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This obituary of Janet L. Jackson appeared originally in a slightly shorter version in *European Journal of Cognitive Psychology* (2005, 17(4), i-ii), the journal of which she had been a member of the editorial advisory board for many years.



In memoriam

Janet Lawson Jackson, B.Sc., Ph.D.
Cognitive Psychologist

12 March 1940 - 30 January 2005

In January cognitive psychology lost Janet L. Jackson, formerly Universitair Hoofddocent (UHD, associate professor) at the University of Groningen (1987-1992), and Principal Researcher (1992-1999) and Deputy Director of the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement in Leiden. Janet will be remembered as a charming and energetic colleague by all those who have had the good fortune to work with her and as a lively teacher by her many students.

Janet came to cognitive psychology relatively late—in 1978 to be exact. She had opted for psychology only after she had been a certified accountant and a math teacher, a supervisor in a pre-release hostel for disturbed and delinquent boys, a research assistant in the Department of Criminal Law at the University of Edinburgh and a qualified remedial teacher and consultant to immigrant families. Eventually, from 1973 onward, she read cognitive psychology and information

processing at Stirling University with Alan Baddeley and Neville Moray, graduating with honours in 1977. All this went alongside the responsibilities imposed on her by the inspired family life that she and her husband, developmental psychologist Alexander (Sandy) Jackson, built for themselves and their three children. When Sandy was appointed, in 1978, UHD in Adolescent Psychology at the University of Groningen the family moved to the Netherlands. Once they had settled there Janet found the time to look for a career of her own. And so, in the fall of 1978, tipped off by my colleague in Developmental Psychology, I invited Janet for an informal and, as it turned out, rather convincing interview. Actually the late seventies were one of the most difficult periods for finding an academic position, but given her credentials I found it relatively easy to find the means for involving Janet in the activities of the Department of Experimental Psychology, if only on a modest and uncertain basis. An important consideration was that Janet made it possible to present some of our courses in English.

Thus, in 1979 Janet embarked on a part-time career as a teacher of cognitive psychology, soon making herself convincingly indispensable. With hindsight she may have been lucky not getting a full-time appointment right away. This gave her the time she needed to work towards her Ph.D., a task she accomplished admirably in 1986 with a dissertation under the title *The Processing of Temporal Information*. By that time, incidentally, she had assimilated enough of the Dutch language to enable her to communicate (and teach) in that tongue, although her Dutch would remain peppered with charming mistakes, goofs that eventually became part of her trademark.



The ESCOP Board 1983-1987. From left to right: Wolfgang Prinz, Janet Jackson, John Michon, Alan Baddeley, Paul Bertelson (Nijmegen, 1985).

By the time she received her Ph.D., Janet had established herself already as a prominent researcher. Thus, for instance, she was involved in the European Society for Cognitive Psychology right from its inception, serving as a member of the founding executive board. It did not take long before Janet got a regular appointment as Universitair Hoofddocent (alias Reader or Associate Professor) in the Psychology Department of the University of Groningen.

Over the years Janet and I developed a close working relation, especially in the domain of time and timing. Apart from the topic of her dissertation she studied the, then prominent, question of the extent to which information about order and duration are stored and recalled automatically or under conscious control. The answer was a qualified “it depends”. That is, we came to the conclusion that temporal information is not remembered unless it has been noticed explicitly—which, however, does not rule out that behaviour may be well-organized in time on the basis of a variety of dynamic processes, of physiological or cognitive signature. The fruits of this timely collaboration can be found in Janet’s dissertation, in a series of articles and in two volumes we edited together—*Time, Mind, and Behavior*, the outcome of a symposium we organized in the summer of 1984, and *Guyau and the Idea of Time*, a commemorative volume for the author who may well be considered the founder of the cognitive-evolutionary view of Time.

Meanwhile Janet also got involved in a host of collaborative connections within and outside the Department in Groningen. Thus she took an active part in some of the psychophysiological projects of the late Bert Mulder and his team, in studies on ageing memory with Betto Deelman’s gerontopsychology unit, and in studies carried out with colleagues in the Traffic Research Centre.

In 1992, Janet’s career took an important turn when she decided to join me in the demanding task of establishing a new institute, the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement (acronymically known as NSCR or NISCALE). This institute was established by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and hosted by Leiden University. Janet took a substantial part of the responsibility of getting it started. Not only did it involve launching, from scratch, a transdisciplinary research programme in a field that in the Netherlands historically had been dominated by a sociological perspective. It also implied overseeing the renovation and furnishing of a provisional and somewhat dilapidated location, hiring and coaching staff, and establishing a variety of new contacts with colleagues and practitioners. Not surprisingly, Janet was soon called to the position of Deputy Director—actually just in time to take on the organization of a move to a completely new location.

Janet’s move to Leiden implied a quite drastic change in terms of her research programme. Nevertheless, her investment in memory and in the temporal structure of cognition and behaviour paid off: much of what she would subsequently take on at NSCR was directly related to the functional memory of offenders, victims, witnesses and law enforcers alike. At the time this was becoming one of the most prominent domains of criminal psychology and it is characteristic for Janet’s professional competence and integrity that very soon she became a recognized and valued expert in this research area.

At NSCR Janet did initiate some important experimental work concerning eyewitness memory and lying witnesses. This led to a rather penetrating analysis of the so-called 'cognitive interview' an innovative way of interviewing witnesses (and suspects) using specific, controlled suggestions. Subsequently, in close co-operation with experts from the National Intelligence and Security Agency and a number of international connections she began to dig deeply into another, somewhat suspect corner of criminal investigation methodology known as offender profiling. The latter quest eventually resulted in 1997 in a critical volume, *Offender Profiling: Theory, Research and Practice*, edited by Janet L. Jackson and Debra Bekerian, then at the MRC Applied Psychology Unit in Cambridge. This volume does much to separate fact from fancy in this domain and to define the proper conditions and procedures for using the profiling method.

Another interesting research opportunity presented itself when a leading fraudster—call him Mr. C—who was, then, just completing a six year prison sentence, decided that his young daughter deserved a straight daddy and that he should therefore terminate his criminal career. Not only that, Mr. C. also insisted that he wanted to donate—as it were—his living brain to science. Janet was quick in suggesting that this offer should be taken seriously. Thus, a small team, including NSCR's resident economist Robert Jansen, engaged in a series of interviews with Mr. C. and performed an experiment aimed at a cognitive analysis of the workings of this highly proficient fraudulent mind. The experiment involved the planning of a plausible 'deal' for each of ten realistic scenarios (including, e.g., what professionally goes under the name of 'gold carrousel'). The results of Mr. C.'s deliberations and 'solutions' were then compared with those of three other fraud specialists—a prosecutor (advocate general) in a court of appeal, an accountant from the national Tax Fraud Investigation Service, and an legislative lawyer. Janet and her team also compared Mr. C.'s ruminations with those of a dozen minor league frauds and embezzlers. Unfortunately this project, which might have resulted in a substantial monograph, was left unfinished.

Janet's transfer to Leiden eventually turned out to have dramatic, but completely unforeseen consequences for her personal life. Not long after she had begun her work in Leiden, her husband Sandy was found to suffer from a suspect tumour. An operation seemed successful, but eventually the initial optimism proved unjustified. For a number of years Sandy's condition remained relatively stable but this tragic development did not fail to have an impact on Janet's work and career.

In 1999 Janet decided to retire from NSCR and to return to Groningen, where the Jacksons had kept their principal basis, an impressive old farmhouse some distance south of the city. This allowed her to stay home and yet remain active in the field of criminal cognition, taking a part time job as a consulting scientist with the Inland Revenue Service. Soon afterward Sandy reached retirement age. The Jacksons had been preparing to take up residence in France after Sandy's retirement, having established a close working relation with colleagues in Toulouse. They had, in fact, already bought a house there. Unfortunately, by this time things took an even more tragic and definitive turn. Janet learned that she too was suffering from cancer. She apparently kept largely silent about this—as far as

I know she left colleagues and professional friends uninformed. Perhaps we might have read the signs: in the course of 2002 Janet became less involved in her work and she found it increasingly difficult to set and keep deadlines. Most of these symptoms, however, seemed readily attributable to her deep concern about Sandy's failing health.

In the event the Jacksons decided not to move to France. Instead they returned to Great Britain on the 20th of May 2003. Barely six weeks later Sandy died. What has happened to Janet since she left the Netherlands I do not know. It seems plausible, in the light of Sandy's death and her own failing health, that Janet just decided abruptly to withdraw from the professional community in which she had partaken so successfully for twenty years. However, what did motivate her to take such a drastic step I find very difficult to comprehend.

I know that Janet had not come to the end of her creative potential and it is clear that she has left some interesting research unfinished. Her professional vigour and focus are clearly stated in the brief programmatic *exposé* she prepared for a review committee visiting NSCR in 1997, from which I quote:

"I came to this Institute [i.e., NSCR - JAM] as a cognitive psychologist and that is what I remain. As such I am interested in how information is represented in the human brain and the manipulations or processes that can be carried out on these representations. In other words, I brought with me the skills relating to my own discipline, i.e. knowledge relating to representational forms; how knowledge of different types (e.g. generative, domain-specific, episodic, visual) is stored and retrieved; how problems are solved, decisions made and reasoning processes carried out. I also brought some expertise relating to language processing and theoretical knowledge, though little, of skills in areas such as artificial intelligence, and information and communication technologies. I also brought experimental skills. A psychonomic approach means carefully setting up an experimental hypothesis based on theoretical knowledge, devising an experiment to test that hypothesis by manipulating the necessary variables, and using the results to further refine the theory which can then, in turn, be tested further. These types of cognitive skills can be applied in various fields. This is no exception in what is now my chosen area, that of criminality and law enforcement. It surprises me somewhat that the cognitive community has until recently paid so little attention to this fascinating field. I believe that the tools that belong to our discipline have a lot to offer. I have tried to apply my skills (theoretical and experimental) to a number of issues that I believe are important: witness testimony, crime prevention and police planning."

This statement outlines, better than I possibly could, how she herself saw her academic ambitions. Janet was a cognitive psychologist to the core and for the professional community that is what she remains!

John A. Michon
Leiden, 16 June 2005

Appendix

Janet L. Jackson Bibliography 1983-2003 (39 titles)

Ph. D. Dissertation

Jackson, J. L. (1986). *The processing of temporal information*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands.

Edited Books

Jackson, J. L., & Bekerian, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Offender profiling: Theory, research and practice*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.

[NB - The publishers, John Wiley & Sons, erroneously advertise this volume as edited by Janet L. Jackson & Elizabeth Barkley. This is causing considerable confusion, especially on Internet, among booksellers and secondary sources, listings, &c.]

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