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Body Webs: Re/constructing Boundaries in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

Alexandra Glavanakova-Yaneva

"Let me begin with the contention that today, everyone is a cyborg."

(Bell 150)

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation.

(Haraway 150)

A truism, a fact of our everyday lives is that technology and nature have reached the stage where they constitute each other. Traditionally, we have conceptualised technology (science) as the binary opposite of nature, though this particular opposition in itself is an artificial construct, as François Dagognet has argued.[1] It seems quite obvious today that not only is nature becoming technologized, but that technology is nature, as Allucquère Rosanne Stone has revealed in one of the most significant essays written on the emerging cyberculture. With the development of digital technology, the process of the merging of bodies and machines has intensified and we are witnessing the increased "prostheticization" and "cyborgization" of the human body. In our postmodern hi-tech world the borderline between humanity/human nature and technology has become increasingly elusive and willingly or not we are remodeling our bodies and minds into cybernetic hybrids.

[1] As cited in Allucquère Rosanne Stone's article, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures."

Within the larger issue of the place of the body in cultural space, which has been the focus of many theoretical discussions in recent years, arises the question of embodiment in cyberspace. What happens to the bodies of users, programmers and fictional characters? As David Bell points out in his overview of the various views on bodies in cyberspace: "there has been an explosion of bodies across the humanities and social sciences" (138). The body has been read in a multitude of ways. It has been reduced to "meat," that cyberpunks readily leave behind when they get immersed in virtual reality; it has evolved into a cyborg, a posthuman, a robot. What follows is a discussion of various interpretations of the fate of the *human body* in cyberspace. The focus of this discussion is a digital novel—*Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson. The second area of exploration is the peculiar transformation of the *body of text* in cyberspace.

An American writer and artist, Shelley Jackson holds an AB in studio art from Stanford University and an MFA in creative writing from Brown University, where she has studied with Robert Coover. Her groundbreaking cyberfictions include the highly acclaimed *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and *'my body'- a Wunderkammer* (1997). She has given a major presentation of her work called *Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl* at MIT's Media in Transition project in 1998. An illustrator of children's books as well as a short story writer, she has recently published in print a collection of stories entitled significantly *The Melancholy of Anatomy* (2002).[2]

Postmodern American literature has turned into a tradition of the "game" of fiction writing, not only by including numerous intertextual references, but also, more distinctively, by revising whole classical texts. Shelley Jackson follows this tradition and among her more recent and familiar precursors are women rewriting men: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, which "revisits" Shakespeare's *King Lear*; Joyce Carol Oates' *The Turn of the Screw*, which indirectly comments on Henry James' work; Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote* and her *Great Expectations* "revising" in significant ways some passages from Charles Dickens' novel. Shelley Jackson's cyberfiction is inspired by a male text, L. Frank Baum's P*atchwork Girl of Oz*, and a female text, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

In *Patchwork Girl*, Jackson imagines that the female companion Victor Frankenstein started to create for his male monster but later destroyed, was secretly finished by Mary Shelley herself. The monster in Jackson's

[2] For more information on her writing, art and philosophy see her homepage: Shelley *Jackson. Ineradicable stain.* 18 June 2000 <http://www.ineradicablestain.com>.

"re-crafting" of the story becomes Mary Shelley's lover and then travels to America, where it goes through numerous adventures and acquires the name Patchwork Girl. The monster decides to go to America because: "There, where the shadows thrown by the radiant future, fall across the present and blot out the past, where everyone is going to be somebody, I felt a pleasant conviction that with money, friends, and luck, nobody had to be monstrous" ("story/seagoing/America").[3]

This is Jackson's scathing satire on the "immigrant's" conception of America. Towards the presumable end of the story in the early 1990s, the reader finds the female monster leading a nomadic existence, writing on her laptop in Death Valley. When spotted by tourists, she terrifies them, as they take her for a yeti.

This cyberfiction, acknowledged as one of the most successful achievements in the medium, consists of 323 lexias[4] varying in length from a single sentence to about 300 words. The lexias are joined by over 400 links, which create multiple reading pathways through the text.

The structure of *Patchwork Girl*, though rather complex, is not as baffling as that of other cyberfictions. This novel consists of five main parts: "story," "graveyard," "journal," "crazy quilt" and "body of text," each of which is divided into several sections and is intertwined through links with the others. Some of the sections have a plot-like structure, some are held together by virtue of association. In "graveyard" the reader can find the separate stories of the women, but also of the occasional man and a cow even, from whose body parts Mary Shelley assembles the monster. By attributing to most of these characters an individuality of their own, Jackson achieves a polyvocal effect in the narrative, while also providing us with a diverse picture of the life of women towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries.

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[3] *Patchwork Girl* is a digital work of fiction, written, distributed and read only on a computer. As such it does not contain the traditional form of pagination. The "pages" from which I quote are indicated hereby in brackets by their corresponding name and their pathway as found in a map of the narrative provided by Jackson.

[4] The term lexia George Landow appropriates from Roland Barthes to denote the screen that usually equals the "page" of a fictional work, written, distributed and read in a cybertext format.

The "journal" is the repository of Mary Shelley's thoughts and feelings. "Body of text" is a non-fictional section of the narrative, that focuses mainly on metafictional issues of writing and language, as well as on speculations about human bodies. The "crazy quilt" part is a mass of related fragments-—a patchwork produced by its many textual appropriations from Frank Baum's *Patchwork Girl of* Oz, internal references, citations and rewritings of relevant theoretical works, providing a commentary on the nature of the narrative in the digital medium. "Notes" are the bibliography.

The diversity of this cyberfiction is enhanced by the various ways offered to the reader for navigation through the text. There are four different maps that help structure the narrative and provide some orientation to the reader. The "control" key can also be used as a navigation tool, for pressing it makes the links in a given lexia visible to the reader. The program has another option—it allows the reader to add notes and to save his/her reading path.

The work's multiplicity noted in its structure is mirrored on the thematic level. Several themes are intertwined. True to the text that has inspired it, the narrative treats issues of female creativity and sexuality. These are interwoven with the issue of embodiment, whereby the artificially constructed, but essentially humanoid monster can be interpreted as a cyborg. The postmodern view on the text, characterized by intertextuality, nonlinearity, fragmentation, dispersal, and dissemination, is treated with irony in this patchwork of a wide range of texts. Finally, the two basic manifestations of the creative act: the creation of a human's life and artistic creation are expressed through the metaphors of the traditionally female arts such as sewing, weaving, quilting.[5] All these themes found in the narrative will be incorporated in the analysis that follows, the focus remaining on Jackson's representation of the body.

Shelley Jackson uses the body as a symbol for the postmodern condition of the subject and as a metaphor for creating narratives. As Jackson writes in *Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl*: "The body is a patchwork though the stitches might not show. It's run by a committee, a loose aggregate of

[5] As Katherine Hayles has demonstrated in her analysis of this cyberfiction ("Flickering Connectivities"), the process of writing itself is repeatedly associated with the feminine acts of sewing and quilting, as well as with the processes of severing and suturing, performed in any act of surgery, traditionally a "masculine" occupation

entities we can't really call human, but which look like lives of a sort… [They] are certainly not what we think of as objects, nor are they simply appendages, directly responsible to the brain" (n. p.).[6]

She explicitly states her view on the body in *Patchwork Girl* in the lexia "body of text/body": "The body could be said to be the writing of the soul." Her *Patchwork Girl* becomes an exploration of the "female" body. The monster is made "like a quilt," pieced together from multiple parts, and becomes a hybrid—a multilayered metaphor for body and text.

In much of the critical literature written on this cyberfiction the Patchwork Girl has been discussed as a modern cyborg.[7] The metaphor of the cyborg in the analysis of Jackson's cyberfiction has been applied on several levels. Firstly, since cyborgs are essentially borderline and hybrid creatures, they illustrate the instability and fluidity of human subjectivity in postmodern times. As Jenny Wolmark comments: "The cyborg's propensity to disrupt boundaries and explore different embodied subjectivities could, therefore, be regarded as its most valuable characteristics" (6). Secondly, because of its hybridity and mutability the cyborg has become a useful metaphor for describing the nature of narrative in cyberspace.

Donna Haraway wrote her famous *Cyborg Manifesto* in 1985 and since then it has deeply influenced a wide range of critical discussions of the interaction of human and machine in our technocratic age. Writing from the standpoint of a socialist and feminist, she defines the cyborg as a metaphor for boundary or border in the conceptualization of our central cultural and social roles, in our racial, gender and class definitions of self. The cyborg for her is a political metaphor, containing the potential for liberalization, as well as the threat for being overpowered in the state of "the informatics of domination":

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a

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6 The abbreviation "n. p." stands for "no page numbers," for quotations from digital texts.

7 The following examples could serve to illustrate this point. First of all, the comments on *Patchwork Girl* by students of English 111, 112 in the years 1996-1998 at Brown University. 20 Nov. 2002 <http://www.cyberartsweb.org/landow/cpace/ht/pg/pglinks.html> Mark Amerika, too, has given the following title to his talk with Shelley Jackson—"Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author as Cyborg-Femme Narrator." Amerika On-line # 7 *Telepolis* 15 Aug. 2003 <http://www.heise.de/tp/English/inhalt/kolu/3193/1.htm>

> creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience,' as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (149)

Haraway explores the metaphor of the cyborg, in order to reveal how the myth of the organic unity of the subject is debunked. She demonstrates how technological practices have been continuously disrupting the Western ontological dualisms: self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, creator/artefact, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. Her discussion includes a utopian vision of the world without gender. Hence, the cyborg for her is a post-gender creature:

> A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility. Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (my emphases 180)

After Haraway, the literature featuring cyborgs, on and about cyborgs has proliferated, as have the diverse manifestations of this constructed entity. Critical disputes have included such issues as who can be considered historically the first "original" cyborg. David Bell points out that likely

candidates have been not only Victor Frankenstein's monster, but "Christ crucified' as well (149). Jennifer Gonzales expands the definition of the cyborg in a way that can contribute to the current analysis. In her view "an *organic* cyborg can be defined as a monster of multiple species, whereas a *mechanical* cyborg can be considered a techno-human amalgamation" (540). Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is a curious case of an organic cyborg. An inclusive metaphor, according to Gonzales, is that of the cyborg consciousness, which stands for the hybridization of self in a culture dominated by digital technologies leading to substantial social, personal and other displacements (540).

Despite the fact that there are common features between Jackson's monster and that of *Frankenstein*, the organic cyborg in *Patchwork Girl* differs significantly from Victor Frankenstein's, its posited predecessor. In the current discussion of postmodern subjectivity, as represented by the body of the cyborg monster, a comparison to Shelley's *Frankenstein* may lead to interesting conclusions. Robert Anderson stresses the differences between the pre- and postmodern monsters. He finds that "In *Frankenstein*, the creature represents a blurring of the distinction between man and monster, between nature and science and of gender categories themselves" (n. p.). It is this blurring of boundaries—the gender and the sexuality—that is monstrous. In Shelley Jackson's interpretation the blurring of these boundaries is not interpreted as something horrible. As Robert Anderson asks: "is it possible that the modern Gothic monster pre-figures the post-modern science-fiction cyborg, the significant difference being that the monster is reviled and the cyborg is celebrated?" (n. p.)

Writing from a feminist perspective Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have opted for an interpretation of Victor Frankenstein as the "monstrous Eve," after discussing the more familiar ways of analyzing Victor as Adam or as Satan in the context of Mary Shelley's rewriting of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Victor Frankenstein not only appropriates the role of God, the creator, but also that of a woman's womb. In other words, it is Victor Frankenstein who transgresses the boundaries between the male and the female and it is this, according to Anderson, more than the monster himself, that horrifies Victor.

In Jackson's "rewriting" of the Frankenstein myth the relationship between the maker and the creation is completely changed. The story is feminized on several levels. The fact that it is a woman "giving birth" to the monstrous creature normalizes the act of the creation of the Patchwork Girl. Though the monster can be interpreted as a transsexual since it combines

body parts from both sexes, its most "conservative organ" is definitively female. Furthermore, the female creator gradually comes to accept its creation, its baby. Mary Shelley at first feels sympathy, compassion and then love for the monster that includes an erotic aspect, both lesbian and incestuous. In a moving scene, described in three successive lexias—"story/severance/Mary," "surgery" and "join" —this total acceptance of the creation by its creator is represented by the patching of a piece of skin from Mary's calf onto the monster's body.

Thus, the myth of Frankenstein is reinterpreted by Jackson as the possibility of building one's identity from imprecise elements and fragments of often unknown origin. As the monster explains: "I am a mixed metaphor. *Metaphor*, meaning something like 'bearing across,' is itself a fine metaphor for my condition. Every part of me is linked to other territories alien to me but equally mine" ("body of text/metaphor me").

Haraway describes the cyborg as "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (163). Multiple and fractious identities find various symbolic and metaphorical manifestations in *Patchwork Girl*. One such recurrent metaphor is that of the dotted line.

> The dotted line is the best line.
>
> It indicates a difference without cleaving apart for good what it distinguishes.
>
> It is a permeable membrane: some substance necessary to both can pass from one side to the other. […] A dotted line demonstrates even what is discontinuous and in pieces can blaze a trail. ("body of text/dotted line")

The metaphor of the dotted line resurfaces towards the presumable "end" of the story, though any ending of a cyberfiction is determined by the subjective feeling of closure of each individual reader. "I hop from stone to stone and an electronic river washes out my scent in the intervals. I am a discontinuous line, a dotted line" ("body of text/hop"). It appears visually in several of the graphics incorporated in the text—images of female bodies, either whole, crisscrossed with dotted lines or completely dismembered, torn apart by the same line.

Another revealing example of the instability and multiplicity of postmodern subjectivity is a critical point in the story: when the monster begins to disintegrate, her body parts literally start to fly in different directions. It is

through the help of Elsie, the woman who previously agreed to sell the monster her past, that the Patchwork Girl is saved. The monster makes a significant discovery:

> I was gathered together loosely in her attention in a way that was interesting to me, for I was all in pieces, yet not apart. I felt permitted. *I began to invent something new: a way to hang together without pretending I was whole.* Something between higgedly-piggedly and the eternal sphere. ("story/ falling apart/ I made myself over") (my emphasis)

The dispersal and multiplying of identity is not seen as monstrous by Jackson but as an acceptable and even normalizing experience. The final message carried by the image and metaphor of the hybrid subjectivity of the cyborg is that the only chance for individual coherence is not striving towards unity and balance, but accepting one's multiplication. As Katherine Hayles states: "the text not only normalizes the subject-as-assemblage but also presents the subject-as-unity as a grotesque impossibility." ("Flickering" par. 29)

The dispersal of the "schizophrenic" multiple personality represented as a cyborg is related to the question of human memory in postmodern writings and theory. In many science fiction films and books featuring cyborgs, at a certain point the prosthesis acquires a consciousness, as in *Blade Runner, The Terminator,* and *The Matrix.* The issue of the past is treated quite humorously in *Patchwork Girl*. The monster experiences serious problems when her various body parts, which preserve the memories of their previous owners, each demonstrating his/her own individual traits, at different points of the story decide to go their own way. Thus, in the lexia "graveyard/the everywoman monster's left leg," the monster tells us that that particular limb:

> belonged to Jane, a nanny who harboured under her durable grey dresses and sensible undergarments a remembrance of a less sensible time: a tattoo of a ship and the legend, Come Back To Me. Nanny knew some stories that astonished her charges, and though the ship on her thigh blurred and grew faint and blue with distance, until it seemed that the currents must have long ago finished their work, undoing its planks one by one

> with unfailing patience, she always took the children to the wharf when word came that a ship was docking, and many a sailor greeted her by name.
>
> My leg is always twitching, jumping, joggling. It wants to go places. It has had enough of waiting. ("graveyard/the everywoman monster's left leg")

Most of the characters in Shelley's *Frankenstein* are connected to each other, as well as to the author, through a common condition of orphanhood. Cyborgs, monsters included, being artificially constructed, are by definition parentless. This lack of a past or even denial of any past is often perceived as common to our postmodern condition of the disintegration of totalizing narratives. However, Jackson insists on reinstating the "humanity" of her monster, for the Patchwork Girl longs for a past of her own and is even willing to buy one from a woman she meets by chance in the street.

As a result, Jackson's female monster differs not only from its male predecessor, it also departs from the habitual treatment of cyborgs in fiction in relation to their corporeality. Shelley Jackson does not simply theorize about the body. In various ways the cyberfiction foregrounds the materiality of the body. A quite unforgettable, vivid example of this is the lexia "body jungle," which describes the dream of the monster walking through a body, envisioned as a jungle of organs. She is walking through intestines, ribs, pelvic crests and ovaries. In her dream, the Patchwork Girl describes the process of aging and death in the following manner:

> Before long the blood in my veins will be the blood of the body jungle. My skin will fall away in scrolls, my palms and fingertips will drift down like aged leaves. My veins will unweave and reweave themselves into the network. My heart will swing free from my ribcage and roost on a branch […]
>
> I do not know how my skull will open, or if, I will still know myself when my brain drifts up to join the huge, intelligent sky. ("story/falling apart/body jungle")

The identity of the subject, no matter how problematic, is intrinsically connected to the body. The very possibility of being and knowing oneself is denied, if the body is "lost." This focus on "the meat" is quite unusual in other fictional representations of cyborgs both in writing and in film.

Jackson's other artistic works also confirm the fact that she is quite empirical and experiential in her explorations of the female body—its organs, functions, fluids. For Jackson it is within the body that the self resides, through the body that each of us can be individually identified. For this reason Jackson insists on the materialist, not the abstract representation of corporeality.

The Patchwork Girl is as much a biological organism as an artificial construct – a posthuman organism.[8] In my view, posthumanism offers a more appropriate way of analyzing the Patchwork Girl, taking into consideration the specificities of representation of this female monster as outlined up to this point.

In the more extreme forms of posthumanism, that can be found in various fields of cybernetics such as artificial intelligence, artificial life, robotics and virtual reality, the human body is interpreted as "obsolete" (Stelarc 562). Stelarc, for example, foresees in the future a replacement of the PSYCHOBODY with the CYBERBODY[9] —a superior body that is cleansed of bad and often malfunctioning software such as emotions and subjectivity. Radical posthumanism returns to the familiar Cartesian denial of the body, while in the interpretation of subjectivity intelligence takes precedence, the body is absent.

Katherine Hayles takes a different stance in the posthuman debate. She negates the anti-human vision and takes a less radical and more humanizing approach. In her serious analysis the posthuman condition is seen as a

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[8] For an in-depth review of the various "strong" and "weak" versions of posthumanism see Tiziana Terranova's paper "Post-human Unbounded: Artificial Evolution and High-tech Subcultures." *The Cybercultures Reader*. 268-282. Her example of the weak variant is the libertarian magazine *Mondo 2000*, which fuses "psychedelic 1960s counterculture, New Age rhetoric and cyberpunk" (270). She compares it with the philosophy of the Extropian group, which share the cyberutopian belief in transhumanism – a radical evolution of intelligent life beyond the human form into a superior posthuman one. Significantly both groups are located in California and the professional occupations of their supporters are mainly connected to the implementation of life-extension technologies, as Terranova points out.

[9] In his exposition on the future of bodies in electronic culture, Stelarc notes under point 7 the following: "REDESIGNING THE BODY/REDEFINING WHAT IS HUMAN. It is no longer meaningful to see the body as a site for the psyche or the social, but rather as a structure to be monitored and modified; the body not as a subject, but as an object—NOT AS AN OBJECT OF DESIRE BUT AS AN OBJECT OF DESIGNING" (562).

specific, historically determined construction we are currently experiencing. Hayles finds that we are all in the process of becoming posthuman, just as other analysts mentioned previously believe that we are all now cyborgs. She writes: "As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screen, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman" *(Posthuman xiv)*.

Hayles' analysis of the characteristics of the posthuman at certain points overlaps with that of the cyborg. However, she insists that even though the cybernetic aspect may be significant, it is not crucial to the definition of the posthuman. For Hayles: "the defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components" (*Posthuman* 4). My argument is that Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* is rather a posthuman than a literal cyborg because the female monster is presented as an exclusively biological organism, invested with humanity. She is capable of love and is loved by others. Jackson insists on the ability of biological organisms to interact, to communicate. This connection founded on our shared corporeality is an opportunity that is denied to the main characters of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, whose loneliness and lack of companionship is foregrounded as the common human condition. In contrast, Jackson finds that: "We are inevitably annexed to other bodies, human bodies, and bodies of meaning" ("body of text/bodies too"). At the same time she asserts: "We are coupled to constructions of meaning; we are eligible, partially; we are cooperative with meanings but irreducible to any one" ("body of text/bodies too").

Furthermore, Jackson's "meaty" representation of the monster is in line with Hayles' appeal not to forget about the flesh, for her dream of the future, as she admits, is not that of virtual disembodiment and total erasure of our mortal selves. In her interpretation of the posthuman model, she finds that: "human functionality expands because the parameters of the cognitive system it inhabits expand. In this model, it is not a question of leaving the meat behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis" (Hayles *Posthuman 291*). She re-inserts embodiment in the posthuman condition and thus opposes the nightmarish, futuristic visions of other quite radical adherents to this model such as Hans Moravec.

Shelley Jackson rescues the body from oblivion, while at the same time she refuses to dehumanize her female monster. Physically, the Patchwork Girl is a parody of the human form, but is still essentially a human form in

its dispersed unstable self and its basic corporeality, declared universal by Jackson:

> Likewise I shall fill the universe to bursting with flesh flesh flesh if I want to. You will all be part of me. You already are; your bodies are already claimed by future generations, auctioned off piecemeal to the authors of the future monsters […] I shall build a palace, a city, a planet of meat. ("body of text/mixed up/universal")

Just as the text it revisits—Shelley's *Frankenstein* is about the mythological extrapolation of creation in the context of bibliogenesis, of birth and of the Romantic ideas of artistic creation—so Jackson's cyberfiction is a metafictional narrative about what constitutes the act of writing.

Traditional linear writing associated with print tries to make the points of suturing text invisible, so that the result appears as a logical expansion of ideas. However, the digital medium entails a different approach to writing. The qualities of collage in George Landow's view are so fundamental to hypertext, "particularly those of appropriation, assemblage, concatenation, and the blurring of limits, edges, and borders—characterize a good deal of the way we conceive of gender and identity" (par. 5). The acts of deconstruction and reconstruction are part not only of the writing process, but also of the reading one. Thus, the reader creates his or her own "patchwork" of text.

The very title page of the cyberfiction is suggestive of the multitude ways in which this text can be read. It professes that this is a collaborative work of fiction, created by "Mary/Shelley and herself." Jackson often deludes the reader as to who is the narrator: the monster, Mary Shelley or Shelley Jackson appear as writing subjects at different times. The narrator's subjectivity is dispersed, as is that of the monster: "I wonder if I am writing from my thigh, from the crimp-edged pancakelet of skin we stitched onto me […] Mary writes, I write, we write, but who is really writing? Ghost writers are the only kind there are" ("story/rethinking/AM I MARY").

Among the most striking examples of the merging of fiction and metafiction and the foregrounding of the act of construction of the text, paralleled by the construction of the monster's body, is the lexia "phrenology." It represents a graphic drawing of the profile of a human head, whose brain is partitioned into numerous sections, each bearing a name or phrase, that function as links and entryways to various parts in the novel.

This interconnection and complex interplay between human body and body of text Jackson underlines yet again in *Stitch Bitch*: "Boundaries of text are like boundaries of bodies, and both stand in for the confusing and invisible boundary of the self" (n. p.). In the lexia "body of text/it thinks" she demonstrates in a manner reminiscent of Derrida, the way our identities are constructed through language.

> 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. ("body of text/it thinks")

Both Jackson and Hayles insist on the primary significance of embodiment in the representation and conception of the subject. The posthuman model as described by Hayles has the highest relevance in the present discussion, for it interprets the familiar postmodern extrapolation of subjectivity—dispersed, unstable, multiple—as the universal "normalized" condition. Through it Hayles suggests the possibility of each person envisioning him/herself "as a posthuman collectivity" (*Posthuman 6*), with the emphasis on *human*. In multiple ways Jackson's female monster articulates this historic/al and cultural reconfiguration of the human being.

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