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Universiteit Utrecht

Gemma
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree
in Women's and Gender Studies

**Niching New Materialist Studies:
Contemporary North-American Young Adults Sports Fiction as
Anorexia Bibliotherapy**

Autora/Author: Rocío Riestra-Camacho

**Directora principal/Main supervisor: Alejandra Moreno-Álvarez –
Universidad de Oviedo**

**Directora de apoyo/Support supervisor: Magdalena Górska – University
of Utrecht**

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**MÁSTER ERASMUS MUNDUS
EN ESTUDIOS DE LAS MUJERES Y DEL GÉNERO**

**ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER'S DEGREE IN WOMEN'S AND
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Máster Erasmus Mundus en Estudios de las Mujeres y de Género
Erasmus Mundus Master in Women's and Gender Studies

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Tesis de master//M. A. Thesis

AUTORA/AUTHOR: Rocío Riestra-Camacho

TÍTULO/TITLE: Niching New Materialist Studies: Contemporary North American Young Adult Sports Fiction as Anorexia Bibliotherapy

DESCRIPTORES/KEY WORDS: Anorexia; bibliotherapy; sports; YA fiction; New Materialism; cognitive literature; abjection

DIRECTORA/MAIN SUPERVISOR: Alejandra Moreno-Álvarez

1. RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

El objetivo de esta Tesis de Fin de Máster es el de analizar desde una perspectiva sociológico-literaria la novela contemporánea juvenil de deportes *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* (2014), de la autora estadounidense Miranda Kenneally. Se considera a la protagonista, una joven atleta, un modelo cognitivo y afectivo de referencia, en concreto para promover visiones funcionales de lo corporal, es decir, basadas en un tratamiento respetuoso del organismo. Defiendo la idea de que las jóvenes con trastornos de la alimentación o vulnerables a padecerlos pueden beneficiarse de esta lectura de lo corporal, alejada de la abyección, que está presente en la novela,. Propongo, además, que durante todo procesamiento lector de ficción se configuran modelos a seguir que influyen en las trayectorias cognitivas de su público lector. La naturaleza mental de tales procesos permite su estudio neurológico y cognitivo. El caso de la protagonista es, en concreto, un ejemplo para lectoras norteamericanas con potencialidades de modelaje psicosomático de su propia noción de bienestar. Sugiero, finalmente, que desarrollar la investigación literaria y de lo corpóreo desde este plano supone la apertura de un nicho académico en los estudios del Nuevo Materialismo y de la biblioterapia, con repercusiones vitales para las políticas de lo corporal.

2. ENGLISH SUMMARY

The aim of this MA thesis is to evaluate from a sociological literary viewpoint the contemporary Young Adult Sports Fiction novel by North American author Miranda Kenneally Breathe, *Annie, Breathe* (2014). The novel's representation of its athletically performing young woman protagonist is considered a cognitive and affective role model with potential for promoting functionally oriented corporeal understandings, concerning what the organism can sensibly do and be put to do. Readers with eating disorders and vulnerabilities to them, I propose, can reshape meanings and goals of projects in their life away from abjection as they read of the bodily in this light. In short, the suggestion extends to the claim that literary fiction produces role models which alter the very states of readers. Such states, given their mental status, can be explored from a neurological and cognitive perspective. In particular, Annie's quest is taken as the beginning of a psychosomatic notion of well-being many North-American girls can feel engaged in. With fiction and corporeality thus examined, I suggest that this approach to literary studies opens a unique and novel spot in bibliotherapeutic and New Materialist studies, with crucial implications for the politics of the bodily.

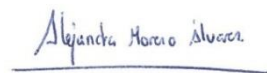
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“Literature has always honored the power of the imagination in shaping our experience of the world”.

UC Santa Barbara Department of English

Words do. These are for you, Dad.

CHAPTER I

Crafting paths

1. Introduction

In the context of Young Adult Sports Fiction (henceforth YASF), Miranda Kenneally's *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* (2014) addresses some crucial problematics that her protagonist, Annie, experiences through her bodily changes as she enters the world of athletics and campus life. Structured as a coming-of-age novel, *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* depicts Annie's progressive acknowledgement of her body as she trains for a marathon so as to honor her recently deceased boyfriend. First characterized as a rather passive young woman with no confidence about her (physical) potential, Annie starts becoming a mature adult with an own burgeoning sense of self, able to understand and listen to her bodily processes and respond accordingly to needs. Her weight-loss progression resulting from the training process, in addition, is put aside over an emphasis on her increased endurance and prowess; thus, from a gender perspective Kenneally's novel displays a positive resolution of a canonical bodily change in a young woman, making it mirrored with well-being, rather than with beauty, contrary to previous Young Adult novels (Younger, 2009). This fact points to an evolution in the teen market which must be addressed to evaluate the positive impact its reading can have on young women readers' adjustment of their future corporeal ideals. More particularly, the shift indexes an internalization of current cultural trends which contain the body of women as functionally oriented (i.e., as able to sensibly perform athletically) rather than aesthetically so, where standards respond to the cultural ideal of

skinniness as beauty (Healey, 2014). In evoking this conception of well-being, however, this thesis does not intend to give a normative understanding of what counts as a healthy body. Quite on the contrary, it assumes certain basic inputs coming from Critical Disability Studies, particularly those focusing on queering the spectrum of normality (e.g. Shildrick, 2009), which already problematize the very dichotomy of healthy and unhealthy lives. Still, in today's allegedly postfeminist society, the pervasive tradition linked to an existence of eating disorders continues its hegemony among young women (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017). With such a statement, I am playing reference to the fact that feminist gains have been surmounted to becoming part and parcel of a postfeminist backlash: if women need not be beautiful and thin anymore to be "counted as" women, it is also respectable if they are themselves willing to embrace skinniness. In short, this is one of the legacies that choice feminism problematically left women with.¹ The conundrum, as it happens here, is that contrary to ways of embodying a normative femininity such as wearing make-up, beauty conceptions related to slenderness not infrequently bring about unhealthy commitments. Certain backlashes, then, are more damaging than others, as it happens with eating disorders, which are in fact very prominent. Only in the United States anorexia is the third most common condition young girl adolescents live under (Golden et al., 2016). Consequently, the decisive impact reading fiction which challenges this harmful normativity can have on their development of a bodily positive framework needs to be exploited with likewise immediacy.

Under the intention of providing such an analysis, this MA thesis will address the views put forward by women's studies scholarship on literary investigation. Because representation of fictional roles is considered potentially constitutive of actual modes of life, I will be adopting the insights of sociological criticism as well as gender studies as applied to literary analyses. The thesis will, moreover, draw upon the contributions made in the field of women's corporeality equally produced in the context of academic feminism, entering into conversation mainly with the works of Bordo (1993) and Wolf (2013). The question particularly addressed here will be that of the alternative representation of the athletic fictional body of girl characters and its possibilities for

¹ Established in 80s North America and coined by Hirschman, choice feminism "indexes the shift to personal (rather than social and political) choices made by women in domains such as paid work, domesticity and parenting, sexuality, as well as grooming" (Gill and Scharff, 2011: 44). Choice feminism, as it applies to grooming practices, advocates for women to have the right to do as they please with their bodies, following beautification procedures, including surgery or extreme diets.

young women readers' enlargement of embodiment issues (Troscianko, 2014) through conversing between these two spheres, the literary and the sociological. These two domains are understood as being interrelated through the idea that representation matters and, more specifically, that fictional works need to account for young women's experiences whose readership can take as role referents (Heinecken, 2015)—referents which remain particularly scarce and gender problematic in Young Adult Sports Fiction (Patrick, 2017). Following a consideration of the issue in relation to its clinical relevance and not only from the perspective of a cultural representational basis, the theoretical framework will also touch upon existing specialised literature on eating disorders produced in a medical setting. It will also incorporate insights from neuroscience and cognitive literary studies, referenced below, aimed at a vital incorporation of bibliotherapeutic studies into the framework. Bridging spheres from the humanities and the “hard” sciences, as will be done here through an original approach to literary studies, caters for an unexplored domain within New Materialism. As it is understood here, New Materialism's core target is to rethink dualities central to contemporary society, including mind versus body, nature versus culture or, if I may thus state it, the inside versus the outside of a work of fiction. The New Materialist focus, hence, is on the material power of language, as it is present in literary works in relation to anorexia and sports culture, and intends to lay ground for a novel approach to literary studies next to cognition and neuroscience, following bibliotherapy as the ultimate aim. In short, this MA thesis intends to shed insight on sports fiction reading as anorexia healing practice; on literary works providing shelter for readers with bodily vulnerabilities.

2. Methodological framework

As regards the methodological framework pursued, the 2014 novel by North American fictional author Miranda Kenneally's *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* will be examined under a receptionist hermeneutic perspective (see Eagleton, 1996) with a basis on women's studies in parallel with a cognitive literary framework. In the light of close reading, an interpretation of the novel is to follow, based on what its processing can provoke on young women readers' imagination and behaviour goal restructuring as regards corporeality.^{2,3} The novel's selection criteria matches this thesis' sociological literary view that the YASF genre to which it pertains is undergoing a current evolution reflective of larger structures of cultural change and fashion affecting what the body of women ought to look like (see Chapman, 2011). The novel, in short, has been chosen as a potential exemplification of this evolution in YASF, whose study remains deceitfully unacknowledged in the academic field of Anglo American literary studies despite the substantial popularity of the genre in the context of the United States (McLemore, 2016). In particular, under the close reading framework, specific paragraphs and lexical structures are to be extracted from the book so as to be employed as evidence of a functional view of sports life in narrative form. The core idea of functionality is that the bodily is to be made function sensibly, respecting its endurance boundaries. The fragments, therefore, will be selected in accordance with the premise that they count as significant depictions of the protagonist's understandings about the athletic body viewed under the light of well-being approaches to corporeality. The resulting close reading of this novel will at points be compared to passages in fictional narratives of anorexia, especially Halse's *Wintergirls* (2009) but also the most recent novel *Paperweight* (2015), by Meg Haston. These, due to space constrictions and analytic focus discrepancies, will not be thoroughly examined but offered as contrast of what novels can cognitively provoke in readers with bodily vulnerabilities. A comparative model schema is, moreover, included for clarification purposes. I employ the terms psychosomatechnicity and affective literary stimuli to refer to possible cognitive effects of reading. Psychosomatechnicity derives from the terms *psychosomatic* and *technicity*, meaning that literature, as a *techne*, provokes changes in the human psychosoma. In

² In cinema and audiovisual studies, the work of Laura U. Marks (2000) had corresponding conterminous intentions with her considerations of audience response.

³ Here, close reading which caters for reader response assumes the tradition of literary reading as transaction, established by Louise Rosenblatt in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978).

turn, affective literary stimuli narrows psychosomatechnicity to its particular affective consequences, that is, it is a term coined to cater for the altering effects of readers' affective states via literary reading. Affect theory is not specifically examined so as to not veer off topic, but it is assumed in the methodology. The perspective adopted here on Affect studies, particularly, responds to the view of authors such as Brian Massumi (2015), moving away from the discursive framework of Sara Ahmed (e.g. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2002). The reason for this is that Massumi's brain studies and cognitive viewpoint is exactly coherent with the cognitive literary and neurological insight here adopted, which are reviewed below.

Empirical evidence from cognitive literary and narrative studies methodologies is predicated upon for examining potential cognitive effects of the YASF novel. The works employed correspond to the studies by Molina et al., *Mente y cerebro: de la psicología experimental a la neurociencia cognitiva* (2016), by Sorrentino and Yamaguchi (2011), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition across Cultures*, by Manuel de Vega (2005) "Language, embodiment, and brain: Critical review", in collaboration with Mabel Urrutia (2012) "Language and action. A current revision to embodiment theories" and that of Emily Troscianko "Fiction and Eating Disorders: a New Partnership" (2014), "Feedback in Reading and Disordered Eating" (2016) and "How should we talk about reading experiences? Arguments and empirical evidence" (2017). Thus, the close reading offered of *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* feeds upon experiments, evaluated in these works, showing that what is experienced culturally, and more particularly narratively when reading a story, frames behaviours based on how interpretation affects cognition. Gaining such a crucial understanding of cultural data from a neurological perspective is what leads my suggestion that meaning, perceived and restructured according to characters' own goals in the story, primes certain behaviours in readers. In particular, those with eating disorders experience, as they read, feedback loops, either positive (positive *reinforcement* of eating disorder reality structuring) or negative (*negative reinforcement*), as Troscianko (2016) proves. Kenneally's novel, following this methodology, is analyzed as one work of fiction which would provoke negative feedback loops. The interpretation offered here is based on the potential bibliotherapeutic reading that young women readers with eating disorders or vulnerabilities to them would cognitively make of it.

CHAPTER II

Worlds around words

“A real literary interest is an interest in man [sic], society and civilization”.

(Leavis, 1952: 200)

Women’s subordination “is not the consequence of an event or a becoming, it did not happen”.

(de Beauvoir, 1949: 28)

3. On the Sociology of Literature and a New Materialist understanding of the body

The core aim behind this chapter is to state that literary studies benefit from sociological considerations just as readers can benefit from literary works through the power of fiction to draw them to sociological action. I would like to begin the chapter by addressing a personal methodological complication which has been recurrent in my study of literary works, therefore both since I began my degree in English Studies and well up until today, when I am engaged in a more specific investigation of the body of woman in North American contemporary fiction. Ever since I started the study of literary critique, I have encountered great opposition to engage in what I now can label as a strictly contextual literary approach to fiction. In such a perspective, the words faced on print seem to be taken as escapists of the very boundaries of paper; as if one were claiming that language speaks straightly to the actual lives of enfleshed embodiment, and do not merely stay with the fictive worlds of its characters. In other words, I have been “suspect” of placing too much emphasis on the external world where literary works are actually crafted, not letting them have a life of their own, so to speak. Very problematically, therefore, I have recursively found myself wanting to research with vivid passion how it is that the ideas in a book come to land on it in the first place, and, crucially, what they do afterwards. That is, I have always been peeping first on western society—on small and relatively short timely pieces of it, I must add, to account for situatedness—to then encountering its representation in literary form. The very encountering of actual modes and trends of life in fiction speaks either for a somewhat biased method of mine of looking exactly for the stories which will tell me what I want

(i.e., what I am already seeing in society) or perhaps, not coincidentally, for the circumstance that there is actually fact (not exactly truth nor reality) in fiction, or as Milner puts it “that literature is not necessarily fictive” (2017: 2).

All of these had been my conundrums in the past, which I now count as the basis on which to justify my approach to literary fiction from a *contextual* and *sociological* framework. Specifically, what I seek to do in this thesis is to analyze the bodily of women in fiction from an already informed sociological study of women’s studies theories of corporeality and embodiment. This, together with using eating disorders specialized clinical literature, to which I shall return later, may appear on surface as a failed, for poorly informed, work of inter/trans disciplinarity, a faulty intrusion of a humanist into the social sciences and then worse, even, into the natural sciences. Particularly, the problem with these analyses is that they “are seen as outsiders’ critiques or at most, extraction of concepts, rather than a serious engagement with the natural sciences” (Hird, 2009: np, in Irni, 2013: 348). In line with Irni, I argue that what is really at stake here is the functioning of “power relations between disciplines in the feminist transdisciplinary debate about materiality” (Irni, 2013: 348). The debate on so called New Materialism is especially productive as regards theories of corporeality (Irni, 2013: 351), and therefore becomes a crucial framework for me to engage in, given my object of knowledge being the implications of fiction for the politics of the body. One crucial knot in this debate is the dispute New Materialism has with poststructuralist perspectives, which partially apply to my reading of fiction and the media as discourses of power in the foucauldian sense. The main critique posed to poststructuralism in this respect is that it over privileges “text and context over world and experience [...] representation and abstraction over social meaning” (Hemmings, 2011: 86, in Irni, 2013: 350). If it was already feeling wrong that I was turning to context (sociology) for the study of text (literature), acknowledging poststructuralism seems definitely incompatible with an engagement with natural sciences in the attempt to study the bodily in its whole, both textual and material, potentiality. This incompatibility arouses in that the humanities and social sciences on a poststructuralist perspective are deemed “matter-phobic” and are therefore somewhat censored from producing New Materialist knowledge. In line with Ahmed’s critique (2008), this MA thesis intends to show that this is not the case, as text is always already material.

Hence, in actuality, I have lately been trying to make room for a novel contribution to the study of the politically corporeal implications of fiction. This

remains an unexplored academic niche with vital implications for the transdisciplinarity that is so enriching to New Materialism. New Materialism, indeed, has been conceived since its inception as a truly transdisciplinary approach to the ontology of matter. It assumes that “meaning is not an ideality; meaning is material. And matter isn’t what exists separately from meaning” (Barad, 2014: 175) precisely because matter, too, has meaning. On this view, then, the body is no longer assumed to be a floating signifier only inscribed in discourse, that is, a construct. Yet neither is it merely considered pure flesh, the physical boundary where an organism ends, as unaffected by the contingencies of living in a relational society. Barad’s critique of Butler’s conception of the body illustrates the point at hand: Butler “is limited to an account of materialization of human bodies, or more accurately, to the construction of the surface of the human body (which most certainly is not all there is to human bodies)” (Barad, 1998: 107, in Irni, 2013: 351). Adding on Barad’s parenthetical comment, it can now be seen with clarity that the human body does not end in a constructionist reading because that is not all that there is to human bodies. This exactly means that Barad is recognizing that it certainly is *part* of what there is in a human body, just that it is not only that, for flesh, bacteria, sweat or calories must surely be *weighed* for as well in this New Materialist ontology of the body. Here, a phenomenological perspective resonates in that, eventually, no distinction shall be made either between body and mind, since what happens in the mind is already embodied. This is a notion owing to the Spinozian critique of Cartesian dualism, built on the basis that, contrary to what Descartes postulated, “each human mind must be determinately either male or female [sic], by virtue of the sex of the body of which it is the idea” (Lloyd, 1993: 14).⁴ Following this line of reasoning, I claim that fiction, likewise, not only does not inscribe the bodies of their characters as mere floating signifiers, but plays recourse to embodied referents of their readers. This is to say, more precisely, that textual allusions to the body point to referents in the fictive world as an “absent presence of a phantasmatic body”, in Shildrick’s (2017) terms, that is, to an imagined and fictive body, which speaks to the contextualized materiality of readers’ and actual human bodies. Things being so, a poststructuralist critique of literature becomes somewhat reconciled with material reality, for I am still talking about signifiers, however, about signifiers which have the potential of bringing some empirical

⁴ Sic accounts here for a strong discrepancy with the binarism of Spinoza’s postulation.

consequences to lived experience. Therefore, this thesis aims to avoid privileging either of these spheres, actually trying to cater for text, context as well as world and (bodily) experience within the analysis framework.

One last theoretical provision remains to be stated, however. In reflecting upon some of the ideas of Foucault (1975, 2004), pertinent to this thesis, I have come to remain critical of quoting his work too often as a way of profiting from the advantages of the validations offered by counting on discourse as a source of power. As I pointed out above, I account for a foucauldian poststructuralist view of the power of discourses. Therefore, this thesis assumes that the media's construction of imposed meanings is at work in society, just as the media is itself influenced by society's particularly performed enactments of those same imposed meanings. In other words, closer to Butler (1993), discourses of power become socially performed and in their enactment they, too, become influenced. Hence, discourse is here understood in a bidirectional perspective, and that is exactly the power granted to words that is being reconsidered in a positive vein. To the particularities of the analysis, this exactly means that the media, from Instagram's world of fitness to novels about girls playing sports, is both informed through and contesting the patriarchal discourse of beauty and skinniness as beauty ideal. I purposively want to abbreviate the paradigm at this point and claim that I do agree on the idea that the power of media discourse molds girls' lives and physiognomies through the representations it offers. That I approve of Wolf's (2013) heading that particular "images of beauty are used against women" (e.g. making them desire skinniness). That idea allows for the complementary claim that alternative images of beauty (e.g. muscular as the new beauty, see Chapman, 2011) can be used by women to their own favour (making them desire "health"). This position, shortened as the discourse (meaning) is material view, is actually one of the best established in feminist academia on embodiment, not only sustained by Wolf, but by Bartky (1990), or Bordo (1993), to name but some of the best known.

By adding transdisciplinary literature on eating disorders, patriarchal and media influenced ideals of beauty and skinniness are not all that there is to eating disorders or sports engagement, as has straightforwardly been claimed to be the rationale behind them so often. Indeed, faulting the media for its recurrent depiction of women's thinness is recursively done both by these scholars and by society at large. In assuming this foucauldian angle as the convincing explanation, the anorexic body, for example, stands "as a metaphor for the social body" (Warin, 2009: 10). That is to say, discourse

(meaning) is assumed to act as the sole provider of drastically *meaningful* material effects, as if discourses brought about literal *happenings* after which an evil agent orchestrator had been. Postulating this state of things, problematically, renders women as “uncritical” consumers “of media images of thin femininity” (Warin, 2009: 10). Building on this critique, Bray sharply refers to anorexia thus posited through the eloquent pun of “a reading disorder” (1994, in Warin, 2009: 10). Media is conveniently turned to scapegoat, to a “red herring” (Warin, 2009: 13) for all that there is behind women’s eternal quest to beauty. The fact is that this is a quest which includes media’s negative influence, but *not only*. This gap, this lack of a more complete explanation of eating disorders, is what substantiates my turning to literature not following either/or approaches. Having argued about the media as scapegoat is what has become crucial when selecting among clinical literature, for the medical discourse on eating disorders has too contributed to this reductionist view. Therefore, I carefully turn to general medical and psychiatric works on disordered corporealities as a humanist in need of approaching specialized encyclopedias and treatises so as to follow these former’s jargon, while instead opting for more interdisciplinary based literature as regards diagnoses, etiology and decisively, treatment. In particular, I resort to the work by medical anthropologist Megan Warin (2009), for her regard of anorexia in terms of daily significations of abjection. Wary of previous medical and media discourses frameworks, Warin approaches the everyday world of anorexia through deconstruction of those meanings, but precisely through acknowledging how material these are, in turn. For similar reasons, I rely on the work by physician Álvarez, who does not take anorexia as a search for beauty, but as a psychosomatic quest for sense and worth in one’s life and body. These seemingly disparate lines of work, one put forward by an anthropologist and another by a general practitioner, are indeed compatible in that both refuse to take disordered conditions of corporeality as aesthetic impairments. Hence, their work pursues a humanistic and phenomenological informed clinical view of the bodily which, moreover, is then more attuned to Critical Disability Studies perspectives. Critical Disability Studies, in particular, examine “the patterns of meaning” assigned to those bodies which disrupt the “ideology of normalcy”, rather than its “specific forms, functions, and behaviors” (Garland-Thomson, 2005: 1559, 1558). Álvarez, for his part, does track these latter, but the difference with most canonical institutionalized medical diagnoses and practices on eating disorders is that he looks at them without censorship, regarding anorectics’ way of life through the lens of bravery. Drawing on Frankl’s

(1988) logotherapy methodology, his treatment procedures trust the reading and analysis of fiction—in particular, of Spanish poetry—as a way to build with the patients more sustainable alternatives of life and embodiment. In this sense, Álvarez’s work offers the last bridge to the bibliotherapeutic rationale for engaging with the analysis literature. In particular, of Young Adult Sports fiction, because I, too, argue in favour of the alternative representation of the body of women offered in this genre as potentially providing alternatives of lived embodiment for its mostly young women readers. The slight changes media, including literary fiction, might bring to women’s conception of the bodily must necessarily be considered too in this positive fashion. In other words, just as exposure to negative media contexts reinforce teenagers’ harmful ideals of thinness and beauty, so could thus fictional works mitigate them if they contained, instead, alternative corporeal models and values. So that at least the media is not one other, however minor, source of conflict for them and may function, on the contrary, as a space where soothing can begin. Exactly so, Emily Troscianko, from the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, initiated a project in 2014 in order to advance “treatment of eating disorders by taking account of the role of fiction-reading”. In this line of work is where I situate the analysis of Miranda Kenneally’s work.

3.1. A postmodern discussion of the boundaries between fact and fiction

Novels, as works of fiction, are here considered rightful sources from which readers draw action. No material consideration of a literary work, however, should miss, I believe, what the classic debate around the fact and fiction divide has already established. As a juicy literary example of the implications of postmodern art to the fact and fiction divide, Muriel Spark’s *Loitering with Intent* (1981) swiftly comes into the picture. Certainly, academia agrees the piece to be one of the most remarkable meta-fictional experiments of the convoluting eighthies:

It would be reductive to suggest that Fleur [the protagonist] is simply a thinly veiled portrait of Spark, but it would be equally simplistic to say that she is definitively not Spark. She is, rather, a composite textual being in whom fundamental questions about the stability of *fictional and ontological identity* contend (Gardiner, 2010: 13, emphasis added)

This example is of great use to my purpose here. In the Greek prefix *meta-* lies one of the tenets of postmodern art, with which Spark capriciously plays in all of her works. As applied to fiction, *meta-* speaks of literature that goes beyond where it is contained, that is, beyond the text. Wolf (2004), in contrast to Hutcheon (1980), insists on taking meta-

fiction as literature which explores going beyond the limits of fiction, rather than literature which is just self-referencing its own fictionality. One of those limit lines, crucial to this thesis, can be found in Katherine Hayles' "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers" (1993). In it, Hayles, the postmodern North-American feminist literary critic, explores an understanding of bodies and textual referents as co-constitutive in three different ways. Through her multi-layered theory she explores the boundaries of fiction when literary texts are viewed in relation to two other domains. These are the sociocultural (in particular, information media and technologies) and the bodily. She firstly contends that "changes in bodies as they are represented within literary texts have deep connections with changes in textual bodies as they are encoded within information media" (1993: 71). Here, she affirms that variations in representation of bodies in literature respond to a pattern where fiction interacts with all the cultural forms of information media. The critic continues "and both types of changes stand in complex relation to changes in the construction of human bodies as they interface with information technologies" (1993: 71). Thus, she establishes a definite connection between that what is represented in literature and the embodied experiences happening in society. What Hayles defends becomes key to the argument that fiction draws from society and, vice versa, society gets influences from fiction and other artistic forms. More importantly, however, are the implications of her theory for the bodily. Hayles argues for a view of the human body as mediated by and mediator of information whether in textual or audiovisual culture. In other words, she clearly establishes the bidirectionality of information similarly to what was claimed above of discourse in the Foucauldian sense. This is, hence, sharply in line with the argument of this MA thesis that literature is potentially altered by and altering of the experience of the body.

There stands a difference, however, between an understanding of the fictional as potential and of the fictional as possible. This is a necessary exhortation in that unmistakably, this thesis is not proposing that because events in fiction hold a certain power they will come alive in reality. Conversely, the notion of the literary as potential presented here owes to the Braidottian pair of *potestas* and *potentia*. In that pair, the feminist author added to Foucault's matrixes of Power as confining (*potestas*) her idea of the affirmative (*potentia*). In Braidotti's theory, the latter refers to Power structures as productive of alternative subject positions and social relations (Dolphin and Van der Tuin, 2012: 22). I resort to this notion, specifically, to imply that literature produces role models which alter the very being of readers. This is different from claiming that what

happens inside of literature happens on the outside. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze admonishes in this respect that:

The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a realisation. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is *actualisation*. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself (2004: 211, emphasis in original)

Deleuze, in particular, is making an exhortation of the ontological implication of the virtual. Specifically, he is claiming that the realm of fiction has a reality in its own right. It is not that the facts represented in fiction stand a chance of happening in real life. On the contrary, the facts expressed in literature are already happening in this very medium. When a reader opens a book and represents in her imagination what is represented in it, she is actualizing it *through her own experience of it*.

It is readers' experiences of texts that are basal in Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" (1977). Barthes claimed that it is a reader's reading of a text that allows it to have meaning in the first place. He, like Deleuze, also referred to the idea of a process of actualization of the reality of a text. Both critics, therefore, contribute to an understanding of fiction as experiential. Reading a book can be taken, thus, as an experience *in* the world and *of* the world. Imagination, in turn, is what allows one to process such an experience. Hence, reading is not just to be equated with minds conceiving stories, eyeballs perceiving print or hands holding a volume. It is, rather, a holistic experience of processing literary stimuli. This is what I refer to as the *psychosomatechnicity* of reading. Simon O'Sullivan, connoisseur of Deleuze and Guattari, exposes a similar idea through the theory of affects as applied to artwork. In "The aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art beyond Representation" (2001: 130), following Bann, he takes art as a basic experientable production. For him, senses allow us to experiment what the art work is in turn representing as sensitive and, therefore, real: "that the ultimate aim of art is perhaps what was formerly celebrated under the term of incarnation. I mean by that a wish to make us feel, through the abstractions, the forms, the colours, the volumes, the sensations, a real experience". His reading of art, moreover, is particularly apt for a New Materialist understanding. O'Sullivan conceives the experiencing of art as a state of becoming in the world that is incarnate within particular bodies of being. In this regard he argues that art is an access point to another world, that is, to our world being experienced differently. In his own words, it is "a

molecular world of becoming” (2001: 128). His conclusion goes hand in hand with the Braidottian notion of *potestas*. O’Sullivan defends that art actualizes ways of being and of becoming in the world, as it pushes the boundaries of what can be experienced.

In postmodernity, one, then, finds that literature can affirm us in lived life. Yet it can also hinder us through potestas. At this point, literary analyses come in extremely pertinent so as to examine what kind of ways of being are actualized in fiction and, therefore, in reality, too. Because fiction is crafted in a sexist society, it is necessary to expose its degree of adherence to that discriminating imbalance. For a girl reader, experiencing beautism on a daily basis from different sources of stimuli, be they mediatic or literary, can be vitally detrimental. It is the duty of gender and women’s studies to stimulate alternative ways of being that are more attuned to a feminist lens, to an affirmative potentia.

3.2. The contextual and feminist sociological approaches in literary analysis

Feminist literary criticism specializes in researching the sexist realities of books, of its women characters or lack of them, of her writers or scarcity of them. Ultimately, feminist literary criticism draws its tenets from the social reality of her readers, of women and of the feminine. In the first-wave, Virginia Woolf (1929) already pointed out that educational differences between women and men hindered the creative force of women authors and had prevented their existence for centuries. That, in turn, she represented through the lives of her most remarkable characters, like Mrs. Ramsay or Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The study of literature next to sociology was indeed very popular in American institutions during the 60s and 70s (Templeton, 1992: 21). In the 60s, when modern feminist literary criticism began with the second-wave, theorists like Kate Millet began to challenge how the feminine had been conceived in the past within literary scholarship. At the end of the next decade, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar publish *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), a must of feminist literary criticism of women’s poetry and prose. Elaine Showalter published her best-known work in literary criticism, *Toward a Feminist Poetics*, in 1979. Her work is famous for distinguishing three phases for ordering the history of women’s literature: the ‘feminine’ (1840-1880), ‘feminist’ (1880-1920) and ‘female’ (1920-) phases. In the feminine phase, Showalter claimed that women “wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature” (1979: 137). The feminist phase spoke to women’s writing that challenged male standards. The last phase, the female phase, is of a synthetic nature.

Showalter argued that from the 1920s onwards women no longer either imitate or reject male standards but turn to their own experience as an autonomous source of art. In the 80s, Black literary feminist criticism began to be recognized at last. North American post-Civil Rights era finally catered for the literary canon to disclose the works and contributions of experts from Black criticism studies, which had been left out from previous given standards. Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) stands as one of the most influential works of contemporary feminist Black and intersectional literary criticism. Black literary feminist criticism also initiated the way for the inclusion of LGB perspectives already in the 80s. In that sense, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983) is Barbara Smith's contribution to the canon with this collection of Black lesbian and Black feminist writings.

It is precisely around the the decade of the 80s, however, that literary criticism, including feminist literary criticism, begins to be questioned for its sociological perspective. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), *de facto*, was criticized for "mov[ing] with confidence [...] critics have suggested, a rather too easy confidence across literature, history, sociology, psychoanalysis and several other disciplines" (Eagleton, 2013: 2). The criticism represents a general hindrance often attributed to literary studies, deemed a perspective of "sociology through literature" that "assumes that the literary work transparently and unproblematically reflects the world around it" (Templeton, 1992: 23). In taking into account a postmodern challenging of the fact and fiction divide in the previous section, such problem is not present in this thesis. Conversely, the "sociology of literature", to which I am more attuned, stands for a strand conscious of the literary work "as an artificial construct whose meaning depends upon the social and historical context in which it is understood [...] itself entangled in the social and cultural processes that surround its production and reception" (Templeton, 1992: 23). Again, it is not a question of approaching how *actually* realistic the events told in a book are, but that they are facts speaking to the values spread in society and of the structures constitutive of it. For a feminist sociological literary criticism perspective, the question of social values and of structures is key. On this, Raymond Williams, the Welsh cultural studies academic, claims:

What seemed to me to happen, in some of the greatest literature, was a simultaneous realization of and response to these underlying and formative [social] structures. Indeed, that constituted, for me, the specific literary phenomenon: the dramatization of a process, the making of a fiction, in which the constituting elements, of real social life

and beliefs, were simultaneously actualized and in an important way differently experienced, the difference residing in the imaginative act (2005: 24-25)

Crucially, then, literary works may bring patriarchal values and structures to the consciousness of readers. It is the task of feminist sociological literary critics to make that consciousness both explicit and collective.

Literature and literary criticism have advanced through feminism, as society has, and because society has. Nevertheless, none of these facts has implied the end of patriarchal culture. This is a basic contention of a sociological perspective of literature informed by feminism. In that sense, I back up the words posed by Eagleton when she claimed that:

Twenty years after Millet [forty, now], we can see how the proliferation of writing by and about women has had a decisive impact on the publishing industry, academic institutions, the nature of critical theory, the practices of teaching and literary criticism. Of course this is not necessarily a sign of the end of patriarchy. It may be instead a sign of the ability of publishers to recognize the marketable [...]. Yet it is, equally, an indication of feminism's pervasive and—to date—impact (2013: 2)

Today, girl protagonists in traditionally male literary genres, like sports fiction, are not a bizarre character type, just like women sport figures abound in society. In particular, in the context of the United States, literature on sports has dramatically changed (see evolution in chapter IV) and this is a result of changing social mores in North American sports life. In order to analyze this phenomenon, the approach must be cognizant of these two intermingled realities. If one were to pay attention only at one side of the coin, that is, either at the evolution of North American YA Sports Fiction or at the evolving conception of sports in the United States, the analysis would miss a background against which to lean. The inconvenience of literary studies which radicalized structuralist and earliest poststructuralist positions has fallen on the former side. With a somewhat misinformed conception of text as the only one object of study, extratextual elements are erased of the picture. This is the consequence, more particularly, of Barthes' Essay "Death of the Author", mentioned above, being popularly taken at face value.⁵ This, however, was not what Barthes intended when writing about structuralism, or indeed, Lévi-Strauss when founding structuralism:

⁵ The Death of the Author is "the 'hinge' round which Barthes turns from structuralism to poststructuralism [...] the essay makes a declaration of radical textual independence: the work is not determined by intention, or context" (Barry, 2002: 67).

[If] Lévi-Strauss had been consistently read in the way that he wanted, it is probable that structuralism would not have spread as it did or led to poststructuralism. This is not to say that all misreadings are good [...] but it is to insist upon a recognition of the importance that extratextual elements play in the determination of poststructuralism, *including* the texts this problematic addresses (Lundy, 2013: 89, emphasis in original)

In fact, Lévi-Strauss himself claimed that an analysis of the logic of a text depended upon the historical and empirical relations it addressed. Such structures, in his theory, must be ordered to reach the logic internal to a text. Hence “because he approaches texts from the perspective of extratextual structures, and because he presupposes that intrinsic criticism has already been undertaken with regard to the text he uses, his approach is in every way extrinsic” (Petersen, 2008: 34). To this view Cultural Studies owes part of its theorizing agenda. Stuart Hall (1980) determined that Cultural Studies followed two strands of thought, one was the structuralist (of Lévi-Strauss), the other being the culturalist (Raymond Williams). In the culturalist strand, the meaning of a text is not determined *a priori*, as a given logical structure, but appears embodied in social practices. Thus, the emphasis is put on the experience made of it. For the structuralists, the emphasis is put on experience as presented by language, what does not prevent experience, as such, from being there. That experience is extra-textual simply means that it appears outside of language, not that it should be negated. For poststructuralism, in turn, what is emphasized even more strongly than in structuralism is that it is experience in the outside that is shaped by and enacted via language. The three strands, however, coincide in the idea that language, itself a human creation, paths human experience and culture.

The reasons why books, as cultural products, influence groups of people and are influenced by them are however rather varied. One theory, put forward by Gardner, goes as far as to getting genes into the framework:

Culture is a kind of database of shifting, constantly transforming information that is built on the database of the gene pool. If a characteristic behavior confers an advantage for survival and replication of an organism, it is going to continue into the future. And the same is true for cultural forms that are stored and transmitted [...] through books, and, more recently, by the internet (2014, in press)

Mentioning the genome in such a way resonates with the idea that only the fittest survive, derived from the theory put forward by Charles Darwin in *The Origin of the Species* (1859). Darwin claimed that it is always more probable that “survival of the

form that will leave the most copies of itself” is produced. In fact, Gardner is here drawing on pioneering neurogenetic work by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins coined the term “meme” to refer to sociocultural values which are spread from nervous system to nervous system via fields like music, fashion or literature (1976). In a similar vein, my understanding of literary works attempts to recuperate *living matter* as a key variable in the picture. The approach can then be deemed a sociological literary critique not approached before in New Materialism. Literary criticism, in turn, for its straightforward relationship with the humanities and its more difficult partnership with the sciences, here exposed, is, for many, banned from studying that sort of bio matter. Under most poststructuralism “writing about the arts concerned itself with *meaning* [...]”. Theorized through this interpretative frame, the place, role and power of materiality in art was subsumed under the rubric of discourse or ignored” (Barrett and Bolt, 2012: i, emphasis in original).

I want to insist that meaning or text alone will not get an analysis of that what happens in a story farther than the book’s own paper and print boundaries. It must be remembered: *there is also life outside the plot*. The poststructuralist death of the author, paradigmatically, almost also killed the audience. For granting them with the power of meaning actualization, interpretations could only follow from an almighty reader. For the same reason, however, a sociological literary approach must not equalize a book’s reception *only* to particular kinds of society or to an ideal readership. On the contrary, it must evaluate what the *potentia* of literature, that is, recognize that books produce role models which alter *the individual being* of its readers.

The author is too easily put to death and individual readers are too easily generalized or idealized. [...] From the perspective of the sociology of literature, culture itself would seem to be a historically determined effect, and individual liberation would seem to be a nostalgic phrase for a mere turn in the deterministic scheme. While the sociology of literature encourages us to focus on what the text is made of, and what has been made of the text, it says little about what *can be made* of the text. In general, the sociology of literature fails to account for the most distinctive cultural quality of literature, its power to engage individual readers (Templeton, 1992: 25, emphasis in original)

Accounting for the literary next to the sociocultural within a feminist context allows it to correlate literary evolution with such distinct socially situated phenomena like individual women readers’ engagement. Adding the variable *living matter*, moreover, considers these readers as living human beings whose organisms become engaged in

processes of consumption, not only of food but of books, both determinant to their animacy. It could be, then, that getting genes into the picture was not an absurdity, but in fact, a crucial step for literary studies.

The kind of processes of literary consumption readers become engaged in is what is decisive. A comparison between an anorectic fictional memoir's passage and one from *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* can already suggest a great deal about the affective literary stimuli potentia of books:

How silly people were to eat. They thought they needed food for energy, but they didn't. Energy came from will, from self-control (Levenkron, 1978, goodreads quote)

I wave at Joe as I pass Joe's All-You-Can-Eat-Pasta Shack where I like to carb-load on Fridays at lunch before my Saturday long runs (Kenneally, 2014: 159)

Today, YASF coexists with literature on eating disorders. Only this 2015, *Paperweight*, a fiction novel on anorexia and self-harm, was published by Meg Haston, attaining great success in the pro-ana community.⁶ However, YASF has made a strong case today, remarkable for a feminist sociological literary perspective. It seems that body positive conceptualizations are expanding. This is most evident in Instagram accounts (Jafari et al., 2016), especially if one goes further than images and delves into some of its captions. It is absolutely necessary for feminist sociological research, however, to not be satisfied with a *temporary* positive trend. We need not "a month of visibility but some centuries of remedial media" (Crenshaw, 2017). Social and literary *movements* might help cure decades of a frenzy rejection of nourishment for the bodily of women. For that to occur it is still necessary to keep fighting harmful experiential consequences of skinniness ideals. On this, theories of embodiment within women's studies proffer much theoretic guidance.

⁶ Pro-ana stands for pro-anorexia, contents which glamorize this eating disorder and offer tips on how to maintain the condition.

CHAPTER III

The bodily as wordly matter

4. Theories of embodiment

The previous chapter has emphasized the experiential side of literature. Through postmodernism, on the one hand, fact and fiction can be said to have been reconciled on a common ground. On the other, through a revision of (post-)structuralism and an advocacy of sociological literary criticism, the textual and the contextual domains of sociology and culture have been settled to conciliation. Moreover, in the previous section, the first steps to merge in this literary perspective a notion of living matter were taken. In this section, I continue drawing equivalent bridges between henceforth separate categories. In particular and thanks to the insights of New Materialism, bonds between the realm of the bodily and that of the mind shall be built. A first idea to be aware of is that the realms of the bodily and of the mind do not, as separate, exist. Before current feminist theorists of embodiment made this one of their present revindications, nevertheless, earlier fellows constructed their way. Here, the works of Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* ([1990]), and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* (1993) will be reviewed.

4.1. Feminist social constructionism: Naomi Wolf and Susan Bordo

Naomi Wolf with *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (2002 [1990]) and Susan Bordo with *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western*

Culture, and the Body (1993), among others, have led the way in the North American social constructionist strand of feminist theorization of embodiment.⁷ Albeit different in scope, their theories have poststructuralism and a foucauldian discursive approach to the matrix of Power and embodiment as common denominators. Hence, their review for an approach to anorexia is ineluctable here. Also, it is during the 90s that they first publish their canonical works. At this time, ten years had gone by of a particularly pronounced frenzy with “the female body” in western countries, as their investigations thoroughly expose. Wolf, indeed, deems that past decade “The Evil Eighties” defining them as exactly the years when “eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical specialty” (2002: 2). It is in the 70s, when feminism was revitalized, however, that the problem of the bodily seems to have exploded. If in the 70s women “breached the power structure” (2002: 10), in the 80s feminism represented “the f-word” and questioning beauty standards became as censorable. The 80s were, without doubt, a time of backfire for women. This is Wolf’s main observation for making her famous claim: that the 80s is an era of “violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty myth” (2002: 10).

Wolf’s perspective along the book is one of deconstructing the modern western ideal of female beauty. Her poststructuralist claims are established on a bird’s-eye grasping of that ideal’s sociological and cultural strata. This, to paraphrase a popular saying, makes Wolf’s macro theorizations to often miss the trees for the wood. Nonetheless, some of her much-cited ideas are of value and need to be recovered here, for their implications to the politics of the body, including the anorexic body. One crucial observation she makes is that the beauty myth, in its modern form, is grounded in a privileging of the visual. The visual, as it applies to the bodily, is one chief domain forming the basis of such politics of the body and theories of embodiment in feminist theory (Threadcraft, 2016). On the culture of the visual, Wolf explains: “before the development of technologies of mass production—daguerreotypes, photographs, etc.—, an ordinary woman was exposed to few such images outside the Church” (2002: 14). It is undeniable that there have been previous conceptions of beauty. Wolf herself is well aware of this. Even more so, preceding beauty myths have also been visual—and bound to religiosity—in many respects. A wonderful art manual that collects the beauty myth

⁷ As for constructivist strands in the tradition of determinism and conditioning, the trajectories of Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow stand out (Grosz, 1994: 9).

of the body throughout history with exhaustivity is *El arte y el cuerpo* (Aaronson et al., 2017). The chapter dedicated to beauty strikes one with figurations of women's fatness and fleshiness as valuably attractive. One such case is the Venus of Willendorf figurine (24.000-22.000 AC) or, closer to present readers, Raphael's *Three Graces* painting (1505), in figures 1 and 2. The difference about the modern beauty myth Wolf addresses is that its imagery is not restricted to a few privileged worshipers or to a small elite, as it were the case with those two illustrations, but it is widely disseminated to the general public.



Figs. 1 and 2

The domains the beauty myth encompasses are vast and the many examples offered by Wolf speak clearly of this fact. However, in strictly talking about beauty upon the female body, the author recognizes two areas of the visual which became determinant of what it would later happen to it. These were women's magazines and pornography. Exactly with the rebirth of feminism, *Vogue* launched in 1969 the Nude Look. Now that women were about to "break free" from many of the constraints of the fashion industry, their bodies became the most asphyxiating ones. The best illustration of this can be found in the world of corsetry. While bodices were promoted as key to attain a model-like (the hourglass) figure in the 50s, "after the 1960s and into the 1970s the art and artifice of ladies represented by waist cinchers and girdles was gone, internalized through a muscular corset created through diet and exercise" (Wissinger, 2015: 146-147). As a result, a progressive abandonment of corsetry garments provoked an organic internalization of their logic. Diet culture peaked, through articles and popular press and magazines (Wolf, 2002: 67) as protests against bustiers scalated. In the 70s, too, a fever of sexual liberation, partly promoted by second-wave feminism, but also through hippie culture, arrived. Pornography rose in popularity, giving women, "for the first time in history, the graphic details of perfection against which to measure

herself" (2002: 134). Wolf concludes with the observation that "meant to convey sexual liberation [...] the formula must also include an element that contradicts and then undermines the overall pro-woman fare: in diet [...] it sells women the deadliest version of the beauty myth money can buy" (2002: 69). In conclusion, the author insists on the progress and seemingly contradictory backlash that came with the newly visually oriented culture, including pornography, coinciding with the resurgence of women's movements. It is perhaps within some of the ways New Era's liberation was promoted that its drawbacks were already contained. Wolf, herself unaware of this, opens a niche of inquiry with her dualistically gendered deconstruction of the beauty myth upon the bodily of women apart from the realm of the mind.

Wolf's agenda, one of privileging the visual as text/meaning to consider the body as its target object, tells, once again, the story of an unsatisfactory contemplation of poststructuralism in academia. The author literally *reads* the body imposed by patriarchal western culture. If she had avoided mentioning the mind as separate from it, it would not be so obvious that she is reinforcing one of the main dialectical constructions poststructuralist feminism sought to deconstruct. Wolf very particularly writes that the beauty myth "prevents women from fully inhabiting the body" (2002: 129). In line with poststructuralist thought, which took down the fallacy of the univocity of the Cartesian male I, that she takes women as subjects is obvious. However, that she understands women's bodies as fleshy matter they inhabit is reminiscent of Platonism. Society, and not simply academia, crucially held this kind of thought. On this, Bordo explains that in the 90s the majority of institutions were still just beginning to grip the messages of modernity, that is, of incorporating subject dualisms (men and women) in place of reductionist ones (men), to already ask that they destabilized duality through the indeterminacy of postmodernity (1993: 242). The same, she adds, stands for society "like it or not, in our present culture our activities *are* coded as male or female" (1993: 242, emphasis in original). The dualism, not, conversely, realized or challenged by Wolf, appears most evident in her chapter "Hunger", where she opens the main discussion with a claim about the newly educated and professional North-American young women of the 70s. She says "their minds are proving well able; their bodies self-destruct [...]. They admitted their minds, and their bodies go. Young women learned that they could not live inside those gates [universities and jobs] and also inside their bodies" (2002: 181). This pattern is applied to all the areas of the beauty myth she studies: the hungry body, the violented body and the sexual(ly repressed) body. Taking

it as *res*, as thing, the body of woman imagined by Wolf appears crafted by the macro structures of the patriarchy, which act as “evil orchestrators” behind women’s beauty.

Whereas Wolf focuses on the visual from a macro structural perspective, Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* offers a study of the bodily which appears more tightly constituted. As Wolf, Susan Bordo focuses on the visual but already having gone beyond many of the criticisms one can pose to Wolf. Bordo’s famous claim that the slender-obsessed aspects of lookism culture *crystallize* on a women’s body, for example, escapes and anticipates later reproaches. In particular, the author claims that she cannot be accused of meaning with that sort of analytical language that women are “cultural dopes blindly submitting to oppressive regimes of beauty” (1993: 30). This is, in fact, the impression one gets from Wolf’s, which cannot be easily extracted of Bordo’s analysis. In presenting her theory about anorexia, however, three main objections towards it will be intermingled:

- The insufficient consideration of Cartesian dualism and postmodernity itself in the determination of anorexia.
- The emphasizing of her position as a feminist social constructivist and postmodern critic about anorexia while dismissing the need to support anorectics to go beyond social constructions as a crucial factor in its amelioration.
- The insufficient consideration of the visibilization of contradictory gender patterns for post 70s women.

I will expand these objections along the chapter to frame my own theorization of anorexia within a feminist New Materialist understanding.

One constant Bordo claims about the realm of the bodily, despite admitting historical variation, is “the construction of body as something apart from the true self” (1993: 5). There she establishes herself as a social constructivist who recognizes that bodies function as constructions behind which stand meanings. It is clear that she presents her theory from a feminist perspective, moreover, when she adds “whatever the specific historical content of the duality, *the body* is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women *are* that negativity” (1993: 5). Like Geneve Lloyd in *The Man of Reason* (1993), Bordo smartly establishes the obvious but needed observation that in the duality body/mind-soul-reason, women are body. This means that women, their bodies and the meanings ascribed to them are always already placed in the negative side of the

scale, quite literally. As for anorectics, upon whom her study focuses mostly, she, in fact, explains:

The extremes to which the anorectic takes the denial of appetite (that is, to the point of starvation) suggest the dualistic nature of her construction of reality: either she transcends body totally, becoming pure “male” will *or* she capitulates utterly to the degraded female body and its disgusting hungers. She sees no other possibilities, no middle ground (1993: 8)

Therefore, Bordo introduces the experiencing of the bodily for the anorectic as dualistic. However, she does not further develop this idea, switching to focus, conversely, on this as a bodily experience that is socially constructed. The difference may seem minuscule, but I suggest that the bodily is a social construction that is dualistically experienced by anorectics. This is not a lexical game but speaks of the thesis’ adscription to phenomenological sociology, rather than to sociology in general. Bordo, as a sociologist and poststructuralist, addresses the *meaningful world* of the anorectic. She mostly dismisses phenomenology when parenthetically adding that the body as experienced would be “the lived body as the phenomenologists put it” (1993: 142). I, conversely, consider the meaningful *lived* world of daily anorectic experience (or the daily *expérience vécue* of French existentialism).

Bordo takes the anorectic as a social body crystallized in a particular way and quickly jumps from their individual experiences, which she scatters throughout the book, to the role of discourses and institutions in this reproduction. This is clear when she says “mind/body dualism is no mere philosophical position, to be defended or dispensed with by clever argument. Rather, it is a *practical* metaphysics that has been deployed and socially embodied in medicine, law, literary and artistic representations, the psychological construction of self, interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and advertisements” (1993: 13-14). Because of being a poststructuralist, she takes reality, including the body, as a text to be read; however, to be read in context. As an informed feminist scholar, she reclaims this past deed of first-wavers as the ones who already “turned to Western representations of the body with an analytic, deconstructive eye. From their efforts we have learned to read all the various texts of Western culture - literary works, philosophical works, artworks, medical texts, film, fashion, soap operas - less naively” (1993: 15). The difference she establishes is that, while first-wave feminism deconstructed these realities dualistically, second-wave feminism, via poststructuralism, deconstructs them through indeterminacy of meaning. The body,

Bordo claims, does not have just one meaning—such as body as nature. Even slenderness in specifically 80s North America does not have just one connotation, she emphasizes. Throughout the different chapters, she explores these different meanings and even the importance of meaning itself for the anorectic. Although I will not stop to review each of the senses she explores, I owe part of my understanding of anorexia to some of her views, which I will be touching upon.

First, Bordo rethinks body dysmorphia (body image distortion syndrome, at the time, or BIDS), uncritically accepted in academia and popularly as a malfunction either in perception (anorectics cannot perceive their emaciated state) or body affection (they hate their bodies). In particular, in her analysis it can be understood as first and foremost a cultural teaching women undergo to learn to *see* their bodies through the lens of imperfection and therefore always already feel bad about them (1993: 57). Secondly, Bordo claims that anorectics strive to see a body about which they feel proud, that is, they themselves struggle to build meaning of their bodies. The pursuit of slenderness is, thus, “an attempt to embody certain values, to create a body that will speak for the self in a meaningful and powerful way” (1993: 67). More crucially Bordo realizes that, “slenderness”, “freighted with multiple significances” can be used “as a vehicle for the expression of a range of (sometimes contradictory) anxieties, aspirations, dilemmas” (1993: 46). As such, she blatantly concludes “interpreting anorexia requires not technical or professional expertise but awareness of the many layers of cultural signification that are crystallized in the disorder” (1993: 67). What is crucial to state is that Bordo differentiates the anorectics’ making of meaning of the bodily from herself as a feminist interpreting its meanings as already anorectic. Hence, there is no bridge between she who investigates and they whom she investigates. I claim that one does not stop at the level of anorexia meaning interpretation but continues to reach them and their own level of awareness about their processes of meaning making. This, exactly, could be useful for healing, so I disagree with her dismissal of professional expertise, that is, of clinicians’ work.

In their Cartesian logic, anorectics strive for physical beauty, as if there was something, Bordo swiftly dismisses, as purely physical beauty. Precisely Naomi Wolf advertised that “the beauty myth tells a story: the quality called ‘beauty’ objectively and universally exists” (2002: 12). Granting that Wolf later claimed that there were many beauty myths, paying attention to both claims acts as a reminder of the fact that the positive meanings associated to slenderness have been sustained on the most objective

basis, according to Donna Haraway (1998): again, that of the visual. Anorectics do not know that there is no such *thing* as skinniness. In journals, they do not see concepts. In fact, Bordo later claims “we are no longer given verbal descriptions [...] rather we learn the rules directly” through visual bodily discourses (1993: 170). Women see trimmed pieces of flesh which are static, already *there*, not in the making. Their process of meaning making is literally a bodily process to reach a bodily creation as if it could ever be a finished product. Exactly when that meaning is not even unitary. Until anorectics do not emaciate their bodies, meaning will simply not be there, because it is nowhere. “She [...] never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form”, contends Butler about woman and body (1993: 40). Hence, anorectics are always *on the making*.

As for some of the meanings she inscribes upon the slender body, Bordo dedicates some space to establish the relationship between skinniness and sexuality. Anorexia stands here as an infantile regression to the “asexuality” of the child, often, it is claimed, after having suffered from sexual abuse and usually in prevention of sexist sexual violence in adult life. Lacking expertise in this field, I want to turn instead to her idea of skinniness as control and professionalism in the individualist era that North American 70s and 80s begins to be. Bordo acknowledges that linked to this job ethos upheaval, it is fat which from the 70s and 80s starts being strictly demonized in North America. It is no longer just “excess body weight”, then, which came “to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will” (1993: 195) but, indeed, lack of muscularity and flabbiness. Muscles came no longer to be associated only with masculinity or with proletarian status. Working out a mildly muscled body became at the time a “glamorized and sexualized yuppie activity [...] a symbol of correct attitude” (1993: 195). Crucially, Bordo identifies that muscularity speaks to a change in consideration of categories of social mobility, or lack of them, rather than class location. In a country where the prevailing mythology is that everyone makes their own social ladder, the trimmed body became a symbol of the fact that one had moved some steps upward.⁸ Anorexia, she concludes, could thus be seen as “an extreme development of the capacity for self-denial and repression of desire, the work ethic in absolute control” (1993: 198). This, she recognizes, specifically represents a virile mastery of one’s life.

⁸This is a reference to the national and work ethos of the United States known as the “American Dream”. For reviewing some of the direct relations of the American Dream with fitness culture see Woodson (2013).

Committing to a slender body, Bordo argues, is committing to femaleness, as slenderness is “the usual form in which the image is displayed” (1993: 204). Crucially, she goes on: if slenderness means correct management of the self, then that is “decisively coded as male” (1993: 205) in the North American ethic, and in traditional western culture. Women in the 70s and 80s, therefore, engage in the contradictions of “the new look” (1993: 206). This look, I want to clarify, is not new. What is novel are its particularly gendered meanings. In actuality, Bordo notes that if the slender female body can at the time mean these seemingly contradictory meanings (maleness and femaleness) this stands as a rationale “for its compelling attraction in periods of gender change” (1993: 173).⁹ Bordo does not elaborate specifically on why or how she deems this era a period of gender change, which I do relate to postmodernity. She hints that this dual meaningful slender body is a rejection of a past notion of femininity, that both previous to Victorianism (the hourglass figure) and of the plumpness which emerged at the post war period, when women were reclaimed back to domesticity, and which lost popularity in the 60s. The incongruities of the new look appear in a professional air, associated to the Caucasian business man of success. The corresponding new professional-looking lady plays male while still a woman (1993: 208). Trimming the body and attaining such a neat appearance go hand in hand, what explains why the frenzy is no longer simply about losing weight for being a beautiful woman but about tonification in order to be a successfully looking one (1993: 211).¹⁰ The shared factor of losing weight and toning the body is soft, excess flesh. Identifying this common denominator between a craze about losing weight and body building from the 70s, apparently in contradiction for a woman, who seems either oriented to build herself down or to build herself up, Bordo claims “helps illuminate an important continuity of meaning in our culture between compulsive dieting and body building and it reveals why it has been so easy [...] to oscillate between a spare minimalist look and a solid muscular athletic look” (1993: 191). The problem she identifies with this commonality, crucial for anorexia, is that “unless one takes to muscle-building, to achieve a flab-free, excess-free body one must trim very near the bone” (1993: 191). This is the reason why one cannot simply stop with anorexia at the level of meaning she has intended to create.

⁹ She, crucially, adds “the anorectic [...] embodies this intersection” (1993: 173).

¹⁰ It is surprising that Bordo does not relate the theorization of the cyborg, of which she claims is “the postmodern body [...], the shape-lifter” and then, paraphrasing Smith-Rosenberg, “of indeterminate sex and changeable gender, who continually alters her/his body, creates and recreates a personality”, to anorexia.

Because emaciation is not a fixed meaning in the first place, but an unfathomable quest, it should never, I believe, start to be in the process of meaning making of a person.

The question stands whether one can pursue slenderness and skinniness, if need be, without reaching emaciation. Four years ago, I started doing cardio and cutting industrial bakery from my diet. I lost 10 kilograms and my bones started protruding, but so still did fat in the calves, hips. I would not identify that with the meaning of success. However, it did feel like something *meaningful* had changed in my life. I felt that before my weight-loss I had “a body” which did not represent me. I felt my body too much. I overperceived it, not misperceived it. Before, it took too much space; afterwards, however, fat was taking too much space *of it*. Two years later, a renewed muscularity driven and rather new food as fuel fitness craze began to be widely publicized for and by women, especially coming from North American culture.¹¹ Body building and cheat meals occupied Instagram feeds. The message (meaning) was: no more suffering. The women (bodies) were: slender, smiling, no longer flabby, no longer fasting. Taken together, textually and bodily, current women’s body building sounds like a goodbye to fatness and to skinniness one only achieves through pain. With this craze it felt like “we could, at last, have it all”. Not so differently, it seems, from 70s and 80s young women in the United States.

Food and diet are central arenas for the expression of these contradictions. On television and in popular magazines, with a flip of the page or barely a pause between commercials, images of luscious foods are replaced by advertisements for grape fruit-diets, low-calorie recipes, exercise equipment. Even more disquieting than these manifest oppositions, however, are the constant attempts by advertisers to mystify them, suggesting that the contradiction doesn’t really exist, that one can ‘have it all’ (Bordo, 1993: 199).

It is obvious that one can have both interest in exercising and in food consumption. Including sports in one’s life, however, should not be equated with cutting food from it. On the contrary, engaging in sports implies a nutritional needs increase. If that is not appreciated in advertisements, because food and sports ones appear discreetly, in current Young Adult Sports novels this is exactly the interesting pattern which is represented. Annie, in *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*, commits to sport and to a coherent sports specialized diet, higher in nutritional value than the one intaking before. Readers

¹¹ For a review, see *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America* (2013) by Shelly McKenzie Lawrence.

can learn that she does not avoid carbohydrates or fats in her diet and still her legs become firmer. It is not a contradiction, but the behind the scenes of physiology and physiognomy one did not usually see in the 70s and not always sees on biased Instagram feeds.

Trimmed women's bodily tendencies are not new, as has been exposed. If body positive movements have become popular, slenderness still reigns, however, and anorexia has not plummeted but rather stabilized in the last years (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017). Hence, one still needs to consider why is it that it peaked in the 70s in the first place and continue combatting it. At that time, postmodernity and poststructuralism, as has been seen, were on the rise in the academic context, including in feminist studies about anorexia, like Bordo's. What is still not considered today when tracing anorexia's rise back to the decade of the 70s is the latter context's own *meta*-consideration. I literally want to contend here that anorexia is also the result of postmodernity, as meta-academic context.¹²

4.2. Reconciling the humanities and the social sciences with New Materialism

The feminist poststructuralist social constructivist visions of Wolf and Bordo are problematic in that they reinvoked the mind body split of the Cartesian subject poststructuralism questioned in the first place. Their theories, albeit poststructuralist, quickly dismiss its promise of anti-dualism, although more markedly in the case of Wolf than in the case of Bordo.¹³ If with poststructuralism they attained to finally recognize that there is not only (con)text, like structuralism had done, but matter, their works eventually feature only (con)text into focus.¹⁴ Nonetheless, in avoiding taking their retrieval of the dichotomy at face value; their contributions, if reconfigured in that promise of poststructuralism, can be of great use. New Materialism precisely intends to avoid such chiasms.

¹²Bordo misses on this point, moreover, because she believes that going beyond dualisms, as postmodernism and poststructuralism attempt, is not possible in real life, only in academia, as was exposed above: "I consider postmodern culture, poststructuralist thought and some aspects of contemporary feminism as embodying fantasies of transcendence of the materiality and historicity of the body" (1993: 15).

¹³ With the promise of poststructuralism I am referring to how the subject was to be conceived under its theorizations. The metaphysics of transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and, later, of Heidegger, rooted the subject of poststructuralism. Their philosophy on the bodily holds precisely the abandonment of dichotomies, proper of Platonic, Aristotelic, Cartesian and Kantian thought. Heidegger, following Husserl, the German father of modern phenomenology, already contends the mantra of New Materialism: that there is no such thing as body as separate from mind, but a "*Dasein*" (being there).

¹⁴ In turn, the most evident example of a poststructuralist analysis of discourse and matter as coconstitutive is Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993).

The term New Materialism appeared as a critique of the supposed anti-dualism of poststructuralism and poststructuralist and postmodern feminism with the intention of refocusing academic efforts on socio-discursive and material processes as indivisible (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2013), but not of surmounting those previous theorizations. Iris Van der Tuin's *Generational Feminism* (2014) captures the advantages of this approach for creating feminist knowledge outside of such generational conflict. She specifically explains that it can be productive to choose not to establish that current and coming feminist knowledge is "better" than that from previous waves. As for corporeality, instead of rejecting the analyses of the bodily conducted by preceding poststructuralist theorizations, they may incorporate them. One aspect New Materialism does indeed alter, however, is lingo. The reason is that, if body and mind cannot be taken as things, then one should not talk of "body" and "mind" in the first place. Nevertheless, there is no terminology in our tradition which transcends this duality in the linguistic realm (Grosz, 1994: 21). Hence, poststructuralism may not be simply disposed of unproblematically. If not its lingo, its figurations are indeed of a valuable nature.¹⁵

In this thesis, I do not take poststructuralism as incompatible with New Materialism. As regards the bodily, I place both in a continuum academically addressing it. In reconciling them, like in *The Octavius* of Minucius (197 AD), poststructuralist terminology can be recollected as a pure witty. In this Roman work, it is made obvious that what the Scriptures say upon invoking the body of Christ has never meant anything corporeal or bloody. Minucius Felix, the writer, made an apology of Christianity as it had been taken by Paganism. He saw it unthinkable to accuse Christianity of anathema, as the Roman Pagans had done, for their cannibalistic ritual of "eating the body of Christ" at every communion. In the same vein, feminist current engagement with the bodily in New Materialism can make an "apology" of the mind body split of poststructuralism and avoid taking its linguistic slippages literally. New Materialism seeks to develop new figurations, too. The most evident linguistic difference with poststructuralism is that, instead of using dashed words to address dichotomous constructions (mind-body), New Materialism employs single compound words ("mindbody", "natureculture"). This is linguistic evidence of an attempt to move

¹⁵ Figurations, abundant in poststructuralism, are defined by Haraway as "a good place to think with", an in-between (political) space between the literal and the imagined (2004: 323). Haraway's cyborg is paradigmatic in this sense.

from an ontic realm to an ontological one. The bodily of New Materialist thought, actually, delves quite deeply into metaphysical philosophy, more than poststructuralism had popularly done.¹⁶ Once again, in considering the *meta-*, this time, of physics, lie some answers. New Materialism is, first and foremost for the purposes here pursued, a question of going beyond the physicality of the body and, in turn, beyond the textuality of language. Identifying that mind and body are constructions, as happens in poststructuralist thought, is to claim them *ontically*. They appear as a linguistic pair that is imagined. Poststructuralists needed to recover the historical figuration mind/body to deconstruct it. However, in order to deconstruct it fully, one needs to take it ontically as a construction and therefore ontologically recognize *that there is no such thing as a mind and a body*, once and for all. Not only expressively imagined, but literally so. Ontologically considering the mindbody, as New Materialism does, however, is not to fall into the trap of monist reductionism. It is not to assume that there is a oneness of Being that is given. On the contrary, New Materialism, while taking bodily and mental as unitary, seeks to establish relationships between both realms. Thus, a crucial difference between para-philosophical poststructuralism (in Hunter's sense, 2012) and New Materialism is that "instead of looking at these binaries like poststructuralism, New Materialism looks at relationships between them" (Górska, 2018).¹⁷

The recursive dualization of mind and body has not only been disputed at philosophical level. In academia, on the one hand, body has been taken as an object of study of the natural sciences, empiricism or later, positivism, versus mind, which has been the object of the humanities and social sciences, idealism or relativism, respectively. One consideration disciplines share about this "object" of study is "a common refusal to acknowledge the distinctive complexities of organic bodies, the fact that bodies construct and are in turn constructed by an interior, a psychical and a signifying-view point, a consciousness or perspective" (Grosz, 1994: 8). It is not only Grosz but many other authors who chronicle the war of disciplines or of the "two

¹⁶"Metaphysical thought was transmuted into an academic culture capable of being taken up in a variety of non-philosophical or para-philosophical disciplines—literary studies, Marxism, psychoanalysis, even historiography and jurisprudence—from whence emerged the array of exoteric hermeneutic disciplines known as poststructuralist theory" (Hunter, 2012: 4).

¹⁷ Luisa Paz Rodríguez Suárez brings into view the confusion of Cartesian metaphysics of ontological and ontic realms, which takes body as soma and this, in turn, as something (*res*) which is merely visible, an object among other objects. Boss, she continues, denounces such confusion as it is the basis on which psychiatric practice has been founded, scissoring mind and body. She concludes that Boss and Heidegger instead "understand that the relationship between the corporeal and the psychic could be explained through causality or synchrony" (2017: 81-83).

cultures” of C.P. Snow (1959), that is, the humanities-hard sciences division. New Materialism attempts to also move beyond this academic divide. However, as academic movement, it does not always acknowledge that people in the street have traditionally considered all these binaries equally dualistically, as was noted by Bordo. My critique here is that they may transcend dualisms, just like academics. Anorectics, in particular, take to the limits the mindbody gap. On how they take this separation, Álvarez claims “Our thesis is that [...] anorexia nervosa could be considered a psychosomatic illness blatantly and paradigmatically affecting the sacred unicity of psychosoma” (2009: 49, my translation). He, crucially, adds on treatment “and whether a psychosomatic monist or fusional conception can help the ill more actively [...] especially to those most deeply embedded in their disjunction of it” (2009: 49, my translation). What then if postmodernity, with its perpetuation, but still, stirring up of dichotomies and the deconstruction of gender, had exactly transcended academy? My contention is that the crisis in identity which anorectics show, their paradigmatic “resolution” of mind as male category and body as female is rooted in the postmodern crisis of the subject.

The modern subject, contrary to the Enlightenment subject, could be conceived as man or woman. The postmodern subject could be not either one or other, but any. The indeterminacy of meaning attributions of postmodernity made the 70s and 80s a time of contradictions rooted in a fragmentation of identities. Gender, which Susan Bordo was brilliantly able to note changing at the time, proves key in the growth of anorexia. The critic, however, missed on taking this relationship further, as she did with Cartesian dualism and postmodernity itself determinant, as I am emphasizing, in the expansion of the anorectic condition. Some of the similarities between gender dysphoria and anorexia, retrieved from memoirs, are leading this idea here. Gender dysphoria, albeit a normative concept, refers to the idea that one feels misrepresented in their current gender adscription. Equally, the *felt* disconnection which arises as a result of anorectics’ sense of embodiment not conforming to what ought to be felt otherwise is what provokes a continued state of abjection towards the bodily as it is. This can be called a state of “being in dysphoria”. In it, the bodily as it is currently limited does not bear resemblance to what an anorectic deems her truer being, which would, finally, represent her: “It is the imaginary anatomy with which the ‘bodily ego’ is identified and the imaginary anatomy that motivates the transformation of the flesh” (Brain, 2002: 159). Dysphoria renders the current state of embodiment apart from subjectivity; the anorectic disembodies her self apart from her sense of the bodily as it is. Resultantly,

putting food into it, putting on weight, integrating fat into it, that is, any form of bodily incorporation, is abjected (Warin, 2009).

The male look asked of a woman is the clearest demarcation of slender femaleness and, at the same time, of gender crisscrossing as it applies to anorexia. A woman had to *look* female thin but masculine trimmed, *appear* male yet feminine (the women suit is a classic of the 70s-80s). *Work* male and *be* a woman. That cocktail was the way to success, a confusingly demarcated identity in a time when identity is, at the same time, less fixed than ever. Because woman can be anything, do anything, look like anything eventually; such indeterminacy, after decades of dual gender roles impositions, takes her to a negation of the self. She is pushed in opposite directions. If woman *was* body, but now it does not assume a form, but all, woman *is* nothing. Addressing postmodernity, Linda Nicholson in fact underlines “the dream of limitless multiple embodiments, allowing one to dance from place to place and self to self” (2013: 145). For her “the postmodern body is no body at all” (2013: 145). As blatant as she is about postmodernity in relation to incarnate embodiment, she takes a step backwards about gender, which she only addresses at theoretical level. Bibliography on postmodernity and gender seems to stay at the level of gender as category. I believe this to be a result of a fear to trespass philosophical boundaries in the event that biology would reduce gender to sexual organs once again.

In anorexia one cannot stop at the level of meaning making, in this case at genders as male/female significations. That the body is meaningful was already seen with Bordo, even with Wolf. Grosz, non-dualistically but causally, includes the variable matter in this consideration. In a proto New Materialist vein, she establishes *the relation* between body and meaning for the specificities of anorexia. She claims “the subject is capable of suicide, of anorexia [...] *because* the body is *meaningful*, has significance” (1994: 32, first italics are mine).

On the other hand, studying anorexia should not stop at the level of the visual. Feminist social constructivism, as has been seen, emphasizes the role of visual culture in women’s embodiment of patriarchal discourses, especially when eating disorders are regarded. Donna Haraway, for example, claims that “the technologies of visualization recall [...] the deeply predatory nature of a photographic consciousness [...] structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility” (2004: 29). For Bordo, having visual messages entails that bodies themselves are the most potent representation in advertisements because women compare themselves to them, seeing what is faulty in

their own bodies (1993: 297). It is as if vision of other bodies, however diverse, stood alone, canceling the anorectic's vision of the body. That women's bodies became visible in photographs, journals and television advertisements made them visualizable to other women, but invisibilized their own bodies to themselves. Even though these are exciting theorizations, visibility and visual perception are granted too much power. There are anorexic women who *cannot see*.

In 2011, Kocourkova et al published "Anorexia nervosa in a blind girl" where they defined body image as a mental construct not dependent on visual perception only, given the case. Unsatisfied with their use of the reductionist expression "mental construct", I have investigated about the other senses, following phenomenology, and theorized about their possible position in anorexia. Wary of overinsistence on visual culture or the ability to see, phenomenology deals with perception, on which all senses are considered, and, indeed, taken as interrelatedly functioning (Merlau-Ponty, 1968 in Grosz, 1994). Moreover, "perception is, as it were, midway between mind and body and requires the functioning of both. Neither empiricism nor idealism, neither pure physiology nor pure psychology have been able" to explain how their processes of study are interrelated (Grosz, 1994: 94), what becomes crucial for the integration of the mental and bodily realms. Touch, the often most developed sense in visually impaired people, "shares with vision the presumption of a static or given object (in this sense, touch is also iconic)" (Grosz, 1994: 98).¹⁸ Now what I want to focus upon here is staticity or givenness of bodies. In visual culture, a photographic metaphor does well. Let it be assumed, in a social constructivist fashion, that a woman sees a skinny body on a magazine and wants to translate that image, literally, on her body. She reads the image but worse, strives to freeze her bodily boundaries in the same way. In default of Photoshop, woman, let it be recalled, has to trim near the bone. She halts herself at the level of unchanging bodily boundaries, as if that were possible. What then, about women who cannot see? Because visuality cannot operate here, staticity provides more insight. Having been socialized in the same kind of dualistic mind/body culture, she can also conceive body as separate from mind. She, equally, associates slenderness to success: she will not want to *be seen* fat. In the absence of vision, she will not experience the slender body, but a phantasmatic, equally powerful, slenderness:

¹⁸ Grosz, in dealing with images, emphasizes that sight reinforces the mind/body dualism: "it functions at a distance, setting up a space or field between the seer and the seen, the physical and the psychical"(1994: 97). This could be more plausible as a factor contributing to slenderness in visual culture influencing women's desire for slenderness than premising that women literally assume representations from it.

Our experiences are organized not by real objects and relations but by the expectations and meanings objects have for the body's movements and capacities. They indicate a 'fictional' or fantasmatic construction of the body outside of or beyond its neurological structure (Grosz, 1994: 89)

With the allusion to what Weir Mitchell called "the phantom limb", skinniness in anorexia would be a condition which represents for consciousness a state. Grosz does in fact, although for psychoanalytic purposes, put both in relation to one another ("anorexia, like the phantom limb", 1994: 40). Conceived as static state, "body" becomes literally graspable for the senses, felt as embodiability. Merleau-Ponty argued indeed that "the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space" (1968: 134 in Grosz, 1994: 105). This sort of photographic consciousness of static slenderness enters into serious conflict with the postmodern indeterminacy of meaning. Women think they can embody slenderness as thing, as *res*. The key is not whether it is seeable or not, but feelable: "the tangible is perfectly capable of existence autonomous from the visible" (Grosz, 1994: 106).

Conclusively, it is skinniness *both* as *thing* and as *discourse* which should be deconstructed. I conceive no better way for doing this than to reconfigure the discursive power of "skinniness" against itself, via counter discourses. Only this time it is assumed, specifically, that the power of discourse can be cognitively repurposed. Along this thesis, the power of words and discourses is assumed; let it be recalled, in a twofold way. In the same way as discourses around skinniness hold prevalence and provoke their effects on harmful ideals assumed of women, like anorexia, so can other discourses be created as a reaction which then incites to care in a functional way about the body. It is a matter of what becomes primed in the information that is consumed what crafts behavior (Cialdini, 2016). For the purposes of this dissertation, this implies that the ways in which the bodily is conceptualized are determinant as to how society will conceive it and act accordingly upon it. This is exactly the reason why Kenneally's choice with the protagonist in *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* is most interesting. For Annie, slenderness is not meaningful; it is not freighted with a cargo of success nor self-confidence.¹⁹ Sports and the experiences built sensibly around it are.

¹⁹ Grosz argues that what is needed is a change in meanings, attitudes, values and beliefs towards corporeality, rather than a change in corporeality itself (1994: 17). Moreover, she refuses to believe in one singular norm of the bodily. Rather, she advocates for a plural model which, crucially, needs to play a role in defining what counts as *fit*, *healthy*, *beautiful* and *desirable* bodies (1994: 22).

CHAPTER IV

Brave new word

5. A therapeutic view of novels

This chapter proffers a specialized perspective which integrates the postulations so far contended around the bodily and the literary in a manner bridging that gap hitherto present in New Materialist studies. The core aim behind it is to propose in what manner fiction can act bibliotherapeutically, explicitly as it applies to a particular novel within contemporary sports fiction among readers with bodily vulnerabilities, namely abjection in anorexia. Notably, bibliotherapy is a type of therapy which uses literature for advancing the amelioration of different clinical conditions. With a tradition in behaviourist psychological treatment, it has been used to handle, especially, depression (see study by Billington et al., 2010), but underused or not considered for many others. It is non-fictional works that are, moreover, mostly used in bibliotherapy. Fictional bibliotherapy, on the contrary, remains deceitfully unacknowledged. Emily Troscianko, from the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, is especially concerned with the lack of investigations about the influence reading fiction can have on fighting bodily disorders.

Sufferers of eating disorders frequently resort or are prescribed to read self-help guides. As for prescription, Farrand notes “self-help books as they are extensively used within clinical practice to supplement standard treatment, with frequency of use being higher among the more experienced professionals” (2005: 3). However, up until today, whether exploring the experiences of anorexia and bulimia in books dealing explicitly

with eating disorders and of reading prescriptive methodologies on how to overcome such conditions in self-help guides is beneficial for their readers remains unresolved. In contrast to specialized non-fictional self-help guides or eating disorders memoirs, extensive reading is rarely approached with the idea of recovery. I only found one article which followed these purposes. In a review of Jacqueline Wilson's novel *Girls Under Pressure* (1998) it was claimed that the "cruel and realistic aspect of the depiction of eating disorders, specifically of the distress and pain that the sufferer of the illness [...] has to go through" can make novel fictional reading therapeutic since "the readers themselves will make a decision towards their own health based on what they have learned from their reading experience" (Tapia, 2015: 7). What is not considered is that girls going through eating disorders are already coping with that particular suffering and still nonetheless decide to go on living with them. Reading these novels, in fact, not infrequently can result in a further reproduction of the behavioural and cognitive pathways readers would now be experiencing as well fictionally (Troscianko, 2016). According to Healey (2014), this would be the result provoked by reiteration, which forces "a cumulative effect" of such patterns. Thomas et al. consider that reading eating disorders memoirs may, moreover, be counterproductive as a way of recovery for actual readers. More specifically, they contend that those with a preexisting pathology can "normalize and glamorize ED symptoms" (2006: 420). I claim, in addition, that such reiteration derives from feeling empathy towards the anorectic protagonist.

Just as exposure to negative body contexts on those literary works and the media, in general, can situate teenagers around the harmful ideal of extreme thinness, so can fictional works contain body positive role models and values. That teenagers reach these contents remains a question of critical literacy. If developed, it can greatly aid the positive processing of stimuli around the bodily. This view coincides with Healey's highlighting of the fact that young women can greatly benefit from making "a conscious decision about what to read and look at" (2014: 12), since they need to absorb positive bodily input to develop a positive bodily framework. This is not to say, however, that fiction explicitly dealing with characters suffering from eating disorders should not be read or even produced, but that such works may be counter therapeutic in these cases. In fact, as discussed by Jafari et al. in their holistic model for the advancement of body positive lifestyles among young North American women, girls who have adopted a "body protective" way of living continually claim the necessity of information filters based on intentionally reducing their exposure to unrealistic body oriented media:

Individuals who are in recovery or recovered from anorexia or related disordered eating behaviors may exhibit different aspects of PBI [Positive Body Image], such as protective factors that work against internalizing pro-anorexia information. PBI interpret incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized and most negative information is rejected or reframed (2016: 111)

The current context of the United States appears as a productive one in terms of the general application of fictional bibliotherapy and, especially, novel bibliotherapy, since as researched by Aubry “many readers in the United States today treat novels less as a source of aesthetic satisfaction than as a practical dispenser of advice or a form of therapy” choosing books “that will offer strategies for confronting, understanding, and managing their personal problems” (2011: 1), chiefly with respect to women readers. Aubry’s claim finds its rationale in the post-Christian turn of American society and its current affluence and maintenance of a protestant ethic, which overall renders them attracted to the attainment of secular well-being. This life view is so strong that in their approach to extensive reading “they expect the same services that they expect from self-help books” (2011: 1).

6. Developing a model of anorexia bibliotherapy

It is my intention to elucidate here the field of bibliotherapy by examining the role of fictional reading as applied to young women audiences suffering from eating disorders but, more specifically, I here seek to investigate the beneficial influence North American Young Adults Sports Fiction (YASF) novels may have for this matter. Instead of solely conducting a textually interpretative analysis, as it is often traditionally done in a humanities setting, a New Materialist understanding of fiction is enriched with an analysis based on cognitive literary studies. The effects of literary processing among readers are hence here presented for due consideration.

6.1. Cognitive literary studies and the processing of affective literary stimuli in YASF

Cognitive literary studies focus upon “the experience of engaging with fiction as fiction—being drawn into fictional worlds, or losing oneself in a good story” (Troscianko, 2017: 2). In the analysis, I consider the language in the novel as stimuli, as literary stimuli that are experienced in the imagination of the readers. Reading is understood to be a phenomenon of the world, with the particularity of making the reader experience it as it could otherwise be. On the most basic level, however, it is about information, linguistic information, in particular, that is processed: “Although reading is

perhaps not the prototype of natural language use, it acts as a gateway to ‘natural’ processes of language use” (Jacobs, 2015: 135).

What is processed, *how* it is processed and to what possible *consequences* constitute the variables of my cognitive consideration of the novel’s analysis. As to what is processed, girl readers with eating disorders or vulnerability to them should be aided to develop a critical literacy for exploring literary choices outside eating disorders fiction and memoirs. The kind of language in YASF, crucially, is qualitatively different from the language of those, for example as regards nutrition. On how it is processed, brain studies shed light through the insights of neuroscience. Jacobs, in “Towards a Neurocognitive Poetics Model of Literary Reading” offers a crucial point, based on the pioneering ideas of Bühler (1934):

When heard or read, words evoke embodied memoirs of the thoughts, feelings, or actions associated with the things/events (and their contexts) they describe, thus activating partially the same neural networks as the corresponding ‘natural’ events [...]. Words have a substance, and the actions they serve -speaking, reading, thinking, feeling- are themselves substance-controlled (2015: 137)

Thus, as for the positive consequences, processing YASF can be determinant for evoking an eased experiencing of being incarnate in the world, grasping the metabolism at peace, responding to its physiological cues. Conversely, reading anorexia memoirs can in this vein be taken as toxic information processing provoking stimuli reminiscent of ignoring hunger, energy deprivation and other such cues. In cognitive theory terms, the effects here addressed are known under the umbrella term of “priming”, the brain is prepared for action, behaviour or for pursuing a goal based on processed information (Sorrentino and Yamaguchi, 2011: 250). What is essential about narratives is that they *spontaneously* prime effects in readers. It is not, as will later be noted, a paternalistic approach from an external agent imposing a behaviour on the subject, rather, it is the reader herself who will frame her goals according to the narrative: “narrative is instrumental to culturally transmitted meaning having compelling psychological forces to engage spontaneous human agency” (Sorrentino and Yamaguchi, 2011: 405). According to cognitive literary theory, goals are primed in readers thanks to the emotionality of characters and the goals they themselves pursue (Sorrentino and Yamaguchi, 2011: 405). As readers engage in a story, they will form *ideomotor representations*, that is, “psychological representations that have ideational and motor components, and that have symbolic expressions (e.g. narratively described actions) and

molar behaviours (e.g. actual behaviour enactment)” (Sorrentino and Yamaguchi, 2011: 405).

Cognitive literary effects, hence presented, can be explored by addressing various aspects of the novel’s language, including phonetics, lexical families in their most literal meanings and connotations at the level of metaphorical language use.

- Phonetics

We first learn to read sounds than to process meaning, therefore the phonetic level comes prior to the lexical one. Words sound in a particular way and that special “music” of a word triggers in readers certain feelings, just like a film’s soundtrack does for a cinema audience (Marks, 2000). In English, many verbs function like onomatopoeias. In the novel, verbs used to convey food consumption are very interesting in that they can convey that the protagonist is having fun and feeling happy about the process of eating. One example is the verb “to pop” in “I steal cherries from the bar and pop them in my mouth” (*BAB*: 171).²⁰ Reminding one of the moment food explodes in her mouth with all its flavor, this and other verbs can function as positive affective literary stimuli: making one feel good about eating food. Cognitively, this is demonstrated in that phonetic effects of words activate both Broca’s area (a part in the brain related to language processing) and the premotor cortex, the part in the brain that is activated when some bodily part is moved, like the muscles in the mouth when eating (Urrutia and de Vega, 2012: 57). Specifically, when processing information on the sounds provoked by actions, particular groups of neurons (popularly known as mirror neurons) fire data at what the other person, in this case the character, is doing with that action, that is, at her intention (de Vega, 2005). The reader, in turn, “mirrors” that action, which does not mean that the person copies the action but that she experiences the same in the brain from a sensorymotor response perspective. Thus, a reader would be able to infer by the phoneticity of a word whether the character is experiencing a positive or a negative effect with her action. For instance, she would interpret by the bursting sound implicit in a verb like “to pop” that the character is positively experiencing food ingestion. The mirror neurons would fire on that basis, provoking a pleasant processing of the character’s action of eating.

²⁰ The novel’s title, *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*, will henceforth be shortened as *BAB* for page references.

- Lexical families

This is the most evident and one of the most determinant levels. The sort of vocabulary used in the novel, around ideas of eating, nurturing, sliming, feeling energized, or improving performance must be addressed, paying attention to the lexical families that are employed to convey ideas around these fields. For example, I claim that most of the ideas represented in the novel examined here can be contained under the umbrella term of bodily functionality and necessities. According to Healey (2014), body functionality starts with the consideration of what the body can do and has done on the pathway to feel respect for its abilities, which overall helps teenagers to feel more positively about their self-concepts. For Wood-Barcalow et al. “positive body image is a multifaceted concept, which is distinct from negative body image. Positive body image (PBI) is considered to be on a separate continuum from negative body image, rather than situated at the farthest pole of negative body image (NBI), thus PBI is not simply the opposite of NBI” (2010: 110). It includes a frame allowing one to appreciate “the functions that it performs for them” (2010: 110). In order to develop such framework, the most important cognitive strategy to adopt is to “set positive, health-related focused goals rather than weight loss related ones” while as regards a more behavioural approach it is relevant to engage with “practices with food and exercise that promote health over weight loss/management” (2010: 114).²¹

Newby to the world of sporting, Kenneally’s protagonist, Annie, decides to start running after her boyfriend, himself a consummate runner, passes away without completing the marathon he had been training for. It is precisely because Annie is represented as a character who echoes having this functional approach progressively along the plot what would enable girl readers to identify with her as a model of body positivity and therefore experience its reading as bibliotherapeutic to such regard. This is seen in the way she starts training in order to complete the marathon and not to lose weight, that is, in the pursuing of a functional aim rather than an aesthetic one, Annie develops a functional view of her capacities. Some of the sort of word families readers encounter in this sense relate to distance covered (“today’s distance: 5 miles”, *BAN*, 1) or resilience attained (“Today’s run is going a little better than last week’s. I’m not as tired, but my feet feel slimy inside my socks”, *BAN*, 14), for example. This appears

²¹ Strictly, necessities-related goals rather than health ones are referred to in the model.

opposite to lexical references to calories burnt or dropped centimeters typically present in anorexia memoirs (Kaywell, 1993).

- Connotations and metaphors

Connotations are secondary meanings words have. They are a key aspect of metaphors, since they act by recalling non-primary linguistic meanings to which certain expressions associate. Troscianko considers metaphors a crucial level of readers' processing of fiction and aesthetics. She claims that "all but aesthetic illusion and narrative engagement are overtly metaphorical, and the thing about metaphor is that [...] it structures our thoughts often without us even being aware of it" (2017: 3). In *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*, metaphors are the most frequent literary device. In particular, food metaphors are. Annie, as protagonist and intradiegetic narrator tells her story in terms of food; hence, they are considered very prominent in the analysis. Specifically, they are conceived as the basic part of the bibliotherapy model, taken to be key to alter the framework experiences of readers towards food and food intake. Metaphors can also be analyzed as altering readers' experience of approaching sports. Instead of focusing on weight-loss or any other kind of aesthetic goal, the protagonist in *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* seeks personal maturing and overcoming in running. For her, it becomes an enriching life project, not one that will consume her. Álvarez (2009) insists on patients' enlarging their projects in life from taking the body as the sole one.²² Annie does not subsume life to it, as it would happen in vigorexia, but actually builds many other areas of life around sport. Projects derive from sport but sport, a project in itself, does not become life. In the case of Annie, it will be exposed how reaching the end of a marathon training allegorizes a coming to terms with her deceased boyfriend's mourning and also with her own social and romantic life as well as future job.

The novel's language, thereby considered, differs greatly from the kind of language eating disorders fiction or self-help guides and memoirs have (see Keywell, 1993), but also from that employed in previous stories in the genre of YASF. Actually, the sort of language North American YASF had in the 70s has varied greatly from contemporary examples like those offered by Kenneally. One of the main differences, crucially, is the question of the meanings associated to bodily changes and the gendered connotations of food and sports.

²² Bordo shares this idea. She contends that the "idée fixe -staying thin- becomes at its farthest extreme so powerful as to render any other ideas or life-projects meaningless" (1993: 159).

Thanks to the popularity enjoyed by the *Zanballer* works of Florida based writer Rozanne Knudson, published between 1972 and 1984, YASF boosted in acceptance among girl readers. 1972, the year of publication of the first part of Knudson's tetralogy is not incidental. This is in fact the year when the legislation in the country incorporated the 'Title IX' through the Educations Amendment. The Title established that every person in the United States had the right not to be discriminated from participation in education federally financed on the basis of sex (US Government Publishing Office, 1972: 373). The prohibition of sex discrimination on the kind of activities that the act contemplated increased young women's participation in college sports by 600% and rose the number of secondary school girls from 295,000 to more than 2.6 million at the time (History, 2009), a figure which has been increasing consecutively for the last 27 years (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2016).

That women began to massively participate in sports, together with the increasing popularity of YASF with young women protagonists in it, did not happen unproblematically. Because the 70s was a time when anorexia surged, young adult literature started incorporating eating disorders in its plots, as Younger's analysis demonstrates.²³ Younger claims that since 1975 there was "an increasing awareness of body-image issues, these books reflect that growing awareness" (2009: 1).²⁴The examples analyzed from an earlier phase (70s-mid 90s) present descriptive patterns which recurrently depict characters who do not comply with the hyper-thin European ideal as misfits, especially as regards sexual proclivity. Characters described as heavy appear "sexually promiscuous, passive, and act as if they were powerless, while in marked contrast thin characters act responsibly and appear to be powerful" (Younger, 2009: 4). Equally, representations of girl athletes' bodies in coetaneous YA sports novels are also challenged for not revealing an *adequate* femininity. The examples are interesting but scarce. In a quite extensive review of North American YAS literature with women athletes as protagonists, Smith, for example, only notes the existence of 9 literary works from the 70s, 23 from the 80s and 35 until 1998 (n.d.). The athletic protagonists of these novels, hence, strive to comply with femininity in sports, namely accentuating skinniness and fearing to look "masculine", i.e., muscular. Eating

²³However, it was not until 1980 that body image disturbance was formally included as a diagnostic criterion in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association.

²⁴ Younger's 2009 extensive analysis covers YA fiction of the period 1975 to 2005, having expanded the span from her previous 2003 article which applied until 1999.

disorders, on the other hand, were also often unacknowledged or ignored in these novels. As noted by Gatz, Messner and Ball-Rokeach, readers of YASF were given “just the opposite impression” since “[characters’ view about] gaining weight was hardly a concern” (Gatz et al., 2002: 8).

Mid-nineties North American authors, eventually, start portraying disorders as suffered by their young women athlete protagonists and the meaning associated to thinness changes. Skinniness is no longer the medium to achieve success in love endeavours, for example. Nonetheless, romantic concerns have remained a motif in YA fiction. In fact, romance has maintained its hegemonic popularity in the literary teen market, even though it has opened room for adjacent topics, including sports: today, in the United States, YA sports novels indeed enjoy great success. According to Lily McLemore, BookPage assistant editor, this literary type, exactly in combination with romance, like Kenneally’s novels, has undergone a phenomenon of “over publication” in the last lustrum (McLemore, 2016). Incidentally, Radway, with her study of romance novels for evaluating women’s readers’ response showed that the daily impact of a subgenre relates to how they self-identify with the heroines in the stories (2009: 101). Here, tracing the evolution of YASF from a sociological literary perspective proves valuable when accounting for receptionist response, and the subsequent cognitive effects among audience. Investigating the literary stimuli processes of current YASF in a cognitive literary model becomes, specifically, vital for addressing its potential impact on readers who have been socialized into bodily vulnerability but are now being increasingly exposed to alternative forms of embodiment through reasonable engagement with sports. Annie, the protagonist in the novel object of study, is one such sportive role model character.

6.2. A model for anorexia bibliotherapy reading through the novel *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*

Following the insights of Cognitive Literary Studies, a model that identifies the levels of signification in a hypothetical fictional account of disordered eating has been developed (diagram 1).²⁵ The focus is therefore on cognitive effect pathways derived from reading processing, specifically as it would apply to amygdala activity.²⁶ Due to

²⁶ Model study image from Monteleone et al. (2017). For brain fMRI corresponding images, see annex.

the reinforcing eating disorder effects such fiction provokes on the reality structuring of readers (Troscianko, 2014), it is addressed in the model as pro-ana fiction.

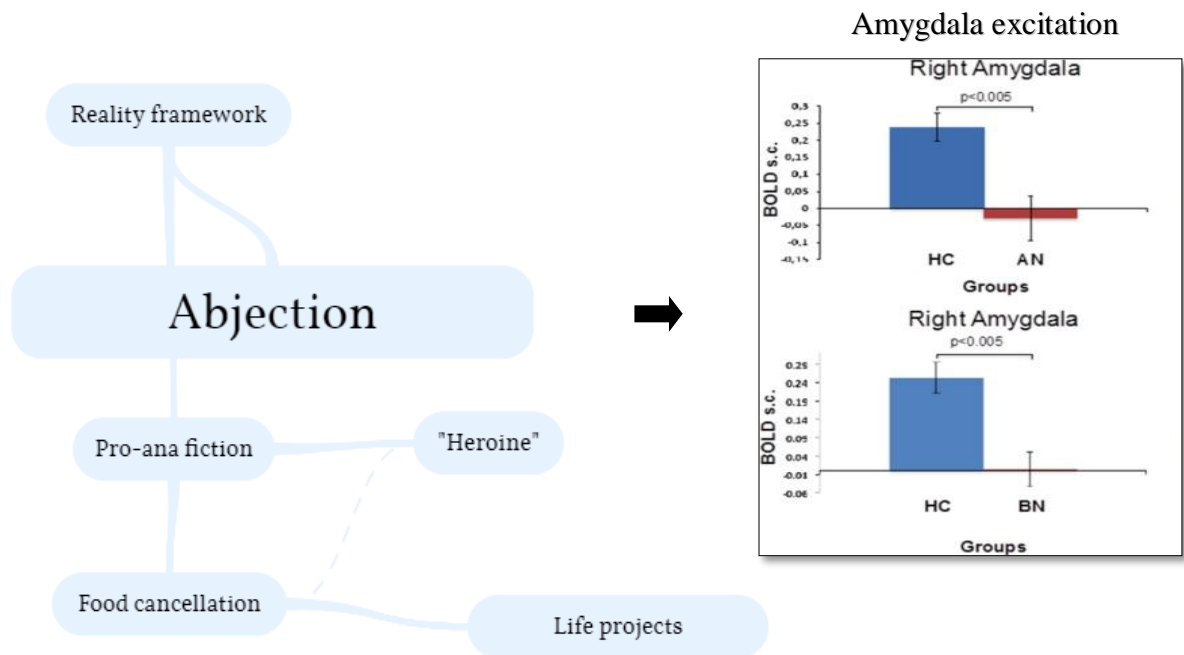


Diagram 1 | Fig.3

The central focus being on abjection is sustained by Megan Warin’s (2009) theory of abjection in anorexia, explained further on. The author offers accounts from women suffering from anorexia whom she interviewed and ethnographically investigated, identifying that a common axis of their phenomenological experience was to undergo daily life through abjection. Food, the focal point of their existence, is thus crowded with a negative cargo of affectivity drawing from a symbolic language of impurity, disgust and revolt. In turn, latest neurocognitive experiments demonstrate that anorectic’s brains have an increased global disgust sensitivity, as shown by excitation of the amygdala during magnetic resonance imaging (Holsen et al., 2012). Equally, I suggest that abjection *is* what is recurrently present in novels and memoirs on eating disorders; hence the diagram design. What these stories can reinvolve, specifically, is that anorexia cancels life projects for a protagonist whose food rejection struggles do not prevent her from eventually becoming a heroine, whatever the outcome. This is extremely problematic from a cognitive literary perspective, as readers hardly always self-identify with heroines in the story aside from how exactly that status was attained.

Warin, interestingly, identified that through abjection, too, society renders anorectics as cast. She identified that the traditional medical discourse holds this view, ostracizing anorectic experience to the extreme. From the Greek words *án* (“no”) *ὄρεξις*

(“appetite”), anorexia was baptized as the illness where appetite is literally lost. Such unnatural disposition of a human being determined that behind a person diagnosed with anorexia is traditionally a woman of very low weight. On the same account, this view made the idea coherent that being skinny for *normal* standards almost caters for being thus diagnosed. Therefore, in medical etiologies it is the thin body that stands as “the focus of attention” and “the marker of illness” (Warin, 2009: 8). Warin establishes the surface of this imaginary in the notion of abjection, a notion which she owes to Kristeva’s (1982) theorization of bodily fluids, which in turn are originally based on Mary Douglas’ (1966) anthropological research on ambiguous symbolism and significations of rituals of purity. For Warin, the symbolism of abjection is to be found in the otherizing mania of western countries, both for the patients themselves and for those making the diagnoses. Her insights are very interesting in this sense because they are attuned to Critical Disability Studies views on anorexia, too. Warin explains that the recurrent favoring of “the skinny body” as the physiognomy deviated from the aesthetically normal to be considered healthy imposes “a privileging of the visual, of the outsider’s, the colonizer’s gaze” (2009: 8). For medicine, the universal physiognomy of reference is the Vitruvian body with enough flesh then and there, yet not too much, in case it veered towards overweight. The stereotype of an anorectic person is a woman who looks unfeminine and/or androgynous since her breasts and hips are considered to be too small. As a result, she is ostracized aesthetically, not recognizable for an otherwise more evident gender presenting level. Furthermore, the anorectic body is judged against the lens of sexual difference: it does not only look unfeminine but is unfemale, as it often develops amenorrhea, an aspect otherwise considered to make woman essentially female for its birth giving possibilities (in discussing de Beauvoir, Gatens, 2003: 278-279). Evaluating their bodies in terms of difference or of the colonizer’s gaze casts them as abject, as different in disgusting terms from I.

In the anorexia bibliotherapy model I wanted to account for the limitations of medical discourse and of canonical feminist theorists of embodiment in their understanding of anorexia, in order to shed light on how an alternative envisioning and fictional telling of bodily experiences can reshape them in turn. Revising their limitations reveals, all in all, that the person with this condition is rarely considered in her subjectivity for having the will for embodying it. This is mainly the result of this emphasis on the body as externality (*res*) and of the privileging of the visual. Exactly as Brain contends, what is occluded is “the possibility that the ‘body image’ for which the

anorexic strives might be derived from the sensations of her body rather than from an alienating representation of ‘the’ body” (2002: 155). Anorectics do not necessarily have delusions as to what they look like (body dysmorphia), nor they literally consider skinny others as their referents, albeit them usually admitting feeling inspired by others’ skinniness (Warin, 2009). Moreover, not only forms of bodily incorporation carry a signification of abjection for anorectics. They also often feel sexuality as an abject area of relationality. Anorectics are often misunderstood as striving to embody the patriarchal ideal of femininity for desiring ultimate skinniness. For that to be accurate they would have to be also concerned with showing off voluptuous breasts, for instance. Conversely, accounts of anorexia reveal a consideration of such ideal of femininity with disgust, as it is viewed as a marker of that sexuality they reject.²⁷ That she “suppresses femininity” might not imply a denial of adult femininity or a willingness to live pro-oedipally in a child’s body.²⁸ It is related with the fact that sexual intimacy and socialization are, exactly, abject modes of relatedness for her (Warin, 2009: 5). In fact, people diagnosed with anorexia find it difficult to have any relationship apart from that they already problematically maintain with their abject sense of the bodily. Nevertheless, in anorexia, this feeling of not belonging, of having no one and nowhere to bear your body (dysphoria, δυσφορία, “grieve I carry”) is complexified because it is felt that at least one belongs within her condition *around* and, at the same time, *not around* food. It ultimately provides a “sense of identity” (Warin, 2009: 199), the one and only project in life. From this perspective, anorexia can paradoxically be pinned down as “a practice that removed the threat of abjection” (Warin, 2009: 127).

When fictional accounts center around these problematics, indeed reproducing the language of abjection around bodily incorporation, as happens in novels and memoirs on anorexia, readers retrieve the same *substance of abjection* of words in them. Descriptions of food recur continuously to the language of anorectics identified by Warin in her ethnographic study. Some very clear examples appear in the recent novel *Wintergirls* (2009), by Laurie Halse Anderson:

²⁷Crucially, for Brain “the anorexic bodily ego derived from the sensations of the material skin only comes to be experienced as sexually differentiated ‘later’, once it has been made sense of as such. [...] This understanding of sexual difference seems to me important if anorexia is to be contextualized within, but not determined by, discourses of gender and sexuality” (2002: 160).

²⁸ “Too often the shrinks assume that an eating disorder is a way of avoiding womanhood, sexuality, responsibility, by arresting your physical growth at a prepubescent state. [...] The shrinks have been paying way too much attention to the end result of eating disorders [...] This end result is not your intention at the outset. Your intention was to become superhuman, skin thick as steel, unflinching in the face of adversity, out of the grasping reach of others” (Hornbacher, 1998: 68).

- (1) I stand up so I can reach the cheesy potatoes and plop a disgusting orange spoonful next to the turkey. (Halse, 2009: 70)
- (2) “Ah”. He stands up and crosses the room. “Why don’t you finish this for me?” he says as he shoves the pie in my face. “I don’t want to”. I push it back. “It’s disgusting”. (Halse, 2009: 101)
- (3) I’m not sure why his mood shifted. Maybe there’s something in the air of graveyards, it penetrates the skin and infects. Maybe that’s why I suddenly feel sick, too. A wave of nausea bulldozes through my belly: sadmadbadconfused, everything gags me. [...] If I had eaten anything today, it’d be coming up right now. (Halse, 2009: 144)

In (1), Anderson’s obvious reference to a “disgusting” spoonful, or piece of pie in (4), is reinforced with the less evident but equally powerful resorting to the language of impure fluids, found in the words “cheesy”, which recalls the fat in the potatoes oozing outside of them. In turn, the phonetic traits of the verb “to plop”, contrary to those of the verb “to pop”, continuously used by Kenneally, activate affects of food filthily falling with a revolting sound on the plate.

- (4) But the yard is neatly moved and the tulips pop like Starbusts [sugus]. (*BAB*: 111)
- (5) I pop open my beer and take a long sip. (*BAB*: 189)

In (4), “to pop” is used as a metaphor, a different linguistic level which will be later addressed in more depth. Here it conveys a fun and nice phonetic comparison of flowers blooming to the sound starbust candy does in the mouth when bitten. In (5), on the other hand, Annie describes alcohol drinking with this verb as she enjoys the company and is having fun during its consumption.

The other examples of positive phonetic effects in *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* are also related to verbs:

- (6) He flips his sandwich. It sizzles in the frying pan and makes my stomach rumble. I’m starving, but I don’t think I can hold any food down. Running screws my stomach. (*BAB*: 22)

In “to flip” and “to sizzle” there is a nice appreciation of the sound the sandwich makes when being cooked. One is reminded of the fun one has in preparing food in the first case, as if Annie saw cooking as a game. In the case of sizzling, it is interesting that it alludes to fat, either from the cheese or from the butter presumably frying the sandwich. Fat from foods or from cooking processes is usually especially object for

anorectics (Warin, 2009: 121). Annie not only does not feel disgusted by it, but indeed feels attracted by the sound.

(7) “My mom is having all her church lady friends over for fried chicken this afternoon and I was thinking we could crash it. Mom’s fried chicken is awesome”. [...] I smile slightly, curl back up under my sheets, and pick the sleep out of my eye. (BAB:109)

(8) “It’s good huh?” He says, and I nod. We chow down in silence. (BAB: 116)

“Crash” in (7) is enacted by Jeremiah, Annie’s romantic lead, in allusion to the sound jaws make as they crack the crunchiness of fried chicken, while “chow” the narrator employs to describe the phonetics of saliva dissolving food slowly, with no rush and in enjoyment of the moment and the company, similarly to the effect of “to sip” in (9).

(9) Who ever thought a frat would be somewhat classy? I use the word *somewhat* because I’m sipping box wine out of a plastic cup. (BAB: 256)

In (10), the narrator does use the verb “to rip”, which suggests violence, however, instead of enacting greediness, she shows that she takes care of her necessity of pure hunger. Later, moreover, the verb “to chow down” is used, which implies a constant but slower rhythm of eating. Finally, at the mention of the verb “to spit” and their laughing, there is happiness to the scene, not hunger anxiety.

(10) Jeremiah joins me, carrying two cans of beer under his arms and a plate of sliced watermelon that we immediately dig into. I rip huge chunks off with my teeth, wiping the juice from my lips with the back of my hand. He daintily eats his piece as I chow down. “Don’t eat the seeds! You’ll grow a watermelon baby”. I spit a seed near his foot to piss him off and he laughs. (BAB: 187)

Annie also demonstrates that she does not mind what other people think when she eats a great amount of food. As such, the verb “to slurp” is used for its connotation of defiance and a certain vulgar expression of not caring, implicit in the rude sound it makes of water intake.

(11)“Ugh,” Kelsey says. “I have a heartburn just looking at Annie’s plate”. I slurp some water in response. (BAB: 224)

The belief in the miasmatic effect of foods, that is, the idea that only by smelling one is putting on weight appeared too in *Wintergirls*, especially in (3), through a language

related to infection and disease.²⁹ Together with the fact that readers feel empathy towards protagonists in books, they can act in painful solidarity with the characters in their rejection of bodily incorporation, reinforcing compartments and affects of abjection:

However, it has been largely ignored in cognitive neuroscience. According to the fiction feeling hypothesis, narratives with emotional contents invite readers more to be empathic with the protagonists and thus engage the affective empathy network of the brain, the anterior insula and mid-cingulate cortex, than do stories with neutral contents. [...] Descriptions of protagonists' pain or personal distress [...] apparently caused increasing involvement of the core structure of pain and affective empathy the more readers immersed in the text (Hsu et al., 2014: 1)

Even in the more metaphorical kind of language of *Paperweight* (2015), the language would stimulate the affectivity of the brain towards a psychosomatechnic experience always focused on abjection of food or any other form of bodily incorporation.³⁰

(12) I am not bulimic. Sometimes I just need the thoughts to go away.

(13) I stare at his T-shirt, now stained with my tears. "I ruined your T-shirt".

(14) Promise was like a precious stone, she told me: hypnotising, but after a while the weight of it could sink you.

Megan Haston's language veers towards the transcendental, to relating the anorectic experiencing as one aiming to become ethereal—eventually, to a protagonist aiming to commit a romanticized *suicide*—note the difference with *BAB*—in honour of her deceased brother. As such, vomiting in (12), for example, recalls a despising of the bodily towards the clearance of the mental, in true Cartesian anorectic logic. The verb "to stain" in (13), on the other hand, activates a sense of experiencing bodily fluids as polluting while the weighty cargo of language in (14) ("stone", "weight") reenacts the fulminating sensation of lacking any project outside of anorexia, such as the promise of friendship or of love. Resorting to the verb "to sink" connotes, once again, an abject experience, emphasizing that the bodily is always trapped into a filthy cage, in this case a sort of metaphorical clogged pipe. Indeed, there is a strong sense of abjection towards filthiness and disorder in anorexia (Warin, 2009: 158, 170), which, incidentally, Annie does not share:

²⁹"And like the airborne contagion of calories, fats could move and infiltrate. Participants felt that fats were more threatening than calories, however, because once in the body they could stick and solidify 'like cement'" (Warin, 2009: 121).

³⁰ Quotes for *Paperweight* were obtained from Goodreads, thus no page reference is available.

(15) Every time I hung out at her house, all I could think about was how clean her kitchen was, how I could see my reflection in the stainless steel appliances. [...] Going there made me so uncomfortable, so unsure of myself, I stopped accepting her invitations to spend the night (*BAB*: 45)

These early examples show that the *substance* of words does differ drastically in contemporary YA sports novels. Especially in connection with romance, the subtype here addressed with *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*, it draws on recounting the experiencing of a life which has incorporated sport as a project from which a myriad of socializing possibilities and opportunities for identity maturing emerge.

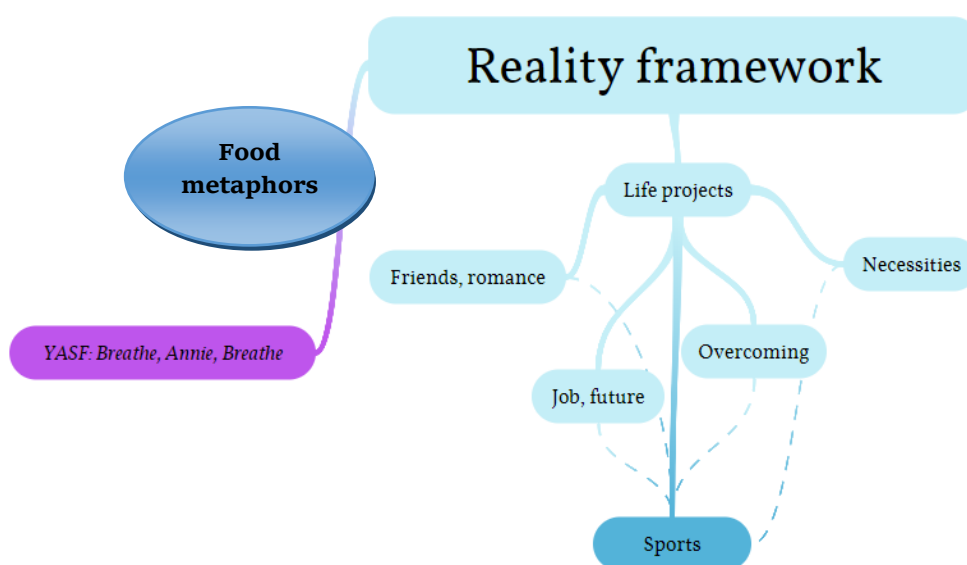


Diagram 2

As the model shows, sport is currently a project in the protagonist's life crucially built on a signification of looking after her necessities, including her socializing needs.

(16) And as much as I hated it at first, running and training have become a huge part of my life. I've made friends with Jeremiah and Matt and Liza. Who am I without this training program? (*BAB*: 202)

The model, in fact, draws from Alvarez's (2009) own "windmill of life", a logotherapeutic visual chart in which each blade represents a life project he discusses with patients in depth. What may surprise one is that one blade is indeed kept for "the body" or "the physique". The others are more variable, they include "love", "friendship", "family", "job" or "studies". The target is never to make patients merely overcome anorexia, not even to simply cure it or forget about the bodily or about food.

Aiming to be true to the Hippocratic Triad, Álvarez's method attempts to make their lives embodyable, livable.³¹In particular, he claims that his aims are:

- To alleviate the ill soma
- To prompt nostalgia of the individual self
- To recover psychosomatic harmony
- To look for the meaning of life (2009: 133, my translation)

I believe that it is compatible to still aim to be slim, even skinny, while embodying life. This can happen when skinniness has been devoid of meaning as thing and devoid of its cargo of success. Practicing sport can indeed displace those meanings of skinniness as success towards accomplishment itself. Winning a competition, finishing a game or completing a marathon are in themselves experiences freighted with a neoliberal satisfactory outcome ethos not likely to be attained unless in the best physiological and psychosomatic conditions. Truth be told, these may be required to be attained following patterns typical of vigorexia or orthorexia. This is a likely reason why this contemporary sports genre focuses too on representing specialized diet/exercising culture emphasizing food intake increasement and bodily building up aims, rather than restrictive outlines. Annie, indeed, increases her food consumption and her macro nutritional intake while, as it is twice recognized, slimming down:

(16) “And I want you to start adding more peanut butter and eggs to your diet. You’re getting too skinny and you need to eat more as we start doing longer and longer runs”. (*BAB*: 82)

Crucially, the moment Annie realizes that she is slimming down, she does not show satisfaction. On the contrary, in the passage this is portrayed as a moment of plain acknowledgement, contrary to previous “Young Adult fiction [which] encourage[d] young women's self-surveillance of their bodies” towards weightism (Younger, 2003: 47).

(17) I strip off my Roadhouse polo shirt and jeans, which smell like onions. I pull a light blue dress off the hanger and try it on. It fits fine. When I turn to the side, I notice my waist is slimming down and my legs are trim. Running over twenty miles a week is bringing big changes to my body. (*BAB*: 50)

Weight-loss, in fact, is a process which is deemphasized in the novel. These are the only two moments when information on this is made explicit as regards the protagonist. As

³¹ “To never cause pain, to always alleviate, to heal when possible”.

can be seen, the language employed to do so is cautious, given vagueness. One other time, Annie remarks that Kyle's mother has lost a considerable amount of weight, considering how loose her dress fits. It is clear that the protagonist does not find "beauty" in Mrs. Crocker's weight loss.

(18) I've never seen her at home without an apron on [...] but it doesn't fit like it used to. It hangs around her loosely. (*BAB*: 89)

In (16), what is remarkable is that what is emphasized is the need to be careful about losing too much weight. Following a functional approach, Matt, Annie's coach, is interested in halting weight-loss not because there is anything intrinsically problematic about being skinny, but because such bodily framework would be detrimental for her endurance capacities. A vital implicature of the novel here is that it cancels the paternalist ethos of dealing "correctly" with one's weight because it is deemed externally good for the person. Memoirs and novels on anorexia, conversely, remind readers, through the suffering of the protagonist, that anorexia is a bad condition to better be overcome. Self-help manuals, similarly, provide recipes on how to change weight-loss conducts judging them on its detrimental basis. Even medical treatment, to the extreme imposing hospitalization and tube feeding, has this distinctive paternalistic approach. The outcomes, on this, are usually limited and even counterproductive:

Too much directivity appears to relieve professional's distress and, therefore, negatively reinforce coercive posture, but it may also have adverse consequences to the patient's treatment. Fallouts are noticed as a remarkably paternalistic approach—seen, for example, in procedures such as involuntary hospitalization not based on scientific guidelines or arbitrary tube feeding—[which] tends to increase the already high resistance in these patients. An intimidating posture also can punish potentially unpleasant statements made by the patient, possibly suppressing genuine reports and predisposing to false descriptions of improvement. Coercion-generated improvements may be volatile and fragile and even unfavorable in the long term (Medeiros et al., 2014: 135)

Annie is also prompted to add more calories, fat and protein to her diet, from the calorific peanut butter and the muscle-building eggs, respectively. It is noteworthy; nonetheless, that Matt's diet requirements are placed in the middle of a passage where Annie was expecting to be reprimanded for something completely different from her diet. Jeremiah, Annie's romantic lead in the novel, happens to be Matt's brother. When

the protagonist discovers that Matt is not talking about his brother, but about dietary requirements for improving in training, she is curiously relieved:

(19) Is that what he wanted to talk about? Peanut butter and eggs?! “I can do that”.

He gives me a smile. I’m guessing he doesn’t know. (*BAB*: 82)

Added to the fact that she seems uninterested about her own weight-loss in (17) and in (20), the novel, I argue, purposely prevents reinforcing stimuli about personal weight-loss satisfaction but also cancels paternalism on weight increase requirements. There is a metabolic reason for them, not one based on the benign opinion that it will be bad for Annie to continue losing weight.

(20) Some people on my team are running because it’s a lifelong dream, some want to lose weight, and the others, like me, haven’t told anyone why they’re doing this.

(*BAB*: 4)

It is not, however, that the protagonist is unaware of the relationship between sport and weight-loss, what would be rather unrealistic or even problematic for not talking through the topic. Such censorship would not be helpful for readers with bodily vulnerabilities, as anorexia therapy, especially logotherapy, like Álvarez’s (2009), shows. It is only, but crucially, that Annie is more concerned about improving for the marathon and, more generally, for her future self. The protagonist decisively shows volition for adapting her bodily performance following those goals. This is an attitude vulnerable readers may benefit from since “voluntary search of treatment [...] is a major issue since the motivation to change is an important element for therapeutic success” (Medeiros et al., 2014: 135).

The “marathon plot device” (Atkinson, 2014: 36) is also crucial as to how to deal with normative standards of beauty that the protagonist does attain, on the other hand, through training. Interestingly, Kenneally resorts to heading the story’s chapters with a training progress chart. This, together with the fact that five of the chapter’s titles are linguistically framed as distance-measuring progress with a recurrent “today’s distance” pattern. They are, moreover, linguistic patterns and formal devices on the opposite side of the scale of eating disorders fiction and memoirs, where kilograms lost is what tends to show plot and characters’ progression (Keywell, 1993). This is crucial, for readers will empathize with Annie’s training improvements and their satisfaction will equally draw from such functional perspective, of what Annie’s metabolism can do, and hence, theirs, too. Determinism and will, which Annie oozes along the novel, is similarly orientated towards progressing in her race trainings, not for example to

enduring hunger or even suffering during exercising. Significantly, Annie is in a very unhappy condition about her pains in training, apart from those gained through her gastrointestinal issues. That she complains about it shows that she is in control of the limits she wants to assume. On the contrary, there is not a hint of an accomplished sense of control for her pain endurance, which would contribute to reactivating that of vulnerable readers interested in fasting or exercising towards extenuation:

(21) After something like a gazillion sit-ups and push-ups and squats, my hip hurts like someone took a drill to it. “I’m gonna be sick”, I say, clutching my hipbone. “Let’s go stretch it out”. (BAB: 149)

The protagonist in *Wintergirls*, for instance, approaches working-out as an exercise “to ~~burn away~~ my leg muscles until the sun comes up” (2009: 99, print is crossed out to emulate “psychotic” thinking) and also derives power from self-starving as a form of will control. Annie never shows satisfaction from being hungry, on the contrary, she is upset about it and always tries to assuage that need. Younger argues in that sense that “For many young women controlling food intake provides a sense of power, but that sense of power is false, since deliberately reducing one's body size usually diminishes physical strength” (2003: 51). It is not conceivable for Annie to stand hunger cues as that would prevent her from growing up in her training. Once again, there is a functional reason which justifies Annie’s eased relation with nourishment, without falling into paternalistic accounts.

All in all, Annie’s approach to sport is deeply subordinated to necessities. Following Critical Disability Studies I find it preferable to employ a language focused on functionality and needs rather than on health, since the latter can more readily be associated to yet another form of bodily normativity. Actually, this view on healthism is interestingly handled in the novel, too:

(22) I like feeling healthy. (BAB: 136)

(23) “I wasn’t healthy. I hadn’t been to the doctor in years and I was living off coffee and takeout [...] and it didn’t make me happy”. (BAB: 219)

In (22), it is not that Annie claims that she likes *being* healthy but she insists on a more transient form state, that of *feeling* healthy. A wider panorama is suggested, and indeed, cognitively stimulated, thanks to these verbal choices. Evoking the more transient condition of feelings rather than on erroneously assumed fixed states of being (as if one could *be* “healthy”, once and for all) resonates with metabolic changes, like endorphins

release after sport, or even with what sport brings more generally to her life, like socializing possibilities—recall (16). In (23), Liza, her running partner, equally associates health with more than physiological states as she introduces the variable happiness in her discourse. Above all, well-being seems to be mediated through affects. From a cognitive point of view, this is vital in that the discourse of healthism, not infrequently close to orthorexia, is cancelled. Readers will then dissociate the possible changes in health the protagonist or her partners undergo from such reductionist view. Even more so, in (24) there is once again a resorting to the language of well-being to reinforce a view of health as an affective state. The sentence, moreover, sets a decisive parallelism, present along the novel, between Annie’s sports progress and her mourning overcoming.

(24) “Never talking about him [Kyle] isn’t healthy sweetie. You need to let it out”. (*BAB*: 84)

Formally, this is reinforced, too, through the use of the marathon plot device. Atkinson draws the same parallelism signaling that this formal structure “mov[es] both the reader and Annie through her training and her grief at a pace that feels authentic to the experience of deep loss” (2014: 36).

That Annie approaches running with a framework based on necessities is even more obvious regarding food intake. Hunger cues are never missed by the protagonist, as claimed before. One of the first days at university, for instance, she loads her plate with a significant amount of food to his friend’s amazement, while she simply explains that she is satisfying a pressing need:

(25) Colton fist-bumps me. “Now that is what I’m talking about. Three barbecue sandwiches *and* a hot dog?” “I’m starving” I say, taking a big bite of the hot dog. (*BAB*: 224, emphasis in original)

Hunger is a necessity that never seems satisfied, as Annie, at the end of her training admits one day that she feels hungry all the time, crucially, despite actually eating, meaning that she is not worried about eating a lot as long as there are hunger cues to listen to:

(26) About five minutes out from Franklin, I whine, “I’m so hungry”. “I swear, Annie, I can’t believe how much food you eat”, Kelsey says. She’s right. For lunch today, I ate an entire large pizza by myself. With my training schedule, I wake up hungry and go to bed starving, *no matter how much I eat* (*BAB*: 300, emphasis added)

This is significant in that the literary stimuli associate hunger cues to *actually* eating. Furthermore, always feeling hungry is very differently codified from anorexia novels, where the narrator expresses sorrow as she knows she will not satisfy that necessity or else will fall into binges (Keywell, 1993: 115, 119). Interestingly enough, Annie once admits being confused about her physiological cues as she is not able to distinguish the moment she needs nourishing apart from the moment she needs to go to the bathroom. In fact, along the novel, the protagonist faces intestine complications and is often sick with food, in a realistic association of running training with exercise-induced vomiting symptomatology (Samborski et al., 2013: 396). Bringing up vomiting into the story is also productive from a cognitive literary point of view in anorexia bibliotherapy. Contrary to vomiting practices of anorexia or of bulimia of the purgative type, in which food is voluntarily expelled to halt calorie processing due to food intake, Annie suffers from gastrointestinal complications which cause her to be sick. A situation of which she becomes very worried and angry, indeed.

(27) “No!” I blurt, and then I get sick again. I clutch the toilet and hate my stomach. Hate it. “I need the money”. “You can’t wait tables like this”. (BAB: 84)

(28) “I’ve never had a client with such a sensitive stomach [...] Maybe you should start eating white pizza, you know, without the sauce”. “That’s sacrilege”, I reply, making him laugh. (BAB: 181)

In anorexia, one can hate the stomach for feeling hunger. Annie hates it for preventing her from being able to hold food down and continue her training, dietary preferences and life normally. Thus, passages dealing with hunger and vomiting do not reinforce hunger endurance or purging habits. Furthermore, Annie vomits “normally”, according to one of the patients Warin interviewed, which means that it is “your body [that] makes you do it” (2009: 132), rather than self-induced. In medicine, being hungry and nevertheless fasting or falling into bingeing only to vomit afterwards is troublesome for rendering the condition as one in which the ill person is lacking in appetite—recall anorexia’s etymology as *ἀν* (“no”) *ὄρεξις* (“appetite”). In traditional clinical investigation, eventually, it comes to be realized, with amazement, that anorectics voluntarily reject food intake despite them being starving and conscious of this hunger. A certain notion of volition surrounds, thereby, the world of anorexia. Anorectics are assumed to be capable of eating, stopping their weight-loss and their own race to death. That is why treatment not infrequently involves imposed food intake and even

parenteral (intravenous) nutrition in hospitalization cases, which as Medeiros et al. (2014: 135) show, is not always productive in long-term treatment. Álvarez (2009) interestingly, does only mention “physiological-endocrine recovery” as a marker of general recovery, placing it in equal importance next to “psychoaffective and life-projecting progress and establishment of family relationships” (2009: 91, my translation).

Following Álvarez, in the model here proposed the importance of sport next to its socializing possibilities is also considered. As for readers with corporeal vulnerabilities, it becomes key to emphasize that *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* deals with a protagonist who lives sport and food consumption intersubjectively. In anorexia nervosa or bulimia, eating and exercising are to be hidden. Annie, conversely, approaches these processes through her social and emotional intelligence. She takes pleasure in sharing every food consumption event, with family members (6), friends, colleagues and her boyfriend/romantic lead. This is important for several reasons. First, eating publicly often involves not being in charge of food preparation. In Annie’s case, she usually rejects food prepared by others at her place not because she is afraid of unsupervised food but because she prefers to stick to her running diet. At the sandwich scene being prepared by his brother, Annie is offered one but she refuses:

(28) He scoops the grilled cheese onto a plate. “You hungry? I’ll make you one of these”. “No thanks. Matt’s meal plan says I’m supposed to have pizza and salad for lunch today”. (*BAB*: 23)

Annie seems to prefer Matt’s dietary recommendations, which does not mean that she is being imposed; clearly, she could have taken the sandwich. Deciding not to switch to a sandwich is interesting, a reader with vulnerabilities would not prime her opting for planned food, as in restrictive diets (when preferred food is refused for a less calorific or less fattier kind of it) but would feel stimulated by the kind of food Annie does not seem to have a problem with: indeed that more calorific and fattier kind of food, pizza before a sandwich. The salad seems to be based on a micronutritional dietary contribution, less in terms of calories than in terms of vitamins, for example. The fact is remarkable as it shows Annie’s compliance to a balanced eating: in the scene she both will take junk food like pizza and a healthy dish like salad. The protagonist can take food or leave it, demonstrating an unproblematic relationship towards intake decisions. Even when following a diet, this is what is inferred from Annie’s actions towards food, as she

actually eats, if not whatever, whenever she wants to. Along the plot, readers often encounter her amusing nibbling habits:

(29) I reach over into Nick's bowl and steal a potato chip. (*BAB*: 164)

(30) I steal cherries from the bar and pop them in my mouth. (*BAB*: 171)

(31) He opens a bag of Swedish fish he brought and offers me one. I choose an orange fish. (*BAB*: 234)

The question of public space, being seen by others when eating, is central here. When dealing with food anxiety arisen in anorexia or gorging episodes, Bordo claims "female eating is always represented as private, secretive, illicit" (1993: 129). In (29) and (30), nibbling could at first be taken as a secretive activity at the mention of the verb "to steal". However, Nick is present when (29) happens and the whole bar crew and clientele is around at Annie's workplace in (30). It rather conveys, then, a connotation of playfulness around food. The only times when Annie eats on her own are when she goes to the cinema and eats popcorn.

(32) I head to the drive-in movie theater, to the spot I share with Kyle [...] I buy some popcorn from the concession stand, then sit on the hood of my car and laugh at all the funny parts, wishing he was laughing along with me. (*BAB*: 35)

(33) I find myself driving back to Franklin to the drive-in movie theater. *Grease* is playing tonight. [...] I buy a small popcorn, sit on the hood of my car, and use my thumb to wipe away the tears. (*BAB*: 252)

(34) I go to the drive-in. Our spot. I sit on the hood of my car and eat popcorn, watching *Titanic*. (*BAB*: 304)

In all cases, contrary to eating the popcorn inside the car, Annie literally eats them on the public space of the exteriority of her car's hood. Food consumption is not to be hidden by the protagonist; moreover, she consumes the popcorn in memoriam of what she used to do *with* her boyfriend. Even in this case, food consumption is mediated by intersubjectivity. There is another aspect of importance here. That Annie goes out to eat food with friends proves that she is also serious about consuming unsupervised and not self-prepared food, which is hardly always higher in calories than that prepared at home and thus often avoided or at least scrutinized in anorexia (Warin, 2009).

(35) When I went shopping at the Galleria with the girls a few weeks ago, we ate a snack at the cookie store. (*BAB*: 78)

In a similar vein, sport is something Annie also enjoys, even prefers, doing in company.

(36) For the past three months, I've had a hard time maintaining the same pace as other people on my team. Either they're too slow for me or I'm too slow for them, but today Liza and I manage to stay together for several minutes. It would be nice if I had company for today's final four miles. It would be nice if I didn't have to run the entire marathon alone. (*BAB*: 78)

In eating disorders, exercising is equally an activity to be hidden, as it is known that it evidences a desire to burn off calories, lose weight or obsessively trim the muscles (Warin, 2009). It is thus feared to exercise in the presence of others. Readers here can empathize with socializing desires similar to those Annie experiences as she highlights the affectivity of sports life. Keeping company of friends or even laughing, as she does with her trainer partner, Liza, and eventually Anthony, another runner, shows Annie's progressive mood changes. It is productive that Annie develops her capacity to laugh, for in eating disorders humour is usually annulled (Garrote Rojas and Palomares Ruiz, 2011).

(37) And even though getting a ride from Jeremiah is sort of like running into a burning building, I like the way I feel when he makes me laugh. I need to laugh. (*BAB*: 40)

Significantly, sport takes Annie towards enjoying life in this and other senses which are often cancelled in anorexia. When she refused Kyle's proposal for marriage, he stopped dating her, and the experience is retold by Annie who does not only deal with grief for her loss afterwards but with the guilt of having said no before. How she tells this experience at the very beginning is similar to what is experienced in anorexia when one is incapable of enjoying any aspect of life.

(38) He felt so betrayed, so hurt, that he broke up with me. And I missed him so much, my stomach twisted up and it hurt to breathe. Pizza tasted like broccoli. Music hurt my ears. (*BAB*: 28)

Although literally related to food, the comparison in (38) makes the analysis necessarily veer towards the metaphorical. Cognitive meaning theory is still facing the inconvenience of abstract language and metaphors, which seem more delicate to be tackled confidently than referential language, like that employed in the literal food or sports content scenes analyzed so far. According to Molina et al., however, metaphors are "a special case of hybrid signification, due to metaphors being referred to abstract ideas, whose expression, however, includes words related to the perceptual or sensory motor" (2016: 342, my translation). When processed, "metaphorical meaning really

activates sensory motor processes” (2016: 342, my translation). In *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* the most evident level of signification is that of similes, whose basis, not coincidentally, draws from real edible experiences. Moreno-Álvarez (2009) deemed eating disorders “edible languages” to signal, following a feminist poststructuralist theorization, that anorexia and bulimia are systems of signification women employ to finally be able to “speak through”, as they have been previously “silenced” by phallogocentric discourse. Fasting, eating and vomiting are all forms of codification that resignify the patriarchal silencing of the protagonists in *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Lady Oracle* (1976) by Margaret Atwood and *The Fat Woman’s Joke* (1967) by Fay Weldon, the novels she thoroughly analyzes. In sports fiction, the contrary case happens. The language in the novel employs metaphors but literally rooted in food, while that in the novels investigated by Moreno-Álvarez is about food processes as metaphors of eating disorders. Although different in genre and age audience scope, the comparison is productive to consider that from a bibliotherapeutic point of view for readers with anorexia, sports novels not only give words to bodily experiences but vitally root these in a salubrious phenomenological experience. At the most evident, Annie has been presented as a character who deals unproblematically with food consumption, sports and socialization. Moments along the novel used for description of her intaking food, for instance, resort to metaphorical structures implying sense of calmness. This can be seen in the way the protagonist “scoops” or “spoons” food into her mouth, suggesting a certain delicacy, which is not there, however, to say that she has a measuring attitude towards it, just that there is not anxiety, once again.

(39) I like bribes that involve dessert. I scoop a bite into my mouth and push a checker forward. (*BAB*: 126)

(40) I scoop Snickers Blizzard into my mouth and lick the spoon dry. (*BAB*: 135)

(41) I spoon ice cream onto my tongue. (*BAB*: 136)

She is, in that sense, an alternative positive role model for readers with bodily vulnerabilities. However, only presenting this perspective would miss that for some people with anorexia the fact that others, including fictional others, have this easy relationship with food can be felt as otherizing, as well: “representing that enviable and truly foreign other: the woman for whom food is merely ordinary, who can take it or leave it” (Bordo, 1993: 100). At the deeper level of metaphorical signification, nevertheless, it is Annie as intradiegetic narrator who thinks in terms of a comfortably eased relationship not only towards food, but significantly towards experiencing reality.

As was seen before, anorexia is about having and *not having* a relationship with food. That contradiction, following Warin (2009), was said to be rooted in abjection. That Annie shows the opposite affectivity towards daily life through the exaltation of food as it shapes her inner experience is more implicit and therefore interestingly non-paternalistic for truly becoming a role model productive of non-object experiencing. It is about a protagonist who shows how to have a relationship with nourishment, not rejecting it but vitally adopting it for perceiving and apprehending life. Annie's sense of reality, as such, is, above all, not lived in dualistic contradictions but on an equilibrium of consciousness structured on food with a positive substance of affectivity. In neurological experiments on affectivity, "cognitive change", that is, "alterations of the way in which stimuli signification is evaluated" is a complex process which varies through language, memory, attention and response (Molina et al., 2016: 485, my translation). Reappraisal, the most studied phenomenon of cognitive change, specifically implies that one adjusts the meaning of a stimulus and its personal significance, modifying prior affective responses to that stimulus. If anorectics have learnt to reject food not exactly on the basis of hunger suppression but rather on the basis of abjection, this latter affective response necessarily would benefit from being altered for an alternative. In reading, reappraisal is exactly at work for it depends on semantic processing in which "semantic information in the memory is used for new reappraisals" (Molina et al., 2016: 487, my translation). Annie's structuring of reality in terms of food metaphors implies that the focus is still on the bodily and food. These are not rejected, obliterated or dealt with unrealistically. However, what she literally aims at with food and her sense of reality being rooted in it bends in the direction of a whole different project of taking care of her self. This is similar to what Álvarez (2009) practices via the windmill of life logotherapeutic model.

In the novel, the level of food metaphors eventually veers towards Annie's integrated experiencing of the bodily. In a study of food metaphors in English grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) language thus encoded maps two levels of experiencing:

Figurative culinary uses are not isolated but rather they belong to a system of metaphors which bring to the surface a mental mechanism that allows people to understand mental processes in terms of foodstuffs. Therefore, CMT regards metaphor as an essential mental phenomenon inherent to human beings which functions by establishing correspondences or mappings between two conceptual domains of experience. In this

case, the source domain FOOD enables us to make sense of another experiential target domain IDEAS [...] Such mappings, according to CMT, appear to be grounded in embodied experience, that is, in the relationship that people establish with the world through their bodies (López-Rodríguez, 2014)

In *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* the target domain caters from describing people and things to emotions themselves, to codifying actions. When describing hair or skin tone, the narrator resorts to food for specifying color:

(42) A gorgeous woman with olive-toned skin, bouncy brown curls and a pink ID bracelet jogs up next to me. (*BAB*: 5)

(43) Nick got his dark, floppy hair from her; my straight strawberry blond must come from my father's side. (*BAB*: 23)

She does so also in order to refer to the color of Jeremiah's eyes (44), the shape of a friend's dress (45) and the fragility of a paper note, compared to the cracking texture of a Saltine, a type of salty biscuit in (46).

(44) His chocolate brown eyes were happy when he said he'd buy me a chai latte before he picked me up in the morning. (*BAB*: 286)

(45) I love her green silk dress with spathetti straps. (*BAB*: 50)

(46) I carefully peer the silk lining back and fish out a delicate piece of onion paper. It's so fine I worry it might crumble in my hand like a Saltine. (*BAB*: 89)

Even when referring to knowledge of someone's personality, the protagonist chooses to express it using food as a scale. "Tidbits" in (47) both recalls "gossip", as a noun, and "candy":

(47) But isn't that what we still are? Strangers? Sure, he [Jeremiah] gave me a ride to my car, and I know a few tidbits about him [...]. (*BAB*: 64)

In these cases, that Annie structures how she perceives appearance, object characteristics and personality in terms of food, which she moreover likes, as she employs it to characterize nice physical traits of herself and others, reinforces the idea that the protagonist is at ease around people, even for something as bodily exposing as shopping dresses (45). She does not find company abject, as she does not describe them in disgusting terms, that is, employing unappetising food similes. Moreover, she does not censure her own appearance, particularly her hair. In the abject experience of anorexia, one refuses those elements "which retain something of the cathexis and value of a body part even when they are separated from the body" including "urine, faeces, saliva, sperm, blood, vomit, hair, skin, nails" (Grosz, 1994: 81). It is positive that Annie

refers to hers in those fruity terms all along the novel. Another example of this appears when she laughs at the shape her legs have acquired when placed in a stretching position (48). She does not find abjection in someone else's touching of her legs, which she finds comic, as she compares them to pretzels:

(48) "This. Is. Akward". I say, grunting. Matt laughs, putting my legs into a pretzel-ish position and pushes down on my knees. God, if I saw someone else doing this I'd totally think it was foreplay. (*BAB*: 149)

It is equally positive that the protagonist shows appreciation of food quality and taste when using a simile for describing Matt's program as "tougher than two-dollar steak" (*BAB*: 16). There is a certain sense of humour but not abjection to that narrator's description. Annie does not spend conscious time for inspecting food's quality when actually eating it, while in anorexia and sometimes in orthorexia persons verificate it for worthiness of being consumed and for making one in turn more perfect (Warin, 2009: 61). That this latter comparison is crafted through humourousness contributes to recodify that possible sense of abjection towards "unworthy" food. As was claimed before, it is also fruitful that Annie has a sense of humour, which, incidentally, she often describes through the verb "to snicker" in (49), reminiscent of the popular chocolate candy bar brand.

(49) Kyle and I stook off to the side, snickering at Nick's misfortune. (*BAB*: 52)

(50) It seems bass ackwards that I haven't even picked out which clases I'm taking yet but I have to decide if I'll supply a crock-pot or an ironing board. (*BAB*: 94)

(51) What if the whole place explodes at once? Would you see the mushroom cloud from space? (*BAB*: 110)

(52) By the end of the race, we've gone from looking like Skittles to just plain dirty. The colours mixed together, creaitng a look I'd call Blue Sewage. [...] I just finished my first 5K. I laugh, grinning up at the sun. (*BAB*: 178)

In (50), the simile with a type of fish recalls the metaphorical image of a bass in a backwards position from the popular saying, what produces a comic description of a situation in terms of food. In (51), moreover, Annie imagines that a cloud resulting from a explosion would acquire the shape of a giant mushroom, while in (52) she compares the color mixture of powder she has been thrown during a training race to skittles candies, about which she laughs. Food is then considered a possible source of comicalness itself and, interestingly, something that is not to be feared. Clearly, the

explosion's cloud reaching enormous dimensions is what Annie is scared of, but she does not find it scary that it would acquire the shape of a *mushroom*. Alternatively, it can be considered something to pun about. Furthermore, Annie plays with food, for instance she likes teasing Jeremiah by throwing fries to him (*BAB*: 137). In turn, in (53), a waitress at the college campus jokes about giving Annie luxurious plates of beef tenderloin as happy as she is when seeing that Annie is enjoying campus social life:

(53) "Can I have another order of cheese fries?" "Hell, I'll give you free New York strips if you want 'em". (*BAB*: 97)

The protagonist also employs comparisons about food which do not contribute to perfect her state but which are anyway worthy of being consumed as she really enjoys them:

(54) Like a wince when you have an ice cream headache: it hurts so bad, but the taste is so good. (*BAB*: 28)

Even when food or drink do not contribute to her nutrition the protagonist consumes it, following appreciation of its taste. This is the case with alcohol, which does not provide any macronutrient or micronutrient of interest for someone who is into sport, not even a sense of being full. Annie, nevertheless, does not stop drinking beer (55, 57, 58) and wine (56) once in a while:

(55) Unless you count chicken fighting in a pool or beer pong, I had never played sports. (*BAB*: 11).

(56) Then we get drinks. This is nothing like highschool parties. (*BAB*: 172)

(57) I pop open my beer and take a long sip. (*BAB*: 189)

(58) We sit around with my brother and his friends, telling stories, roasting marshmallows, and emptying a cooler of beer. (*BAB*: 192)

Example (59) leaves no doubt of the fact that she definitely takes pleasure in enjoying food, which is desirable for codifying delight in food consumption out of denial for anorectics, whom resort to cancelling preference in favor of calorie saving, what can even influence their loss of taste as a sense (Warin, 2009: 68).

(59) I [...] then take a bite of fried chicken. I groan as it melts in my mouth. (*BAB*: 115)

When Annie rejected food she could have preferred in favor of what she had "prescribed", however, she was following a functional approach: "The very notion of nutrition, Lupton suggests, is a functionally orientated one: food is for nourishing, for fuelling the body, for building bones, teeth and muscle" (Warin, 2009: 102). Moreover,

apart from spontaneously eating with friends as has been seen, she does choose food or drink purely in terms of flavour, like Gatorade, of which she loves the lemon version, as it is repeatedly emphasized along the novel.

(60) Matt's assistant Bridget passes me lemon Gatorade [...], she knows my preferred flavor. (*BAB*: 76)

(61) I love my lemon Gatorade. (*BAB*: 87)

(62) I take the paper cup from his hand and sip. Lemon. Mmm. (*BAB*: 180)

What is clear is that she definitely prefers enjoying intake, thus she applies the verb "to relish" even to plans she would rather reject:

(63) On the one hand, I don't relish the idea of ending up sharing a dorm with a crazy girl who sports a faux hawk and plays the accordion or something. (*BAB*: 51)

Space is also codified as food or, alternatively, food is described spatially in a positive vein, as happens in (66). In (64), for instance, beer is literally signalled as the element structuring the space where the final marathon is going to take place.

(64) "I do know where the beer stops are", I say. "Miles sixteen and twenty-two". (*BAB*: 302)

(65) And just in case we get lost, Matt hung a bunch of orange ribbons on various light poles and street signs. Like Hansel and Gretel and their crumbs. (*BAB*: 37)

(66) A stick of butter, a loaf of bread, and a block of cheese sit on our counter. (*BAB*: 22)

There is a certain codification of calmness to the latter two sentences. In (65), Annie recalls the bread crumbs from the popular children's story as if she could feel safely guided through food. In (66), in turn, food is spatially situated as "sitting", what does not suggest a menacing sensation from fatty food like cheese and butter are. In anorexia there is often a recurrent sense of nervousness about any state and control is developed for governing reality (Warin, 2009). Indeed, exercising and fasting are modes of exercising that control. In *Breathe, Annie, Breathe*, it is noticeable that the protagonist experiments a sense of control about her life through the schedule and food requirements which accompany marathon training; however she places exercising control at the level of food enjoyment, suggesting that willingly committing to rigorous training does not necessarily cancel enjoying eating, therefore the donut simile:

(67) I never imagined I'd be that girl who comes to love working out, who craves it like a cop wants a donut. But I can't figure out if I like being active or it's that I love working toward something. (*BAB*: 54)

Moreover, Annie's reflection here recuperates that sense of sport bringing projects to one's life while not becoming itself a project. It is the fact that she loves exercising and the simile of her willingness to do so with a comical food craving stereotype that annuls obsessiveness and instead makes comicalness feature more prominently.

Love, as one of the aspirations the protagonist develops from her vinculation to sport, is also addressed in terms of food metaphors. When evaluating the pros and cons of dating Jeremiah, Annie is worried about his risky lifestyle and his involvement into extreme sports. Thus, she describes her romantic lead as "hot sauce", suggesting that spicy flavours can be fun but imply too much danger. Therefore, Annie claims to prefer a softer kind of romance, codified in terms of "white bread" and "vanilla".

(68) I need white bread. I need vanilla. I don't need a guy who hurts himself running on an injured ankle. (*BAB*: 118)

(69) Things must've been pretty bad for his mother to kick him out of the house and his little sister not to see him for an entire year, and like I said, I need white bread, not hot sauce. (*BAB*: 127)

Jeremiah is also compared to "an order of mashed potatoes" (*BAB*: 173) by Annie's brother, as he sees how many scars Jeremiah has on his face. In fact, that Annie and her older brother reject Jeremiah for his dangerousness, she in terms of preferring vanilla, speaks for a moralistic rejection of sexual intercourse, which is a motif at the beginning of the novel. One day (70), Annie encounters Jeremiah on the trails and spontaneously has sex with him and feels ashamed afterwards. The main reason is that she feels she is cheating on Kyle somehow. This is expressed recurring to a Puritan lingo of shamefulness, intertextually playing reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

(70) They [panties] make me feel gross. I *am* gross. What I did today was skanky and selfish [...] Water rains down on me [in the shower] and I pray it will make me clean [...] I turn the water up as hot as it will go, burning my skin scarlet red. (*BAB*: 69-70, emphasis in original)

Annie's conception of sex at this point is one of abjection. She refuses to be touched or to touch ("I touch a finger to the scar on his arm [...] I yank my finger away, *BAB*: 140). The protagonist speaks of guilt and loneliness in terms of metaphorical hunger, a guilt

that is able to consume her and also in terms of sensations of solitude which feel like emptiness:

(71) Yeah, the guilt ate at me, but I still get goose bumps just thinking about his hands on my skin and his slips warming mine. (BAB: 167)

(72) Living with a hole in my life blows. (BAB: 117)

(73) I haven't seen Kyle in eight months and it's like looking into a black hole. (BAB: 127)

When the narrator first referred to her loss, she codified it in terms of an abjection of reality, of the activities one can otherwise enjoy in life, such as taste (*not food*), music and necessities one cannot spare in order to actually live, like breathing, thus the novel's title. Below, the paragraph is recalled once more in (74), while (75) expands on similar feelings of disgust and adds the motif of fluid expelling.

(74) And I missed him so much, my stomach twisted up and it hurt to breathe. Pizza tasted like broccoli. Music hurt my ears. (BAB: 28)

The key is that as Annie progresses in her training, she starts gaining knowledge about the bodily in terms of her limits and own potential. Obtaining insight from the realms of medicine, anatomy and chemistry, she becomes able to literally decodify her body. She understands that her legs swell as lactic acid builds up in the skin (BAB: 83, 221), that her stomach vomited because she was damaging gastrointestinal tissue with Ibuprofen (BAB: 200) and that her right knee needs muscular strengthening and orthopaedic positioning in order to make it through the race (BAB: 201). With that knowledge, she progressively decides she does not want to continue living in abjection resulting from loss, but start experiencing life. That includes building up a future, in terms of the possibility of having a partner and even a dream job, namely physiotherapy.

(76) I take the opportunity to page through the MTSU course catalog. Standing in the back of the vestibule, I dog-ear the physical therapy section. This human anatomy and physiology course looks cool. Working with Matt and discovering muscles I didn't know I had is making me more interested in the human body. (BAB: 145)

Her first sexual intercourse since the passing of Kyle represents the ultimate turning point. Knowledge of her bodily capacities helps her to build confidence around them until final recognition of her necessities implies that sex and spontaneous romance are no longer abjected. On the contrary, this is experienced as an expelling of all that guilt,

rejection of other's touch and repression, metonymically represented through tears contention.

(77) Today is the first day I've truly cried since. I feel guilty for having whivers when Jeremiah smiled at me. I like how he took care of my blister. Made me laugh. I loved that glimmer of hope I felt for just a second. (BAB: 71)

In the end, Annie undergoes an epiphany which summarizes this positive experiencing of life through sport, from her loss of Kyle to the running of the marathon itself and the possibility of having a partner, even one you can lose and ultimately reaching the recovery of a friendship.

(78) But I'm glad I didn't miss any of the time I had with him. If I'd been worried I'd lose him, maybe I wouldn't have dated him. And I never would've had all those other moments". Realizing this, my body feels lighter, feels stronger, like I could go out and run a marathon right now [...] "So, you're telling me to risk being with Colton, even though it could ruin our friendship, but you won't give Jere a chance? Why not enjoy what you have now?" "Why don't you enjoy what you have with Colton" We laugh together. "I'm sorry..." Kelsey says. "I shouldn't have spread that rumour that I liked Kyle". "Forget about it. We're starting over". (BAB: 271-272)

What is eventually derived from the close reading of *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* framed within the model of anorexia bibliotherapy is that readers will accompany its protagonist through a road which started on abjection, but crucially of a very different type from that enacted in anorexia. In the story, it is derived from loss of a loved one and is progressively cancelled towards a caring of the self rooted on a functional view derived from sport life. It is vital that disgust of the anorectic kind does not surface, for it implies a safer narrative departure point which will not reenact those readers' vulnerable cognitive and neural paths. However, it is productive that it is abjection that Annie is able to surpass, balancing it with a sensible incorporation of the bodily in her life; exactly instead of the alternative, that is, a paternalistic rejection of skinniness present in anorexia novels, memoirs and hegemonic clinical treatments. The idea behind this novel, as has been put forward, is that it insistently implants, through its narrative structure, functional motif, lexicality and topics and even the food metaphors framework, affective literary stimuli which from a cognitive and neurological perspective and a feminist standpoint grant possibilities of life for young women with bodily vulnerabilities.

7. Conclusion

This MA thesis has aimed to integrate otherwise disperse fields of knowledge, at all times following the common thread of anorexia as a form of bodily vulnerability expugnable through fictional bibliotherapy. Following a sociological literary optic informed by gender scholarship on embodiment, together with a cognitive perspective, the recent North American YASF novel *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* (2014) has been set for due examination. The analysis was based on the consideration that the novel's representation of its athletically performing young woman protagonist crafts a cognitive and affective role model for young women readers. The framing of athletics training for a marathon run in honour of her deceased boyfriend as the protagonist's end-goal eventually becomes the narrative excuse for ongoing a metaphysical healing process of the self. Alongside, the protagonist strives to change, through athletics training, her depressive framework towards reality which had resulted from her mourning process. Hence framed, the protagonist's quest has been valued for its potential for promoting an understanding of corporeality based on a sensible approach to well-being among young readers. Those suffering from eating disorders, it has been contended, will benefit from sports fiction reading like Kenneally's, as her stories figure as a source of satisfaction and happiness inherent in caring for one self. In particular, the analysis of *Breathe, Annie, Breathe* has revealed itself as a resource for young anorectic women readers' reshaping of meanings and of vital projects away from the abjection which is inherent to this eating disorder. The hermeneutic analysis, particularly, was structured under the methodological basis of Cognitive literary theory and neuroscience, where the intersection between anorexia and fiction traced the work of Troscianko (2014, 2016, 2017) for the advancement of literary investigation on the field of eating disorders. Such interdisciplinary framework was based upon the transdisciplinary view which is inherent to New Materialist studies. The cognitive literary framework, namely, has shown the potential of fictional reading processing of functional stimuli of the novel, what has been

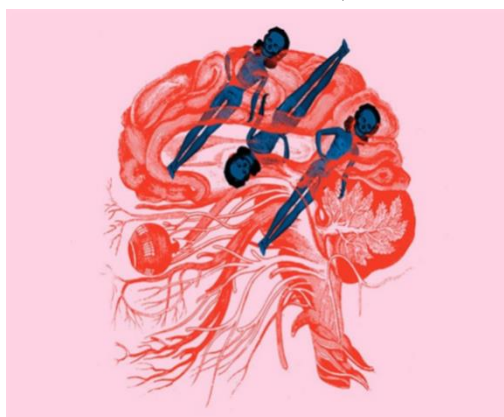


Fig.4

addressed under the umbrella term of the psychosomatechnicity of affective literary stimuli. The examination of the novel's narrative scaffolding, topic of functionality, vocabulary management and metaphorical framework around food has disclosed

patterns which from this cognitive and neurological viewpoint and a gender standpoint have suggested alternative embodiment possibilities for young women with bodily vulnerabilities. With sports fiction reading fiction and corporeality hence examined, this MA thesis caters for having opened a niche within bibliotherapy and New Materialist studies. In short, the cognitive literary hypothesis here researched extends to making the claim that literary fiction produces role models which alter the very states of readers. In that vein, the analysis has revealed bodily bibliotherapeutic potentialities behind the realm of fiction of great value for the politics of bodily vulnerability.

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Annex: fMRI brain study for sweet and bitter flavor images from Monteleone et al. (2017)

Sweet

Bitter

