gauzy curtain, can then be enlisted to ensure the solidity of its background or surroundings. The third is to let two fictional things confirm each other’s solidity, either by having them touch or by having one of them (provided it is a character) report on the solidity of the other. As Scarry observes, fictional characters may be unreliable but they “almost never misreport to us the tactile qualities of their fictional worlds” (“Vivacity” 16).

Although the techniques for making literature tangible listed by Scarry draw mainly upon realist novels, Jackson applies them to what I in the introduction described as her *object writing*. Tactile interactions between objects, characters and even immaterial entities are frequently described, and protagonists and narrators tend to be experimenters interrogating and reporting on the tactile qualities of fantastic objects. A central example of the construction of fictional objects is the creation of Herman Godfrey in “Musée Mécanique.” This description also features another stylistic device characteristic of Jackson: the literalisation of tactile figures of speech. Touching is closely related to doing – manually manipulating – and provides active, intrusive models for cognitive processes, such as “grasping,” “penetrating,” “cutting into” or “getting a grip on.” When Herman is completed by the addition of character traits, Jackson erases the distinction between physical and psychological features through her choice of tactile and gustative figures:

The fairy godmothers bend over the cradle. Going around the circle, they give him: a stroke of genius, a stroke of luck, a touch of fever, a pang of guilt, a long stretch of the imagination, a dose of common sense, a dram of hope, a taste of his own medicine, the tickle of a premonition, a twinge of misgiving, a prick of conscience. The last one gives him the kiss of life. (Musée)

On their own, the tactility of conventional expressions such as “stroke of genius” is weak, but amassing them as above draws attention to their tactility. The fairy godmothers going around and bending down to hand over their chosen qualities urges the reader to experience the stretching, tickling and pricking as phantom touches rather than as abstract figures of speech. The preceding description of Herman’s mechanical construction also invites such a reading. In light of Jackson’s oeuvre, the birth scene suggests an author’s hands-on manipulation of her medium and a making tangible of the intangible qualities with which a literary work is infused.

Scherr writes that “as to touch is always, also, to be touched, the tactile work of art asks its audience to become active participants in the aesthetic exchange” (173). In Jackson’s work, the most prominent model for such tactile participation is playing with dolls, as I shall discuss in the first section. The Jackson sisters’ perform a feminist reclamation of this neglected, feminine art form in their co-authored *The Doll Games*. Through their collaborative memory work, they performatively recreate their doll games, including friction and sibling rivalry. The work outlines a phenomenology of doll games which Jackson also proposes as a tactile, interactive model for writing. Throughout this chapter, I shall elaborate upon some key concepts in this shared phenomenology of literature and doll games.

In the second section, I develop the concept “tactile metonymy” to describe how the playing girl might hook up via touch to the doll world existing on a different scale. I then go on to argue for works of fiction as comparable miniature worlds to which the reader might hook up via a virtual form of tactile metonymy. *The Doll Games* provides a clear example of this due to its archival, spatialised hypertext structure, requiring the reader to sort through the material and thereby creating a sense of tactile interaction with the work.

“Exquisite Corpses” discuss tactile connections in light of the surrealists’ interest in collage and assemblage. The frequent descriptions of assemblage and construction in Jackson’s work relate back both to Scarry’s techniques for making fiction tangible and to the practice of play. I discuss play and experimentation as models for artistic practices and as instances of what Bill Brown terms “misuse.” While when objects are used, their sensual and material qualities tend to recede from view in favour of utility, misuse brings out the sensation of the thing as such (Brown, “How” 953-6).

Relating back to doll games, I then discuss artistic misuse resulting in what I term “conceptual intimacy,” a specifically tactile mode of relating to a piece of art. Conceptual intimacy is an aesthetic effect resulting from the viewer’s or reader’s tactile familiarity with the object world. I develop this concept in order to get away from theoretical discussions of dolls and toys in terms of memory, nostalgia or commodity fetishism. The memory involved in conceptual intimacy is impersonal and tactile, residing in the skin. It does not require recognition of the art object; only an appreciation of its tactile potential. As I argue, conceptual intimacy can be employed to enhance the sense of virtual tactility in art forms preventing actual touch.

Doll Games

Even though almost any token would serve to anchor a new character (or is it host, or seed, or springboard? I am not sure how it works exactly, though I am sure it is something like the adoration of holy relics, icons, or fetish objects), the indigestible aspects of that object, those qualities peculiar to it as an inanimate thing, clung somehow to the character we invented, adding indefinable nuances (textures? connotations?) that worked something like an extra personality. A prosthetic personality? Was the doll a prosthetic body for a character, or was the character an imaginary outgrowth of the doll?
(Doll [stiffness])

Dolls are ubiquitous throughout Jackson’s oeuvre: from the doll-dildo in “Dildo” and nerve dolls in “Nerve” briefly featured in *The Melancholy of Anatomy* to protagonists like the mechanical man in “Musée Mécanique” and the rag doll coming apart at the seams and losing limbs in *Patchwork Girl*. In some stories, taxidermy figures as a specific instance of playing with dolls, since both practices are about (re)animating dead matter. “The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin” deals with the eccentric 19th-century hobby taxidermist Walter Potter, who dressed up badly stuffed

animals and arranged them into whimsical tableaux, the protagonist of “Angel” stuffs rats and “play[s] with them like dolls” (Angel 24) and the protagonist of “Husband” wears a “husband skin” akin to a life-size finger puppet. The nexus of the doll theme in Jackson’s work is the hypertext *The Doll Games*, co-authored with her sister Pamela Jackson. When read through the lens of this work, dolls appear even in texts where at first glance there were none: the giant foetus in “Foetus” shows obvious resemblances to grotesque baby dolls and the mutilated protagonist of “Short-Term Memorial Park” recalls doll mutilations.

This brief survey apart, I shall restrict my interrogation of dolls in Jackson’s work to the richest source for my purpose: *The Doll Games*. In this hyperwork combining auto-ethnography with experimental fiction and scholarly pastiche, the Jackson sisters try to recreate the doll games they used to play as children. In order to understand this project, one needs to distinguish between three levels: “the doll games,” meaning the original games played by the Jackson girls, “The Doll Games,” meaning the adult sisters’ auto-ethnographic and artistic collaboration around these games, and “*The Doll Games*,” meaning the provisionally finished work in hypertext form.

The Doll Games project, as described in *The Doll Games*, takes the tangible material remains of childhood games as a starting point for exploring problems of memory and autobiography. Pamela writes in her “doll journal”: “handling the dolls gives me a murky bodily memory (tinged with nastiness, I must add) of how I might have related to them before” (Doll [pjournal]).⁵⁰ This accords with Stewart’s argument that souvenirs address the sense of touch rather than the sense of sight because the more “acute sensation of the object [...] promises, and yet does not keep the promise of, *reunion*” (*Longing* 139). Pamela’s body remembers playing with dolls but the memory is “murky” in that it resists conscious articulation: there is a sense of immediacy to tactile memory, yet there is not direct access to the childhood self.

Despite their sense of immediacy and intimacy, tactile memories may be collective and not just individual (Marks, *Skin* 201). This opens for art based on tactile memories shared by the audience, such as Joseph Cornell’s “dossiers” and “sandboxes” in which the handling of souvenirs collected by the artist is meant as “a trigger for palpable memory” (Mileaf 159). Cornell’s art is highly nostalgic in nature, and so are more mainstream examples like the animated film *Toy Story*, which according to Barker “calls up its adult viewers’ nostalgic impulses by appealing to the sensual childhood memories that reside at the surface of their skins,” more precisely through the “smooth

⁵⁰ I use “Pamela” and “Shelley” to distinguish between author-personas in *The Doll Games*, while “Jackson” is reserved for the author(s) of un-attributed material.

textures and bold colors” of 1950s toys and commodities (45-6). Similarly, *The Doll Games*’ minute descriptions and depictions of dolls and their accessories, often emphasising wear and decay, appeal to collective tactile memories of adolescence in 1970s western culture, and of playing with dolls more generally.

Pamela further describes handling the dolls as “handling my child self and my child fantasy world in the flesh” and her relation to that childhood self as “one of fascination, if not outright longing” (Doll [pjournal]). In Stewart’s analysis of souvenirs, such nostalgic longing is dependent upon the gap between the material presence of the thing and the past experience which it represents. To close that gap would be to erase the nostalgia, which the nostalgic does not really want (Stewart, *Longing* 145). Nostalgia is understood a case of fetishism, in which a part – in this case a doll – substitutes for the whole – in this case childhood – in such a way that the distance between part and whole is simultaneously experienced as a loss and as a “surplus of signification” (Stewart, *Longing* 135). In Stewart’s Marxist understanding of fetishism, the nostalgic projection of authentic experience onto essentially worthless objects is a negative effect of the alienation of capitalist consumer culture. I do not agree with this pessimistic view, though to some extent it reflects Pamela’s own painful doubts about the possibility of accessing the past through the dolls. Brown proposes an alternative, insisting that although both Freud and Walter Benjamin cite Marx, Freud’s understanding of fetishism as an “erotic investment in the object” and Benjamin’s as “an aesthetic fascination with objects” depart from commodity fetishism. In Freud’s account as well as Benjamin’s, the desire for objects is primary to their commodification and does not work according to a logic of compensation (Brown, *Sense* 31). I side with this positive view of fetishism, which is also shared by Marks.

Marks explains fetishism through Benjamin’s concept of “aura”:

Aura is the sense an object gives that it can speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it. It is a brush with involuntary memory, memory that can only be arrived at through a shock. We return again and again to the auratic object, still thirsty, because it can never completely satisfy our desire to recover that memory. Hence the sense that an auratic object maintains its distance no matter how closely we embrace it: it is distant from us in time even as it is present in space. (*Skin* 81)

Marks’ description of auratic objects resonates with Stewart’s description of souvenirs in its emphasis on distance and memory. The crucial difference is that for Marks, aura is not generated and sustained solely by the fetishist’s desire, but partly by the materiality of the object itself. While Stewart understands the meaning of souvenirs to reside entirely in the personal narrative projected upon them by the nostalgic fetishist, Marks insists that objects “have a life independent of the human relations they encode, beyond

their discursive and narrative significance” (Marks, *Skin* 120-1). Thus, the meaning of objects such as dolls is not reducible to a perceived surplus of signification resulting from the gap between signifier (doll) and signified (childhood). The material object itself generates a surplus of meaning exceeding linguistic and symbolic signification.

Brown describes fetishism as “a social relation between human subject and inanimate object, wherein modernity’s ontological distinction between human beings and nonhumans makes no sense” (*Sense* 30). As Marks explains, “aura is the quality in an object that makes our relationship to it like a relationship with another human being” and makes it appear to “look back at us” (*Skin* 80). This is exactly how Pamela describes her relation to her favourite doll: “There is a sense of boundaries crossed when I touch her or stare too hard, as if it is too intimate, as if I should be careful of her privacy. I wonder if it is that she is child-me, so that touching her feels like touching my child self in some invasive and uncanny way, or just that she is a child and I am not anymore” (Doll [pjournal]). Following Stewart, Pamela’s notion that she is touching her own child self through the doll would be understood as nothing but an egocentric projection. However, it might also indicate a less ego- or anthropocentric form of distributed subjectivity. Pamela’s sense when she touches her doll that it has part of her soul in it, or vice versa that she has part of its soul in her, supports Marks’ notion that “[f]etishistic subjectivity does not inhere in individual souls but rather is distributed among bodies, objects and places” (Marks, *Skin* 120). Shelley expresses a similar sensibility through grafting her face onto the body of a doll in her “self portrait (as harvey)” (Doll [shellvey]). In the following, I understand the dolls in *The Doll Games* as auratic objects in Marks’ sense rather than as souvenirs in Stewart’s sense. This is because my concern is the more general phenomenology of doll games outlined in the work, not tactile memory and nostalgia.

As part of this phenomenology, the Jackson sisters explore how the tactile manipulation of dolls and their props functions in relation to the games’ aspect of collaborative oral storytelling. The crucial issue is aptly summed up by Stewart: “The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative” (*Longing* 56). In one of the recorded and transcribed conversations that are part of *The Doll Games*, the Jackson sisters discuss how this worked differently for each of them in their personal games and fantasies:

S: It’s not like I didn’t have fantasies where I didn’t use the dolls, but I found it added a sense of event and embodiment, if I was able to have the dolls interact with each other, instead of the diffuse imaginings that lacked such clear parts.

P: That makes sense, but I think for me the dolls started getting in the way once I became too aware of them as plastic objects and was less able to project myself inside

them. So then it was actually a distraction. The plastic hitting on plastic and the blank stares.

S: I don't think I carried out those private games as a solo version of the kind of doll game we would have done together, I think the dolls were more like talismans. I mean I did make them walk along and meet each other and stuff—

S: At the end of the last tape what I was saying was that in my private sexy doll games I didn't exactly act them out like a one-man version of our real doll games, I just kind of held on to the dolls and used them as—as talismans, as idols, they just focused my thoughts and made me able to summon up separate entities and interactions and specific situations a little bit better than in the washy world of my imagination. (Doll [t14-fantasies])

While for Shelley, the dolls function as described by Stewart to embody her imaginations and make them less “diffuse” or “washy,” Pamela protests that for her these “plastic objects” fail to embody her imaginary self. She cannot bridge the gap between her fantasy and the dolls’ material qualities, especially their tactile ones: “plastic hitting on plastic.” Shelley employs the language of magic and religion (“talismans,” “idols”) to try to explain how for her dolls can be simultaneously plastic objects and embodiments of fantasy. This relates back to Marks’ more spiritual than psychoanalytic understanding of the fetish as an object “partaking physically of the thing it represents” and demanding in turn that the subject stand in physical contact with it in order to partake of its magic (*Skin* 119). If dolls are understood as fetishes, it does not matter that their plastic bodies cannot perfectly reproduce fantasy scenarios: holding on to them is enough to partake of their creative power.

That the dolls do not perfectly represent the narratives of games and fantasies does not mean that their tactile qualities are irrelevant. As with fetishes or auratic objects in Marks’ understanding, meaning is not simply projected onto them but resides partly in their materiality. Thus, although the Jackson sisters describe how minimally individuated objects like sticks or shampoo bottles could be played with like dolls, the intimately familiar characteristics of their actual dolls informed their games. Shelley describes in her doll journal how for example the “bendyness [sic] of Phyllis became part and proof of her frivolous nature” and how “rubbery arms and legs had a pathos that hard, jointed limbs couldn’t achieve even if (which was true) they ‘worked’ better and could strike more natural, more expressive attitudes” (Doll [stiffness]). The connection between bendiness and frivolity could be seen as an arbitrary one, in which frivolity is metaphorically understood as a form of psychological “bendiness” and then projected back onto a literally bendy body. However, taking material agency into account, bendiness can rather be understood as an expressive and meaningful tactile quality which exceeds yet informs the notion of a “frivolous nature” into

which it is approximately translated. Brown seems to suggest as much when he modifies Gaston Bachelard's concept of "hybrid objects," that is, objects with which the subject is so intimate that they take on a sort of subjectivity of their own. Brown critiques Bachelard's conception of the hybrid object as a mere "phenomenological prosthesis" providing "material ground for imaging the subject" and instead defines it as "a participant in the intersubjective constitution of reality" ("How" 942). This definition of hybrid objects is close to Marks' definition of auratic objects and similarly invites consideration of doll agency as part of doll games.

To sum up, my reading of *The Doll Games* differs from the nostalgic reading suggested in relation to *Toy Story* and Cornell's sandboxes in which tactile interaction trigger personal childhood memories. Following Deleuze and Guattari, it might be argued that by "playing" with *The Doll Games*, the reader enters into a "becoming-child," or more specifically a "becoming-girl" (similarly, the Doll Games project could be described as a becoming-girl of the adult Jackson sisters). This has little to do with memory, which is "incurably Oedipal" and "brings about a reterritorialization of childhood"; instead deterritorialisation occurs through what Deleuze and Guattari term a "childhood block," that is "the highest intensities that the child constructs with his sisters, his pal, his projects and his toys." Via such "childhood blocks" in art (Deleuze and Guattari base their argument on Kafka's writing) the child is "coming to reanimate the adult as one animates a puppet and giving the adult living connections" in a process quite apart from conscious recollection (*Kafka* 78-9). In the following sections, I shall draw upon the phenomenology of doll games to develop a notion of tactile metonymy which can also be applied to the reading encounter.

Tactile Metonymy

Who can resist a dollhouse? With working hinges... tiny mahogany doors with tiny brass latches... a miniature book with only four pages? The dollhouse had two halves that swung open to reveal the rooms inside. Two dolls could be side by side in the room and the next moment at opposite ends of the house. How marvellous! The furniture was elegant, if biggledy-piggledy: the sofa stuck sideways in the stairwell had tasselled throw cushions. Mama stuck the tip of her baby finger in a ceramic potty with painted-blue ducks in the bowl, felt warmth flood her cheeks. (Half 10-1)

A crucial function of touch in the phenomenology of doll games is what I term tactile metonymy. By this I mean that one form of touch stands in for other forms of touch which are impractical or impossible, so that for example the fitting of a finger into a doll's purse stands in for fitting the whole hand. Or, it may suffice to touch the doll, directing its hand to reach into the purse in turn. I argue that touch is an essential part of doll games, not just instrumental in facilitating the dolls' metaphorical representation of human behaviour. Tactile metonymy goes beyond metaphor in that it brings the player into direct contact with the doll's world.

In substituting a partial touch for the whole, tactile metonymy is more specifically a form of contact across scales. The playing girl cannot fully inhabit the doll's world, but through tactile contact she can nevertheless gain more direct access to it than via imaginary identification alone. That tactile metonymy does not provide complete access is made painfully clear in *Half Life* when the adult protagonist attempts to inhabit her old dollhouse by carrying it like a costume.⁵¹ Nevertheless, I disagree with Stewart's argument that in approaching the dollhouse, "[a]ll senses must be reduced to the visual, a sense which in its transcendence remains ironically and tragically remote" (*Longing* 67). Stewart analyses dollhouses and other miniatures as static tableaux offering up nostalgic bourgeois perfection for visual consumption. This differs from the Jackson sisters' and mine interest in dolls and their miniature worlds *as actively toyed with*.

I also disagree with Stewart that tactile pleasure is opposed to visual pleasure. Rather, the kind of vision involved in doll games is the haptic visuality discussed in the introductory chapter. Haptic visuality is connected to the miniature scale in that it is a *close* vision, a caressing gaze moving near enough to its objects to discern previously unperceived textures and details. Marks and Barker both use the miniature art of stop-motion animation to exemplify haptic visuality in film (Marks, *Touch* 132-3; Barker 137-8). Barker even argues that stop-motion animation "addresses itself first and foremost to the fingertips" because its animation of inanimate objects is a form of "hands-on play" triggering tactile memories of play in the audience (137). Similarly, I would argue that miniatures such as dolls address the fingertips, prompting an urge to touch and a tactile mode of seeing. Simply by virtue of their smallness, miniatures force the viewer to lean in close to see properly, almost close enough to touch the thing with the eyes. While for Stewart, miniatures epitomise a distant and disembodied vision in that the small scale prevents physical access but allows full visual overview, for me, following Marks and Barker, they epitomise closeness and contact.

Phenomenologically, the miniature is not identical to the larger object it miniaturises, as Bachelard observes (159-63). Stewart views miniaturisation as anthropocentric in that it depends on the absolute scale of the human body (*On Longing* 56). I would rather argue that miniaturisation moves away from anthropocentrism in its attempt to inhabit the perceptual worlds of inhuman, inanimate and even inorganic others.⁵² Marks writes that the animated films of the Quay brothers (another sibling couple involved in creative collaboration) approach "the point of view of dust, or of the air"

⁵¹ This scene echoes the artist Janine Antoni's photograph "Inhabit" where a woman's legs are trapped in a dollhouse.

⁵² "Perceptual world" is my free translation of the biologist Jakob von Uexküll's term "Umwelt."

(Marks, *Touch* 131). Of course the inhabitation can never be complete; there is always a clash between human and nonhuman scales.

This mismatch is crucial to the pleasure of the miniature: as Shelley points out in her doll journal, “what is SO REAL is delightful precisely because it isn’t quite real.” According to Shelley, “too much perfection” invites a static form of visual pleasure which arrests the action of the doll games (Doll [language]). Thus, the doll games stagnate into the static tableaux described by Stewart, the visual perfection of which is due to the inability of the human eye to register miniature flaws. In action, however, the form of vision involved in doll games is closer to Stewart’s description of the grotesque, partial vision of the gigantic (*Longing* 88-9). When looking close with the rowing, tactile gaze described by Marks and Barker, the miniature is enlarged into gigantic proportions. Miller describes how cinema “magically enlarges without making pores, follicles, moles, hairs, and blotches more perceptible,” thus presenting human figures with the proportions of giants but the perfect complexion of miniatures (56-7). Jackson instead describes dolls and toys with miniature proportions but the coarse textures of the gigantic, thereby emphasising tactile interest over visual perfection. If miniatures were identical versions of larger objects on a smaller scale, they would appear perfectly smooth and seamless. Since they are manufactured out of ordinary materials, however, they enlarge the textures of those materials. As Shelley puts it, “there was a huge excess, a wrongness, unavoidable, right down to the coarse weave of the clothes” (Doll [language]). This mismatch of scales (human-sized cloth versus doll-sized clothes) provides the eye with pleasurable friction and tests its limits of perception. Furthermore, it tests the limits of dexterity, that of the maker as well as that of the player. Stitches, joints and irregularities reveal the manual work of creation, while stains, scratches and fractures reveal the manual wear of play. Miniaturisation invites the kind of close attention required to notice such tactile traces and, in Barker’s words about the animated film *Street of Crocodiles*, opens up “a world of dirt, dust, flesh, fabric, and textures that are familiar to us but which the film invites us to see for the first time” (139).

Doll games transfer objects to the wrong scale and put them to the wrong use in such a way as to “test the relation between materiality and meaning” (Stewart, *Longing* 57). Dolls are miniature representations of humans, but their material meaning exceeds this representation, which is made clear when the scale of the doll comes into contact with the scale of the playing girl in tactile metonymy. Shelley writes about the dolls’ “tiny feet and hands that seemed to address our own bodies in unclear but troubling ways, that were just the right size for digging in nostrils or ears or bellybuttons, for scratching between toes”(Doll [sex]). The doll’s body does not just “address” the girl’s body in the sense of representing it, but also in unexpected ways

facilitated by the material clash of scales. Reversely, objects on a human scale might “address” the dolls differently, so that for example a bureau becomes a mountain.

Tactile metonymy provides prosthetic access to a world on a different scale. Pamela describes how the Jackson sisters used their dolls to inhabit miniature landscapes that were otherwise inaccessible to them:

We thought about landscapes that are the wrong size, or that we can't enter into, tiny ones or unreachable ones like the whirlpools under the falls, and the odd yearning, frustration almost, that we feel toward them. We want to be able to get into them, enter in all the way, not just look. Maybe doll pleasure has something to do with this. When we brought the dolls to Arizona with us we always wanted to experience all the landscapes with their bodies as well as ours. Floating them in the rain buckets, or making them swim in the bird pond (swimming was always the best. Watching the dolls swim). There was pleasure there that we couldn't have with our own bodies: with the doll we could not only insert ourselves into a landscape but also see ourselves there — tiny body in clear pools, clambering over rocks, etc. A spatial pleasure, and visual. (Doll [pjournal])

Pamela describes the pleasure as visual, but I would argue that it is a visually mediated tactile pleasure: a virtual rather than actual form of tactile metonymy. In order to prosthetically experience a miniature world through the doll's body, one needs to be in touch with it. Even when one lets go of the doll to watch it inhabit the landscape from a distance, the prosthetic pleasure is dependent upon one's previous tactile intimacy with it. Knowing what the doll feels like stands in a metonymical relation to feeling what it feels. It is significant that Pamela singles out swimming as the most pleasurable doll experience, since the immersion in water maximises contact with the surroundings and literalises the immersion in a world that the exercise is all about.

The clash of scales prevents the playing girl from being spatially immersed in the doll's world. Nevertheless, tactile metonymy provides a mode of contact across scales unavailable to Stewart's observer “trapped outside the possibility of a lived reality of the miniature” (*Longing* 66). Stewart opposes the spatiality of the miniature tableau to the temporality of speech and narrative (*Longing* 66-7), but doll games combine the setting up of miniature milieus with dialogic storytelling, unfolding both in space and time. Acknowledging the difference between static miniatures and play, Stewart writes that “once the toy becomes animated, it initiates another world” (*Longing* 57). This miniature world does not remain enclosed within the larger world, but rather expands to enclose it. Human-size objects drawn into the game are imperfectly assimilated to the doll scale and the awkwardness produces texture and friction.

If miniatures tend toward stasis, as Stewart insists, it is not due to their perfection but rather due to that friction, which provides enough tactile

interest to make the most minimal narrative – a mere gesture or scenario – intriguing. Mundane actions such as eating or getting dressed, which rarely merit a place in fiction, become engrossing when acted out with a doll due to the tactile pleasure of handling miniature objects. Doll games are to a large extent about moving the doll bodies around, trying them out in different material configurations and spatial settings. Although in practice play is far from static, a lot of the “action” in doll games would amount to description rather than narration if translated into literature. Narrative is miniaturised and closely bound to tactile interactions, as exemplified by Shelley’s reference to “the narrative of a hand on a breast” rather than to a more abstract narrative of “love” or “sex” or “desire.” Granted, such “minute and detailed actions [...] could only be acted out in the crudest way with a doll,” which is Shelley’s reason for abandoning doll games and acting out fantasy scenarios in her head instead. Nevertheless, doll games provide her with the model for such fantasy scenarios, in which imaginary characters are virtually moved around and made to interact like dolls. During a transitional period, “the dolls just lay in position in [her] hand” while she fantasised about them. (Doll [s]ournal]). This combination of actual stasis and virtual movement recalls Stewart’s description of fantasies set in motion by miniature tableaux, and supports her grudging admission that “the object in its perfect stasis nevertheless suggests use, implementation, and contextualization” (*Longing* 54).

Formally, *The Doll Games* is structured like an online archive, sharing with Cornell’s dossiers “a nonlinear organization that requires the viewer to leaf through concrete ephemera in order to arrive at comprehension” (Mileaf 175). The difference is that with Cornell’s dossiers and sandboxes there is an actual “tactile encounter of sorting images or shifting sand across a horizontal field” (Mileaf 188), while the reader’s tactile encounter with *The Doll Games* is virtual. To be more specific, the tactility of *The Doll Games* involves actual manual interaction with the computer interface, a virtually spatialised archive of documents and artefacts to “leaf through,” and richly textured visual and verbal renditions of dolls and other objects. As phrased in one of *The Doll Games*’ mock-scholarly notes: “We may ponder, here, the sense in which the visitor to the Doll Games hypertext ‘handles’ the doll body as well, exploring with eye and touch the labyrinthine forms of textual body and fleshly memory” (Doll [p]ournal/pj-5]). I argue that the reader handles the dolls in a virtual sense, and that this phantom touch may serve as a tactile metonymy putting the reader in contact with the larger world of doll games.

The virtual world the reader of *The Doll Games* gets in touch with is a miniature toy world perceived so closely it is magnified. As Bachelard puts it, “[a]ttention by itself is an enlarging glass” (158). Bachelard (160) and Stewart (*Longing* 47) both observe how the writing of miniature worlds

tends toward detailed descriptions. In their minute detail, such descriptions function as a verbal version of enlargement which arrest narrative and prolong the text. As an example, Scherr observes how Stein's tactile writing style "results in a close-up so extreme that the object under observation is represented out of all proportion or that language and objects are pulled so near we are given a glimpse of their finest grains and textures" (201). By attending to every detail without subordinating them to the progress of a linear narrative, the literature of miniatures approach the inclusive, non-hierarchical structure of the archive. It also has much in common with the visual arts, predominantly a spatial rather than chronological organisation and verbal equivalents to techniques such as zoom, pan, focus, close-up, blow-up and depth of field.

Interacting with *The Doll Games* can, using a figure from the work itself, be compared to opening the doll box in the Jackson sisters' closet, scrutinising its contents, discarding some and selecting other to arrange across the rug in their room where the doll games take place. As in Cornell's sandboxes, this opening up of the work through playful interaction draws upon Bachelard's phenomenological insight that "the contained and curtailed geometry of the box could be blown open and made animate" (Mileaf 186). Although in *The Doll Games* the tactile play is virtual, the reader animates the static arrangement of the work in a similar fashion to how dolls are animated by being actually moved around. In the best case scenario the doll documents in *The Doll Games*, like dolls in a doll game, provide access to a miniature world which expands to include the reader. In a sense, this is no different from any successful reading experience. "The book sits before me, closed and unread; it is an object, a set of surfaces. But opened, it seems revealed; its physical aspects give way to abstraction and a nexus of new temporalities," Stewart writes, comparing books to Bachelardian boxes (*Longing* 37). As her reference to temporality suggests, the reader enters a world which is not just spatially but temporally miniaturised. Stewart cites an experiment showing that time is miniaturised in proportion to the scale of the miniature, so that the smaller one imagines oneself to be, the faster one will pretend to perform a certain action (*On Longing* 66). As time moves faster in fiction in general, this suggests that all books contain a miniature world which engulfs the surrounding world as the reader enters into it. *The Doll Games*, however, explicitly thematises this through its spatial arrangement and references to scale.

Exquisite Corpses

Isolated incidents suddenly strung themselves together into an argument, a prediction. (Half 72)

The most notable tactile theme in Jackson's work is that of fitting things together, exemplified by the pieced-together body and narrative of

Patchwork Girl, the inventions of the “genius girls” in “Musée Mécanique” and the merged, hybridic objects in “My Friend Goo.” Artistic creation is figured in terms of invention, experimentation and play involving material agency, not as the artist imposing her will or vision upon formless matter. This relates to the “exquisite corpses” (or “cadavres exquis”) of surrealist art and to the machinic assemblages theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, which similarly juxtapose incongruous elements in order to produce novel sensations. An exquisite corpse is a drawing or text created by several participants who each add their piece without having seen the previous contributions. I use it in a more general sense to sum up the surrealists’ interest in collaboration, chance and juxtapositions of different materials, often in machine-like arrangements with interactive and/or interacting components.

Jackson makes explicit references to surrealism and Dadaism in her motivation for working with hypertext: “I would like to introduce a different kind of novel, the patchwork girl, a creature who’s entirely content to be the turn of a kaleidoscope, an exquisite corpse, a field on which copulas copulate, the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table” (Stitch). As each reader follows different links and reads lexias in a different order, the text moves like a machinic assemblage, making and unmaking connections. Jackson’s use of hypertext to spatialise her writing is in line with what Brown describes as “a fundamental strain of modernism,” that is, “a different mode of mimesis – not one that serves to represent a thing, but one that seeks to attain the status of a thing” (*Sense* 3).

In Jackson’s work, exquisite corpses appear not just on a structural level but also on the level of content, as in the following description of Herman Godfrey:

Parts of him were made of absinthe, antimony, arsenic, bismuth, chromium, cuttle-bone, egg yolk, grout, gutta-percha, jute, latex, lead, manganese, molasses, nickel, paper, phosphorus, plaster of paris, tungsten, wax, wicker, and zinc. But most of him was tin: the sharp little feet with their unfilled edges, the head with its neatly welded planes, the curved door on its shoddy hinges which swung open to reveal – what a contrast of workmanship! – the perfectly formed genitals, soft and rubbery. (Musée)

“Musée Mécanique” sums up several related themes that will run through this section: play, invention, experimentation, collaboration, connection, function and fit. Its protagonist is a mechanical assemblage who in his unlikely combination of building materials resembles an exquisite corpse. He is invented by the “genius girls” who “have their fingers in everything” and “who can thrust their hands into space and bring back power, who can tap a message into the air and bid it go where they will” (Musée). From Herman’s perspective, the genius girls are the omnipotent creators of the entire world, yet they cannot make truly novel or original inventions since everything

there is necessarily resembles something else.⁵³ Their inventiveness is an art of mechanical tinkering, of deftly putting together available materials into functioning entities. They depart from the traditional idea of the creative genius by the emphasis on craft above artistic vision, and by being a collective whose individual names and exact number remain unclear.⁵⁴

By virtue of being improvisational, collaborative and hands-on, play serves as a model for avant-garde art practices. For Shelley, doll games are “like chemistry experiments performed on models (I’m thinking of those snap-together molecular models with the blue and red balls) to find out how things fit together” (Doll [sex]). This description emphasises the experimental nature of play, as well as its tacity: the “fit” refers both to physical connections and to narrative logic. Similarly, the dexterity of the genius girls is repeatedly alluded to, as demonstrated by the quotations above and by Herman’s admiration of “their small deft hands passing through arcane configurations with the greatest of ease, their wet, agile tongues creeping further and further out of their mouths” (Musée) In “Angel,” the “demanding craft, requiring patient, knowing hands” of taxidermy is favourably compared to the “high art” of abstract painting (Angel 20). Common to these passages is that “deft” and “knowing” hands become autonomous agents in the collaborative creative process, quite apart from the deftness and knowledge of the humans they are attached to. They are not disconnected from the human organism, as the reference to tongues responding to the hands’ work shows, but the connection is machinic rather than conscious.

Brown defines play as a form of creative misuse which brings together children and surrealists artists in “the aesthetic appropriation of the everyday, the reanimation of cultural detritus, the recoding of icons” as emblematised by “spontaneous assemblage, bricolage, collage, camp” (“How” 954-5). He criticises *Toy Story* for policing against this creative misuse and promoting a “proper” use of toys as dictated by commercial interests (Brown, “How” 963-4). For Brown, to play with toys only in the specific way intended by the manufacturers is not to play with them at all. “If the use value of an object amounts to its preconceived utility, then its misuse value should be understood as the unforeseeable potential within the object,” he writes (Brown, “How” 956). Stewart makes a similar definition of play, writing that “[t]o toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within

⁵³ From a Deleuzian point of view, the reason the genius girls cannot invent something truly new might be that they use *intelligence* rather than *intuition*. According to Deleuze, drawing upon Bergson, intelligence operates by categorisation and analogy and thus reduces difference to sameness. It is inventive in the sense of putting things to new uses, but ultimately reduces everything to functionality, see Olkowski 129-33.

⁵⁴ Agency is distributed not only among the girls but also among the material objects involved in their creative endeavours, which can be understood in light of Marks’ suggestion that the sense of nonhuman and inorganic agency permeating the Quay brothers’ films is an extension of their collective identity as twins and their “devotion to anonymous craft rather than authorship,” *Touch* 139.

sets of contexts, none of which is determinative” (*Longing* 56). By testing what can be done with a thing such as a toy, misuse brings out the sensual qualities of it, which tend to recede from view when it is perceived simply in terms of its use value. The abstraction of “working the permutations, trying on consequences” is made tangible in doll games, as the limits of the dolls’ materiality are tested (Doll [intros]). When dolls are misused for example through sex or age changes, the physical characteristics associated with their use value (or, as the Jackson sisters put it, their “shelf identities”) are either redefined or modified using amputations and prosthetics. Even the “shag rug” makes itself newly sensed in the “sore and bumpy” knees and elbows of the Jackson sisters as it is misused as setting for doll games (Doll [intros]).

Toy Story’s rhetorical defence of use value draws upon the figure of the sadistic child who picks his toys apart, “demonized as a Dr. Moreau figure who experiments with toys, torturing them and producing speechless mutants, bodies and things, body parts jumbled together as frightening composites” (Brown, “How” 963). In contrast, Barker defines children’s wish to look inside their toys to see how they work as a normal part of play, yet her description of it as a “morbid, destructive curiosity about the nature of the machine” still stresses the pathology of this behaviour (144). Following Brown, I would like to present a less gloomy picture of this experimental dismantling. The desire to find out what makes a thing tick is “revealed as a fantasy doomed to exposure” (Brown, *Sense* 7) only if that something is conceived in terms of a specific, mysterious component that can be found inside it. In Jackson’s work, Imogen in “Egg” is closest to this doomed, destructive drive to look for meaning *inside* things, as she crawls into the giant egg hoping for a transcendental experience. More commonly, Jackson portrays the search for the animating principle as an experimental dismantling and trying out of different configurations, in which desire is regenerated instead of disappointed. Brown writes that “[m]odernity’s child is sated by surface alone,” having abandoned the urge to look inside her toys for an animating spirit (*Sense* 7). Modernist artists, however, are not content with the use value of toys but (re)animate them by deconstructing and reconstructing them. Even in *Toy Story*, the sadistic boy does not simply kill and destroy his toys, but creates mutants and composites as animate as the other toys in the film.

Play, as described by Jackson, Brown and Stewart above, is closely related to experimentation – another activity which has been described as a masculine, sadistic-voyeuristic drive to pick things apart and look inside. In Jackson’s writing, characters are often faced with fantastic entities, but instead of exclaiming in horror about the unfathomable and indescribable strangeness of these (as in for example Lovecraft), they tend to take a rather pragmatic approach and experiment on them. Thus, the protagonist of “Cancer” “out of curiosity” bends a twig of the plant-like cancer growth until

it wilts and Imogen measures the temperature of the egg and subjects its surface to alcohol, salt and oil (Melancholy 58, 15). Although they do not necessarily find answers, their behaviour is driven by an attitude towards matter as though it were animate, had agency and could respond, if not in a human tongue.

This idea is elaborated on in “My Friend Goo,” where the protagonist collects “seashells,” that is, fused objects thrown up by the sea of “goo.” “This one looked like a doll’s head, its features rubbed away, merged with something the shape of an egg cup. It was the exact color of my hand and together they made another object. I held it a moment and pretended we were fused, but when I opened my hand, we came apart easily,” she recounts of one of these “seashells” (Friend 49). She takes the colour match as a clue that she might be part of this hybrid object too, but the fact that it does not adhere to her hand tells her otherwise. The “seashells” appear to be merged and smoothed versions of contraptions put together in a television show popularly called “*Slime with Worms*.” It is almost impossible to make out what is happening on the show due to the extremely poor reception, but what remains when sound (completely) and vision (colour, detail and sharpness) are removed is movement and tactile interaction:

Nobody could agree on whether it was a science program or a how-to show or some unfamiliar kind of pornography. The figures were always touching objects to other objects with strange intensity. Then the camera would swing close to the objects, which moved furtively against one another for a while. Then something would happen. Nothing more definite than a little coat being draped over a rail, or a hoof knocking against a cobblestone. (Friend 54-5)

The description of the action is strongly reminiscent of the Quay’s animated films, where there is little plot but much intensity of movement and friction. The possible genres suggested are all based on the display of objects interacting: the experiments and models of science programs, the hands-on demonstrations of how-to shows and the bodies in congress of pornography. The protagonist has a revelation when she gets the essence of the show:

Slime with Worms: it was a show about fitting things together. That was so obvious, I had missed it! I tried pushing the decoy duck knob into the egg cup, and it snapped right in, dutter mudded dop. The 8 gear fit on the boomerang grip. I was building something, I just didn’t know what it was yet. (Friend 59)

The television show provides her with a manual for approaching the “seashells.” While a connection based on visual resemblance (being of the same colour) fails to hold, fit makes a strong tactile argument for how things might work together. There is no need for classification of different parts or a blueprint to follow: the material knows what it does even though the

protagonist does not.⁵⁵ In Henri Bergson's terms, the experimentation favoured in Jackson's work proceeds according to *instinct* rather than *intelligence* (see Olkowski 122-3).

As suggested by the double deformation of the "seashells," first filtered through the blur of bad reception and then worn smooth by the "goo," an object needs to be defamiliarised and stripped of its common use value in order to speak for itself. This accords with Brown's understanding of misuse: "By *misuse value* I mean to name the aspects of an object – sensuous, aesthetic, semiotic – that become legible, audible, palpable when the object is experienced in whatever time it takes (in whatever time it is) for an object to become another" ("Secret" 3). The "seashells" need to be unfamiliar amalgams in order for the protagonist of "My Friend Goo" to discover how they can be fitted together into a larger assemblage. While these hybridic objects still partly resemble familiar utensils like eggcups, Herman Godfrey dreams of completely stripping off the "layers of semblance" and discover "the thing in all simplicity." If he succeeds in perceiving a thing as "completely unfamiliar," he thinks that "it will all come naturally, cog will cleave to cog, drive-shafts lock and turn" and he will succeed in inventing something new. Hoping that his hands rather than his mind will know what to do, like the dexterous hands of the genius girls, "in secret he clanked his metal palms together – what a clamor – and in secret he pried and fiddled" (Musée).

The forming of formless matter might be seen as opposed to mechanical tinkering and closer to the traditional image of artistic genius, where the artist imposes his (I use the male pronoun pointedly here) vision upon the material, transforming it into an original creation. In Jackson's work, however, even moulding tends to involve the co-agency of an only seemingly amorphous material. The appendixes following the story in "Phlegm" details in scientific terms how "P energy" spontaneously generates structure in the phlegm which needs the help of a human hand to become a "beautiful form" instead of "a shapeless mound bristling with little points" (Melancholy 115). Even though the moulding of phlegm is surrounded by trends and traditions influencing the choice of form, it is nevertheless described as "a kind of clarifying and articulating of what was already there" and which cannot be clarified or articulated in words (Melancholy 122). In "Sleep," sleep takes palpable form as warm, golden snow which can be turned into a double and left behind by a person who wishes to start a new life. Instructions for how to make this human effigy appear to be embedded in the sleep and inform the hands of the maker directly: "Even the clumsiest become deft and knowing as they pat and roll the golden column, persuading it into human form," the

⁵⁵ This is even clearer in "Nerve," where the constructing subject is completely done away with: "Nerve fibers have a curious property. They organize themselves. They twine, knot, braid, lace, plait, mesh, splice. Some stringent ancient script takes over," Melancholy 71.

protagonist explains, “I could pat it together. My hands would know what to do” (Melancholy 130, 133).

To connect things is to make a material argument, a concretisation of the process of making cognitive connections. This is not to say that the machinic connections in Jackson’s work are reducible to metaphors for abstract and intangible arguments. Even when they explicitly invite allegorical readings, there is always a material remainder, a sensual specificity of fit and friction making its own non-discursive argument. The instinctive logic of experimentation is privileged above the intellectual logic of categorisation. As seen in the previous section, this is also the logic of the fetish and the auratic object, which do not just represent something, but connects to that something metonymically, or indexically (Marks, *Skin* 85-6).

Material logic resides in the materials connecting to each other and in the hands feeling the fit rather than in an organising mind. This point is powerfully made in “Musée Mécanique” when a door opens in Herman Godfrey’s chest and a platform juts out which he cannot push back inside by force. When he places a wooden bust of Nefertiti on the platform, however, the mechanism responds: “The stage glided smoothly inwards. The doors swung up in synchrony, beautifully. She slid inside. The doors snicked shut” (Musée). As in the Quay brothers’ *Street of Crocodiles*, certain actions prove effective (certain connections “take”) and lead to certain results, but the relation between cause and effect is unpredictable and does not correspond to a natural law of causality. Importantly, the material logic of Jackson’s writing is not deterministic, as in for example biological determinist interpretations of physical features, but instead incite multiple connections and novel sensations.

The role of human hands in making material connections should not be reduced to a detached instrumentality. Rather, hands are involved as part of the assemblages they help to create. In *My Body*, Jackson describes hands as “tending to things with a kind of earnest helpfulness” (Body [hands]), which seems to express what Didier Anzieu terms the “attachment drive,” that is, a desire for pleasurable tactile contact as such rather than for closeness with another human (or living) being (cited in Barker 39-40). There is an excess to inventive tool use which demonstrates that it goes beyond the merely instrumental and involves the multiplication of tactile connections and sensations.

Jackson’s writing abounds with prosthetic connections between bodies and objects. An example among many is the dog leg held hidden inside the sleeve by the protagonist’s son in “The Hook.” While at first the mother is shocked and angry to feel a decaying dog paw in place of the expected hand, by the end of the story the prosthetic dog leg serves to connect mother and son, so that she can “kiss its darling, darling little pads” (Hook 66). As Grosz observes, things need to be prosthetically incorporated in order to be used

(*Volatile* 79-81). A tool user cannot simply manipulate a tool and remain unaffected, but needs to enter into a prosthetic assemblage for it to work. A simple example of this is the kind of bodily habits which make the patchwork girl remark that “[o]ne of my fingers is comfortable enough with a needle, another seems easier on the handle of a knife.” (Patchwork [graveyard/left arm/hands]). A more elaborate example is the prosthetic “husband skin” in “Husband,” which transforms its wearer and enables or disables certain actions. “There were tasks of grooming and stroking that my hand could only perform when transfigured by the husband glove,” the protagonist narrates, “I stretched my fingers in the fingers of the husband, fingers that knew and had performed those services so long awaited. I pinched myself, and it was my husband pinching me” (Husband 164). The husband skin appears as a concretisation of what Ahmed terms “repetitive stress injury”: the habituation to a certain type of activity which makes it feel given, while other activities appear out of range (*Queer* 56-60). Normally, the “husband function” would take the form of an immaterial property, not a literal skin to wear, yet it may nevertheless be understood as a prosthetic extension of a body transforming it in certain ways and allowing it to do certain things.

In *Politics of Touch*, Erin Manning argues that the senses, and especially touch, function to prosthetically extend human bodies into Deleuzian “Bodies without Organs” (xiii-xiv). In this understanding, tools and prostheses do not complement a human subject, as in the psychoanalytical-phenomenological model where the human body incorporates prosthetic extensions. Instead, prosthetic connections hook up parts of the body in intensive circuits with material objects and immaterial forces without necessarily involving the conscious human organism. This might best be illustrated by cases where it is not the hand, icon of agency and touch in the active sense, that does the touching: “My vagina has very long and sticky lips and sometimes I would stroll pantyless through a store in a short skirt, brushing nonchalantly against the merchandise, and come out with valuable items stuck to me” (Body [vagina]). In this scenario from *My Body*, it is not the hand – or even the mouth of the vagina – that desires, selects and grasps. Instead, random items simply stick to the protagonist, forming unlikely assemblages. Another lexia relates how she chains herself to her writing desk using her navel piercing (Body [stomach]). There is more obvious agency involved in the creation of this prosthetic umbilical cord, yet its purpose is to remove agency. By chaining herself to her desk, Jackson’s autobiographical persona concretises her link to the writing machine. This way, she stabilises the assemblage and prevents it from disassembling when she puts down her pen or rises from her chair to go do something else, that is, when some part of her not involved in the writing machine strains to enter into a different assemblage.

Prosthetic assemblages do not simply connect discrete entities which may then be disconnected and reconnected to other assemblages. As the discussion of habituation and repetitive stress injury suggests, each assemblage transforms the entities involved. In *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson insists that to touch something is to mix molecules with it and not to remain intact:

There is no shrink-wrap preserving you from contamination: your skin is a permeable membrane. Molecules hang in contiguity but are nowhere near as locked in place as a brick wall, and when they get excited, they take flight! Come closer, come even closer: 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. (Patchwork [body of text/hazy whole])

In this formulation, the contiguity of molecules making up a body assures that the contiguity of bodies involves some mixture between them. This idea can be elaborated using Serres' description of the skin not as a *medium* between bodies touching, but as a *mixture* in which bodies mingle. As a theory of contact, mediation serves to separate and classify rather than fuse and hybridise. Against the common notion of skin as a form of envelope outlining the body and separating it from other bodies, Serres proposes a notion of skin as a sort of nimbus thinning out until it is unclear exactly where it ends. As I understand this, it is a conception of the skin *as felt*, where sensations of things touched mingle with the sensation of one's own flesh and skin, not *as seen*, where the factual porosity of the skin is on a smaller scale than the human eye can perceive (Serres 80-1).

Neither Serres nor Jackson makes a strict division between actual and virtual contact. To be in touch with ideas or fictions is also to enter into a hybridic assemblage. When some of the components are virtual and not bounded by material solidity, it becomes even clearer that they permeate one another as they come into contact, they way consciousness could be said to permeate synapses and brain cells. In the following section, I deal with prosthetic connections between authors, readers and literary works and outline a specific technique for inviting and intensifying virtual tactility.

Conceptual Intimacy

We don't understand each other, but something understands something, the way one gear understands the other with which it meshes. (Hagfish)

Jackson describes in an interview how writers, readers and texts enter into prosthetic assemblages like the exquisite corpses mentioned in the previous section:

Writing is like shedding skin, no, because it's living flesh, though writing is not like having babies, I've never quite taken to that metaphor (maybe because I've never had a baby), it's more like stitching together a monster out of bits of your self and bits of

other stuff and sending it out to do things for you. It's a fetch, a demon double, neither you nor clearly separate from you. And it goes and presses itself on people, it infiltrates them. (Jackson in Amerika, "Stitch")

In this section, I am focusing on the connection between reader and text, and how the virtual tactility of this contact can be increased. A technique which was briefly mentioned in relation to *The Doll Games* is inviting the reader to play. Ludic or interactive aspects of a work posit the reader as an experimenter making connections. In a metatextual comment on her role as both author and reader of her own story, the patchwork girl writes that unread words stagnate into "enclosures of wrought letters fused together with rust, iron cages like ancient elevators with no functioning parts. Whereas the read words are lubricated and mobile, rub familiarly against one another in the buttery medium of my regard, rearrange themselves in my peripheral vision to suggest alternatives" (Patchwork [body of text/blood]). Instead of mentioning actual tactile interaction such as typing or clicking links, the visual activity of reading is described in startlingly tactile terms, as producing lubricant for the material reconfigurations of words. This suggests that the hypertext form as such is not enough to turn a text into a dynamic assemblage, but that active reading achieves this even with formally monolinear texts.

How is reader interaction produced specifically as phantom touch, and inversely, how can phantom touch be used to intensify the interactive experience? In order to address these questions, I develop the concept of conceptual intimacy. First of all, might writing stand in an indexical and not just representational relation to touch, as do other art forms like sculpture (Mileaf 191), painting (Paterson 88-9), photography and film (Marks, *Skin* 92-3)? Brian Rotman distinguishes between "capture media" such as audiovisual recording and "notational media" such as writing, but observes that mainly notational forms such as figural painting, textile arts and handwriting nevertheless capture traces of the artists' touch in their arrangement of brushstrokes, threads or ink (428). Such traces of touch (the artist's or that of passing time, for instance), giving the viewer a sense of standing in physical contact with the work, is what Benjamin referred to as aura (Marks, *Skin* 140). In *My Body*, Jackson's autobiographical persona describes how while drawing she is "pressing the soft lead voluptuously into the paper. A blind person could trace my drawings with her fingertips three pages down in my notebook" (Body [eyelid]). Here, drawing becomes doubly tactile, as the artist's touch is captured not just visually but as a tangible imprint. Typing and printing does not allow for such direct transmission of touch, though older methods of writing such as engraved lettering might. As I shall argue, however, virtual forms of tactile metonymy might achieve a similar auratic effect.

Capture operates metonymically, while notation operates metaphorically (Rotman 427). Thus, Degas' bronze statue *Little Dancer* refers metaphorically to a dancing body, but the wig and bodice it is clothed in refers metonymically to the reality of the stage. "By incorporating found objects, Degas established a different (tactile, metonymic) way to be modern," Trotter argues, and goes on to describe *Little Dancer* as "an important precedent for the techniques of collage and assemblage" (*Cooking* 300). The surrealists' interest in found objects and in the indexical aspect of photography (Mileaf 15) as well as the action painters' use of painting as a capture medium instead of a notational medium (Rotman 429) take this metonymic modernity further. Marks argues, against Benjamin, that film is auratic (and fetishistic) because it stands in an indexical relation to a real situation leaving its imprint on the surface of the film. For her, the actual material contact is what makes the connection metonymical and not just metaphorical (Marks, *Skin* 92-3). I believe, however, that virtual, immaterial connections can function metonymically too, and that discussions of the mimetic operations of film can be transferred to literature in order to argue this point.

Marks characterises mimesis as "an immanent way of being in the world" in which "subjects take on the physical, material qualities of objects, while objects take on the perceptive and knowledgeable qualities of subjects" (*Skin* 141). There is a mimetic relation between an artwork and its subject matter as well as between artwork and audience. In the former relation, mimesis is distinguished from symbolic representation, but this distinction does not correspond to the above distinction between capture and notation. Mimesis would be the artwork *performing* a gesture instead of representing one. In the case of film, the notational representation of a gesture coincides with the captured trace of an actor's gesture, while mimetic gestures capture the gestures of for instance photographers more indirectly and often indecipherably. Translated to literature, neither mimetic nor represented gestures capture the gestures of the author in any obvious way. Nevertheless, the mimetic gestures of art operate metonymically rather than metaphorically.

Barker distinguishes the mimetic relation between artwork and audience from identification as traditionally understood within film theory, characterising it instead as a "kinaesthetic empathy" between audience and film (119). The film becomes a prosthetic extension of the viewer's body, a "vehicle for movement and action" (Barker 110). I understand this mimetic relation between audience and artwork as a form of metonymy because certain gestures in the audience, such as tensing or gasping, stand in for more comprehensive forms of action and involvement of which they are a part. Barker argues that when watching the "kinaesthetic comedy" of Buster Keaton, the audience empathises with his agile attempts to fit into tricky and

shifting spaces and situations, recognising – perhaps in an unconscious, embodied way – the complicated, partial fit between spectator and cinematic space (93-7). Similarly, a literary text mimicking the fitting together of objects (as, according to Scarry, literary realism routinely does in order to create a sense of solidity) induce the reader to mimic in turn the construction process and thereby take part in the literary assemblage.

An important feature of modernism is to put the audience in actual contact with the artwork by emphasising its material rather than representational aspects. Artistic meaning becomes sensual, processual and relational, for example in the encounter with the surrealists' found and juxtaposed objects (Mileaf 86, 109-10). Literary modernists too experimented with "the material specificity of reading, of engaging with things – books – that have ideas in them" (Brown, *Sense* 9). In Hertel's view, electronic publishing precludes this possibility as reading ceases to be a tactile activity and readers "no longer feel the materiality of texts" (177). But as hypertheorists have been quick to point out, writing and reading on the computer involve their own forms of actual tactile contact as well as virtual tactility, and if anything, electronic literature has intensified (post)modernist concerns with the materiality of the medium. All literary media are tangible in some way, yet I think Barbara Korte is right to point out that "what is significant about literature cannot be touched anyway" (cited in Hertel 177). The mimetic, metonymical connection between reader and work can be made virtually tangible quite independent of actual contact, for instance through conceptual intimacy.

I borrow the term conceptual intimacy from the photographer and art scholar Åsa Andersson, who used it in a conference presentation to refer to a certain phenomenological intimacy with objects. Conceptual intimacy differs from conventional understandings of intimacy in that the subject-object relation is neither personal nor emotional. Crucially, however, "conceptual" does not indicate abstract concepts but a connection to conceptual art, where conceptions are often perceptual and corporeal rather than cognitive. Conceptual intimacy in art draws upon the unconscious, routine tactile intimacy with things in order to present unfamiliar objects as though they were intimately familiar. The removal of an object from its mundane context and framing of it as a piece of conceptual art simultaneously estranges and enhances its air of conceptual intimacy. (A similar thing occurs when it is framed as the object of phenomenological inquiry and the sense of conceptual intimacy surrounding it is consciously reflected upon.)

An example of conceptual intimacy from visual art would be Franck Juery's photographs of miniature models and paper cutouts in the series entitled *Ni-na*. This is photography addressed to the fingertips: to the tactile memory of fiddling with minute things. Through haptic visuality, these photographs evoke a virtual form of tactile metonymy through which the

viewer can hook up to these miniature worlds. The extremely limited depth of field obliterates the surroundings and in effect magnifies the miniature tableaux so that they fill up the entire world of the work. The models and toys are photographed against squared paper and often posed beside matches: pictorial conventions for showing scale. However, in a playful reconfiguration of these conventions, the paper is torn and crumbled into a landscape where the burnt and crooked matches stand in for trees. Thus, these would-be reminders of proper proportions are appropriated to the toy scale. This kind of creative misuse suggests tactile tinkering to see what will fit where and how, which contributes to the sense of conceptual intimacy.

Artworks evoke conceptual intimacy by addressing the sense of touch, though as in the example above the tactile contact tends to be virtual and visually mediated. The viewer's gaze may be directed to discern tactile traces in the material, which function as visual instructions for phantom touch. Important techniques for inviting such a tactile mode of looking are miniaturisation, texturing and wear, for reasons suggested in the previous sections. Tactile traces may be for example smudges, stains, fingerprints or folds which suggests how the object has been touched before and may be touched again. They may also be clues for handling, such as joints, hinges, fasteners or openings. Such tactile traces lend the object an air of conceptual intimacy: that is, of having been intimately known by others and of being intimately known by the viewer even though no actual touch has taken place. Conceptual intimacy can be described as a virtual form of *fit*: a sense that one can hook up to an object, create a working connection with it and metonymically inhabit its world.

Conceptual intimacy is dependent upon, but not identical to, tactile familiarity. Drawing upon the psychologist William James, Brown makes a distinction between perception and sensation and argues that “in the routine of daily life, perception perpetually forecloses sensuous experience in order to render the material world phenomenal, which means rendering it inhabitable.” Perception is associated with use (phenomenological intentionality and the unconscious habits of everyday life) while sensation is associated with “misuse” (misrecognition and the experience of things as such, for example in art).⁵⁶ Perception and sensation are not opposed; rather, “the experience of sensation depends on disorientation, both habit and its disruption” (Brown, “Secret” 6-7; *Sense* 7-9). What this means, applied to my discussion, is that conceptual intimacy can only be *sensed* when one's tactile familiarity with everyday objects is somehow disturbed. When an object is presented as a piece of conceptual art, for example, the perception instrumental to using the object is stopped in its tracks and

⁵⁶ Brown makes a third, corresponding distinction between objects and things, perhaps the most important one for this “thing theory.” As I use “thing” and “object” interchangeably throughout this dissertation, I have bypassed this distinction in order to avoid confusion.

transformed into sensation for sensation's sake. Actual use is replaced with virtual use as the viewer toys with different ways of touching and handling the object, drawing upon her tactile knowledge of similar objects and upon visually mediated tactile cues.

Doll games are commonly associated with a particularly personal, highly emotional form of intimacy dependent upon individual childhood memories, but I want to consider them as a form of creative misuse in which conceptual intimacy makes itself felt. The proper use of a doll is to play with it, but play is close to misuse in Brown's sense: experimentation with putting things to new and different uses ("Secret" 3). Because their use keeps changing, the sensual experience of dolls as material objects tends not to recede into perceptual intentionality. To the extent that a doll's shape is functional to the more specific purpose of manipulating its limbs in a semblance of human life, it may be comparable to a tool being used, while other objects drawn into the doll games are more unequivocally misused. However, even the doll's use value is conflated with its "misuse value," that is, the "fetishistic overvaluation or misappropriation" of a thing (Brown, "Secret" 2-3). Shelley writes that "the doll games themselves depended on the ability to see things another way, to animate a stone or forked bits of plastic. Imagine someone who couldn't do this, who picked up a doll as one picks up a strange tool, careful in case there are sharp bits, wiggling the moving parts" (Doll [uncanny]). In this hypothetical scenario, instrumental perception is interrupted by the subject's inability to figure out how to use the object, but is not replaced by a sensation of the thing as such. Since the object in question is a doll, to fail to understand its use is also to fail to understand its misuse, that is, the fetishistic animation which is a crucial feature of play as well as art. As Shelley explains, playing with dolls made animation as such approach a perceptual habit, so that "anything could metamorphose into a prop in a doll game, or even a character" (Doll [uncanny]). Doll games routinely draw upon the kind of use which tactile habits might help one figure out ("wiggling the moving parts") and transform it into a creative misuse exceeding instrumentality ("to animate a stone or forked bits of plastic"). Conceptual intimacy, which otherwise tends to recede into the background of perceptual habits, is foregrounded by this process of estrangement.

If playing with dolls brings out a sense of conceptual intimacy, this is even truer for the work *The Doll Games*. As the reader does not share the Jackson sisters' personal recollections of the specific dolls presented, the sense of intimacy created in the work draws upon a more general tactile familiarity with dolls. Dolls make for an effective choice of object for conceptual intimacy, since many readers will have spent hours and hours of their childhoods intimately handling dolls. Presumably, most reader's tactile memories of doll bodies far exceed their conscious recollections of doll play.

Instead of drawing upon such tactile familiarity in order to arouse the reader's idiosyncratic memories, associations and emotions; *The Doll Games* draws upon it to create conceptual intimacy. A reader with no individual experience of dolls might bring her tactile familiarity with toys or other objects to her encounter with the photographs and descriptions of doll bodies, so that a sense of conceptual intimacy is nevertheless achieved.

The depictions of dolls in *The Doll Games* enhance tactility and thereby conceptual intimacy by emphasising wear. The entry for "plastic" in the glossary details the aging of doll bodies: "Although it [plastic] does not decay like organic matter, it can become discolored, break, or tear; plastic joints may wear down, leading to the loss of a limb, and plastic hair, unless molded to the head, may fray and fall out" (Doll [glossary]). The connection between wear and life (including death and decay) is brought out by, but not dependent upon, the doll's resemblance to a human body.⁵⁷ On a more general level, wear increases tactility in several ways: First, by adding tactile allure to the material, either polished smoothness or intriguingly tattered and cracked textures. Second, by being a sign that the material has been touched and handled often before. Third, by indicating that the material responds to touch by changing, entering into a process of organic decay which makes it almost animate enough to touch back. The surrealists drew upon the potential of wear to intensify tactility by incorporating found objects into their works of art (Mileaf 85-6), and Jackson practices a literary version of this technique in which the found objects are virtual.

Marks connects wear in general with aura in her discussion of the tactile look of stop-motion animation: "All the surfaces in Quay films have a heavy patina of tarnish and decay, so that even floors and furniture have a sense of aura, that is, the marks of a long-gone, living presence" (Marks, *Touch* 132). For Stewart, the "suffusion of the *worn*" with aura is nothing but a nostalgic projection, a mere "metaphor of texture" (*Longing* 139). This is true in the sense that the patina of Marks' example and a lot of other art is a *fabrication* of the passing of time. However, even when the surface is not as old and worn as it seems, the patina does more than metaphorically represent past presence: it does actually - metonymically - capture the touch of the artist or manufacturer. Furthermore, regardless of whether the wear is "fake" or not, it may work to trigger phantom touch in the viewer and create a sense of conceptual intimacy.

⁵⁷ In one of their recorded conversations, the Jackson sisters discuss how dirt and decay make the plastic bodies of dolls more like living, aging, human bodies, see [t3-fall].

Reading as Playing

I was also moved by the image of reading as offering yourself to be wounded by a piece of writing. Like all tran[s]formative experience, reading at its best does some kind of damage to the envelope in which you move about. It's a breach, but one that you suffer voluntarily. You open yourself to it, expecting and even hoping to be altered by it, without knowing how. (Jackson in Nunes, "Written")

Throughout this chapter, I have developed the phenomenology of doll games outlined in *The Doll Games* into a phenomenology of reading emphasising the virtual tactility of literature. My line of argument is grounded in a consideration of doll games as a neglected, collaborative and improvisational, art form. The Jackson sisters describe how they experience the world on a different scale through the bodies of their dolls, and use their dolls to gain access to landscapes they would otherwise be barred from. Drawing upon this idea, I have argued that the touching of the dolls function as a sort of tactile metonymy, by which for example the fitting of a finger into a doll's purse stands in for fitting the whole hand. Through such tactile metonymy, rather than through purely imaginary identification, the playing girl gains access to the doll's miniature world, which does not remain enclosed within a larger world but temporarily erases or merges with it. I have further argued that the phenomenology of doll games serves as a model for a phenomenology of reading in which the reader hooks up to the fictive world via tactile metonymy. On a very concrete level, the reader gains access to a fictional universe by opening a book or interacting with an electronic hypertext. On a more virtual level, Jackson's rhetorical gestures of calling attention to the tangible body of text works to create a sense of tactile metonymy even in the absence of actual touch.

More generally, the form of touch privileged by play is that of fitting things together and experimenting with various material configurations. This is a central form of phantom touch in Jackson's work, related not just to doll games but to art forms such as exquisite corpses, assemblage and collage. It has an obvious connection to Deleuze's conception of desire not as a want originating in a (perpetually lacking) subject, but as a productive force making connections. What I refer to as exquisite corpses might as well be called "desiring machines," Deleuze's term for assemblages produced by desire (Colebrook, *Gilles* 1-2). As a model for experimental art practises, play emphasises the material agency and tactile allure of found objects. By material agency, I am referring to the fit and friction of things, including immaterial things such as words, which is allowed to play a part in the creative process. By tactile allure, I am referring to an urge to touch and make contact which might seem to reside in the skin and hands rather than in consciousness.

In art forms prohibiting actual touch, tactile allure can nevertheless be summoned up by what I term conceptual intimacy. While conceptual intimacy figures most prominently within visual and installation art, Jackson employs it as part of her object writing, modelled upon surrealist object art. Conceptual intimacy denotes an impersonal form of intimacy between hand and doll, mouth and pen, or ear and shell, for example. Because tactile relating to the world is such an intimately familiar experience, conceptual intimacy can be suggested by small means such as two shapes which might fit together or two textures which might create an interesting friction. Virtual tactility is further enhanced by frequent references to texture, contact and manual manipulation. Together with Jackson's metatextual references to the fictionality and material specificity of the text, this presents the reader with a phantom sensation of language as a tangible medium to be reconfigured and played with.

Seeing Sight: The Anatomy of Vision

And since to look at something is to resemble it, it is foolish to look too long at anything, unless it is wise. Anyway, each looking is a likening; each likening an adhesion; each adhesion a little loss, a little wound, a place on you that used to be, that yearns to be sky, cloud, dung, donkey, another person's face. (Early 96)

There is a large body of scholarship documenting the “visualism,” “ocular-centrism” or “scopophilia,” as it is alternately called, of modern western culture (see Classen, *Worlds* 5-7). More generally, studies of perception and sensation in various academic fields tend to lean heavily towards the (audio)visual. Even critical studies of a panoptical, patriarchal or colonial “gaze” can be said to partake in the larger ocularcentric tradition in which iconoclastic scepticism towards visual appearances plays an important part (see Jay, *Downcast* 13-16; Crary, *Suspensions* 2-4). However, some visual culture scholars argue that the iconoclastic tradition of privileging word over image and treating everything as “text” has precluded serious consideration of the visual on its own terms (see Stafford; Bal *Reading* xiii). Due to the wealth of material related to sight both in Jackson’s work and in general, I dedicate this chapter to a very specific motif: the anatomising gaze turned back upon itself. Jackson’s anatomisation of the eye concretises vision and prevents it from becoming a disembodied view from nowhere, conflated with “perception” in general.

Within literary studies, visual description has its own term: ekphrasis. Although the prime example of ekphrasis tends to be the shield of Achilles featured in the *Iliad*, there is a historical increase in literary descriptions of objects and scenery around the 18th century (Wall 1-6). This increase roughly corresponds to a shift from rhetoric as the model for the arts, including visual arts, to painting as the model for prose (Schor 33). The abundance of visual description in the realist novel does not necessarily fulfil a narrative function, but instead creates a “reality effect” when taken in at a glance (Trotter, *Cooking* 202-8). With modernism, the visual aspect of literature becomes even more pronounced, as authors experiment with literary correspondences to new visual technologies such as cinema, x-ray and the microscope (Jacobs 9-38; Danius 1-24; Crary, *Suspensions* 6-7; Bal, *Mottled* 3-4). However, such experimentation might also entail a critique of visuality, such as the surrealists’ scepticism towards sight, following an alternative “antipictorialist” trajectory within literary criticism (Tadié 114).

Reading has traditionally been thought to involve the production of virtual images, which have been discussed to a greater extent than other forms of literary phantom sensations. A limitation in these discussions is their general emphasis on a painterly or filmic effects of *flatness* (see Gallagher 283-5;

Hertel 191-3; Bal, *Mottled Screen* 2-3).⁵⁸ For instance, the basic premise guiding Scarry's arguments in *Dreaming by the Book* is that inner vision naturally produces transparent, flat, still images which lack solidity and are resistant to movement. However, Scarry only refers to her own experience to support this assumption, while experiments with rotating mental figures indicate that many people (including me) can easily visualise depth and movement.⁵⁹ I would suggest that the type of visual imagination described by Scarry is inherently *readerly*, and specifically honed on a canon of classics. As most of her literary examples are pre-20th-century, it is likely that their visualisation techniques are informed by visual technologies such as painting, photography and magic lanterns; technologies corresponding to Scarry's view of inner vision as either clear and detailed, but still, or an ethereal play of light and shadow. Jackson's literary visualisation techniques, on the other hand, are reasonably influenced by 20th and 21st century technologies such as cinema, computer games and multimedia environments.

However, the visual technology I wish to highlight as a figure for the spatial vision in Jackson's work is an earlier one: "In the stereoscope, two visions, each flat in isolation, form a third so real its sideways depths seem to tilt and open beneath your feet like a chasm. What magic transforms paper into flesh, a figured surface into room to breathe? The subtle but significant difference between not quite identical twins" (Half 102). Stereoscopic devices were all the rage in the 19th century, reflecting a more general interest in binocular vision (Crary, *Techniques* 118-20). They do not depict depth but (re)create it by drawing upon the eyes' ability to merge two different flat images into a three-dimensional space. When brought to bear on a literary text, binocular vision can be understood as the reader's ability to juxtapose several different phantom images. While normally these images are given in sequence, Brophy literalises the idea of writing in stereo by dividing the text on the page into two parallel columns for parts of *In Transit*. The narrator explains that it is "wasteful to direct the two speakers of a stereophonic system, or the two lenses of a pair of spectacles, to helping two sense organs to focus on a single object" and that the "true advance of civilization will come when science enables a human being to see two Veroneses, one out of each eye, at once or to lend each of his ears to a different opera at the same time" (93). What this tongue-in-cheek rationale misses is that the doubling involved in binocular vision (as well as binaural hearing) is not redundant

⁵⁸ According to Trotter, the seemingly obvious flatness of painting did not emerge as a significant quality until the impressionists began to draw attention to the materiality of canvas and paint, 292-3, see also Jay, *Downcast* 154. Thus, flatness in literary ekphrasis might be counted among the technologically mediated forms of vision to emerge with modernism.

⁵⁹ See Esrock and Sacks 220-31 for a survey of scientific debates about the importance of visual imagery for cognition, and discussions of the great individual varieties as to how voluntary, conscious, clear and detailed mental images are.

but adds a new dimension: depth. Even if the reader could focus on two things at once, for example in order to read a different column of text with each eye, it is doubtful whether two flat images should count as “more” than stereo vision.⁶⁰ In my less literal understanding of stereo writing, different images evoked by a literary work form a whole larger than its constituent parts.

Impracticalities aside, it is not necessary to present more than one image at once, as the image currently given might be combined with a previous one in the kind of virtual stereo vision I am referring to. While in actual vision different aspects of a thing can only be seen one by one in sequence, virtual vision can present a combined image which is not just three-dimensional but multiperspectival. Scarry laments that virtual vision tends to be fragmented, but the form of fragmentation in which a thing is seen from several different angles at once is only a disadvantage when judged by the standards of perspectival realism.⁶¹ I connect this multiperspectival simultaneity to the multimodality of phantom sensation, where things can be for example seen and felt all at once, without regard for proximity or point of view. As demonstrated in relation to haptic visuality in the introductory chapter, there is a similar intermingling of virtual and actual perceptions involved in apprehending real material objects. For instance, while actually seeing one aspect of an object one might virtually see a recalled or imagined alternate view or posture. Jackson captures this phenomenon poignantly: “Looking around,’ I said, and it turned out I meant it: *around*: like when something is so familiar that you can see it from all sides no matter where you stand. When it seems to be gripped in a fist of your regard. Or mouth cunt ass” (Early 97). The “fist of your regard” is a startling figure for a haptic visuality which grasps the object of the gaze from all angles at once, but Jackson does not stop there. She adds the “mouth cunt ass,” implicitly of the regard, to further emphasise the tactile, even erotic, intimacy of seeing – a taking in which, if taken literally, would obstruct the view, thus a uniquely literary phantom sight.

“Image” (as well as “picture” etc.) can have a highly abstract and metaphorical meaning, and when used in a more concrete sense is often extended to encompass representations in different sensory modalities. When I discuss images in Jackson’s work, I refer to multisensory figures with a strong visual aspect. As for the degree of abstraction, I do not use “image”

⁶⁰ This is not to dismiss Brophy’s experiment in stereo writing, which is effective in presenting a text and its commentary, parallel strands of thought or alternative plotlines. I am merely pointing out that the formal device has little bearing on stereo vision.

⁶¹ Furthermore, I think that Scarry exaggerates the relative deficiencies of the inner eye. In actual vision too, only part of a scene is seen in clear detail, while the rest is seen through the blur of peripheral vision. The impression that the whole scene is seen clearly is created by moving the eyes, changing the focus and habitually filling in the blanks. It is hardly surprising that inner vision shares the difficulty in creating complex images in clear detail.

to refer to ideas or conceptualisations, though many of the images appearing in Jackson's work can be considered concretisations of abstract ideas. Of course, few of the (literary) images I discuss are actually visual images, but I would like to keep the distinction between virtually *visual* images with an articulated sensory component, and purely abstract "images" (if such a thing exists). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Deleuze mostly discusses literary percepts in terms of visions and auditions. It is clear that these retain some connection to ordinary perception: "The finest writers have singular conditions of perception that allow them to draw on or shape aesthetic percepts like veritable visions, even if they return from them with red eyes" (Deleuze, *Essays* 116). This formulation suggests that although there is no proper connection between aesthetic percepts and visual images, a particularly acute or otherwise extraordinary vision might aid a writer in making perceptible the imperceptible. (Presumably, a writer with a more developed ear might make percepts audible instead and so on.) The detail of the red eyes stresses the corporeality of actual seeing even if it is meant figuratively: it is in itself an example of an idea made *visible* and may call attention to the eyestrain of reading. With the aid of Jackson, I want to reinforce and specify the connections between virtual visions and actual optical conditions.

If Esrock is right that references to seeing effectively prompts visual imagining (183), then Jackson's explicit thematising of sight should be the best place to start looking for phantom sights in her work. This chapter opens with a section connecting back to the section on body writing and anatomical blazons in the introductory chapter. Here, I focus specifically on the trope of auto-anatomisation prominent in *My Body*, with additional examples from the work of Jackson and Brophy. In the following section, I describe how Jackson, alongside Barnes, hones in this auto-anatomisation upon the eye, thus turning the anatomising gaze back upon itself. The next section shifts the focus slightly from the eye as organ to Jackson's anatomisation of the sense of sight. By detailing various optical phenomena, she insists upon the concrete particularity of vision and refuses its abstraction into a gaze from nowhere. At the same time, neither the eye nor the sense of sight are understood in a strictly physiological fashion. Like Barnes, Jackson performs a Burtonesque anatomisation of physical and psychological aspects of vision wrapped up in one. In conclusion, I describe how this notion of sight as situated and subjective – as *eyesight* rather than vision – can be applied to literary phantom sight. Jackson compares writing to taxidermy: the fabrication of a vivid image of life out of inanimate matter. The reader is invited to see herself reflected in the glass eyes of the specimen, completing the picture by lending them her life while at the same time recognising her death in their mute materiality. More specifically, Jackson's

anatomised bodies looking back prompt the reader to turn the anatomising gaze upon herself.

Auto-anatomisation

Two breasts look up from the dirt. (Gallows)

In the introductory chapter I described Jackson's body writing as a revision of the blazon genre. Traditionally, this genre presents an album of ekphrastic images of beautiful (or, in the case of anti-blazons, ugly) female parts. Like Wittig before her, Jackson replaces the static voyeurism of the genre with blazons of grotesquely fragmented yet living bodies in motion. Like Wittig, she also draws upon anatomical illustrations and textbooks to describe the blood and guts of the body in pieces, in a fashion some readers may consider violent. A more specific convention both authors borrow from early modern anatomy is that of auto-dissection.⁶² The tradition of Christ demonstrating his wounds, sacred heart and bowels of pity played into the Renaissance convention of depicting anatomised bodies as alive and performing their own dissection. In literature as well as anatomical illustration, self-dissection offered a concretisation of "nosce te ipsum" (Sawday 110-29). This conflation of physiological and psychological self-knowledge is characteristic of Jackson's use of the auto-dissection trope. The female worm in "Hagfish, Worm, Kakapo" expresses a wish to literally keep an eye on the parasitical male projecting "images," "metaphors" and "dreams" into her consciousness from inside of her: "I envy the man with the pane of glass set in his abdominal wall so the creatures of science could view the factory in which his organs labored" (Hagfish). As Sawday points out, to actually look inside oneself is taboo because potentially lethal (12). However, art, like the medical imaging technologies it often draws upon, allows for virtual auto-dissections which simultaneously challenge the taboo and feed off its charge.

Apart from early modern anatomy, Jackson models her virtual dissections upon "visible (wo)man" toys with transparent skin and/or detachable organs. The mechanical Herman Godfrey, fascinated by organic life, visualises a living mouse in this way:

Though he had never seen a mouse he thought it was a mouse, and as he thought this he imagined the mouse in front of him, as big as a zeppelin, and he could see its insides through the walls, and it was all red inside, red was like a kind of spell of life, and it dripped and bubbled and there was a turning and pumping and conveying in there and a rendering into sludge and extruding and discarding and it was hot with activity in there, a boom town of mousyness, and all alive-o. (Musée)

⁶² Martindale describes how the lesbians in Wittig's *Le corps lesbien* authoritatively anatomise themselves, 347.

Unlike actual visible (wo)man models, Jackson's virtual version offers a look inside the living body. An animated self-portrait on a page of her website promoting *The Melancholy of Anatomy* presents the visible woman as auto-dissection.⁶³ An arrow pointing at the nude portrait prompts the viewer to "touch my heart," indicating the stylised Valentine heart held up in front of her chest. As the viewer tries to metaphorically touch her heart and perhaps, as implied by her nudity and her invitation, get to know her intimately, the picture changes. Even before the heart is touched by the cursor, it metamorphoses into an interior organ held in front of her suddenly opened torso.⁶⁴ The heart is still stylised, but now in a more naturalistic and anatomically correct fashion reminiscent of models made out of wax or plastic. There is no gore; the intestines are clearly defined, dry and distinctly coloured in the tradition of anatomical illustration (see Sawday 100-1). Nevertheless, the viewer might feel shocked at the sudden revelation of intestines, implicated in a violation of the body portrayed and perhaps even punished for her erotically tinged curiosity. The interactive touch, mediated by mouse and cursor, might not turn the viewer into an anatomist dissecting a corpse but it does turn her into a layman opening the flaps of a "flap anatomy" or removing the detachable organs of a "visible woman." Meanwhile, the challenging gaze of the nude, which remains constant and unfazed as her torso springs open, reminds the viewer that this is Jackson's show. Her auto-dissection startlingly demonstrates the literal meaning of anatomical imagery such as "touch my heart."

The entire work *My Body* is a case of auto-anatomisation, if not strictly speaking auto-dissection. While the work's illustrations depict only the body's outsides, a few of the texts provide a look inside the body of Jackson's persona. In one case, she employs a crude technology for visualising her insides: "Holding up my hands against the sun, or cupping the light of a flashlight, I looked at the bones inside, a shadow in a luminous mantle" (Body [hands]). More often, she imagines it: "I can always give myself a funny feeling by picturing what my skeleton is doing" (Body [skeleton]). Like Benedetta Bonichi's x-ray revisions of art history in which skeletons look themselves in the mirror, embrace or hold up meat in a paraphrase of Francis Bacon, Jackson's living skeleton brings together the vanitas tradition with contemporary medical imaging technologies.

Other passages recall the early modern allegory of body as house: the protagonist can virtually double and diminish herself in order to travel into her own body and explore its secrets:

⁶³ The page in question is no longer linked from the main site, but as of 29 Jan. 2013 still accessible at the following address: <<http://www.ineradicablestain.com/melancholy.html>>.

⁶⁴ I should acknowledge that the untouchability of the heart may be due to a simple technical solution – that of having the entire picture and not just part of it function as "trigger" for the animation. Ideally, Jackson may have intended for the touch of the symbolical heart to trigger the transformation.

While I know that the inside of my body is a dense press of lubricated meats I can't help seeing it as hollow space, like the inside of a trunk. Each elusive hint of sensation from one of my organs is a glint of colored light that reveals the organ hanging there like a Christmas tree ornament, so it's never lightless inside, but a warm, ruddy dark. It is a secret, busy space, and when I imagine myself inside it, I am filled with glee and self-satisfaction. (Body [internal organs])

The satisfaction derived from imagining her inner organs is reminiscent of *The Story of Mary MacLane*, in which the reader is invited to gaze upon the author portrait and know that “inside the pictured body is a liver, a MacLane liver, of admirable perfectness” (21). Like Jackson's, MacLane's autobiographical persona performs her auto-dissection by way of sensory clues instead of applying generic anatomical knowledge to her body.⁶⁵ Her conviction that she has her exceptional liver to thank for her flawless digestion, strong constitution and temperament in general suggests an almost humouralist understanding of anatomy. That these visions of the body's interior are not anatomically correct does not make them less real. They translate experiential evidence gathered by other senses into visual images, in a way not wholly unlike how medical imaging technologies operate. Unlike medical rhetoric, however, these literary auto-dissections refuse any neat distinction between fact and fiction, matter and mind.

So far, I have been discussing auto-dissections performed with the mind's eye or for the benefit of an external viewer (as is the case with Jackson's visible woman self-portrait). However, *My Body* also comments specifically upon the visual complications of auto-anatomisation, understood as literally turning one's eye back onto oneself. The concern with the anatomising gaze is associated with the work's illustrations and discussions of drawing. Although the fairly naturalistic, black-and-white line drawings do not obviously reference anatomical illustrations, the perspectival realism they employ is informed by anatomical studies of nude models and historically even of dissected corpses. Renaissance artists believed that in order to properly depict a body it should be conceived of as a volume, not a surface, and its interior structure of muscle, tendon and bone made visible through the skin (Sawday 85-6). Jackson writes herself into this tradition, as the body blazoned is seen through the eyes of an aspiring painter, who learns anatomy from art history: “It took a book to correct my eye and point out that the neck is a sturdy extension of the trunk, bigger around than most people's arms, not a spindly perch for the head” (Body [neck], see also [ears]).

The harshness of the drawings indicates a devotion to scientific objectivity and a resistance to idealisation, yet their perspective differs sharply from that of conventional anatomical studies. Several of them are drawn from the highly subjective point of view of someone looking at her own body. The

⁶⁵ See also Jackson's vision of the brain as an architecture (labyrinth or burrow) changing characteristics depending on what it feels like, Body [brain].

unconventional angles and foreshortened perspectives make the body appear grotesque, or as Jackson puts it:

When nobody else was around or willing to sit still for me, I drew whatever I could see of myself: my feet, for example; my legs. What my eyes showed me, though, looked very strange on paper. [...] It was the truth (from my perspective), but what use was it to art? In my renderings of all-I-could-see, I had better leave myself out, or regard myself in a mirror, at a safe distance. Look too closely, I noted, and you will see monsters. Realism, and possibly reality itself, is reticence and fudging it. (Body [legs])

The body of perspectival realism is normalised and has a normalising effect on the perception of actual bodies in space. In drawing apparently distorted and disjointed body parts, Jackson aligns herself with painters such as Alyssa Monks, Jenny Saville and Joan Semmel who render photorealistically their own and other bodies reflected in mirrors, refracted in water, seen close up or from odd angles.⁶⁶

A literary parallel is the auto-anatomisation performed by the narrator of Brophy's experimental novel *In Transit* in order to determine her/his own sex, which s/he has inexplicably forgotten. S/he regrets being "imprisoned inside this I like the tadpole-pupil inside the jelly eye" and unable to see her/himself from the outside (85). The pun on I/eye brings out the curious visual bias of her self-perception, as though, much like the reader, s/he were only given certain partial perceptual clues. Her/his sex-specific parts are tactile and kinaesthetic blanks, just like they are textual blanks. "Impatiently I calculated that my problem would be solved in three seconds if only I could have the privacy in which to rip open that zip and – no matter how cursorily, provided wholesaley – look," s/he complains, reflecting the Freudian obsession with ocular proof of sexual difference (Brophy 78). Being in a public place (the entire novel is set in an airport) prevents her/him from undressing, however, and her/his clothes are unrevealing: "If I'd had to go on the evidence of my trousers alone, I would have been obliged to believe that an exceptionally long penis took its rise half-way down the inside of my left thigh and presently curled like coral over the front of my leg towards my knee" (Brophy 77). Ironically, the privacy and mirrors provided by restrooms are off limits until s/he has determined whether s/he should enter the ladies' or the gents'.

While the particular dilemma of forgetting one's sex might be quite unique, the public restroom problem is very real for trans people and others who fail to pass for the sex indicated on the door. The narrator of *My Body* also describes "incredulous shrieks in bathrooms and dressing rooms" due to

⁶⁶ "Photorealism" can mean different things. What I am referring to is primarily that the paintings in question conform to a photographic truth about perspective. But, like the camera obscura, the camera lets in light through one opening and flattens perspective compared to human stereoscopic vision. Thus, alternative ways to render depth in painting might equally well be termed "realist."

her ambiguously muscular physique (Body [arms]). The bodies of other girls are perceived as harmonious wholes, feminine in every part, while the narrator experiences her own as a jumble of oversized and mismatched pieces: “In my mind’s eye I was a leering giant, gesticulating and capering around the little people, making them laugh, just one jot off a Frankenstein monster. My parts didn’t match; I couldn’t even make them move smoothly together when I thought I was being watched” (Body [shoulders]). Seeing oneself, in the mind’s eye or from the point of view of eyes situated in the body they are watching, renders the body fragmented, distorted, grotesque. The narrator of *In Transit* laments that the reader, trapped in her/his limited field of vision through first-person narration, might find her/him unattractive in her/his incompleteness (epitomised by the lack of determinate sex):

For I cannot shew [sic] you anything of myself in its entirety – no not the simplest action on my part, not the extending of my arm. I have to shew you the internal sensation of my muscles flexing, the breaking-into my frame of vision by a segment of arm I intellectually know to be my own.

And that is, I know, not very appealing. It’s like shewing you a constant dissection, with a square of skin cut, folded back and pinned down in order to display the sinews.
(Brophy 86)

However, Dolidon points out that fragmenting close-ups also serve to liberate bodies from their inescapably sexed ideal forms. Despite the narrator’s protestations, her/his indeterminate sex is what makes her/him appealing as a hero(ine) in Brophy’s picaresque adventure flirting with the operatic travesti tradition. The plot of the novel revolves around the missing penis, but once found it ceases to be of any interest: in the macabre organ auction closing the novel it is the last item to go. As for Jackson’s persona in *My Body*, she lavishes loving attention upon parts, even though they add up to a monstrous whole. For instance, stretch marks are seen not as blemishes but as beautiful markings like those in the coat of an animal: “Across my hips at the widest point are pale striations with a faint sheen to them, like a crocheted net just under the skin, like the cream curdling in coffee, just a little, and collecting into pale skeins” (Body [hips]). In the following section, I shall discuss the anatomising gaze turned to a specific part: the eye itself.

Anatomising the Eye

My eyeballs are wondrously firm and spherical, my vision clear and sharp, my gaze calmly speculative. I can peruse with equal clarity the finest of print and the faint script of smoke from a distant chimney; I owe this to Tituba, who loved to read. (Patchwork [graveyard/head/eyeballs])

More than any other sense, sight has become abstracted and disembodied (see Classen, *Color* 73). The western philosophical tradition of figuring the

intelligible as the visible depends upon severing the mind's eye from the bodily eye and "seeing" with a pure reason unaffected by optical particularities (Vasseleu 13-4; see also Jay, *Downcast* 537). In between the most metaphorical extension of sight to encompass knowledge in general, and the most specialised meaning of sight as individually variant, there is a generalised form of (implicitly visual) perception belonging to no eye in particular (see Paterson 65). When "vision" or "the gaze," is discussed, this is perhaps the level most frequently addressed. Foucault's panoptic gaze, for example, is itself invisible, like the all-seeing eye of god (Jay, "Rise" 310). When Jackson describes her genius girls as "one complicated being, with almost as many eyes as a fly, hence all-seeing," however, she appropriates the divinely omnipresent gaze with a difference: instead of a disembodied view from nowhere this is a dispersed view from everywhere dependent on a great number of individual eyes working collectively (Musée). As I shall argue throughout this section and the following, Jackson resists the abstraction and generalisation of sight by anatomising the eye. As with her blazoning of other body parts, this takes the form of vivisection rather than dissection and involves immaterial aspects such as sight. The anatomical studies of eyes reproduced on the cover of *The Melancholy of Anatomy* not only illustrate Jackson's concern with the anatomy of the eye, but also the power of eyes and even eye-like shapes decontextualized from any face or person to evoke a gaze. Jackson alludes to this power in *Half Life* when she has the protagonist Nora say: "Your pajamas are staring at me" to Louche who is wearing a pyjamas "figured with peacock eyes," that is, a print mimicking a mimicry of eyes (Half 171). In the case of *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, this power is reinforced by the placement of the eyes on the spine of the book, so that they appear to look out at prospective readers.

When Jackson writes that "vision eclipses the eye" (Putti) and that "an eye is featureless, when it is your own" (Early 99), she is referring to the fact that the eye cannot see itself. It can, however, have its gaze returned by another eye (for example its own reflection in a mirror) which sees it seeing. Peter de Bolla describes how Enlightenment moral philosophy encouraged auto-inspection in the form of an internalised impartial spectator, so that the visibility of the viewer became an intrinsic part of the more general fascination with visuality (74-6). I would argue that such auto-inspection is still very much part of western visual culture, and that it reaches its apex in the image of meeting one's own gaze in a mirror, film or photograph. Although auto-inspection is not limited to the eyes, guarding one's eyes is crucial since they are considered uniquely expressive (Jay, *Downcast* 9-11). In the Cartesian mechanistic view of the body, the eyes were understood as literally the points of entry and exit for the soul (Trevor-Roper 152). The eyes' expressive capacity creates a tension between seeing and being seen. While using one's eyes to see with, the consciousness that they too have

visual characteristics recedes from view, until someone meets the gaze and reminds the seer to guard her appearance.

When the protagonist of *My Body* scrutinises the bodies of adults, she is careful not to let them see what she sees reflected in her eyes: “I looked no higher than their hips because I was embarrassed to look at their faces, partly out of simple shyness, but also because I was afraid they would read the curiosity and the passionate disdain I felt for them in my eyes” (Body [other bodies]). This wish to see without being seen seeing repeats the pattern of the male poet who is anxious that the female blazoned should not return the gaze since the exchange of glances between lovers is figured as a battle where gazes wound (Lobanov-Rostovsky 202-3). Looks do not have to be hostile in intent in order to be received as intrusions. In “Cancer,” the protagonist is horrified that the postman witnesses his attempt to evict the cancer from his house, but even more horrified to discover the man’s eyes acknowledging what they have seen: “We looked down at the large mass struggling inside my apron. When I raised my eyes, I was met by such a grotesquely knowing, indeed sympathetic gaze that I dropped my bundle and stepped back, setting the door between us” (Melancholy 59). This intimate exchange of gazes makes it impossible to politely pretend that there is nothing there to be seen. The protagonist is forced not just to see the postman seeing, but to acknowledge that he has seen him seeing, and to see in turn the postman’s shared secrets. Rather than acknowledge what he has seen in the postman’s eyes, he chooses to forcibly cut off the exchange of gazes by shutting the door. This inelegant solution cannot save his face or undo what has been seen, but at least prevents his eyes from seeing or showing more.

The eyes’ expressive capacity is worrying because it may reveal too much, but simultaneously reassuring since its opposite, a blank stare, suggests lifelessness and soullessness. When the founder of the Word Church mourns a dead rabbit and sees “its glazed eye brighten,” this is a conventional sign that the rabbit has come back to life (Consuetudinary 140). In *Half Life*, after having seen footage of her chronically dormant conjoined twin Blanche opening her eyes, the protagonist Nora asks herself: “Hadn’t that naked eye seemed (in the instant before a practically mathematical sense of paradox made me unable to look) hazy, glazed, unaware? Not an organ of sight but a memorial to it?” (33). The absence of expression in the eyes entails the absence of perception as well and reduces the eye to an unseeing object to be looked at.⁶⁷ Because the eye is perceived as a somehow transparent, quasi-

⁶⁷ While in *Half Life*, the perceived lifelessness is reassuring to Nora, who wishes Blanche to remain dormant, in John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, the vampire’s eyes frighten because they have a dead stare: “Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object’s face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass,” 27-8. Here, the eyes appear as opaque matter whose very gaze is material and unable to penetrate the

incorporeal medium of gazes, calling attention to its tangible materiality is disturbing. As Miller points out, the eyes are the one non-disgusting bodily orifice, emitting the one non-disgusting bodily fluid: tears. Perhaps this is because the transparency of eyes as well as tears does not make them too grossly material. Conceived of as severable body parts made up of a jelly-like substance, blood, membranes and sinews, however, eyes can be intensely disgusting (Miller 90). Any reminders of the eye's materiality tend to be disturbing, such as even minor eye injuries or the unseeing stare of the dead. Touching the eye is not recommended due to the risk of irritation and infection, but the taboo against it runs much deeper than with most other forms of touch or unhygienic behaviour advised against by the medical establishment.⁶⁸

In the lexia on eyes in *My Body*, the narrator relates her discovery that eyes are material objects:

To touch the surface of the eye was a forbidden thing, I shrank from it without needing to be told, and that was probably because the eye was not really a thing, but a visible soul. Surprising, then, to study our cat's eyes from the side, one afternoon on the sunny sofa in my living room, and see that the colored part was a thin membrane, iridescent as a butterfly wing, stretched across a ball the front part of which I could see right through, and that the pupil was just a hole in the membrane whose edges tightened and flared as the light changed. Surprising also to half-open my eyes in the sunlight and see the rainbow corona in my lashes, and even see the lashes themselves, complexly cross-hatching the sky. Astonishing to consider that I really was looking out from between my eyelashes, across the swell of my cheek, down my nose. (Body [eyes])

It is significant that the study of an animal makes the protagonist aware of the materiality of the eye. Although animal eyes may be perceived as "visible soul," other animals do not communicate with glances in the same way humans do and it is not considered impolite not to meet their gaze.⁶⁹ This relative irrelevance of the expressive capacity of the eye opens up for a one-way scrutiny of the eye's anatomy and allows for the protagonist to see that the iris is in fact a membrane located some way into the transparent eyeball and that the pupil is a hole in that membrane. Like Barnes' description of the nervous Jenny whose "orifices expand and contract like the iris of a suspicious eye" (*Nightwood* 88), the passage from *My Body* calls attention to the eye as an orifice letting in light the same way the ear lets in sound

exteriors of things. Like the eyes of the dead, they lack that immaterial spark which would make others transparent to them while simultaneously turning them into transparent windows of the soul.

⁶⁸ This is why Janine Antoni's photograph *Mortar and Pestle* of a tongue licking an eye is so disturbing. Eyes are not supposed to be touchable, much less edible. The prospect of having one's eye licked or licking a live eye is probably disturbing even to those who routinely eat animal eyes. In the latter case, the eye is safely transferred to the category of food and the disturbing clash between eye as semi-embodied soul and eye as piece of meat does not appear.

⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, cats and many other animals perceive a direct frontal gaze as threatening and tend to either attack or look away submissively if their eyes are met.

waves or the nostril lets in olfactory molecules. The expanding and contracting (or in Jackson's words the tightening and flaring) of the iris recalls the sphincters of more abject orifices which the iris is usually not associated with at all, but which it gets to metonymically stand in for in the quotation from Barnes.

Studying the anatomy of the cat's eye leads the protagonist of *My Body* to consider the embodied situatedness of her own eyes. She discovers that vision does not always eclipse the eye, to paraphrase the quotation from "The Putti," but that under certain conditions the anatomy of the eye becomes visible, for example in the form of eyelashes intruding upon the field of vision. This is unlike the anatomist whose abstracted and abstracting scientific gaze, according to Sergei Lobanov-Rostovsky, depends upon *not* seeing oneself mirrored in the eye of the anatomised corpse (197-201). Again, Jackson performs a literary vivisection rather than dissection, first by observing the movement in a live cat's eye and then by auto-blazoning her eyes as perceived from the inside rather than in a mirror image.

Harvey argues that Winterson performs a similar critique of the anatomical gaze in *Written on the Body*, partly by drawing attention to the narrator's own eyes (338). However, the mention of the narrator's eyes is nothing like the auto-blazoning performed by Jackson's persona in *My Body*, as the only aspect of the eyes the reader gets to "see" is their brown colour. To be fair, the female lover's eyes are never blazoned at all, but this omission might serve to ensure that she is unable to return the anatomising gaze. Alternatively, it might underscore this feminine character's lack of erotic investment in the masculine gaze, as indicated by her wish to strip herself and her lover of all senses except touch and smell (Winterson, *Written* 162). Either way, the relation between a disembodied and desexed yet masculine blazoner and a female as well as feminine body blazoned remains quite traditional. "I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes," the indeterminately sexed narrator declares, and consequently eludes the reader's gaze (Winterson, *Written* 89). When briefly glimpsed through the eyes of the blazoned woman, s/he is described as "a pool of clear water where the light plays," that is, as a body lacking any physical features interfering with its function as mirror for whatever s/he looks at or window to the soul (Winterson, *Written* 85).

It might be argued that the subjectivity the narrator lets the reader see in her/his eyes lies not in their physiological characteristics but in the desire they express, but this too is in keeping with the conventions of the blazon genre. The "lascivious naked eye" of Winterson's narrator accords with "the Petrarchan conceit of the eroticized eye," in which "the visible world is embodied as an aggressive beauty, a female eye that does not see but solicits the male gaze" (Lobanov-Rostovsky 197). Winterson concretises the convention of being wounded by beauty in bite marks left by the female

beloved and described by the narrator as “easy to see under my shirt,” but this image only confirms that the narrator’s only visible physical characteristics are reflections of her/his love (Winterson, *Written* 118). The narrator blazons the beloved woman in anatomical detail, but remains un-anatomised except on a purely psychological level.

Determined to “recognise her even when her body had long since fallen away,” the blazoner refigures the female lover’s death and dissolution by partitioning and enumerating her body tissues (Winterson, *Written* 111). But unlike Nora in Barnes’ *Nightwood*, s/he does not depict her/his own “eyeballs loosened” in death and still recognising the beloved (Barnes, *Nightwood* 53). Neither is she like Barnes’ Doctor O’Connor with his “susceptible orbs staring down into and up through the cavities and openings and fissures and entrances of [his] fellowmen, and following some, and continuing others, and increasing many, and them swelling and opening and contracting and pinching like the tides of the sea” (Barnes, *Ryder* 137). O’Connor’s eyes are susceptible to the allure of the bodies he scrutinises in his medical profession because they are of the same flesh. The orifices he peers into swell like the sea and he too is “a mortal like the sea with [his] ebb and flow” (Barnes, *Ryder* 137), formulations suggesting the iris as contracting orifice. Apart from a sea, the bodies he surveys are described in terms of a subterranean landscape of tunnels and caverns, contrasting with Winterson’s pastoral topography of “forests” and “ivory coast” (*Written* 117). Unlike Jackson and Barnes, Winterson plays down the political potential of writing the anatomical body into the blazon genre by using conventional imagery to sublimate the body of the blazoned woman, and by allowing her narrator to remain a disembodied desirous eye.⁷⁰

Winterson’s preference for the eye as mirror or window to the soul over the eye as physical organ is in keeping with her critique of the anatomical partitioning of the body into separate systems, of which detailed attention to the physiology of vision was a part (see Crary, *Techniques* 79-81). Barnes takes a different route and instead merges spiritual and material aspects of sight, such as in her detailed descriptions of Nora’s “large, protruding and clear” eyes with the “mirrorless look of polished metals” which “contracted and fortified the play before her in her own unconscious terms” (*Nightwood* 47). In this image, the subjective aspect of vision is made visible as a dimmed and distorted reflection of a sight in the eyes of the beholder. Nora’s eyes are semi-opaque, or “mirrorless” yet reflective in the way metal is reflective, adding body to the “clear water” of the narrator of *Written on the Body*. In a

⁷⁰ The poetic sublimation is neatly captured in Winterson’s symbolical use of the colours red and white, which transforms the blood and bone of the diseased, decaying body into conventionally tasteful images of a beautiful woman’s luxurious hair and pale skin, or a spray of berberis against a marble tombstone. The problem is not her use of imagery as such, as I argued in relation to Crowder’s anti-metaphorical stance in the section on body writing in the introduction, but its generic quality and its tendency to gloss over any disgusting or disturbing aspects of the visceral body while ostensibly paying its tribute.

similar fashion, Robin's eyes are described as being of a "mysterious and shocking blue" and having "the long unqualified range in the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 33). To the quite conventional note of the colour of the beloved's eyes is added a more unexpected qualification which serves at once to point out an ocular fact – Robin's distant focus – and an immaterial quality – the absence of human reciprocal gaze.

Robin is further associated with a nonhuman gaze in a scene at the circus where the animals in the ring "did not seem to see the girl, but as their dusty eyes moved past, the orbit of their light seemed to turn on her" (Barnes, *Nightwood* 49). Possibly, Barnes is referring to the Galenic theory of extramission, according to which the eye sends out rays instead of being a passive receiver of light (see Lobanov-Rostovsky 198-9). As an optical theory it was discredited in the 17th century, but as Teresa Brennan observes it lingers on in ideas of the evil eye, mesmerism and the psychoanalytic gaze (219-21). More concretely, what Barnes describes is the corneal refraction in the eyes of animals such as felines which extramission theory may have been based upon, also described by Jackson in a scene of night driving: "In the huge banks of unblemished dark on each side she occasionally saw two eyes like shiny dimes, blank as Orphan Annie's" (Half 38). The circus animals cannot see Robin because she is in the dark and they are blinded by the same light which makes their eyes shine. In other words they do not visually recognise her on human terms; instead their eyes light her up like spotlights, making her visible to Nora. Like Robin herself, these animals do not partake in the human exchange of expressive gazes, which facilitates the anatomisation of their eyes.⁷¹ In a later scene where Nora's and Robin's gazes meet in the dark, their eyes are described as illuminating the surroundings as though they not just reflected but emitted light (Barnes, *Nightwood* 57-8). Unlike the circus animals, they both see and illuminate at once, and the luminosity of their eyes cannot be explained away as corneal refraction as there is no external light source.

In *Ryder* too Barnes conflates psychological and physiological aspects of sight, and especially in connection with animal eyes. In a sequence where a rape victim is blamed by a mob of gossips, the "World's Eye" the fallen woman is asked to consider is concretised in a list of different eyes: "To the Oblong Eye of the Deer, is not your Condition lengthened? By the Owl, is there not purchased a Dreadful Rotundity? To the Shallow Eye of the Fish, you are but a little staled, but to the Bossy Eye of the Ox, you may ride as High and Damned as Jezebel. [...] To the Myriad Pupil of the Fly, what can it but manifold your Grievance?" (Barnes, *Ryder* 25). Although physiologically implausible, these explanations of how differences in eye anatomy affect

⁷¹ Additionally, their blind sensing of Robin suggests an animal alignment with senses other than sight.

vision reflect the 19th century shift from geometrical to physiological optics whereby vision became subjective and dependent upon the idiosyncrasies of the eye (see Crary, *Techniques* 16).

Studies of subjective optical phenomena and even the discrepancy in perspective between the two eyes called the divine perfection of the eye, previously employed as an argument against evolution, into question (Beer 90). Barnes makes a mocking intervention into this theological debate when she has a preacher in *Ryder* claim that “beasts have the holy look who have their eyes on either side, for they are apart and contrive not together, and the one sees not what is seen by the other,” while human eyes are so “dumbfounded acquainted” that “it’s a terrible time I’m having setting holiness between them” (187). Apart from referring to the biblical injunction against impure mixings, this eccentric religious interpretation of the placement of the eyes suggests that prey are more innocent and therefore holier than hunters. Like other hunting animals, humans have their eyes set on the front of their head in order to perceive depth with stereoscopic vision, while prey have their eyes on the sides in order to maximise their field of vision and detect dangers behind them (Trevor-Roper 129-30). Translated into Barnes’ psychological terms, this implies that prey have only disinterested peripheral vision, while hunters possess an interested gaze focused upon the object of their desire. In *Nightwood* as well as *Ryder*, the intentionally directed gaze conventionally associated with human encounters is negatively connoted and posited against vision as a reflexive phenomenon in the eye. At the same time, any neat dichotomy between human and animal vision is undone by Barnes’ insistent translations of psychological aspects of sight into physiological terms and vice versa.

Like Barnes, Jackson demonstrates a fascination with the psychophysiology of vision exceeding conventional scientific understandings of it. However, her anatomisation of the eye is less fantastical and more concerned with how idiosyncrasies of human sight may affect artistic vision. In the following section, I shall discuss her literary treatment of various optical conditions and subjective visual experiences as part of her larger project to anatomise vision.

Anatomising Sight

If I really wanted to render what I saw, then I would have to paint a faint nose-shadow just above the base-line of every canvas. In addition, I'd have to include the white ghosts of nearby shapes looked at too long and the incompletely joined, not-quite-duplicate views of objects closer to than the subject at hand: I'd have to learn to render the condition of Out Of Focus. Nothing stayed still and flat and bright like a picture, not even a picture. Everything was jostling, shimmering, bleaching out or darkening, receding and then riding forward with a jerk. To stop that hokey pokey for long enough to pick a view and draw it wasn't easy. (Body [eyes])

In *My Body*, Jackson's autobiographical persona develops a muscle spasm in her eyelid by straining her eyes studying drawing (Body [eyelid]). This brief account picks up several concerns from classic aesthetic theory detailing how the eye might be caught, educated or fatigued by the object of vision (Bolla 69-70). The education of the eye is not simply a figure of speech for the refinement of aesthetic sensibilities, but involves actual strain upon the organ of sight – what might be considered a form of repetitive stress injury in Ahmed's sense (*Queer* 56-60). The protagonist of *My Body* fatigues her eyes tracing the lines of drawings by Albrecht Dürer and Käthe Kollwitz until they are familiar enough to recall and copy. The combined interest in anatomy and aesthetics reflects the previously mentioned shift from geometrical to physiological optics and the associated change in artistic theory and practice culminating in the 19th century. Whereas previously artists were expected to conform to an objective optical truth, the modernist ideal was to render the world as subjectively seen. However, this still entailed an education of the eye in order to free it from aesthetic and other cultural conventions hindering pure perception (Crary, *Techniques* 82-8). This parallel shift in optical and aesthetic theories also entails a shift in emphasis between two conceptions of light: lux and lumen. Lumen, the divine light of reason illuminating everything there is, was replaced by lux, light as actually perceived, with its capacity to dazzle, blind or be insufficiently bright (Jay, *Downcast* 29-30).

In classical art, lux was transformed into lumen by the camera obscura, which framed and projected a view in preparation for drawing. Its single opening letting in light functioned as an ideal objective eye, replacing the two subjective bodily eyes with their subtly different points of view and flattening the perspective (Crary, *Techniques* 46-50). Initially, the protagonist of *My Body* is troubled by the discrepancy between her two eyes, which produce two different potential views to paint: "How could I be expected to draw things the way they really looked if in any given moment things looked, not one way, but two?" (Body [eyes]). Having abandoned her juvenile artistic ambition of faithfully reproducing perceptual reality, however, she instead presents seeing double as a concretisation of the artist's visionary power: "I could let my eyes slide out of focus and see two worlds, slightly out of

register. They were different, but not very. But one day my eyes went out of focus and for an instant I saw two completely different worlds. I picked one, but ever since, I have been haunted by the feeling that this world is insufficiently real. It only happens to be as it is, it might have been otherwise” (Body [eyes]). In essence, Jackson suggests that the concrete reality of binocular vision inspires the aesthetic conception of an alternate reality.

More specifically, Jackson’s artistic vision is informed by her experience of “migraine blindness” (retinal or ocular migraine) and related aura phenomena described in *My Body*:

Migraine blindness starts with the funny feeling that I’ve missed a clue, that someone’s pulling a prank on me. I know what to look for, and I spread my right hand in front of my face, palm up, and stare at the tip of my baby finger. My thumb disappears. If I let my eyes stray toward where my thumb should be it will reappear, but fix my eyes on my pinky again, and it vanishes. As soon as I check, I am aware that I have known of the problem for some time, but that it has only now reached my conscious attention. Things have been missing (ears, page numbers, the arm of a sofa) but I have been filling in for them. Now that I am paying attention, reading becomes impossible; the ending of a long word disapp . Everyone is one-eyed, smiles are weirdly abbreviated. Try driving; indeed, try walking in this condition. Objects appear out of gopher holes, or lumber toward me on half their ordinary complement of wheels, or cross my path and vanish. (Body [migraines])

The temporary loss of sight in one eye (or in half the visual field) reinforces the previously mentioned experience of discrepancy between the two eyes and the related feeling of unreality. While in the previous description of the eyes going out of focus, Jackson’s persona arbitrarily chooses one visual reality, in a migraine attack the choice is made for her and half her visual world stolen. But the migraine not only subtracts from her visual perception, it also adds a subjective visual phenomenon known as a scintillating scotoma. That Jackson perceives this as a gift of aesthetic inspiration is clear from her description of it as a “horrible and magnificent” “chimera” and its duration as a “ceremony” (Body [migraines]). Her borderline sublime terminology recalls speculations that the visions of St Hildegard and the metaphysical painting of Giorgio de Chirico might similarly have been inspired by migraine auras (Trevor-Roper 143, 150).

The most obvious influence of Jackson’s ocular migraine on her writing, apart from the passage from *My Body*, are her references to migraine in two of the stories in *The Melancholy of Anatomy*. In “Cancer,” the protagonist relates: “The cancer appeared in my living room sometime between eleven and three on a Thursday. I am not sure exactly when, because I suffer from bouts of migraine, and sometimes I miss things, or see things that aren’t there, flashing shapes like the blades of warrior goddesses, the vanes of transcendental windmills.” The fact that the cancer appears sometime during

the migraine attack suggests a connection, which is further reinforced by the transition of visual descriptions from the migraine auras to the cancer, which is at first “barely visible, a pink fizz, like a bloodshot spot of air” (Melancholy 57). The cancer appears as a material trace of the aura phenomenon, inhabiting the same sphere between the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent, before growing to forcefully assert its presence. In “Egg,” the migraine is more obviously a period of conception for the fantastical phenomenon giving the story its name, as Imogen goes to sleep with a migraine and wakes up with “a red dot smaller than a pinhead” in her eye (Melancholy 12). The dot turns out to be an egg, and when she removes it from her eye her headache disappears, as though it was a form of birth pangs. The optical phenomenon of migraine aura is replaced with the more concrete phenomenon of an irritant in the eye. However, during her sleep of conception, Imogen has “a dream of effortless energy, purpose, and interest” reminiscent of Jackson’s description of scintillating scotoma as “energetic and purposeful” in *My Body* (Body [migraines]). The optical experiences associated with migraine are so intense that the ordinary perceptual world feels unreal in comparison: “When I have my eyes back I am not sure I know them. The healed real world looks whole, but its colors are a little tawdry, it turns up at the edges. I keep checking to make sure all the pieces are there, but if something were missing, could I tell?” (Body [migraines]). Consequently, in “Egg” and “Cancer,” ocular migraines spawn a fantastical egg and cancer growth, concretisations of the aesthetic inspiration to be gained from such extraordinary perceptual phenomena.

Jackson’s use of ocular migraine is comparable to Cixous’ account of the profound effects of her myopia upon her writing:

I write because I am nearsighted: it’s also, I think, through nearsightedness, thanks to my nearsightedness, that I love:

I am someone who looks at things from very, very close up. Seen through my eyes, little things are very big. Details are my kingdom. Some people survey. Some people who are far-seeing don’t see what is very near. I am someone who sees the smallest letters of the earth. (Cixous, *Coming* 109)

While Jackson’s migraine blindness and auras infuse her world with a sense of unreality, Cixous’ myopia forecloses grand overviews and instead lends gravity to easily overlooked details, and analogously Cixous’ écriture féminine has a different quality than Jackson’s body writing.⁷² What the two authors have in common, however, is that they allow their respective optical conditions to affect not just their visual perceptions but their worldviews in a

⁷² The myopic writing style might not be idiosyncratic to Cixous. Trevor-Roper speculates that myopia is overrepresented among writers and can be discerned in stylistic traits such as a focus on details within close visual range and a heightened reliance on hearing and touch, 31-6, see also McSweeney 172-4.

more general sense. Thus, they both acknowledge an unconscious, even inhuman, agency of the body.

In “Angel,” visual disorders takes on more sinister connotation as the protagonist’s father, an abstract painter, voluntarily sacrifices his eyesight to his artistic vision:

His father had declared many times that he had furthered his art by the little trick of unfocusing his eyes to study form an composition without getting hung up on details of rendering. That and squinting. Years of squinting and unfocusing, though, had had a deleterious effect on his vision, and when he was in his cups he often lamented the loss of his once-keen eyesight to his friend the poet. Despite this, his father would not wear his glasses outside the house, claiming to appreciate the play of abstract forms that the visual world became without the disciplinary lens. (Angel 20)

The price is high: his artistic vision literally becomes the death of him as he fails to see the car that hits him as he crosses the street. Though drastic, the story is not so farfetched in light of actual visual artists who preferred to have their myopia uncorrected in order to avoid the banal naturalism of perfect vision (Trevor-Roper 36-44). The difference between this blurred vision and Jackson’s and Cixous’ eye conditions is that his squint functions as a sublimation and abstraction of vision. Rather than allowing the concrete particularities of eyesight to inform his art, he attempts to overcome it and reduce the clutter of visual detail to pure form. That is, he appears to belong to the school of high modernist formalism, in which motif and narrative content are irrelevant, while Jackson and Cixous are closer to the impressionists, whose “emphasis on the fleeting, temporalized, evanescent glance meant they retained a certain awareness of the corporeally situated quality of vision,” according to Martin Jay. The impressionists were however a “way station to the pure, self-referential art” of formalism, since they “sought to reproduce the experience of light and color on the retinas of their eyes” and thus treated motif or subject matter as mere occasion for such optical experiences (Jay, *Downcast* 154-5). The realists, on the other hand, wished to render “a visible reality there to be observed” (Jay, *Downcast* 180). However, despite the “scopic detailism” (Jay, *Downcast* 112) of their style, realists and naturalists were not necessarily interested in visual detail as such. Schor describes how Roland Barthes’ concept of the “reality-effect” in the realist novel depends upon a sort of myopic gaze resolving individual details into insignificant parts of a larger pattern. Thus, the reductive impulse embodied by the unfocused eye in “Angel” is not exclusive to formalism but present even in such a seemingly cluttered genre as realism (or at least in literary theory on realism).

In line with the understanding of the myopic gaze as reducing visual noise, Cixous might be expected to naturally perceive the larger pattern. Instead, she chooses to posit her myopia against a surveying gaze and emphasise its

function as a magnifying glass lavishing loving attention upon what is small and near. Similarly, Jackson makes creative use of the visual noise introduced by her ocular migraines. As I have previously mentioned, Jackson employs visual realist techniques order to infuse her fabulist fiction with a sense of vivacity. Thus, she can be said to combine the scopic detailism of realist fiction with an impressionist or more generally modernist interest in subjective visual phenomena. While she is not above wilfully squinting, this is not done to reduce and formalise but rather to introduce an element of creative ambiguity and unleash the imagination, such as when the eyes' attempt to make sense of darkness turns it "into meaningful entities, stern or laughing faces" (Body [eyes]). It is like when the taxidermist protagonist of "Angel" finally takes, and simultaneously subverts, his father's advice: "He could not make out the angel against the dark branches overhead, only sense something hurtling toward his head. If he blurred his eyes, just for one moment, he could make believe it was flying" (Angel 33). The taxidermist needs darkness and unfocusing in order to see something other than the corpse of a boy with chicken wings stitched to it, but what he sees is not the pure form his father would like him to perceive. Instead his squinting is done in the service of his "hopelessly narrative sensibility" (Angel 20) and affords him a glimpse of the invisible: the virtual life of fiction discussed in the first section of this chapter. In sum, Jackson's attitude to optical illusion is closer to the taxidermist's than to the patchwork girl's dismissal of the dimly seen, such as ghosts: "If one had to squint to see them, no doubt they had little to show" (Patchwork [story/seance/skepticism]).

In many ways, Jackson's interest in subjective visual phenomena aligns her with the modernist concern with an "innocent" or "pure" artistic vision described by Jonathan Crary in the following way:

Rather it is a question of a vision achieved at great cost that claimed for the eye a vantage point uncluttered by the weight of historical codes and conventions of seeing, a position from which vision can function without the imperative of composing its contents into a reified "real" world. It was a question of an eye that sought to avoid the repetitiveness of the formulaic and conventional, even as the effort time and again to see afresh and anew entailed its own pattern of repetition and conventions. (Crary, *Techniques* 96).

As already touched upon, this modern form of artistic vision was inextricably tied to the 19th-century scientific interest in physiological optics, an interest entailing scientific experimentation as well as a proliferation of optical gadgets. What these experiments and gadgets showed was that vision is subjective and that the eye can be tricked into seeing what is not really there. Rather than attempt to overcome visual idiosyncrasies and achieve an objectively correct view of visual reality, modernist artists wished to render the world as perceived through their eyes.

As optical experiments in the early 1800s demonstrated that various forms of stimulation of the optical nerves all produced a sensation of light, vision became “redefined as a capacity for being affected by sensations that have no necessary link to a referent.” This also conflated the traditional distinction between “inner vision” and vision resulting from external stimuli into “a single immanent plane” of sensation. In effect, perceptual experiences were granted the power to produce multiple new realities, rather than just reflect a given reality more or less accurately (Crary, *Techniques* 91-2). Accordingly artists and scientists took a particular interest in visual phenomena such as afterimages, which were no longer considered “optical illusions” but “optical truth” (Crary, *Techniques* 97-8).

References to subjective visual phenomena are scattered throughout Jackson’s work. In *Half Life*, Jackson describes the sky as “swarming everywhere with luminous specks, like pond water under a microscope, absolutely fabulous with cooties” (Half 308). This might describe afterimages or the eyes’ attempt to make sense of a monochrome area, but most likely “vitreous opacities,” that is, opaque fragments within the eye itself becoming visible under certain conditions. In a vivid rendition of a thunderstorm, Nora recounts how the “afterimage of stripes and teeth danced in the air before my eyes” after a lightning flash (Half 316). While vitreous opacities are perceptions of minute objects present in the eye, and afterimages delayed reactions to visual stimuli, phosphenes are the perception of light without any actual visual input: “When lying in bed in the dark I sneezed I saw blue cat-whiskers of light at the edges of sight. When I pressed on my eyes I saw concentric circles that slid around with my fingers, circles of blue and muted orange, the very color of pressure”(Body [eyes]). Jackson’s persona provides experiential evidence for her notion that pressure has a colour, which is not a metaphor or even a case of synaesthesia but optical reality according to the modern understanding of vision, in which visual perception is disconnected from visual stimulus.

Nora in *Half Life* perceives phosphenes on several occasions as a result of fatigue during the trip into the desert concluding the novel. They are described for instance as “black crowdings pierced with tiny stinging lights,” as “little lights flashing and zinging” and as the sky “going paisley with little flares and detonations” (Half 396, 419, 423). Alongside such optical illusions, she also experiences outright visual hallucinations explained as her conjoined sister Blanche’s dreams interfering with her perception. At the very end of the novel, however, these illusions give way to a different kind of optical phenomenon:

Wobbling behind the heat-warped air, the bobbing green and purple retinal bursts, the old impurities and new scratches in the glass windows of the dollhouse, was something unlike all these. I had the funny idea it was a city. The dollhouse lurched as I broke into a shuffle. A tiny book dinged me in the lip, a sofa champed against my chin, and

after a while I saw there really was a city, standing upside down on a fault in the sky. Thin Air! The inverted houses flexed and flared and then steadied and stood firm, depending from a flake of land that was stuck in the sky like a sliver of mirror glass in an eye. (Half 426)

In one sentence, Jackson describes three different kinds of optical phenomena: the concrete obstruction of flawed window glass, phosphenes' impression of light and colour, and a mirage, which importantly is "no phantom" (Half 426) or illusion but a distorted reflection of some distant yet existent thing only visible under certain atmospheric conditions. Apart from reinforcing the physicality of vision, the disturbing image of a glass sliver stuck in an eye refers to H. C. Andersen's tale *Snedronningen* (*The Snow Queen*), in which fragments of a devilish, distorting mirror lodged in people's eyes and hearts make them see only evil and ugliness. I do not believe that this is meant to infuse the mirage with negative connotations, only to suggest that the atmospheric phenomenon creating it is like a mirror sliver in the eye of the sky visualising a different reality. In this case, a mirror made of air, moisture and light showing a real ruin as a shimmering city turned upside down.

The mirage brings me to conclude this section the same way it began, by discussing the very condition of visibility: light. Just like sight can be generalised into a disembodied gaze or embodied by an eye with its idiosyncrasies, so light can be abstracted as lumen or concretised as lux. Unsurprisingly, Jackson is mostly concerned with the latter, but the distinction is not as clear-cut as it might seem. If lux is really taken to be light *as perceived*, then it should include subjective visual sensations such as phosphenes. This move, however, paradoxically abstracts lux by detaching it from the objective presence of light. If lux includes the subjective sensation of light resulting from various forms of electrical or mechanical stimuli of the optic nerves, there is a short step to also include virtual sensations of light resulting from purely mental stimuli, such as literary phantom sights. Then how can lux be told apart from lumen understood as the abstract light of reason illuminating what is before the mind's eye? The answer is that the distinction between lumen and lux denotes not a difference between imagined and real light, but a difference between ideal light and phenomenological experience. Lumen is a transparent medium of illumination and clarity, while lux is *perceived-light-as-such*. It is lux in this complicated sense that Jackson is concerned with.

Unlike lumen, lux is dependent upon the visual apparatus and potentially damaging to it, as experienced by early 19th century optical scientists ruining their eyes by staring directly into the sun, and artists such as Turner painting dazzling light and its afterimages (see Crary, *Techniques* 138-41). Jackson follows their lead in describing light as a subjective sensation, even when there is an external light source. Waking up prematurely from narcosis, Nora

is blinded by the bright lights above the operating table and attempts to make sense of her visual impressions in a semi-conscious state:

I pulled on my body like a sock and opened my eyes.

Blurshine.

I thought for a moment, Oh, I see, I'm swimming! The light in my eyes was the sun swinging on the broken surface of the water, and the pinkish blur was Granny in her funny flowered swim cap. I rose, blowing bubbles. I broke the surface into the familiar smell of an indoor pool: chlorine, mildew, and decay.

"Granny?" I said, or meant to say, and blinked the water out of my eyes. The chlorine made my vision blurry, the lights were ringed by great fuzzy haloes, and there was a swinging shine that was either very large or very close. I set myself to the task of focusing on the shine, and eventually it resolved itself into a blade. (Half 321)

This scene says several things about optics. First, there is the difficulty of focusing due to the muscle relaxation of narcosis. Then there is the dazzling caused by the eye's need to adjust from the darkness behind closed lids to bright light. Further dazzling is added by Nora unwittingly staring straight into the lamp upon awakening. Additionally, the work of the visual cortex to make sense of the play of light and colour upon the retina is disturbed by her disorientation. Unable to immediately rationalise the confusing display into a coherent image, her brain picks up olfactory clues and interprets it as an underwater scene. This shows that the visual apparatus is quick, sometimes too quick, to extrapolate from any available impressions. Not until Nora concentrates on seeing a single element clearly is the illusion dispelled. The whole episode depicts light not as a medium for making other things visible, but as a sometimes misleading part of the picture, that is, as lux.

The notion of lumen and the heliocentric tradition of thought in which the sun represents the light of reason can be critiqued by turning towards darkness and obscurity, as was done in the Romantic Counter-Enlightenment (Jay, *Downcast* 106-10). Besides this simple reversal, however, there is an alternative trajectory within literature and philosophy in which lumen is replaced by lux in the form of a searing, blinding sun, as in authors like Roussel or Bataille (Jay, *Downcast* 398, 510-1). This is only the 19th-century acknowledgement that "a glut of light is blinding" (Half 386) drawn to its logical conclusion. In Jackson's work, the critique of visualism is not as strong and consequently lux does not take on such sinister connotations. It is however dazzling or blinding to a lesser degree, often as a consequence of abrupt shifts in lighting. This introduces an element of temporality: the blinding is not absolute, as when staring into the sun, but relative. The eyes can see in bright light or deep shade, but when moving between the two, the pupil needs time to dilate or contract accordingly. Thus,

upon going inside on a sunny day, one is “sun-blind” with “eyes still jazzy from the dance diagrams of the sun” (Half 153, 16). A sudden transition from darkness to brightness, such as when opening one’s eyes or turning on the light, has a similar effect. “Then the sun broke through, straight into my eyes, so the car was rubied, and fringed with eyelash-rainbows. My nose was a shining boomerang hanging over the aisle, Blanche a big blond blur,” Nora narrates (Half 261). An excess of light does not increase lucidity but creates interference and reduces visual acuity.

Under certain lighting conditions, otherwise invisible things such as dust, fine hairs, clear water or plain glass reflect light, as suggested by the “eyelash-rainbows” mentioned above. This tends to give the impression of making visible not just the things in question but light itself. These minute or transparent things lend light a body of sorts, a phenomenon captured by Jackson’s phrases “pollen-thickened light” (Word 145) and “heathered light drifting softly down like a vertical current” (Hagfish). While in these cases, pollen or water lends body to the light, in other cases light appears somehow semi-solid on its own. The patchwork girl feels “conscious of the light around me as if it had substance, an amber cube and I the stuck eternal bug” (Patchwork [story/falling apart/parting]) and Nora feels “weightless, suspended in a thin but buoyant medium made of heat and light” (Half 422). The idea of light adding perceptible texture to the air, like a wind or a mist, might reflect scientific knowledge that light is made up of particles (and/or waves). Herman Godfrey desperately wishes to be “sure the light was a steady wind of photons, and not a slather of blond enamel” (Musée). That is, he wants light to have material presence in the air and not just be a visible surface effect. He is afraid that what appears to be visible proof of light reflecting off objects may just be painted highlights. In a strict sense, the distinction is not viable since forged light effects such as “a slather of blond enamel” needs actual light in order to become visible and so can be said to prove the presence of photons. However, such indirect proof is not enough for Herman who wants to sense light as such. In sum, he wants light to be lux – minuscule bodies made perceptible under certain conditions – and not lumen – an incorporeal illumination from nowhere. Through these literary phantom sights Jackson conditions the reader’s eye to see light as lux instead of lumen, just like she conditions it to see various optical phenomena which otherwise might not be consciously perceived.

In the Virtual Museum of Writing

Like Potter, Shelley kept the living lark in mind, but he, too, spent a lot of time fiddling with feathers.
(Original 334)

As described in the introductory chapter, Jackson’s work can be characterised as a form of object writing in which spatial configurations of

things take precedence over narrative. Some of the virtual spaces favoured by Jackson are cabinets of curiosities and museum dioramas: specifically visual arrangements of information. In her essay “The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin,” she compares fiction to an exhibition, her specific example being the taxidermy tableaux of Walter Potter. She draws upon Scarry’s work on vivacity, but brings out the spatiality of literary images to a much greater degree. According to Jackson, the kind of referentiality at work in fiction functions so that words point away from themselves without pointing at anything in particular: “we do not bother to look out the window” for a lark mentioned in a poem (Original 333). In order to successfully create virtual images, writers have to attend to the material aspects of language such as “the black and white of the page,” while such visual qualities rarely interfere with the literary phantom sights of the reader (Original 334). Visually, writing presents a static series of signs which readers animate by “running our eyes over it from beginning to end [...] and in this way the words are pulled before our eyes at the pace of living,” but the work of the eyes fades from consciousness (Original 343-4). The virtual image of life produced by literature obfuscates the actual image of words on a page: as Massumi puts it, learning to read is “learning to stop seeing the letters so you can see *through* them” (139).

Mieke Bal describes writing as a series of snapshots (*Mottled* 9) and I agree that due to linguistic as well as literary conventions, writing cannot mimic the simultaneity or seamlessness of live perception. Instead, writers (at least most prose writers who, like Jackson, work with visual realism) have to capture a sequence of emblematic scenarios and rely on the reader to fill in the blanks. According to Scarry’s argument in *Dreaming by the Book*, the gaps in a description mimic, and thereby smooth over, the reader’s difficulty in visualising the move from a to b. In my view, however, she is mistaking a generic feature of verbal description for a didactic tool facilitating the production of mental images. Language is necessarily sequential and may capture glimpses of movement in more or less detail depending on the pace of the narration. Jackson claims that readers are generally willing to “see life where none is,” especially in “fleeting details: A tiny striated rainbow in eyelashes. Light creaming on a pale breast. The nervous jerk in a red Adam’s apple” (Original 344). It is hardly a coincidence that she proves her point with a series of visual details related to optical effects, light, colour and movement. Scarry spends the major part of *Dreaming by the Book* detailing literary techniques for infusing mental images with a sense of motion, such as adding flashes of light or shadow play, or having a series of static images replace one another in quick succession. Jackson refers to such poignant images of lightness and transience as “fiction’s glass eye” which “shines on the page like life” (Original 345). Her formulation does what it describes, as

the shining glass eye of fiction is itself a vivid phantom sight inspired by the taxidermy theme.

Comparing the virtual image of life created by taxidermy to that created by fiction, Jackson argues that in fiction the actual image of the text interferes less “because it’s not as interesting to look at as a dead bird” (Original 334). It might appear relatively unproblematic that the actual image of a dead bird interferes with the virtual image of a live bird since based upon visual resemblance, “a stuffed lark is a better representation of a lark than the four shapes we agree to see as letters” (Original 333). However, Jackson insists that “two larks compete for our attention, one of them agile and imaginary; the other stiff, a little dusty, and visibly dead” (Original 334).

The discrepancy is made especially clear in Potter’s taxidermy tableaux because he dresses and poses the animals like humans (or like anthropomorphised storybook characters), but even in naturalistic taxidermy the animal does not simply picture “itself.” As Jackson puts it, “what could be weirder than a gull stopped midflap” (Original 335)? The natural history diorama is always already mediated by pictorial conventions instructing the viewer to see a virtual image of a live animal in the actual image of a dead animal (or, to be more exact, in the composite image of dead animal parts such as skeleton and skin and other materials used to arrest the process of decay). Scientific imaging techniques tend to obscure the mediation, naturalising truth as there to be seen by the naked eye and themselves as the naked eye to see it with (Angel, “Physiology” 20-4). As Jackson writes about taxidermied animals: “Like porn stars they strike poses that afford a complete view of what in real life is usually out of sight, and they offer this view as proof of the real, even as the support of the real – as the *realer* real, which both is and represents itself at once” (Original 335).⁷³ At the same time, the mediated and therefore ostensibly objective eye of science creates by contrast another kind of naked eye, the unmediated, subjective eye of the modernist artist indulging in perception for perception’s sake (Danius 18-9).

Jackson directs such an artistic “naked eye” at the art of taxidermy and perceives death in place of life. “Angel” thematises this double vision as the taxidermist protagonist creates an angel by stitching a pair of chicken wings onto the corpse of a boy found in the park, and then decides to “look hard at what was really there: a dead boy, the appurtenances of a chicken, his own sick handiwork” (Angel 32). The story does not settle on this disillusioned vision, but ultimately, if ambivalently, celebrates the power of art to transform and animate its material. Invisible things such as angels need to borrow the body of art in order to be made visible, but the merger with the

⁷³ For a seminal study of the production of “ocular proof” of sexual pleasure in pornography, see Linda Williams.

visual qualities of the artists' medium is never perfect. Thus, the taxidermist needs to sense rather than see his creation in the dark to prevent the actual image of a winged corpse from obscuring the virtual image of a flying angel (Angel 33). The sight of a dead body may, as previously suggested, provide more interference with what it depicts than the sight of words on a page. Nevertheless, the same principle applies to literature. The phantom sight of a flying angel may be produced by the text but does not exist on the same level as the static signs on a flat page. Thus, "[i]f he flew, the taxidermist wouldn't see him. He would fly out of or into the page: the mortal direction, the invisible direction" (Angel 32).

Life is not just invisible to the taxidermist because he belongs to the category of inanimate matter (subcategory: literary characters); life as such is invisible because it is in perpetual motion (Rohman 70). In *Half Life*, Nora explains that her and Blanche's "Dead Animal Zoo," a collection of animal carcasses, is superior to an ordinary zoo since live animals run and hide from view while "dead things are for looking at" (179):

Dying, I had worked out, was a vigorous form of appearing. Living animals draw back or move at a strategic angle to your line of sight, thereby keeping some of their appearance to themselves. Dead animals don't just meet your look squarely, they spring up to the line of sight and pile into your eyes. You can see more of them, faster, than you can see anything else. (Half 179)

Death makes living beings visible by arresting the motion of life. But as Nora goes on to explain, dead animals move too, they "just move a lot slower" (Half 179). Taxidermy visualises life through ending it and arresting its motion, but it also needs to arrest the motion of death – decomposition – in order to freeze the image of life. Viewers are supposed to overlook actual signs of death such as wear, wires, dust and stitches in favour of the virtual image of life presented.⁷⁴ Trotter describes how perspectivalism in painting similarly freezes and formalises the motif, obscuring the slow movement of decay perceptible if one looks hard enough at anything (*Cooking* 215-9).⁷⁵ One does not have to look very hard in order to see death in a taxidermy display, which makes the example of taxidermy both obvious and unusual in a culture which tends to render (actual) dead bodies invisible: "By custom, by euphemism, by the undertaker's arts, by medical practice, the materiality of the corpse is kept out of view. When we see it openly displayed, it is obscene, but also, if we're honest, a little thrilling" (Original 339). According to Kylie Rachel Message, drawing upon Jean Baudrillard, the corpse is

⁷⁴ I do not mean to imply that death is the truth hidden beneath appearances. To see death in an image or tableaux can also be a matter of convention, as exemplified by the memento mori genre. Taxidermy rarely presents a virtual image of death, however; the purpose of the art being to make dead animals as "lifelike" as possible.

⁷⁵ He further argues that Cézanne captures decay in his still lives by breaking the rules of perspective and having the objects subtly lean into each other or towards the viewer.

obscene because it is too real: it unquestionably “means” death, yet “its meaning is beyond our line of vision” as death by definition eludes experience (114). For Nora, however, this elusive excess of reality is reassuring:

The deer was nothing but what it seemed, an unfortunate creature whose life had ended. It did not lift up its head and speak to me. Though the sand on which it lay shivered when the water drew back and seemed as dry as if no water had touched it since the rainy season, the deer was real. It was what I needed. (Half 375)

Unlike the waves in perpetual motion and the sand shifting between wet and dry, the dead deer does not do anything. In the context of *Half Life*, this means it does not produce any signs or clues to be interpreted by the increasingly paranoid Nora.⁷⁶ Death is so real it fixes the carcass to its literal meaning – “a dead deer” – and suspends the dizzying proliferation of significance, to Nora’s relief.

Michael Mendelson suggests that the sight of the corpse might aid in fathoming what cannot be clearly conceptualised or articulated (202), and in Jackson’s work, the confrontation with the visibly dead often leads to recognition of one’s own mortality. The absence of life foregrounds the materiality of the body and offers it up for scrutiny. When the natural history lesson or anthropomorphising fable fades from view, taxidermy shows “the stuff a living thing was made of”: “the dust on a fur coat, the light in the shaft of a whisker” (Original 340). Such visual details invite the spectator to compare her own mortal body to the dead body on display and to identify with the stuffed animal instead of the image of life it presents. Reflected in the mirror of the taxidermy tableaux “I see skin, hair, teeth. I see a corpse-to-be,” Jackson claims (Original 346). Seeing a corpse is the closest one can come to seeing oneself as one will look like when one can no longer see (Message 113).

In an interesting parallel to Jackson’s treatment of the taxidermy theme, taxidermy artist Julia deVille’s contemporary reinventions of Baroque and Victorian memento moris draw attention to the deadness of the specimen: she treats dead animals as individuals whose remains she lovingly transforms into mourning jewellery. There is a strong touch of the macabre in her respectful transformation of bone, fur and feather into beautiful artworks. Hair loses its lustre when no longer attached to a living being, limbs become stiff and brittle-looking; in short, organisms are turned into objects. As taxidermy makes concrete and explicit, art kills in order to reanimate and the reanimation is never quite the same as life. As Jackson puts it in “Stitch Bitch”: “It’s not the same as life, fiction has a funeral flavor

⁷⁶ I am not referring to clinical paranoia, although some readers might be prepared to give Nora this diagnosis, but to the mode of critical interpretation Sedgwick terms “paranoid reading” or “the hermeneutics of suspicion,” 124-46.

to it, no question, a stony monumentality life luckily lacks, it has the thudding iambic footsteps of the undead” (Stitch). Reviving corpses as artist’s material like Potter and deVillie do, alongside photographers like Nathalia Edenmont or Joel-Peter Witkin, can open up dizzying vistas. A perfect example of this would be the anatomist Frederik Ruysch’s memento mori tableaux, in which foetal skeletons are revived in expressive poses lamenting their own deaths: death-portraying-life-portraying-death, all in order to remind living viewers of their mortality (see Roberts and Tomlinson 290-6). Though not exactly immortal, prepared specimens are quite likely to survive their audience. In Emma Donoghue’s “A Short Story,” an anatomist preparing a tiny girl’s skeleton for the Hunterian Museum muses: “She would stand grinning at her baffled visitors until all those who’d ever known her were dust” (202).

Holding up a mirror of mortality is the specimen’s way of looking back at the spectator. Jackson suggests that the stuffed animal might “open its eyes and see the cracked glass, smell the dust, feel the beetles crepitating under its skin,” that is, be reanimated into awareness of its own death (Original 344). In a scene fittingly set in the Hunterian Museum, the skull of “One and a Half,” a boy with a parasitic twin, appears to look back at Nora:

There was a glint of light in one eye socket. It almost looked like an eye – moist, shiny – regarding me from inside the skull. My heart lurched. I stared back, I hardly know how long.

Finally, I dared to step forward. As I did, the pale point of light grew, slid and rippled and split in two around a flaw in the glass. I recognized my own reflection, and laughed, relief warming my cheeks. I was the scariest monster there. (Half 189)

Nora’s relieved realisation that she is looking at her own reflection might be taken to mean that any semblance of life in the specimen can be nothing but a projection. However, her relief turns out to be premature as the specimen bursts into song. This foreshadows the full variety act performed by stuffed six-legged kittens and three-eyed chickens later taking place in the Potter Museum (Half 237). The rational explanation for these occurrences is that Blanche’s dream world is interfering with Nora’s perceptions, but this reminder of her conjoined twin only emphasises Nora’s exchangeability with the monsters on display. The animated specimens follow her out of the museum, into the desert in the novel’s climax, prominent among them a two-headed pig foetus with “ivory snouts pointing left and right, like a cartoon of a pig shaking its head” (Half 428) which prompts “a sudden image of Blanche and myself in the womb” (Half 358). The theme of the natural history exhibit coming to life appears in Bartlett’s *Skin Lane* too, and as in *Half Life* it starts with the exhibits looking back at the protagonist: “All the animals are certainly watching him – he knows that. He stares back at them

– at all those rows and rows of labels; all those bright, glass eyes” (Bartlett, *Skin* 252). For Mr F in *Skin Lane*, the scenario is a form of wish fulfilment instead of disorienting hallucinations: “And now this dead menagerie is not enough; he decides he wants to see them come to life. [...] He watches wide-eyed as all around him the beasts twist, dig and tear at the pins and wires they’ve been threaded and maimed with; he smiles” (Bartlett, *Skin* 253). Nevertheless, the flock of animals unleashed in his imagination sweeps him up in a mutual becoming; as the dusty taxonomy specimens turn into ferocious living animals, so Mr F becomes-beast.

As suggested by the figure of taxidermy mounts coming alive and following the protagonist around, museum spaces refuse to be contained in Jackson’s work. They continually seep into real life, such as when Nora hears of the Museum of Childhood and imagines that her “whole past might be displayed there, with pornographic candor and a bronze plaque: *The North-American Child, 20th Century, Desert Habitat*” (Half 198). Later she is convinced that she is in a diorama and calls herself “a taxidermy girl in a wind-up world” (Half 325, 356). Similarly, the taxidermist in “Angel” describes his paid work as “so dead that day that everyone was just standing around glassy-eyed” and upon finding straw on the floor he thinks “I’m in a diorama!” (Angel 31). During an exhibitionistic display in his window, he is excited by the thought that he might look like “some kind of mannequin or lay figure from a museum diorama” (Angel 28). The eerie effect is reminiscent of Hiroshi Sugimoto’s breathtakingly beautiful photographs of dioramas in which their mundane framing as museum exhibits has been removed. In the concluding section, I draw out the implications of opening up the virtual museum of literature to include the reader.

Reading as Auto-anatomisation

Since he spent so much of his time with the dead, the taxidermist sometimes felt like he was dead already, that everyone was. The past was fixed and everyone was living it, or that shrinking part of the past that still lay ahead of them. Their gestures weren’t really optional; they would prove in retrospect to be unchanging, final. Even his thoughts, in their repetitive circlings, would look from any distance like a fixed point. He, Darla, his masturbating landlady were all mounted specimens, memorabilia of the future. (Angel 31)

To recognise oneself in the museum exhibit is to acknowledge that one is a thing that might be put on display. Death only makes human materiality visible by rendering bodies (more or less) inert and thinglike. The animated taxidermy animal functions as a transition to identifying with inanimate matter, as it is easier to identify with something which has once been alive. Ultimately, however, Jackson treats all matter as corpses available for artistic (re)animation: as David Tiffany has it, toys and poems alike are forms of “animated pictures” (21-30). The spectator who looks closely at Herman Godfrey “to see if the sheen of enamel bears any resemblance to that

of human feeling” will discover her own reflection in “the dot of light on the raw metal inside back of his skull” (Musée). This might be taken to indicate that any light of life discernible in Herman is reflected off the onlooker, but equally that the onlooker sees her own lifelessness in the mechanical toy. Analogously, the “window” of writing, seen in a different light, turns into mirror reflecting the reader (Original 346). Instead of identifying with the virtual view of life seen through the window, the reader might recognise her materiality in the opaque medium of language. Language, toys and taxidermy specimen all share the capacity of being animated with human flesh.

The reader is prompted to recognise herself in the virtual museum exhibits through meta-literary devices such as direct address. The narrator of Brophy’s *In Transit* reminds the reader: “In your own eyes, I don’t doubt, you are a very real part of the real world. But please remember that, to me it is you who are the fictitious – the, indeed, entirely notional – character” (73). Literary characters and narrators are textual functions but so are, strictly speaking, readers. From the narrator’s point of view, the lack of physiological, especially sexual, characteristics which makes her/him appear unreal and inhuman, is shared by the reader. While the reader may be reassured by the knowledge of her own sex, she is at least reminded by the narrator’s auto-anatomisation that she, too, is confined to a partial and distorted view of her own anatomy and cannot, for instance, see the back of her shoulders. Literary anatomies such as Jackson’s hold up a mirror to readers and encourage them to anatomise themselves.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, Jackson’s anatomisation of the eye conditions the anatomising gaze of the reader in specific ways. The bodies anatomised in her work are alive and look back, which invites the reader to see herself reflected in their eyes. As brought out by the trope of auto-anatomisation, there is no abstract anatomising gaze exempt from anatomisation. By anatomising the eye and describing various subjective optical experiences, Jackson embodies and particularises vision. Sight means seeing, an activity unfolding in time and involving temporal phenomena such as afterimages. The eye is not a geometrical vanishing point but a bodily organ – or rather two, working in tandem to produce stereoscopic vision. Similarly, light is not an invisible medium of visibility but a substance bouncing off surfaces and outlining objects in space.

At the same time, Jackson is careful not to reduce the richness of the dominant sense to its strictly physiological operations. Her comparison of literary works to taxidermy tableaux brings out the virtual aspects of actual vision: to simultaneously see something else in what is before the eyes. All art with a visual aspect juggle actual and virtual vision, drawing attention to or from the visible materiality of the medium. Deleuze has written extensively on cinema, arguing that the camera and the cutting produce a

new form of seeing which is not arranged around the point of view of an interested human observer (see Colebrook, *Deleuze* 56-9). I would add, however, that in order to access this nonhuman eye the spectator needs to perceive more than light projected onto a screen. What makes literature special compared to the visual arts is merely that the actual sight of the written word is so dull that it tends to fade from consciousness, giving way to phantom sight. As I have shown in this chapter, some of the most vivid phantom sights in Jackson's work are dismembered parts still living and vivisected bodies opening up themselves to display their innards.

Hearing Voices: Writing as Ventriloquism

A flag clucked against its pole, an almost anatomical sound, like a throat clearing before a speech.
(Half 345)

After sight, hearing is the most privileged sense in modern western culture. When sight is not posited against touch, as detailed in the chapter “Touching Texts,” it is often posited against hearing, especially in the Christian iconoclastic tradition privileging the true word of god above dazzling and seductive appearances (Jay, “Rise” 312). Due to the generally dominant status of the sense and its particular function as carrier of (oral) language, there is a wealth of material related to sound and hearing in Jackson’s work. In order to manage this material, I have chosen the figuration of ventriloquism as a structuring device. It might appear that ventriloquism has more to do with speaking than hearing, but in my understanding the phenomena of “speaking in tongues” and “hearing voices” are interrelated. As Steven Connor shows, the phenomenological roots of ventriloquism are to be found in infantile onomatopoeic mimicking of the characteristic “voices” of things. “What is imitated in onomatopoeic voicing is the world’s own capacity to give voice,” Connor writes, and further “I give the world an animate life by taking it as a voice” (10). In my understanding, this giving voice is not an anthropocentric “speaking for” (replacing the voice of the thing with a human voice implying a human interior) but a particularly intense form of listening. In *The Doll Games*, Jackson describes how “the whole material world used to seem on the verge of humping itself up and acquiring legs and a pinched, squeaky voice” (Doll [uncanny]). I assume that humans, like many other animals, are evolutionarily attuned to listen for and imitate voices. Thus, voicing stands in a similar relation to hearing as eating does to tasting: they are not identical but intertwined.

The relation between hearing and voicing is brought out by the history of sound reproduction. During the 19th century, focus was shifted from the production to the reception of sounds; or, rather, the location of sound production was shifted from external source to sensing body. Sound began to be understood as the ear’s translation of certain vibrations potentially perceptible through other senses as well. Whereas earlier technologies of sound reproduction had attempted to mimic for example a speaking mouth, new technologies mimicked instead the workings of the tympanum and incorporated a vibrating membrane which translated sound waves into something else and back again (Sterne 2-3). Jackson treats these two basic modes of sound reproduction as contemporaneous and complementary, for example by having the automaton Herman Godfrey of “Musée Mécanique”

incorporate both. He finds his makers, the genius girls, “too loud, their voices battered his wax-paper ear drums, sending white lines of strain across them” (Musée). Like the earliest technological devices imitating the tympanum, Herman’s ears translate sound into visible signs instead of electrical impulses. His voice production draws upon an even older technology, however: “Herman Godfrey screamed. The Kratzenstein device successfully reproduced the vowels a, e, i, o, and u by expelling air from bellows into tubes of different shapes. Herman Godfrey did too. It sounded like crying” (Musée). The Kratzenstein device was one of the 18th century speaking machines based on the principle of mechanically synthesising speech (see Connor 350-1; Sterne 72-7). By describing the sound of Herman’s voice as “like crying,” Jackson underscores the affective expressivity of mechanically produced sounds. This is quite typical of the soundscapes her texts produce: they are full of nonhuman voices and body noises. Examples from *Half Life*, the central work treated in this chapter, include the “quiet gasp” of a prosthetic knee joint (231) and the “long sad bovine honks” of cars (371).

Perhaps such authorial giving voice to inanimate things is a typically modernist trait. According to Douglas Kahn, modernism “produced a greater emphasis on listening to things, to different things, and to more of them and on listening differently” (9). Kahn connects this to the increasing availability of sound recording, which turned the voice into concrete sound available as material for art, and blurred traditional distinctions between voice, noise and music (8-12). As an example of the distinct sound of modernist literature, Mina Loy took her cue from jazz to write poetry that “releases the rhythms of modernity, which are also the rhythms of the immigrant” (Goody 198). Goody describes how in Loy’s work “word sounds and word-play (alliteration, polysemy, neologisms, punning, bathos, rhyme) produce an excess of poetic convention”: a modernist style which, like that of Djuna Barnes, draws heavily upon literary tradition (197). Discussing Barnes’ intertextual loans from literary history, Caselli argues that “Barnes’s ventriloquism is an attack against the primacy of voice as the mark of a natural, or primary state of language” (23). I agree that the (post)modernist sampling technique shared by Barnes and Jackson expresses scepticism against orality as a mark of naturalness or primacy. I do not believe, however, that such literary ventriloquism entails scepticism against orality as such. Instead, I would like to stress the literality of *voice* in literary voice and concur with Winterson’s claims in her essay “A Work of My Own” that “style has in it many voices” and that it “is not style as collage, it is style as polyphony, where the past is audible again” (*Art* 180-1). That “voice” is not taken to express genuine self-presence does not mean that the audible resonance of literary voice has to be rejected or resisted. On the contrary: writing as ventriloquism is all about hearing voices. Winterson insists that in

order to achieve voice and style, the “writer has to hear language until she develops perfect pitch” (*Art* 172). By applying a musical term to literature she foregrounds the sonority of language: not its meaning or message but its rhythms and cadences audible to the inner ear in a style that “reads itself aloud” (*Art* 184).

My discussion of literary ventriloquism is developed in the first section of this chapter, through a reading of works by Jackson, Carter and Bartlett employing the ventriloquism trope to question authorship. While narrating the story of *Half Life*, Nora worries that her words are unconsciously dictated by Blanche, while the protagonist of *Patchwork Girl* channels the voices of her creator Mary Shelley and of the several different persons (and a cow) whose body parts she is stitched together from. Drawing upon such literary examples, I show how writing can be understood as ventriloquism in several different ways: as the reader, the author and language itself throwing their voices and speaking through the mouths of one another. Writing is ventriloquism first of all in the sense that each linguistic utterance echoes previous utterances and each literary work cites previous literary works. Thus, writers are never the sole and original authors of their texts. Furthermore, writing may be understood as authorial ventriloquism in that the reader’s speech organ is unconsciously, silently engaged in articulating the words. However, the ventriloquism also works in reverse, as the reader throws her voice and speaks through the text, colouring the authorial voice with her own timbre and inflection.

Language itself has an inhuman agency preceding that of individual language users, so that there is an oscillation between “I speak language” and “language speaks me” (Lecerle, *Violence* 5-6). In the second section, I deal specifically with how the voice of language as such is made audible in nonsense and wordplay. By voiding the text of semantic meaning, nonsense foregrounds the sensual pleasure of linguistic sonority and invites reading aloud. Rather than write pure nonsense, Jackson tends to weave wordplay into her narratives in the vein of *écriture féminine* and other forms of experimental writing. Several of her stories, most prominently “My Friend Goo,” demonstrate the power of language to speak itself and generate affective intensity in forms such as nursery rhymes and tongue twisters, where a logic of nonsense rather than sense dictates the text. “Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead” and “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” deal with channelling the voices of the dead through elaborate linguistic rituals involving mispronunciations, obstructed speech and stuttering. This recalls Deleuze’s dictum that great writers are those capable of making language stutter, in order to deterritorialise it away from sense-making.

The stuttering of language has a correspondence in body noises such as hiccups and farts which give voice to other agencies than the conscious

human subject. Even the voice involves distinctive corporeal resonances in excess of communication – what Barthes terms “the grain of the voice” (Dunn and Jones 1-2). Such bodily sounds are the theme of the third section, with *Patchwork Girl* as its most prominent example. The patchwork girl is haunted not just by voices, but by bodily ties and sounds bursting out in what resembles a hysterical attack during a séance. Since the patchwork girl’s body is conflated with the body of text, her hysteria thematises the modernist hysterisation of literary form, where the text eludes the authoritative narrator and erupts in senseless sonorities (Kahane vii-xv). More specifically, this haunted and hysterical hypertext partakes in a feminist reclamation of the traditional association between female voices and gushing body fluids (Dunn and Jones 2-4). However, Jackson departs from the celebration of the organic in *écriture féminine* through her preference for the grain of the machine, or the noises made by artificial bodies. To illustrate this I turn to “Musée Mécanique,” where the bodies of protagonist and text alike resound with phantom sounds of ticking, creaking, whirring, clonking and so on.

Song is a central example of when the sonority of the voice overshadows (although it may also accentuate) any verbal message communicated. Rather than consider the musicality of literary language, its rhythms and sonorities, as has been done in studies of poetry, I devote the fourth section to phantom sounds of music in Jackson’s prose. Throughout a close reading of a performance scene in *Half Life*, I pick out various aspects of music which might function to deterritorialise literature away from linguistic sense-making. I discuss singing as a machination, queering and becoming-animal of the voice, and as a particular form of ventriloquism in which music itself sings through the singer. I also argue that Jackson’s incorporation of an actual aria into a virtual musical performance works as a form of sampling or ventriloquism. In conclusion, I propose singing along as a model for reading.

Hearing Voices

In my bowls I found some comfort and thus learned my first lesson about language: that one might host what one could neither master nor become, for in a sob weep all the generations past and to come; a wail is all words, all languages at once. (Consuetudinary 137-8)

Ventriloquism is often used to figure a lack of originality, as in Kilgour’s characterisation of Coleridge’s *Biographia* as a “passive dummy not of truth but of a host of foreign voices who invade it” (190-1). In this section, I want to consider ventriloquism without anxiety of influence and treat it as the normal condition of writing. I argue that writing can be understood as ventriloquism in several different ways: as readers, authors and language itself throwing their voices and speaking through the mouths of one another.

The starting point for my discussion is Jackson's explicit thematising of the ventriloquism of writing in *Patchwork Girl* and *Half Life*.

Before moving on to my readings of these texts, I first need to outline the phenomenology of ventriloquism, as explained by Connor in *Dumbstruck*:

When animated by the ventriloquist's voice, the dummy, like the cartoon character given voice, appears to have a much wider range of gestures, facial expressions, and tonalities than it does when it is silent. The same is true of any object given a voice; the doll, the glove puppet, the sock draped over the hand, change from being immobile and inert objects to animated speaking bodies. Our assumption that the object is speaking allows its voice to assume that body, in the theatrical or even theological sense, as an actor assumes a role, or as the divinity assumes incarnate form; not just to enter and suffuse it, but to produce it. In bald accuracy, it is we who assign voices to objects; phenomenologically, the fact that an unassigned voice must always imply a body means that it will always partly supply it as well. (Connor 35-6)

According to Connor, then, ventriloquism depends upon the fact that disembodied voices are routinely assigned to any plausible body in or out of sight. Crucially, however, the phenomenological intolerability of bodiless voices does not make the voice subordinate to the body. Instead, the voice commands any body it is assigned to, which gives the ventriloquist an uncanny power to animate objects and direct others. The question running through this section is how this may apply to *literary* voices: what kind of bodies do they summon up or commandeer?

In *Half Life*, Jackson suggests a phenomenological drive not just to assign bodies to disembodied voices, but to actively invent voices for inanimate or inhuman bodies: "We mock up an interlocutor in whatever flurry of molecules can keep a mask on. We're ventriloquists in love with our dummies" (Half 359). This can be understood as the driving force behind not only ventriloquism but doll games and narrative fiction in general. Merrill Cole's description of Robin in *Nightwood* as "the dummy that makes the ventriloquists speak" reinforces the notion that who- or whatever does not speak for itself provokes ventriloquism in others (406). Robin is not exactly silent: she sings, screams and speaks, but the reader rarely gets to know what she says and thus she inspires not only her fellow characters in the novel but numerous critics and academics to speak for her. Connor distinguishes between an "active" and a "passive" form of ventriloquism, defined as "the power to speak through others" and "the experience of being spoken through by others" respectively (14), but as the example of Robin shows, things are not always so clear-cut. Sometimes "active" ventriloquism is described as a "passive" experience: a compulsion to speak through or for others. Other times is it not at all clear who is speaking through whom: when a girl speaks for her doll in a game, for example, is it she putting words in the doll's mouth or the doll putting words in hers?

In Jackson's work, ventriloquism is connected to twinning.⁷⁷ This is especially the case in *Half Life*, where the extra head of a conjoined twin might function as a ventriloquist's dummy. In one instance, this is literally the case: the trickster Mr Nickel wears a prosthetic extra head which he makes speak, not through ventriloquism proper but through recordings of his voice. This recalls a tradition of associating mechanical "speaking heads" and automata with ventriloquism (Connor 337-42). Connor describes a historical shift from religious to physiological explanations of ventriloquism, which also entailed a shift from conceiving it as a passive, feminine experience of "speaking in tongues", to an active, masculine experience of "throwing one's voice" (Connor 227-9). With his prosthetic speaking head, Mr Nickel fits into the latter conception of ventriloquism as virtuoso entertainment often performed alongside mechanical marvels. However, even in his case the construction of ventriloquism as *active* is undermined by his lack of actual vocal skills and by the fact that technology rebels and makes his prosthetic head speak incoherently

The protagonist Nora, on the other hand, is fully aligned with the earlier conception of ventriloquism as giving voice to divine or demonic powers. More specifically, with its continuation in the Gothic literary tradition, which according to Kilgour oscillates between "demonic possession" and "neurotic obsessions," "so that voices may come from outside, from daemons or God himself, or from inside, from the human mind, which is prone to 'hear things'" (177). Since Blanche is dormant she does not speak through her own mouth, but Nora worries that she is ventriloquizing through hers via their shared nervous system. The fact that Nora and Blanche are never simultaneously conscious means that they cannot talk to each other, which conforms to the general pattern of ventriloquism:

This is a pattern that remains constant across many different cultural instances of the doubling of voice, whether in cases of possession, or mesmeric speech, or spiritualist trance, or multiple personality disorder: not only can the other voice not speak at the same time as the proper voice, it cannot communicate with it. The presence of one implies the silence or absence of the other. (Connor 205-6)

This is most obvious in a scene at a restaurant where everything Nora tries to say comes out as a moo (*Half* 362-3). Since the mooing silences her own voice and precludes explanations, all she can do is silence the mooing in turn by keeping quiet. This scene of vocal takeover is an unusually blunt example of the novel's ventriloquism theme. While narrating her story, Nora worries that Blanche is dictating her words in more subtle ways: "But now, everything I thought was mine begins to look like hers. I'm lip-synching my

⁷⁷ By "twinning" I mean doubling in a more extended sense than just literal twinning. Jackson's work is full of copies, stand-ins, mirror images and siblings, though perhaps no more so than that of other (post)modernist writers and artists.

autobiography. This fake book, full of spelling terrors. I pore over it, looking for notes from underground” (Half 366). The problem is, of course, that for the paranoid mind everything looks like a sign. Every thought, word or action Nora does not wish to acknowledge as her own, she can blame on Blanche. Blanche might even be considered a physical manifestation of the voices Nora hears, if Connor is right that ventriloquism works because voices supply their own bodies.

Nora’s predicament recalls one of Claude Cahun’s self-portraits: a manipulated photograph of her with two heads, one whispering in the ear of the other, which has the air of listening intently. The work is part of an œuvre of self-portraits where Cahun uses costumes and makeup to take on different identities, male as well as female. It repeats the doubling from her famous self-portrait in front of a mirror, but in a more startling and uncanny way. Crucial to my discussion is the way one head speaks to the other, concretising the notion of split subjectivity as “hearing voices” and “speaking in tongues.” This is not to reduce the entire plot and premise of *Half Life* to a metaphor for the so-called death of the subject. As I argue throughout this dissertation, Jackson’s concretisations of concepts introduce a sensual specificity irreducible to allegory. She employs literature (as well as other art forms) to think through matter, or think materialistically, about problems which cannot be fully abstracted.

Nora’s identity crisis is inextricably connected to her embodiment as a conjoined twin, but it is pertinent for singletons as well. Hearing voices inside one’s head might lead to the experience of having more than one consciousness sharing one body, which for Nora is literally the case. However, Nora can never be sure whether a foreign voice is really Blanche’s and not just her own split subjectivity speaking. In her paranoid speculations, she considers the possibility of being “Nora thinking she is Blanche thinking she is Nora thinking she is Blanche thinking she is Nora” (Half 373). Ultimately, the distinction breaks down: if Nora believes her words to be ventriloquised by Blanche, then in some sense it *is* Blanche speaking:

The real question is, if I can write a fake Blanche, then what makes me think I am not writing the real Blanche? And its corollary: If she can write a fake Nora, what makes me think this one is real?

Who’s writing this book, anyway? (Half 373)

Nora’s authorial identity crisis brings me back to the question of writing as ventriloquism. As Nora worries that she is not the author of her narrative, so does J. F. Bellwether, the “editor” of *The Doll Games*: “Is it possible that I am neither the critic nor the audience, but just the latest dummy of the Jackson girls—that those pint-sized ventriloquists are throwing their voices out of the

past, not to reveal their secrets, but to play yet another DOLL GAME?" (Doll [editorintro]).⁷⁸ Nora and Bellwether are both right to be suspicious, as they are in fact fictional characters "played" by the Jackson sisters. However, their doubts reflect those of actual authors. Writing fiction can be thought of as ventriloquism in the active form: as the author throwing her voice and speaking through her characters. Yet it can equally well be thought of as ventriloquism in the passive form: as the author being possessed by her characters and speaking in tongues, and this is how the figure is most often used.

Writing is ventriloquism in the basic sense that each linguistic utterance echoes previous utterances and each literary work cites previous literary works. As Kilgour puts it: "Even when circumscribed by copyright, words are always crossing boundaries, entering into ourselves and others whether we want them to or not" (185). She shows how this is particularly true for the words of canonised authors such as Shakespeare and Milton, who are constantly and often unconsciously quoted and re-quoted without attribution. Thus, writers are never the sole and original authors of their texts. The Romantics viewed authorship as the giving voice to others, yet were concerned with subsuming these other voices under a strong authorial voice, and introduced the figure of ventriloquism for the threat of authorial self-loss (Connor 297). Later, the crisis of the subject in the 19th century brought about a corresponding literary "fragmentation of the speaking subject" which was eventually formalised in modernism (Kahane vii-xv). This means that the authoritative narrator of the early novel was replaced by unreliable, ill-informed or multiple narrators. Hertel traces the continuation of this development in the contemporary "novel of voices" which emulates oral storytelling (100). Claiming that "many writers today appear to hear voices, and their writing appears to be a struggle to lend them a literary shape," he emphasises the aural qualities of the resulting prose (Hertel 91).

Bartlett's *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* can be characterised as a novel of voices: a collective novel of gay male history in which the protagonists are a sort of gay everymen named only "Boy" and "O." The intradiegetic narrator, an anonymous peripheral character, imaginatively lends his voice to the protagonists and cites monologues and dialogues he could not realistically have heard. The ventriloquism works on several different levels, so that O in turn impersonates other gay men in his sleep: "Sometimes he spoke in a way that reminded Boy of a programme he had once seen about spirit mediums; like a strange kind of ventriloquist" (Bartlett, *Ready* 137). Overt references to ventriloquism such as this invite

⁷⁸ The doll players throwing their voices out of the past are not twins but sisters, with additional doubles provided by matching pairs of dolls. Their teamwork provides a different take on the ventriloquism-twinning connection than the one where one twin speaks through the other (though there is some concern that the older sister Shelley manipulates the younger Pamela into saying and doing things).

being read metatextually as comments upon the nature of authorship, even when the connection is not explicitly made in the text.

While in Bartlett the ventriloquism is a benign act of giving voice to the forgotten victims of history, in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* it instead figures the force of history to repeat itself. Her mythological characters are directed by ancient scripts, so that even at their most terrible and powerful they appear lacking in agency. This lack of agency might even make them more frightening: you cannot reason with a monster any more than with a ventriloquist's dummy. The beast in one of Carter's rewritings of *The Beauty and the Beast*, "The Tiger's Bride," needs a translator to communicate with humans: "His masked voice echoes as from a great distance as he stoops over his hand and he has such a growling impediment in his speech that only his valet, who understands him, can interpret for him, as if his master were the clumsy doll and he the ventriloquist" (Carter 53-4). What this passage seems to suggest is that unintelligible speech is like no speech at all: even though the statements originate from the beast, it is his valet who is figured as the ventriloquist in this exchange. The reference to echoes, one of many positively reverberating throughout the book, also locates the origin of the beast's speech elsewhere. An additional example from "The Lady of the House of Love" makes this thematic even more explicit: "Her voice, issuing from those red lips like the obese roses in her garden, lips that do not move – her voice is curiously disembodied; she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of clockwork" (Carter 102). The vampiric curse is compared to the programming of a speaking automaton, forcing the vampire to repeat outdated lines. There is no room from improvisation: when she deviates from the script, she dies. In Carter, the references to ventriloquism metatextually signal the fairy tale genre's inherent resistance to revisions. It is flexible to a degree, allowing for variations, but if the author wants to fully tap into its literary force she cannot deviate too far from the formula.⁷⁹

Like Bartlett and Carter, Jackson belongs to the (post)modernist tradition affirming the multitude of voices speaking in any literary text. While her work fits neither with Bartlett's quasi-oral novel of voices, nor with Carter's close grappling with one particular genre, it has affinities with both. Jackson reworks a multitude of sources from different genres and historical periods in order to wring new voices out of them, particularly voices of women, queers and freaks. *Patchwork Girl* is an obvious example of this technique, where the protagonist personifies the text as patchwork of intertexts and explicitly comments upon it:

⁷⁹ This is probably why Carter's often dark and bloody tales remain more effective than many other queer and feminist revisions which too easily discard the compulsive, formulaic repetitiveness of the genre.

This language I speak, it's haunted. No, it is a haunting, a possession, an unfamiliar voice, dogs growling, in my throat. Stuck succubus, I was going to say, because possession is as sexual as it sounds. A haunting and sexual intercourse/discourse. But if I don't own it (and it is unfaithful to me) nobody else does either, or ever did. It's just singing, snarling wind blowing through our mouths on its way through time. And I have as big a mouth as anyone. (Patchwork [story/rethinking/voice])

Rather than express an anxiety of influence, the patchwork girl affirms the idea of language as speaking through her. It brings about an intimate encounter with the other which is described in terms of sexual pleasure, not violation. In place of a pessimistic view of discourse as dominated by certain strong voices which one has to guard oneself against, the patchwork girl offers an optimistic view of it as belonging to no one and therefore to everyone equally.

The *Frankenstein* intertext for the figure of the reanimated corpse determines the association of language with death and haunting, but I do not think that this is incidental. Jackson's Word Church stories, "Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead" and "Consuetudinary of the Word Church," also deal specifically with channelling the voices of the dead:

Before we channel the dead voice, we must silence the living one. This is not the same as simply not speaking. We must practice unspeaking. This is the lively production of a silent voice. Paper is the familiar medium for the production of your own voice as a ghost: we practice haunting whenever we write. (Consuetudinary 141)

Writing is described as the ghost of speech, posited halfway to the voices of the dead. Jackson seems to suggest that because the written voice is already silent and ghostly, it is easily overtaken by other voices speaking through it. In writing, one sheds one's voice and adds it to a vast library of disembodied voices surviving their authors. This notion is supported by Leigh Eric Schmidt's contextualisation of printing among voice reproduction technologies: "Speaking trumpets, acoustic tubes, ventriloquism, voice-producing statues, and talking machines all suggested the disembodiment of the human voice, the transmission of sound from an absent, hidden, detached, or simulated speaker" (54). In an article on sound poetry, Brandon LaBelle outlines how the mechanical reproduction of the human voice inspired modernist poets like Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitter to turn themselves into "speaking machines" aligned with other artificial recreations of the body such as Frankenstein's monster and Bellmer's dolls (160-1). Considered as a voice reproduction technology, writing is especially suited to giving voice to the dead, which aligns it with spirit possession.

The ventriloquism of writing is closely connected to the ventriloquism of reading. The foreign voices authors try to channel or guard themselves against are often literary voices confronting them in their simultaneous role as readers. Lest this discussion becomes too abstract or figurative, let me

explain that I mean “voice” as a literary phantom sound. In this I agree with Claire Kahane, who argues that “whether spoken or written, words bear the weight of audition; they are ‘heard’ with the third ear even when there is no actual speaking voice present” (xiii). Writing produces a phantom voice which needs a body, and the most obvious solution is for the reader to provide that body. Kahane cites research showing that reading involves a “silent voicing” unconsciously engaging the speech organs which quite literally makes writers ventriloquists (xiii). As Hertel points out, the reader does not speak in the authors voice; she is “an echo with its own timbre” like an actor interpreting a script or a singer a score (98-9). In a sense, then, the ventriloquism can be understood as working in reverse: as the reader throwing her voice and speaking through the text, which again complicates the active/passive distinction.

Hertel argues that in the quasi-oral novel of voices, “the reader’s attention is at least partially drawn away from the content of the words towards the language of the narrator and its material quality as sound” (91-2). This emphasis on the sonority of language brings me to the third and final form of literary ventriloquism: the ventriloquism of language itself. By foregrounding sonority above sense, writers may tap into the inhuman agency of language: its capacity to generate itself via formulaic expressions, grammatical structures and sonic resonances. In Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s words, nonsense expresses a basic linguistic paradox: “I speak language, in other words I am master of the instrument which allows me to communicate with others, and yet it is language that speaks: I am constrained by the language I inhabit to such an extent that I am inhabited, or possessed by it” (*Philosophy* 25). In “Stitch Bitch,” Jackson endorses such possession by language: “If you let [language] be serviceable then it will only serve you, never master you, and you will only write what you already know, which is not much” (Stitch). Punning on the multiple meanings of the word “sense,” she claims that “the careful guarding of sense in language [...] promotes common sense at the expense of all the others” (Stitch). Thus, writers must give up some authorial control to language itself, admitting it as co-creator of the literary work, in order to bring out its full sensual potential. Merely using language to communicate preconceived ideas is not akin to artistic creation. In the following section, I shall detail how Jackson works with language as sonorous material through nonsense, wordplay and mispronunciations.

The Stuttering of Language

A noisy noise annoys an oyster, get it? Got it? Good. (Friend 56)

While a quasi-oral narrative style can easily adhere to the visual realism described in the introductory chapter, other genres emphasising aural and vocal qualities interfere more radically with visualisation. As Lecercle writes

about nonsense, “the semantic blanks are not meant to be visualised”; instead “the words sing in our ears, unexpected links are established between them, relationships of alliteration, assonance or rhyme, of potential spoonerism [...], of leisurely exploration of phonetic similarities” (*Philosophy* 24). Like Victorian nonsense poetry, the concrete poetry (see Leeuwen 3) and sound poetry (see LaBelle 146) of 20th century avant-garde writers treat language as expressive, even musical, sound. The voiding of semantic sense in these genres only takes to extremes what all writers have to work with: “the material of language: the clicks and moos of k’s and o’s, the lag and lurch of commas and full stops” as Jackson puts it (Original 334).

Although Jackson shares an interest in the sonority and other material qualities of language with for example Dadaist poets, she does not go as far in removing linguistic signification. As she puts it in “Stitch Bitch,” she is “interested in writing that verges on nonsense, where nonsense is not the absence of sense, but the superfluity of it” (Stitch). Thus, rather than write Dadaist sound poems, she weaves wordplay into her experimental prose in the vein of *écriture féminine* where “the narrative is overcome by plays with sound” (Crowder 141). The most prominent examples of this technique are her Word Church stories and “My Friend Goo,” which explicitly deal with the materiality, and especially the sonority, of language. In all of these stories, mispronunciations and speech defects are highlighted forms of language production, such as the “stuttering practice, tongue twisters, silence scales, and arpeggios” performed as part of the rites to open a channel to the land of the dead in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” (Consuetudinary 136). To render speech defects in writing is an obvious, and for Jackson typically literal, way of achieving the “stuttering” of language which Deleuze insists that writers must strive for in (*Essays* 107-14).

I choose to explicate this technique through a reading of “My Friend Goo” because it features plenty of wordplay as well as a framing narrative in which the protagonist theorises about language.⁸⁰ The nameless and indeterminately sexed protagonist can even be said to *be* language, begot of a two-dimensional father who speaks only in tongue-twisters and an amorphous mass of a mother who embodies “goo” in the sense of “an inarticulate cooing or gurgling sound like that made by a baby” (Friend 51).⁸¹ The tongue twisters were originally meant for the protagonist to practice proper pronunciation, since s/he first learns to speak from the sea of goo:

Sometimes when it hissed and mumbled, it sounded like words, though not ones that could be found in any dictionary. This is the first language I imitated, when I began to

⁸⁰ While the narrative of “My Friend Goo” is interspersed by tongue twisters in various languages, the Word Church stories thematise wordplay but feature few actual examples of it.

⁸¹ “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” also celebrates infantile babble as speech unencumbered by signification: “She *babbled*. The Founder often spoke of this period as a Golden Age, in which the universal Voice had not yet been trussed up in words all too easily mistaken for her own,” 139.

Speak. Even now, if you've noticed, I sometimes sound more like a storm than a person. When I'm self-conscious, my tongue seems to thicken or flatten into something like a rudder or an oar, unfit for the fancywork of words. I wuh-wuh-wuh-wuh-wuh-*wuther*, like wind rubbing itself, goo on goo. (Friend 49)

“Wuther” not only indicates the sound of wind (as in *Wuthering Heights*) but onomatopoeically imitates it, an effect reinforced by the repeated syllable. Children learn to speak by repeating vocal sounds and using them as expressive “sound gestures” before they grasp their referential meaning. Poetic language combines the expressive and the referential use of linguistic sounds (Tsur viii). Nonsense and sound poetry takes language to the expressive extreme, demonstrating that unintelligible speech, like foreign languages, animal cries and music, can nevertheless be highly intensive and affecting.

The protagonist of “My Friend Goo” not only has trouble pronouncing referential language, but actively rejects it. Embarrassed by the inane banality of common phrases, s/he expels them with the interjection “P.U.” (Friend 50), an apparent acronym in which the letters stand for nothing but their sound onomatopoeically approximating a retch. “P.U.” captures her/his preference for sound over sense, or for a new sense in sound. With quasi-scientific method, s/he repeats tongue twisters until new words are produced through mispronunciation:

Every new word I hit upon, such as “bubby” or “rigger,” I wrote down phonetically. I used symbols I made up myself, concentric circles, crescent moons, zigzags and little wizard hats. They were easier to remember than the ones in the dictionary and more accurate, since a few of the sounds I made were not featured in the English language. I pored over these words, trying to fit them together. Sometimes I thought I felt a gladdening inside me, telling me that I'd got something right, a word or phrase, and those I memorized. I didn't know what they meant, of course, but I had a feeling that in this case, not knowing wouldn't hurt. It might even help. (Friend 53-4)⁸²

The protagonist hypothesises that ordinary words may be considered mispronounced nonsense: “Maybe when I thought I was making sense, I wasn't. Or if I was, it was insignificant compared to the crucial nonsense I was making simultaneously and by the very same means” (Friend 56). Such speculations align the character with so-called *fous littéraires* who over-interpret literary works or linguistic structures looking for hidden meanings. According to Lecercle, nonsense as a genre invites such “interpretation gone wild, but also lucid” since “its dissolution of sense multiplies meaning” (*Philosophy* 3, 20). As in the wordplay of children and the arcane analyses of *fous littéraires*, sonority takes precedence over signification in authors' experiments with language (see Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* 28-9).

⁸² Similarly, mispronounced words are added to the liturgy in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church,” 139.

What these linguistic experimentations have in common is a sense that the sonority of language carries meaning beyond arbitrary signification. Reuven Tsur describes how poetry draws upon “‘mysterious’ intuitions concerning speech sounds” such as “the double – hushing as well as harsh – quality of the sibilants” (viii). For Adam Piette, any affective or other qualities associated with speech sounds are purely coincidental: “Onomatopoeia, child-rhymes, doublets, comic riddling are small-scale, local phenomena in a language. They cannot be used to justify a dark faith in phoneme demonology” (9). I would argue that although the intuitive qualities of vocal sounds defy systematisation, their existence is demonstrated by their effective literary use. As LaBelle puts it, “sound poetry disregards the notion of the arbitrariness of the signifier/signified relation, grasping instead the sonic specificity embedded in acts of speech that lace sound with meaning” (152). Listen to how Blanche is introduced at the beginning of *Half Life*: “Blanche: a cry building between sealed lips, then blowing through. First the pout, then the plosive, the meow of the vowel; then the fricative sound of silence” (Half 5).⁸³ The plosive not so much indicates as performs an uncontrollable outburst of sound, as the fricative performs hushing. This has nothing to do with the semantic meaning of the word “Blanche” (French for “white”)⁸⁴ but draws upon the felt meaningfulness of linguistic sounds.

The performative force of sonority is further brought out by a passage in *Half Life* where Audrey, who in a parody of transsexualism claims to be a conjoined twin born in the wrong body and who considers experimental surgery to attach a prosthetic head, claims to be “a little slip of [Mother Nature’s] tongue.” Nora counters: “If you’re a slip of the tongue, I’m a whole fucking speech defect. Buh-body. Puh-person” (Half 367). Her formulation effectively connects the problematic subject status of conjoined twins to the agency of language evident in nonsense. The stuttered “buh-body” adds something to “body” which can neither stand on its own (“buh-“ only makes sense as a botched attempt to pronounce “body”) nor be extracted without fundamentally altering the resulting entity (“buh-body” is a whole new word with a unique resonance in excess of “body”). The reference to speech defects emphasise the materiality of language; more precisely, its dependence upon a speaking body whose tongue might slip. At the same time, the idea that “buh-body,” pronounced by “Mother Nature,” might actually *create* the “buh-body” of a conjoined twin, asserts the performative force of linguistic utterances. Of course, on the meta level, the text of *Half Life* does create the “buh-body” of Nora and Blanche, as a phantom body sensed by the reader.

⁸³ In *Doll Games*, a similar sonic analysis is made of the name “Dawn,” associated with simpering femininity: “The flat drawl of that long vowel sound, diphthonging unpleasantly and for too long,” [dainty].

⁸⁴ Although this is also commented upon and might be similarly connected to silence via the whiteness of a blank page.

By calling attention to the sonorities of language, authors reinforce the voice of language itself speaking through them. This voice is always coloured by the speaking body, be it human or artificial, which is why sound poets have often worked with inarticulate noises and technologically modified voices apart from linguistic sounds (LaBelle 159-162). Much like speech defects, sound reproduction technologies amplify the ventriloquism of language by removing agency one step further from the speaking subject. When Nora's housemate Trey leaves his voice recognition software on, language is produced without any speaking subject at all: "Silence spoke a lushly maternal language. 'Mommy,' it said, 'On a moon oh Mom, on on on moon, Mommy, om'" (Half 55).⁸⁵ In "Early Dispatches from the Land of the Dead," Jackson combines physiological and technological forms of stuttering into the phantom sound of a broken-up recording: "A small drift had nearly covered the – thing – what – sometimes it is hard to – sound of recorded voice stammering – downward flame..." (102) In the following section, I shall discuss the "grain of the voice" rendered audible by coughs, hiccups, laughter and other asignifying verbal noises interrupting the flow of speech (see Neumark, "Introduction" xxvi-xxvii), as well as the "grain" of technological voices.

Body Language

In the quiet of the desert at noon I can hear my body murmuring to me. If I held a small, powerful microphone to my wrist or thigh you'd hear like interference on a wire the tiny distant voices of other personalities, of which I am a cord, or discord. I mike my fingernail. I mike my tripes. These voices aren't stilled, distilled, iced over, stopped in permalife. They're not recordings. They're not potentialities either, and they're not "types". They're people, thinking and talking about it. They've got a sense of history, dense and disappointing. At times I write down what I hear. (Patchwork [story/rethinking/miked tripes])

Like language may erupt in senseless sonorities, so the body may erupt in non-linguistic sounds ranging from more to less communicative, expressive and/or voluntary, such as sighs, laughter, hiccups and digestive noises. These body noises have an obvious connection to the historical conception of ventriloquism as a voice originating from some other part of the body than the mouth: the Latin "ventriloquist" and the older Greek "engastrimyth" mean someone speaking through the stomach (Connor 49-50). Originally such a displacement of the voice was seen not as evidence of ventriloquial skill but of possession. In the religious ecstasy of early Christianity, the entire body was possessed by the voice of God, later to be replaced with the voice of the devil as the church seized control over who may speak for God (Connor 124-5). In order to construct pagan divine inspiration as demonic possession,

⁸⁵ There is also a passage in "Musée Mécanique" which appears to have been run through imperfectly calibrated voice recognition software.

Christian tradition insisted that the oracle of Delphi spoke specifically through her genitals, which forms a direct line forward to the feminine malady of hysteria (Connor 69-72). Although hysteria may not cause body parts to speak in articulate language, it involves “disturbances of voice, vision, hearing, and even breathing” (Kahane xi). Such disturbances have been read as a secret language to be interpreted by the psychoanalyst (Connor 41).

As suggested by Kahane, literary modernism brought about a hysterical dispersal of authorial and narrative voices (vii-xv). In his Deleuzian reading of modernist authors, John Hughes writes:

Language is affected by invasively expressive, but unsignifying, manifestations of its sonorous material. This affects both the means and subjects of representation itself. Speech and body both become disrupted by persistent noises, animal sounds, crackings, and so on, by sounds partaking of the purely physical. (Hughes 62-3)

Thus, there is a hysterisation of the body of text, which erupts in senseless noises, and a corresponding hysterisation of the bodies *in* the text, who cease to be coherent characters. Jackson explicitly thematises this in *Patchwork Girl*, where the protagonist’s possessed and hysterical body is conflated with the body of text. According to Jackson, hypertext is particularly well suited to effect a hysterisation of literary form, as it is itself a hysterical body which “gives a loudspeaker to the knee, a hearing trumpet to the elbow” (Stitch). Like the body language of hysteria or possession contests the authority of the speaking subject, the hypertext form abandons the hierarchic structure of the codex and speaks with many voices.

To reinforce this, Jackson has patched together *Patchwork Girl* out of quotations and intertextual references to other works. This mirrors the patchwork girl’s body patched together out of the body parts of others. During a séance, these others speak up, first as a belch: “All my neighbors turned to me, not surprisingly, because the belch had come from my own throat. Nonetheless, I knew, as one knows one’s intimate sputterings, that it was not *my* belch” (Patchwork [story/séance/a spirit voice]). The medium tries to address the spirit but the patchwork girl’s “sole testimony was a barrage of belches, burps, rumbles, sniffles, sneezes, hiccups, whines, yelps, farts, and snorts” (Patchwork [story/séance/a spirit voice]). The other participants in the séance are not attuned to such corporeal forms of haunting, and throw her out for offending the spirits. On a different occasion, the patchwork girl tries to single out Mary Shelley’s voice from “the hubbub of whispers and broken words” in her head by stabbing a skin graft from Mary, but its only response is “a blob of ordinary blood” (Patchwork [story/falling apart/Mary?]). If the voices belong to her recycled body parts rather than to the persons they used to be part of, it is only logical that they

do not speak coherently. As in hysteria, it is body memory speaking without access to articulate speech.

Possession explains such body language as originating in spirits or demons, while hysteria explains it as originating in unconscious desires and repressed traumas. In “Stitch Bitch,” Jackson adheres to the latter explanation: “In hysteria, the body starts to tell those [repressed] stories back to us – our kidneys become our accusers, our spine whines, our knees gossip about overheard words, our fingers invent a sign language of blame and pain” (Stitch). I would argue, however, that the conflation of hysteria and possession in *Patchwork Girl* tells a slightly different story. The repressed memories of the patchwork girl’s body parts originate in their former lives and cannot be derived from her psychological interior. Like the patchwork girl, Nora in *Half Life* is afflicted by tics originating in a body not entirely her own. Her condition can be described as a possession coming from the inside – from parts of her own body – or as a hysteria coming from the outside – from someone else’s consciousness. The point is that such interior/exterior distinctions break down, as I concluded previously. On one occasion, Nora suggests that she might be hearing voices as the result of a sinus infection: “There was an incessant rustling and chirping inside my head, though whether this was ghosts or phlegm I did not know and barely cared” (Half 331). Since Nora’s haunting, like the patchwork girl’s, is so robustly corporeal ghosts and phlegm might ultimately amount to the same thing.

I understand body noises as the inhuman, asubjective voices of the body speaking through the human subject. Instead of describing such noises in quasi-linguistic terms, as sign system, I consider them as expressive sonorities exceeding communication and codification. What the corpse in “Angel” says “in a voice of poisoned sighs and whistles” is that it is on its way to become undifferentiated matter (Angel 30). It cannot speak of the soul or spirit since it no longer has one; it can only speak of the decomposition process it is going through. Other body noises speak of life, such as the hearts which “beat at a slow, nearly vegetable rate, with a deep cluck and boom” in *Patchwork Girl* (Patchwork [body jungle]). Body noises may be expressive, but in a performative rather than signifying sense: they sound exactly what they do. This is also true for descriptive phrases such as “cluck and boom” which play on the sonority of language to perform phantom sound. In *My Body*, Jackson goes further and provides the text with an actual instead of a virtual version of body noise: the repetitive sound of breathing which creates a sense of living presence.

Oral noises like breaths and burps serve as a reminder that even the voice involves aspects other than linguistic utterances. The unique expressiveness of timbre, tone, inflection and so on goes beyond the voluntarily cultured or communicative. Such vocal qualities emanate from the friction and vibration

of bodily substances, being like all sounds collateral (Ihde 72), which troubles the voice as figure for individual agency (Dunn and Jones 1). Roland Barthes' concept "the grain of the voice" famously captures the extra-linguistic materiality of articulation, though he makes a rather odd distinction between breathing and other bodily resonances in the voice. Through the traditional association of breath – pneuma – with soul, he aligns it with the representational, communicative and expressive functions of voice, the opposite of grain. Grain is instead exemplified by the throat and face made audible in the strictly sonorous aspect of language: the forming of vowels and consonants in the mouth (Barthes, "Grain" 183).⁸⁶ However, as demonstrated by sound poetry experimenting with various oral noises, breathing can indeed render audible the materiality of the body (LaBelle 154-5, 158). When Jackson pronounces the word "pneuma" as a stylised gasp for air in her recording of Herman Godfrey's birth scene from "Musée Mécanique," it hardly gives an impression of breath as disembodied spirit.⁸⁷ Modified to include audible breaths – or breathlessness – as an additional example of grain, I find Barthes' concept more useful.

What is particularly striking about the grain of the voice is Barthes' insistence that it is not "personal" or "original" but still "individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no 'personality,' but which is nevertheless a separate body" ("Grain" 182). This opens up for a Deleuzian understanding of voice as *particular* without being *personal*, which can in turn be applied to authorial voices. Stewart argues that "sound production and reception in poetry always carry an image of the particularity of human voices" (*Poetry* 109) and MacKendrick adds that "[t]here is something irresistibly somatic in textual style, in the recognizable (even when depersonalized) voice" (151). I agree, and I recognise a strong authorial voice in Jackson's writing, but I would like to emphasise that the somatic particularity of such a voice need not be interpreted in terms of psychological individuality. This notion is supported by Carolyn Abbate's application of grain to authorial voices: "Rather than killing the author, Barthes proposes the rebirth of an author 'inside' the artwork, one that reveals herself in the 'grain' of the voice(s) that speak what we read (hear); he eliminates a specifically male position (the Author), supplanting it with this overtly female and musical force (the Voice)" (232). Voice is feminine because it is bodily, and more specifically because the organ of vocal production – the larynx – is often described in terms of a vaginal orifice (Koestenbaum 211).

⁸⁶ To be fair, Barthes' opposition between breath and body stems from the emphasis on the free, unobstructed flow of breath within "vocal culture" (classical song technique), where the muscle and mucus of the body tend to be regarded as obstacles to be disciplined, rather than as the material premise of breath and song.

⁸⁷ Mp3 files of her readings are available under the heading "Noise" at her website. The excerpt from "Musée Mécanique" is named "Clockwork."

Like the wandering womb causing hysterical symptoms or the Delphic oracle's speaking genitals, the larynx throws its voice from a hidden location inside the body (Koestenbaum 217).

Grain can be heard in a general authorial voice, but also more locally in the voices of characters. Authors may perform these voices by directly rendering the inflections of speech or by describing their particular aural qualities. The former might seem preferable, as it mimics more closely the voice in action, but I believe that authors choose the latter technique when they want to draw attention to vocal qualities without any irrelevant and potentially distracting content of a statement. Barnes, for example, describes Robin's voice as "the low drawling 'aside' voice of the actor who, in the soft usury of his speech, withholds a vocabulary until the profitable moment when he shall be facing his audience" and Jenny's as "a light rapid lisping voice which one always expected to change, to drop and to become the 'every day' voice" (*Nightwood* 34, 60-1). Robin's and Jenny's voices echo each other: one low and the other high, one creating pleasant and the other unpleasant tension. Listeners wait for their "proper" speech to begin, and Barnes' text performs this waiting by giving them few actual lines. In *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes describes a voice which is not only feminine but specifically lesbian: "that lamenting Herculean Voice that sounds to us like a Sister lost, for certainly it is not the Whine of Motherhood, but a more mystic, sodden Sighing" (31). Although the owner of the voice is shortly given a soliloquy, her voice is first recognised as lesbian by its *sound*.⁸⁸

The performative and the communicative function of the voice might coincide in statements which do what they say. Such is the case in Bartlett's *Skin Lane* when Mr F instructs his apprentice Beauty in how to handle furs: "The voice Mr F used to mutter to himself like this wasn't particularly soft; it was quiet, but not soft. It was *firm*" (104). The almost inaudible words give the impression that Mr F is talking to himself, yet the quality of his voice both mimics and incites to touch. Furthermore, they perform his desire for Beauty, drawing him into a sonic bubble encompassing only the two of them, aurally caressing him and implicating him in the sensual touching of the skins. Bartlett's authorial voice in turn performs a soft yet firm linguistic caress by emulating a storyteller intimately addressing the reader.

In related fashion, O wards off a homophobic assault on Boy by shouting "in a voice which he had never heard himself use before, something that sounded more like a car crashing than a human voice" (Bartlett, *Ready297*). Norie Neumark describes the scream as "voice at the extreme of

⁸⁸ That Robin's "low" and Bounding Bess' "Herculean" voices might perform an audible lesbianism regardless of words is supported by Elizabeth Wood's notion of "sapphonic." Wood argues that in opera, where the lyrics are usually neither lesbian-themed nor even intelligible, a certain type of female voice crossing the sexed break between registers and timbres might nevertheless resound as lesbian or "sapphonic," 28-33.

signification” and as “a vocal gesture” which is repressed in polite conversation (“Introduction” xxvii). As such, it overtakes O’s vocal chords and surprises him with its unfamiliar, even inhuman sound. His imperative has the intended effect thanks to the thrown voice of a crashing car emanating from his throat. As in Jackson’s “Milk” where “[s]mall peeping cries seem to help the cloud relax” (Melancholy 160-1), the manner of vocalisation is more important than the words. Discussions of performativity tend to focus on linguistic speech acts, but vocal gestures might as well be wordless (Neumark, “Doing” 96-7). In *Half Life*, Nora and her two housemates all work with phone sex, performing vocal gestures of arousal for a living. Their wordless cries mingle anonymously, disconnected from their bodies: “The house was always moaning, whimpering, sighing, as if it were alive and in heat. We called it the House of Voices” (Half 16). As a car throws its voice and speaks through O, so they throw their voices and speak through their house, collectively animating it.

These speaking houses and cars bring me to the ventriloquism of technologically (re)produced voices emanating from things. While today the technological throwing of the voice has become routine, when recently invented devices such as phonographs and telephones were perceived as eerie. Like the speaking body parts discussed above, such speaking things were associated with spirit possession and with the voices of the dead (Connor 263-7; Sterne 287-301). Recorded voices are often discussed as “disembodied,” but as Neumark points out, this is a visualist assumption since what is missing is the *sight* of the speaking body and not its *sound* (“Introduction” xviii). Rather, microphones and telephones amplify grain (the body made audible) such as breathing and oral noises (Connor 380-1). Hopkinson describes this effect in “Something to Hitch Meat to”: “Something was obscuring Aziman’s voice in the phone, making rubbing and clicking sounds over and around speech” (Hopkinson 26). It turns out that Aziman is chewing on hard candies shaped like skulls: the telephone, designed for communication, instead transmits the body noise of teeth against (imitated) bone.

Apart from its capacity to transmit and amplify bodily grain, there is a “grain of the machine” (Sterne 274) making audible its own body or material specificity. With seemingly anthropomorphising descriptions of a phone signal “terrible as a scream” (Half 175) or “the attent hush of a live line” (Half 184), Jackson underlines the sensual intimacy of technological grain. When Nora switches genres from telephone sex to ghost stories, a familiar “click” tells her that her client has hung up: “And he carried a stethoscope in his cloven hoof,’ I said to the dead receiver” (Half 370). Like Hopkinson’s skull-shaped candies, Jackson’s stethoscope – a technology for amplifying body noises such as heartbeats – direct the reader’s attention towards the sonorous grain of the telephone.

“Musée Mécanique,” the text by Jackson resonating most strongly with grain, merges anatomical and technological grain in typical fashion. The story is full of the phantom sounds of clockwork: the repeated phrase “tick tock” and other renderings of machine noises. These are the protagonist Herman Godfrey’s body noises, as he is an automaton, but they are also the machinery of fiction made audible. Jackson’s precise descriptions of the sounds Herman makes, such as “the cartilaginous ball-joint squeaking in his right knee” (Musée) contribute to a sense of conceptual intimacy.⁸⁹ Since sounds are collateral, there is an inevitable tactility to them: examples like squeaking joints serve to highlight texture and friction. Such tactile phantom sounds also comment implicitly upon Jackson’s techniques for making her fictional universe feel palpably real. The genius girls who have created Herman have “hair rustling like torn paper” (Musée); the sound of friction lending them body while simultaneously indicating that they too are literary creations. When Herman tries to think of the real world he inevitably ends up with “little figures whirring, stopping, wobbling, turning, clasping, whirring, tick tock, no, that’s not what I meant to say –” (Musée). “Musée Mécanique” is a ticking, pinging, clanging, twanging text which draws attention to the grain of language: its materiality made audible in the linguistic sounds employed to onomatopoeic effect.⁹⁰

Singing Language

A small mammal, freshly killed, is played upon as a bagpipe, holes being punched in the windpipe for this purpose, and fitted with straws to permit controlled egress of breath. (Consuetudinary 137)

This section circles around the performance scene in *Half Life* where the conjoined twin 2-Ply sings an aria from Henry Purcell’s opera *The Indian Queen* with one head and raps in a Jamaican accent with the other. My reading of this scene unravels several different themes which are crucial to my Deleuzian understanding of the performative force music introduces to the text: music as transsexual, machinic and animal. Overarching these themes, however, is the idea of music as a form of ventriloquism parallel to yet distinct from that of language and literature. I shall argue that music speaks, or rather sings, through the text: more specifically the baroque voice of Purcell’s *Indian Queen*. If my discussion of this voice sometimes brings me far from the virtual performance in *Half Life*, this is because the text resonates with the actual aria.

The emblematic example of music as ventriloquism is George du Maurier’s novel *Trilby* (1894), in which Trilby has a great voice but sings

⁸⁹ Similarly, conceptual intimacy in *The Doll Games* is reinforced by the tactile body noises of the dolls, such as the “muted crunch when their knees were bent,” [sex].

⁹⁰ “Clockwork,” the excerpt from the text read aloud by Jackson to a musical accompaniment of metallic noises, literalises its sonority. However, I find the sound effects more effective in writing, where they are integrated into the text rather than competing with it.

incorrigibly out of tune until she is hypnotised by the music master Svengali, who plays her vocal chords like an instrument and turns her into a famous singer. As Felicia Miller Frank has shown, Trilby is but one example of female singing voices which are somehow ventriloquised, mechanically produced or otherwise disembodied in 19th century literature (114-5). In line with my previous discussions of literary ventriloquism, however, I am departing from the negative view of ventriloquism as an oppressive influence silencing the true voices of women and others. Instead, I am interested in how ventriloquism can be affirmed as artistic inspiration, facilitating the loss of authorial control necessary in the creative process.⁹¹ Rather than Trilby, then, my emblematic figure is Barnes' street singer from *Ryder*, possessed not by a music master but by her own voice:

For a great voice was within her, beating against her heart and her lungs, a windy brute terror, tearing and strumming the nerves and the arteries of her body like some monster plucking a prison of harp strings and singing, divinely and terribly, against her kidneys, so that she could not take her rightful place on the operatic stage, but must stand athwart the gutters, singing and ***** like a stupendous hound dog, and her child sitting beside playing tra la la, la la! (Barnes, *Ryder* 81)

Apart from its description of singing as a form of ventriloquism, this quotation also captures the sublime force (“divinely and terribly”) of music, its sometimes violent effects upon the body (associated with animality via the “hound dog”) and its contagious nature (the child trying to sing along): themes recurring in Jackson's treatment of music.

Music demonstrates its ventriloquistic force in the urge to sing along. Even more strongly than in nonsense and wordplay, the pleasure of vocalisation takes precedence over any linguistic content one might or might not want to agree with. Thus, the protagonist of “My Friend Goo” is smitten by the unintelligible, garbled speech of the TV show “Slime with Worms”: “Everyone complained about it, but secretly I liked the fog, the indistinct figures, the humming that rose and fell in tides, and often found myself there in dreams from which I awoke also humming” (Friend 54). Robin in *Nightwood*, named after a songbird, sings tunes which Nora compulsively picks up: “Sometimes Nora would sing them after Robin, with the trepidation of a foreigner repeating words in an unknown tongue, uncertain of what they may mean” (Barnes, *Nightwood* 51). The songs are literally in foreign tongues (Italian, French and German) and the words or titles are never given. What is important about them is the atmosphere they create of Robin's leaving. Nora tries to bring her back with language, interrupting the song with speech, but the musical spell is stronger so that “the song would be taken up again, from an inner room where Robin, unseen, gave back an echo

⁹¹This is not to say that artistic creation is not also focused, disciplined and regulated; it is necessarily a balance of both.

of her unknown life more nearly tuned to its origin” (Barnes, *Nightwood* 52). It is not so much Robin who is singing as the music which is singing through her, driving her out on the town.

Jackson emphasises the performative force of music with her many references to for example religious chants (Anatomy 163) and alluring croons (Husband 160). In “Here is the Church,” a fictional Nina Simone even perceives a punk rock cover of her “Mississippi, Goddamn” sounding like “a hog getting its throat cut and keeping right on screaming through the slit” as “the gun she had been trying to make” (Church 93). Music is first and foremost a (performative) doing, not a (signifying) saying, and as such posited in opposition to language (although literary uses of language are often described as musical). When literature becomes-musical it partakes in the non-representational intensity of music. While social Darwinists consider the communicative function of language primary, and music merely a playful offshoot of this, Grosz argues instead that the elaboration of voice as musical instrument of seduction precedes language and humanity (*Chaos* 30-9). Her account particularly emphasises the seductive power of music, shared by humans and other animals. This is thematised by Jackson in her account of the mating rituals of kakapo parrots, written from the female’s perspective:

On a moist still night his singing pummels my soul to dissolution. The booming goes on and on and into the center of it I go homing. The booming and my faithful listening ear are already love happening. My ear, his dish are rhyming shapes. His voice penetrates my ear, my ear reels forth his voice. (Hagfish)

This is an entirely musical and aural seduction: the mates have not yet seen each other and when they do, they find each other homely and ridiculous. By then the sexual encounter between voice and ear has already taken place, an encounter which by no means denies the body. On the contrary; when hearing the male’s call the female “vibrate[s] all over with love of piercing beauty, like the smidgin of flesh in the throat of a singer” (Hagfish). Musical seduction involves the whole body. Grosz describes music as the most viscerally immediate form of art, with the power to move listeners in a very literal way as its vibrations put bodies in motion (*Chaos* 29).

Apart from the more common association of music with animal mating calls, Jackson replaces musicology’s formal anatomy of music with the music of anatomy.⁹² In *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, songs are performed by, among others, trained sperm, a seductive egg and an insinuating hair (Melancholy 38, 25, 124). One of the most elaborate examples are “Nerve,” where fields of vibrating nerve fibres “hum a particular note” which inspires

⁹² This denies music its status as specifically human high culture, but it does not deny its sophistication or complexity.

people to “work[...] out the harmony on their creaking beds” (Anatomy 70). This music of the nervous system above all emphasise receptivity and sensitivity: sensations so intense that distinctions between senses and even organisms lose their meaning. The nerves are not contained within bodies but dispersed transmitters of affect assembling themselves into provisory beings, reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari’s BwOs. The protagonist George says of his nerve lover: “He was a kind of tuning fork. He vibrated with a perfect pain. I trued my pain to his and my pleasures fell into harmony as well” (Anatomy 77). This specific connection between music and sexual pleasure recalls Pynchon’s woman taking a man’s “erection into her stretched fork, into a single vibration on which the night is tuning” (*Gravity* 233) and Barnes’ Ryder bragging about “the merry music I’ve struck up with my spherical, timbersome pipe of a single stop, the core of the codpiece” (*Ryder* 165). The difference is that in “Nerve” the music of sexuality is neither confined to heterosexuality nor clearly distinguished from other forms of sensual intensity. George tunes his whole being to his nerve lover, becoming-nerve in effect.

Similarly functional and contagious are the work-songs of the bloodlarks in “Blood,” which the protagonist describes as “that tuneful, I still find myself humming them” (Melancholy 139). Her dead lover, Singsong Sally, used to sing them so loudly that “you looked everywhere else first to see who was singing before you came to her mouth moving, and then you was [sic] amazed to see the tiny figure who put it out” (Melancholy 143). The discrepancy between big voice and small body already suggests ventriloquism, which is strengthened by the first introduction of her singing as “an eerie sound it was to have float up from a hell red hole” (Melancholy 141). Sally’s voice emanates from sewers associated with bodily orifices: most obviously a menstruating vagina but also “the tubes of a big ear” (Melancholy 145). Apart from contributing to the music of anatomy, this recalls the early conception of ventriloquism as speaking from different parts of the body than the mouth: the speaking sex of the sibyl and Jackson’s “Hearing Mouth” and “Speaking Ear” (Consuetudinary 140).

The anatomical configuration associated with ventriloquism in *Half Life*, that of the conjoined twin, stands in a special relation to singing. Jackson explores the possibility for the doubled voice of a conjoined twin to produce “a two-note chord” (Half 203). While in speech the voice of one twin usually silences the other, in song the doubling of voices is an asset. Nora and Blanche are too conflicted to sing together; instead Blanche sings while Nora accompanies her on the piano, which theoretically one person could do (Half 80). However, when Nora begins to be haunted by Blanche’s voice she hears a stuffed two-headed kitten in a museum sing “in a sort of buzz of two voices that now and then veered apart into harmonies.” While at first the doubled voice is merely a “noise” like “the hiss of a punctured bike tire,” the

separation into distinct melodic lines makes it recognisable as singing (Half 232).⁹³ This suggests that the two voices at first cancel out each other into white noise: the musicality lies in their differentiation.

A similar point is made in relation to the artist 2-Ply: when Nora hears him speak, one twin in BBC English and the other in a Jamaican accent, she asks which voice is his real one, and gets the answer “Both, neither” (Half 207). With 2-Ply’s background, he can claim either as genuine, and has chosen to “polarize.” When Nora later hears him perform in a club he accordingly raps with one voice and sings opera with the other. The music reinforces the discrepancy between the two voices:

The sample and the vocals drew precariously far apart from each other, but the beat stubbornly continued, now synchronized with neither. The whole concoction came loose from the people onstage and seemed to emanate from the walls and now, actually, from my stomach, a disagreeable sensation. (Half 208)

The two voices as such indicate ventriloquism: two different cultural heritages speaking and singing through 2-Ply. Furthermore, the two voices together are “thrown” into the room and takes on a life of their own disconnected from the musicians. When Nora feels the music emanate from her stomach it refers to the etymological meaning of ventriloquism. The feeling makes her sick, which underscores the roots of sound in vibration and the force of music to physically affect listeners.

One of 2-Ply’s two voices performs what is associated with the genuine and with roots, while the other performs what is associated with highly cultured artifice: passing as white, English, upper-class and possibly female. I do not wish to suggest that the distinct singing and speaking style of the Jamaican voice is any more “natural”: instead, the discrepancy between the two voices makes both appear equally artificial and arbitrarily cultivated. However, in the following I shall focus on the implications of the operatic voice. That 2-Ply sings in an “operatic falsetto” (Half 207) is already a distinctly sexed form of ventriloquism. Wayne Koestenbaum cites a 19th century singing manual describing falsetto as a “species of ventriloquism” and discusses its condemnation as a false and effeminate form of vocal production (217-21). Thus, 2-Ply’s operatic falsetto can be understood as the ventriloquism of a feminine voice. More specifically, it is the voice of Queen Zempoalla in Henry Purcell’s 1695 semi-opera *The Indian Queen*, whose aria “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly” he has incorporated into his performance.⁹⁴ Torn between her lust for power and her unrequited love, Zempoalla sings: “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly in vain, since I am

⁹³ The noise of a punctured tire and the mediation of a hearing aid also introduces a machination of the singing voice, which I shall discuss shortly.

⁹⁴ A semi-opera is a play with interspersed music featuring both actors and singers.

myself my own fever and pain.” 2-Ply appropriates her words for the twofer condition and mixes them with his own lyrics.⁹⁵ That he sings in the voice of a queen, specifically, points towards the opera queens of gay culture and reinforces the idea of falsetto as a form of vocal drag.

High voices were highly valued in the early modern era when Purcell wrote the music to *The Indian Queen*.⁹⁶ The most celebrated voices belonged to castrati, who retained the high notes otherwise lost during male puberty combined with the richer resonance of a grown body and the power of unusually large lungs. Unlike today, high notes were considered heroic rather than feminine, and opera heroes and heroines sang in a similar register. Other voice types were used mainly in minor or comic roles, such as tenors playing old women and basses playing gods. In Italy, most opera roles were sung by castrati, with female singers competing or filling in (Reynolds 135-8). This was not the case in England, where castrati were not used before Handel’s time. High treble voices of non-castrated men – countertenors and boy sopranos – were used in church music but considered too weak for opera. Thus, the role of Zempoalla in Purcell’s *The Indian Queen* was originally sung by a female soprano, as it is in contemporary recordings. There is however a tradition for countertenors from Alfred Deller to Andreas Scholl to perform “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly” transposed down to a lower key. Jackson does not indicate which key 2-Ply sings in, only that he sings in falsetto, so the reader is free to phantom-hear him sing the original soprano version. Either way, his falsetto echoes not just a female voice but the legendary voices of the castrati.

High male voices such as those of the castrati have been highly valued partly for their capacity to transcend sex and incorporate a feminine register.⁹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari describe them in terms of a “becoming-woman” and “becoming-child” of the voice which “deterritorializes it by decoding it as masculine or feminine, adult or child” (Bogue, *Deleuze on Music* 36). This is not to be understood as an imitation or appropriation of women’s voices, but as a musical becoming directed away from sexed identities and human subjectivity altogether. Voices of great singers from the castrato to the soprano diva have often been described as sexless, angelic or inhuman, and compared to birds or musical instruments (Miller Frank 4-7).

In “Lessons from a Starfish,” Eva Hayward associates the (relatively) high voice of Antony Hegarty (of Antony and the Johnsons) singing the lyrics to “Cripple and the Starfish” (“I’ll grow back like a starfish”) with castration

⁹⁵ As far as I can tell, the additional lyrics are Jackson’s own and not from an existing song.

⁹⁶ One might argue that high voices are still highly valued, and indeed sopranos in later opera sing considerably higher. However, the modern soprano diva competes with the tenor, a relatively high but by no means the highest possible, male voice. Tellingly, it is taboo for tenors to sing falsetto; they are supposed to heroically reach their high notes using the masculine chest voice.

⁹⁷ Similarly, even though female singers are often famous for their high notes, those with castrato-like wide range and strong lower register tend to be especially admired, see Wood; Castle 200-38.

figured not as lack but as opportunity for growth and change. She is referring to transsexual surgery, not the castration of singers, but the connection is close at hand. While in the Freudian model castration can only be considered a traumatic loss, so traumatic that even women are supposed to suffer from being in a sense born castrated, for mtf transsexuals and castrati singers it may instead be considered part of a transformative process facilitating the development of new physiological traits, such as a wonderful voice.⁹⁸ Hayward goes on to argue that Antony's singing performs the rippling motion of the starfish and of the sea at large. Although she does not refer to Deleuze, she outlines what in his terminology might be called a musical becoming traversing becoming-woman and becoming-animal.

On a more sinister note, Carter connects vocal becoming-woman and becoming-animal in "The Company of Wolves," her rewriting of *Little Red Riding Hood*. In her version of the story, the wolf is a werewolf who imitates Little Red Riding Hood in a "high soprano" and her grandmother in an "antique falsetto" (Carter 115-6). Of course, the vocal imitation or ventriloquism is part of the wolf's trickery in the original fairy tale, but Carter's emphasises it with her precise descriptions of his shifts in timbre. Furthermore, the werewolf's vocal skills is specifically connected to his becoming-wolf through a number of musical descriptions of the wolves' howls, such as "an aria of fear," "wolfsong" and "the canticles of the wolves" (Carter 110-2). Thus, the vocal becoming-woman used by the werewolf to deceive his victims is part of a larger musical seduction which leads to Little Red Riding Hood's becoming-animal.

Since music is often posited as the feminine other to masculine reason, singing as such can be described as a becoming-woman of the voice, a deterritorialisation away from linguistic signification on par with nonsense. In the early modern tradition, music was described as feminine affective excess ravishing the soul (Brett 11-3; Dunn 55-9) and similar formulations persist in later writings on the seductive power of song especially. Paraphrasing Barthes, Miller Frank writes that "the 'magnetic fluid' that is the idealized voice escapes gender identification by participating in qualities of both": "at once penetrating, fluid, and diffuse; it abolishes limits, passes through the skin; it is linked to an internal sensualism, it provokes orgasm" (105). In sum, 2-Ply's vocal becoming-woman is not simply drag but a queering of the voice wrapped up in further becomings and in the feminine affective force of music itself.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to singing as a "machining" of the voice which deterritorialises it away from language (*Thousand* 334-41). This is perhaps

⁹⁸ This is not to defend the castration of boys, who were often sold to the church by poor parents, but since the procedure is no longer performed there is little need to condemn it. Some of the contemporary horror surrounding castrati appears sensationalist and even hypocritical, considering boys are still routinely circumcised. For a similar argument, see Abbate 233-4, note 17.

especially true of the classically trained voice, which attains the status of a musical instrument. The sexless impersonality and virtuosic skill of the castrato's voice was underscored in compositions where voices and instruments imitated one another or the sound of birds (Reynolds 137). Later composers treated the voice of the soprano prima donna in similar ways, most extremely in the modernist works for electronically manipulated voices by Luciano Berio (Murphy 168).⁹⁹ As for 2-Ply, his voice is not only double but doubly machined: both operatic and technologically amplified. Instead of a bird or an instrument, he responds to a passing train (the performance takes place in a club in an abandoned underground station): "the voices converged, riding the rattle of the train up to perilous heights" (Half 208). Machined by the train, both voices reach falsetto heights in unison and the different lyrics become mashed up. Treating the train as a fellow performer, 2-Ply matches the finale of his song to the climactic noise it makes: "It peaked with a shout – *"Since I am myself my own fever!"* – and then skated down the train's quick diminuendo with a now almost whispered, *"Since I am myself my own fever and pain"* (Half 208). Even though the inclusion of the train into the performance is planned, it introduces an element of chance which needs to be improvised around. This gives 2-Ply opportunity to show off his virtuosic musicianship but ultimately it is out of his control.

In Jackson's work, there is no opposition between genuine, sensual voice and artificial, non-sensual machine noise. Nora has a vision of singing, two-headed chickens "clear[ing] their throats with a shriek like a needle skidding on a record" and "sound[ing] like field recordings come alive, all seethe and crackle" (Half 327). The fact that the chickens are ventriloquised by old recordings draws attention to their fictionality but does not in any way detract from the sensual intensity of phantom sound. If anything, static and deterioration adds to the grain of their voices. There is a tendency within traditional musicology to dismiss sound reproduction as "objectification" compared to the ideal of improvisatory and collaborative live music, but recorded sound provides the raw material for a different kind of music-making in contemporary electronic music (Hemmett 79-91). The culture of sampling and digital manipulation treats recordings not as pale copies of live events or as finite objects but as so much noise available for further processing. Jamaican popular music especially has been influential in working with audiotapes and synthesisers to create thickly textured

⁹⁹ The singing automata in Romantic literature, prefiguring the female automata of modernism, underscore the "machinic" quality of the virtuosic singing voice: they imitate live women so well that only their excessive perfection makes them suspicious and potentially monstrous, see Miller Frank 194-5. In "Musée Mécanique" Jackson creates a singing machine who is male but feminine and whose voice transcends sex and species: Herman Godfrey is "a mezzosoprano" who speaks in "a false baritone" and also "trill[s] like a cricket." Unlike female automata like Hoffmann's Olympia and Villiers' Hadaly, he not infallible but uses "too much vibrato on the high notes, to cover up a slight uncertainty of pitch." This underscores the grain of the machine discussed in the previous section: the fact that machines too have bodies with unique resonances and defects.

soundscapes since the 1970s (see Gibson). 2-Ply's performance draws upon this tradition by its layering of samples like "a plaintive horn" and "some very biological sounds burbling and whistling" into complex rhythms (Half 207). Timothy S. Murphy describes how in experimental electronic music recorded voices are treated as concrete sound, often distorted beyond recognition (167) and 2-Ply uses a sample so faint that Nora cannot tell whether it is "pages rustling" or "tiny voices" (Half 207). This ambiguous phantom sound performs a double duty as musical and literary sampling: the rustling of pages is the actual sound of literary voices, the whisper of intertexts.

Jackson samples not only literary history but musical history as well, letting music throw its voice and sing through the text. The actual aria by Purcell adds an extratextual dimension to 2-Ply's performance for readers already familiar with it or curious enough to seek it out. Jackson does not simply quote the text for its content but indicates how the word "fly" is stretched out "over a whole paragraph of notes" thus: "*To fly-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y in vain*" (Half 207-8).¹⁰⁰ For those who have heard the song, the exact rendering functions like a score for a trained musician, triggering a virtual hearing of the music. The rising and falling pattern of quick notes in the musical ornamentation indicates a rather butterfly-like flight, but in Jackson's version 2-Ply sings it in time to the train, which makes the flight much more forceful and machinic. The result is a virtual music only existing in literary form, yet drawing upon actual musical elements as well as upon the actual sonorities of words.

Reading as Singing Along

A Shelley Jackson at the peak of her powers is an unforgettable sight. Her baying carries for miles, and even faraway creatures grow uneasy at their meals of cress and frogspawn and slink into the underbrush. She has no predator but man.

But what is this? A quiet chirping begins stitching up the ruptured afternoon. Who is the daring tunesmith? Look down, below the awesome paw, the claws stained with unnameable substances, below fallen twig and leaf, to a small chitinous individual, rubbing her musical legs together with a secretive smile. This too is Shelley Jackson.

Lo! A quick flash of wings overhead, an uncouth cry. Shelley Jackson! (Ineradicable [Who IS isn't])

Through the figuration of ventriloquism, this chapter has dealt with various ways of making texts resonant. The first is to concretise the voice in "literary voice," for example through explicit references to ventriloquism or speaking in tongues. The second is to highlight the actual sonority of (oral) language

¹⁰⁰ The extra letters match the number of notes closely: in fact there is one "y" too many compared to the score, but it is a fast passage and difficult to hear. Some singers might in fact add an extra note on "fly" in place of the first of the two notes on "in."

through nonsense, wordplay, mispronunciations and speech defects such as stuttering. The third is to create literary phantom sounds of non-signifying body noises, so that the body of text bursts out in a hysterical attack of noisemaking echoing that of the bodies in the text. The fourth is to make the text musical, which has often been discussed in terms of rhyme and rhythm, especially in relation to poetry, but which in Jackson's case is done as a literary form of musical sampling.

Writers have always tried to use language sonorously and musically, but their methods for doing so have shifted throughout literary history. Modernist sound poetry reached the extreme of voiding verbalisation entirely of linguistic signification. This emphasised the sonorous materiality of language and showed how it could be used to perform sound gestures. Though inspired by modernist movements such as Dadaism, Jackson does not go as far in abolishing referential language. Rather, she works with referentiality as one of her tools to create literary phantom sounds. This is by no means unique to Jackson; rather, what is original about her body writing is how often these phantom sounds are anatomical noises, though often emanating from inhuman and inorganic bodies.

In *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari write about language as a deterritorialisation of the mouth from eating: "Ceasing to be the organ of one of the senses, it becomes an instrument of Sense." Writers must in turn deterritorialise language from its communicative function, in order to achieve the intensity of percepts and affects. Literature shares with music a deterritorialisation of sound from its formalisation in the "language of sense" and "organized music" respectively. This does not mean complete nonsense and formlessness, but rather a working with *and* against conventions such as referentiality and grammar to attain "an asignifying *intensive utilization* of language." Deleuze and Guattari's examples of asignifying sounds which deterritorialise language from sense in Kafka's work occur mostly on what is conventionally thought of as the level of content, which means that unlike nonsense, the text still makes enough sense to have descriptive content. "Of sense there remains only enough to direct the lines of escape" they write, indicating that this might be a more efficient literary strategy than to write pure nonsense (*Kafka* 19-22).

In Kafka's work, references to animal noises direct a line of flight towards the becoming-animal of the text. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari insist, distinctions between form and content are undone so that "the words themselves are not 'like' the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects, or mice" (*Kafka* 22). This means that a text cannot easily be "about" asignifying sounds and still retain its sense (that is, its formal distance from these noises, its self-assurance that the linguistic noise it simultaneously makes is fully silenced by signification). Throughout this chapter, I have made little distinction

between phantom sounds occurring on the “surface” of the text (that is, actual sounds of words virtually heard in silent reading) and those occurring “in” it (that is, references to sound and hearing). This is because I believe with Deleuze and Guattari that the distinction is a false one, since there is always more to literature than its letters. Like Kafka, Jackson carries out her literary experimentation through an ostensibly absurd or surrealist content. As in Kafka, there is also a connection between asignifying sound and becoming-animal in her work, although this has not been my main concern in this chapter. I have touched upon Jackson’s association of music with mating calls, which is only part of a larger pattern. In the rewritten fairytale “The Swan Brothers,” an animal cry is the first step of the protagonist’s animal transformation: “She presses her lips together to keep herself from crying out and her whole face pouts and tightens. And then she cries out after all and, amazed by the sound she makes, spreads her wings and hurls herself through the window into the rushing sky” (Swan 87). The face the protagonist makes in her attempt to resist the cry becomes the instrument of the cry, as her pout is prolonged into a beak. Her intention is to “save” her brothers from their transformed condition, not to become-swan herself. Nevertheless, her investment in her swan brothers has opened the way for the becoming, making the call from the animal collective too strong to resist.

As indicated by this story of siblings turned into swans, animals tend to come in flocks. In “Angel,” the collective cry of cats in heat instigates a becoming-animal not of the protagonist directly but of the whole house: “The cats of his landlady sometimes keened all together, a throaty wail that penetrated his floorboards and rose up in the pipes so that it was sometimes as though he lived inside a keening cat, a cat in heat” (Angel 22). Like the smell of cats discussed in the chapter “Smelling Sense,” the sound of them is airborne and contagious.¹⁰¹ The collective process of becoming-animal helps to bring out a crucial aspect of literary ventriloquism: its impersonality. If ventriloquism in general suggests a stronger (or more politically privileged) individual speaking for a weaker one, obliterating her or his own voice, the forms of ventriloquism discussed in this chapter undo such notions of voice as marker of personal authenticity. Spiritual or demonic possession tends to involve a host of spirits or demons, and hysteria a host of unconscious impulses which cannot be said to come from “outside.” Rather than a silencing of the proper voice of the subject, hysteria and possession constitute collective enunciations from which individual voices emerge.

Animal collectives embody this principle, such as the humming bee swarm which Nora encounters in *Half Life*: “The ball of bees was about the size of a head, and I had the sensation that it knew I was there. Well, of course it did

¹⁰¹ Sounds are comparable to smells in that they also travel through the air from their sources and provide a vague and fleeting spatial orientation, see Feld 183-5.

know I was there, collectively. But it seemed about to speak” (Half 418). While these bees remain perpetually “about to” speak and never do, Jackson applies the same figure to the genius girls in “Musée Mécanique”: “When they spoke, there was a generalized humming, like the sound of a swarm – of course, that is what they were – from which (from time to time) an entire utterance would emerge, as if borne up by the density of a neutral element” (Musée). This captures the function of ventriloquism I wish to highlight better than the figure of the master ventriloquist with his dummy. The ventriloquist in Jackson’s work is a swarm or an element, such as the patchwork girl’s recycled body parts or language at large. This might be least apparent in *Half Life*, where Nora struggles to distinguish her voice from Blanche’s, but even here it is brought out by the doubling of doubling to kaleidoscopic effect. The stuffed chickens and kittens with various numbers of heads and legs figure the collective voice of ventriloquism in this novel.

Introducing animal cries, body noises, music and wordplay into the text emphasises sonority above sense and helps to create its distinct “sound” (what might also be called literary voice) from which characters and utterances then emerge as secondary effects. The conventional order where the subject precedes the statement is thus undone: there is no statement to communicate, only the impersonal activity of noisemaking of which the author needs to make her/himself a medium. At least, the noise needs to come before the message if the result is to fulfil the criteria of creative writing. This leads me to a related point I want to make about the “sound gestures” (see Tsur viii-ix) Jackson makes. Apart from doing things with *words*, as linguistic performativity is usually understood, there is a doing things with *sounds*, such as Gertrude Stein drawing upon the tactile, vibratory aspect of hearing to perform a “linguistic caress” (Scherr 203). Referencing the folk belief that magical incantations depend more upon pronunciation than understanding, Jackson writes in her mock-treatise on dildos: “Be careful when you say the words *mildew*, *Bilbao*, *bibelot*, *billet-doux*, or even *peccadillo*, that you do not accidentally summon a dildo, for truly, you do not know what will answer your call” (Melancholy 87). The gist is that language use has purely sonorous effects in excess of the intended message. In onomatopoeia, saying and doing are conflated: “hush” indicates quiet through a hushing sound. Going a step further, the imperative “ssh” no longer signifies but simply effects a hushing. In their *Interstitial Library* project, Jackson and Christine Hill invent an additional step: “hh,” a hushing spoken half on breathing out and half on breathing in, which “when pronounced correctly, does not just name the space between life and death, and by extension all things, but creates it in the throat of the speaker, so that when in need of a quick escape, one can actually slip through the tiny aperture thus created” (Interstitial [glossary]). This indicates the interstitial spaces in language where the system of signification does not add up and

where a line of flight might take off. The sonority of language provides one such space for deterritorialisation.

I have already discussed reading as ventriloquism, in a mutual interplay with writing as ventriloquism where it is often unclear who is the ventriloquist and who the dummy. As the model for reading introduced to wrap up this chapter, I would like to modify that to reading as *singing along*. Ventriloquism might suggest a one-way exercise of power by which the reader is unconsciously made to mouth the author's message. Singing along, on the other hand, indicates a conscious practice of simultaneous listening and voicing. Unlike ventriloquism it is also a collective activity with some room for improvisation and embellishments, although one is undeniably singing someone else's tune. Finally, it emphasises the sensual sonority of literature and the pleasure of giving voice to it. Apart from any other sound gestures literature might make, its most basic gesture is an invitation to sing along.

Coda: A Phantom Tail

It did look like an alligator, but only the way the wind looks like the wind – you see it from how the trees react. It was like a sound you can't place: near or far? (Word 160)

I have chosen to call my conclusion a phantom tail because tails and phantom limbs both figure in Jackson's work, and because it suggests more clearly than the phantom smells, tastes, touches, sights and sounds previously discussed a rewriting of the body into a BwO incorporating virtual limbs. Jackson's minor writing for queers to come not only creates new sensations but recreates the sensory apparatus to perceive them with. It does not provide a blueprint for a utopian queer body yet to be realised, but queers the body in a very real way by adding phantom prostheses to it. I think the interplay of actual and virtual is succinctly captured by the concluding statement of "Stitch Bitch": "A beaker of imaginal secretions makes us all desire's monsters, which is what we ought to be." In the context of Jackson's oeuvre, the phrase "desire's monsters" suggests a monstrous body, an assemblage of mismatched pieces held together by desiring connections, while "imaginal secretions" evokes the power of fiction to release actual bodily secretions. In *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson expands on the same idea:

There is a kind of thinking without thinkers. 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. (Patchwork [body of text/it thinks])

Writing about *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles makes the more modest claim that electronic hypertexts necessarily create cyborg readers "spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines" ("Flickering" par. 13). I prefer Jackson's hybrid to Hayles' cyborg because Jackson's figure does not overstate the importance of the electronic medium. New technologies create new ways of sensing, but the technology of literature is not limited to the material specificities of its medium. As Jackson suggests, language too is an intelligent machine. All literature regardless of medium uses language to create virtual realities which then form hybridic connections with the actual.

The referential aspect of language adds conceptual complexity to phantom sensations, while at the same time the nonreferential aspect of sensation adds performative force to language. Like other forms of art, literature makes perceptible what is otherwise imperceptible. Specifically, language allows for literary phantom sensations to be packed with abstract notions and other things that are impossible or impractical to sense directly. From the other direction, phantom sensations work to pry language away from

communication, representation, signification and systematisation. They function as performative gestures employing language to escape linguistic signification. In the words of that tired old writing advice, they show instead of tell. Importantly, however, the showing is not just a fancy means of telling more effectively, which can at any moment be translated back to telling by literary scholars and critics. As with all other artist's materials, there is a sensual excess to language and this is what makes literature compelling.

The "showing, not telling" of fiction can be summed up in the idea of literary gestures, such as when G. V. Desani (or his fictional counterpart) identifies his whole novel *All About H. Hatterr* as "a *gesture*" on par with laying a tree across a railway (12). Gestures are a recurring concern throughout Jackson's oeuvre. In an anecdote from her book tour with Kelly Link, she expresses a wish to complement her writing with actual gestures: "David's comment on my reading of *Fat* is a little shudder. I say, if I could blurb my stories with gestures, I would use that one" (Tour [Day 14]). Although gestures are to a large extent conventionalised and culturally specific, they do not signify in any straightforward way. It might seem obvious that the abovementioned shudder indicates disgust, but the precise affect released by the gesture goes beyond such generalising designations. The absurdity of ascribing absolute meaning to gestures is demonstrated by the "genuflection dial" invented by the protagonist of "Short-Term Memorial Park," which measures and standardises the exact amount of reverence demonstrated by each bow. As Barker puts it, "gestures are never vague, although they may be ambiguous or ambivalent. They take specific forms and have specific meanings depending on their context. Their meaning depends upon situation and style, that is, upon the 'situation' in space and personal style of the body that makes them" (78). Upon rearranging his stuffed rats into different tableaux, the protagonist of "Angel" reflects upon the power of gestures to be intensely expressive even though their meaning is unfixed and open to interpretation:

The rats were very expressive, but expressive of what? was the question. Whatever he had the rats doing, they seemed to be in the right, most eloquent postures – it was instructive how warlike a preening or foraging pose could seem in a new context. Or how grief-stricken, how merry, how amorous. (Angel 24)

In their expressiveness, gestures provoke yet elude interpretation, giving the protagonist of "Angel" the impression that the rats are "making demands in a sign language he did not know" (Angel 24). Relatedly, "The President's Mouth" tells the story of how the American president decides to make a powerful statement by stretching and scarring his lips and tongue until he can no longer speak. This proves to be a more efficient demonstration of power than any speech: "On telephone conferences, he listened politely, then laid his tongue firmly on the mouthpiece. Who could argue with that?"

(President) In the end, however, the president fails to control how his mouth is perceived and interpreted. Gestures may have more or less firmly established connotations, but no denotations to check the proliferation of these.

Rotman, like Barker, emphasises the embodied and situational aspect of gestures and insists that they should not be reduced to linguistic signs (434). I agree, with the important reservation that language too is embodied and situational and not reducible to signification. Barthes describes the language of lovers as a sort of athletic straining to express the unsayable, which he terms “figures” and I would term gestures (*Lover's* 3-8). In my opinion, this is not only true of amorous language but of all forms of intensive, that is creative, language use. As “The President’s Mouth” indicates, gestures can be formalised and monumental, like official language, but they perpetually threaten to slip out of their formalisation. In “Hagfish, Worm, Kakapo,” the bodies of two aged court ladies remembers gestures formalised in “patterns whose purpose is forgotten” but which nevertheless still carry the power and dignity of institutionalisation. As always, Jackson is most interested in the moment where the system of signification breaks down: “But when they reach each other, what? Play of fans? Euchre? A long hairpin pushed through the cheek to transfix the tongue like some stunned moth? They can’t recall. They beg their fans, their garments, the very ground to remember for them” (Hagfish). As traditions become obsolete, the expressive force of gestures ceases to be contained and normalised by convention, and suddenly any gesture appear as plausible or absurd as any other. The president’s decision to gesturally embody the hyperbole of political jargon has the same estranging effect, as does Jackson’s invention of religious rituals in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church.”

Because gestures are related to verbal language, yet more expressive and less formalised, they serve as a model for performative language use. Barker argues that films make gestures, not to be confused with the gestures of actors. The audience responds bodily to these filmic gestures in various ways which are not reducible to “identification” with a character or with the camera’s point of view (Barker 78-80). Similarly, literary works might make stylistic gestures such as revealing, withholding, sprawling, lingering, repeating, hurrying, caressing, attacking or avoiding. A central gesture in Jackson’s work is that of demonstration, exemplified by the Word Church rituals: “Lecture delivered by the silent display of objects held up in sequence by the Headmistress. Congregation may hold up objects of their own to show approval, as for example small pieces of wood, dollar bills, dentures, etc” (Consuetudinary 145). The gesture of display is related to the archival form of especially Jackson’s hypertexts. In this important instance of what I term object writing, a text is spatially structured as a museal display of objects, rather than as a linearly progressing narrative. Even in works with a more

traditional narrative structure, such as *Half Life*, Jackson often inserts ekphrastic tableaux:

Exhibit 27. A trio of malformed chicks. Beaked knots of feather and bone, bent ornaments for a Bedlam Easter hat. Only one had found its footing, standing square on its four legs, four wings sticking straight out like a biplane's. It possessed three eyes, like a symbol from mathematical logic: ∗ Therefore. Something had been demonstrated, but what? (Half 230)

If anything, this exhibit symbolises the lack of symbolism in Jackson's work. These virtual, multisensory images exist for their own sake, for the perceptual and affective intensities they release. They point toward something indescribable but do not symbolise it in representational fashion, as in analogy or allegory.

I would like to highlight pointing as a specific gesture of display, such as all the pointing fingers in mannerist art and the manicules indicating important points in medieval manuscripts. Mary Ann Caws describes how the surrealists picked up the pointing finger from baroque mannerism and made it their quintessential gesture. The pointing gesture "indicates either enthusiasm or an estimation of importance" but "refuses possession" and "is as *unrepresentational* as possible: it simply is and says so" (Caws 262, 280). I would argue that such surrealist pointing is central to Jackson's work as well, though it rarely appears in visual form. Instead, Jackson uses textual versions of it: "grammatical deictics such as 'this' or 'that,' exclamations such as 'Look!' or designating and limiting expression such as 'only' and 'nothing but' that demand close attention and posit the object's relevance" (Caws 262-3).

Additionally, pointing serves a special purpose in surrealist art and Jackson's oeuvre alike. "What you point at you can play with," Caws states in relation to one of Joseph Cornell's boxes arranged like a game (231). Pointing invites the audience not just to look but to pick and choose objects to do something with. The archival structure invites participation, perhaps especially when realised in hypertext form: links are pointing gesture saying "click here." However, instead of waxing lyrical about the ludic element in electronic literature, I want to draw attention to the invitation performed by pointing. Actual interactivity easily grows routine so that clicking links fade from consciousness the way turning pages do, and the excitement of play gives way to feelings of boredom and restlessness. A more effective strategy to retain the excitement is to linger on and intensify that *invitation* to play, even when no actual manipulation of the work is possible. Object art and object writing do this, by creating actual or virtual objects with enough sensual, especially tactile, appeal to invite play. As I showed in the chapter "Touching Texts," *The Doll Games* enhances the ludic feel of the hypertext form through an emphasis on the tactile qualities of dolls and other doll

game props, creating what I term conceptual intimacy. This sets up reading, but also writing, as play: “It is a good model for writing, playing doll games. The doll as word never loses its materiality; much of doll games consist of perfecting (with an editorial exactingness) the right arrangement of symbolic elements” (Doll [language]). In Jackson’s view, the writing process consists of experimentally rearranging linguistic elements like toys in a game or objects in a museum display. Ideally, the sensual qualities of language are given such importance that words attain the status of things. The rituals in “Consuetudinary of the Word Church” are likewise designed to materialise language, and it is suggested that “all material objects may be words in a language of the deader dead” (150).

Jackson does not simply translate immaterial ideas into material configurations in order to clarify them; she rather subjects immaterial entities to hands-on experimentation alongside material entities, as the virtual space of literature enables her to do. Ideas are subjected not to the logic of rational argumentation but to the logic of concrete connections, which privileges pragmatic experimentation over generalising categorisations, and which works metonymically (through contiguity) instead of metaphorically (through resemblance). To consider literature as a set of gestures is a means of resisting the urge to interpret: gestures are untranslatable; they cannot be paraphrased or summarised because there is no more efficient, exact or eloquent way to express what they express.

The mannerist pointing gesture is not the only loan from the baroque in Jackson’s work. There is also a more general influence from baroque vision which can be put in the context of its modernist revival (see Jacobs 7). Baroque vision is fascinated by the obscure and the opaque and as a consequence more haptic than perspectival. Through “a bewildering surplus of images” it “strives for the representation of the unrepresentable” (Jay, “Rise” 318). The narrator of “Heart,” the emblematic story opening *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, embodies baroque vision in her or his quest to observe invisible entities known as “black hearts”:

Observing, of course, is the wrong word for the patient cultivation of blind spots, for trying to understand, by the ways in which, yes, I do not understand, what the heart is. In this investigation, invisibility is evidence, blindness the closest I may come to insight, the particular shape and tenor of ignorance, a clue and a scripture. When I can no longer see anything, I will know I am face to faceless with the heart. What, I sit at my telescope, straining my neck, my fingers numb claws, in hopes of catching sight of nothing at all? Yes. I will know it when I don’t see it. (Melancholy 4)

In some ways, this description is not far from actual scientific practices of deducing invisible phenomena from observable traces, speculated correlations and mathematical calculations. The scientific rhetoric of visualising the invisible is subtly undermined by the references to blindness,

as well as by the strained neck and numb fingers calling attention to the subjective, embodied gaze of the observer. The hearts resist visualisation and can only be “unseen,” so to speak:

We can't see them, but we know they're there, fattening.

They give off a kind of light, but it is a backwards light that races inward away from the onlooker to hide itself from view, so this light, whose color we would so much like to know (maybe it's a color we haven't seen before, for which we must sprout new eyes), looks more like darkness than any ordinary darkness, and seems to suck the sight from our eyes, and make itself visible in the form of a blind spot. (Melancholy 3)

Visual technologies extending and transforming human vision are not enough to see the hearts: one would have to sprout new eyes. Due to its virtuality, literary phantom sight is the closest one comes to such prosthetic new eyes. Only in Jackson's story “Heart” can the black hearts be glimpsed at all. If, as Tiffany suggests, matter is at its core (the heart of the matter) invisible and reality made up by scientific images of for example electrons, then poetic images of the invisible may be on par with science in shaping reality (4-6). “Heart” adds to reality a literary phantom sight of the invisible, making the imperceptible perceptible. Invisibility is figured as a darkness, black hole, anti-light or blind spot, to which Jackson lends heft and vivacity by describing it as a huge, heavy and even “fattening” “melancholy behemoth” (Melancholy 3). In the process of “catching sight of” (which can never succeed) there are specific phantom sights, which is how percepts are made perceptible.

The central placement of this story before the four sections named after the four humours invites interpretation of the hearts as “the heart of the matter”: both the physical heart animating the body and a more abstract animating principle which scientific imaging techniques can never get at. As the dark side of the same coin, the heartbeat also signals mortality and the melancholy in “the melancholy of anatomy.” Although the dead are in a sense more visible than the living (because static, as suggested by the specimens preserved in formaldehyde, stuffed animals and mounted skeletons of the natural history museum), death as such, like life as such, remains invisible. There is a literary tradition of rendering death as darkness and having the absence of light stand in metonymically for the absence of life (Mendelson 195-8). “Heart” fits into this tradition, especially the claim that the black heart can only be known when one “can no longer see anything,” that is, when death has extinguished vision. However, to simply state that the black heart symbolises death would undo its power to visualise the invisible and unknowable. The black heart does not symbolise; it images. While symbols, metaphors, analogues and allegories function representationally, and conform to the spatial logic of perspectivalism, there

are images and figurations which do not. Massumi argues that the virtual can be figured by a series of images approximating its flux (133-6), which is close to the above description of baroque vision. Jackson works in this way when she presents phantom images which are somehow obscure or oscillating, for example through her common technique of juxtaposing divergent views and accounts written in different styles.

It is important not to reduce the making perceptible of the imperceptible to visualising the invisible, as “Heart” might tempt one to do. Literary phantom smells, tastes, touches, sights and sounds are not strictly speaking sense impressions, but they address themselves to specific senses in ways which should not be reduced to metaphor. As suggested by the sense-specific models for reading I have outlined at the end of every chapter, phantom sensations need to be particular in order to generate enough intensity. However, like actual perceptions, virtual perception often involves more than one sense. It is my hope that my decision to structure my dissertation around the Aristotelian five has not contributed unnecessarily to the traditional hierarchy of the senses, or to a normative and ableist conception of the human body.

If you have phantom smelt, tasted, touched, seen and heard while reading this dissertation, I think I have succeeded in demonstrating my point. As Hélène Cixous writes in her essay “Tancredi Continues”: “I am afraid, I won’t hide it, because I have a secret to tell which is so beautiful it dazzles me, and if I am not able to dazzle you, I will have committed a crime against everything that I venerate, life, beauty, desire” (*Coming* 88-9). With some reservations about the word “secret,” which indicates psychological depths to be (psycho)analysed and religious mysteries to be revealed, I agree. This is not an easy task to combine with the formal requirements of academia or its ideals of scientific detachment to the so-called object of study. Nevertheless, the best academic writing does dazzle, I think, as well as fiction. It all depends on finding a style adequate to the task, a style which cannot be a readymade disciplinary style “applied” to any subject matter.

Deleuze does not share the common view that language determinates thought and in extension reality (to the extent that the only reality accessible to the human mind is that reflected by thought – an idealist view). For Deleuze concepts are non-linguistic responses to problems posed by the world. As soon as they are turned into *linguistic* concepts with a fixed meaning they lose their usefulness as *philosophical* concepts; they become shorthand for thought. This means that concepts cannot be clearly defined, only closed in on using various words and figurations (Colebrook, *Gilles* 17-21; Olkowski 92). Deleuze and Guattari are trying to think new thoughts and say the unsayable, hence their sometimes excruciating jargon. I share their optimism about the possibility of writing what there are as yet no words for, and their conviction that this cannot be done simply by coining new

terms and explaining them. I believe that authors write whole books to catch a glimmer of it (though like all art, fiction catches a glimmer of percepts and affects rather than concepts). Or, to borrow a less visualist figure from Marks, to brush against it: “Sometimes it is the *inability* of writing to capture experience that is the most evocative. Over some years of attempting to achieve these translations, the best moments have been when my writing did not master the object but brushed it, *almost* touched it (*Touch* ix). Ultimately, I hope that with the aid of Jackson and other writers and artists I have closed in on something not easily summarised.

Sammanfattning

Denna avhandling är en monografi över den samtida amerikanska författaren och multimediateknikern Shelley Jackson. Jacksons verk består av hypertexterna *Patchwork Girl*, *My Body* och *The Doll Games* (samförfattad med hennes syster Pamela Jackson), romanen *Half Life*, novellsamlingen *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, bilderböcker för barn och en mängd fristående noveller samt projekt i gränslandet mellan olika konstarter. Till skillnad från tidigare forskning om Jackson, som nästan uteslutande behandlar hennes banbrytande, tidiga hypertext *Patchwork Girl*, tar jag ett samlat grepp om hennes produktion. Även om det inte har varit mitt syfte att täcka in allt så vill jag ge en omfattande bild av författarskapet, eller snarare konstnärskapet, som helhet. Jag sätter också in Jackson i en tradition av politiskt såväl som estetiskt radikal queerlitteratur där bland andra Monique Wittig, Djuna Barnes, Brigid Brophy, Leonora Carrington, Angela Carter och Neil Bartlett hör hemma.

Frågan som Jacksons verk har givit upphov till och som denna avhandling försöker besvara är hur texter kan skapa sinnesförnimmelser. Jag slogs från början av den sinnliga konkretismen i Jacksons stil, som får även hennes mest metatextuella experiment att kännas levande och verkliga. Ett sätt att beskriva det är som ett slags "kroppslitteratur" analog med "kroppskonst": det vill säga att skriva i stället för att skulptera, måla, fotografera eller iscensätta kroppen. Franska feminister som Hélène Cixous har ägnat sig åt att skriva kroppen inom vad som kallas "écriture féminine," och Jackson har hämtat inspiration härifrån. En annan inspirationskälla är den tidigmoderna anatomiska vetenskapen och höviska dikter tillägnade kvinnors kroppsdelar. Härifrån hämtar Jackson sina ofta groteska kroppar som öppnas och styckas levande eller rentav dissekeras sig själva inför läsarens ögon. Jag argumenterar även för att Jackson närmar litteraturen till skulpturen och installationen genom sina försök att skapa konkreta textobjekt. Ett sätt att uppnå detta är genom att strukturera texten spatialt snarare än temporalt och göra den till ett rum fullt av utställda ting i stället för en berättelse som följer en tidsaxel. Mest konkret blir detta i Jacksons multilinjära hypertexter.

För att besvara frågan om hur litteratur kan ge upphov till sinnesförnimmelser vänder jag mig till den franske filosofen Gilles Deleuze och hans samarbetspartner Félix Guattari. Deleuze har utvecklat det komplicerade konceptet "percept" för att fånga något i sig icke förnimbart som kan göras förnimbart genom konst. Enligt mitt resonemang görs perceptor förnimbara genom vad jag kallar "fantomförnimmelser." Att jag använder ordet fantom är inte för att föra tankarna till ekon eller skuggor av äkta sinnesförnimmelser, utan tvärtom för att indikera den intensivt upplevda verkligheten i fantomsmärtor: bara för att lemman inte finns där

betyder det inte att förnimmelsen är mindre verklig. Enligt samma princip argumenterar jag för att litterära sinnesförnimmelser är verkliga upplevelser, även om texten inte ger upphov till några faktiska sinnesintryck. Jag hävdar också att all konst (egentligen all perception) har ett virtuellt inslag vid sidan om det konkret materiella. Litteraturen står dock i en särställning genom att själva textartefakten (med få undantag) är så renons på konstnärligt intressanta intryck. Nästan allt av intresse sker i stället på det virtuella planet, bland fantomförnimmelser skapade av språket.

Avhandlingen är indelad i fem kapitel, ett för vart och ett av den västerländska traditionens fem sinnen. Jag vänder på hierarkin och börjar med det teoretiskt och kulturellt förbisedda luktsinnet. Lukter befinner sig i gränslandet och låter sig inte fångas, därför förknippas de med vad Deleuze kallar "blivanden". Jag följer ett luktspår genom kapitlet från dödblivande över kvinnoblivande och djurblivande till växtblivande, och avslutar med att argumentera för att läsaren kan dras in i litterära blivanden genom fantomlukter. Nästa kapitel behandlar smaksinnets funktion i vad jag kallar "avsmakens estetik". Jag hävdar att Jackson laborerar med kopplingen mellan svällande kvinnokroppar och kroppsöppningar och (av)smak, specifikt fantomsmaker av fett och socker, i en estetik som använder äckel som en intressant och nyanserad affekt bland andra. I det tredje kapitlet om känsel utvecklar jag systrarna Jacksons fenomenologiska observationer om att leka med dockor till en lekfull och taktill modell för läsande. Det fjärde kapitlet handlar om hur det dominanta synsinnets riktas tillbaka mot sig själv. Av alla fantomsyner i Jacksons verk hör de som skildrar ögats anatomi, optik och ljusfenomen till de intressantaste. Jag hävdar att detta konkretiserar synen och förhindrar den från att bli en abstrakt och metaforisk blick från ingenstans, och att läsaren uppmuntras använda denna konkreta, kroppsliga typ av seende till att se litterära fantomsyner. I det femte kapitlet, slutligen, analyserar jag fantomljuddet som en form av litterärt buktaleri där det är oklart om det är författaren, läsaren eller själva språket som talar. Även om olika sinnen fyller olika funktioner i Jacksons verk har alla litterära fantomförnimmelser det gemensamt att de överbrygger avståndet mellan textens kropp och läsarens. Denna performativa beröring gör litteraturen meningsfull.

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How do literary works employ language to evoke sense impressions? This is the question addressed in this dissertation, triggered by the oeuvre of contemporary American author and multimedia artist Shelley Jackson. Inspired by the recent wave of sensory scholarship in the humanities and guided by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theories on art and writing, this study develops a notion of *literary phantom sensations*. Drawing upon Deleuze's notion of the virtual as real but not actual, "phantom" is not meant to indicate a pale shadow of real sensations, but the intensely perceived realness of phantom limb phenomena. Furthermore, Jackson's particularly sensual writing style is described in terms of *body writing* and *object writing*, and put in the context of other politically experimental writers such as Djuna Barnes, Neil Bartlett, Brigid Brophy and Leonora Carrington, together forming a *minor writing for queers to come*. This dissertation makes a contribution to literary, cultural, feminist and queer studies.

