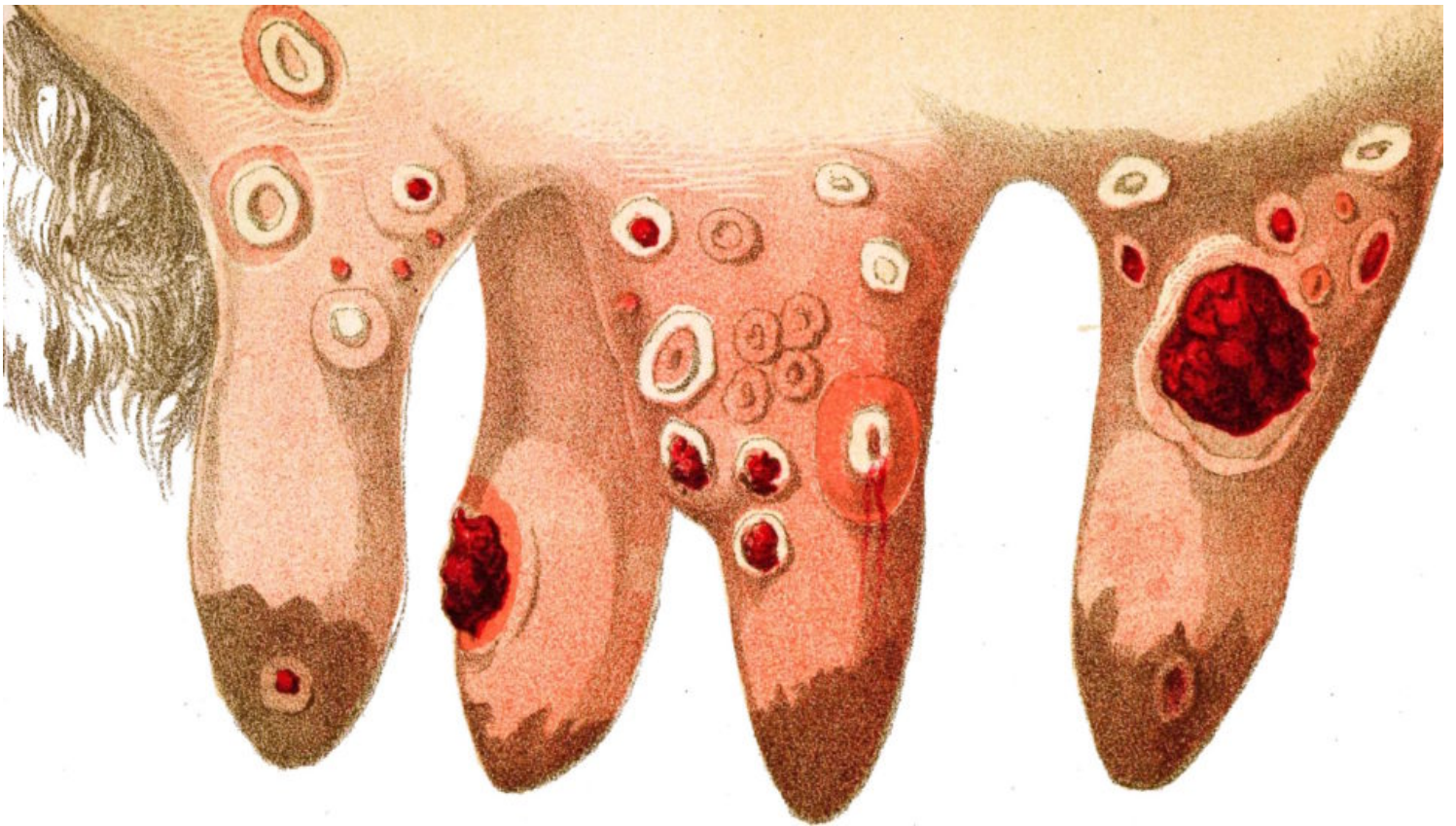


## FEAST

# Flurry

MELANIE JACKSON



1

The night time consumption of milk and cheese is associated with restful sleep; dreams of plenty; the land of milk and honey - as well as nightmares, terrors and bizarre visual disturbances. The potential powers of nurture and sustenance are cut through with spectres of the diabolical. Hippocrates<sup>2</sup> described,

"monstrous bodies that are seen in sleep and frighten a man indicate a surfeit of unaccustomed food... "

The affiliation of cheese with bad dreams is so entrenched in the popular imagination, in 2005 the British Cheese Board commissioned a study to try and dispel the link. 'Now that our Cheese and Dreams study has finally debunked the myth that cheese gives you nightmares we hope that people will think more positively about eating cheese before bed', claimed the BSB secretary Nigel White in a press release *Sweet Dreams Are Made Of Cheese*.<sup>3</sup> According to the study, rather than causing nightmares, cheese precipitated pleasant nighttime fantasies – even noting that different regional products incubated different dream forms: women who ate Stilton had unusual dreams replete with talking animals, people eating Cheddar dreamt about celebrities, those eating Red Leicester dreamt of their schooldays, whereas over half of Cheshire eaters had no dreams at all. There are theories that the bacteria and fungi present in blue cheese such as tryptamine or tyramine, have psychoactive effects, though the report concludes that is the presence of the stress releasing amino acid *tryptophan* in cheese that may be triggering these phantasms. Tryptophan was first isolated from the milk protein casein by Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins in 1901.<sup>4</sup> He discovered that tryptophan could not be manufactured by the body, and has to be obtained from the diet, and is essential for animal life. It is the least abundant of the essential amino acids, but it is one of the most crucial, as it is involved in the formulation of niacin and the neurotransmitter serotonin. Serotonin regulates mood and appetite. In turn it is also essential for the production of the hormone melatonin, which we need to maintain circadian rhythms, to sleep.



5

In medieval dream landscapes such as Bruegel's *The Land of Cockayne* (1567) animals offer themselves up in consumable forms, with cutlery ready in their beaks or carving knives plunged into their backs, ready and waiting to be feasted upon. (Perhaps they are ready to eat themselves, a culinary ouroboros, in a self-sacrificial eternal return). Although *The Land of Cockayne* is a dream landscape, the motif of animal self-sacrifice is laid down in doctrine. According to medieval exegesis, God's instruction to Adam to name the animals gave humans dominion over them. Through this divine mandate, the act of naming allowed humans to make use of what they named, in any way they saw fit. Thomas Aquinas interpreted this to mean that animals existed primarily for human consumption, reasoning that fish swam in schools only in order to help us catch them.<sup>6</sup> This legitimised instrumentalisation of nature set in motion a pervasive humanism that we are only just beginning to dismantle in the face of species and habitat extinction.



Z

After thirty years of the intense genetic manipulation of cows to maximize profit, as part the US Dairy Association's national 'animal improvement programme' a recent academic paper surmises: 'intense and accurate selection has led to substantial genetic improvement in milk, butterfat and protein yield' though 'genetic change in health and reproduction has been undesirable'.<sup>8</sup> Yields increase whilst bodies diminish. The animals of Bruegel's dreamscapes are brought into being.

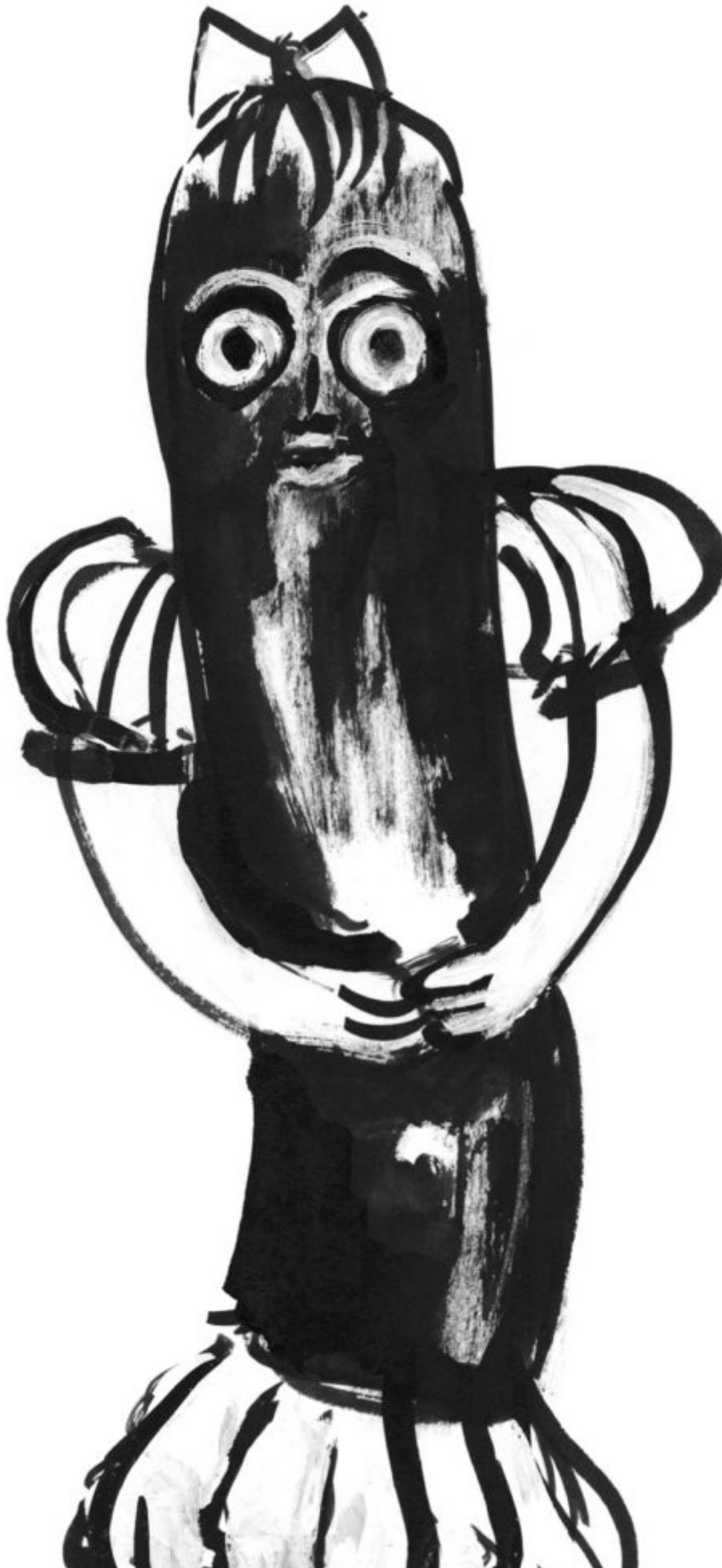
Contemporary genetics reforming of the animal body and the animal industry echoes with the representations of meat, milk and dairy throughout medieval and folk history. Medieval feasts saw inversions and subversions of familiar food-stuffs fill table-tops. Food took on animate forms incorporating great tableaux and scenes of pillage and shipwreck, battles sieges, military encampments and biblical epics. There were inversions and deceptions, with substitutions and re-moldings of one food substance reconstituted to look like another. There were automatons, whales spewing fish, singing mermaids and cavaliers, a dromedary releasing birds from pies to swarm around the dining hall, only to be rounded up by a royal falcon. Edible architecture of epic proportions began

to make its appearance on banqueting tables of the wealthy, presenting what a working person could only dream of. Whilst a working person could only dream of aristocratic feasting, in the eighteenth century the aristocracy fantasised the work of the peasant labourer. Marie Antoinette for one, staged pageants of the pastoral, and built a dairy in the grounds of Versailles, where she would perform the ritual consumption of freshly drawn milk complete with a sixty-five-piece Sèvres porcelain service, including porcelain buckets mimicking the wooden counterparts in use in the peasant economy, and rhitons modeled as perfect breasts with pert pink nipples.



2

At the present moment the supply of food in industrialised nations means that urban supermarkets are permanently and copiously filled, with 24 hour availability. Fantasies of food without labour are partially facilitated through drone agriculture and robotic checkouts. Bizarre novelty food forms find their way into every corner shop.





10

In a recent visit to Japan, the sweet and snack shelves of the *con-bini* – the convenience stores on every city corner had me enthralled. I am drawn to the forms that appear through capitalism’s regurgitation of folk tales and dreamscapes in commodity form. Novelty foodstuffs and their semi-monstrous mascots and leering marketing avatars fill a consumer space in which spectres of the macabre, bizarre and fantastical surface. A blushing round headed figure and his entourage of friends and enemies seem to populate large swathes of the snack aisles and freezer cabinets. One appears to be an oyster-head with a discontented lemon as the mascot on his own superhero chest. They are gurning and flying from all directions in digital brilliance.

Bizarre and transgressive imagery is incorporated into normative food products throughout the developed world - characters with rictus grins and popping eyes, and hybrid body forms populate the market. The animated tableaux of medieval feasts are given contemporary form. Milk is whipped into: The McFlurry, Mr. Whippy, Dairy Queen Blizzard, Cheese String, Dreaming Cow, Laughing Cow, Skinny Cow, Happy Cow, Crusha, Marvel—dairy icons that perform health and the abuse of health; an array of high-calorie, high-fat, low-calorie, low-fat, high-sugar, sugar-free, highly processed glimmer with techno-scientific, multicolor, hedonistic, and eroticized appeal. The cow, used frequently as a metaphor for the passive, dumb, and exploited, is often replaced by marketing mascots wily, smart-talking animals and apocryphal consumers of milk—cats, rabbits, mice. In novelty frozen form milk adopts any and every shape, from superheroes to baroque architectonics, from platonic solids to human body parts.<sup>11</sup>

Food made large, animated and mobile are themes that run through folk history and fairytale, from the medieval tales to the present. In Breughel’s *The Land of Cockayne*, (the original Dutch title *Het Luilekkerland* meaning ‘lazy luscious land’), houses are roofed with pies, our aforementioned pig trots

by with the carvery knife ready inserted into its flank for easy pickings. But these engorged men were not just here for our amusement – it was also a secular political commentary on the rivalries of the Hapsburg catholic orthodoxy and Calvinist resistance. The land of plenty, of milk and honey is a foundation myth of America and accompanies its promotional culture throughout the early twentieth century. Giant lobsters, vegetables, ice creams: a rebellious, all-consuming, self-directed proletariat appear as motifs again and again. These are assertions of the right for excess. An abundance thought initially to only exist in dreamscapes is readily consumable in the present. Yet, the seeming accessibility of excess comes hand in hand with exploitation. South American plantation workers, native American energy avatars removed from mineral rich lands, enslaved African American workers then underpaid domestic workers were incorporated as logos to promote the products purportedly produced by their own underpaid labour. Commodity chains lead from land, to animals, to humans, foregrounding the technologies of production and the commercial triumph of invariant standardization as the trajectory of high capitalism.





Our relationship to the dream and fantasy becomes increasingly blurred with the consumption and representation of animal products. John Berger claims that the first paintings were of animals, and our relationship with them tells us much about ourselves.<sup>13</sup> He reminds us that animals perform as ciphers of futurity – and indeed what we rehearse on them we later perpetrate on humans, whether it be models of work, extinction, mass industrialisation, medicine and now fertility, social organisation and genetic modelling. The terms *vaccine* and *vaccination* are derived from the latin *Variolae vaccinae* (smallpox of the cow), the term designated for cowpox by Edward Jenner. He used it to describe the protective effect of cowpox in cows against smallpox in humans, noticing that dairymaids had become immune to smallpox after their exposure in the milking shed. The origin of inoculation against disease is to be found in the dairy. In another origin tale, the detailed datasets gathered from dairy breeding programmes generated some of the earliest applications of quantitative analysis and selection algorithms, and became a model for other industries to follow.

Advances in genetics and human fertility programmes were gleaned from research into the reproduction of cows. Animals are given a value, or Lifetime Net Merit, in dollars. Factors used in the calculation include an estimate of how much a bull's genetic material will affect the potential revenue from a dairy cow. Fluid, fat, protein ratios of the milk, and the quality of the ensuing progeny are predicted by gene markers and heritable traits, as well as pedigree records and market conditions. Body size, udder condition, foot, leg and body ratios, cheese merit, fluid merit, daughter calving ease, productive life, daughter pregnancy rate, stillbirth rate and robot compatibility are all deduced through complex calculations of big datasets. There is an air of rationality gone wild, cold logic mixed with hijinks whimsy and mythopoesis: one bull who was scientifically calculated as possessing the highest net worth is named Badger-Bluff Fanny Freddie, and another, Ensenada Taboo Planet-Et.<sup>14</sup>



### 15

A probiotic microbe recently discovered in human breast milk led animals to grow unusually lustrous fur. Further observation of the males revealed thick skin bristling with active follicles, elevated testosterone levels and oversize testicles. Females developed higher levels of oxytocin.

The enteric nervous system contains a hundred million neurons embedded in the walls of the long tube of our gut, which measures about nine meters end to end from the oesophagus to the anus. The enteric nervous system uses more than 30 neurotransmitters, and 95 per cent of the body's serotonin is found in the bowels. An excess of serotonin is as disruptive to mental health as a deficiency. We are beginning to understand that gut microbes facilitate change not only in the gut, but in sexual reproduction, brain physiology and neurochemistry. The interplay between food, microbes and the gut have multiple effects and affect, motivation, and higher cognitive function.<sup>16</sup> This association between microbes in food, the gut and brain chemistry is so profound that a new field of psychobiotics is forming. The link then between eating and dreaming, eating and thinking, and human and nonhuman entities is far more profound than the science of the modern era ever knew, but that Hippocrates recognised in the monstrous spectres that appeared in the night.

## End Notes

1. *The Casual Cow-Pox in the teats and udder of a black and white milch cow After Mr. Ceely, of Aylesbury, 1884.*
2. Heracleitus Hippocrates. *Nature of Man. Regimen in Health. Humours. Aphorisms. Regimen 1-3. Dreams. Heracleitus: On the Universe.* Translated by W. H. S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library 150. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931. 421–447.
3. British Cheese Board. *Sweet dreams are made of cheese* 2005, accessed online January 2017 [http://web.archive.org/web/20060115000115/http://www.cheeseboard.co.uk/news.cfm?page\\_id=240](http://web.archive.org/web/20060115000115/http://www.cheeseboard.co.uk/news.cfm?page_id=240)
4. Kimberly Dick, *Tryptophan History & Politics.* University of Bristol Chemistry Department accessed online January 2017 <http://www.chm.bris.ac.uk/motm/tryptophan/index.html>
5. *Junk Ouroboros*, Melanie Jackson 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.
6. Augustine says, 'by a most just ordinance of the Creator, both their life and their death are subject to our use...Dumb animals and plants are devoid of the life of reason whereby to set themselves in motion; they are moved, as it were by another, by a kind of natural impulse, a sign of which is that they are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others'. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1273 De Civ. Dei i, 20.
7. *Junk Ouroboros*, Melanie Jackson 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.
8. Gary Rogers, 'Genetic Change in Dairy Cattle Over the Past Three Decades', *Milk, Hormones and Human Health* October 2006, accessed online January 2017 [http://milksymposium.mcgill.ca/pdf/2\\_6-rogers.pdf](http://milksymposium.mcgill.ca/pdf/2_6-rogers.pdf)
9. *Bum Bum and Creamy Dreams*, photograph by Melanie Jackson, 2016.
10. *Junk Ouroboros*, Melanie Jackson 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.
11. An expansion of this paragraph can be found in the co-authored text Melanie Jackson and Esther Leslie 'Journeys of Lactic Abstraction' *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 62, 2018.
12. *Junk Ouroboros*, Melanie Jackson 2016. Image courtesy of the artist.
13. John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (1977) London: Penguin 2009
14. Alexis C Madrigal, 'The Perfect Milk Machine: How Big Data Transformed the Dairy Industry' *The Atlantic*, May 2012. See also Melanie Jackson and Esther Leslie 'Journeys of Lactic Abstraction' *Cabinet Magazine*, Issue 62, 2018.
15. *Nachtmilch Kristalle*, Melanie Jackson, 2017.
16. Peter Andrey Smith, 'The tantalizing links between gut microbes and the brain' *Nature* 14 October 2015 accessed online March 2017 <http://www.nature.com/news/the...>

### Melanie Jackson

Melanie Jackson works with image, text, sculpture and moving image. She lectures at the Slade School of Fine Art and is represented by Matt's Gallery, London. She is currently collaborating with Esther Leslie on a book *Deeper in the Pyramid* which will launch at a solo exhibition of the same name in 2018 at Grand Union, Birmingham in conjunction with Primary, Nottingham.

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