Monster/Machine: A Prosthesis to *Patchwork Girl*

by

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MONSTER / MACHINE
A PROSTHESIS TO PATCHWORK GIRL

BY CHRIS GORTMAKER
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A PROSTHESIS
TO A MONSTROUS TEXT

But let us have books that squirm and change under our gaze, or tilt like a fun-house floor and spill us into other books, whose tangents and asides follow strict rules of transformation, like a crystal forming in a solution, or which consist entirely of links, like spider-webs with no corpses hanging in them.

Shelley Jackson, "Stitch Bitch"

A text is a prosthesis for thought. With our body, we couple it with our mind, and think through it. This is a prosthesis to *Patchwork Girl*, a hyperfiction assembled in 1995 by alleged author Shelley Jackson.¹ I have sutured my writing onto this work of digital hypertext literature to assemble the monster tangled up in the machine of its text. This hyperfiction is a monstrous text—a machine that tries to become a body. It is an experiment in cyborg-writing that tries to transform our conceptions of "human" and "text." Its protagonist, the patchwork girl, is a cyborg myth that imagines a supersession of the violence of liberal humanism and textualization. This prosthesis will follow the formal logic of this cyborg myth to its limit. There, we will see how *Patchwork Girl* marks itself as a limit-text of cyborg-writing. As the hyperfiction attempts to think through the opening of critical and political possibility at literature's interface with informatics and cyborg theories of the posthuman, it also closes that possibility. On the topic of this closure, *Patchwork Girl* is exceedingly self-reflective. It is a pensive hypertext.²
Fig. 0.1. A mapping of *Patchwork Girls* six zones, as their constituent spaces appear in the map window. While the hyperfiction's five multicursal zones are accessible from its "title page" lexia, the unicursal America Narrative is only accessible from three lexias embedded in these zones' network structure: the lexia "mutinies" in the "broken accents" zone, and the lexias "us" and "hideous progeny," which are found in a space accessible from the "journal" or "story" zones and marked: •
INTRODUCTION
WORK ➔ TEXT ➔ HYPERTEXT

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.

Roland Barthes, S/Z

HYPER-

What is hypertext for Patchwork Girl? Its "hyper-" prefix points over, above, and beyond the "text" that it modifies. Hypertext is oriented towards progress. It signifies a movement beyond whatever this text thing is. This is what Ted Nelson seems to have had in mind when he coined the term around 1965. Nelson envisioned hypertext as a strategy for textual organization that would transcend the formal constraints of print. By "print," Nelson was thinking of the book, the codex: a materialization of text in a form defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (one of the bigger codex texts—but online, a hypertext) as a "portable volume consisting of a series of written, printed, or illustrated pages bound together for ease of reading." Nelson's hypertext is an information technology: a "series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways." The hypertextual reader produced by this technology may follow multiple paths through a whole, passing between fragments of text via hyperlinks that yield—jumping between these fragments—according to the reader's interaction with a responsive interface and the rules imposed by the cybernetic machine behind it.

There are four primary structures of digital hypertext organization: axial, arborescent, network, and layered. Axial hypertext follows a single axis of links—what
I will call a unicursal (single-path) progression of text fragments with a single entrance and single end point. Arborescent hypertext has a branching, tree-like structure with a single entrance but numerous possible end points at the "tips" of its branches. Network hypertext has multiple entrances and end points and forms a structure of text fragments connected by hyperlinks that has no dominant, orienting axis. Arborescent and network hypertext are multicursal because they present us with a choice of paths through their wholes. The experience of reading layered hypertext, on the other hand, is somewhere in-between unicursal and multicursal. Consisting of two hyperlinked layers of a single page, layered hypertext facilitates a back-and-forth jumping between different versions of a page—each of which might present different elements but share a significant common form. Text annotation is one of the most common forms of layered hypertext.

In Patchwork Girl, we find all of these different digital hypertext structures employed across the six zones that constitute its network whole. Turning to the "broken accents" zone, we see that scattered text fragments (on the left) replace what, in a codex book, would be the pages we turn to progress through the work (fig. 0.2).

Figure 0.2. Map and text windows of lexia "this writing" (found in the first space of the "broken accents" zone). See fig. 0.3 for a larger version of this text window.
On high there is a toolbar with basic navigational controls, below which there are two windows that display the hyperfiction: a map window (left) and a text window (right). The text window displays the title and body text of the current lexia—the "page"—being read, while the map window displays the current space in which the lexia being read exists, adjacent to neighboring lexia. Each zone in Patchwork Girl consists of multiple spaces, whose lexias are linked together in complex and variable ways. To progress from one lexia to another via a predetermined path—what I will call the default path (sometimes it is available, sometimes not)—we can use either the directional buttons found in the toolbar, press the enter key, or click any area of the text window. To return to the hyperfiction's cover page, we simply click the toolbar's "cover" button. In addition to the default path, we can also click on any lexia in the map window to view its text in the text window. Further, there may be hyperlinks within each lexia's text that lead us to other lexias either in the current space or another space—potentially in a "far-off" zone of the hyperfiction. In Patchwork Girl, these hyperlinks are hidden by default, but appear with blue underlines (only if they exist; some lexia only have a default path) when we press the option and command (#) keys together (fig 0.3).
Clicking on any of these hyperlinks (whether or not they are revealed) shuttles us to another lexia. Thus we can progress through the hyperfiction along the many ready-made paths that constitute its structure, or, eschew this structure altogether and make our "own" path by clicking through lexias in the map window. Jumping like this through a network—from "page" to "page," lexia to lexia, via the sudden flicker of the hyperlink—is digital hypertextuality. The above lexia "this writing" notably blurs the distinction between reading and writing, foregrounding the heuristic peculiarity that reading Patchwork Girl is always, in a sense, writing it—stitching together its "story" as one path chosen out of many.

This bricolage quality of digital hypertext is an essential aspect of our interaction with computer technology,\(^6\) and can also be thought of more capaciously as hypermedia: a term used to describe digital multimedia environments that include a combination of text, audio, images, or video. Then, at an even higher conceptual altitude, there is hyperspace. This kind of extrapolation of the "hyper-" prefix has significantly marked discourses of computer technology, and in turn, contemporary literary and critical theory. In this hyper-language, we get an aphoristic glimpse of the extent to which computer technology has changed how we perceive text, media, and space (not to mention time).\(^7\) Indeed, utopian and dystopian projections of literature into digital hypertext futures abound in the 1980s and 1990s.\(^8\) Today, codex books (in all their digital simulations, e.g., the Amazon Kindle) seem to be here to stay. What is certain, however, is that the rise of digital hypertext and its umbrella category, new media, has radically changed how we think about literature,\(^9\) bringing new forms of literary representation to light and, in turn, providing fresh perspectives on the codex form that literary theory has taken for granted for hundreds of years. As Katherine Hayles asserts in a 2004 essay in Poetics Today: "The long reign of print has induced a
kind of somnolence in literary and critical studies, a certain inattentiveness to the
diverse forms in which ‘texts’ appear. Literary criticism and theory are shot through
with unrecognized assumptions specific to print.”¹⁰

The magnitude, formal complexity, and variety of content found in
hypermedia environments have instigated an epistemological pivot in cultural studies
by illuminating just how "medial"—how in-between—any singulative concept of
medium like "print" really is. While the twofold material and immaterial nature of the
codex book (its material "body" and its transcendent meaning) has been a topic of
philosophical debate for hundreds of years,¹¹ the emergence of new media has
mainstreamed these debates across media and disciplines. Intermediality studies is a
notable development tied to to the emergence of new media.¹² Regarding the massive
breadth of this field's disciplinary object—the many medial paradigms present in any
medium—we might think of its "inter-" prefix as generally synonymous with "hyper-.”
This terminological blur points to the notable conflation of the orientations between
and beyond in our contemporary experiences of media. In many medial environments,
especially those involving screens, we take for granted the immersive—indeed,
hallucinatory—experience of reading, watching, or playing between and beyond any
unified notion of medium.

While Patchwork Girl is primarily text-based (it makes limited but meaningful
use of images), it is uniquely enabled by its digital hypertext form to thematically and
formally evoke many different media technologies and their semantic-affective
capacities. For this reason, I will often refer to the hyperfiction's mediality to
emphasize that its medium is not a unified, neutral substrate of information
transmission like "a computer" or "a screen,” rather a field of intermingling medial
paradigms—a "media-ness”—that symbiotically constitutes its meaning-making
system. The hyperfiction’s protagonist, the patchwork girl, emerges through a process of characterization in which digital hypertext allows her to transcend merely textual, i.e. verbal, expression. *Patchwork Girl* does not let us ignore the monstrosity—the *between* and *beyond*—of its medium.

**HYPERTEXT LIT**

Digital hypertext literature emerged in the 1980s when personal computer programs like Hypercard made the use and production of digital hypertext more widely available to the public, attracting educators, industry professionals, and, in turn, literary authors. Early hypertexts like Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story* (1987) garnered mainstream praise for their use of digital hypertext to create beguiling "interactive" narratives with no formal "end." First published on floppy disk, Joyce’s *afternoon* was soon moved to the Storyspace platform: a computer program for writing and reading digital hypertext literature that Joyce developed in the 1980s with media theorist Jay David Bolter and programmer John B. Smith. Today, Storyspace is the most prominent platform for hypertexts written in the 1990s—a period that some have called the "Golden Age" of literary hypertext. This canonizing periodization is based largely on the disruptive effect that the technological innovation of the late 1990s had on literary hypertext production.

With early web browsers like Netscape, the World Wide Web mainstreamed the reading of digital hypertext. While this development did present new creative possibilities for literary hypertext production, the Web’s hypermedia bricolage of commercial sites, blogs, and social networks effectively overshadowed its more "media-modest," text-based precursor. In dramatic terms, we might think of the Web as a monstrous techno-capitalist wave sweeping over a peculiar little whirlpool of hypertexts. The Dot-Com boom largely stunted utopic narratives of a literary
hypertext future. Of course, multitudes of "literary" whirlpools have spun off in the
wake of this monstrous wave; hyperfictions are still being written—they just no longer
hold the vanguard edge that they commanded at the turn of the millennium.

Published on Storyspace software by Eastgate Systems in 1995, Jackson’s
Patchwork Girl is one of the most widely read and discussed works of digital hypertext
literature. It resurrects and reimagines the female creature who appeared fleetingly in
Mary Shelley’s early-nineteenth-century gothic sci-fi novel Frankenstein. Approaching
this act of literary resurrection with all of the narrative dynamism afforded by digital
hypertext, Jackson animates Frankenstein’s potent nexus of Western mythology—a
synthesis of Adam and Eve, Paradise Lost, and the Prometheus myth’s common
warning against the danger inherent in the pursuit and technological expression of
knowledge.

Jackson wrote Patchwork Girl in an MFA writing program at Brown University
—the preeminent hub of literary hypertext production at the time. In fact, the
beginnings of Patchwork Girl occurred to her in a class on literary theory taught by
George P. Landow, the scholar whose work in hypertext theory cast the technology as
a prophetic materialization of poststructuralist theories of textuality.13 This academic
backdrop is inseparable from what Mark McGurl calls Patchwork Girl’s "typically
fractured and surrealized" relation to genre and form.14 While the hyperfiction is
distinctively inflected with genre-fiction elements of gothic, horror, and sci-fi, we
might also think of it as a generically-veiled work of theory (a philosophical novel,
perhaps). Its project is substantially informed by the feminist-poststructuralist
discourses that, throughout the 1990s, engaged with questions of technology and
liberal humanism. While these discourses might be described as part of the
"posthuman" turn in the humanities, I will largely avoid this term. Instead, this
prosthesis to *Patchwork Girl* will allow us to inductively develop an angle on the perspectival shift entailed by posthumanism. The concept of the "monstrous" will guide our inductive approach because of its negative and transformative relation to the concept of the human. Now, to meet *Patchwork Girl* on its own terms, we will situate it within contemporary literary theory to flesh out the theoretical framework and critical terminology—the "conceptual technology"—of this prosthesis.

**FROM WORK TO TEXT, HYPertext TO CYBERtext**

Hypertext theory is often periodized into first- and second-wave bodies of thought. In 2004, upon rereading Roland Barthes’s 1971 essay "From Work to Text," Katherine Hayles (whom we will consider a second-wave hypertext theorist) affirms its "prescience" but notes "just how far we have moved beyond it." As the bellwether account of the concept of *text*—the veritable "protagonist" of poststructuralist theory, Barthes’s influential essay crystalizes the emergence of poststructuralism’s deconstructive, truth-skeptical, and performative approach to literary interpretation. Here, the monolithic, closed literary work yields to the open, emergent dynamism of the *text*: "the Text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)." As the static, authorial object of the "work" cedes to the motion, the *gesture*, of the "Text" that passes through multiple works and meanings (a galaxy of floating signifiers), the poststructuralist dematerialization of the "work" into the "Text" is clear.

First-wave hypertext theorists might agree with Hayles that we have moved "beyond" poststructuralism’s theory of text, but only insofar as digital hypertext is a *reification*—a "thingification"—of this abstract theory as a literary medium. These first-wave theorists tend to approach digital hypertext as a transposition of poststructuralism’s theory of text from "conceptual technology" into technology
proper: materialized as the stuff of machines and screens. In 1991, Landow famously writes that digital hypertext is "an almost embarrassingly literal reification" of poststructuralism's pivot away from unifying conceptual systems of "center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity" and towards the textual de-centering and dispersal of a literary theoretical approach grounded in "multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks." First-wave theorists tend to see digital hypertext as a liberatory, reader-empowering development in literary technology—to each reader their own performative assemblage of text-fragments, to each their own text: the reader as self-author. Traces of this reification theory exist today in the word "lexia," which is borrowed from Barthes's 1968 essay S/Z, and necessarily evokes its concept of the writerly text.

While these first-wave theorists initiate theoretical approaches to understanding the logistical roles of readers in digital hypertext environments, the presuppositions of their reification theory leaves blind spots when it comes to the actual close reading of hyperfictions. In fact, much first-wave hypertext scholarship eschews the close reading of hyperfictions altogether, turning instead to discussion of their literary technology's epochal implications. By drawing literary hypertext so forcefully into the fold of poststructuralist literary theory, these theorists overlook the numerous ways that digital hypertext environments present media-specific conditions of reading and writing. Certain aspects of digital hypertext are necessarily beyond the scope of poststructuralist theories whose object of knowledge is the codex book.

Attuned to the shortcomings of this first-wave approach, Espen J. Aarseth helps lay the groundwork for second-wave hypertext theory with his 1997 work Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature. With a wariness of theoretical imperialism and "media chauvinism," Aarseth distances his work from the"reification
fallacy” of first-wave theorists. From this critical vantage, Aarseth establishes a critical terminology for the study of hyperfictions, and, more broadly, a perspective on all forms of textuality he calls "cybertext." Drawing on Norbert Weiner’s discipline of cybernetics—the study of any system with an information feedback loop—this perspectival shift focuses on "the mechanical organization of the text, by positing the intricacies of the medium as an integral part of the literary exchange." Aarseth’s cybertext encompasses "a wide range (or perspective) of possible textualities seen as a typology of machines, as various kinds of literary communication systems where functional differences among mechanical parts play a defining role in determining the aesthetic process." For Aarseth, text is not only the poststructuralist "galaxy of signifiers," nor is it the "philological (or observable) work"—it is a machine: "a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal signs" in which the verbal sign, the medium, and the "operator" constitute a system in which any one of these three elements is defined by the other two, the boundaries between them inherently "fluid and transgressive" (fig. 0.3).

Aarseth’s "Textual Machine" subsumes the poststructuralist theory of text—a duplex system of operator and verbal sign—into a triplex system that integrates the text’s
medium: its signifying materiality. When I refer to "text" in this prosthesis, I do so from Aarseth's cybertextual vantage—that is, I refer to the *machine* of the text.²⁴

To make adequate use of this perspectival shift, my formally-attuned close reading of *Patchwork Girl* will draw on certain concepts developed by second-wave theorists; foremost among these is the hyperlink. Challenging the first-wave conviction that digital hypertext is a reader-empowering liberation from the codex book, Aarseth identifies estrangement as a central aesthetic of hyperfictions that is formally grounded in the spatio-temporal discontinuity of the hyperlink.²⁵ The hyperlink produces a fragmentation which, as described by Hayles, "is deeper, more pervasive, and more extreme than with the alphanumeric characters of print."²⁶ While first-wave hypertext theorists did recognize that the hyperlink was an aberrant phenomenon, their reifying theoretical approach limited the extent to which they could develop robust theories of its consequences.

Hayles's second-wave approach takes on the hyperlink with a theory of "flickering signification."²⁷ Hayles does not intend this theory to supersede the floating signifier in our consideration of digital hypertext; language is language, and hyperfictions will always employ the same linguistic sign-system whose referents poststructuralism indelibly rendered "arbitrary." Rather, Hayles posits flickering signification as a quality inherent to the particular *processual* nature of signification in any text that is mediated by a computer: a cybernetic machine with encoding/decoding operations. A screen flickers because each moment of its visible image (its text, perhaps, but always a screenic image) is the output of a feedback loop that processes any input from us, the reader-operator, through its encoding/decoding function to again render this image visible—changed or unchanged—before us. All
digital hypertext is screenic, and therefore appears *flickering* before us as a result of this cybernetic process.

Both Hayles’s theory of flickering signification and Aarseth’s systemic-materialist theory of text will be central technologies of this prosthesis. With our formalist approach to *Patchwork Girl*, we will see how its protagonist is as much a theorization of the machine of her text as a literary expression of a subjectivity. As Jackson proclaims in *Stitch Bitch*, a companion essay to *Patchwork Girl*: "Boundaries of texts are like boundaries of bodies, and both stand in for the confusing and invisible boundary of the self." Bodies of text will blur together in the hyperfiction, and for this reason, a terminology of text that transcends yet remains attentive to medial specificities is a necessary technology if this prosthesis aims to meet the hyperfiction on its own terms.

**A TERMINOLOGY OF TEXT**

Gérard Genette’s terminology of text presents a selection of prefixes to "text" that will orient us within the *Patchwork Girl*’s hyper-textual environment. Genette’s 1982 work *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* sets forth a comprehensive terminology of "transtextuality," "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts." We might think of Genette’s transtextuality as the diverse, intermingling set of relationships that constitute a text’s "transcendence": its drift into a cloud of links that connect it with other texts—their particular thematics and modes of enunciation. This cloud of links—"the literariness of literature"—is what Genette refers to as the "architext." Transtextuality is a text’s manner of transcendent engagement with the architext; it is not a classification but an inherent, qualitative aspect of any text—"there are no texts without textual transcendence." The gesture of a text’s transtextuality is the object of poetics because
"any writing is rewriting; and all literature is in the second degree." This is the basis of what we might call Genette's poststructuralist-leaning "open structuralism": an exploration of how a text reaches beyond the singularity of its medial instantiation—the work—to rewrite other texts.

Genette defines five relationships that, together, constitute this transtextual movement. "Intertextuality" is the copresence of one text within another, manifested explicitly within a work through quotation, plagiarism, or allusion. Patchwork Girl makes extensive use of these three tools of intertextual linking, freely integrating sentences and sometimes entire passages from Frankenstein (and other texts) into its lexias. Sometimes the hyperfiction provides a citation, others times it "plagiarizes." Often, it will speckle sentences with words and phrases distinctive of Shelley's authorial voice, conjuring an aura of allusive connection to the fictional world of her novel.

Of greater importance in Patchwork Girl is "paratextuality": all of the "secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic," that accompany the primary body of the text including titles, paginal formatting, dust jackets, the order of chapters, organization of lexias in the map window, buttons, hyperlinks, etc. Evidently, hyperfictions greatly expand the range of paratextual entities present in the machine of their text. The paratextually expressive capabilities of Patchwork Girl's map window figure significantly throughout the hyperfiction, whether spatially rendering the patchwork girl's body or evoking the patterning of a quilt.

Genette defines "metatextuality" as one text's commentary, criticism, or explanation of another text. Evidently, intertextuality and metatextuality are not mutually exclusive; they are essentially entangled. Patchwork Girl relates metatextually to Frankenstein because its intertextual quotation of the scene in which Dr.
Frankenstein destroys the female creature is part of a critical commentary that establishes the foundation (and the politics) of the patchwork girl’s character. Like intertextuality and metatextuality, what Genette calls "hypertextuality" describes the union of one text with another: "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not commentary." Essentially, Genettian hypertextuality describes the relationships that constitute any text’s second degree existence. We can consider Patchwork Girl—with Frankenstein as its primary hypotext—as hypertextual in both a technological and a Genetttian sense. The hyperfiction characterizes its protagonist by staging this terminological-conceptual conflation, systematically meshing the spatio-temporal experience of its digital hypertext’s "architecture" with the verbal, literary transcendence of its architext.

Genette’s final transtextual relationship is "architextuality": a text’s relation to genre. This is the classifying structure of poetics that places a text within generic categories such as novel grocery list, poem, hyperfiction, tweet, etc. Patchwork Girl’s architextuality is complex; it is difficult to pin a single genre to it. Yet, "hyperfiction" works well, especially if we consider it a riff on "genre-fiction" in which the formal-technological connotation of "hyper-" shapes the literary-mimetic connotation of "fiction." In this light, "hyperfiction" points to a mechanization of literary mimesis—the surfacing of a text’s literary technology in its meaning-making system—which is precisely what we will find in Patchwork Girl’s characterization of its protagonist: the patchwork girl.

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A CYBORG MYTH

With all this talk of text, there is a problem that must be accounted for—textualization: the process by which we transpose our reality into mediated verbal
INTRODUCTION

signs. When we textualize, we impose the form of text on the content of our world; we abstract, and distill meaning. Jackson’s textualization of *Patchwork Girl* begins around 1994 in a theory class with Landow. Thus, it is little surprise that the hyperfiction essentially stages the reification theory of first-wave hypertext theorists. For Jackson, digital hypertext must have appeared as an exhilarating coincidence of theory and practice: the poststructuralist model of text materialized as a powerful, *liberatory*, new literary technology. *Patchwork Girl* exemplifies how digital hypertext allows poststructuralist theories of text to be formally animated in ways that would not be possible for a codex book. Turning to our model of the text-as-machine, we can see how digital hypertext—as medium—expands poststructuralism’s account of text beyond the interface of operator and verbal sign to structure all three of this model’s constituent elements—the entire triangular form of our figure (fig. 0.3). In this way, *Patchwork Girl* presents us with an entanglement of verbal sign and medium that gives us an immanent, "embodied," critique of textualization.

In her 1984 "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway excoriates the "Textualization' of everything in poststructuralist, postmodernist theory [that] has been damned by Marxists and socialist-feminists for its utopian disregard for the lived relations of domination that ground the ‘play’ of arbitrary reading." By replacing sign and referent with signifier and signified, freeing the latter to dance in an ideology-illuminating (if well theorized) but easily arbitrary play of meaning, poststructuralism has inevitably given rise to strains of critical theory uprooted from the "lived relations of domination" that structure social reality—that is, the realm of the *body* itself. This is the dangerous, violent possibility—the hideous progeny—spawned by the conceptual technology of poststructuralist textualization (such is the nature of technology).
This schism between the dematerialized (but powerful) poststructuralist text and the material body finds a literary-formal reconciliation in *Patchwork Girl’s* characterization of its protagonist as a *myth*. In the Marxist tradition of literary criticism, a myth is an imaginary solution to a real problem—an antinomy, a paradox—whose opposed terms, here, we will take to be *body* and *text*. Georg Lukács describes myth:

> Mythologies are always born where two terminal points, or at least two stages in a movement, have to be regarded as terminal points without its being possible to discover any concrete mediation between them and the movement… mythology inevitably adopts the structure of the problem whose opacity has been the cause of its own birth.\(^{36}\)

*Patchwork Girl* imagines its protagonist as a "mediation" between the "two terminal points" of body and text. Indeed, the character of the patchwork girl—tangled up between digital hypertext mediality and verbal sign—emerges for us across the hyperfiction as a *hypertext-as-body*. She is the hyperfiction; she mediates herself as a myth that reflexively "adopts the structure of the problem" immanent to her own form (a text is *not* a body). In this way, the hyperfiction imagines a feminist-materialist reconciliation of the poststructuralist theory of text's uprootedness from material reality by staging this theory's reification in digital hypertext as a monstrous, feminine body. *Patchwork Girl* appropriates first-wave hypertext theorists’ reification theory to perform an immanent, *embodied* critique of the "textualization of everything."

Reading *Patchwork Girl* in this way is most interesting for us when we consider the myth embodied by its protagonist in the *second-degree*. This is where this prosthesis will officially begin in Chapter 1, considering how the hyperfiction grafts itself hypertextually onto *Frankenstein* to shape the myth of the patchwork girl. In Shelley’s novel, the female creature is a myth of monstrosity, even more so than the infamous male creature commonly referred to by his creator’s name "Frankenstein."
We will flesh out our concept of the "monstrous" to follow the deconstructive gesture of the hyperfiction's "story" zone as it dips into Shelley's novel, extracting the female creature as the myth of the patchwork girl.

In Chapter 2, we will bear witness to this myth's *incarnation* in the hyperfiction's multicursal "graveyard" and "quilt" zones. A critical reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope will situate our consideration of the hyperfiction's project of literary embodiment. Then, with the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body flickering before us, we will encounter the myth of *Patchwork Girl*’s protagonist in a technologically hypertextual sense—that is, as a *cyborg* myth. Not only is the patchwork girl a resurrection of Shelley's female creature, she is a also striking animation—in digital hypertext form—of Haraway's "effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" in her "Cyborg Manifesto":

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, 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 centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation.37

A cyborg is an organism enmeshed in its technologized natural world, untranscendent. The cyborg, Haraway argues, may therefore be accountable to its social reality in radical ways and orient its politics towards progressive historical transformation. *Patchwork Girl* (re)animates this myth in literary form to metamorphose *Frankenstein*’s monstrous female creature into a cyborg—a character liberated from the forces that destroy her Shelley's novel. This hypertext-as-body project is an experiment in *cyborg-writing* in which *Patchwork Girl* tangles the "organism"—the body—of its protagonist with the machine of its text. The hyperfiction's body/text entanglement is the formal ground from which its content interrogates dualisms of human/machine, human/animal, culture/nature, self/other.
These dualisms determine the object of *Patchwork Girl*’s embodied critique—what we might sweepingly refer to as liberal humanism: an ideology of the human that has historically denied humanity and rights to people of color, women, and other subaltern subjects. We will trace the becoming of this embodied critique through *Patchwork Girl*’s digital hypertext form: a gesture of monster metamorphosing into a cyborg. We will develop an account of the hyperfiction’s *formal logic* that allows us to grasp its embodied critique beyond its immediacy—that is, beyond the mere screenic, verbally and medially signifying presence of its hypertext-as-body.

Chapter 3 examines how according to this formal logic, the hyperfiction both structures and accounts for its own textualization (and the violence it entails) via the feminist-materialist untranscendence imagined by Haraway’s cyborg myth. A reflection on *Patchwork Girl* as illuminated by the cyborgian artifact of the sonographic fetus will situate us within the limitations of this reflexivity. We will then trace this formal logic through the remainder of the hyperfiction, attuned to how *Patchwork Girl* appears to critique—to “workshop”—its own project. Our path will depart from the network of the hyperfiction’s five multicursal zones to enter its single unicursal zone: the America Narrative (this is the order of reading that the hyperfiction seems intent we follow [see Map, fig. 0.1]).

In the America Narrative, we will find that the machine of *Patchwork Girl*’s text, although technically without end, reaches a critical point at which it seems to answer our question: What is hypertext for *Patchwork Girl*? In the words of Georg Lukács, we will see that at this point, the hyperfiction reaches its ultimate extreme: it no longer points dialectically to anything beyond itself: its dialectic is mediated only by the reification of the immediate forms of production. But with that a climax is reached in the conflict between existence in its immediacy together with the abstract categories that constitute its thought, on the one hand, and a vital social reality on the other.
Lukács is talking about the epistemology—what can be known, how—of reification. For *Patchwork Girl*, the reification theory of digital hypertext, along with Haraway's "ironic political myth" of the cyborg, are the "abstract categories that constitute its thought." Textualized in digital hypertext form, this thought is *thingified* on a screen, flickering before us and mutating into a body. We consume this hyperfiction as a myth: an exploration of the merging of body and text in literary form. Yet, at this point in Chapter 3, at the climax of the unicursal America Narrative zone, we will discover that the hyperfiction has cast its *entire project* into a state of contradictory suspension. Having followed the gesture of *Patchwork Girl's* cyborg-writing along the arc of its vertiginously reflexive path—from monster to cyborg, female creature to patchwork girl—we will find that it "no longer points to anything beyond itself." Yet, at this point, we will know enough about this text in its immediacy to raise our understanding to another level. We will find that the problem of body and text which underlies its cyborg myth is subtended by the recalcitrant problem of race that determines so much of late-twentieth-century American fiction.
1 | EXTRACTION

CASTRATION: AGAINST / FOR, EVEN SO

Topically, connotations are meanings which are neither in the dictionary nor in the grammar of the language in which a text is written (this is, of course, a shaky definition: the dictionary can be expanded, the grammar can be modified).

Roland Barthes, S/Z

NAMING THE MONSTROUS OTHER

*Patchwork Girl* tells the story of itself—the patchwork girl—so this prosthesis will follow the gesture of her characterization as it unfolds across the entirety of the hyperfiction. We will shape our reading around this gesture and produce a structuration of it—isolating a path from the hyperfiction's web—that extracts some meaning from its movement. This chapter explores the hyperfiction's "story" zone, which presents the clearest, most immediate picture of the root of its fictive world. In this zone, the hyperfiction superimposes itself palimpsestously onto *Frankenstein*, extracting Shelley's character of the female creature to render her, metamorphosed, as the patchwork girl. In vital relation to the concept of the monstrous, this metamorphosis re-writes, re-assembles the unarticulated, subjugated form of the female creature in Shelley's novel. The patchwork girl emerges from this gesture of characterization as the embodiment of a properly "polemical" *socio-formal* theory of *Frankenstein*. Its social element contends that Mary's deviant intentions for her novel were restricted to conform to her society's expectations of properly "feminine" literary production. Patchwork Girl couples this with a conjecture that the codex book form itself limited Shelly's characterization of the female creature's monstrosity.

To begin to approach the character of the patchwork girl, we must index the language used to name the monstrous. We define our humanity against the
monstrous. The etymology of "monster" resonates with this negative determination, tracing its way through the French *monstre* to the Latin root *monstrum*—a portent, prodigy, wicked creature, atrocity—to the verb-base *monere*: to warn of something ominous. When Immanuel Kant judges an object to be monstrous if "by its magnitude it annihilates the end which its concept constitutes," he means that as long as an object is monstrous to us, it short-circuits any teleology our concepts impose on it. We cannot find a meaning, an *end*, in it. Breaking out of the categories of the acceptable and the possible, the monstrous shatters our beliefs to leave paradox gaping in their place. A monstrous text might shatter our reading, leaving us with only its paratext—simply looking.

In our eyes, the monstrous exceeds itself. It triggers our self-defense (self-knowledge) mechanisms—our ideology. The monstrous can expose the ideology that shapes how we understand our world, showing ideology itself to be monstrous. Here, I depart from Kant’s account. While he describes the monstrous object’s effect on us as an *abstract negation* which leaves us with the ultimately incomprehensible sublime, I take the effect of the monstrous object’s "magnitude" to be a *determinate negation*. The monstrous leaves us with something (ourselves), but this something may be transformed, *mutated*. This is not a given, of course, but a tenuous possibility. Thus, I situate the concept of the monstrous within the dynamism of epistemological movement—a movement of knowledge, changing what and how things can be known. *Patchwork Girl* attempts to (re)animate this mutative possibility of the monstrous.

In this light, the monstrous is destructive, but also constitutive (potentially reconstitutive). In literature, the monstrous is a characterization device that renders a subjectivity against the other, constituting a perspective through the purely negative articulation of an outside, a beyond. The monster is *not* the hero, *not* human. Monsters
define us at our limit—they are *abject*. They are present as a psychological beyond that circumscribes the "I" and the proper name: that proprietary haven of meaning where the signifier-signified link may find a foothold on the icy surface of language. Kristeva's theory of abjection illuminates how the monstrous interfaces with the self—the body and language. The abject cannot be bound to a stable, comprehensible object. It is ab-ject: the "wellspring of sign for a non-object… on the edges of primal repression" from which an utterance like "Monster!" might originate, tearing reflexively out of an encounter with the incomprehensible, the disgusting. "Monster!" is a signer that points to the unnameable. The monstrous is the primal, mythic ground from which to imagine otherwise via new categories, new names. *Patchwork Girl* takes the abject female creature in *Frankenstein* as this ground, staging a metamorphosis of her monstrosity into the patchwork girl.

The concept of the monstrous reflects a broad and complex discourse that spans histories and cultures. I have drawn Kant and Kristeva to the fore not only because of their incisiveness, but also because their respective accounts bookend the myth of monstrosity so powerfully distilled in *Frankenstein*—a myth into which *Patchwork Girl* poses a transformative intervention. As the dominant metonym for "monster" in Western pop culture, the name "Frankenstein" is an immediately apparent symptom of this intervention's exigency. From the "Franken-food" of our genetically-modified industrial foodstuffs to the "Franken-babies" of right-wing anti-abortion discourse, "Franken-izing" is casual gesture of abjection—of discursively banishing threats to various conceptions of humanity. That "Frankenstein" stands in as our monster-metonym today points to the socio-historical forces that have shaped the legacy of Shelley’s novel.
As the name given to that which cannot be named, "monster" is the metonym of a signified without a socially operative signifier. Throughout Shelley’s novel, Dr. Frankenstein and other characters refer to the male creature as "monster" twenty-seven times; "fiend" twenty-five times; "daemon," "creature," and "wretch" fifteen times or more; and "devil," "being," and "ogre" only occasionally. By refusing to give the male creature a proper name, Dr. Frankenstein denies him a fundamental token of social belonging: a means of entry into society’s discursive system, and a sign on which to pin humanity and rights. The male creature both breaks and is broken by the language of his creator’s society.

Since our Western system of naming is structured by the patronymic—the father’s name—it figures that over the past two hundred years, Shelley’s strictly unnamed monster has been given the name of its father-creator: "Frankenstein." The extraordinary power of "monster" as the name for the nameless, the culture-destroying, has been sublimated within the cultural acceptability of the father’s name. It is this patronymic imprisonment that Patchwork Girl seeks to shear away from Frankenstein. Beneath this imprisonment is the mythic root of the patchwork girl’s character: the 1816 urtext manuscript—the "first draft"—of Shelley’s novel. This manuscript is as much a non-object, a trace, as the stunted character of the female creature. It is from this figurative coupling of Shelley’s abandoned early draft of Frankenstein and the abandoned charnel remains of the female creature that Patchwork Girl contrives the fictive world and character of the patchwork girl. Here, she is "born."

BIRTH, URTEXT

The patchwork girl’s characterization does not begin in one place. Depending on which zone of the hyperfiction we choose from its title page, we encounter a
different form of her "birth." In "birth," the second lexia along the default path of the "story" zone, the hyperfiction makes this clear by presenting us with an array of six possible paths into the network of its multicursal zones (fig. 1.1).

![Figure 1.1. Text window of lexia "birth" with links revealed (found in the first space of "story" zone).](image)

There is no default path from this lexia, so we must reveal links on the page. By way of the six different links that appear, we can enter five the hyperfiction's six zones; only the "quilt" zone is inaccessible from this lexia. A cursory overview of these "several births" will orient us within the hypertextual "muddle" of the hyperfiction's multicursal zones.

Clicking "from a muddy hole" leads us to the "graveyard" zone, where we explore the patchwork girl's body parts as they lie beneath a headstone, arranged as lexias in the text window. Clicking "under the needle" or "under the pen" draws us into the "journal" zone. Here, focalized through a fictionalized Mary Shelley, the patchwork girl's "birth" is a metaphorical alignment of Mary writing the idea of the female creature into a journal—the mythic urtext of *Frankenstein*—and actually stitching her body parts together (as if Mary were Dr. Frankenstein in her novel-in-progress). Just as in *Frankenstein*, where the male creature flees his creator, the female creature has fled Mary—her creatress. The "journal" zone begins with their reunion, mirroring the scene in Shelley's novel when the male creature reencounters Dr. Frankenstein to
demand the creation of a female companion. In *Patchwork Girl*, Mary and the female creature encounter each other with trepidation and soon grow intimate. Eventually, in a fantastical scene of creatress-creature sex, we witness a kind of "primal scene" with a non-oedipal spin. In Chapter 3, the symbolism of this sex scene will prove pivotal to our understanding of the hyperfiction's broader formal logic when it reappears, mirrored in the America Narrative zone.

Clicking "it took place not at all" draws us into the "broken accents" zone, whose swirling, textual-corporeal musings exhibit the full disjunctive dynamism of digital hypertext's multicursality. Clicking "a good story" shuttles us into a space also accessible from the "journal" zone in which we may access the long, unicursal America Narrative. Described in the lexia "birth" as "a good story" of *Bildungsroman* destiny-writing, this zone is set markedly apart from multicursal "muddle" of the patchwork girl's "several births." More explicitly displayed in this lexia, "birth," than anywhere else in the hyperfiction, this opposition between the patchwork girl's unicursal characterization in the America Narrative versus in the five multicursal zones will prove crucial to our understanding of *Patchwork Girl*'s project.

Finally, the path yielded by clicking "the plea of a bygone monster" does not bounce to another zone of the hyperfiction, but leads us through the rest of the lexias in the "story" zone. Here, we find the hyperfiction's "answer" to the question of the female creature's destruction in *Frankenstein*: a "polemical" theory that conjecturally couples the "bygone" creations of Dr. Frankenstein and Mary Shelley: the female creature and the urtext manuscript of *Frankenstein*, respectively.

Adjacent to the lexia "birth," the column of lexias that we access by clicking "plea of a bygone monster" quotes exclusively from *Frankenstein* to sketch a summary of the female creature's fleeting appearance in the novel. Titled "plea," "a promise,"
"filthy work," and "treachery," they excerpt the dialogue between the creature and Dr. Frankenstein in four fragments: The creature's demand for a "creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself," followed by Dr. Frankenstein's fraught agreement to this demand, his work assembling the female creature, and his sudden destruction of her unfinished body. *Patchwork Girl* poses its intervention in the next lexia, "she," which is written in the patchwork girl's voice and sits out of alignment in the map window with the column of the four previous lexias.\(^5\) As if to point to itself as a diegetic aside, a backstage whisper, the patchwork girl's voice in the lexia appears in parentheses (fig. 1.2).

The female creature appears in a dramatic intertextual suspension between *Frankenstein* and *Patchwork Girl*. As if gate-crashing her own moment of bodily destruction and textual deletion, she careens around Dr. Frankenstein's workshop, all the while under Shelley's wary gaze (indicated by the third person "She" who watches with "half-fearful amusement").\(^5\) As an omniscient spectator, the patchwork girl suggests that the female creature and her "hijinks" were not written, denied "life" in representation, because of their incompatibility with the "wrought iron flourishes of her prose." The oxymoronic contrast of materiality and movement in "wrought iron
flourishes" conjures an image of swirly paisley contained by prison bars. By describing Shelley's "prose" in these contradictory terms, this image gestures towards *Patchwork Girl*s "polemical" theory of *Frankenstein*—a theory of how the novel formally manifests the contradictions of its literary production. The hyperfiction contends that Shelley's original intentions for her novel were imprisoned by her patriarchal social reality. Yet, we can glimpse these intentions in the novel's "negative spaces"—the traces of what goes unsaid in its prose.

Throughout *Frankenstein*'s literary production, Mary's husband Percy, her father, and numerous other male actors including printers and publishers both directly and indirectly altered whatever story its original conception—its urtext—might have held. We do not have this urtext: the "foul papers" that Mary wrote during July and August of 1816. On these long-lost pages, Mary recorded the "grim terrors of [a] waking dream" inspired by a night of ghost stories during her and Percy's infamous vacation in Geneva with Lord Byron. Patchwork Girl imagines this urtext as an early draft of *Frankenstein* in which the female creature actually has a fleshed-out narrative existence. The hyperfiction weaves this urtext-myth as the conjectural ground of its intervention into the novel's patriarchally imprisoned monster-myth. Historically, this conjecture is not unsubstantiated. Thus, a brief history of *Frankenstein*'s literary production will illuminate how this mythic urtext and its patriarchal imprisonment constitute crucial pillars of Patchwork Girl's architext—the textual constellation through which the hyperfiction extracts its monstrous protagonist in a blur of corporeal and textual (re)assembly.

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**SHELLEY'S HIDEOUS PROGENY, A POLEMICAL THEORY**

The earliest available version of *Frankenstein* is the 1816-1817 Bodleian manuscript—the version on which the novel's first edition, published in 1818, is based.
In a comparative study of this manuscript and the novel's first edition, Charles E. Robinson finds that Mary's husband Percy contributed between 4,000 and 5,000 words to the 72,000 word text and made organizational edits including the arrangement of chapters.\footnote{According to Anne K. Mellor, even though Percy tended to impose "his own favorite philosophical, political, and poetic theories" in "revisions that distorted Mary's intentions and ideas," the majority of his edits were stylistic. He essentially transposed his wife's straightforward, often colloquial writing into a style Mellor characterizes as "stilted, ornate, [and] putatively Ciceronian" with a "preference for more learned, polysyllabic terms."} According to Anne K. Mellor, even though Percy tended to impose "his own favorite philosophical, political, and poetic theories" in "revisions that distorted Mary's intentions and ideas," the majority of his edits were stylistic. He essentially transposed his wife's straightforward, often colloquial writing into a style Mellor characterizes as "stilted, ornate, [and] putatively Ciceronian" with a "preference for more learned, polysyllabic terms."\footnote{In Frankenstein's second edition, published in 1823, 123 word changes were made by either Mary's father William Godwin or a printer.} In Frankenstein's second edition, published in 1823, 123 word changes were made by either Mary's father William Godwin or a printer.\footnote{Subsequently, adaptations of Frankenstein for the stage and a variety of chapbooks appeared until, on Halloween in 1831, its first "popular" edition was published. With extensive editing by Mary herself, this text is the most commonly read version today and the version that Jackson sets Patchwork Girl in relation to. In its Introduction, Shelley famously refers to the text as her "hideous progeny" and bids it "go forth and prosper."} From Patchwork Girl's vantage, this conflation of text and the monster written within is not mere wordplay. The 1831 edition of Frankenstein is the "hideous progeny" of fifteen years of writing misshapen by masculine hands and scarred by the deaths of Mary's children and husband, as well as a string of betrayals largely precipitated by her father and other men.\footnote{Patchwork Girl approaches the 1831 as an amalgamation of this maternal torment and patriarchal violence. It contends that the "paisley" of Mary's artistic genius—her intention to bring the female creature fully to life—was imprisoned within the "wrought iron" patriarchal structure of this social reality.}
In the three lexias following the default path after "she," *Patchwork Girl* elaborates this "polemical" theory of the female creature's destruction. The lexia "basket" invokes Mary's "hideous progeny" fusion of corporeal and textual creation. It connects imagery of the gory, abandoned remains of the female creature in Dr. Frankenstein's workshop to a scene in which Mary works in a "reverie" on the urtext manuscript pages of *Frankenstein* (fig. 1.3.).

Indeed, there were remains—unused lengths of venous plumbing, fatty trimmings, deleted passages, a page that blew off a table in the garden where a rock imperfectly anchored an untidy slew of manuscript pages while she wandered in a reverie, attending only dimly the disquisitions of one of the philosophical friends of the household. Percy himself excised parts he found blemished. Yet the child lived. Lives.

Has it not struck you as odd that the whole of a female of stature commensurate with that of her monstrous intended (not to mention a 'great quantity of stones') could be hoisted by one man and borne out to sea—in a basket?

In her 1831 Introduction, Mary recounts precisely such a scene in which, as "a devout but silent listener," she overheard discussions of "various scientific doctrines" including an experiment in which Erasmus Darwin animated "a piece of vermicelli in a glass case." It was this overheard account of scientific life-giving which lead Mary, that very night, to imagine *Frankenstein*'s myth of techno-scientific monster creation. The lexia "basket" figuratively links the novel's mythic urtext with the female creature's remains, and makes its accusation that from this urtext, "Percy himself excised parts he found blemished." This gesture imagines a schema of *Frankenstein*'s ideation in which Percy's subjectivity is both the initial gateway of Mary's knowledge and its ultimate gateway: a circumscribing masculine *constriction* of her textual expression.
Then, in a sentence linked to the adjacent lexia "scam," the patchwork girl narrates aloud, "Has it not struck you as odd that the whole of a female of stature commensurate with that of her monstrous intended (not to mention 'a great quantity of stones') could be hoisted by one man and borne out to sea—in a basket?" Referring to the scene in which Dr. Frankenstein tosses the female creature's remains into the ocean, this lexia poses a cutting rhetorical question of plot-plausibility. The female creature's destruction and disposal in Frankenstein are so violent and rapid that, under close scrutiny, they do appear to wrinkle the novel's reality effect. Moreover, if we take the pronoun of the phrase "her monstrous intended" not to point to the female creature as the male creature's intended mate—merely an instrumentalized object—and instead take this "she" to point to Mary and her intention to write the female creature into existence, we discover this sentence's symbolic, twofold meaning. It is both a critical description of the violently misogynistic implications of this plot event and a latent affirmation of the monstrous "female of stature" of its excised content. This sentence presents the hyperfiction's "polemical" theory in capsule form, giving us a glimpse of the patchwork girl as the "paisley in its negative spaces," but only once we are attuned to how the mark of gender structures our reading of the text, determining what meanings can and cannot come to "life" therein.

Clicking through this microcosmic sentence's hyperlink, we find ourselves in the adjacent lexia "scam," reading: "That's right: it was a cover-up, a scam, a lie." This accusatory revelation appears whether or not we click this hyperlink, since there is already a default path between these lexias. Yet, the hyperlink makes our click and its lightning-fast flicker between lexias affect the revelation of Percy's misogynistic text edit. Here, within the palimpsestuously blurred fictional world of this string of lexias—hypertextually grafted onto Frankenstein and barbed with metatextual critique—our
click concretizes *Patchwork Girl's* fictive world and protagonist with a negative gesture that is necessarily positive, animating the possibility of an urtext in which Mary actually writes the female creature into existence. We begin to bring the patchwork girl to "life" from behind the "double thickness of letters and second-hand accounts… precautions [that] were needed to secure the monster behind those locks and screens," as she omnisciently describes in "real M.," the last lexia of the "story" zone.

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**CASTRATION, FROM PATH TO WEB**

The patchwork girl is an intervention into *Frankenstein's* discourse of feminine monstrosity that emerges hypertextually from its urtextual root. This urtext is *Patchwork Girl's* means of transforming the novel's patriarchally imprisoned monster-myth into the myth of the patchwork girl: a gateway through which we may follow the "path" not taken in Shelley's novel. Yet, the idea of a divergent path does not adequately express the patchwork girl's emergence from *Frankenstein*. Mellor notes that "From the perspective of deconstructive criticism, *Frankenstein* exemplifies what Kristeva has called ‘the questionable subject-in-process,’ both a text and an author without stable boundaries." If the history of *Frankenstein's* creation illuminates any myths of literary production, they are the monolithic "work" and "author." By bidding her "hideous progeny go forth and prosper," Shelley herself reflects on the the monstrous multiplicity of her work—a *patchwork*. Accordingly, *Patchwork Girl* reanimates her novel as a text—a *motion* of cutting across various manuscripts and editions influenced by many (masculine) hands. Only in this way is the hyperfiction able to critically illuminate and penetrate the patriarchal imprisonment that secures its conjecture of the female creature's monstrous, latent content "behind locks and screens."
The patchwork girl's characterization is not a path apart from *Frankenstein*. Rather, the hyperfiction characterizes her as an *immanence*: a monstrous plural lurking in the "negative spaces" of Shelley’s novel that has been banished, as Barthes would say, from the realm of the text’s "true, canonical meaning." She is the "paisley" connotation hovering behind the "wrought iron" of *Frankenstein* patronymic denotation.62 *Frankenstein*’s urtext is merely a myth that lets us discover this monstrous plural, extracting it from the connotative/denotative gnarl of the "hideous progeny" written by the novel’s *distributed authorship*. The hyperfiction leverages its digital hypertext form as a critical but celebratory metamorphosis of the novel’s imprisoned feminine monstrosity, allowing its "paisley" to branch hypertextually beyond (but inevitably through) its prison bars.

On *Patchwork Girl’s* title page, this gesture appears in microcosmic form (fig 1.4). The byline "BY MARY/SHELLEY, & HERSELF" offers no explicit authorial attribution. Instead, it plays on the coincidence of Shelley Jackson and Mary Shelley’s names to present a concise formulation of the patchwork girl’s characterization. "SHELLEY" signifies as Mary’s patronymic and Jackson’s forename, which together signify in opposition to "MARY" because of the slash mark dividing them. This notation invokes what Barthes calls the *paradigmatic slash*: the "wall of Antithesis" that "permits meaning to function."63 This paradigmatic split of "MARY" and "SHELLEY" appears throughout the hyperfiction in the patchwork girl’s reference to her author-creator as "M/S." Indeed, the single space of the "story" zone bears this title.64

Further, in the lexia "interrupting D," found in the top right corner of the cavernous "broken accents" zone, the patchwork girl exclaims, "I, on the other hand, have adopted a nominal mother (M/S) who is more like a midwife, and spring unparented from my own past selves." Here, the patchwork girl is interrupting Jacques
Derrida—literally inserting herself into his text—to contest his assertion that "As a living thing, logos issues from the father." In between the patchwork girl's interruption, Derrida is explaining his diagnostic concept of phallogocentrism: a synthesis of "phallus" and "logocentrism" that refers to the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning. Thus, the patchwork girl poses herself—her text, her body—as a contradiction to this masculine structure of meaning and its teleological insistence on "telling as absolute truth one and only one story about reality." Her chimeric body—an assemblage of the remains of many other individuals—is a rebuttal against phallogocentrism's telos of monadic truth. With no unified point of origin, only Mary Shelley/Shelley Jackson as an authorial "midwife" that mediates her many
"births" from the languages of other texts, the patchwork girl embodies the myth of a "living thing" whose existence circumvents the Father and his logos.

The mythic urtext of Frankenstein is not the patchwork girl's monadic truth. It is not a pure, originary essence but a means of illuminating the monstrous multiplicity of Frankenstein's literary production. Indeed, we find a resonance between the patchwork girl's "nominal mother (M/S)" and the abbreviation "MS," which, as Hayles notes in her reading of Patchwork Girl, stands for "'original' material text in normal editorial notation." Thus, the paradigmatic slash's denoted bifurcation of "MARY" from "SHELLEY" also connotes a manuscript—Frankenstein's mythic urtext—which, animated into meaning by Patchwork Girl, splits free from its patriarchal imprisonment. This is the severing, transformative gesture of Patchwork Girl's "polemical" theory: to extract the female creature from this imprisonment—Mary from Shelley—so that she may be transformed into the third term of this byline: "& HERSELF." In contrast to the negativity of the paradigmatic slash between "MARY" and "SHELLEY," this third term is positive; its ampersand extracts the patchwork girl from the preceding opposition to incarnate her within the shell of the pronoun "HERSELF." While she inhabits this third term, she does so only as a connotative infiltration. Via its nominal, reflexive ambiguity, the patchwork girl shirks the phallogocentric, liberal humanist pitfall of being the singular "author" of herself by assimilating into a proper name.

For Barthes, the paradigmatic slash's function is immediately negative, a force of opposition, yet necessarily positive and generative. It allows meaning to function through antithesis. As the third term, the patchwork girl produces the antithesis of "MARY/SHELLEY" as she emerges from it. "& HERSELF" marks the severing of Mary from her patronymic and a disruption of the phallogocentric paradigm this
represents. Indeed, this byline presents the patchwork girl as the mark of a *castration crisis* in Shelley’s text. In Lacanian psycholinguistics, castration marks the moment of crisis when the phallogocentric subject realizes that their subjectivity is premised on *absence*—i.e. that their *presence*, their meaningful self-importance, is not true in itself, but based solely on the negativity of their opposition to the other. The female creature’s destruction in *Frankenstein* is the moment of castration crisis when the "meaningfulness" of her character within the novel congeals. She amounts to nothing more than a pile of charnel remains; the castrating gesture that creates her meaning in Shelley’s text is an act of *abjection*.

When Dr. Frankenstein realizes that bringing the the female creature to life might pose a threat to "the existence of the whole human race," he is taken by "a sensation of madness." In her patchwork feminine body, he encounters the Kristevian symptom of the abject: "a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster." Faced with this terrifying nothingness, he rips her limb from limb. She is unmade, "unwritten." This abjection is motivated by a relation of bodies: how the male and female creatures’ reproduction of monstrous bodies would destroy humanity. Thus, the female creature’s destruction is an act of castrating the male creature in a corporeal sense: preventing him from reproducing. Barthes describes this "banal," corporeal castration and the "structural bearing" of its psycholinguistic counterpart:

The banal definition of being-castrated ("You who can give life to nothing") thus has a structural bearing, it concerns not merely the aesthetic duplication of bodies (the "copy" of realist art) but also the metonymic force of its generality: the fundamental crime of disaster ("Monster!") is in fact to interrupt the circulation of (aesthetic or biological) copies, to disturb the controlled permeability of meanings, their concatenation, which is classification and repetition, as with language. Itself metonymic (and with what power!), castration jams all metonymy: the chains of art and life are broken.
Dr. Frankenstein’s abjection of the female creature is also his "banal" castration of her intended mate: a "disruption" of his intent to instrumentalize her as a means of obtaining a social-reproductive existence. But, following Barthes, we can extract ourselves from this banality to consider castration in the "structural bearing" of its psycholinguistic concept: how an exclamation of "Monster!" marks castration via its futile attempt to name what cannot be named, the presence that is pure absence: "Monster!"

*Patchwork Girl* locates itself within the psycholinguistic crisis of Shelley’s text to extract the "metonymic force of its generality": the monstrous, feminine force that breaks the "chains of art and life" within *Frankenstein* because it yields only a failure of naming and charnel remains. The hyperfiction contends that the female creature’s "structural bearing" in *Frankenstein* is a monstrous threat to not only its surface-level elements of plot and thematics, but to the "controlled permeability of meanings" of its phallogocentric language and codex form.

Returning to the lexia "she" (fig. 1.2), we find this logic of the patchwork girl’s characterization against castration (but *through* it, even so) when she asserts herself as more than just a transtextual reference to Shelley’s novel. The male creature believes that he needs a female companion "To be linked to the chain of existence and events," and the patchwork girl assents to this basic condition of existence (indeed, a condition of *narrative* existence), but with a marked suspicion of the language. She assents to being "linked," but refuses to be "bound" by this "chain": "No," the she exclaims, "I forge my own links, I am building my own monstrous chain, and as time goes on, perhaps it will begin to resemble, rather, a web" ("she"). Inflected with imagery of hyperlinking, this lexia illuminates the centrality of digital hypertext to the anti-phallogocentric myth of the patchwork girl. It is on this ground that the
hyperfiction couples the social critique of its intervention into Shelley’s novel with a conjecture of literary form: the female creature’s "life" was stinted not only by 

*Frankenstein’s* patriarchally imprisoned literary propduction, but was limited even more fundamentally by the phallogocentric paradigm of its codex book form.

Jackson contends that digital hypertext offers a transformative alternative to the literary-technological paradigm of the codex book. In her 1997 essay "Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl," she makes this socio-formal theory explicit:

The banished body is not female, necessarily, but it is feminine. That is, it is amorphous, indirect, impure, diffuse, multiple, evasive. So is what we have learned to call bad writing. Good writing is direct, effective, clean as a bleached bone. Bad writing is all flesh, and dirty flesh at that… Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine… Hypertext then, is what literature has edited out: the feminine.75

For Jackson, representation of a feminine subject like the patchwork girl is what has been scorned throughout history as "bad writing” and excised from the "literary.” If this "banished" feminine subject is to be assimilated into literary representation as a character, Jackson asks, how does its "bad writing" become legible as "flesh" without being reduced to the "bleached bone" of phallogocentric "Good writing?" It becomes flesh in digital hypertext, and *Patchwork Girl* is Jackson’s performative exploration of this "polemical" theory.

The myth of the patchwork girl is this theory’s vehicle. Extracted from the abject female creature's "pre-nominal" and "pre-objectal" "structural bearing" within *Frankenstein’s* phallogocentric terms of representation,76 *Patchwork Girl* attempts to give her a name and an object: a form of text in which her "flesh" can begin to emerge. In its metamorphosis of the female creature, the hyperfiction inscribes the distributed authorship of poststructuralist textuality within the body and subjectivity of the
patchwork girl because it attempts to represent her by *being* her—assuming her monstrosity by incarnating her as a cyborg: a hypertext-as-body.
2 | **INCARNATION**

**MUTATION: THE REASSEMBLED BODY**

the subject knows the female body only as a division and dissemination of partial objects: leg, breast, shoulder, neck, hands. Fragmented Woman is the object offered... and although the finally reassembled woman is actually there before him, near enough to touch, this redeeming body remains a fictive one.

Roland Barthes, *S/Z*

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**FROM MONSTER TO CYBORG**

An antagonism towards technoscience marks late-twentieth-century feminist thought. Donna Haraway’s 1984 "Cyborg Manifesto" challenges this antagonism and its premise that technoscientific "social practices, symbolic formulations, and physical artifacts" necessarily deepen dualisms of "mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism." Against conceding to the "necessary domination of technics" or organizing resistance premised on the return to "an imagined organic body," Haraway introduces a "slightly perverse shift of perspective" towards the (possible) subjectivity of the cyborg: "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." Haraway argues that technoscience cannot be transcended, but must be worked through in progressive contradiction, its tools put to work exposing and subverting dualisms the split subject from object, humans from the environments that shape their social reality. As cyborgs, we are not unified subjects that transcend the nonhuman multiplicity of our technologized natural world. Our humanity is nominal, and tenuous. We are intermingling assemblages: chimeric entanglements of structurally coupled biotic and abiotic systems. As cyborgs, we are something like human; the term "posthuman" enters onto the scene.
Characterized by the assemblage's ontological framework of organizational and functional fluidity, the cyborg subverts the ideas of unity and transcendence that have historically grounded the various formations of the liberal humanist subject. Within liberal humanism's vast complex of ideologies, the cyborg targets a particular strand: a culture whose racist and sexist conceptions of the human rise from its radical split from and self-privileged over nature. This ideology has historically relegated people of color, women, and other subalterns to the less-than human status of nature: a domain of the monstrous and the abject that the human subject alone may transcend. A cyborg subjectivity is radically enmeshed in this domain, untranscendent. It is accountable to its environment: the material-semiotic assemblage of its nature-culture. Haraway contends that a cyborgian perspective on the world makes new patterns of critical thought and desirable historical transformation possible by destabilizing dualisms of organism/machine and body/technology.

In this way, the "ironic political myth" of the cyborg proposes a politically desirable yet inherently contradictory subjectivity: a feminist-constructivist framework within which technology might find a non-instrumental reconciliation with the body. The cyborg inhabits technology and the body's socio-historical antagonism out of necessity because, as Haraway argues, "Liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility." Haraway objects to the feminist-essentialist impulse of many "progressive political people" to search for a unified, organic essence that predates technology's instrumental relations with the body—particularly the female body. A cyborg subjectivity embraces the contradictions of the present as the necessarily scarred, but not passively accepting, ground of theory and practice.
On these constructivist premises, Haraway’s "ironic political myth" is a generic welding of "science fiction" and "social reality" that opens up a space for a cyborg subjectivity within a 1980s cultural imaginary that might otherwise dismiss its analytic power as a mere futurist fantasy. Haraway argues that the speculative cyborg futures of science fiction, stripped of their macho-futurist sheen, offer us a productive grammar with which to theorize and practice feminisms amid the awesome and terrible contradictions of Late Capitalism's techno-culture. Indeed, the cyborg is only available to us as a concept and, via Haraway, a speculative subjectivity because of this monstrous techno-culture. As a way of understanding this monstrosity and finding revolutionary agency within it, the cyborg entails an epistemic shift, a heightened sensibility to the (im)materialities of this techno-culture's infrastructure.

Haraway calls this infrastructure *informatics*: information technology and the biological, social, linguistic, and cultural changes necessarily coupled with it. The cyborg is enmeshed in and, Haraway contends, accountable to informatics because, by nature of its concept, its "self" is not ontologically distinct from its technology. Via screen, fingertip, running shoe, optic nerve, etc., the cyborg is permeable to and constituted by the (im)material flows of Late Capitalism's globally-networked hyperspace. Science fiction and social reality find a fruitful coupling in the cyborg because its techno-science is here—its total repudiation is out of the picture—and its entanglement with the body must be accounted for in responsibly embodied ways. Haraway argues that the cyborg is a perspective well-situated to account for the entangled, prostheticized lives we find ourselves living in a hyper-technologized world.

The implications of Haraway's cyborg are many within the myth-complex invoked by *Frankenstein*—and by hypertextual proxy, *Patchwork Girl*. We might
consider "Cyborg Manifesto" to be a kind of intermediate hypertext that shapes the politics of *Patchwork Girl*'s hypertextual "uptake" of *Frankenstein*. The linkage is clear as Haraway proclaims: "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden—that is, through fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and a cosmos." The patchwork girl is mutation of *Frankenstein*'s patriarchal terms of Edenic feminine origination. She embodies a transformative rebuttal of the female creature's total contingency on the male creature's instrumentalizing demand for her existence. Like *Frankenstein*'s female creature, extracted and incarnated as the patchwork girl, the Harawayan cyborg's origination is impure and non-innocent; grotesque and technological, it is an anti-Eden—devoid of a holistic and heterosexual originary essence.

Emerging from the "hurly burley of minced flesh and blood" of *Frankenstein*'s castration crisis, *Patchwork Girl* is a literary performance of cyborgian subject-formation. It animates the Harawayan cyborg's paradigmatic collapse of the opposition between machine and organism in a formal experiment that collapses text into body, merging the character of its protagonist with the machine of its text. In this chapter, we will explore how *Patchwork Girl* approaches this paradigmatic collapse as a project of cyborg-writing, characterizing the patchwork girl as a hypertext-as-body: a myth that metamorphoses monster into cyborg.

**Body in Time-Space and Text**

*Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing speaks to and against a complex history of experimental, body-centric representation in literature. We find one of the most influential accounts of this in Mikhail Bakhtin's 1937 essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." Bakhtin explores how the sixteenth-century writer François
Rabelais characterizes a monstrous body as the organizing core of his novel's meaning-making system and, in turn, the site of his broader political project to cast this body as the ground of a revolutionary, Enlightenment subjectivity—much as Haraway's cyborg might be considered a revolutionary subjectivity for our Late Capitalist conjuncture. Bakhtin's critical distillation of Rabelais's project offers a consonant (and generatively dissonant) framework for understanding *Patchwork Girl*'s hypertext-as-body characterization of its protagonist.

Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" describes the structured process of how texts assimilate real historical time and space into literary representation. In the chronotope, "Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history." A chronotope is a text's most essential machine element. It determines just about everything in narrative, setting limits on and seeding tendencies within a text's possibilities of representation. By tracing the dialectical unfolding of different chronotopes as they appear throughout literary history, Bakhtin produces a typology of textual machines. He finds that the development new types of chronotopes markedly reflect conjunctures of radical epistemic-cultural shift in Western civilization. Indeed, Bakhtin's formulation of the chronotope is itself notably shaped by his own historical conjuncture. This insight, integrated with Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais, will draw certain socio-formal dimensions of *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing into historical context and frame them for further exploration in this prosthesis. Reading Bakhtin through *Patchwork Girl* lets us see just how disruptive digital hypertext can be within twentieth-century literary theory.

Bakhtin locates what he considers the apex of literary time-space representation in Rabelais's 16th-century pentalogy *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. The
novel's eponymous protagonists mediate a phantasmagoria of grotesque action as their monstrous bodies are guided by the "definite direction" of the "Rabelasian chronotope": "to 'embody' the world, to materialize it, to tie everything into spatial and temporal series, to measure everything on the scale of the human body, to construct—on that space where the destroyed picture of the world had been—a new picture."87

The Rabelasian chronotope posits this "new picture" of the world as a rejection of the dominant, co-dependent ideologies that had ordered the medieval world: feudal class relations and the Christian teleology of human existence. Gargantua and Pantagruel's unbounded physical relation to the world shows that the potential of the human is not determined by transcendent, eschatological status—the Church's consolation for feudal oppression—but by corporeality alone: the worldly, untranscendent body. In Bakhtin's reading, the corporeally-shaped time and space of Rabelais's text subverts the ascetic other-worldliness of medieval ideology, collapsing its schism between the transcendent word of the Church and the worldly body.

When Bakhtin describes the subversive "body-matrix" constructed by the Rabelasian chronotope, he characterizes it as an entirely textual phenomenon: a reassembly of the human subject "first and foremost, via a verbal matrix."88 On the level of this verbal invocation of the body, Patchwork Girl's transtextual re-linking of Frankenstein's world immediately resonates with the Rabelasian chronotope. Beyond this immediacy, however, the hyperfiction re-links the female creature's "body-matrix" in a way that critically updates our understanding Bakhtin's concept.

The hyperfiction complicates the terms Bakhtin's argument that the Rabelasian chronotope's feat of "[structuring] the entire picture of the world around the human conceived as a body... is the completely unrestricted, universal chronotope of human life."89 On these terms, literature can only represent "human life" in its "unrestricted,
universal” form by posing the human body as the index of the entire world—the
determining gateway of meaning. *Patchwork Girl* animates this theory by casting its
protagonist’s body as the gateway of its meaning-making system. Yet, the patchwork
girl’s corporeal logic is not limited to *verbal* expression. The hyperfiction situates her
body more entirely at the root of its narrative assimilation of time and space by
structuring both its verbal matrix and its *medial* matrix according to her corporeal
logic—a logic of cyborgian assemblage.

The patchwork girl’s characterization re-links *Frankenstein* (and other texts, as we will see) through a verbal/medial “body-matrix” that we might think of as a
cyborgian update to the terms of Bakhtin’s chronotope—particularly its superlative,
Rabelasian form. The hyperfiction’s cyborg-writing fleshes out an essential criterion of
the chronotope: any text’s assimilation of real historical time and space necessarily
shapes meaning that is verbal *only* insofar as it is medial. In this way, the patchwork
girl’s hypertext-as-body draws Bakhtin’s chronotope into more complex discourses of
materiality, technology, and gender than accounted for in its original formulation.

It is clear that a more radical theory of the chronotope would account for the
technology of literature itself and the forms of literary production and consumption it
determines. Bakhtin begins to recognize this in a 1973 "Concluding Remarks"
addendum to his original 1937 essay. He reflects on the "external material being of the
work" and its "purely external composition" which, although made of "dead material,"
"is not dead… is speaking, signifying." Thus, the previously invisible materiality of the
paratext begins to appear. The "external material being of the work" is no longer a
passive stage for the difference of inscription. Meaning is immanent to the medium,
and—as *Patchwork Girl* shows—so is a politics.
The corporeality and "human life" Bakhtin refers to throughout his essay is unmarked in its masculinity; considering the historical context, his language is unsurprisingly patronymic. Lauren Berlant characterizes the "grotesque realism" Bakhtin formulates in relation to literature like the Rabelaisian novel "as a political aesthetic that uses bodily excess to refuse the composure of power... [because] its appetites call normative power's reason out as a lie, as desire masked by an image of itself as owning greater symmetry and perfection." So much is true, yet, Bakhtin's account of the "grotesque realism" in Rabelais is itself a masculine "composure of power." In its unmarked masculinity, the revolutionary body at the center of the Rabelasian chronotope begs the question of the "unrestricted" and "universal" "human life" it supposedly represents. *Patchwork Girl* undercuts the "composure" of the Rabelasian chronotope's unmarked medium and masculinity by characterizing its protagonist as a feminine body that stages a "re-linking of the world" not only via immaterial verbal signification, but via a materialist reflection on its own "flesh" at the level of the medial-as-corporeal.

When Bakhtin describes the action of the chronotope as a hallucinatory phenomenon in which "Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible," we sense the paradigmatic gap in his metaphor: the unaccounted-for medial "flesh" of any text that, in Bakhtin's formulation, does not actually become "artistically visible" as we read. Moreover, even the most "unrestricted" and "universal" form of Bakhtin's chronotopic flesh still bears the masculine "composure" of his patronymic theorization. In *Patchwork Girl*, these immanent yet previously invisible facets of the chronotope jump to the forefront of its meaning-making system. Its chronotopic "flesh" marks itself as *flesh* and as *feminine*—"dirty flesh at that," as Jackson would say. The hyperfiction's cyborg-writing takes the suggestive generality of Bakhtin's "flesh"
metaphor as a practical problematic: How can literary characterization bridge the paradigmatic gap between body and text?

A HEADSTONE, SLIPPING AND FLICKERING

Across Patchwork Girl’s multicursal zones, a motif that aligns corporeal and textual assembly combines with symbolically shaped visual-tactile experiences of navigating digital hypertext to guide the reader across along this paradigmatic bridge, approaching the collapse of text into body. The lexia "graveyard," an epigraph to the "graveyard" zone, orients us within this motif: "I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself." This lexia primes us to the blurring of corporeal and textual assembly we find in "headstone," the first lexia of the "graveyard" zone (fig. 2.1).

The "headstone" lexia schematizes an opposition of body and text across the map and text windows to transform the Storyspace interface into simulation-stage for this opposition’s paradigmatic collapse. The map window displays a cross-section view of the patchwork girl’s grave with her body parts buried beneath it. The text window, read
under the connotative sway of the lexia's title, is clearly a headstone inscription. Naturally, we encounter this first as a form of intertextuality—the quotation of a headstone inscription. Yet, when we consider it spatially, the stark rectangle of a headstone flickers into view. This cohesion of verbal sign and medial space precipitates what I will call a textual punctum: the reflexive point at which a text's medial technology appears suddenly as an irreducible component of the text’s meaning. The "headstone" lexia is the organizing nexus of a textual punctum that spans the "graveyard" zone and stages a particularly striking "birth" of the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body.

I derive this concept of the textual punctum from Barthes's punctum: the spontaneously arresting prick of some element within a photograph that, in its absolute, affective particularity to the viewer, breaks through the studium: the viewer's received aesthetic-political concepts of the art of photography. Barthes formulates this punctum/studium distinction specifically for photography—explicitly against the experience of text, so, inevitably, my appropriation of it does violence to its concept. Yet, the "headstone" lexia pricks us with precisely this violence of "category error." In the textual punctum's moment of vertiginous reflexivity, text slips into image only to skid out of the realm of reference and appear to us as an object—pure referent. This is a movement of hallucinatory sublation, of the machine of the text suddenly producing for us, the operator, a vivid and expressive congelation of verbal sign and medium that pulls us out of reading to simply look.

A textual punctum is an intentionally realized device that mutates what we might think of as our textual studium; it reorganizes the apperceptive structures that normally guide our meaningful hallucination of verbal signs. The "headstone" lexia's disjunctive use of enjambment clearly exhibits this structured, mutative quality.
Buoyed by the disorienting deictic parentheticals "Right and Left," this enjambment derails our left-to-right reading and forces us to consider the text window as a signifying spatial whole. Thus our textual *studium*, which hems us into the left-to-right syntax of normal reading, strains and mutates. Our eyes, untethered, are left with the less rigidly structured visual field of image syntax. We slip from verbal sign into image. This mutative slippage is violent: It is violence against text, textualized, and it possesses an inertia (a contagious disorientation, perhaps) that precipitates the image's paradigmatic skid into the self-referential signification of an object. Our otherwise fluid operation of text congeals when a textual *punctum* compels a book to "book" itself, or, in our case, a screen to "screen" itself, flickering before us as a *screenic headstone*.

A textual *punctum*’s vertiginous reflexivity necessarily effects meaningful violence against its own text. The meaning of the "headstone" lexia’s violence to our textual *studium* is co-emergent with our experience of navigating the entirety of the "graveyard" zone. Likely, this experience begins with the default path from the "headstone" lexia to the lowermost lexia "out," which reads: "Burdened with body parts, your fingernails packed with mud and chips of bone, you slink out of the graveyard. A kind of resurrection has taken place." Compelled by this gruesome prolepsis, we backtrack to the "headstone" lexia or turn to the map window, intent on unearthing the meaning of these "body parts" before we "slink out of the graveyard." By either clicking on the hyperlinked words of body parts in the "headstone" lexia or selecting lexia—that is, excavating body parts—from the map window, we piece together the patchwork girl’s body. All of the lexias in the "graveyard" zone except for the "headstone" lexia describe the past lives the patchwork girl’s body parts—the
corporeal ticks and tendencies of their original owners—to stage a clear, allegorical expression of her "distributed authorship."

As we explore the patchwork girl's history through these accounts of her body's past "owners," a paradoxical sense of temporality arises. While on one hand, the lexia "headstone" reflexively propels itself into what we might consider the "paratextual present"—the right now of our textual punctum experience of it as a screenic headstone, we are subsequently drawn into the fragmented, imagined pasts of the patchwork girl's fictive world. The "graveyard" zone compounds this temporal oscillation because its default path returns us to the "headstone" lexia after each of our encounters with another lexia (a body part, a shard of self). This arborescent hypertext structure has a single beginning and end in a screenic headstone. As if diving into the patchwork girl's grave and clawing ourselves back out to surface beside the headstone standing over it, we are constantly forced to draw ourselves out of the patchwork girl's fictive pasts and, "burdened with body parts," confront the stark, paratextual present of the "headstone" lexia.

When this screenic headstone repeatedly uproots us from the fictive past of a given body-part lexia, we excavate ourselves from our own readerly hallucination of verbal signs. Of course, (re)reading in this hallucinatory loop, we are merely excavating the body of the patchwork girl: her hypertext-as-body is the vehicle of this mutative reading-ritual. With each flicker between the depths of the patchwork girl's grave and the sheer screenic surface of her "headstone," we integrate the verbal matrix which describes her patchwork body and identity into the hyperfiction's broader medial matrix. Her character emerges for us throughout the "graveyard zone" as a motion cutting across multiple verbal, fictional pasts into a screenic, flickering now. Under the influence of this paradigmatic skid through a text-image-object mediality,
we encounter the cyborg myth of the patchwork girl in the hallucinatory immediacy of her flickering hypertext-as-body.  

While this collapse of text into body is most explicitly orchestrated in the "graveyard" zone, it remains an ambient constant across the entire network structure of Patchwork Girl's multicursal zones. By various means of verbal/medial entanglement, a motif that aligns corporeal and textual assembly constantly induces our skid into a screenic paratextual present. We might think of the entire, multicursal tangle of the "graveyard," "quilt," "journal," "story," and "broken accents" zones as an elaborately orchestrated textual punctum device. The "graveyard" zone is simply a microcosmic instantiation. Navigating these zones, we become increasingly sensible to Patchwork Girl's strategic collapse of text into body as it compels us to assume new modes of readerly hallucination in which text "takes on flesh." We are intermittently jolted by pangs of recognition, that this—the screenic presence of the hyperfiction before us—is a body.

READING, SEWING, QUILTING, FLOWING

Like the "graveyard" zone, Patchwork Girl's "quilt" zone orchestrates this collapse of text into body by encouraging looping patterns of reading that mutate our textual studium. As parts of this multicursal tangle, the "graveyard" and "quilt" zones stage the "birth" of the patchwork girl's in different ways because their respective structures of hypertextual organization encourage different patterns of reading. While the "graveyard zone" has an arborescent hypertext structure, the "quilt" zone is built with layered hypertext that encourages looping patterns of reading not among lexias but within each lexia's fragment of text. In this way, the "quilt" zone interrogates the ideology that shapes our reading. It allegorically mutates our textual studium to render the cyborg myth of the patchwork girl as a corpus, a textual-corporeal constellation.
The "quilt" zone's map window displays a schematic representation of a multicolored quilt. There is no default path through this zone. Each lexia presents us with a choice of two hyperlinks: We must click either its hyperlinked body text or the hyperlinked line of hyphens beneath it, as in the zone's first lexia, "scrap bag" (fig 2.2).

Here, an enigmatic narrator seems to bear some kind of author-creator relation to a "girl" whom we might assume to be the female creature or the patchwork girl. With the patchwork girl's distributed authorship in mind, this narrator's voice hovers connotatively between Dr. Frankenstein and Mary Shelley (and Shelley Jackson, inevitably). The bizarre list of "materials necessary" for this narrator's "new creation" only thickens the enigma of their identity. When we click through the hyperlinked body text with hopes of attaining some solution, it mutates. We encounter what appears to be an "alternate reality" of the "quilt" zone. The multicolored lexia in the map window turn a stark, default monochrome, and the text window mutates into a jarring array of character styles with what appear to be bullet-point citations below (fig. 2.3).
The "quilt" zone's enigma yields to epiphany. It is a "quilt" of text that has been stitched together with scraps from other works, and we may loop into its bibliographically annotated layer at any time by clicking on a lexia’s body text. Every lexia in the "quilt" zone lets us pull back the veil of authorial originality we instinctually cast over its text to "reveal" the multiplicity of its architext: the transcendent "secret" of its literary production materialized in the layer below. While bibliographic citation of excerpted text occurs sporadically throughout the rest of Patchwork Girl, the "quilt" zone pushes intertextual bricolage to its limit to leverage the effects of source citation or its lack—its modulation of the "texture" of text—on our textual studium.
As we progress from lexia to lexia in the "quilt" zone, its patchwork verbal material and layered hypertext structure encourage a looping pattern of reading that disrupts our textual studium by counterposing our syntactic predilection for narrative coherence against our (ideological) affinity for authorial unity and literary "originality." To circumvent the annotated layer and progress from lexia to lexia, we may click on the hyperlinked line of hyphens that appears at the bottom of each lexia in the multicolored space. Like a seam sewn through each lexia, these hyphens allegorize our reading as a performative process of stitching together the textual "scraps" that constitute the multicolored quilt displayed in the map window.

This text/quilt allegory appears clearly in the "journal" zone's lexia "written," where Mary Shelley recounts how she had "made" the female creature by "writing deep into the night by candlelight, until the tiny black letters blurred into stitches and I began to feel that I was sewing a great quilt." Throughout the "journal" zone, writing and corporeal assembly blur into a single gesture that spans fictive worlds: the female creature emerges in text in Shelley's journal (Frankenstein's urtext manuscript) and in a flesh in Shelley's world (as Patchwork Girl fictionalizes it). This motif of body-writing concretizes the historically feminine labor of quilting as an operative metaphor, and the dotted line/stitch/suture as a central symbol, for Patchwork Girl's cyborg-writing.\footnote{101}

As a textile seam, a bodily suture, and a textual stitch composed of hyphens, the dotted line is the perforated paradigmatic slash that, in its symbolic flexibility across Patchwork Girl's medialities and fictive worlds, unites the hyperfiction's many leaky oppositions (while inevitably "dividing" them) within the schema of its hypertext-as-body. As we encounter it in the "quilt" zone, the dotted line is an opportunity. Every lexia in this zone poses a yes-no question, a binary choice: To draw
back the veil of illusive authorial unity by clicking on a lexia’s hyperlinked body text? 
Or, to circumvent the "quilt" zone’s annotated layer entirely and click on the stitch/suture-as-link to jump to the next lexia?

At first, reading in the "quilt" zone amounts to looping into and out of the annotated layer then clicking on a seam to move to the next lexia, and so forth. The clashing styles and disjointed sense of narrative in each lexia’s body text makes the action of looping into its annotated layer hard to resist. Once we know that Jackson has technically "written" none of the text in the "quilt" zone, the impulse to reveal each disjointed phrase’s "true" author is undeniable. So we click the body text and loop between layers, bridging the interstice between singular text and plural corpus with the lighting-fast jump of the hyperlink. Unlike the turn of a codex book’s page, the hyperlink spans a spatio-temporal gap that is beyond our perception. Then, may be the wrong metaphor for our reading. We are flickering between the "quilt" zone’s layers. This radically fragmented way of reading makes the story running through the "quilt" zone more difficult to understand. Comprehension of narrative in the ever-seductive annotated layer is especially difficult. To read from boldfaced text to normal text to italicized text is to apprehend each uniquely formatted excerpt as its own floating fragment. Sentences and phrases become atomized and disorientingly proprietary, impeding our integrative process of reading. A narrative aporia begins to yawn open before us, and our impulse to flicker between layers diminishes.

This disorienting textual "texture" is unmarked in the multicolored quilt space, but still apparent in the semantic distortion of each lexia’s disjointed tone and diction — the "difficulty" which drives us to the annotated layer in the first place. Facing narrative aporia in both of the "quilt" zone’s layers, we adapt. Our textual studium mutates, and we begin to read with a connotative soft-focus. If we are not driven to
abandon the "quilt" zone (satisfied, perhaps, with its clever fort/da approach to literary bricolage) and persevere elsewhere in our search for narrative, our reading becomes an extended act of reconciliation with its textual monstrosity. When we begin to flicker from lexia to lexia by means of the stitch/suture-as-link, intentionally avoiding the annotated layer, the "quilt" zone's narrative takes shape in the flow of our connotative soft-focus. Our connotative intuitions roam freely over its craggy text, drawing dissonant particulars into narrative focus, but only via our own impressionistic associations. We find that the "quilt" zone narrates the patchwork girl's creation and self-discovery—a story of her learning to embrace her monstrosity.

The vehicle of this self-discovery is the dotted line. It is the perforation along which we unfold the "quilt" zone's vaporous narrative, following the patchwork girl's metamorphosis from monster into a cyborgian unity-in-multiplicity. The "quilt" zone stages this "birth" of the patchwork girl through a processual re-shaping of our textual studium. By the time we finish reading the zone, its text is no longer monstrous to us but strange, new, and intimate; our connotations are the lubricant of its narrative. Its layered hypertext not only reveals the monstrosity of text, but, as it channels our desire for narrative towards the stitch/suture-as-link, it also compels us to adapt—to affirm this monstrosity. The stitch/suture-as-link becomes the symbolic, mediating object of our reading-ritual in which we ignore the phallogocentric impulse to naturalize language and search for an essential, unified meaning. Instead, we embrace text and the body it describes as forms of monstrous assemblage: each a patchwork of disparate voices and materialities that come together in the cyborg myth of the patchwork girl.

MUTATION, AGAINST CASTRATION

The dotted line is the central symbol of the patchwork girl's cyborg myth. As a hyperlink, stitch, suture, or scar, it is able to both "mark a cut" and "commemorate a
"joining," as the lexia "cut" in the "journal" zone describes. It is the paradigmatic slash, perforated: the leitmotif of leaky oppositions that "collapse" but do not fall away into nothingness, as in psycholinguistic castration. In *Patchwork Girl*, the paradigmatic slash cedes to the dotted line: the flexible membrane that allows flowing in-between and the construction of accordingly dynamic cyborg oppositions that cut *and* join.

The "graveyard" and "quilt" zones articulate this paradigmatic permeability by mutating of our textual *studium*.

I draw the term "mutation" from Hayles's psycholinguistic theorization of the intersection of literature and informatics. Hayles argues that contemporary literature's embeddedness in informatics—from hyperfictions' screenic medialities to codex books' digital typesetting—necessitates a rethinking of Lacanian psycholinguistics. This rethinking pivots away from the floating signifier and its dialectic of presence/absence because these Lacanian psycholinguistic terms—their "coupling of language and sexuality"—have less of a hold on the cybernetic dynamisms illuminated by digital textuality's coupling of "language and machine." Hayles posits the flickering signifier and information theory's dialectic of pattern/randomness, whose crisis is *mutation*, as a psycholinguistic framework attuned to the media-specific qualities of objects of knowledge that we interact with through digital information technology. When we interact with information technology, mutation crises arise from a "psycholinguistics of information" because our mediating object is a cybernetic machine—which, in the case of *Patchwork Girl*, signifies via a screen. Flickering signifiers facilitate transformations of text and image that, Hayles describes, "would be unthinkable if matter or energy, rather than informational patterns formed the primary basis for the systemic exchanges." In a hyperfiction, the primary device for such transformations is the hyperlink. Its lightning-fast *flicker* propels the mutative experiences of reading.
that give "birth" to the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body across the multicursal zones.

In hypermedia environments, mutation crises mark the disruption the dialectic of pattern/randomness that subtends our meaningful hallucination of verbal signs:

[Mutation] marks a rupture of pattern so extreme that the expectation of continuous replication can no longer be sustained. But as with castration, this only appears to be a disruption located at a specific moment… The randomness to which mutation testifies is implicit in the very idea of pattern, for only against the background of nonpattern can pattern emerge. Randomness is the contrasting term that allows pattern to be understood as such. The crisis named by mutation is as wide-ranging and pervasive in its import within the pattern/randomness dialectic as castration is within the tradition of presence/absence, for it is the visible mark that testifies to the continuing interplay of the dialectic between pattern and randomness, replication and variation, expectation and surprise.108

The "graveyard" and "quilt" zones' mutative rendering of the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body does not emerge from machine-error randomness like glitch, lag, garbled text, or random strings of code appearing on a page. It is randomness that emanates from what we perceive as textual difficulty—"bad writing," perhaps—and is propelled by the flickering intensity of the hyperlink. From the disruptive enjambment and deictics of the "headstone" lexia to the impenetrability of the "quilt" zone's patchwork language, mutation marks the "specific moment" of crisis when we flicker into a textual situation that compels us to adapt. Mutation reshapes our textual studium so that it productively subsumes this randomness and attunes us to new patternings of information. Patchwork Girl's use of hyperlinks allows for transformations of text that are intense enough to destabilize us, but structured enough for their disruption of our studium to be meaningful. This textual violence provokes the "continuing interplay of dialectical terms" at the hallucinatory nexus of
body and text so that between us and our screen, our screen and the patchwork girl, these terms become permeable, and we encounter a hypertext-as-body.

Reading *Patchwork Girl* in terms of mutation gives us a formally-attuned way of theorizing how the hyperfiction subverts the phallogocentric structure of meaning that produces the female creature’s destruction in *Frankenstein*. By reanimating the female creature, the hyperfiction situates itself within the castration crisis of Shelley’s text. It contends that with digital hypertext, it can make this apparent collapse of meaning *meaningful* by shaping its protagonist within and against the constant negativity of castration. Thus, with a psycholinguistics uniquely shaped by informatics, we might think of *Patchwork Girl*’s cyborg-writing as a technologically-enabled semantic feminization: a staging of Jackson’s theory of ”bad writing” to produce an oppositional position within and against the paradigm of phallogocentric meaning that dominates the Western, liberal humanist literary tradition. Yet, *Patchwork Girl*’s cyborg-writing does not sit still in this oppositional position. As we will see, the hyperfiction’s formal logic produces a vertiginous reflexivity through which it critically reflects on, transforms, and reveals the limits of its project.
3 | REFLECTION
THE PENSIVE HYPERTEXT

For if the [hyper]text has nothing more to say than what it says, at least it attempts to "let it be understood" that it does not say everything; this allusion is coded by pensiveness, which is a sign of nothing but itself… At its discreet urging, we want to ask the [hyper]text: What are you thinking about? but the [hyper]text, wilier than all those who try to escape by answering: about nothing, does not reply, giving meaning its last closure: suspension.

Roland Barthes, S/Z

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CYBORG-WRITING

The patchwork girl is a cyborg myth in hypertextual form. Her flickering hypertext-as-body appears when our patterns of reading mutate, jarred by the screenic jump of hyperlinks that riddle the hyperfiction's five multicursal zones. She is a constant movement of cutting across authorial voices, fictive worlds, and the hypertextual fragments that constitute her screenic presence. Her digital hypertext bricolage clearly stages the reification theory of first-wave hypertext theorists by materializing the poststructuralist theory of text as a hypertext-as-body. Yet, to whatever degree Patchwork Girl "thingifies" a poststructuralist theory of text, it does so as a gesture of critical appropriation. The hyperfiction's cyborg-writing is an immanent critique of the dematerializing violence of textualization. It denies its protagonist the "disembodied" transcendence of its textual machine that our codex-attuned textual studium and much of twentieth century literary theory takes as a presupposition of literary production. In this way, the hyperfiction tries to disrupt the power relations that are reproduced via processes of textualization—be it poststructuralist theory or grotesque genre-fiction. As a matter of literary practice, textualization cannot be
avoided; yet, *Patchwork Girl* tries to show how it can be transformed, mutated into more embodied and reflective modes of representation.

This formal experiment aims to animate Haraway’s claim that the cyborg “changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century.” The hyperfiction challenges masculinist power relations as they are naturalized in cultural production and its shaping of the human subject. Drawing on Judith Roof’s feminist narratology, Laura Shackelford reads *Patchwork Girl* as a critique of these power relations, in which

[the] masculinist, instrumental conception of subjectivity as a form of self-authorship, which figures subjectivity as the symbolic abstraction from one’s embodiment and mastery of the material world, requires a simultaneous repudiation and disavowal of the supposed infrastructure, a reduction of the ‘female’ to ‘sameness,’ to an ‘originary ground,’ which is ‘invested’ with ‘male’ difference that results in the production of law, culture, narrative, meaning. The cyborg myth of the patchwork girl imagines a supersession of these oppressive terms of cultural production. It embodies a feminist narratological critique of phallogocentrism and its "instrumental conception of subjectivity" by surfacing its text’s medial "infrastructure" as a body. Thus, the "originary ground" of the patchwork girl’s textual meaning is "female," but irreducible to "sameness." Her hypertext-as-body resists the "symbolic abstraction" that liberal humanism uses to construct a human subject which transcends its "embodiment and mastery of the material world."

*Patchwork Girl* contends that just as the "originary ground" of women’s bodies have throughout history been the invisible, instrumentalized medium for the masculine production of "law, culture, narrative, meaning," to lose sight of the body in our hallucinatory interactions with text and its various technological "infrastructure[s]" reproduces these very power relations.
REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

This chapter explores how Patchwork Girl critically reflects on its own reproductive technology. I use the term "reproductive technology" as an inflection of digital hypertext technology that, on one hand, is a gesture towards hypermedia’s illumination of the second-degree nature of cultural production: the capacity of its flickering, screenic reproduction of text, image, etc., to dissolve myths of monolithic authorship. On the other hand, I use the term in its broadest sense to invoke the capacity of cultural production’s material-semiotic technologies to reproduce the power relations that shape our social reality. These two senses of the term meet in informatics: information technology and the biological, social, linguistic, and cultural changes necessarily coupled with it. Haraway’s cyborg myth derives its critical power from its enmeshment informatics; the subjectivity it imagines is accountable to the paradoxical empowerment of information technology. Isabelle Stengers aptly describes the Harawayan cyborg as a "coupling of non-innocence and accountability," and affirms that to tell cyborg stories is "to produce both the account and the way to take it into account." Yet, cyborg theory’s capacity to be liberatory in practice has stark limits. These limits are not immediately apparent in Patchwork Girl; on this topic, the hyperfiction is pensive. We will approach this pensiveness on the hyperfiction’s own terms by exploring how its critical reflexivity articulates the limits of its cyborg-writing project.

The Harawayan cyborg’s complex relation to medical-reproductive technology is the arena in which we will situate our understanding of Patchwork Girl’s formal logic. The semiotics of medical-reproductive technology are deeply political—particularly abortion: one of the most controversial interfaces of Haraway’s cyborg with social reality. At this interface, we find the flickering signifier of the sonographic
fetus: a cyborgian artifact that powerfully articulates the practical limits of cyborg theory. Heather Latimer situates *Patchwork Girl* within the discourse of the sonographic fetus, which is arguably the first cyborgian artifact to significantly breach the American mainstream. Quoting Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, Latimer notes that the "sonographic fetus is in many ways the ultimate cyborg in that it is 'created' in a space of virtuality that 'straddles the conventional boundary between an organic body and a digital text.'" Yet, rendered "live" as a grainy image on a screen via ultrasonography, the cyborg body of the sonographic fetus has become an iconic image and rhetorical touchpoint for arguments against women's abortion rights. As many feminist theorists have argued, the sonographic fetus is an ominous limit-case of cyborg theory's liberatory powers. The mass-media dissemination of its image has led to its rhetorical appropriation by right wing discourse as the signifier of a "natural" and independent subject—a human life. Anti-abortion discourse has been able to shape its pale, grainy image so that it (re)produces a signified that *transcends* the ultrasonographic technology and female-gendered body which makes it available as an image in the first place.

The sonographic fetus has proven unable to tell a cyborg story that exposes and disrupts body/machine dualisms because the syntax and presentation of its image is not nuanced enough. Its medial technology simply fades from view because it is not "told" in the cyborgian complexity of its body/machine entanglement. Consequently, the female-gendered body that hosts this fetus is too easily rendered invisible—objectified as the originative ground from which anti-abortion discourses can symbolically abstract its fetus as an independent human subject. Latimer describes how "the fetal cyborg's subversiveness has been undermined by its image, so that it no longer exposed dualisms but helps erase them." The bluntly "transcendent" power of
the sonographic fetus's image certainly produces an account of a cyborg subject, but it does not provide a way for us to take this subject into account. Of course, a fetus's "subversiveness" returns as soon as it is not sonographic. Removed from its mother’s body, it is monstrous—an abject horror. Like *Patchwork Girl*, the sonographic fetus is a cyborgian artifact that metamorphoses monster into cyborg. Yet, it lets us see how the revolutionary implications of this metamorphosis short-circuit when its monster/machine entanglement evaporates, and it loses the ability to productively mutate its social reality's ideological *studium*.118

The sonographic fetus's cyborgian power has been subsumed into the misogynistic myth-complex of right-wing ideology. Indeed, the affective power—the *prick*—that has propelled this image of "life" into the mainstream exemplifies how flickering signification draws the mechanisms of Barthes's *punctum* into an uncertain territory where "we confront in it the wakening of intractable reality"119—but with our critical faculties disarmed by the apparent reality (the "life") of images that transcend their medial technologies. Haraway gestures towards this hallucinatory quality of the sonographic fetus when she compares it to "the DNA double-helix—not just a signifier of life but also offered as the-thing-in-itself… a technoscientific sacrament."120 While *Patchwork Girl*'s characterization of its protagonist's "life" relies on the hallucinatory effects of flickering signification, the hyperfiction does not allow its meaning to transcend its medial technology. Even in the hallucinatory immediacy of the "graveyard" zone's textual *punctum*, the hyperfiction defines its own mimetic limit, providing us with a way to take its cyborg myth into account.

The object-in-itself that appears in the "graveyard" zone is not simply a body. What we immediately encounter, of course, is a screenic headstone. As we navigate the "graveyard" zone's arborescent hypertext, branching out to "excavate" body parts and
looping incessantly back into the stark rectangle of its paratextual present, the patchwork girl appears to us explicitly through this headstone symbol. Thus, simultaneously signifying her cyborgian multiplicity and the ultimate icon of death and phallic finitude, the headstone "lexia" is the ironic vehicle of her hypertext-as-body's hallucinatory "life." It reflexively articulates the mimetic limit of *Patchwork Girl*’s cyborg-writing by circumscribing its hypertext-as-body gesture at the point of its most forceful instantiation.

The "headstone" lexia reflects critically on the very concept of literary mimesis—of a character’s "life" within a text—by constructing a time-travel paradox, presenting us with the patchwork girl’s birth and death, assembly and dissolution, in one pregnant moment of paratextual present. With its endpoints collapsed into the "headstone" lexia’s singularity, the patchwork girl’s "life" is reduced to its material, ontological essence—a simple expression of *what is*: a screenic medium that is "dead" but necessarily "alive" when coupled with our gaze. Thus, the "headstone" lexia signifies the form of Mehaffy and Latimer’s "ultimate cyborg," but imposes the condition of *narrative*. The patchwork girl is a virtual "life" collapsed into a database from which it may only be extracted, incarnated, and reflected upon if we perform it across the structured, cybernetic stage of its medial technology. Unlike the "ultimate cyborg" of the sonographic fetus—a flickering "snapshot" of a cyborg subject, *Patchwork Girl* tells a cyborg story in which such a "being" may only be apprehended in its "becoming"—inseparable from the complexity of its cyborgian origination in the machine of its text. The hyperfiction’s formal logic structures it against readings that would split the monster/machine coupling of the patchwork girl’s cyborg myth. That is, until this formal logic compels the hyperfiction to perform this split itself.
A FORMAL LOGIC, AN IMMANENT TRACE

The sonographic fetus exemplifies the practical limits of cyborg theory in discourses which produce complex accounts of our technologized world but do not produce complex ways in which we should take this technology into account. This pitfall brings the politics of *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing into focus. As opposed to an image, the hyperfiction evidently has a greater capacity to be accountable to its reproductive technology. The politics of *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing manifest in its formal logic: a critical reflexivity through which it reflects on its own mimetic limits. By resisting a phallogocentric, self-naturalizing mastery of its own textuality, the hyperfiction privileges process over product, attempting to present the "being" of the patchwork girl only in the contradictions of her "becoming."

This formal logic produces a peculiar symptom. The hyperfiction preserves a trace of its own becoming, consciously foregrounding the process of its own literary production. In "Stitch Bitch," Jackson gestures towards this formal logic when she describes how the hyperfiction "grew in clumps and strands like everything I write, but unlike everything else it had permission to stay that way, to grow denser and more articulated but not to reshape itself." The dynamism of narrative-construction afforded by digital hypertext seems to have allowed Jackson to preserve a trace of her own ideation-in-writing across the entirety of the hyperfiction's structure. Consonant with Jackson's theory of digital hypertext and feminine "bad writing," this element of *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing seems to have eluded critical consideration altogether. The hyperfiction's overall structure reflects the conceptual unfolding of its own process of textualization; it harbors a trace of the gestative process by which Jackson textualized and developed her cyborg-writing project into and through the capacities of her Storyspace program's digital hypertext technology.
Our exploration of *Patchwork Girl*'s formal logic will be guided by this immanent trace of its literary production. Supplemented by some biographical information, this trace will allow us to mediate the hyperfiction's appearance according to its own process of becoming. As we follow the unfolding of this trace, we will find *Patchwork Girl* pushing its cyborg-writing to the very limits of its form. Trying to account for its literary technology, the hyperfiction abandons its hypertext-as-body project completely. Thus, its formal logic manifests as a structural bifurcation: One half of the hyperfiction is comprised of the multicursal zones' hypertext-as-body project while the other consists of the long, unicursal zone of the America Narrative. This structural bifurcation is central to the hyperfiction's project, but also seems to have eluded critical consideration.¹²⁴

Across this schism, *Patchwork Girl* casts the experimental technicity through which it foregrounds its medial technology into a state of suspension. This appears in its immediacy as merely a structural instantiation of the hyperfiction's cyborg myth—that is, this myth's problematic of body and text appears to have been extrapolated to the hyperfiction's entire, bifurcated structure. The multicursal zones appear as a hypertext-as-body, and the unicursal zone unfolds along a single, "linear" axis to invoke the form of a codex book—merely a "text." Yet, when we mediate our consideration of this structural bifurcation according to the immanent trace of the hyperfiction's literary production, it tells a different story. It is an existential crisis of form. *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg myth is overdetermined by an anxiety located at the nexus of body and text, culture and nature—an anxiety of race. According to the terms of its formal logic, the hyperfiction manifests this racial anxiety as a formal contradiction spanning its entire structure. Thus, on the hyperfiction's own terms, we
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will reflect on the question that it floats across its entire, pensive structure: What is hypertext for *Patchwork Girl*?

To accompany the hyperfiction on this process of reflection, we will depart from the "broken accents" zone. This is where Jackson began writing the hyperfiction, and where we will pick up the immanent trace of its literary production. Entering the "broken accents" zone from *Patchwork Girl*’s title page, we encounter a frontispiece image. Each of the hyperfiction’s other multicursal zones, including the title page itself, also has a frontispiece. These lexias are titled "her," "hercut," "hercut2," "hercut3," and "hercut 4," and their pixelated images depict the patchwork girl’s body in variously recombinant states of assembly. The only outlier is the frontispiece for the "broken accents" zone: "phrenology" (fig. 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Text window of lexia "phrenology" (frontispiece to the "broken accents" zone).
This image of a woman's head in profile assumes the form of a phrenological map: a diagram that has historically been used to corroborate theories of women's biological inferiority while racializing Africans and other subalterns. Throughout the nineteenth- and twentieth-century, phrenology was a "scientific" means of determining who deserved to be fully human (certain white men), partially human, and not-human—that is, part of Nature: objectified as exploitable and disposable. Phrenological maps *textualize* the human body, attributing certain psycho-social capacities to different shapes of the human cranium with labels like "sublimity," "conscientiousness," and "self-esteem." The frontispiece to the "broken accents" zone replaces such labels with the names of the patchwork girl's past bodies and words that allude to the content of the "broken accents" zone. In their arbitrary organization, these labels parody phrenology's project of textually mapping the body.

On one hand, this parody of the phrenological map critically foregrounds the dubiousness of any scientific effort to conceptually *master* a biotic system through the imposition of language or any other formal system. In her "Stitch Bitch" essay, Jackson asserts that the "project of writing, the project of life, even" is to "interrupt, unhinge, disable the processes by which the mind, glorifying in its own firm grip on what it wishes to include in reality… substitutes an effigy for that complicated machine for inclusion and effusion that is the self."126 The poststructuralist ethos of her thinking is clear: our imposition of form on the world is a heuristic strategy that necessarily "substitutes an effigy" for the object of our contemplation. This gesture is consonant with the hyperfiction's formal logic, and speaks to the immediately apparent meaning of the "phrenology" frontispiece: Like the ironic symbolism of the "headstone" lexia's textual *punctum*, it reflects critically on the act of hypertextualization of a body. Yet, its parodic invocation of phrenology's racializing body-textualization lends an air of
racial anxiety to this formal logic. The "broken accents" zone holds the most programmatic elaboration of Patchwork Girl's cyborg-writing, thus the "phrenology" frontispiece," as this zone's symbolic gateway, seems intent on casting a note of uncertainty over its hypertext-as-body form.

Knowingly titled "body of text" in the map window, the "broken accents" zone leverages the full disjunctive capacity of digital hypertext's multicursality. Stitched together with this formal hyperbolism and focalized through the patchwork girl, its lexias describe Patchwork Girl's hypertext-as-body project more explicitly than anywhere else in the hyperfiction. Indeed, it is quickly clear that we are not merely focalized through the patchwork girl—we are reading of her, within her. In the lexia "blood," she narrates, "I align myself as I read with the flow of blood that as it cycles, keeping moist and living what without it stiffens into a fibrous cell"; in the lexia "all written," she exclaims: "You could say that all bodies are written bodies, all lives pieces of writing." Hyperlinks form vascular, intertwining paths through contemplative meditations on digital hypertextuality, language, femininity, the body, and chance sensuous experiences. Like a writer's journal, the "broken accents" zone weaves together wandering thoughts to gestate and reflect on its own creative process.

This sense of writerly gestation has a notable biographical basis. In a 2013 interview, Jackson describes the "broken accents" zone as the "initial core" of the hyperfiction. She recounts how around 1993 or 1994, her thoughts about the feminine and the materiality of texts and bodies merged with hypertext theory in a Brown University MFA class taught by Landow. The resulting urtext of Patchwork Girl was a "meta-hypertext": a critical work for Landow's class that developed the character of the patchwork girl as a means of exploring this "gnarl of theoretical concerns." At first, Jackson "linked together everything that seemed related," which produced "the
most impenetrable, Brillo pad like mass of links and a ton of repetition in the reading experience.” Jackson recounts how facing this monstrous tangle, she recognized that a "kind of mental hypertext" was an essential element of any narrative, regardless of medium. With this in mind, she erased her hideous progeny’s tangled mass of links and started over, linking together distinct threads to create the beginnings of the hyperfiction’s multi-zoned structure.

When Mark Bernstein of Eastgate Systems proposed that Jackson publish this early version of Patchwork Girl, she insisted that it still "needed to be fleshed out.” She then added the "graveyard," "quilt," much of the "story" zone, and the America Narrative to create the version published today. Throughout this editing process, the "broken accents" zone retained the gnarled, gestative complexity of Jackson’s urtext. Indeed, its title refers to the moment in Frankenstein when the male creature is just beginning to learn language by covertly listening to another converse "in broken accents, whilst [he] comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken.”¹²⁸ Thus, Jackson has preserved Patchwork Girl’s gestative form in the "broken accents" zone as the ground from which the hyperfiction stages a symbolic representation of its own literary production—its own hypertextual "birth" and metamorphosis—within itself. The hyperfiction is a reification of Jackson’s immediate forms of production. It reflects on itself as such, and on how Jackson transformed its project throughout the process of her literary production.

We find a microcosmic kernel of this reflexivity in the "broken accents” lexia "hazy whole,” where the patchwork girl exclaims, "I am recognizable now, but who knows what prostheses will be grafted onto my already powerful form, making up for all the deficiencies we have yet to invent?” The hyperfiction’s formal logic attunes it to the indeterminacy of its own hypertextual gestation. We might take these "prostheses"
to be ourselves: readers who will (re)produce the hyperfiction by stitching together new strings of lexias with each reading. Indeed, we might consider such "prostheses" to be essays like my own, here, on this page and coupled with your mind. More immediately, however, this lexia points to a more localized "prosthesis" to the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body—the hyperfiction's sixth zone: the American Narrative.

This long, "conventionally" narrated zone is the hyperfiction's immanent "prosthesis": a stitched-on narrative appendage that emerges from the multicursal zones but takes no part in their hypertext-as-body project. It transcends the body, leaving behind the fragmentary reading experience of the multicursal zones' experimental technicity. Entirely composed of unicursal, axial hypertext, the America Narrative unfolds along a default path of adjacent lexia with linear chronology. It stages a "birth" of the patchwork girl that entirely avoids leveraging its digital hypertext form. In the "story" zone lexia "birth," the patchwork girl refers to it as "a good story."

THE AMERICAN PROSTHESIS

The America Narrative affords us a smoothly narrated account of the female creature's metamorphosis into the patchwork girl. It thematically mirrors the multicursal zones, while posing itself as their formal converse. However, it is effectively hidden—only accessible from two links embedded deep in the network of the multicursal zones. We may only enter it through hyperlinks found in the lexia "hideous progeny"—located in a space suspended between the "journal" and "story" zones—and in the lexia "mutinies"—located in the "broken accents" zone. For this reason, it is unlikely that we discover the America Narrative until after immersing ourselves in the multicursal zones (see fig. 0.1). It is a respite—indeed, an escape—that
we must labor to find within the gnarled complexity of our readerly coupling with the patchwork girl's hypertext-as-body.

The first space of the America Narrative holds fifty-nine unicursally linked lexias (of the zone's eighty three total) and depicts the female creature's departure from Shelley's world in England and her tumultuous life in nineteenth century America. In America, the female creature is subjected to norms of femininity that pathologize her deviance, leading her to develop "symptoms" of a schizo-condition. She begins hearing voices and developing ticks. These "symptoms" escalate in the America Narrative's second space. Here, marked by the lexia "interim," we jump forward in time to the twentieth century, where the female creature's metamorphosis into the patchwork girl escalates. Struggling against her schizo self-fragmentation, she tries to master her monstrous body and achieve a unified sense of self. In the lexia "passing" and "I," she imagines "cultivat[ing] preferences to found a personality on" so that "the most disparate sentiments will seem unified under the aegis of I—on that pedestal, that little podium." Attacking her scarred body with cosmetic products in the lexia "craft," she "tack[s] up pictures of models and film stars… to preside over [her] metamorphosis."

She has a single intent: to assimilate into late twentieth century American society, molding her monstrosity into the unified and self-mastered ideal towards which she has been constantly interpellated since arriving in America from Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century Europe. To this end, the female creature develops an intimacy with an American woman Elsie, aiming to possess her identity. Across two lexias—"buying past" and "photo album," it is unclear whether this identity-possession is a reality or a fantasy. Whether the female creature actually assumes Elsie's name and life or contrives this identity-transfiguration through a photo album is left suggestively ambiguous. Nonetheless, she buys Elsie's identity, moves into her childhood home,
and attempts to live a normal life as a coherent human subject. She narrates: "I acquired myself" ("photo album").

Yet the female creature cannot escape fragmentation. From the lexia "tic" onwards, she begins losing body parts, literally splitting apart at the seams. With visceral dreams of corporeal dispersal in a jungle made of flesh ("flesh jungle"), her fantastical metamorphosis into the patchwork girl begins. Eventually, she explodes, her body parts flying off with wills of their own, leaving her in a state of existential crisis—of pure negativity: "only a raw beginning, the place to start a story from, and the thing ending no longer the same thing at all in the ending, so not ending, not beginning either, not doing, not reflecting, not resting, not" ("diaspora"). This corporeal explosion mirrors the female creature's destruction in Frankenstein. It dramatizes her castration crisis, but with a symbolic, twofold nature. While her "parts darted, hung in the air for a good half hour" in the lexia "coda," the next lexia, "or," performs a rapid analepsis to backtrack on this terrible explosion: "Or if that did not happen… up would rise a fog dense with visions." This contradictory corporeal/psychical account of the female creature's existential crisis then resolves into one (although she remains "in pieces") as she runs a bath and calls Elsie.

On one hand, these two contradictory lexias focalize the female creature's schizo condition with their disorienting mix of the corporeal and psychical sides of her existential crisis. On the other hand, they characterize her corporeal explosion here, and her castration crisis dismemberment in Frankenstein, as, together, an illusion—an existential crisis that has been overcome. Accordingly, in the next lexia, Elsie comes and she and the female creature have the kind of cyborg sex which, in Haraway's words, certainly "restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism)" (fig. 3.2):129
This fantastical sex scene is the patchwork girl’s one and only “birth” in the America Narrative. It is her non-oedipal subject formation: an entangled act of cyborgian origination in which the female creature finds "a way to hang together" independent of an illusive humanist holism and the instrumentalizing logic of heterosexual reproduction. In this moment of self-discovery, subject passionately entangled with object, she sublates the monstrosity which, created by Mary Shelley in nineteenth century Europe, has not been able to found a subjectivity amid the violent interpellation of America's phallogocentric humanism. Against this violence and through the pleasure of her immersion in Elsie, Elsie's immersion in her, the female creature metamorphoses beyond her monstrosity to embrace herself as the patchwork girl—a cyborg: "Something between higgledy-piggledy and the eternal sphere… something like human."

This is the same cyborg myth the multicursal zones tell with their hypertext-as-body project. Across the various discursive modes and textual machinations of its bifurcated structure, Patchwork Girl gestures towards a single story of

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Figure 3.2. Text window of lexia "I made myself over" (found in the America Narrative zone).
metamorphosing monster into cyborg. While the patchwork girl is "born" in the multicursual zones whenever she emerges for us as a hypertext-as-body, the America Narrative abandons this experimental technicity for a unicursal, axial expression of this story: a single "birth." The unicursal zone reflects the multicursual zones’ "several births." Indeed, the corporeal explosion that marks the patchwork girl’s "birth" in the America Narrative mirrors the fragmentary hypertext-as-body mechanisms of the "graveyard," "broken accents," and "quilt" zones. Further, her sex with Elsie mirrors her sex with Mary in the "journal" zone. Both Elsie and Mary Shelley are the patchwork girl’s "nominal mother" in these transformative sex scenes—the non-oedipal "primal scenes" of the patchwork girl’s cyborgian subject-formation that mirror each other across the entirety of the hyperfiction’s bifurcated structure.  

The America Narrative is a unicursal prosthesis extending just far enough from its hypertext-as-body to hold up a mirror that renders the "several births" of this multicursal tangle in one congealed reflection: a single "birth." This mise-en-abyme recursion of the patchwork girl’s "birth" simultaneously transcends and enmeshes itself in the hypertextual technicity of the multicursual zones’ hypertext-as-body project. *Patchwork Girl* characterizes its protagonist as a hypertext-as-body project of cyborg-writing and simply a "good story," a body and merely a text—the patchwork girl is tangled up somewhere in-between.

Thus, *Patchwork Girl* casts its hypertextual technicity into a state of suspension. After surfacing its reproductive technology as a hypertext-as-body in the gestative phase of its literary production, it doubles back. It retraces its steps to reproduce its story, but supplants its hypertextual technicity—superseding itself. In the last lexia of the America Narrative, "a life," we encounter what feels like a conclusion to the hyperfiction, and the patchwork girl reflects on this very process of self-supersession.
Wandering the barren white expanse of Death Valley and writing on a laptop, she narrates: "I watch my own words graduating instantaneously into the past tense and becoming someone else's else. They look fixed... What exists: this latest word: my scarred finger, myself imagining possibilities... It bothers me, the thought of my words becoming clues, something someone might peer at to try to find a lost object." With this suggestion that the patchwork girl herself has written *Patchwork Girl*—and is anxious on the subject of her "auto-poetics"—we take the only path available and find ourselves back in the "broken accents" zone: the hypertext-as-body from which the America Narrative emerges, like a self-reflective thought transcending the body. The America Narrative is a prosthesis for thought. It is a device of self-reflection that, having held its contemplative mirror up to the cyborg-writing so programmatically theorized and practiced in the "broken accents" zone and its multicursal appendages, suspends this reflection in a *mise-en-abyme* recursion of its protagonist's "birth"—its own "birth"—and returns to its hypertext-as-body, pensive.

**INTO THE VAPOROUS MACHINERY**

In its immediacy, *Patchwork Girl*’s bifurcated structure appears to be a schematization of its cyborg myth—an opposition of body and text that contraposes the multicursal zones’ hypertext-as-body to the unicursal America Narrative. However, in light of the hyperfiction’s formal logic, we can see that this bifurcated structure schematizes a *process*: the immanent unfolding of the hyperfiction’s own literary production. Beginning in the "broken accents" zone, this process unfolds into the America Narrative as a gesture of the hyperfiction transcending its hypertextual technicity. *Patchwork Girl* compels us to follow this gesture as we read because the America Narrative is only accessible from deep within the tangle of the multicursal zones’ network. It seems intent—indeed, anxious—that we grasp the process of its
conceptual gestation, and with it, deconstruct its cyborg myth. Returning to the
gestative core of this myth in the "broken accents" zone, the lexia "it thinks" meditates
on the vision of a cyborg "life" that is at stake here (fig. 3.3).

In its hypertextual animation of the Harawayan cyborg, *Patchwork Girl* reveals and
animates the monstrous mediality—"steaming flanks and solid redoubtable hoofs"—
that can writh beneath the "vaporous machinery" of the verbal sign. This mediality
becomes, in Bakhtin's words, "artistically visible" in the hypertext-as-body of the
patchwork girl.  

Yet, as we immerse ourselves in this "vaporous machinery," formally attuned to
the microscopic exchange between verbal sign and medium, we can lose sight of the
"vaporous machinery" that looms beyond the scope of the hyperfiction's immediate
presence. I refer to the macroscopic technological assemblage that has produced the
work of literature itself: its mode of production. Mark McGurl assumes this
macroscopic view, situating *Patchwork Girl* within the institutionalized literary
production of the American postwar paradigm that he terms the "Program Era":

Another way to read [*Patchwork Girl*], however, is as a testament to the
possibilities of systematic creativity—creativity authorized and sponsored by
erotically technologized institutions like Brown. And here it is the creative-
writing program, the institution, the social technology, that too easily plays the
part of "vaporous machinery," receding from our view even as we become
interested in the properties of print and pixels. It is the university that provides
the technology for hypertext, and it is the university that doles out cultural
capital and technical expertise that Jackson puts on display, never more so than
when she mashes feminist theory into her creative work.\textsuperscript{135}

Jackson's "eroticly technologized institution" and the "systematic creativity" of its
MFA program evidently permeate \textit{Patchwork Girl}. From poststructuralist theory to
digital hypertext technology, the hyperfiction leverages cultural capital that is
entangled in in the literary-industrial, cognitive-capitalist cultural production
complex of the postwar American university system. The liberatory aims of its cyborg-
writing must be considered in the full contradiction of this entanglement.

McGurl's perspectival shift is indispensable. Yet, the formal logic we have
distilled across this prosthesis points to a more complex picture of \textit{Patchwork Girl}'s
relation to this "vaporous machinery" than he suggests. If we push on the exegetical
reductionism apparent in his rather cynical characterization of the patchwork girl's
character as merely "the self as 'team player,'" a generative gap appears in his
conclusion that "for all of Jackson's commitments to the avant-garde, it is not hard to
see [this subjectivity] as the model of an unresisting employee, the office worker
willing and able to learn the new software."\textsuperscript{136} There is more to be said about
\textit{Patchwork Girl}'s cyborg myth within McGurl's totality of postwar American literature
than suggested by his reading of it as the "model of an unresisting employee." To
articulate the forces that play between his reading and mine, we will situate our
formally-attuned account of \textit{Patchwork Girl} within his account of totality.

McGurl casts \textit{Patchwork Girl} along with Michael Joyce's hyperfiction \textit{afternoon},
\textit{a story} and the entire "emergent field of electronic literature" as "the most literal
contemporary instantiation" of the postwar literary enterprise he calls
\textit{technomodernism}.\textsuperscript{137} Constituting one pole of McGurl's "Program Era" paradigm of
postwar American fiction, technomodernism contraposes \textit{high cultural pluralism}: "a
body of fiction which joins the high literary values of modernism with a fascination with the experience of cultural difference and the authenticity of the ethnic voice.”

McGurl argues that works of high cultural pluralism are considered "literary" in postwar America because they are performances of authentic, ethnically-marked experience. They introduce difference into a system of literary canonization that increasingly values such difference as an extension of the aesthetic program of regionalism and increasingly in accordance with liberal pluralist ideologies of multiculturalism.

McGurl defines technomodernism as the "dialectical reversal" of high cultural pluralism:

At the very limits of the high cultural pluralist enterprise, where the space it inhabits begins to curve, one encounters technomodernism, its unmarked dialectical reversal… Whereas high cultural pluralism represses technologies that contribute to its performance of authenticity, technomodernism identifies with the "emptiness" of pure formality—that is, with the systematicity of the system itself, drawing the machine to itself in the form of ontological prosthesis.

In *Patchwork Girl*'s cyborg-writing project, we find precisely this technomodernist foregrounding of digital hypertext's "systematicity," but perhaps in a more complex form of "systematicity" than McGurl, from his macroscopic altitude, seems to suggest. The telos of the hyperfiction's formal logic is to critically reflect on and deconstruct the "systematicity" of its technologically enmeshed cyborg-writing project. *Patchwork Girl* "draws[s] the machine to itself" while also going out of its way to disentangle itself from this machine. Its cyborg myth is more the unfolding of an existential crisis of form than merely the "model of an unresisting employee." The hyperfiction formally emanates an anxiety about its hypertextual technicity’s grounding in the "systematicity" of technomodernism and the institutional mode of production from which it emerges.
The America Narrative presents the "dialectical reversal" of the multicursal zones. It "represses" the digital hypertext technology with which the multicursal zones stage the hallucinatory "authenticity" of the patchwork girl's ethnically unmarked, but technically marked hypertext-as-body. The hyperfiction presents the America Narrative as a narrative of difference. Its protagonist lives in America as a deviant, suffering under a mark of monstrosity that we know, from our exploration of her hypertext-as-body in the multicursal zones, is primarily a mark of technical experimentation—of technicity, not ethnicity. Indeed, McGurl describes the technicity of technomodernist works like Patchwork Girl as "the displaced representation of a paradoxically ethnic non-ethnicity." The patchwork girl's difference is the technicity of hypertext, but the America Narrative represses this difference to conjure another—presenting itself as an "ontological prosthesis" of high cultural pluralism: a supplement to the machine.

Patchwork Girl appears to assume the form of its cyborg myth: a problematic of body and text, but this formal maneuver is motivated by a deeper problem. The hyperfiction splits itself along the fault line of its reproductive technology in anxious reflection on its reproduction of contemporary American literature's recalcitrant problem of race. Symptoms of this race anxiety like the "phrenology" frontispiece have an aura of prescience—as if Jackson, writing her way out of the "erotically technologized" context of her hyperfiction's gestation in a class with Landow, recognizes just how white her project is, and anxiously marks it as such. Yet, in its pensiveness, Patchwork Girl is unable to do anything more than mark this problem. The hyperfiction's formal logic surfaces the problem of race, tangled up in the apparently liberatory gesture of its cyborg-writing, but here reaches its limit. The hyperfiction reflects endlessly into itself, unable to turn itself to account for the deeper
monstrosity tangled up in the machine of its text: the spectre of race that haunts its exceedingly white posthumanist enterprise. The patchwork girl is a cyborg myth that mutates to its limit, then signifies its own inadequacy.
Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges"

I’m not where you say I am. Hypertext blurs the distinction between subject and object, matter and absence of matter. We no longer know where it does its thinking, or what it is driving at. (It’s no one and no-place, but it’s not nothing.)

Shelley Jackson, "Stitch Bitch"

*Patchwork Girl*’s cyborg-writing is a gesture of sublation. It imagines an elevation of the monstrous female creature to a higher, more complete plane of existence. This cyborg-writing is a posthumanist project. The hyperfiction’s sublation departs from the ground of the liberal humanist subject. It rejects and aims to transform this subject’s phallogocentric unity that naturalizes itself as human against the monstrous beyond of its gendered and racialized others. Yet, the processes of racialization that determine this human subject are not immediately apparent in *Patchwork Girl*. For all its nuanced attention to gender and sexuality, the hyperfiction remains equivocal on race. Indeed, its relation to race is not immediately clear because it *appears* as the medium itself. The hyperfiction’s reproductive technology—a flickering web cast over the patchwork girl’s body—powerfully shapes her cyborg myth, but only by assuming the form of a racial anxiety embedded in the social reality of its own production.

This becomes clear to us on the hyperfiction’s own terms. Once mediated by the formal logic we have distilled across its multicursal zones, *Patchwork Girl*’s
hypertextual technicity appears as nothing less than a reification of Jackson's immediate forms of production: the cultural capital of her MFA program and its contradictory relation to the liberal multiculturalism of the 1990s. As my reading demonstrates, Patchwork Girl attempts to transcend the technomodernist whiteness of its institutional context by suspending its hypertextual technicity. Its America Narrative emerges from the multicursal zones as an anxious expression of authenticity: a prosthesis of cultural difference. This formal contradiction marks the paradoxical situation of literary technicity in the American creative-writing program. It also illuminates a repressed intersection of cyborg theories of the posthuman with liberal ideologies of multiculturalism.

Cyborg posthumanism's liberatory power is circumscribed by its knowledge production. The "no-place of hypertext" Jackson celebrates in her "Stitch Bitch" essay is an exciting literary-technological frontier. In Patchwork Girl, it is also the unmarked topos of a non-ethnic ethnicity. The hyperfiction's technicity, while it seems to enable accountability to the cultural reproduction of power relations, actually blocks its ability to account for the processes of racialization that determine the liberal humanist subject. What this amounts to, I contend, is a distinctly postmodern reinscription of the liberal humanist ideal of self-writing that masters and naturalizes the self against difference. Formally, Patchwork Girl tries to supersede liberal humanism's false transcendence of difference; but in the process, it effectively reifies difference in its fragmentary multiplicity, freezing hierarchy in place by proclaiming itself post-hierarchy, post-human.

The patchwork girl is a mythic body based on the recombinatory logic of the cyborgian assemblage. As a myth, this body all too easily extrapolates its prostheticized dynamism of self, its cyborgian flux, to perform a sublation of the
liberal humanist subject that, in the "no-place" of hyperspace, encroaches on embodied experience that it cannot claim, let alone transcend. Speaking to this danger of posthuman metamorphosis, Alexander G. Weheliye contends that the "greatest contribution to critical thinking of black studies—and critical ethnic studies more generally—is the transformation of the human subject into a heuristic model and not an ontological fait accompli."147 To transcend a fissured ground like the liberal humanist subject is to erase its fissures. Below the exciting, vanguard immediacy of such liberatory gestures, structures of subjugation can fade from view. The theorists I’ve worked with in this essay ratify the Marxist axiom that vision from below obtains epistemological superiority. That axiom is no less true in hyperspace, that beyond-space of postmodernism and posthumanism. But as I have tried to show in my reading of Patchwork Girl, our practical fidelity to this axiom requires an adjustment of our critical tools in the face of reproductive technologies that blur the line between reading and looking, our hallucinations and what our machines hallucinate for us.
INTRODUCTION

1 In 1997, Shelley Jackson opened a talk on Patchwork Girl by announcing, "I expect there are some of you who still think I am Shelley Jackson, author of a hypertext about an imaginary monster, the patchwork girl Mary Shelley made her first-born run amok. No I am the monster myself, and it is Shelley Jackson who is imaginary, or so it would appear, since she always vanishes when I turn up" ("Stitch Bitch").

2 This pensiveness is a symptom of formal contradiction—of the hyperfiction's form reaching the limit of what it can account for. To understand this contradiction, my formalist approach allows us to elucidate the socio-historical circumstances from which this contradiction arises, and to which the hyperfiction (re)produces itself as a response. It seems that no critical work on Patchwork Girl has produced an account of its form as a whole. I intend this essay to respond to this critical exigency and perhaps shed some light on why the hyperfiction has been read in the way that it has (see note 144).


4 Nelson, Literary Machines, 0/2.

5 The geometric-spatial language of "linear" and "non-linear" is less meaningful when a work like Patchwork Girl formally encourages us to choose how to navigate its textuality. In a digital hypertext, the "line" we chart through a text when we read becomes one of the many possible lines—possible tellings—from which we attempt to assemble the mythical "line" behind it all: the tale. The terms "unicursal" and "multicursal" are more precise because they acknowledge the tangle of possible "lines" that always haunt (with more or less meaning, depending on the form of the text in question) our choice to read in a certain way. See Espen Aarseth's discussion of unicursality, multicursality, and literary labyrinths in Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997), 5-8.

6 I find the term bricolage apt for describing the experience of reading digital hypertext in both its English and French meanings: "construction or (esp. literary or artistic) creation from a diverse range of materials or sources," and "do-it-yourself, DIY", respectively (Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "bricolage," and Cambridge French-English Dictionary Online, s.v. "bricolage").

7 On one hand, hyperspace is the totality of individual locations and their interconnections in a digital hypertext environment (see note 102). It also holds a broader meaning, famously described by Fredric Jameson, as the "latest mutation in space — postmodern hyperspace—[that has] finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment... is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism [Durham: Duke UP, 1991], 43). Of course, we can bridge this extrapolation of "hyper-" to the concept of the hyperreal Jean Baudrillard put forward in his 1981 essay Simulacra and Simulation. However, a Baudrillardian approach to digital hypertext poses certain questions beyond the reach of this essay, and I avoid it accordingly. For a Baudrillardian consideration of digital hypertext literature, see Stuart Moulthrop, "Hypertext and 'the Hyperreal,"’ in Hypertext ’89, ed. Meyrowitz et al. (Pittsburgh: ACM P, 1989).


with a systems-theory approach informed by hypertext theory (92-95 writing). Aarseth introduces a methodology for classifying and interpreting works of ergodic literature.

Ergodic literature has existed as long as writing has been a spatial practice (as long as writing has been Egypt and the I Ching to Appollinaire’s Calligrammes and Queneau’s Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes, ergodic literature has existed as long as writing has been spatial practice (as long as writing has been writing). Aarseth introduces a methodology for classifying and interpreting works of ergodic literature with a systems-theory approach informed by hypertext theory (92-95).
Landow asserts that "All hypertext systems permit the individual reader to choose his or her own center of investigation and experience. What this principle means in practice is that the reader is not locked into any kind of particular organization or hierarchy" (*Hypertext* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992], 58). Generally, it is true that we can more readily choose our "center of investigation and experience" in a hyperfiction. However, Landow's claim that digital hypertext frees readers from "organization or hierarchy" exhibits a myopia characteristic of first-wave hypertext theory. There is no equivalent to dog-earring a page in a program like Storyspace. To reach a previously-traversed lexia in *Patchwork Girl*, we must laboriously retrace our steps. Any readerly position within a hyperfiction's structure organizes alternate readerly paths and potential re-reading in a "hierarchy" of accessibility.


As Aarseth's text/machine model and Hayles's flickering signification make clear, the paratext of *Patchwork Girl* is allographic (variable for each operator) in ways that meaningfully surpass the paratextuality of most codex books. Hardware components such as the screen, CPU, keyboard, and mouse/trackpad as well as both "normal" software functioning and glitch, lag, crash, whatever together result in an entirely unique allographic dimension of how we experience hyperfictions. For an example of the paratextual variation across different versions of *Patchwork Girl*, see note 51.


In its contemporary usage, "liberal humanism" points to so much that it can sometimes signify little. When I use the term, I point specifically at the object of *Patchwork Girl*s critique: a phallogocentric construction of the human subject based on the exclusion of gendered and racialized others. This construction of the human is grounded in liberal, masculinist values of a fixed notion of identity and a naturalizing mastery of self and meaning dependent on the premise that language immediately represents reality. On these terms, we can sweepingly consider poststructuralist and posthumanist thought as attempts to negate this construction.

For Pierre Macherey, ideology is fragmented, but in textual representation—in language—must necessarily appear with "an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth" (A Theory of Literary Production [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978], 174). Kristeva’s psychoanalytic notion of the “semiotic” finds a more radical “monstrosity” immanent to language as its "its tonal and rhythmic qualities, its bodily force. In Kristeva’s account, the drives are not simply excluded by language but also inscribed as an alien element within it… prior to the reign of propositions, judgments, positions, and theses, these being subsequent possibilities that might arrest or seize a movement that always exceeds them” (Emily Zakin, "Psychoanalytic Feminism," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta [CSLI, Stanford U]).

Ibid.

Attending a performance of the first stage adaptation of Frankenstein, Mary Shelley found that its playbill placed "— — — —" next to the name of the actor who played the male creature. She then noted in a letter that "this nameless mode of naming the unnameable is rather good” (Wolfson and Levao, "Introduction," 26. Quoted from Selected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed. Betty T. Bennet [Johns Hopkins UP, 1994], 27).

In historical dialogue, Kant and Kristeva’s definitions of the monstrous also point to the epistemological “relocation” of the monstrous from exterior to interior, mind to body, that in its presentation here and in general, is entangled with gender. While men have historically been permitted to exist as transcendent, floating brains throughout history, women have been denied such intellectual expression—their bodies and minds subjugated and instrumentalized as untranscendent otherness. The feminist theory Patchwork Girl embeds itself in marks a shift back towards the body with powerful materialist critiques of the transcendentally disembodied liberal humanist subject.

With Google Image search as a cultural barometer, it is clear that a certain energy drink and talkative CGI eyeball with legs may have disrupted the metonymic supremacy of Frankenstein’s monster in our cultural imaginary. Yet, the degree to which Dr. Frankenstein’s male creature looms over contemporary Western culture is undeniable. Scores of cultural productions ranging from movie adaptations to multimedia advertising campaigns have transformed Shelley’s male creature into today’s generic monster: a towering, green monster-man drastically different from the creature in her novel. Susan Tyler Hitchcock places "Frankenstein”—this transformed version the male creature—"alongside Mickey Mouse, Uncle Sam, and even the haloed Aryan meant to represent Jesus” in the "lineup of icons of the Western world" (Frankenstein: A Cultural History [New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007], 9).

If we consider this creatress-creature sex scene in terms of Ned Lukacher's concept of the primal scene, it takes on a feminist-narratological spin. In *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 1988, Lukacher expands Freud's concept of the primal scene, in which a child first witnesses the sex act (usually between their parents) as a traumatizing scene of violence that shapes their psychosexual development, to describe a "trope for reading and understanding." Thus, for Lukacher, the primal scene becomes an "ontologically undecidable intertextual event that is situated in the differential space between historical memory and imaginative construction, between archival verification and interpretive free play"; it is the "interpretive impasse that arises when a reader has good reason to believe that the meaning of one text is historically dependent on the meaning of another text or on a previously unnoticed set of criteria even though there is no conclusive evidential or archival means of establishing the case beyond reasonable doubt" (24). In the "journal" zone's intermeshing fictive worlds—the fictive "historical memory" of Mary Shelley and the "imaginative construction" of the female creature—we see how this creatress-creature sex scene situates us paradoxically in the "differential space" in-between *Patchwork Girl* and *Frankenstein*: an ontologically disruptive nexus where body and text blur together in the psychosexual subject-formation of the patchwork girl. Indeed, the patchwork girl's myth is "dependent on the meaning of another text," and her characterization is dependent not only on *Frankenstein* in its immediacy, but on negating "the previously unnoticed set of criteria" of the novel's patriarchally imprisoned literary production. The anti-heteronormative sexual logic of this "primal scene" reappears, mirrored, in the climax of the America Narrative, which I explore in Chapter 3 (see note 130).

*Patchwork Girl*'s "story" zone in a 2005 version of Storyspace illustrates how variable a hyperfiction’s paratext can be. We can actually see the links between lexias displayed as arrows in the map window, and the parenthetical quality of the lexia "she" becomes explicit as it sits out of alignment with the five lexias that exclusively quote *Frankenstein*:

![Patchwork Girl - [Storyspace Map: M/S](image)](image)
Given this zone's intertextual intensity, my referral to the "female creature" versus the "patchwork girl" may seem ambiguous. This is the nature of her character. To the degree that she stages a reification of the poststructuralist theory of text, she also emanates what we might think of as a "poststructuralist ex-nomination."


Mellor argues that these tragedies contributed to a significant re-shaping of the 1831 Frankenstein's philosophy in which an organic conception of nature cedes to a "mechanistic one…a might machine, a juggernaut, an imperial tyrant" with individuals "now but puppets" subjected to forces of fate and human imperfection. Dr. Frankenstein's character becomes a victim in the 1831 text, no longer the strictly contemptible "originator of evil" depicted in the 1818 version ("Choosing a Text of Frankenstein to Teach," 164-166).

Mellor, "Introduction to Frankenstein, Third Edition (1831)," 171. Wolfson and Levao note that "The improbable sounding pasta experiment of animating vermicelli probably derives from a confusion of Darwin's references to microscopic animals in a paste of flour and water (which contains animalcules) and his reference to vorticella (microscopic animals) 'coming to life after being dried.' The confusion was probably encouraged by the etymology of vermicelli: little worms. (Byron enjoyed punning on 'celli' and 'Shelley')." (The Annotated Frankenstein, 341-342, note 18. Wolfson and Levao quote Leonard Wolf, who cites personal communication with Darwin's biographer, Desmond King-Hele).

Mellor, "Choosing a Text of Frankenstein to Teach," 166.

Barthes, S/Z, 7.


This title is not visible in the version of Storyspace I use to read Patchwork Girl. However, it is visible in earlier versions of Storyspace. See note 51.

The patchwork girl interrupts Derrida in a passage from “Plato's Pharmacy,” Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981): Referring to Plato's recognition of writing as a ... 171). Derrida comments: "As a living thing, logos issues from the father. There is thus for Plato no such thing as a written thing. There is a logos more or less alive, more or less distant from itself. Writing is not an independent order of signification; it is weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a rephrased corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath. The phantom, the phantasm, the simulacrum (eidolon, 276a) of living discourse is not inanimate; it is not insignificant; it simply signifies little, and always the same thing. This signer of little, this discourse that doesn't amount to much, is like all ghosts: errant" (143). Throughout Dissemination, Derrida discusses the privileging of speech over writing in Western philosophy—its immediate presence over the mediated, technological absence of the written word. This is an element of his concept of phallogocentrism. While this essay does not venture into the realm of Derrida, the patchwork girl's presence within the shape (and imagery) of this discussion, as sketched by the above quotation, becomes clear in my traversal of the "graveyard" zone in Chapter 2.


We might also think of the patchwork girl as a "third term" in the sense put forward by Georges Bataille. Julian Pefanis describes Bataille's "third term" as "Neither the result of a dialectical synthesis, nor the reference of a semiotic practice... neither a Hegelian nor a structuralist origin but a Nietzschean, Sadean one—the 'beyond' of good and evil" (Heterology and the Postmodern, 42). In the lexia "metaphor me" in the "broken accents" zone, The patchwork girl defines herself against the notion of phallogocentric truth and the polar scheme of dialectical antithesis: '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 with other territories alien to it but equally mine... borrowed parts, annexed territories. I cannot be reduced, my metaphors are not tautologies, yet I am equally present at both poles of a pair, each end of the wire is tethered to one of my limbs. The metaphorical principle is my true skeleton.'

Shelley, Frankenstein, 166.


The female creature's deletion as an act of "humanity-saving" castration/abjection is alive in myth today, especially given the pop-scholarly fervor of Frankenstein's 2016 biennial. In a 2016 study published in BioScience, authors Nathaniel J. Dominy and Justin D. Yeakel model species interaction in a formal treatment of Dr. Frankenstein's choice to destroy the female creature. They conclude that although Dr. Frankenstein's 'act itself was impulsive (caused by a 'sensation of madness')... his rationale for denying a mate to his male creation has empirical justification... the decision was prudent because it averted our own extinction by competitive exclusion" (Nathaniel J. Dominy and Justin D. Yeakel, "Frankenstein and the Horrors of Competitive Exclusion," BioScience [2016]).


Frankenstein, as Barthes would say, is a "pensive text" with a "supplementary, unexpected meaning which is the theatrical sign of the implicit... the signifier of the inexpressible." (S/Z, 216). Unable to be "legally" assimilated under a name, this monstrosity fissures the text and precipitates the collapse of castration. From Patchwork Girl's vantage, the female creature is this "signifier of the inexpressible." The hyperfiction leverages its digital hypertext technology to try to reanimate her trace in Frankenstein: the "metonymic vibration of castration" (S/Z, 209). In my reading of Patchwork Girl, I try to show how it too is a "pensive text."

Shelley, Frankenstein, 147.

Jackson, "Stitch Bitch."


2 | INCARNATION


On liberal humanism, see note 38.

Baujke Prins notes that "the central opposition that the cyborg undermines is the opposition between nature and culture. Haraway's assumption is that a variety of social categories, such as race and gender, have been used to 'reinvent' nature in a way that suits dominant hierarchical theories of race and gender differences" ("The Ethics of Hybrid Subjects: Feminist Constructivism According to Donna Haraway," Science, Technology, and Human Values 20.3 (1995): 360).


I draw this sweeping definition of Haraway's "informatics" from Hayles (How We Became Posthuman, 29). In "Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway uses the term "informatics of domination" to refer to "rearrangements in world-wide social relations tied to science and technology. Her cyborg myth attempts to produce a 'politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender' determined by our historical conjuncture's 'movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system'" ("Cyborg Manifesto," 28).
We can certainly read *Patchwork Girl* as a literary response to numerous call-to-action moments in Haraway's manifesto—i.e. "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (33). Heather Latimer points out that the lexia "bio" and "identities" in the "bad dreams' / 'self swarm' space of the "broken accents" zone pay explicit homage to Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" by rewriting its language in statements like "the body as seen by biology is chimerical" and "we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" (Heather Latimer, "Reproductive Technologies, Fetal Icons, and Genetic Freaks: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and the Limits and Possibilities of Donna Haraway's Cyborg," *Modern Fiction Studies* 57 (2011): 330).


Bakhtin elaborates on the action of the Rabelasian chronotope: how it "expose[s] the body's structure and its life and on the other hand drag into the body-matrix a heterogenous world of things, phenomena and ideas that were, in the medieval picture of the world, infinitely far from the body, and included in completely different series of words and objects. Whatever direct contact these objects and phenomena had with the body was brought about, first and foremost, via a *verbal matrix*, their verbal compacting into a single context, a single phrase, a single compound word" ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," 176).


In her reading of *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles hints at a chronotopic, formalist approach to understanding the hyperfiction's project when she describes its use of frontispiece images (I will read these images in a similar yet divergent way in Chapter 3): "we enter these textual blocks through a bodily image, implying that the text lies within the represented body. This dynamic inverts the usual perception the reader has with print fiction, that the represented bodies lie within the book. In print fiction, the book as physical object often seems to fade away as the reader's imagination re-creates the vaporous world of the text, so that reading becomes, as Friedrich Kittler puts it, a kind of hallucination. The bodies populating the fictional world seem therefore to be figments of the reader's imagination. First comes the immaterial mind, then from it issue impressions of physical beings. Here, however, the body is figured not as the product of the immaterial work but a portal to it, thus inverting the usual hierarchy that puts mind first" ("Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*: The Importance of Media Specific Analysis," *Postmodern Culture* 10, no. 2 [12/5/2016 2000]).


I draw the general shape of this concept of the textual *punctum* from Hayles, who attributes it to a discussion of Barthes's punctum in Jane Gallop's 1988 work *Thinking Through the Body* (the essay "The Prick of the Object" in chapter 'Carnal Knowledge' (New York: Columbia UP), 149-160). However, I can not find where Hayles finds any discussion of the textual *punctum* in Gallop's book. Nonetheless, I find her theoretical "translation" of Barthes's concept compelling. (Hayles, "Corporeal Anxiety in *Dictionary of the Khazars*: What Books Talk About in the Late Age of Print When They Talk About Losing Their Bodies," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.4 (1997): 803.)


My concept departs from the total contingency of Barthes's *punctum*, in which "The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah... to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise into affective consciousness" (*Camera Lucida*, 55). While a textual *punctum* withdraws us from the "usual blah blah" of readerly immersion, it acts on us, we do not "affect" it.

While you can resize the text window in Storyspace and remove some of the enjambment, disjunctive line breaks appear independently of the text window's size after the word "Legs" and the subsequent phrase "(Right and Left)."

I further explore the meaning of this textual *punctum* in Chapter 3—particularly the symbolism of the screenic headstone itself. While the realm of Derrida is beyond the reach of this prosthesis, the imagery of the "headstone" lexia’s textual *punctum* device is steeped in his discussion of the written versus the spoken word in the "Plato's Pharmacy" section of his work *Dissemination*. See note 65.
In older versions of Storyspace, hyperlinks between lexias appear as arrows in the map window. In this screen shot of a 2003 traversal of the "graveyard" zone, we get a glimpse of this arborescent hypertext structure—hyperlinks looping between the "headstone" lexia and body-part lexias:

We might think of the hallucinatory immediacy of the patchwork girl’s hypertext-as-body, emerging via textual punctum, in terms of the collapse of reference into referent (image into body) that Barthes invokes by foregrounding the mechanics of light in our punctum experience of film photography: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here…touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (Camera Lucida, 80-81). In her broader artistic practice, Jackson is fascinated with this paradigmatic collapse between body and text, which Barthes captures so gracefully in his phrase "carnal medium." See Jackson’s work Skin: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viF-xuLrGvA.

Image of the map window that appears upon entering the "quilt" zone:
The "quilt" zone is mostly built from two works of fiction: the 1831 edition of Frankenstein and L. Frank Baum's 1913 children's novel The Patchwork Girl of Oz. Excerpts from theoretical works include a 1991 English translation of Helene Cixous' essay "Coming to Writing" and Barbara Maria Stafford's 1991 Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine. There is even an unattributed excerpt from Elle Magazine and a snippet of Eastgate System's instructional volume for Storyspace software. Even though Jackson cites these sources, she still tweaks the quotations. There is a lexia titled "(sources)" accessible from Patchwork Girl's title page, as well as several lexias scattered throughout the hyperfiction that provide source information for excerpted material. In the lexia "(sources)," Jackson notes: "At certain places in this web I have lapsed without notice into another's voice, into direct quote or fudged restatement. My subject matter seems to call for this very unceremonious appropriation. Those with a stronger sense of personal property may which to know who is speaking when."

The textile idiom of the dotted line and the "quilt" zone invoke an important history of feminine labor and the development of information technology. In her history of women and computers, Sadie Plant theorizes the mnesic properties and inextricability of process and product in weaving: "Because there is no difference between the process of weaving and the woven design, cloths persists as records of the processes which fed into their production… The visible pattern is integral to the process which produced it; the program and pattern are continuous… A piece of work so absorbing as a cloth is saturated with the thoughts of the people who produced it, each of whom can flash straight back to whatever they were thinking as they worked" (Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 66.).

When we turn the page of a codex book, we catch a glimpse of the pages on either side. We see the paper that is under and over, "before" and "after," the page at-hand. In this passing moment of spatio-temporal mapping, we establish where we are in the machine of the text. The fictive time-space we pass through in the text appears connected to the real time-space we inhabit in the paratextual present; immaterial narrative progression maps onto material paginal progression. The hyperlink affords us no such moment of mental-mapping. Stuart Moulthrop attributes the hyperlink's disorienting effect to this form of spatio-temporal "myopia" in which "the preterite space through or over which we move remains unseen" (Stuart Moulthrop, "Pushing Back: Living and Writing in Broken Space," Modern Fiction Studies 43.3, [1997], 663). Moulthrop describes this "myopia" in terms of cybernetic black box closure: how the "visible, binary circuit of connection" presented for us on a screen is entirely contingent on "the unseen matrix or structure of possible structures against which the transaction is realized, figure against ground" (663). On mental mapping in hyperspace, see note 7.

The lexia "misconception" exemplifies the "quilt" zone's approach to characterizing the patchwork girl both thematically and stylistically. In the annotated layer, it appears like this: "A hideous monster with calf's head and hooves, or that other dreadful person—the girl who is all patches—emerge from unsuitable sights and mixed fantasies. Through art, one could even breed misfits and transform them into a new species. "Mosaic" technique of the maternal imagination, mistress of errors; aren't you the very demon of multiplicity?" This passage combines fragments from Helene Cixous's "Coming to Writing" (normal character style) Barbara Maria Stafford Body Criticism (italics), and L. Frank Baum's The Patchwork Girl of Oz (bold).

Hayles notes: "Although presence and absence loom much larger in Lacanian psycholinguistics than do pattern and randomness, Lacan was not uninterested in information theory. In the 19.54-55 Seminar, he played with incorporating ideas from information theory and cybernetics into psychoanalysis" (Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999), 298, note 14). When Patchwork Girl does evoke a sexual logic underpinning its narrative, it subverts heteronormativity. See note 50.
In Hayles’s explanation of the exigency of mutation and its dialectic of pattern/randomness, we find the media-materialist perspective that, overlooked by many twentieth century literary theorists like Bakhtin (evidently, an ethics-based critique of Bakhtin—which my reading is not—on this literary-technological ground is rather “immaterial”—he was writing in 1937) has been newly illuminated by contemporary informatics: “characteristics of print texts that used to be transparent (because they were so pervasive) are becoming visible again through their differences from digital textuality… it is precisely because material interfaces have changed that pattern and randomness can be perceived as dominant over presence and absence. The pattern/randomness dialectic does not erase the material world; information in fact derives its efficacy from the material infrastructures it appears to obscure” (How We Became Posthuman. 28).

Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 33.

Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 30.

Hayles, How We Became Posthuman. 33.

3 | REFLECTION


Even as Patchwork Girl subverts masculinist structures of meaning-making, it has still been read in ways that reinscribe these structures. Shackelford critiques Landow for reading Patchwork Girl as a pedagogy in how digital hypertext liberates the reader to construct the text and therefore themselves, as “Frankenstein readers, stitching together narrative, gender, and identity.” She is right, I think, to identify this constructivist reading as a reflection of Landow’s own liberal ideology of self-authorship: a masculinist relation to identity construction that, projected here onto a writing technology, is “purchased at the expense of women and other minority subjects whose bodies are presumed to speak for themselves.” As Shackelford reminds us, subjects’ bodies are already materialized and “imbued with power relations that determine the terms of legibility or illegibility in advance,” and therefore restrict the self-authorship proposed by Landow to certain privileged subjects (“Subject to Change,” 76-77).

Following Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson describes the computer and other screenic technologies characteristic of postmodern culture as “machines of reproduction rather than of production… in the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content—into narratives which are about the process of reproduction” (Postmodernism, 36-37). As a critic, Jameson might have little patience for the reflexive formal experimentation of a hyperfiction like Patchwork Girl, as it literally inhabits his phrase “aesthetic embodiment.” My reading aims to show that the hyperfiction reflexively harbors this kind of Jamesonian skepticism of its “process of reproduction,” and transforms the extent to which it is “about” this process. Patchwork Girl does not entirely let itself “slip back” and get comfortable in its postmodernist reflexivity.

On this sweeping definition of informatics, see note 83.


On this point, Shackelford cites Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, Karyn Valerius, Monica J. Casper, Valerie Hartouni, Susan M. Squier, Sarah Franklin, and Monica Casper.

Latimer, “Reproductive Technologies, Fetal Icons, and Genetic Freaks,” 332.
In the terms of the Russian formalists, the "headstone" lexia explicitly puts to rest the assumption of a *fabula*—a singular, essential "tale"—behind the hyperfiction's *sjuzhet*—its "telling." While the hyperfiction's multursal 'narrative' already destabilizes this assumption, the "headstone" lexia does so with forceful intention. David Wittenberg calls this assumption the "postulate of fabular apriority" (Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative (New York: Fordham UP, 2013), 119-124). This postulate is what what Wittenberg playfully calls a "ruse of fictional historicality": the maligned assumption of much narrative theory (and of the armchair reader) that a tale's telling (*sjuzhet*) assembles a temporally linear tale (*fabula*) which, in our narrative-soaked minds, necessarily preexists this telling. According to this postulate, the telling *a priori* follows the tale even though we *a posteriori* encounter the telling first (all we can encounter is the telling). This contradiction rises to a text's surface (literally, the paratextual surface) in the time travel paradoxes often found in works of science fiction. Wittenberg argues that these texts imagine paradoxical temporal loops that explicitly negate the postulate of fabular apriority that we, as readers, bring to the text as our assumed "theory" of its narrative (an ideological, "popular" phenomenon, hence the title of Wittenberg's book). When a protagonist meets their double stepping out of a cosmic wormhole from the future, the beginning of their story becomes its end, and vice versa. This shatters the grounding referent of our reading—the *fabula* and its presumed historicity—and with this narrative shock, we experience what Wittenberg calls the "rise of the paratext." Here, in lieu of the *fabula*'s grounding referent-function, the materiality of the text before us rises as the referent in-itself.

The book *books* itself, right before our eyes. Indeed, Wittenberg's account of time travel narratives gestures towards the phenomenon of the "headstone" lexia's textual *punctum* (Wittenberg does mention *Patchwork Girl* in passing on page [126]): "although the naturalization of fabular apriority is rendered impossible by the time travel paradox story, the story does not end in a state of chaos or indeterminacy but rather with a fully concrete paratext, a book, which is a medium (in a rather literal sense) through which one may continue to play the dialectical game of reconciling the temporal orders of sjuzhet and fabula. And thus, strangely enough, the paratext is even more primal than the fabula—or stands in behind it, the ultimate postulated object of the cathexis of narrative coherence or truth, the thing one must finally always possess in order to read, and to finish reading" (126).

In *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT UP, 2001), Lev Manovich argues that the "database becomes the center of the creative process in the computer age" (227). While he does not explicitly make the case that the database has "displaced" narrative as a dominant cultural form—as Hayles has suggested ("Traumas of Code," Critical Inquiry [2006]: 142)—his cursory treatment of this question compellingly foregrounds how new media has precipitated a "technical, or 'material,' change in the definition of narrative" (227). Manovich approaches this database/narrative question with a focus on the production of new media artworks and electronic texts. Aarseth's *Cybertext* also approaches this question, albeit on less polemical terms and, I think, more productively, with his concept of ergodic literature, which illuminates how readerly interaction with electronic texts complicates codex-centric understandings of narrative (92-95).
For example, Shackelford notes that there are "five sections of the work—'Story,' 'Graveyard,' 'Crazy Quilt,' 'Journal,' and 'Broken Accents'" and that "Each section assembles the patchwork girl in relation to a particular technology—print narrative, reconstructive surgery, quilting, handwriting, and digital hypertext, respectively—foregrounding the organization and sensory modalities this medium tends to privilege" ("Subject to Change," 75-76). While this reading produces a compelling thematic account of the hyperfiction's structure, it fails to produce much more meaning than Shackelford's consequent remark that "the patchwork girl is like hypertext in this regard, a multimedia production." Moreover, it has no account of the America Narrative's distinct structural separation from the five zones immediately accessible on the hyperfiction's "title page" lexia. The America Narrative is clearly a sixth zone, but Shackelford seems to consider it part of the "story" zone, even though only the "journal" zone has a narrative which is explicitly continuous with the America Narrative (yet to group the America Narrative with the journal zone would run contrary to Shackelford's media-thematic reading).

Frontispiece images, as seen in the text window: "her" for the hyperfiction as a whole, "hercut" for the "quilt" zone, "hercut2" for the "journal" zone, "hercut3" for the "story" zone, and "hercut4" for the "graveyard" zone:

124 Jackson, "Stitch Bitch."
127 Jackson, "The Interview with Shelley Jackson About Patchwork Girl."
128 Shelley, Frankenstein, 118-19.
Drawing on Roof’s feminist narratology, Shackelford describes how this sex scene “theorize[s] a lesbian sexual and textual grammar that throws the oppositional sexual economy naturalized in relation to print narrative into relief… Roof identifies a heterosexual, reproductive ideology underpinning and reinforced by the binary logics of narrative. She suggests that narrative’s reproductive ideology differentiates between positions that are metaphorically masculine or feminine, active or passive, whose coming together or ‘conjoinder’ produces narrative meaning. Within this reproductive narrative logic, relations of sameness are typically cast as nonreproductive and metaphorically homosexual. Yet Roof notes that ‘configurations of the lesbian tend to mark the failures’ of this binary, heterosexual system’ (‘Subject to Change,’ 90).

On the sexual logic of Patchwork Girl’s narrative, see note 50.

This scene clearly alludes to the setting of Frankenstein’s frame narrative where the male creature wanders the arctic icecap. Throughout the America Narrative, moments like this bring into focus how thoroughly Patchwork Girl inhabits Shelley’s text. The lexia “cut and paste” in the America Narrative also alludes to this frame-narrative as the patchwork girl wrestles with her patchwork self, trying to assimilate into American society: “Lacking a past altogether, though, wasn’t safe. It was too easy to slide around on that glossy Arctic surface, that held so many reflections and released them just as easily. I wanted a past with abundant nooks and textures, impossible to slip on or fall through.” In addition to its Frankenstein allusion, this imagery expresses a latent awareness of just how politically “slippery” the patchwork girl’s character is. Once stripped of the hypertexual technicity that shapes her “past” in the multiscursal zones, her character is stark and parasitic, as if this technicity has stood in for a “real” identity, a “real” politics. This is, of course, immediately accounted for in the hyperfiction’s thematics; but its form tells a different story.

Drawing on systems theory’s account of self-reference and reflexivity as autopoiesis—a necessary part of any system’s self-constitution—McGurl suggests that we take the literary productions of American creative-writing programs as ‘acts of authorial self-making—or not merely—as the feats of radical individuation the often represent themselves to be, nor as evidence of a final dispersal of subjectivity in and across social institutions and the mediasphere, but as moments in the operation, the autopoiesis, of a larger cultural system geared for the production of self-expressive originality. The name for this overall project is “technoromanticism,” and taking advantage of a common Greek root in autopoiesis (self-making) and poetics, and forcing an obvious but helpful pun, we can call the routinely reflexive operations it calls for ‘autopoetics’” (The Program Era, 49). Patchwork Girl lays out its auto-poetics before us, anxious—as if workshop itself—that we grasp its creative process.

Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” 84.


McGurl, The Program Era, 46.

McGurl, The Program Era, 43.

McGurl, The Program Era, 32.

McGurl, The Program Era, 56-62. By liberal ideologies of multiculturalism, I refer to what Timothy Bewes, drawing on Žižek and Hardt and Negri, calls ‘postmodern,” “reflexive racism”: ‘In a multiculturalist society, reification flips over onto its contrary, the respect for difference. A liberal policy of ‘anti-racism’ becomes… the vehicle of a postmodern ideology of ‘reflexive racism’… ‘postmodern racism’ is a form of segregation, not hierarchy, in which cultural difference comes to fill the role that biology and ethnicity once played. ‘This pluralism accepts all the differences of who we are so long as we agree to act on the basis of these differences of identity, so long as we act our race.’ In this transformation, ‘culture,’ ‘difference,’ ‘tolerance,’ become the means by which the struggle against reification is itself reified” (Reification, or, the Anxiety of Late Capitalism [New York and London: Verso, 2002], 76). My reading of Patchwork Girl aims to show how the hyperfiction reproduces this racism.


McGurl, The Program Era, 46.
104 Patchwork Girl mentions race explicitly only a handful of times. In the lexia "why hideous?," found in the "journal" zone directly adjacent to one of the two entrances to the America Narrative, the female creature describes how "Every part of me is human and proportional to the whole. Yet I am a monster—because I am multiple, and because I am mixed, mestizo, mongrel." While clearly and critically gesturing towards a liberal humanist logic of racialization, the patchwork girl does no more than reiterate her technicity-conflicted "ethnicity": she is only "mestizo" because she is "multiple"—fragmented by the hypertext-as-body idiom of the hyperfiction's cyborg-writing. In another instance, found in the "broken accents" zone's lexia "whole?," race is subsumed into the figurative language of a brief meditation on "angels" and the belief-system of liberal humanist unity and self-mastery: "Classical wholeness and taxonomic self-knowledge is harder and harder to believe in. Maybe even for angels, although they don't seem reft by racial and cultural differences, and seem to believe in hierarchy, in assigning moral parking spots as if souls acquired goodness stepwise, in integral packets. Notches, tax brackets; Thrones, Powers, Seraphs."

137 McGurl, The Program Era, 67. McGurl elaborates: "If we apply interpretive pressure to overtly pluralistic fiction to make visible the machinery involved in its production of difference, with overtly machinic technomodernism we can apply it in the opposite direction. Doing so, we see how even the 'whitest' technomodernism can function as a discourse of difference, producing a symbolic placeholder for a paradoxically non-ethnic ethnicity that might be called (with apologies to John Guillory) 'technicity'" (62).

144 Critical readings of Patchwork Girl, when they do address race—they rarely do—largely reflect the hyperfiction's own shortcomings. Shackelford's reading is a good example: brilliant in its integration of cybernetics and feminist ethics, but far less nuanced in terms of race. In a moment of prescience, she does note that the hyperfiction "fails to address some of the more dissonant, nonbinary intersections between processes of racialization and of gendering, unwittingly marking unacknowledged components and limits to this cyborg analogy" (93). However, she does not elaborate on this point. Otherwise, Shackelford rightly identifies that the patchwork girl expresses "aspirations to a femininity modeled after Mary Shelley's" and is "thus racially coded white" ("Subject to Change" 87). Yet, she argues that the hyperfiction "confronts and confounds binary racial categories that attempt to differentiate absolutely according to a reductive binary of black and white. On this point, she cites the lexia "I am" in the "story zone," in which "Body parts taken from numerous corpses give the patchwork girl the "motley effect of patched skin," and describes how in the lexia "she stood," in the "journal" zone, Jackson's 'Mary Shelley' notes that 'the various sectors of her skin were different hues and textures, no match perfect; 'warm brown neighbored blue veined ivory'" (88). While I agree with the gesture of Shackelford's argument, it relies on a reductive chromatism that, like the hyperfiction itself, reinscribes the putatively biological basis of the category of race. She does not account for the "vaporous machinery" of racialization. This contrasts markedly with her more nuanced, non-biologically essentializing reading of the hyperfiction's representations of gender and sexuality. Subsequently, Shackelford produces a reading of the "phrenology" frontispiece that is less critical then mine, arguing that it "attempts to think through the intersections and differences between processes of racialization and the sex/gender system, both of which stake their claims on bodies, producing their own sometimes overlapping, yet also dissonant, modes of monstrosity." Again, Shackelford does not elaborate on how these "modes of monstrosity" are "dissonant." While my reading suggests that Patchwork Girl self-consciously foregrounds this "dissonance" as if hedging its political implications, this lexia and the hyperfiction as a whole is certainly open to a more critical reading than my own on the topic of race.
TRANSCLUSION

In computer science, transclusion is the inclusion of one text fragment within another by digital hypertext reference. Each hyperlink in Patchwork Girl is a transclusion, as are most hyperlinks we encounter on the Web. We sense the magnitude of hyperspace when transclusion splits one word open to reveal a thousand, one flickering signifier mutating into a constellation in the blink of an eye. Time and space fuzz-out. So too, perhaps, does a simple notion of truth (let’s transclude phallocentrism!). So we find ways to ease the vertigo of hyperspace. Flickering signification gets smoothed around the edges. Sometimes our transclusions swoop into view on our screens, sometimes they swipe-in. Haptic feedback reminds us that we have bodies. We are “acclimating.” However, we still flinch sometimes, like when we flicker into a disturbing fragment of hyperspace on the Web. Transclusion is antiblack police brutality, streaming live, next to a reminder that tomorrow is your friend’s birthday. A Facebook jaunt mutates into something else entirely—something monstrous. We have transcluded Patchwork Girl into something bigger than itself, linking its fictional world to our social reality and the fictions we put to work in the shaping of it.

Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


