Between Floors: The Ups and Downs of Mediated Narrative

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Between Floors: The Ups and Downs of Mediated Narrative

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media, Art, and Text at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

BETWEEN FLOORS: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MEDIATED NARRATIVE

By Melinda Marguerite White, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media, Art, and Text at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012

Directors: Dr. Susann Cokal, Associate Professor, Department of English and Dr. Marcel Cornis-Pope, Professor of English and Media Studies, Department of English

“Between Floors: The Ups and Downs of Mediated Narrative” and the accompanying creative remediation project, “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” meld theory and practice of print with electronic literature and installation art. I argue that as medium changes, narrative is transformed yet can be reconstructed as the reader/viewer becomes increasingly involved, even embodied within the work. This embodiment is what Nathaniel Stern calls “Moving and thinking and feeling” (1) and can result in a more direct emotional experience. The form, structure, and medium (broadly understood as the discourse, or sjužet) rely on authorial intention, yet as a narrative becomes more interactive and experiential the feedback loop shifts, placing meaning, message, and construction of narrative (the chronological story itself, or fabula) between media and reader/viewer. This necessarily complicates the notion of authorship, yet within an embodied space, such as the installations included in this analysis, there is a potential for greater emotional understanding between author/artist and reader/viewer.

In the print story “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” the protagonist, June, visits her father in a hospital after a tragedy and ends up spending the rest of her life there. The metaphor of an elevator throughout the print, electronic, and installation versions furthers the trapped, claustrophobic feeling of the narrative as well as the ups and downs of relationships and grief. Pieces of the narrative remain recognizable through the electronic literature and installation, yet as the reader/viewer is increasingly immersed in the narrative, it becomes a more subjective and overwhelming emotional experience. The elevator metaphor extends through the analysis—an emblem of traditional linear narratives and the narrative arc and technological immersion. The analysis explores theories of language, medium, authorship, nonlinearity, interactivity, and embodiment through existing narrative, new media, and installation theorists such as Peter Brooks, Marshall McLuhan, and Nathaniel Stern. This dissertation and to an extent, experiment, uses theory and practice to illuminate narrative using a recombination of existing theory and an original remediation in three distinct forms, to further the understanding of the nature of narratives, media, authors, and readers, while blurring boundaries between disciplines.
Introduction
(Or Beginnings, Middles and Endings—Perhaps Not in That Order)

It’s a new elevator, freshly pressed to the rails, and it’s not built to fall this fast.
–Colson Whitehead, the Intuitionist (1)

We are always between floors. We move through our daily lives in a way similar to riding in an elevator—inhabiting the liminal space between expression and understanding, residing between the lobby and our destination, immersed in media as we move from one place to another. Up or down: there are only two directions. As elevator passengers we are, for the most part, passive participants in our journey. We trust elevators to carry us to our destination without seeing the mechanism that drives them yet surrendering our control over their movement. We push buttons and expect to make it to our floor of choice even though we cannot see where we are going. We hold certain similar expectations of texts—beginnings, middles, and endings for instance—the predictable ups and downs of linear narrative.

If, after entering an elevator, we are moved sideways instead of the predictable up or down movement, we are still aware, or even more aware, that we are enclosed in an elevator. Enclosed, it is possible that we would not be entirely unaware of moving side to side instead of up and down, but we would feel a subtle difference in direction. Or would we? Perhaps even though the movement of the medium (the elevator) has changed and the destination would be different than predicted, it would still be a destination. And we would have arrived, confused perhaps at how we got there, but there nonetheless. In a similar way, reader/viewer expectations are often thwarted when confronting an unconventional text, whether printed, electronic, or artistic. Relying heavily on interaction focuses the feedback loop on the reader/viewer, allowing
her or him to come to a subjective understanding of the text, but perhaps conveying the original emotion intended by the author/artist.

Linear texts are what the common reader thinks of traditionally when he or she opens a book, reads the foreword, proceeds to Chapter One and moves from left to right, page to page, until she or he reaches the end, which may include a bibliography, an appendix, end notes, or a works cited page—a sure sign that the journey has ended. If we think of linear print narrative as a traditional elevator, a space where we have our own individual experiences but not much control, have a limited relationship with the medium, and no real connection to the mechanism behind it (the author) then non-linear literature would be something more akin to Willy Wonka’s great glass elevator, moving sideways at our command—making unexpected movement, causing us to take more control and even, if we so desire, breaking through the ceiling to take us to our destination of choice. Because, as readers, we want and expect a destination in any context as we do in linear narrative. Experimental print literature, electronic literature, and installation art can propel us into a three-dimensional narrative space where the reader/viewer becomes an integral part of the work. It can also make us aware of the mechanisms that allow the movements of narrative, the cogwheel mechanism of narrative transportation.

The present dissertation project, “Between Floors,” will illustrate how media—specifically print text, new media, and installation work—can portray similar narrative elements through varied levels of reader/viewer interaction, even if we are not entirely aware of our own participation, the technology behind the medium, the author’s intention, or our own physical involvement within the frame of an installation. As new media theorist Lev Manovich argues, “All classical, and even moreso modern, art is “interactive” in a number of ways” (Manovich 56). All three of these media can engage the reader/viewer physically and through this
interaction affect the inward nature of the reader/viewer directly—viscerally and emotionally. By representing one narrative, “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” in three media, I will explore how levels of interactivity, immersion, and visual text influence narrative. I will demonstrate how these specific media compositions convey the same ideas and themes of communication, isolation and connection, movement, and physical space through their common interactivity, with emphasis on medium as message (McLuhan 19). Chapter One will focus on the history of communication and narrative, both oral and visual, with Chapters Two through Four devoted to narrative in print, user-guided electronic text, and installation art respectively. Chapter Five will reflect on the creative project based on the remediation of a narrative content from print to multimedia installation.

The creative narrative portion of the project, “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” will be a remediation of a narrative, transferred from a print text to an electronic text and, lastly, to an art installation. The narrative describes a female protagonist who comes to a hospital to visit her father, only to find herself living out the rest of her life there. As the character, June, travels between floors to visit her parents and explore the hospital, I will use the elevator metaphor to elaborate on the possibilities of moving without moving, immersive space, communication, isolation, and connection. Because the narrative is fragmented and evokes feelings of claustrophobia, disorientation, and self-searching, the story can create a

---

1 Remediation: most commonly known as transference from print to film, takes a narrative or work in one medium and recomposes it for another, often presenting some part of the story or message in a new way. It is referred to as “retransmission” by Peter Brooks (4). In Remediation: Understanding New Media, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define Remediation in the glossary as follows: “Defined by Paul Levenson as the ‘anthropotropic’ process by which new media technologies improve upon or remedy prior technologies. We define the term differently, using it to mean the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. Along with immediacy and hypermediacy, remediation is one of the three traits of our genealogy of new media” (273).
visceral response and is a good candidate for remediation. As I will explain in Chapter Five, focusing on these creative examples, with the change in narrative form, the feedback loop changes, providing less emphasis on authorial intention, and more emphasis on both medium and reader/viewer. Although the concept of “plot” becomes less straightforward as the medium and presentation (sjužet) change, the narrative concept, or fabula, of the work may still be pieced together, constructed by the reader/viewer to create meaning relative to the individual’s experience (Brooks 12-13).

**Narrative**

As communicative beings, we have been taught and consider it natural to find narrative in everything, including our own lives. As Peter Brooks argues:

> The desire and competence to tell stories also reach back to an early stage in the individual’s development, to about the age of three, when a child begins to show the ability to put together a narrative in coherent fashion and especially the capacity to recognize narratives, to judge their well-formedness. Children quickly become virtual Aristotelians, insisting upon any storyteller’s observation of the “rules,” upon proper beginnings, middles, and particularly ends. (3-4)

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2 Feedback Loop: The relationship between author/artist, medium, and reader/viewer. All elements of the feedback loop are ever-present, although the emphasis or importance of one aspect over others may shift. Used by James Phelan within the context of narratology, this term has also been applied to electronic narrative and art (Phelan 4).

3 *Fabula* and *Sjužet* are narratological terms used by Russian formalists to describe the equivalent of story and discourse. *Fabula* is the narrative, the skeletal story, as it happened (chronologically); *Sjužet* is the way the pieces of the story are presented and rearranged for dramatic and rhetorical-semantic effects through flashbacks, structure, metaphor, etc. As illustrated throughout my dissertation, although these terms belong to structuralism, they can be applied to show the increasing emphasis on reader/viewer as narrative becomes more subjective. (Brooks 12-13)
Since childhood, we hold certain expectations of narratives, learning to compose them ourselves even when the expected Aristotelian structure is not followed.

Narrative is not new, we have always utilized it to make sense of the world. As Jean Starobinski suggests, all communication and any narrative form can be seen as an obstacle as we try to relay interior emotion to others. From early cave paintings human beings have attempted to communicate and make sense of the world through both visual and oral or written communication. The symbols and tools used for this expression have drastically changed over the years, and yet we continue to make the best use of the tools available to us in an attempt to be fully understood. In the introduction to his book *Hyper/text/theory*, George P. Landow, one of the leading hypertext theorists, argues that both poststructuralist print literature and hypertext grew “out of a dissatisfaction with the related phenomena of the printed book and hierarchical thought” (1). Postmodern literature and hypertext both defy reader expectations of linear narrative and instead offer a more fragmented, multidirectional, reader-focused experience.

Brooks goes on to state that “Narrative in fact seems to hold a special place among literary forms—as something more than a conventional ‘genre’—because of its potential for summary and retransmission: the fact that we can still recognize ‘the story’ even when its medium has been considerably changed” (Brooks 4). This is what I will be illustrating with my own exercise in remediation (or retransmission as Brooks calls it), demonstrating in chapter 5 how a specific narrative content and purpose can be re-conveyed through different narrative media. I expect the narrative message to inevitably change as it is remediated. With increased interactivity, reliance on visual text, movement, and immersion, I predict the narrative will lose some of its more traditional elements, such as plot and character development, that are easier to
portray by the conventions of print text. In addition, the remediated narrative will become more open-ended, with emphasis on the internal and emotional response of the reader/viewer. The story may not be as straightforward in an electronic or installation medium but the metaphorical meaning and emotional response should remain and perhaps even be heightened as the reader/viewer becomes more involved and immersed in the work.

Art has always been interactive, but with technology and immersion of the viewer in the frame, much like a reader of interactive literature, it is becoming more-so—it is increasingly up to the viewer to shape the work, involving more decisions, more experience that is set up by the artist, but which is filtered through the subjective point of view of the participants themselves. Immersion in an interactive installation brings the viewer into the frame as part of the work, again coming to his or her own conclusions of narrative and meaning.

This physical demand on the viewer and immersion in the work in order to affect her or him directly is the effect I propose to create in my elevator installation work and also in the print and hypertext versions of my narrative. My work will also address the compositional and reader/viewer experiences that change as the narrative becomes less linear and text-driven and more interactive and immersive.

**Feedback Loop**

Of course in any work of literature or art, one can detect the inescapable presence of the feedback loop. In the feedback loop there is author/artist, medium, and reader/viewer. In linear print texts the goal is often to relay the narrative to the viewer without much attention to medium, which was often supposed to be “transparent.” In literature and art the effect can be that of surpassing the medium, causing the reader/viewer to lose himself or herself in the work. The
reader/author relationships are often experienced as traditional narrator/storyteller and reader/listener ones; this provides a significant, yet mostly passive role for the reader. In more interactive and non-linear works this emphasis often shifts to other relationships within the feedback loop, causing the reader/viewer to become more actively engaged in the meaning making or construction of *fabula*, the story, but the author/artist is always a factor; she or he can never be entirely removed from the recursive relationship.

James Phelan describes the recursive relationship or feedback loop “among authorial agency, textual phenomena (including intertextual relations), and reader response” as follows:

In other words, for the purposes of interpreting narratives, the approach assumes that texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways; that those designs are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them; and that reader responses are a function of and, thus, a guide to how designs are created though textual and intertextual phenomena. At the same time, reader responses are also a test of the efficacy of those designs. (4)

Traditional print literature, then, often places little emphasis on the author, disguised as first or third person narrator (frequently omniscient) and de-emphasizes the materiality of the medium. The modernists stretched the reader/author relationship, using interior train of thought to personalize the narrative, as from one human being (or character) to another. Postmodernists, even when they were not necessarily rebelling against modernism, took a different approach. They often highlighted the materiality of the text, using fragmentation and reader interaction to do so, and placing themselves (or an author-narrator) in the narrative to put the focus back on the
author to reader relationships but also to problematize it. Electronic authors highlight the medium even more, using the tools of technology to convey metaphor and theme, and requiring the reader to become involved in the text as more of a co-author than a passive participant; the increase in interaction on the part of the reader/viewer may create more work on her or his part, but can ultimately result in a more personal experience. Often in installation works, the concept of the work does not come together unless the viewer is inside the frame, a part of the work itself—engaging in a collaborative process of creation between artist and viewer. Installation art may sometimes attempt to remove the artist completely when the relationship dynamic between the work and the viewer becomes the most significant relationship, but it is still the artist’s decision, to some extent at least, to let this happen.

As technology has changed us, our ways of “reading” texts have also required adaptation. Bound to expectations of our new ways of being in the world, we have moved from linear forms of communication to embodied, interactive, nonlinear forms to lessen the gaps in the feedback loop between author/artist and reader/viewer to accommodate the ever-changing media through which ideas, narrative, and communication must pass. Roland Barthes famously argued for the death of the author: "We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphralstical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). The death of the author may be a controversial notion, but it served to make a point: to involve the reader in a work, the author must be willing to leave much of the meaning in the reader’s hands—so that the reader’s experience and interpretation take precedence over the author’s intention. Although the author/artist surrenders a certain amount of control over meaning (narrative) when composing a
non-linear, interactive, or immersive work, his or her intention always maintains a certain role. The feedback loop may shift to emphasize the relationship between medium and reader/viewer, it is the artist/author’s choice and use of that medium that ultimately influences meaning.

**Project**

Throughout this analytical dissertation project, entitled “Between Floors,” and the accompanying remediation of a story into print, hypermedia, and installation, I will show how media can carry narrative by using metaphor, moving image, interactivity, and immersion within the constraints of the technology—current tools of creative expression such as computers, the internet, programs, and projection. Each remediation of the narrative in this project will illustrate the shift of significance in the feedback loop triangle but prove that no matter where the emphasis is placed, the narrative can still carry over—just in different ways. McLuhan has argued that “the medium is the message” (19) and although various use of technological media may change the message and shift the emphasis away from author/artist in the feedback loop, it is the author/artist’s choice and use of medium that creates message. Even the choice to obscure the author or artist’s presence in a work is to some extent the choice of that author or artist; the medium itself may do the rest of the work.

The term “media” can include any medium through which we communicate or receive ideas. The effect of media on message changes and shifts as the medium relies more heavily on the reader’s subjective interpretation of a text or a viewer’s interaction with an electronic text or within a work of installation art. The feedback loop between author/artist, medium, and reader/viewer also changes accordingly. Phelan describes the feedback loop from a literary standpoint: “Methodologically, the feedback loop among author, text, and reader means that the
rhetorical critic may begin the interpretive inquiry from any one of these points on the rhetorical triangle, but the inquiry will necessarily consider how each point both influences and can be influenced by the other two” (5). Although the emphasis may shift, with the viewer becoming more present than the artist, for instance, all points are influenced by each other and one is never completely absent. Gustav Freytag developed a narrative/plot triangle based on Aristotle’s ideas of beginnings, middles, and ends in his book *Technique of the Drama* (1863). This triangle, also known as Freytag’s Pyramid, includes rising action, climax, and denouement (falling action) (MacEwan 114-115). While the traditional elevator can represent the more traditional narrative plot, that of the rising and falling action of a narrative arc or Freytag’s Triangle, a multidimensional elevator can explore various dimensions of narrative space. Non-linear texts or works of art can create multiple narratives—not only one line of narrative arc, but a unique narrative based on the readers’ experiences with the text and on the *a priori* knowledge they bring with them to that experience.

This is similar to the subjective experience undergone when encountering visual rhetoric; some visual elements are more straightforward, less subjective, but when a viewer is faced with a more complex and interactive work of art, the experience becomes more subjective, personal, and, sometimes, more powerful because of the work’s invitation to personal connection. With more subjective story lines, the reader becomes (w)reader⁴ (Landow 14), participant, co-author in a work, and, thus, more emotionally invested perhaps.

As Jean Paul Sartre argued, “Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity” (29). In

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⁴ (W)reader is a term coined by George P. Landow in “What’s a Critic to Do?,” the introduction to *Hyper/Text/Theory*, to describe readers of interactive texts who play the role of both writer and reader. (14)
existentialism, subjectivity is the unavoidable condition of seeing the world only through our own eyes—never truly being able to understand another’s point of view. The necessarily isolated experience of the individual is the very reason we are unable to explain it. This applies to all attempts at communication but is perhaps even more complicated in literature and art; authorial or artist intention is something the reader/viewer can never really be certain of and what a reader/viewer takes away from a work can vary from one individual to the next.

Just as when we are in an elevator, in our attempts to communicate, including through narrative, we are constantly moving between floors—struggling with the tools of our time between direct communication of ideas and the obstacles technology and media uniquely present, often hindering this attempt at communication. While in the space between floors we are unaware of our actual position in space. As we stop at a floor—whether it is our destination or not—there is a moment of clarity, a finite understanding, although temporary, of where we are situated.

In Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction, Jean Starobinski reminds us that: “Upon encountering nature’s obstacles, man’s original unity is shattered and his power over the world—science and technology—is born” (218). This idea of shattered unity is man’s movement “from the realm of immediacy to one of mediation” (218). Overcoming obstacles is a challenge yet leads to reflection, judgment, comparison, and the ability to use instruments (218). Technology, including print text, computer-mediated narrative, and installation work, changes the way we communicate. Although all communication is mediated, technology provides new avenues for expression; as the elevator represents traditional narrative and comprehensible mechanism, postmodern literature, hypertext, and installation art can provide multi-directional
communication, structural possibilities, and more reader-centered experience-based communication, as I will illustrate throughout this dissertation.

“Between Floors” will also emphasize the commonalities between postmodern literature (including stories by Robert Coover), electronic literature (that emphasizes interactivity), and installation artwork (including work by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller), emphasizing also their ability to reflect inwardly the physical experience of engaging and interacting with not only the text, but also the medium—defying thereby reader/viewer expectations. While focusing on the metaphorical spaces between text and technology, “Between Floors” will apply theories such as Jean Starobinski’s idea of obstacle to language and communication, Marshall McLuhan and Paul Virilio’s theories of medium, Lev Manovich’s discussion of interactivity, and George P. Landow’s associations between postmodern literature and hypertext, all of which help us explore and emphasize the connections between print, electronic, and installation works.

The elevator will serve as an overarching metaphor and emblem within the three modes of narrative and the accompanying analysis; it will also provide an example of “old media” in a discussion of conventional narrative and reading expectations compared to the multidirectional narrative in postmodern literature, hypertext, and installation work. We may find traditional elevator technology more comfortable and familiar than the plan for a space elevator or multi-directional Wonka-type elevator, where the frontier is more open and boundaries less defined; in similar ways, linear print narrative may also offer us the stability and predictability lacking in postmodern literature, new media, or installation art. The responsibility of interactive text and art is one we do not always want to be burdened with. While focusing on this responsibility of the reader/viewer in interactive texts and the metaphorical spaces between text and technology, what I hope to prove is that the narrative in three media—print, electronic, and installation—each with
its own set of possibilities and limitations, can affect the reader/viewer directly through different
levels of interaction, involving them as co-creators and co-writers, in an attempt to overcome the
limitations of language and media and to narrow the gap of subjective communication—a
struggle faced by all authors and artists.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One will serve as a historical overview of oral, written, and visual
communication. I will emphasize that multimedia communication has a historical context, as we
have been striving to communicate ideas and feelings directly using text but also non-verbal
communication. This chapter will also convey the idea that language (in any medium) is a
mediator and an obstacle to direct communication and further that there is a need for narratives
to make sense of our lives. All communication, unless taking place telepathically, requires a
medium—symbols, images, words, text—making direct communication or transmission
impossible. This does not stop us from trying to convey emotions through media in an attempt to
truly reach another person; one way to accomplish this is through narrative. The chapter will
examine historical narratives from cave painting to multimedia narratives including William
Blake’s poem “The Tyger” and the stele of Hammurabi.

Chapter Two will focus on postmodern print literature, including Italo Calvino and
Robert Coover, and on how media, object, and structure in a text change, problematizing the
process of meaning-making while also emphasizing the feedback loop as the reader becomes
more involved in co-creating a narrative.

Postmodern literature developed in the post-WWII era, as a response to Modernism and the
Age of Enlightenment. While being informed by existentialism and a general skepticism about
grand narratives and explanations, it also reflected a general frustration about the possibility of
developing original ideas—a feeling that everything had already been written. The more
experimental modernists had already challenged the traditions of narrative, disrupting the way
readers used to interact with narratives. What many postmodern authors sought to achieve was
something that went even further, closing the gap between reader and author by playing with
elements such as point of view, structure, and plot-driven narrative. These are elements that I
have integrated into my own work of fiction and will also apply to the hypertext portion of the
narrative.

According to Raymond Federman, author of postmodern fiction and criticism, the
postmodern text aspires to “denounce the language that continues to perpetuate lies and illusion”
(Clavier 44). The postmodern text shakes up our previously held belief in narrative and our roles
as readers, confronting us with the unexpected, demanding us to make our own connections,
construct our own fabula, and come to our own conclusions through interactivity, structural
eccentricities, intertextuality, metafiction, and changes in perspective—elements of the
postmodern sjužet.

Chapter Three will move to electronic literature—utilizing electronic media as a means to
communicate as the medium becomes increasingly interactive and narrative relies more heavily
on (w)reader involvement, images, movement, and audio components. This chapter will include
an analysis of works such as afternoon by Michael Joyce, and more recent works by Donna
Leishman and J.R. Carpenter.

In the introduction to Hyper/text/theory, Landow also argues that: “hypertext reconceives
conventional, long-held assumptions about authors and readers and the texts they write and read”
(Landow 1). I will argue that the challenging of “long-held assumptions”—the reader/viewer’s
expectations of linear text and a passive role in the creation of narrative—is also achieved by postmodern print literature and installation art. Electronic literature takes postmodern ideas of fragmentation, reader interaction, and structure and applies them in a medium we have become immersed in over recent years, the computer. With increased interactivity, more work on the part of the reader, multiple narratives may be produced by one electronic text (although this may take place over several independent readings).

Chapter Four will transfer narrative into the art world. Focusing on interactive art, I will begin with a painting by Richard Serra, exploring how our interaction begins outside the frame moving the reader/viewer inside the frame as he or she experiences the narrative instead of merely interacting with it. The central themes here are the changes in the feedback loop, and how video surveillance and embodiment of the viewer can place him or her inside the artwork as co-creator of a subjective narrative. This will be illustrated through examples of such artists as Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, Xu Bing, and Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv.

As examples of the type of installation work and the effect I hope to produce in my elevator installation, the works in this chapter often compel us to confront ourselves, think about the world and our position in it, about how we communicate and the language we use to do so, although often faultily. Interactive installation and video installation work can have some of the same effects as interactive online media. Nauman’s Going around the Corner Piece, for example, certainly forces a confrontation with the self, through its embodied presence within a work, but with less emphasis on language or the place of the artist than is seen in much of his work. Here the viewers are viewing themselves inside the frame, expression without language, and making the work of art as they go.
Chapter Five will include my artist’s statement and consider the compositional processes involved in remediating a narrative into a print text, electronic text, and installation art piece. The narrative conveys an emotional personal experience turned into fiction and illustrates how the narrative changes as the reader/viewer becomes more involved in the text and the narrative relies more heavily on image and space than on the printed word. As the element of plot becomes parodied and suspicious in the age of Modernism, it is still a necessary element, a mechanism that we need but which remains behind the scenes; as an elevator moves us upwards or downwards, we do not consciously consider the hidden mechanism that drives it. As the feedback loop between author, medium, and reader/viewer changes with the transference of narrative into various media, the pieces become less linear and deciphering the sjužet relies more on the reader/viewer than on the intentionality of the author. This means that the narrative may be more subjective, but equally meaningful. The remediation of the narrative into three media will attempt to prove that the narrative essence of a work can be transferred to new media, maintaining to some extent the original integrity of the narrative while changing the way it is conveyed to the reader/viewer and even some of its implications, illustrating that the medium as well the reader/viewer are vital parts of message.

The narrative will be expressed in three unique but cohesive texts—a print story, an interactive hypertext, and an installation, grounded in the various historical media throughout the dissertation. The remediations will differ in their uses of print and visual text, movement, abstractness, and levels of reader/viewer interaction; even though I will be using similar pieces of the same text, similar aspects of design, and each medium to express metaphor and theme, the presentation will inevitably evoke different responses in the reader/viewer. As the narrative is remediated, I will highlight the commonalities and differences of print, electronic, and
installation work; I will also emphasize the ways in which the narrative changes as it moves from medium to medium, relying increasingly on interactive elements and non-alphabetic text such as video, audio, images, and movement.

In my concluding section, I will consider the future of interactive narratives, the ever-changing world of experimental, electronic literature, and interactive installation work. I will comment on the changing technology and the idea that we are continuously seeking a new medium through which to communicate, in hopes of reaching others with our message, yet how every medium complicates that message.

Technology is an elevator, encompassing us as we travel upwards, not stopping at every floor, not observant of the journey, but in a constant state of waiting for our destination. Yet our destination, it seems, is constantly changing, as new floors are added just as we think we are close to reaching the top. As passengers in this elevator of consumer technology, no aspect of our lives goes untouched—we are affected socially, commercially, and, not so noticeably perhaps, artistically. The possibilities seem limitless, each new floor providing new conveniences, new changes in our social interaction, new tools for creative expression, yet we are still trapped inside this metal box. What if the elevator crashes through? Will we soar through the air, finally free and light, or will we plummet and crash?

We are still, and may always be, attracted to linear narratives, to the extent that we can take nonlinear plot and reconstruct it into a chronological *fabula*—this is how we have been trained since childhood to make sense of text as well as life. As the feedback loop becomes more flexible and texts focus more on reader/viewer experience than on authorial intention, interactivity and reader-controlled narrative can offer multidirectional options while still conveying meaningful narratives. We are traveling in unexpected directions, not always sure
where we reside yet the elevator stops, the familiar ding sounds, the doors open, and we
momentarily have awareness and understanding… before the doors close again and carry us
away to another destination.
Chapter One
Inevitable Obstacles: Language and Communication
(Or How We Learned to Love the Linear)

True beauty never strikes us directly. The setting sun is beautiful because of all it makes us lose.
—Antonin Artaud4

Think of an elevator where you might push a button for your floor and end up somewhere else; this is often what happens between our need to communicate and what the person we are communicating to understands. As writers and readers we must, therefore, explore the best way to utilize the tools of expression available to us—language, syntax, inflection, and visual cues—often in combination, to convey our internal thoughts and ideas, and allow others to understand us. Finding the right relationship between author/artist and reader/viewer must also take into account the most effective medium for the particular message.

All experience is mediated from the time we learn language and onward. There is always language, symbol, medium between us and our understanding of the world and always has been. As Artaud suggests in the epigraph, true beauty makes us lose the ability to translate our experience into words—makes us speechless (71). We are often incapable of absorbing the true experience until it is almost gone; beauty and meaning are difficult to capture in the moment and we need a sense of order to capture them—as sense of chronology, linearity, an end of the experience. In her essay, “‘Hot with Rapture and Cold with Fear’: Grotesque, Sublime, and Postmodern Transformations in Perfume,” Dr. Susann Cokal describes the effect of the sublime as “a category of experience that strikes wonder and terror into the beholder; it so palpably approaches the divine that it transcends physical form and leaves the perceiving subject” (180).

Causing an overwhelming emotional response, the sublime⁵ can be both beautiful and repulsive. According to Immanuel Kant, the sublime is found in nature, where it “refers to things which appear either formless (a storm at sea; a vast mountain range) or which have form but, for reasons of size, exceed our ability to perceive such form” (Shaw 78). One of the main existential dilemmas of human beings is how to express true feeling and transmit such intangible ideas from one individual to another. Medium—whether verbal or written communication, visuals, performance, or installation art—is an inevitable enabler and obstacle in this process.

Just as the elevator is a medium of transportation through which we travel vertically to our destination, we must also use a given communication medium to convey and exchange ideas. We have learned to interpret symbols, to glean meaning from oral and textual media. The conventions we have incorporated to “read” and interpret texts have both helped and hindered us. Linearity, one such convention, provides expectation, organization, and distinctive “lines” into which ideas are placed and then received by the reader/viewer. We privilege linear forms of mediated communication because we know how to interpret them, we know what to expect, and we know how to “read” this way. This dissertation, for example, necessarily uses more or less linear presentation even as it discusses nonlinear communication. However, linearity may not be the best venue for certain emotional or complex experiences; embodied communication where the reader/viewer is a participant may convey emotion and complexity more completely through

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⁵ Here is Immanuel Kant’s description of the feeling of the sublime: “The feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. Hence it is an emotion, and so it seems to be seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination’s activity. Hence, too, this liking is incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect, and so should be called a negative pleasure” (as quoted in Shaw 78).
interaction or inclusion in the work, leaving interpretation up to the reader/viewer is an experience potentially closer to that of the sublime.

The linear expectations of narrative are what allow us to recognize it as such, its familiarity, so that we may get out of it the message, often what we think the author intended. As Seymour Chatman argues in “What Novels Can Do That Film Can’t (and vice Versa)”:  

Narrative is a deep structure independent of its medium. In other words, narrative is basically a kind of text organization and that organization, that schema, needs to be actualized: in writing words, as in stories and novels, in spoken words combined with the movement of actors imitating characters against sets which imitate places as plays and films; in drawings; in comic strips; in dance movements, as in narrative ballet and in mime; and even in music, at least in program music of the order of *Peter and the Wolf*. (117-118)

As Chatman points out, we are surrounded by narrative, not only in oral storytelling, novels, or plays or films; our very lives are narrative. What we mean by narrative, or at least traditional written narratives, are those plotted stories that meet reader expectations by providing standard elements such as the traditional narrative arc, with a rising action, climax, dénouement, or some variation of this. There is exposition, there is conflict, and there is resolution. When these linear patterns fail to appear, in literature and most often in life, readers become uncomfortable, expecting something that they are now not sure is ever coming. In the beginning of *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks provides a description of our need for narrative:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are
reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semi-conscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. The narrative impulse is as old as our oldest literature: myth and folktale appear to be stories we recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work. (3)

As mentioned in the introduction, Brooks goes on to discuss children as young as the age of three who insist on the “rules” of narrative—that is on beginnings, middles, and ends. He sees narrative as a “language code” that “allows us to summarize and retransmit narratives in other words and other languages, to transfer them into other media, while remaining recognizably faithful to the original narrative structure and message” (3-4). We now build digital narratives using the Internet, cell-phones, and social networks.

The way these narratives are built, according to the Russian Formalists, can be broken down into fabula (story) and sjužet (discourse). “Fabula is defined as the order of events referred to by the narrative, whereas sjužet is the order of events presented in the narrative discourse” (Brooks 12). So sjužet, the discourse, or “active shaping force” (12), is how the story is presented, be it linear or nonlinear, forwards or backwards, by using the specific features of each medium, and fabula is our understanding, as readers/viewers, of the basic story, reconstructed from what we are given through the medium. Therefore, we can recast even nonlinear or visual textual information into some kind of story or narrative, even if these are not the same for each person or as the author intended them to be “read.” It is because of our need for narrative, and
the rules ingrained in us as readers/viewers, that we desire to construct narrative out of the
smallest puzzle pieces presented to us, even in a visual text, one that is not presented
chronologically, or contains various points of view, or requires our own interaction with the
work to create meaning.

In literature, these “rules” have become ingrained in structural patterns and even spread
to encompass specific genres of literature—fairy tales with happy endings, mysteries with clean
solutions, the hero’s journey and return. Cultural practices and traditions have regulated
storytelling, giving narratives a particular shape, which at the same time allows oral, visual, and
textual stories to be re-told and remediated. As mentioned in the introduction, Brooks
acknowledges the uniqueness of narrative, as it has the capacity to not only be summarized but
also remediated, allowing the story to be understood anew in another medium (4). Even if a text
lacks linearity, we are trained to find the narrative within it. This is why no matter what medium
is used to express that narrative we will discover it; unconventional structures or media may
thwart our expectations, but we will most often find the story.

An elevator follows certain conventions, transporting us vertically to a floor below or
above, with easy-to-follow instructions—push here for up, here for down, the corresponding
button for the floor of your choice. As with nonlinear communication, if we entered an elevator
and found no buttons or if they were in no particular order, we would be confused and unsure of
how to proceed but we would find some meaning in it and figure out how it works. We have
certain expectations for life experience, for verbal interactions, and for text, and these codified
expectations are what help us in translating ideas from one person to another. That does not
mean that we cannot adapt. As technology progresses, we can expand our expectations; we can
accept an elevator that travels miles into space or moves horizontally. There are already
escalators and moving sidewalks; the first time moving stairs and sidewalks were encountered we had to change our thinking, our expectations, as people did with the invention of the elevator. The elevator can represent any medium we come across; we have certain expectations of them now but these had to be learned, we had to adapt—and we can do this with any medium through which we communicate.

**Language and Communication**

One experience we long for, as communicative human beings, is the ability to express our inner desires, feelings, and thoughts directly to another. This type of direct transmission\(^6\) could be compared to a blood transfusion, where vital energies flow directly into a body that did not create them. Since we are not telepathic beings, this type of transfusion of self to another has been thus far impossible. Our goal seems to be to negate the medium (necessary for any communication) or the author/artist and let the message flow into the reader/viewer. Thus far, immersion in a text, electronic medium, or installation work where the reader/viewer is inside the frame, a part of the creative process and essential element in the work itself, seems to be the closest we have come to this. This makes, of course, the message highly subjective to the reader/viewer; perhaps little of what the author/artist meant to convey, his or her intention comes across filtered through this personal relationship of the reader/viewer to the work.

All communication requires a medium and writing itself is a technology—a tool we use to communicate. Oral, written, and mediated communications of all kinds cannot be separated from one another. Often to get a more direct message across we combine multiple modes of communication.

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\(^6\) Direct Transmission is used medically to describe a virus that is passed from direct skin-to-skin or bodily fluid contact. In Zen Buddhism “direct transmission” means the process of passing Zen from soul to soul without speaking or writing (Sokei-an). In art this would mean an attempt to convey the feeling/meaning from artist to viewer directly, with little complication from the medium (transparency).
communication—oral and body language for example. In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter J. Ong explains why we need to study oral and written communication concurrently:

Human society first formed itself with the aid of oral speech, becoming literate very late in its history, and at first only in certain groups. *Homo sapiens* have been in existence for between 30,000 and 50,000 years. The earliest script dates from only 6000 years ago. Diachronic study of orality and literacy and of the various stages in the evolution from one to the other sets up a frame of reference in which it is possible to understand better not only pristine oral culture and subsequent writing culture, but also the print culture that brings writing to a new peak and the electronic culture which builds on both writing and print. In this diachronic framework, past and present, Homer and television, can illuminate one another.

(2)

As mentioned above, orality and literacy are not separate; image and text are not separate; print and electronic media are not separate—we must consider the evolution of communication media together, noting how one influences the other and how we are still evolving with the media available to us. We combine speaking and body movements or facial expressions to convey meaning everyday. This is important especially in view of the fact that technology continues to connect us and yet separates us bodily. Even emoticons cannot convey sarcasm via text message. Our most primal method of communication and what comes before language, both in the evolution of man and that of the individual, is body language. Our physical beings can often express feelings that are beyond words and transcend the need for language or another medium.
Our smiles and facial expressions transmit emotion, our eyes signal warmth or skepticism, our touch can comfort and calm and express love.

**Visual Communication**

Another early expression of language began with visual representations of objects. In *When Writing Met Art*, Denise Schmandt-Besserat claims that the prehistory of writing and art began as early as 7500 B.C. Early artifacts, such as tokens in various shapes and “impressed texts,” had symbols that represented measures of grain or animals in a flock (3). These symbols were “linear” texts, according to Schmandt-Besserat, as they were inscribed in straight lines. Schmandt-Besserat thus acknowledges the significance of symmetry in Mesopotamian cultures. Horizontally and vertically, the lines possessed a hierarchy and were semantic—endowed with meaning. Although, here, linear was not right to left, but symmetrical, as the first mark was placed in the center and then alternating marks on the right and left, outward (8-9). These artifacts are an early example of art combined with language, where the art was pragmatic, representational, and served to convey information or accounts.

Cave paintings also represent objects or creatures in the world and communicate early forms of narrative, as they often involve a sense of movement or action. The earliest known cave paintings were discovered at the Chauvet Cave in the Ardèche valley of southern France, with the first images dating back to around 30,000 B.C. (Clottes). Another group of paintings were discovered at Lascaux (15,000 B.C.) depicting similar themes and animal portraiture (Tedesco). These paintings related narratives of the hunt, family, rites of passage, and categorizations of species. These representations were early forms of written language. Not only did they convey the significance of the hunt and the value of various species of animals, but they also illustrated a
greater narrative, that of early man’s attempts to separate himself from animals. In *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*, Georges Bataille states: “Reindeer Age human figures, insistently acknowledging that profound but paradoxical separation between man and animal, seem almost to imply a systematic effort to preserve man from the naturalism which, when it was a question of representing animals, achieved astonishing perfection” (115-16). *Lions Hunting Bison* (see Fig. 1) depicts observations of life, not man hunting beast, but animal instincts in action (Clottes).

![Figure 1: Lions Hunting Bison, Chauvet Cave. A pride of lions hunt bison, one of the rarest scenes ever found in Paleolithic art. (Clottes)](image)

Although cave paintings were not read in a strictly linear way, there were guidelines for their interpretation, just as there are guidelines in “reading” art today. The narrative was fairly circular, but because the reader knew how to read the painting, the circular reading was also linear, even though it does not move in the traditional left to right pattern that we have now come to expect. The portrayal of these lions and bison shows the lions (on the right side of the frame moving towards the bison on the left) as predatory; it also emphasizes the movement and the chaos involved in the hunt. Human figures were depicted differently, although often in animal
masks, and the artists’ subjects were mainly animals, showing what was important from their perspective; this suggested that the artists saw themselves as separate from the animals they painted (Bataille 115). Although the sjužet was lacking chronology and linear structure, we are able to construct a chronological narrative discourse, the fabula, of the hunt in our minds. Although still images, paintings like these are nevertheless able to tell a story.

Medieval painting was another early form of visual narrative (after oral language was developed but before everyone could read written text) whose reading method had to be learned, creating its own expectations for the viewer. Whether it was in a three-panel triptych or a single panel with a single figure repeated representing the chronological life of a saint, the reading was sometimes circular, like the cave paintings, while maintaining a linear narrative. For example, a panel from a triptych\(^7\), *The Blessed Agostino Novello Saves a Child Fallen from Its Cradle* (see Fig. 2), attributed to Simone Martini, shows the action of the narrative with outstretched hand, prayer, and the scholarly saint almost breaking through the painting to assist in the rescue of a fallen child. In the lower part of the painting we seem to get a glimpse of the child, healthy again, and all is well and calm. Several of these panels are in two parts—repeating the same figures to emphasize a continuation of the action, in fact the resolution. In this case we read from top to bottom but the narrative is still cohesive and linear.

\(^7\) In *Medieval Painting* P. Francastel cites this painting as a panel from a triptych (c. 1330) from church of Sat’ Agostino, Siena (129).
In churches, paintings often adorned the walls, meant to be read in a linear fashion but would have actually been read in the order they were seen. Although the images were originally controversial, in a letter defending religious paintings, St. Gregory the Great wrote: “Painting is admissible in churches, in order that those who are unlettered may yet read by gazing at the walls what they cannot read in books” (as quoted in Hinks 97). Although the paintings no longer exist, historic records provide detailed information about wall paintings for the church at Ingelheim by Louis the Pious; the left wall had scenes from the Old Testament and the right wall corresponding scenes from the New Testament (Hinks 100). Although they appeared in chronological order, the artist could not really control the order in which they were read.

Visual communication has remained important while evolving over time and it often attempts to express and communicate emotions and ideas on a basic level, providing the viewer with a more instant internal response than abstract symbols or words. However, the receiver’s interpretation of any visual symbol can often be as subjective as, or more so than any verbal or written communication involving a fully developed language. We rely heavily on visuals in our culture to communicate (as directly as it is feasible) and they have a great impact on our
societies, although often going unnoticed, such as in advertising, both print and electronic mass-media. Visuals carry pathos, affective information, appealing to our emotional response before processing meaning. Because our culture is so bombarded with visuals from television, billboards, magazines, signs, photographs, we hardly notice them, but they infiltrate our thoughts and feelings. Visuals often combine with other modes such as oral, written, or representative communication, as body language and speech, to sway our emotions, add meaning to message, create irony and metaphor, and allow us to see meaning behind words. Think of the way an American flag is placed behind political speakers, the authority the presidential seal has on the podium, and the way we know someone does not mean what she or he says by her or his stance, shifting eyes, or facial expression. Oral communication is more powerful in person because of these other, more visual factors; although language is still a medium through which we must express ourselves, combined with body language, expression, and tone, it can be very effective.

**Oral Language**

Oral communication came before written communication and has been exceedingly more present than written language. “Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages—possibly tens of thousands—spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all” (Ong 7). Early narratives were dependent on memorization and passed from person to person, embellished with the body language, facial expressions, and vocal fluctuations possible in this type of storytelling. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, “thought of writing as a kind of complement to oral speech, not as a transformer of verbalization” (Ong 5).
Oral communication is fallible but extremely effective in conveying basic wants and needs, such as “Pass the salt.” The more complicated or emotionally driven the situation, the more difficult it becomes to find “just the right words,” and often we express our thoughts orally before entirely processing them, particularly in strong emotional responses. Ong points out that the understanding of oral language and its relation to written and other technologically mediated language does not come easy. As he argues:

Understanding the relations of orality and literacy and the implications of the relations is not a matter of instant psychohistory or instant phenomenology. It calls for wide, even vast, learning, painstaking thought and careful statement. Not only are the issues deep and complex, but they also engage our own biases. We—readers of books such as this—are so literate that it is very difficult for us to conceive of an oral universe of communication or thought except as a variant of a literate universe. (2)

In order to understand the move from oral culture to written and print culture and the current electronic culture, what Ong defines as an age of “second orality,” it is essential that we look at the foundations of orality and writing. Ong says, in fact, that “Our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age, not earlier. Contrasts between electronic media and print have sensitized us to the earlier contrast between writing and orality” (3). Because our current electronically mediated culture necessarily depends on visual, oral and written communication, it has brought us back to a point of understanding each medium and the necessity of each form as well as its contributions to the others. This
resembles the way elevators made high-rise buildings possible while the buildings necessitated the invention and continuing evolution of the elevator.

**Written Language and Multimodal Communication**

In *When Writing Met Art*, Schmandt-Besserat illustrates several early intersections of writing and art, including votive statues with inscriptions and meaning. She emphasizes the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic\(^8\) statuettes: “the sculptures gave presence to the departed, and the inscriptions granted them speech” (85). She underscores their significance because “they document the beginning of writing as a full-fledged communication system” (85). She also remarks on how the stele of Hammurabi,\(^9\) carved sometime before 1750 B.C. (see Fig. 3) used text, laid out in columns (88), and image in a new way: “The stele of Hammurabi keeps the two media entirely separate. The relief is devoid of inscriptions, and the text spreads uninterrupted; even so writing and images are closely juxtaposed” (90-91). This monument is considered “the epitome of the interface between writing and art in the ancient Near East” (87); certainly a significant ancient example of multimodal art.

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\(^8\) This term refers to the Early Dynastic II period [2750-2600] (the beginning of the sculptural tradition of votive figures) and the Early Dynastic III period (2600-2340 B.C.) when these figures reached their climax in Mesopotamia (Schmandt-Besserat 74).

\(^9\) King Hammurabi, who ruled Babylon between 1792-1750 B.C. commissioned the monument, in order to commit not only his image but also his name and legal verdicts to stone (Schmandt-Besserat 87).
Written language, growing out of our need for symbols and keeping records, while giving us time to process and write down our thoughts, allows for words to be less impulsive and more controlled. Writing itself can be compared to current technological tools of communication. While discussing Plato’s view of writing as an alien technology, Ong states:

We find it difficult to consider writing to be a technology as we commonly assume printing and the computer to be…. Writing is in a way the most drastic of the three technologies. It initiated what print and computers only continue, the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent spaces, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist. (82)

Writing, as Ong points out, “is completely artificial” (82) compared to oral communication. Although writing also possesses its own stylistic means of suggesting and emphasizing meaning, it lacks important physical and verbal cues, such as facial expression and tone of voice that can often assist the receiver in a greater understanding. The move from oral literacy to written texts changes all the rules of communication, as does the move from writing to print, and from print to
electronic media. This could be seen as a negative, since, as established earlier, visual cues and bodily communication combined with speech often provide us with a deeper understanding. Yet Ong argues that the artificial nature of writing is a positive: “Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness” (82).

Before print, texts were transcribed by hand, most often by monks, and thus considered rare and sacred. They were exclusive, available only to the higher classes who were educated and able to afford them. The Gutenberg Bible (1455) (see Fig. 4) was the first significant text to go to press with the invention of printing.10

![Figure 4: Gutenberg Bible (ca. 1455), Lenox Copy, New York Public Library.](image)

This new technology changed distribution and cost, thereby changing the “elite” and sacred status of books to something that everyone (at least the literate classes) could own; society as a whole was changed (Schillingsburg 1). In his introduction to From Gutenberg to Google, Peter Schillingsburg states:

As I stood looking at copies of the first book printed from moveable type 500 years ago—its beauty, its endurance—I had a vision in the form of a question:

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10 The Gutenberg Bible, nearly 1,300 pages, was printed in Mainz, Germany by Johann Gutenberg (ca. 1390s-1468) in the 1450s.
where, in 500 years, would anyone stand to look at a museum display of the first
electronic book and would the words “endurance” and “beauty” come to mind?
The question may have a breathtaking answer, though I do not know what it is. (I)

What Schillingsburg refers to throughout most of his book are electronically archived texts
(including the William Blake archive) and scholarly editions. This is not what is now referred to
as electronic literature. “Endurance” would apply to these electronically archived texts
(transferring scholarly texts to the internet such as in the Blake archive) and, in time, electronic
literature as well (scholars of electronic literature are currently working on a way to preserve e-
texts). As far as “beauty,” there is something inherently elegant in this machine in front of me,
with plastic buttons for expressing my thoughts and a backlit screen on which to read them. Just
as the technology of the elevator endures while ever changing, and as a medium of transportation
possesses a certain technological grace and aesthetic, all media potentially possess an endurance
and beauty similar to this first printed text, or any printed text for that matter. For what we call
electronic literature, the multimodal communication of orality, text, and image can now move,
change per the reader’s interaction; words, images, movement, and sound combine in what I
would call a beautiful experience.

Illuminated manuscripts, some early printed texts, and some early authors, such as
William Blake, added image to text with the “tools” of technology, much as early votive statues
or the stele of Hammurabi had done. “The Tyger,” from Blake’s Songs of Experience,”
illustrates the metaphor in his poem and the fine balance between aesthetic and creative beast
(see Fig. 5). The image of the tiger here can represent the natural inspiration of the writer/artist,
although the innocent looking drawing does not quite match the powerfulness described in the
poem. The branches of the tree reach out and almost combine with the handwritten words, further emphasizing the connection between poetry and nature.

Figure 5: "The Tyger" by William Blake (1794) (Traumann).

Blake’s page design suggests a way of adding emotion or feeling by embellishing font to illustrate its suggestive importance or adding images to enhance the written word, as physical gestures and expressions were missing from the communication. In order for the written word to convey message as well as attitude and emotion, authors such as Blake added other media that would convey and emphasize the message—another early form of multimodal communication.

When the first books were printed, people must have experienced a sense of loss. Here before them, instead of hand drawn illustrations and handwritten text, was a mechanically reproduced text. The hand of the author and artist was no longer clearly visible, changing the emphasis from author to medium and reader in Phelan’s ever-changing feedback loop (see my introduction). Texts were now available to most everyone, a feat re-realized today with the
accessibility of works on the Internet; yet without the hand of the artist, as in a print reproduction of a famous painting without brushstrokes, the mark of the author/artist was disappearing.

Just as the printing press caused major social change, current technologies have brought about a more impulsive and instant written communication with e-mail and text message, allowing for the spontaneity of emotion more closely related to verbal communication but without the physical cues to guide us, leaving us to infer tone and meaning from words on a screen—an electronic medium but a medium all the same.

**Language as Obstacle**

Language, in all its forms, is a medium for communication, but it nonetheless continually hinders our utopian hopes of a direct transmission of ideas and thoughts from one person to another. All media stand between our thoughts and our expression of them, yet we have no alternative; we must use tools to communicate.

Language is an obstacle blocking pure sensation, the direct intimate communication from one being to another. As Jean Starobinski states in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*: “Anything that prevents things and people from appearing to be transparent to his [or her] desire takes on the value of an evil omen, a sign of hostile intent, which discloses what it is intended to hide” (222). Authors and artists have struggled to close the gap of subjective communication, attempting to transmit ideas and emotions to others through the use of metaphor, visuals, emotions, and reader/viewer involvement; each movement, period, genre, and individual has privileged various ways of achieving this goal. Conventions such as representation, style, linear narrative and plot have been utilized in accordance with reader/viewer expectations at any particular historical moment in hopes of communicating more effectively—not just in literature but in our daily communications such as an office memo, a phone call, or this dissertation. Yet,
any medium is a potential obstacle to this universal desire to have one’s ideas communicated clearly. Language is not only an obstacle but a conduit for communication, often enhancing it.

Authors attempt to express an internal idea or emotion—trying to find just the right words to get the message across; artists attempt to paint or sculpt an intimate feeling or vision to convey a message that is not always received as she or he intended. As technology advances we rely on it increasingly for communication, using even cell phones, text messaging, and social networks to maintain personal relationships. Since we are often able to convey intangible creative concepts, we continue to hope that media or multimodal expression will accomplish the goal of a more direct, less subjective means of communication. However, every medium, with its own unique enabling potential, also comes with its own unique set of limitations and complications.

Overcoming the obstacles that keep us from transparent communication, from the ability to see the world from another’s point of view, is a constant existential struggle. As Jean-Paul Sartre argued, “man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity” (29). We cannot escape our own subjective view of the world, colored by our unique experience and perspective; we can never see the world from another’s point of view or have ours completely known. This frustration over the inability to directly communicate our true selves, our ideas, our desires, limits us but also drives us to write, to create, and to seek out new modes of exchange to improve our chances at intersubjective communication.

In Plato’s analogy of the cave, the viewer/receiver sees first the shadows on the wall and believes them to be reality, then the symbols that in the light of the fire project the shadows, which could be seen as language; then the realization of Truth comes when the viewer/receiver goes beyond these representations, leaves the cave, and seeks the Truth of the world in an
unmediated way. The more representational a symbol of Truth is, the further we are removed from the reality of it, of being able to see beyond the shadows, the symbols, and stepping out of the cave into reality (Plato 312). Reality, however, is also an imperfect copy of the ideal essences. Representation, according to Aristotle, can give us an essential representation of reality and even a superior connection with it. Representational language, oral or written, and artistic representations of narrative or feeling function in similar ways, distancing us from the “real” through subjective mediation, but they also allow a process of actualization in which reality is recreated in a way that makes it available to us and makes us understand it better. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse argues that “To Plato of the later dialogues and to Aristotle, the modes of Being are modes of movement—transition from potentiality to actuality, realization” (127). The receiver inevitably interprets symbols subjectively and the author has little control over what meaning is transferred. Unfortunately these representations, symbols, the media through which we communicate, through which we view much of the world, are the only means we have and so we continue our attempts at more complete communication. Also fortunately—these indirect and imaginative means of understanding the world allow us to see “reality” more fully, filling in its gaps, and foregrounding its structure.

In the past, we have relied heavily on the traditions of narrative, plot, and “rules” to guide us through the processes of communication, whether transmitting or receiving, oral or written. As Brooks argues:

Plot is, first of all, a constant of all written and oral narrative, in that a narrative without at least a minimal plot would be incomprehensible. Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements—incidents, episodes, actions—of a narrative: even such
loosely articulated forms as the picaresque novel display devices of interconnectedness, structural repetitions that allow us to construct a whole; and we can make sense of such dense and seemingly chaotic texts as dreams because we use interpretive categories that enable us to reconstruct intentions and connections, to replot the dream as narrative. It would then, be perfectly plausible to undertake a typology of plot and its elements from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* onward to the new novel and the “metafictions” of our time. (5)

We look for (and find) plot within works because we need it to make sense of things, provide us with an order to the world. Brooks does concede that there are time periods when plot is more significant. When a plot is more ambiguous, the author’s intention less obvious, the *sjužet* less familiar, the reader is free to create his or her own narrative, or *fabula*, in keeping with his or her knowledge of the rules, his or her training and expectations. While these rules have made the act of communicating within expected boundaries understandable in a way, they may not encompass larger, more emotional or intimate ideas that are best communicated via non-traditional structures. Non-linear texts or works of art can create multimodal narratives in place of, or in addition to, the traditional linear narrative arc, involving also the readers’ experiences with the text and the *a priori* knowledge they bring with them to that experience. With more subjective story lines, the reader becomes (w)reader (to use again Landow’s term), participant, co-author of the work, and, thus, more emotionally and intellectually invested in it.

To overcome the obstacles of representation, symbol, language, and medium, we must work for understanding, with what tools we have, towards actuality, realization of Truth. Including the viewer/receiver in the process of creation, in the feedback loop and the
transmission of the message, it is possible to work towards this goal. What we seek is a “language of power,” in Paul de Man’s words, a “pure effect rather than cognition” (89). In discussing de Man in The Shape of the Signifier, Walter Benn Michaels refers to this as “an encounter with language as it ‘frees itself of its constraints and discovers within itself a power no longer dependent on the restrictions of cognition’” (8)11. This power of language, however, came at a price since, according to de Man, it alienates us from outside reality by creating its own reality. The “pure effect” of language is what Starobinski also emphasizes in his discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of “pure sensation”:

The mist or veil that comes between him [Rousseau] and things in the outside world is dispelled only if he recovers the pure sensation of the thing or if the real object becomes an image in memory or reverie. Pure sensation involves the world’s giving itself without opposition from us. We create a horizon in our imagination from which things offer themselves to us without effort on our part.

(221)

The way authors/artists and readers/viewers approach narrative has continuously been adjusted in an attempt to capture the imagination and transcend the obstacle of a mediating language. In an elevator we may feel restricted by our passivity and our enclosure; in a similar way, some authors have wanted to branch out, not limit themselves to the up and down of traditional linear literature but to see where technology, including print text, can take them. As a first step, both authors and readers must overcome the obstacle of traditional narrative

11 When discussing the power of language, de Man also states: “to understand a text is one thing, to feel its force is another” (9), which also goes along with the “pure effect” or “pure sensation” discussion that follows.
expectations. In “Nonlinearity and Literary Theory,” Espen J. Aarseth argues that “To present nonlinear textuality as a phenomenon relevant to textual theory, one must rethink the concept of textuality to comprise linear as well as nonlinear texts” (53). Traditional expectations, on both the author’s and reader’s, include beginnings, middles, and endings—starting with exposition and character development, encountering conflicts along the way to a climax, and finding at the end some closure or resolution to the problems dramatized.

Narrative theorists have spent years defining and classifying these elements and instructing us on how to analyze texts based on these expectations and standards. In Experiencing Fiction, narratologist James Phelan analyzes authors such as Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, and Ian McEwan based on a model that necessarily includes beginnings, middles, and endings.

Phelan classifies Jane Austen’s narrative as “narrative comedy.” He describes the reader’s expectations created by her novels as follows: “As everyone knows, Austen works with the marriage plot; all her novels trace the routes that her female protagonists take to the altar. In all cases, she uses that marriage plot in the service of narrative comedy: that is, she asks her audience both to desire and expect the marriage and to take pleasure in its achievement” (28). By following the narrative and social conventions of the time, Austen provided her readers with the conclusion they expected. Unlike a mystery novel that a reader might read in order to discover the “who done it?,” readers of Austen’s novels read through plot points to discover, not the end, which is expected, but the humorous events that will lead the heroine to the altar.

The beginning of a novel like Pride and Prejudice contains the exposition: the introduction of the main characters, their social standing, moral character, and temperaments. The middle offers a twist or epiphany of sorts—in the case of Elizabeth Bennet the realization
that, in fact, she has been unfairly judgmental (prejudiced) and that Mr. Darcy is actually of upstanding moral character while her other possible suitor, Mr. Wickham, also misjudged, is the true villain. The plot consists of overcoming various obstacles between Elizabeth and the altar, while also including the courtship of two other couples. The obstacles include Elizabeth’s family, particularly her unruly sister Lydia, and other circumstantial and social blocks to true love and happiness. Not only does Elizabeth Bennet face outward obstacles to her journey towards marriage, but she also struggles with her internal character along the way. The reader needs this internal conflict to stay interested in the external events, to feel invested in the journey. No matter where the narrative travels, we know how it will end. Not one but two Bennet sisters end up matched and married to worthy (and wealthy) men. This is what we expect and we are rewarded and satisfied as the narrative comes to its logical conclusion, much like a mystery novel (or a fairy tale), neatly wrapped up in the end.

Linear narrative continued to play an imperative role while also expanding into new forms. Defying reader expectations, the modernists employed a free-flowing inner monologue form in an attempt to recreate in their structures organic human thought. As Brooks argues, “with the advent of Modernism came an era of suspicion toward plot” (7). Although the modernists still employed plot, they were no longer dependent on them, and form or discourse (sjužet) gained precedence. For instance, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* develops an elegant flowing inner monologue of the main character, Clarissa, in a natural train-of-thought manner:

And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day

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12 This struggle with the inner character occurs also in Austen’s novel *Emma*, where the heroine must overcome her own weaknesses in order to be “worthy” of her groom.
wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans (but one must economize, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth), and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. (5)

Woolf continues to overwhelm the reader with sentences like these that capture the inner character of her protagonist as no other point of view could reveal. Yet not just her protagonist—for other characters have their turn at first person inner monologue explication as well. Sometimes the inner-voices are tagged with “he thought” and “she thought” until the reader feels as if she or he is in the room with the characters at the party and hearing all the thoughts behind the scenes as well as the outward dialogue. This form was unusual and unexpected (though anticipated by Joyce) and although the plot was still very present, it was not foregrounded; the more conventional style of storytelling was replaced with an intimate, jumbled glimpse into Clarissa’s life. Although satisfied by the plot, fairly simple—as we know from the first sentence
Clarissa is throwing a party and “would buy the flowers herself” (3)—the detail, the form, the fragmented thoughts, are extraordinary.

*Mrs. Dalloway* was composed shortly after James Joyce’s novel *Ulysses*, which anticipated later experiments with nonlinearity and intertextual references. Both authors are considered seminal contributors to modernism and their experimental style opened the gate for even further narrative explorations. Postmodernists such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Italo Calvino, Doris Lessing, and Robert Coover added to this experiment with nonlinear text already utilized by modernist authors such as Woolf and Joyce, emphasizing the materiality of the text, intertextuality, increased interaction on the part of the reader, narrative self-reflection and meta-fiction—all challenging reader expectations and reader/author relationships.

According to Brooks we are still immersed in narrative plots, on television and in comic strips for instance. As he notes: “If we cannot do without plots, we nonetheless feel uneasy about them, and feel obliged to show up their arbitrariness, to parody their mechanisms, while admitting our dependence on them” (7). He further argues that until we stop conveying information through storytelling, we will be dependent on the conventions we have been trained to utilize for understanding plots and dependent on the plots themselves (7). However, while postmodern authors may employ plot, utilizing some of the “rules” and conventions (or parodying them), and while dependence and habit may lead the reader to invent or impose plot where it is missing, postmodernism certainly succeeds in shaking up the narrative and breaking the line that accompanies it. In Coover’s work, for example, he takes well-known plots in children’s fairy tales, including *Briar Rose*, and plays with their linear structure, adding perspectives from various characters and touching on more adult themes, such as feminism and sexuality.
Challenging narrative and reader expectations was not only a matter of a rebellion against linear forms of reading. It also translated an existential human dilemma: if man cannot overcome human subjectivity, then narrative is necessarily ambiguous, intertextual, and fragmented as human thought. By relying on the readers’ subjective experience and interpretation of meaning in a text, postmodern authors often gave up a sense of author intention to allow the reader to become a co-narrator, co-creator of the text. Postmodern texts leave much of the meaning open to interpretation; Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, for instance, allows the reader to follow (or not follow) clues, continuously expecting to “solve” the mystery along with the main character. The ending of the novel leaves the reader up in the air, with additional tasks to resolve; they must decide the fate of the protagonist and what actually took place and, additionally, the significance, if any, of what has transpired. In Coover’s story “The Babysitter” we get the same type of experience although even more ambiguous as he merges fantasy and reality, again from various perspectives and leaves the reader to decide the “facts” in the case. Hypertext is an excellent example of postmodern literature, as it allows the author to map out these possibilities through the medium, offering physical choices to the reader and the ability to change the narrative as they read. Electronic literature also typically utilizes the same elements of postmodernism, including fragmentation, nonlinearity, intertextuality, interactivity, ambiguous endings, and sometimes meta-fiction.

In opposition to the idea that a text must have a fixed beginning, middle, and end, Aarseth argues that “the lessons of nonlinear literature show us a textuality different from our readings (and our readings of ‘reading’), more fundamental than our messages, and through the evolving rituals and technologies of use and distribution, subject to many types of change” (53). He does not see linear and nonlinear texts as binary opposites, but throughout his writings uses
the term “text” in a broader sense than more tradition textual semantic theorists. This is where perhaps the author/reader relationship, the reader’s subjective interpretation and the materiality of the medium, take precedence over the message or at least become equally significant. We will see this happen in the review of postmodern literature and electronic literature that follows in chapters two and three. The feedback loop will shift to emphasize medium and reader as reading and writing become more of a horizontal experience, a digressive sprawl in place of the traditional vertical elevator trajectory.
Chapter 2
Nonlinear Print Text: Reader/Author Relationships
(Or the Gaps that Need Filling and the (W)Readers Who Fill Them)

…the convergence of voices, past and present, the snatches of experience that become the grain that irritates, the core that we pearl over to become the stuff of fiction.
—J. Yellowlees Douglas (183)

The Nonlinear

Continuing but also redefining modernism, postmodernism revels in the non-linear. The elevator here no longer travels up and down in predictable ways but side to side, diagonally, and often follows the whims of its passengers or sometimes the mechanism itself. As a text becomes less predictable, the narrative experience changes—the feedback loop (see introduction) shifts to focus more on the experience of the reader rather than the author’s intention. In his introduction to The Shape of the Signifier, Walter Ben Michaels states: “Readers for whom the same text can have different meanings are not readers who have different beliefs about what the text means; they are readers who have different responses to the text, whatever it means. They do not, that is, have different interpretations of the text; they have different experiences of the text” (8). The presentation of postmodern texts often plays with structure, chronological time, sequence, perspective, and plot; as the $sjužet$ becomes less predictable, the $fabula$ becomes more subjective and up to the reader’s construction and interpretation. As Aarseth’s definition illustrates: “A nonlinear text is an object of verbal communication that is not simply one fixed sequence of letters, words, and sentences but one in which the words or sequence of words may differ from reading to reading because of the shape, conventions, and mechanisms of the text” (51). Instead of a completed journey from one floor to another, in a nonlinear work every journey may result in a previously undiscovered destination.
Still, as Brooks argues, “Plot is why we read” although it “has been disdained as the element of narrative that least sets off and defines high art” (4). Postmodern literature seems to move away from the significance of plot to place more emphasis on unexpected structures, yet plot is inescapable and, as readers, we will construct it from whatever pieces we are provided or invent it even if the text discourages us from it. As Brooks argues further:

Plot is, first of all, a constant of all written and oral narrative, in that a narrative without at least a minimal plot would be incomprehensible. Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements—incidents, episodes, actions—of a narrative: even such loosely articulated forms as the picaresque novel display devices of interconnectedness, structural repetitions that allow us to construct a whole; and we can make sense of such dense and seemingly chaotic texts as dreams because we use interpretive categories that enable us to reconstruct intentions and connections, to replot the dream as narrative. It would, then, be perfectly plausible to undertake a typology of plot and its elements from the Iliad to the Odyssey onward to the new novel and the “metafictions” of our time. (5)

So although the materiality of the text and the media through which it is presented changes, and no matter how it is transferred from one medium to another, the reader will find narrative and meaning, the fabula. The materiality and the media become more significant in postmodern narrative, electronic narrative, and installation art, as I will demonstrate through the next chapters.
The materiality of any text has an impact whether we are aware of it or not. Certain choices made by the author or publisher can change the reader experience; cover art, font, headers and footers—every aspect of design is included in the medium of expression. This is true of traditional linear narratives, whether they are print texts, ballets, ballads, or films. In postmodern print and electronic literature the materiality of the texts is often further highlighted to create feeling or metaphor, where, as Marshall McLuhan put it, “the medium is the message” (19), or at least significant to the message in terms of the feedback loop.

Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* emphasizes the materiality of the book by providing a nonlinear reading experience. What might be considered a print hypertext, *Hopscotch* contains a linear novel in the first half of the book and nonlinear supplemental chapters in the second half. To engage in the supplemental chapters of the book, the reader must physically flip back and forth from the main narrative to the supplemental chapter that corresponds to the linear chapter (these are not presented in order). In the “Table of Instructions” Cortázar warns:

In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all.

The first can be read in a normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56, at the close of which there are three garish little stars which stand for the words *The End.* Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience.

The second should be read by beginning with Chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter. (Cortázar 1)
He then adds that if the reader becomes confused, he or she may consult a list of the linear and supplemental chapters in the order they are to be read. He concludes with “Each chapter has its number at the top of every right-hand page to facilitate the search” (1).

Although the reader has the choice to read only the first nonlinear narrative, it is difficult to resist “hopscotching” back and forth between the linear and supplemental texts. It is this physical moving from linear chapters to randomly numbered chapters in the second half of the book—flipping back and forth—that creates meaning and metaphor. This is achieved not only with the supplemental, intertextual, and additional characters and narratives but also the physical interaction of the reader as well.

In *Hopscotch* materiality contributes to the message, adding a layer of metaphor, while giving the reader options (two ways of reading the text) and making the reader a co-conspirator in the development of meaning. Sometimes the supplemental chapters tell the reader who is speaking or writing, as in Chapter 107, which is “WRITTEN by Morelli in the hospital” (461). More often, the chapters are from no particular perspective, such as in Chapter 104:

Life as a *commentary* of something else we cannot reach, which is there within reach of the leap we will not take.

Life, a ballet based upon a historical theme, a story based upon a deed that once had been alive, a deed that had lived based upon a real deed.

Life, a photograph of the noumenon, a possession in the shadows (woman? monster?), life, pimp of death, splendid deck of cards, ring of forgotten keys that a pair of palsied hands degrade into a sad game of solitaire. (458)
The “hopscotching” between sections of text also provides the reader reflection time, to contemplate the often philosophical, ambiguous, and intertextual supplemental segments—including 119, a snippet from London’s *The Observer* and 128, a quote from Artaud, in the original French—in relation to the main narrative. These intertextual fragments in the supplemental chapters leave pieces of the narrative open to interpretation; depending on the *fabula* the reader creates for himself or herself, the story could ultimately change but the overall plot of the main novel remains.

It is not only the material structure of the book that can change the reading experience, but also the micro-level sentence and paragraph structure that can be nonlinear—create meaning and metaphor. For example, in a linear print text like Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, his word, sentence, and paragraph styles create confusion and dreamlike description as in: “Trying to overcome his disturbance, he grasped at the voice he was losing, the life that was leaving him, the memory that was turning into a petrified polyp….” (397). Throughout the novel, García Márquez utilizes ambiguity of character (having many with the same name), time, and a combination of the realistic with the fantastic; even the very words he chooses point to memory, swirl and confuse. The overall effect is a metaphor of memory—providing the reader with the sensation of the fragmented intangibility of memory, a major theme of the novel.

Fragmentation, usually created by sentence and paragraph structure and the materiality of the text, can be compared to art collage, causing the reader/viewer to make connections among potentially disparate words, objects, or lexias (fragmented pieces of text much like a vignette). As Vannevar Bush says of the organic associations of the brain: “Man cannot hope fully to duplicate this mental process artificially, but he certainly ought to be able to learn from it” (44).
In the same way the human brain makes connections, the reader/viewer fills in these gaps in art or literature with his or her subjective experience, thus building a narrative world, or *fabula*, from the pieces she or he is presented.

Robert Coover’s short stories are often fragmented—mainly lexias of text with breaking space, merging perspectives, time, and possibilities, separated by white space that the reader must fill in with interpretation. As Thomas E. Kennedy points out, “A Coover story functions much like a cubist painting: presenting myriad points of view at once and showing us finally that reality is *not* fixed, as conventional literature would have it, that it is *not* a single, linear event, based on cause and effect, that leads through complication to climax and resolution” (9). For example, in his stories “The Magic Poker” and “The Elevator,” Coover utilizes lexias of text to meddle with the reader’s sense of time, perspective, and reality. “The Magic Poker” uses fragmented lexias, arranged in a nonlinear fashion to create ambiguous time and perspective, repeating scenes from various perspectives or with different possible outcomes. Purposefully confusing the reader, Coover adds to the mystery of the narrative by merging the perspectives of the various characters into one story, emphasizing the subjectivity of reality while also illustrating the combined experience of human beings. For instance, he creates two possible scenarios for the same set of situations, provided in two separate sections of the text. The characters are two girls and a caretaker’s son, who may or may not be the first person narrator. One early lexia, which could be from either girl’s point of view, describes her finding the poker:

She crouches, haunches flexing golden above the bluegreen grass, and kisses the strange poker, kisses its handle and its long rusted shaft. Nothing. Only a harsh unpleasant taste. I am a fool, she thinks, a silly romantic fool. Yet why else has
she been diverted to this small meadow? She kisses the tip—POOF! ‘Thank you,’ he says, smiling down at her. He bows to kiss her cheek and take her hand. (25)

Three lexias later a similar scene: “She kisses the rusted iron poker, kisses its ornate handle, its long rusted shaft, kisses the tip. Nothing happens. Only a rotten taste in her mouth. Something is wrong. ‘Karen!’” (26). The fragmentary nature of the narrative leaves the reader to draw her or his own conclusions of setting, characters, time, and narrative, constructing one of multiple possible fabulas. In these examples, for instance, the reader cannot be sure if the first lexia is a fantasy or another outcome of the same situation or another perspective from the other female character.

The first person narrator explains the creation of the setting, which could also mean that he or she is an authorial narrator. For example, the first lexia of the story begins: “I wander the island, inventing it. I make a sun for it, and trees—pines and birch and dogwood and firs—and cause the water to lap the pebbles of its abandoned shores” (20). The section ends with: “I impose a hot midday silence, a profound and heavy stillness. But anything can happen” (20). Already we are introduced to the idea that in this narrative anything is possible. A couple of pages later, he interjects again: “I arrange the guest cabin. I rot the porch and tatter the screen door and infest the walls. I tear out the light switches, gut the mattresses, smash the windows, and shit on the bathroom floor. I rust the pipes, kick in the papered walls, unhinge doors. Really, there’s nothing to it. In fact, it’s a pleasure” (22). This leaves it up to the reader to decide if it is the caretaker’s son lurking or the author arranging the details of this place for the two girls to discover. The intermittent use of first person narration of a character (or the author) watching the girls adds to the intensity and heightens the tension. The multiple possibilities within the
narrative create an ambiguous world where the reader begins to consider that all of the possibilities could be taking place simultaneously or, at least, in one of the characters’ imagination. Coover himself acknowledges how narratives are changing:

    Our ways of looking at the world and of adjusting to it through fictions are changing…. Our old faith—one might better say our old sense of constructs derived from myths, legends, philosophies, fairy stories, histories, and other fictions which help to explain what happens to us from day to day, why our governments are the way they are, why our institutions have the character they have, why the world turns as it does—has lost its efficacy. Not necessarily is it false; it is just not as efficacious as it was. (as quoted in Evenson 11)

Coover’s stories often defy readerly expectations, especially of linearity; we arrive on the elevator, expect to move from lobby to destination but movement in an unexpected direction, stops on floors we did not push buttons for, and finally an uncertain destination leaves us with subjective closure to say the least. Coover changes narratives, creates unexpected twists in the traditional fairy-tale plot, offers multiple points of view and multiple possibilities, combining reality with subjective perception(s) of that reality. Coover, as did Cortázar, turns the narrative into a hypertext with a multi-directional plot, problematizing any form of linear narration.

His story “The Elevator” seems to encapsulate some of the postmodern ideas of readership, while the text itself embodies non-linear narrative despite its linearly numbered “order”:

    As the automatic doors press together and the elevator begins its slow complaining ascent, Martin muses absently on the categories. This small room, so
commonplace and so compressed, he observes with a certain melancholic satisfaction, this elevator contains them all: space, time, cause, motion, magnitude, class. Left to our own devices, we would probably discover them. The other passengers chatter with self-righteous smiles (after all, they are on time) about the weather, the elections, the work that awaits them today. They stand, apparently motionless, yet moving. Motion: perhaps that’s all there is to it after all. Motion and the medium. Energy and weighted particles. Force and matter. The image grips him purely. Ascent and the passive reorganization of atoms.

(129)

According to Coover, like a text the elevator “contains them all”; as readers we expect to passively “discover” or “unearth” a story just like in an elevator we passively expect to arrive at our destination. As for readers’ expectations, “The Elevator” uses numbered lexias, corresponding with the floors and elevator movement, providing a semblance of order and structure. The main concept of the story is embodied in a number (each corresponding to a floor) of possible scenarios and outcomes during one man’s elevator ride but they do not appear to be sequential but simultaneous, something probably unexpected for the reader. These scenes vary from fairly typical rides (or ones that start out typically), to other passenger/co-workers tormenting “oldarty Marty” (127), to death and sex fantasies involving the shaft or the elevator falling and the young elevator-operator girl. In the final lexia, Marty forgoes his usual ride and takes the stairs, possibly avoiding the elevator’s disastrous plunge. This type of ambiguity allows the reader to interpret the text in any number of ways, with Coover letting go of the control of that interpretation. Playing with the sjužet, Coover presents lexias with chronological numbers.
that contain multiple possible reconstructions of the story, or fabula, determined ultimately by the reader. The lexias could be describing every possible event on this particular morning or actual events combined with Marty’s fantasies as he rides the elevator; the final interpretation of whether the elevator is falling or not is left to the reader. This movement from author to reader in a feedback loop is a vital element in postmodern literature as well as in electronic texts.

Allowing the reader to piece together a narrative gives him or her an interactive role within the story being told. I chose the example of Coover’s “The Elevator” in particular, as my own narrative will have lexias in the print version and also use numbered floors with non-linear narrative in the electronic version (see Chapter 5).

This interactive experience provides the reader with subjective meaning, however it does not provide much as far as traditional narrative expectations, such as linear presentation of beginnings, middles, and endings. As readers we search for meaning in fragments and ambiguity, using our own experience and imagination to fill in those gaps—focusing on the void rather than the object—creating a narrative and bringing ourselves closer to Rousseau’s dream of “pure sensation.” As the sjužet, presentation of plot, becomes more fragmented and more gaps are present, readers must become more involved in the discourse of the text and contribute to the meaning-making, the construction of fabula, the story, as we have been trained to read this way and expect a meaningful narrative, whether it is clearly present or not.

Another postmodern text, and like Hopscotch a print hypertext, that highlights materiality with fragmentation is Vladimir Nabokov’s multi-genre Pale Fire. Written in the form of a poem and commentary, it is a profound satire on authorship, the author/reader relationship, and subjective truth. By providing a poem as the central work and “supplemental” footnotes as the main narrative, Nabokov asks his readers to consider where the truth lies and how we look for
meaning. Here we are asked to form our own subjective ideas while relying on the questionable trustworthiness of the second narrator, which might lead the reader to conclude that the meaning is in the connections we make to a text, our own experiences that we bring to our individual reading process. When discussing unicursal (linear and straightforward) and multicursal (non-linear and multidirectional) texts in his book *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen J. Aarseth argues that *Pale Fire*, like the footnote or supplemental text, can be both:

Perhaps a footnoted text can be described as multicursal on the micro level and unicursal on the macro level. Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, however, leaves the mode of cursality up to the reader, consisting of a foreword, a 999-line poem, a long commentary of notes addressing individual lines (but really telling the commentator’s story), and an index, it can be read either unicursally, straight through, or multicursally, by jumping between the comments and the poem. (8)

The idea of multicursal, nonlinear, texts, even a footnoted text, leaves the reader with more options and less closure than a linear text that begins with a foreword and ends with a resolution on the last page. What is lost in a multicursal text is that sense of finality and closure the reader has when he or she finishes the last page and know they have read every word. According to Walter J. Ong, “Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion. This sense affects literary creations and it affects analytical philosophical or scientific work” (132). However, a print text like *Pale Fire* leaves the reading path up to the readers—they may either read the poem straight through, focus on the footnotes and skip back and forth, or read the footnotes first. This creates multiple readings of the same text—mapped by subjective preference and more of a web-like, nonlinear story, what some might see as a labyrinth.
Espen J. Aarseth sees little or no difference in the labyrinths created in print or in electronic literature. In response to David Lodge’s statement that texts like *The Crying of Lot 49* are “Labyrinths without exits,” he states: “Here, the image of the labyrinth has become severely distorted. A Labyrinth without exit is a labyrinth without entrance; in other words, not a labyrinth at all” (*Cybertext* 7). Even though Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* is a linear text in that readers begin on the first page and end on the last, it is a labyrinth in that the journey contains twists and turns, the plethora of references take the reader out of the linear narrative, and the finality is ambiguous to say the least. There really is no closure at the end of the novel, or at least not one that the reader can verify or can see played out.

As in *The Crying of Lot 49*, one way for a text to be nonlinear and interactive is through intertext, another tool common in modernism and postmodernism that involves references or remediations of other texts, assumed to be in the reader’s knowledge, but not always. This referencing can add layers of meaning to the narrative as the reader makes connections to pieces of the puzzle outside of the page. According to Ong:

> Print ultimately gives rise to the modern issue of intertextuality, which is so central a concern in phenomenological and critical circles today. Intertextuality refers to a literary and psychological commonplace: a text cannot be created simply out of lived experience. A novelist writes a novel because he or she is familiar with this kind of textual organization of experience. (133)

Intertextuality places emphasis on the reader in the feedback loop and his or her ability to construct *fabula* from what the author has presented; whether it is recalling another work the reader has encountered, a historical event, or leaving the main body of the text to read an
explanatory footnote (as in Pale Fire) or supplementary chapter (as in Hopscotch), the choice to do so and the effort required are the reader’s.

James Joyce’s Ulysses, a transitional text between modernism and postmodernism, is a prime example of intertextuality. Although intertextual elements can occur within a linear text, they work to take the reader out of the text, either physically, as he or she consults another work or links outside of a hypertext, or in her or his mind, as they contemplate the additional frame of reference and how it relates to the current narrative. Joyce’s use of outside references creates another layer of meaning within the narrative and his modernist voice combined with the integration of references had a profound effect on future postmodern authors. Intertextuality existed previous to postmodernism but may have become a transitional element from modernism to postmodernism, as authors were reacting to the idea that everything had already been written and there was a need for a focus on individualism and experiment. As Ong states:

Manuscript culture has taken intertextuality for granted. Still tied to the commonplace tradition of the old oral world, it deliberately created texts out of other texts, borrowing, adapting, sharing the common, originally oral, formulas and themes, even though it worked them up into fresh literary forms impossible without writing. Print culture of itself has a different mindset. It tends to feel a work as “closed,” set off from other works, a unit in itself. Print culture gave birth to the romantic notions of “originality” and “creativity,” which set apart an individual work from other works even more, seeing its origins and meaning as independent of outside influence, at least ideally. When in the past few decades

13 Although the definition of “intertext” varies among theorists, from Barthes to Hutcheon, Ulysses stands out as the salient literary example. Other modernists have built literary works around rich intertexts, from Virginia Woolf’s Orlando to Eugene O’Neill’s Morning Becomes Electra. Earlier examples of intertext are of course present from Biblical to ancient Greek texts.
doctrines of intertextuality arose to counteract the isolationist aesthetics of a romantic print culture, they came as a kind of shock. They were all the more disquieting because modern writers, agonizingly aware of literary history and of the de facto intertextuality of their own works, are concerned that they may be producing nothing really new or fresh at all, that they may be totally under the “influence” of others’ texts. (133-34)

This is what postmodernists were reacting to—that everything had already been written. As Roland Barthes states, “Modernism begins with the search for a Literature which is no longer possible” (38). Postmodernism extended this concept into the realm of literature that defied expectations; texts broke away from linearity and expectation not only with plot and style, but structure and form, in an attempt to create something new. Why not heighten that idea by rewriting/remediating well-known works or narratives or including other authors, texts, and cultural references in their work?

As mentioned previously, Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* is a fundamental intertextual work, for some readers have required an additional guidebook to its multitude of references. Cultural references, such as to Huntley and Brinkley, the Beatles, Remedios Varo and allusions to other narratives such as *Oedipus Rex* and texts such as *The Book of the Dead*, all add layers of meaning and mystery to Pynchon’s narrative. Like the protagonist Oedipa’s journey and attempt to unravel a mystery through ambiguous and often chaotic clues, the reader of *The Crying of Lot 49* attempts to piece together a puzzle that is never solved and ends in entropy. In this way, Pynchon may have been commenting on reader expectations and the deconstruction movement in literary analysis. The manner in which readers create *fabula* from *sjužet*, depends
on close readings, down to even the smallest detail or clue, put together in an effort to find some coherence in the world the novel projects. With multiple intertextual references, the postmodernists often seem to be playing with this idea. Pynchon, in particular, provides an ample amount of sjužet, even making it fairly linear for the reader, and yet, no matter how much we pick apart the clues or details of the text, the resulting meaning is always subjective and Pynchon’s intentions ever hidden from view.

Other postmodern print authors such as Robert Coover, Angela Carter, and Jeanette Winterson often use intertextuality by reworking classic stories or historical figures to add context or bring about certain expectations or prior knowledge in the reader. Intertextuality still challenges readers, requiring them to do work, whether physically or mentally, to gain the full experience of the text. This requires putting aside the assumptions of how readers see traditional reading, allowing them to play a role in the process, affect meaning, and contribute to their own experience.

Similar to a nonlinear text that requires the reader to fill in the gaps of the fragmented text, to interact and challenge its assumptions, the move towards abstraction in art may also be said to do the same. In The Theater and Its Double, Antonin Artaud highlighted the frustration with “true expression”:

All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to dissimulate it. True expression hides what it makes manifest. It sets the mind in opposition to the real void of nature by creating in reaction a kind of fullness in thought. Or, in other terms, in relation to the manifestation-illusion of nature it creates a void of nature by creating in reaction a kind of fullness in thought. Or, in other terms, in relation to the manifestation-illusion of nature it
creates a void in thought. All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void. And the lucid language which obstructs the appearance of this void also obstructs the appearance of poetry in thought. That is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would reveal have more significance for the spirit than the lucidities of speech and its analytics. (Artaud 71)

The suggestion here is that abstract and ambiguous representations of thought might better express “true feeling,” or at least betray it less than with language. Images tend to provide a more direct emotional response, although they struggle to effectively communicate elements like plot and characterization that, for narrative, are perhaps better conveyed through verbal text. Because images can trigger a more visceral, uncritical response, they can also be more deceptive and manipulative of our emotions as well. Artaud suggests, however, that all powerful feeling produces a “void”—an emptiness resulting from the space between the artist or author’s project and the reader or viewer’s interpretation. This void can trigger the interactivity required to form meaning from a fragmented, nonlinear text or an abstract work of art. It is in that space between that we find the message. By using elements such as fragmentation, intertextuality, non-sequential or simultaneous time, labyrinthine structures and plots, and lack of closure, postmodern literature produces in the reader this sense of the void but also stirs the reader into action. It is in this void that the reader has increased interaction with the text, must fill in those spaces between fragments, form her or his own closure from pieces and ambiguity. The reader’s experience combines with the author/artist’s expression and through the interaction of two subjective experiences both are better understood.
**Author and Artist**

The feedback loop is inevitable, as is the medium through which we choose to attempt communication. By focusing on the medium we can shift the narrative emphasis from author to medium or reader. Although the medium may be highlighted and the reader’s role more significant, the author is still very present—in deciding what medium to use, how much reader participation to encourage, and in his or her own role in the narrative. As Michel Foucault argues: “The coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences” (101). As individuals struggling with expression, authors and artists work towards communicating those inner ideas to the reader or viewer of their work. When communicating, inevitably through a medium, authors give up a portion of their control over meaning and some even celebrate the subjective experience of the reader or viewer, composing often intentionally ambiguous work.

The feedback loop (Phelan) from author/artist to text/media to reader/viewer is malleable depending on the work, the intention of the author/artist, and the response of the reader/viewer. “Intentionality” can be interpreted as the attempt to convey the author or artist through the text, or other media, to the reader or viewer. The author or artist may use the medium, what de Man and other poststructuralists call the “materiality of the signifier,” to call attention to the physicality of the text and to provide a more feeling-based response over meaning (Michaels 60). To give up the author’s or artist’s control and focus on reader response would qualify as “anti-intentionality,” where the reader is the starting point on the feedback loop, his or her response to the work being the only reliable meaning there is and one that leaves the author out of it, to some extent at least. By contrast, direct “transmission,” a fantasy really, would involve the message
being conveyed somehow from medium to viewer—with the author or artist again not a priority in the feedback loop (Michaels 9). The focus becomes the reader and the reader’s subjective understanding of the narrative project or fabula, from what the author (intentionally) presented in the sjužet. However, these two areas will quite possibly never mean the same thing to author and reader, the space between is too vast; the most successful “transmission” we can hope for is that the author feels complete in his or her expression and the reader fulfilled in her or his meaning-making experience.

Whether an author or artist can ever fully convey his or her intention in a work is highly questionable. Even in postmodern literature, which often seems to cultivate a form of “anti-intentionality,” by which much of the meaning of the text is left up to the reader, the text has still been authored. Allowing the control of meaning to rest with the reader’s response is often a decision made by the author, the text being specifically presented as fragmented, ambiguous, and open to interpretation, but nonetheless authored. Some authorial intent would still be at work, even if it would consist of allowing the reader to have her or his subjective interpretation of the text or of emphasizing the contradictory interpretive possibilities in a text. The sjužet is intended by the author who plays, dismisses, or emphasizes structure or materiality for a purpose. There are most definitely postmodern literary texts, modernist art, and electronic works that leave the interpretation and sometimes the narrative up to the reader. But these works were still composed with a result in mind, if only to stimulate subjective interpretation. We can take the author or artist out of the feedback loop and focus on reader response to medium and its materiality, but the author or artist’s project is still the starting point, however unconscious or realized.

With intentionality, we are still far from the idea of clear “transmission” and interpretations will still be subjective and differ from reader to reader. It is usually not the point
of a work of literature or art to announce the intention of the author or artist, but only an attempt to dramatize a certain intention or direction. Depending on the ideas the author or artist is trying to dramatize, the medium he or she chooses can assist in this readerly interpretation through text, structure, visuals, audio, and varying levels of interactivity.

Just as Coover gave up some degree of authorship by composing fragmented narratives that require the reader to fill in the “gaps,” in *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, Italo Calvino requires another level of interactivity from his reader, by making him/her a character in the text. *If on a winter’s night a traveler* emphasizes the reader/author relationship while drawing attention to its materiality with a clever metafictional procedure, where the narrator speaks directly to the reader in the second person. The novel opens with “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade” (3), and ends with, “And you say, ‘Just a moment, I’ve almost finished *If on a winter’s night a traveler* by Italo Calvino’” (260).

The reader may feel that the author is speaking directly to her or him as she or he reads, and there is even a second female reader, to ensure no one feels left out and both genders are included. The readers become the characters in every other chapter, which can be seen as a commentary on the reader/author relationship and the expectations readers may hold on to, even in postmodernism, as they search for meaning. Calvino intertwines multiple disparate texts throughout *If on a winter’s night a traveler*. Narrative construction and plot are not necessarily a priority of postmodern authors, but we find ourselves caught up in even the first chapter of a story and desiring its resolution. The first chapters, offering the first hints and foundations of plot for several hypothetical novels, fall in between the numbered chapters and are titled as follows:

*If on a winter’s night a traveler*
Outside the town of Malbork
Leaning from the steep slope
Without fear of wind or vertigo
Looks down in the gathering shadow
In a network of lines that enlace
In a network of lines that intersect
On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon
Around an empty grave
What story down there awaits its end? (Contents)

Reading the titles of each chapter, the text is already a commentary on readers’ expectations. The consecutive “chapter ones” draw attention to the fact that you are reading a fictional story and becoming absorbed in a text, made of pages and words—each one in a different style and genre. The first paragraph of the first “chapter” works to pull the reader out of the second-person meta-text and into the “story” of what we expect to be the novel we have just been told we are reading. The chapter launches into the narrative with sentences such as: “The novel begins in a railway station, a locomotive huffs, steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph.” And “The pages of the book are clouded like the windows of an old train, the cloud of smoke rests on the sentences” (10).

Directly after the first chapter, we are, surprisingly, spoken to once again: “You have now read about thirty pages and you’re becoming caught up in the story” (25). Our attention is once again taken from the narrative and focused on the author, our relationship with him, and on the book itself and who controls it. The first sentence of Chapter Two reads as follows:
An odor of frying wafts at the opening of the page, of onion, in fact, onion being fried, a bit scorched, because in the onion there are veins that turn violet and then brown, and especially the edge, the margin, of each little sliver of onion becomes black before golden, it is the juice of the onion that is carbonized, passing through a series of olfactory and chromatic nuances, all enveloped in the smell of simmering oil. (34)

There is again a reference to the material book, but most noticeable is the overly descriptive style of sensory description and flowing structure, prevalent in modernism with authors like Virginia Woolf.

The other chapters utilize genre conventions and mimic recognizable styles to point out our readerly expectations, which are being continuously challenged throughout the intermittent chapters about readers (ourselves). The conventional genres and styles also comment on postmodernism as a revolt against expectations and structural norms, when authors had begun to feel that every plot had already been written.

Drawing attention to the text as a material object and its author changes the reader/author relationship. In novels where the author speaks of the writing process itself, as in Joan Didion’s *Democracy*, we may be absorbed in her storytelling while at the same time we are continuously reminded that it is storytelling and the author is the one in charge. In the first chapter Didion introduces her characters but, in the second, adds herself: “Call me the author” (16). She then goes on to hypothesize how Trollope might begin this chapter: “Let the reader be introduced to Joan Didion, upon whose character and doings much will depend of whatever interest these pages may have, as she sits at her writing table in her own room in her own house on Welbeck
She then states that she has “no unequivocal way of beginning it, although I do have certain things in mind” (16). And she goes on to list the things she has in mind, including a poem by Wallace Stevens that she then asks the reader to consider.

This involvement of the reader through metafiction is again apparent in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions*, where the author inserts himself into the narrative, causing his characters to do things (or not do them) and eventually confronts his character Kilgore Trout and informs him that he is merely a character in his creation… this text: "'I'm your Creator,' I said. ‘You're in the middle of a book right now--close to the end of it, actually.’ ‘Um,’ he said.” (Vonnegut 299). After the mess that Trout, an author himself, created by writing a novel in which the reader is informed that he/she is the only one in the universe with free will, Vonnegut (or his narrator) allows Trout to go free and have his own will by saying, “’Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are free’” (301). In a sense at the close of the novel the narrator/author is also liberating his readers, restoring their free will indirectly.

By granting his characters, and perhaps readers, free will, Vonnegut surrenders his “creator” role and allows Trout to go free. Authors and artists inevitably give up control, or present that illusion, of meaning in some sense, whether intentionally or not. By dealing with a medium as our only means of communication, we are giving both the medium and the reader or viewer control over the interpretation of meaning. Between floors, in the gaps between fragmented segments of text, intertextual references, and ambiguous endings, the reader must use his or her own experience to assist in the creation of meaning and story. The beauty of a text or a work of art is that each individual will have a subjective experience with it and will take from it something valuable based on his or her own experiences. This interaction of reader/viewer with the work is what is remarkable, is the reason many authors and artists create artistic work, but
they are also motivated by a certain intention in creating it. Authors and artists also choose their media based on what forms best express their inner feelings and thoughts. Once a medium or genre is chosen, the author’s or artist’s control over the meaning of the work is surrendered at least in some respect. To illustrate that all communication is subjective, some authors and artists intentionally compose ambiguous or fragmented works, leaving the reader or viewer to participate in the meaning-making. This method pulls readers into the text, makes them conscious of the unexpected sjužet and gets them involved in the co-creation of fabula, or understanding of story. Although the (w)reader is constructing his or her unique fabula from the sjužet presented by the author/artist, the (w)reader’s understanding is still influenced by the author’s choices, from words to structure to medium. Yet, this understanding on the part of the reader may be more personal, more connected to his or her own experience, or more of a shared emotional experience between author and reader than in a linear plot-based narrative; the reader is still a co-creator in the narrative.

Artists and writers may also find that a combination of media best suits their vision. Since the first books authors have combined visuals and text; artists often use text in their work to draw attention or clarify or comment on the idea of the work but also to set up a dialogue between word and image. Postmodern literature often focuses on structure and language to create a new space, often fragmented and non-linear, that engages the reader in new ways. As Ted Nelson argues in *Computer Lib/Dream Machines*, “Ordinary writing is sequential for two reasons. First, it grew out of speech and speech-making, which have to be sequential; and second, because books are not convenient to read except in sequence” (29). He further explains that “[T]he structures of ideas are not sequential. They tie together every which-way. And when we write,
we are always trying to tie things together in non-sequential ways” (29). As Ong makes clear, this applies even more heavily in the move to an electronic medium:

Finally, the sequential processing and spatializing of the word, initiated by writing and raised to a new order of intensity by print, is further intensified by the computer, which maximizes commitment of the word to space and to (electronic) local motion and optimizes analytic sequentiality by making it virtually instantaneous. (136)

By contrast, Nelson stresses that hypertext, a term he coined, as a form of “non-sequential writing” can be composed both in a print and electronic form (29). With technological advancements and the current computer age, we are now able to combine multiple modes of communication to create a narrative that is not only text or visuals, but also text and visuals and movement and sound and interactivity. We are no longer restricted to the “long held assumptions,” the ups and downs of traditional, comfortable narrative, but have been introduced to multimodal, multidirectional, and interactive narrative. As with the invention of the printing press, the new technologies offer us new hope in our existential desires and attempts to communicate “pure expression” or “true feeling.” Yet, as is often the case, each new technology seems to promise immediacy but also increases the level of complexity and mediation. The combination of media, particularly in an electronic environment, means focusing again on the media and the reader response in the feedback loop. Often part of the response has to do with the medium, though it is not only the medium that is the message, but also the author or artist’s use of the medium, and the reader’s interpretation and construction of the narrative that creates meaning. However, we still have to work to express ourselves; whether we desire to convey the
author or artist or to let go of intentionality and focus on the reader response, we must overcome the obstacle of media, towards a transparency that will make this type of internal expression and understanding possible. What this transparency might consist of is the limited transference of an author or artist’s intentional use of sjužet to evoke a personal response in a reader or viewer. It may be impossible for the author or artist’s intended message ever to be received exactly the way she or he meant to express it, but through expression, the choice of media, and the presentation of the sjužet, the author or artist will succeed in connecting on a more emotional level with their reader/viewer. Perhaps that is all we can strive for. Through the use of media, authors and artists employ the tools available to them, familiar to their audiences, to express ideas more thoroughly, though not any less ambiguously, and this may mean utilizing technology as a tool of creativity with its multidimensional and non-sequential possibilities. Think of the elevator again, the fact that a postmodern elevator may surprise us by traveling horizontally, diagonally, provide us with more options, some of which are under our control, though only the ones that the creator of the elevator has specifically chosen to provide us. We are no longer trapped in a vertical space and although we must reconsider the newfound freedom, the decisions are now our own, we have more room, we have more control over our destination, or at least it appears that way from inside this windowless box. Once presented with multicursal possibilities, we may begin to experience a desire for even more participation, more control; we must be willing to exert the effort to make the experience our own, end up at the destination most beneficial to us and our unique experience.
Chapter Three
Electric Light: Media and Remediation
(Or the Effect of Reader-Reliant Meaning Making in Electronic Text)

The electric light is pure information.
—Marshall McLuhan

As Vannevar Bush writes of the organic associations of the brain: “Man cannot hope fully to duplicate this mental process artificially, but he certainly ought to be able to learn from it” (44). Narrative that defies linear structure and form becomes fragmented and interactive, requiring (w)reader or viewer participation (and less author or artist control) to create meaning from the gaps, links, and physical demands. As Lev Manovich argues, “Interactive computer media perfectly fits this trend to externalize and objectify the mind’s operations” (61). With new media, the sjužet, still author or artist controlled, is more open to reader/viewer interpretation as the latter creates fabula; narrative is still something we seek and we will find it or create it, even when it is not presented in a linear or predictable way. The nonlinear narrative creates a subjective reader or viewer experience while heightening reader/author relationships; it draws attention to the materiality of the text or artwork and away from plot-based narrative, placing more emphasis on the reader’s role in the feedback loop. As Landow argues, “the act of reading will change as the nature of the reading site or mechanism changes” (4). The act of reading is already changing, as readers become more immersed in the hypertextuality of the web, in the fragmented nature of text messaging, or are constantly bombarded by visual culture. This is not the end of books by any means. Even Landow allows that, “as one who has always done a good deal of reading reclining on sofas or stretched out on a bed, I certainly sympathize with those who do not like to read on a computer screen” (4). The meaning and metaphors created through
print in postmodern literature, such as Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* or Calvino’s *On a winter’s night a traveler* or Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, can only be achieved in the medium of print, and often what is achieved is more surprising and amazing because of the medium. As readers of nonlinear texts, print or electronic, and viewers participating in immersive installation art, we must perhaps work harder, find our own meaning, our own way, but the payoff is ultimately worth it.

**Electronic Literature**

As in postmodern literature, electronic literature’s use of fragmentation, links and lexias, creates a between floors space, gaps where the (w)reader must create her or his own meaning, fill in the missing pieces, infer and recreate. Textual fragmentation works like collage in art, the way Vannevar Bush describes the connections the mind makes— it causes the viewer/reader to make connections to potentially disparate objects or lexias, filling in the gaps. Coover’s structure is fragmented, consisting mainly of textual lexias, merging perspectives, time, and possibilities, separated by white space that the reader must fill in with meaning. In “How Do I Stop This Thing?,” J. Yellowlees Douglas discusses expectations of print narratives: “Obviously the spatial form at work in these print narratives exists in the minds of readers grappling with their intricacies of time and place, with patterns of recursion, and with digressions that violate expectations based on readings of conventional narratives” (174). Of hypertexts, she states: “They [the readers] can even decide when their readings of the narrative are complete, based on their reconstructions of the narrative as a virtual, three-dimensional structure” (160). In experimental, non-linear print and hypertext narratives, the construction of the story, *fabula*, is left up to the reader, as the *sjužet* does not follow linear patterns of chronology or plot; it is in the
space between lexias, ideas of time, perspective, and order where the reader has room to co-
create a narrative.

To create this convergent space, any author must be willing to give up a certain amount
of control, especially if composing in an electronic reader-controlled medium, and the reader
must give up searching for authorial intent and be content with his or her own interpretation. Ted
Nelson has defined hypertext as “non-sequential writing” (29). Non-sequential writing finds
itself at home in postmodern fiction, where this non-sequential space can be created with
intertextual references, overlapping segments of time, and fragmented sections of text. An
example of non-linearity expressed through intertextuality is present in Thomas Pynchon’s The
Crying of Lot 49, several times throughout the novel and most definitely at the end, where
Pynchon leaves the reader to make sense of both what has passed and what the future holds for
Oedipa. Other examples include the fragmentation found in Coover’s stories, or the space
between the linear and supplemental chapters of Hopscotch, where the reader never knows what
she or he will encounter. It is in these spaces that the reader is permitted to put the pieces
together and create fabula, or his or her understanding of the story.

In Michael Joyce’s hypertext fiction afternoon, a story, non-sequential writing and
ambiguity are the themes of the day. In a classroom of students approaching this text, it is
possible that none of them will find closure—discovering what actually happened to Peter’s ex-
wife and child. This ambiguity can be frustrating, for a reader who wants the ending neatly
bound, like a murder-mystery novel. However, like an abstract minimalist work of art, it forces
us to consider multiple possibilities, see things from several angles, and to find our own meaning
there. In a work like this where narrative is dependent on reader choices and interaction, the
fabula may be different each time a reader encounters the text. All of this adds meaning to the
text. In Lot 49 and afternoon, for instance, it solidifies the mystery surrounding the characters and the journey they are on for elusive truth. It also forces the reader to reconsider closure in a text. In Lot 49 we may have closure in that we have reached the end of the material book, but in a text like afternoon, we must stop when we tire of reading, get caught in too many loops, come to our own conclusions. Michael Joyce himself, in a moment of reflexive meta-fiction, states: "Closure is, as in any fiction, a suspect quality, although here it is made manifest. When the story no longer progresses, or when it cycles, or when you tire of the paths, the experience of reading it ends" ("Work in Progress," a lexia in afternoon, a story).

As Landow has argued, “Electronic linking, which gives the reader a far more active role than is possible with books, has certain major effects” (Hypertext 3.0 109). By tying sections of text together with a link, there is a connection made, and meaning created by juxtaposing lexias depends on what is read next. This is another instance of the variability present in footnotes, intertextual references, choose your own adventure books, but the possibilities for these connections, as well as the stakes, are greater with electronic media: “Many who first encounter the notion of hypertext assume that linking does it all, and in an important sense they are correct: linking is the most important fact about hypertext, particularly as it contrasts to the world of print technology” (Landow 6). Like Vannevar Bush’s idea that we should learn from the organic web trails and associations of the brain, links and lexias seem to suit our thinking and learning processes. To reinforce Bush’s notion, Ted Nelson states in Computer Lib/Dream Machines that “Our goal should be nothing less than REPRESENTING THE TRUE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF HUMAN THOUGHT” (80). However, there is much more to learning to read this way, as we must learn to operate and alter our expectations in a sprawling horizontal elevator; there is work required but surprise and wonder often await us.
Interactivity persists in an electronic medium, defined by Landow as follows: “The particular importance of networked textuality—that is, textuality written, stored, and read on a computer network—appears when technology transforms readers into reader-authors or ‘wreaders’” (14). Like postmodern texts that blur the boundary between reader and author with metafiction and fragmentation, electronic texts work to close the gap of subjective experience even further, by bringing the (w)reader into the frame, changing the narrative as she or he makes navigational decisions, gleaning meaning from the movement of the mouse. This is explicit in hypertexts like *afternoon* and *Patchwork Girl*, as well as in Flash-based poetry such as “dear e.e.” by Ingrid Ankerson and Lori Janis and “Cruising” by Ingrid Ankerson and Megan Sapnar. In these “poems that go,” the navigation creates message and metaphor; meaning comes from the scrolling of the mouse to catch pieces of a dream or navigate a car while cruising. When we become participants in the experience of reading, we enter into a relationship with the author and the text, making decisions and choices, inferring meaning, creating *fabula*, and making connections. In an electronic text, much like in postmodern texts, the meaning is not going to be handed to us in a neat, linear fashion. Nor may we ever know the author’s intention. What we gain from the experience is a co-constructed narrative, more uniquely our own.

In electronic literature, the structure may feel random, or within the reader’s control, but often it is a tightly woven web. *afternoon, a story* by Michael Joyce is made up of over 500 lexias and the reader moves through them by clicking on various words or moving the text forward by answering “yes” or “no” or by moving through in a more linear fashion. The lexias are so fragmented that they seem random, reader controlled, but Joyce has carefully structured the piece so that only certain lexias appear after others or with others. This structure has the same consequences as Coover’s print stories: ambiguous time, perspective, and with overlapping
connections and loops and a narrative that comes together like a puzzle as the reader continues through it.

Some electronic structures are intuitive, straightforward, or even mapped out for the reader, as in Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*, which provides visual maps for both the overall work and individual sections (this does not mean the reader never gets lost in the text). This text, like many other hypertext or new media works, allows the reader to begin where they like and skip to sections as they see fit, which determines the meaning, or can at least put emphasis on one section over another. In hypertext literature, Landow’s advice to writers is to be prepared for readers who “fall in through the livingroom ceiling rather than entering through the front door” (*Hypertext 3.0*, 111). Writing lexias of text that can be read in any order is challenging both for writers and readers and they make works like *afternoon* change with every reading.

Similar to the way elevators contain us, mediate our actual movements, give us the impression of being in control, while we trust them to carry us to our destination electronic media change the reading experience—shift the feedback loop from authorial intention or control to a medium and reader focused interaction. However, despite appearances, by choosing the medium through which to express the narrative, and devising the links and structure of the text, thus limiting the reader control, the author is still very much in control, even though seemingly less present. All communication is mediated, most traditionally through language, but currently often through technology, including film, television, the Internet, social networks and text messaging. As Jean Starobinski suggests, when we are confronted with nature’s obstacles, we turn to technology to overcome them (218). The same way the elevator solved the obstacles of urban space and vertical transportation, media attempt to solve the dilemma of subjective communication, provide an interactive, emotional experience, and break the boundaries of linear
narrative. We continuously seek new technologies to fill the gaps in our ability to communicate; yet with these new technologies also come new obstacles.

**Media**

In *What Do Pictures Want?* W.J.T. Mitchell argues, “A medium is more than the materials of which it is composed. It is, as Raymond Williams wisely insisted, a material social practice, a set of skills, habits, techniques, tools, codes, and conventions” (203). This would imply the significance of the author or artist and his or her use of the medium to convey message. Language exists because it is a socially agreed upon set of codes and symbols. Art is also a set of skills and habits and conventions. Each discipline, as each medium, has a specific “material social practice.” With advancements in technology, reading online has become a social practice, as has e-mail and text messaging. Electronic literature also has its own set of techniques, tools, and codes, though the conventions are still being formed.

As the technology of the elevator has advanced, so have the tools with which we communicate. Elevators began with ropes and pulleys and have come a long way since Elisha Graves Otis introduced his safety elevator at the 1854 World’s Fair with the words: “All safe, ladies and gentlemen, all safe” (Ford 7). Today Otis makes a practically silent elevator called the Gen2 that keeps computer controls and cables encompassed within the elevator car, eliminating the need for underground cable storage or a control room. As our experience within an elevator where the mechanisms are hidden and movement is almost imperceptible, our interaction with a computer medium takes place without seeing the mechanisms and does not require an understanding of how it works. Otis has also developed the Compass destination entry system that allows passengers to enter their destination on interactive touch screens in the lobby, which
then direct them to the correct elevator, placing passengers going to the same or nearby floors in
the same car, reducing wait and travel time (http://www.otisworldwide.com/). Similarly,
interfaces and server technology have reduced wait times and altered our expectations of time-
based information. As technology advances and we rely on it increasingly for communication,
specifically of often-intangible creative concepts, there is new hope that media or multimodal
expression will accomplish the goal of a more direct, less subjective means of communication.
However, as we have learned, the more open the text, the less authorial control, the more reliant
the feedback loop is on the reader; it falls upon the reader to make his or her own sense of
narrative, rendering narrative even more subjective, but possibly also more personally
meaningful.

Electronic texts create narrative by combining elements such as text, visuals, movement,
audio, and interactivity. Digital narrative can communicate traditional literary elements such as
plot, metaphor and theme, or alternatively, more abstract expressions, often with the additional
goal of creating a response in the reader/viewer through increased interaction. Media,
specifically digital texts, can be used to communicate abstract ideas while changing the form and
expectation of a text, influencing meaning and moving the reader towards a more direct
experience-based communication. Yet digital narrative has its own complexities, as does any
medium through which we communicate and, likewise, any technology.

The elevator has evolved from more tangible mechanisms to unseen microprocessors and
sensor belts that can signal their own disrepair. Paul Virilio sees this shrinking of technologies as
making them less noticeable, so that we are more able to, as in the case of the elevator,
participate without seeing the mechanism:
If we consider chronologically the evolution of the technologies of transmission (command and support), beginning with the mechanical means, then electromechanical, electromagnetic, and finally today’s microprocessors, what do we find? An ever greater miniaturization of components and processes; in other words, a certain statistical tendency to fade from view, to conjure away the mechanism and the machine…. (162-163)

The transparency of a medium, whether it is text, electronic, or installation, is a vital element in its ability to convey a more direct sensory experience. The reader wants to be immersed in a novel, as a viewer wants to be psychologically transported in a gallery. When the reader/viewer is interacting with a medium, but not overtly aware of its mechanism or technology, or of the author’s intention, she or he becomes immersed in the narrative and, thus, more affected psychologically. J. David Bolter refers to this in his book *Remediation* as “The Logic of Transparent Immediacy.” He states: “virtual reality is immersive, which means that it is a medium whose purpose is to disappear. This disappearing act, however, is made difficult by the apparatus that virtual reality requires” (22). Whether it is a book or a computer, we cannot escape the medium; yet our interactions with the machine can become part of a narrative, not entirely transparent, sometimes even purposefully highlighted to create meaning.

Since direct transmission of ideas is a pure fantasy, all expression needs a medium—ideas are expressed using the tools we can best maneuver. With digital media, a contemporary tool of expression, authors are able to combine multiple modes of communication to create a narrative that can work towards providing a reader with a more interactive communication; as the reader becomes co-creator of the work, the media an extension of both artist and reader, a
direct line of meaning is created between them. Although we still have to work to overcome the obstacle of media in our communication, technological possibilities offer us hope in our existential desire to communicate “true expression” (Artaud 71) or “pure sensation” (Starobinski 221) while also remaining aware of the fact that all media place certain constraints on that objective.

It is the author or artist’s choice of medium to represent her or his ideas, feelings, and stories that holds significance. Every medium has its own unique place, its own ability to convey certain ideas, while failing to express what other media could do better. Attempting to combine media in multimodal compositions that often engage the reader/viewer on a more physical level than text is another strategy used by artist and author for a more direct (or accurate) communication. However, multiple media can confuse, as can interactive texts, and without text, installation works are immersive but often lack story or narrative that is more easily represented through words. By choosing the best medium or combination of media, to communicate internal ideas and stories, artists and authors can work with the tools of communication to either attempt a semblance of transparency of medium or to highlight the medium to assist with the ideas and expressions. In building the sjužet in multimedia works, the creator will involve interaction, movement, audio, graphics, and overall feeling; the reader, in turn, will continue to strive to make meaning, constructing a fabula from this diversity of media presentations.

“Digital Born”

Electronic literature is still an emerging research field that crosses media boundaries and promotes a relationship between the arts and humanities and continuously changing technologies. Examples of published electronic literature illustrate the natural tendency to use
electronic media for creative expression; they suggest that narrative can be expressed through a
digital medium differently from even postmodern print texts. As N. Katherine Hayles discusses
narratives are more than literature archived on the web, they are “digital born,” composed for the
medium and using that medium to convey metaphor, emotion, and narrative. In this essay she
presents the working definition:

Electronic literature, generally considered to exclude print literature that has been
digitized, is by contrast "digital born," a first-generation digital object created on a
computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer. The Electronic Literature
Organization, whose mission is to "promote the writing, publishing, and reading
of literature in electronic media," convened a committee headed by Noah
Wardrip-Fruin, himself a creator and critic of electronic literature, to come up
with a definition appropriate to this new field. The committee's choice was framed
to include both work performed in digital media and work created on a computer
but published in print (as, for example, was Brian Kim Stefans's computer-
generated poem "Stops and Rebels"). The committee's formulation: "work with an
important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts
provided by the stand-alone or networked computer" (“Electronic Literature:
What Is It?,” no page).

Another process familiar to electronic literature and more generally to all textual transfer
from one medium into another is referred to as remediation, what could also be referred to as
retransmission, or what Brooks calls translation of a narrative into another medium (3).
Remediation can take many forms, with the most familiar being adaptation from literature to film. Print authors often use intertextual references or remediation of well-known works. Robert Coover, for example, has remediated traditional fairy tales or classic films into original postmodern narratives. Donna Leishman and other electronic authors and artists have remediated folktales and existing narratives into visual interactive narratives. These remediations, not entirely unlike remeditations of print literature to film, require a recreation of a narrative into a new medium, often changing the emphasis to visual representations, audio, more physical interactivity, and affecting the author/media/reader feedback loop. In the process, the content (themes) may also change, so that the work in the new medium is only an off spin of a work in another medium. These elements have been present in “digital born” literature since the beginning.

Early electronic literature was mainly hypertext-based. Stories such as Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story* and Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* were composed in software called Storyspace, distributed in the beginning on floppy disc, now on CD Rom. Hypertext was often a restructuring of traditional texts, just as in postmodern literature. According to Landow, “Electronic linking, which gives the reader a far more active role than is possible books, has certain major effects” (56). Like intertext and fragmentation, a hyperlink that the reader must click on to travel between lexias of text creates a gap to be filled in by the reader, requiring of them both physical and mental interactivity. Linking fragmented text together through single words or phrases, allowing the reader to choose which link to follow, ties together sometimes disparate pieces of narrative or perspectives—this simple non-linear link causes connection and disconnection, author and reader associations, and, in short, creates meaning in a text. It is the
reader, here, the focal point of the feedback loop, interacting with media, who must uncover the 
fabula and own her or his interpretation of the work.

Published in 1987, *afternoon, a story* is stark in comparison to current new media 
literature, consisting of black text on a white background, with unmarked hyperlinks within the 
text to other lexias of the story. It is now available in an online format by Norton (see Fig. 6). As 
in many works of postmodern literature, Michael Joyce utilizes intertext to comment on other 
authors such as Julio Cortázar and his print text *Hopscotch* and the film *Blow Up* based on one of 
Cortázar’s short stories, both considered precursors to hypertext. He also employs fragmentation, 
as the lexias are short snippets of text (sometimes only a few words) on individual pages, and 
ambiguity as a result, where the reader is unsure which character is narrating and often what is 
going on in the main plot. Each reading of *afternoon* consists of a unique narrative: sometimes 
the reader will get an insight into Peter, the protagonist’s experience with a car accident, possibly 
involving his ex-wife Lisa and his son; other times the narrative is focused on his work, also 
somewhat mysterious or his relationships with Werther, Lolly, or Naussica. By following links 
embedded in the text, the reader controls the path of reading and yet must consider that every 
path and loop she or he may get caught up in were purposefully designed by Michael Joyce 
himself. *Sjužet* is always the author’s mark on a narrative, *fabula* the responsibility that rests on 
the reader.
Every reading of *afternoon* results in its own semblance of narrative coherence and closure. As J. Yellowlees Douglas discusses in her essay “How Do I Stop This Thing?: Closure and Indeterminacy in Interactive Narratives,” *afternoon* lacks the closure of a print text. After reading the text four times and coming to “the end” or final lexia, she says, “My arrival at a sense of an ending for *afternoon* is thus tied equally to reading strategies translated directly from reading print narratives and to strategies which embrace the text as an interactive narrative existing in virtual, three-dimensional space” (Douglas 172). Joyce himself states in one of the first lexias:

> Closure is, as in any fiction, a suspect quality, although here it is made manifest. When the story no longer progresses, or when it cycles, or when you tire of the paths, the experience of reading it ends. Even so, there are likely to be more opportunities than you think there are at first. A word which doesn't yield the first time you read a section may take you elsewhere if you choose it when you
encounter the section again; and sometimes what seems a loop, like memory, heads off again in another direction.

There is no simple way to say this. (Joyce, “Work in Progress,” a lexia in afternoon, a story, CD-ROM)

The idea of closure, “as in any fiction” (Joyce), is also an issue in postmodern print literature. In Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*, for instance, the reader has the option of reading the supplemental chapters (or only some of them) instead of the entire text. Many hypertext fictions end when the reader becomes weary of linking and reading, or, alternatively, feels she or he has reached some form of closure, as did Douglas. Because of the play of intertextuality in postmodern literature, the text can expand indefinitely as the reader is led to other texts and other subjects.

Electronic texts also often succeed in intertextuality by remediating works into the new medium. Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* (CD-ROM), for instance, takes the stories of both *Frankenstein* and *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, working them into her own unique narrative, complete with meta-narrative, another element common in postmodern literature. She comments on the act of reading and writing, and on the relationship of the narrator with the female monster she has created out of pieces of others, whose narratives are also included along with the body parts they have contributed. Not only must the reader connect the *sjužet* of story by using the pieces of narrative that came before Jackson’s work, but the reader’s role in piecing together meaning is also physically highlighted in the presentation of the text. Unlike Joyce, Jackson adds imagery to her Storyspace text (see Fig. 7).
In his 1945 essay, “As We May Think,” long before the rise of the Internet, Vannevar Bush argued that: “The human mind does not work that way. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain” (44). His suggestion was that “linking” one topic to another was the natural way we think, and even learn. This seems the structure of choice in both postmodern literature and hypertext. Some might disagree with Bush’s idea that “hypertext” and “linking” come naturally; certainly our culture has often favored more linear ways of thinking, reading, and writing.

With the rise of the Internet, electronic literature entered a world of links and networked possibilities. N. Katherine Hayles describes the move to Internet texts, which she refers to as “second generation”: 

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With the movement to the Web, the nature of electronic literature changed as well. Whereas early works tended to be blocks of text (traditionally called lexia) with limited graphics, animation, colors and sound, later works make much fuller use of the multi-modal capabilities of the Web; while the hypertext link is considered the distinguishing feature of the earlier works, later works use a wide variety of navigation schemes and interface metaphors that tend to de-emphasize the link as such. (Hayles, “Electronic Literature: What is it?” Website)

Lori Janis and Ingrid Ankerson prove the value of reader interaction and “navigation schemes and interface metaphors” in the poem dear e.e (http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/summer2001/ee/ee.htm) which appears to be a literary reference to the poet e.e. cummings (see Fig. 8). The entire text uses lower case letters and flying punctuation (particularly the semi-colon) to echo both the style and the general dream-like sporadic quality of cummings’s poetry. The narrator addresses “e.e.” and recalls a dream where someone rearranged the narrator’s apartment. The introduction, the only author-controlled, “linear” piece of text, says: “i dreamt of you last / night-you had snuck into my / apartment (i don't even have / one) to re-arrange it all; though / there are no recollections of what / it may have been before you-” (Ankerson and Janis). The metaphor could apply to both a relationship and to e.e. cummings directly—his style of poetry rearranged the literary world.
The multimodal composition of dear e.e. is as significant as the text. As the images fly by in a Flash video, the reader is at first overwhelmed by floating furniture and words and rapid, dreamlike sound. By scrolling over the images, the reader learns to adjust the speed of the looping poem with the movement of the mouse; furthermore, by holding the mouse over the animation to make the text appear, the reader is able to “catch” the parts of the dream long enough to read them. It is this movement of the mouse that provides the feeling of holding onto fragments of dream memory and piecing them together to form meaning. Due to his experimental style, e.e. cummings’s work can be viewed as a precursor to hypertext poetry. His poetry emphasized play on structure, words, images, ideas, punctuation that broke traditional boundaries of a linear print medium. dear e.e. is an expression of new media possibilities—a natural progression stemming from groundbreaking print authors such as e.e cummings, whose use of experimental structure, language, and punctuation enhanced meaning and unsettled the reader. New media poems such as dear e.e. utilize available technology to emphasize the
interaction of meaning, emotion, medium and reader.

It is the technology of the computer medium in works such as this that allows a new kind of reading, a new way of creating meaning and narrative. In 1974, when Ted Nelson wrote *Computer Lib/Dream Machines*, he knew that technology would play a huge role in our lives. It is only natural that generations that have grown up with or adapted to computers, cell phones, cable television, music downloading, and social networking (sometimes all at once) would utilize the tools at hand to compose creative and scholarly work, and communicate with others. As Nelson says:

> It matters because we live in media, as fish live in water. (Many people are prisoners of the media, many are manipulators, and many want to use them to communicate artistic visions.) But today, at this moment, we can and must design the media, design the molecules of our new water, and I believe the details of this design matter very deeply. They will be with us for a very long time, perhaps as long as man has left; perhaps if they are as good as they can be, man may buy even more time—or the open-ended future most suppose remains. (3)

J.R. Carpenter uses available electronic tools to design “the molecules of our new water,” in her innovative electronic literature. Her works employ the newest technologies while staying true to both the beauty of hypertext and html code; her prose is strong and conveys the themes of identity and place. One of her most recent texts, *CityFish* ([http://luckysoap.com/cityfish/index.html](http://luckysoap.com/cityfish/index.html)), combines JavaScript, html code, video, a collage of images, and Google Maps (see Fig. 9). The entire work is contained on one html page with interior links, some of which are subway tokens that move the reader from one lexia to another,
representing the narrator’s travel between New York and Nova Scotia, Canada. She goes against
electronic readers’ expectations here as the text scrolls from left to right in a linear
“conventional” format although the links allow the reader to hop around from lexia to lexia
within the text. There is a definite beginning and ending point, including a “return to beginning”
link when the reader reaches the “end” of the page. The narrative is here an almost biographical
account of a move—represented physically by a scrolling “eastward,” yet the reader also has a
choice as to how the pieces are read which can change the perception of a more “linear”
narrative due to her or his interpretation. Carpenter also utilizes intertext and remediation with
poems and lines from other authors intertwined with her own writing. As in postmodern
narratives like *The Crying of Lot 49*, the references add layers of meaning to the text and appeal
to the reader’s previous experience or knowledge. At the conclusion of the text Carpenter
graciously states: “My most humble respect to the authors of the texts I’ve reprinted without
permission: Rob Allen, Djuna Barnes, Michel de Certeau, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen
Ginsberg, and Henry David Thoreau” (Carpenter, “credits,” final section of *CityFish*). This type
of attribution is not necessarily common in intertext or remediated works but draws attention
here to the postmodern truism that no idea is original and all authors are writing from a place of
influence or previously published ideas. This also provides the reader with the possibility of
leaving the text to reference these others in their entirety, providing another insight or additional
layers of meaning.
Carpenter used similar software in her previous texts, all with a unique recognizable aesthetic. Since texts like *Les huit quartiers du sommeil* (http://luckysoap.com/huitquartiers/index.html) and *in absentia* (http://luckysoap.com/inabsentia/index.html) (see Fig. 10) which employ Google Maps to build narrative, other authors have used My Maps or Google Maps code added to an existing webpage to create narrative—combining geography, images, and text in a hypertext format. Google Maps and other familiar software allow authors to compose unique texts using a format that is recognizable, user friendly and updatable. Carpenter has a striking design sense—a way of combing multiple media to create interactive, interesting literary texts. Other authors have used Blogs, Facebook, Flickr, Wikis, and Twitter to compose narratives that appeal to users in a familiar reading environment. This suggests that the way we think influences how new technology develops and also how we use it. It is within that technology that we swim—as technological fish.
The medium, chosen by the author and interacted with by the reader, is therefore an integral player in meaning making. Marshall McLuhan sees medium as message and media as extensions of ourselves, which both seem to naturalize the medium but also to call attention to it so that communication is not longer direct or unmediated:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. (19)

Artistic works are not entirely transparent and, in fact, often highlight the medium to convey message to the reader. The medium becomes somewhat transparent as we become immersed in a novel, transported to the place and time and lose ourselves in narrative. This transparency can
also take place when we lose ourselves in an installation piece, become a part of the work itself in an organic experiential way. But in each case we are easily brought back to the realization that we read a novel or experience an installation work. What authors and artists are sometimes working towards is a way of highlighting the medium to become part of the message—it becomes the sjužet, the way the narrative is presented and is inseparable from the narrative itself. This is done in postmodern literature, where authors draw attention to structure and materiality and even authorship. In an electronic text, it is difficult to make the medium transparent, although there are examples of texts that draw you into the experience, as if you are becoming one with the machine. Often the medium’s potential is exploited to provide the reader with feeling and metaphor through his or her interaction with the piece. While the interactive elements allow perhaps for a more immersive experience, the materiality is hardly transparent. As mentioned above, we can approach some degree of transparency in an immersive installation as well, though many such works make meaning by accenting the involvement of the viewers, making them aware of their, not only interaction, but involvement in the work to create narrative.

The melding of human with machine, particularly in language and code through an electronic medium, is represented remarkably well in Talan Memmott’s electronic literature composition, Lexia to Perplexia

[http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott__lexia_to_perplexia.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott__lexia_to_perplexia.html) (see Fig. 11). In this interactive piece, as the reader moves through the text, she or he encounters more and more computer code, and computer-controlled environments. This hybrid, or “creole” (Hayles 50) of

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14 Lexia to Perplexia (2000) requires Netscape 4.x or Internet Explorer 4.x to be viewed properly.
15 In the case of Lexia to Perplexia, N. Katherine Hayles describes “a CREOLE discourse compounded from English and computer code. (A creole, unlike PIDGIN, is not an amalgam but a new language that emerges when two different language communities come into contact.)” (50)
language and code brings the reader into an immersive technological experience, where she or he becomes one with machine, but is no longer in control. We are so intertwined with the technology that it becomes transparent. In Memmott’s use of the medium to compose this “digital born” work, the medium becomes an extension of both author and reader.

In *Writing Machines*, N. Katherine Hayles suggests that *Lexia* is a remediation of sorts of the myth of Echo and Narcissus (50), but not a remediation in the sense that we think of other works, such as Coover or Carter’s postmodern fairy-tales, or books turned to films, or print texts translated to a digital medium. Memmott also touches on an integral theme in hypertext literature—that of using technology to further human communication. He addresses the challenge of subjective communication: “Bi.narrative communification is rendered in the wreck, the mess in the middle, the collision of incompatible transmissions, arising from the eroded ruins of miscommunication” (Memmott, “Metastrophe,” “Minifesto 1,”

*Figure 11: Lexia to Perplexia* by Talan Memmott. Screen capture ([http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott__lexia_to_perplexia.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott__lexia_to_perplexia.html)).
Memmott then addresses the possibility of a solution: “Language finds new space and between I and other, we feel self and other better rendered -- self @ author” (Memmott, “Metastrophe,” “Anonymous.[N].”

This could represent not only the human need to communicate, but also the use of technology and multimodal composition to further close the gap of misunderstanding. By using the tools of his time to create a narrative impossible without the code of the medium, Memmott is showing the reader the mechanism, the melding of man (woman) with machine, the new language that can be rendered in this new space “between I and other” (Memmott).

*Lexia to Perplexia* uses lexias, links, images, and moving images and text to express fragmentation and ambiguity; the layers of interaction required to read the text, as well as the complex interface, complete the theme of technological integration Memmott is expressing. If we are becoming one with machines we can see them as extensions of ourselves, as artists do a paintbrush. A computer mouse is a powerful tool of creative expression. Memmott uses code and a website medium to express himself—the perfect medium for his ideas. The interactivity in *Lexia to Perplexia* is prominent in the themes of the work and because there is no map, the reader must sometimes search for rollovers or links.

Donna Leishman uses almost entirely “intuitive” navigation in her electronic literature. Her remediations of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Bluebeard* are visual Flash interpretations of familiar tales. In *RedRidinghood* ([http://www.6amhoover.com/redriding/red.htm](http://www.6amhoover.com/redriding/red.htm)) (see Fig. 12) she retells the fairy tale in a dark, animated, and interactive electronic literature. *The Bloody Chamber* ([http://www.6amhoover.com/chamber/index_flash.htm](http://www.6amhoover.com/chamber/index_flash.htm)) (see Fig. 13) is a multimedia, reader-controlled version of *Bluebeard* with hints to Angela Carter’s remediation of the story.
(also titled *The Bloody Chamber*) in print format. Remediating a text, whether it is from print to film or from print to electronic literature, changes the narrative with the addition of visuals, audio, video, movement, and perhaps most of all, reader/viewer interaction. Sometimes the themes themselves are remediated, adapted to a new cultural and historical context. Leishman has a way of giving familiar stories new life and finding them a new audience. By recreating the text for the computer, she offers the reader a chance to participate, and sometimes change the outcome for the protagonists, empowering both the readers and the characters in a current and engaging medium. Although her texts are mainly visual while also depending on reader interaction, the reader does not need to be familiar with the original story to follow the narrative.

Figure 12: *RedRidinghood* by Donna Leishman. Screen capture ([http://www.6amhoover.com/redriding/red.htm](http://www.6amhoover.com/redriding/red.htm)).
Leishman, very much a visual artist, has a unique style, apparent in *Contemplating Flight* (http://www.6amhoover.com/flight.html), an entirely visual interactive narrative (see Fig. 14). The reader must interact with the text without direction, as in her other stories, and to influence the audio and movement in the piece. The narrative is present although it is without text and the reader becomes immersed in the navigation as co-creator of that text. Because the text is purely interactive and visual, it is at the crossroads of digital art and text; the narrative is there, it merely becomes more subtle and ambiguous, up to the reader’s experience and the outcome, if the reader gets that far, dependent on where the reader has chosen to click most frequently. The themes of life, death, and growth, with their “both positive and negative cancerous connotations” are represented by the vein-like tree, the hesitancy of the bird, the determination of navigation required by the reader, and the slow unfolding path of the narrative (Leishman, “Dissonance in Multi-Semiotic Landscapes in the Work Of Donna Leishman,” http://www.hyperrhiz.net/hyperrhiz06/24-artist-statements/77-dissonance-in-multi-semiotic-landscapes).
Contemplating Flight requires us to see narrative as a space without an alphabetic text, where medium and reader combine to complete meaning. As George P. Landow argues, “hypertext reconceives conventional, long-held assumptions about authors and readers and the texts they write and read” (1).

Contemporary work in the field proves that authors and readers are breaking the boundaries of long-held assumptions of “text,” “authorship,” and reader/author relationships. The media we choose to express narrative and find meaning and message are changing as a consequence. Likewise the impact of technology changes us socially, just as socially we change and adapt the media to suit our ever-changing needs. The elevator changed the landscape of cities, allowed the possibilities of high-rise buildings and vertical space. It also impacted us socially, addressing our need to move upwards, taking up less horizontal space, while changing the way we perceive transportation media and requiring us to adapt to a public non-space where we are physically close and yet social etiquette demands as little social interaction as possible.
Social Implications

Although McLuhan sees media as almost organic extensions of self, he still acknowledges that they have “personal and social consequences” (19); they still possess their own set of limitations as technology, in a similar way as text often restricts us in the ideas we are trying to express. Virilio sees a danger in the transparency of technology, as in an elevator where we are unaware of movement and not physically moving, or in a vehicle in which we are moving without moving, experiencing the world through what Jean Baudrillard calls a simulacrum. To quote Baudrillard:

Every technical practice is a social practice, every technical practice is soaked in social determination. But it doesn’t present itself as such: it claims autonomy, innocence, a technical rationality founded on science. This rationality subtends the ideology of faith, which imposes itself on our society as morality, wherein technical practices, separated from social reason, become a technique of the social, and more precisely of social manipulation, and therefore a technics of power. (51)

The elevator, as technology, has had a major impact on architecture and city structures, affecting urban centers, social interactions, and continues to have cultural reverberations. This is what Baudrillard means by “every practice is a social practice” and what Herbert Marcuse means when he discusses technology as imposing structures on thought and behavior. No technology is purely innocent, purely innovative—they permeate our lives. As Marcuse states in the opening line of One Dimensional Man: “A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom
prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress” (1). This concept of “unfreedom” suggests that as we “progress” technologically, we become bound to that very technology, dependent, affected, changed. As Marcuse states, “The idea of ‘inner freedom’ here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain ‘himself’” but goes on to observe, “Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality” (10). In similar ways, we are immersed in technology when we enter an elevator, sometimes daily, without knowledge of the unseen mechanisms that control it, and we are alone but not alone; or when we log onto the Internet, perhaps even more often, physically isolated and yet connected to others in a non-space. Constantly connected, immersed in technology, even private spaces are imposed upon by technologies, including the Internet, where we are connected to a vast outer space—what Marcuse calls the “opening of the bedroom to the media of mass communication” (19).

Virilio’s fear is that we are moving forward so fast with technical inventiveness that we are unaware of where we are going, what horizon we are headed for. “Speed has become the privileged measure of both time and space” (134). In Negative Horizons, Virilio uses time and space as metaphors for medium and message. His concept of Dromoscopy emphasizes and critiques our addiction to speed and its negative effects on society, advising us to slow down, to know where we are going before we reach the horizon, and examine the technologies that we may not be ready for, that may even destroy us.

In “Requiem for the Media,” Baudrillard discusses the difference between medium of distribution and medium of communication (75). He sees the medium not as a vehicle of content, but as a vehicle of form and operation. He associates the medium with his concept of simulacrum: “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is
the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (“Simulacra and Simulations” 166). For McLuhan, it is the medium that is the message (19). The medium that communicates message has social implications just as the elevator has changed how we view vertical space or as the Internet has changed the way we attain information and even socialize. Authors and artists can also turn the medium into a significant “text” in the exchanging of ideas, the expression of narrative, the *sjužet* or “active shaping force” (Brooks 14). Media can create or change meaning and message, have far-reaching cultural implications, perhaps even determine social behaviors and individual thought. The media are significant for many reasons but because of the potential transparency of media, their role is often underplayed. However, the medium is not more significant than the message, as might be inferred from McLuhan’s stance. The medium may become emphasized in the feedback loop, there may seem to be a strong relationship between media and the reader/viewer, but the author/artist never really disappears, as the mechanisms working the elevator are always there, behind the scenes. The message is also there—equally, if not more important, than the medium; the elevator cannot be prioritized over its passengers, just as we cannot disregard digital narratives and their (w)readers because they are composed electronically and the medium begs for our attention.

Paul Virilio, on the other hand, foregrounds speed over both medium and message and sees us stagnated, inert, inside our vehicles of medium—moving without moving, what he calls the “rushing standstill,” as in the case of the elevator. Although Virilio doesn’t explicitly mention the elevator—he uses the metaphor of faster and more militant vehicles, like the stealth bomber—the elevator may serve as a space where, physically immobile, we move vertically, not fully aware of our relation to space, or of our destination(s) necessarily, disconnected from each other and nature, but not as hostile or menacing as in Virilio’s examples.
While, as Lev Manovich suggests, all art is interactive (56), the level of immersion in a text, a technology, an installation, changes meaning depending on the immersion of the reader/viewer in that work. Not only are we challenging our “long held assumptions” with non-linear text, multidirectional narrative, and interactive installations, we are also creating new assumptions—holding out our existential hope for a perfect medium through which to communicate our intimate experience. As McLuhan puts it, “If it is asked, ‘What is the content of speech?’ it is necessary to say, ‘It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal.’” An abstract painting represents direct manifestation of creative thought processes as they might appear in computer designs” (20). This suggests that not only are abstract forms of expression more direct, resulting in more internal forms of response from a reader/viewer, but also that computer designed narrative may be even more successful in the “direct manifestation of creative thought.” When a viewer is inside the frame of an installation, a co-artist of that work, physically experiencing something direct, something internal, the obstacles of subjective communication seem to be overcome. And yet, however transparent, the medium still exists; even if the viewer is unaware of his or her own participation, the mechanisms behind the experience, like the gears and belts that drive an elevator, those mechanisms still exist—the installation offers a simulacrum of some internal feeling or expression of the artist—standing between the artist and viewer. Language is still a mediator and an obstacle in our communication and no matter how much a computer becomes an extension of self, a tool of expression, it is still a screen, a modem, a processor, an obstacle.

While being aware that all media have limitations and complications, we need to move forward, upward, as we attempt to find a better way to express ideas and feelings. We live in technology as fish live in water. It is only natural for us and essential to the future of the
humanities to utilize the tools of our time for creative expression. In *Writing New Media*, Anne Frances Wysocki argues, “When someone makes an object that is both separate from her but that shows how she can use the tools and materials and techniques of her time, then she can see a possible self—a self positioned and working within the wide material conditions of her world, even shaping that world—in that object” (15). The author or artist can construct the *sjužet*, express her or his inner emotion, visualize the narrative in her or his own mind, yet the *fabula*, the construction of story, is left up to the reader or viewer. There is no way around this process of intermediation, neither in literature and art, nor in communication in general. We desire to break through the obstacles of media and communicate directly what we feel and think—as McLuhan puts it, “our human senses, of which all media are extensions” (34). We must see the possibilities of moving toward a less subjective means of communication, while remaining aware of the technology that moves us there—technology and media that can change us, not just as readers and writers, but personally and socially.
Chapter Four
The Embodied Experience: Immersion and Installation Art
(Or Interactive Spaces and the Viewers who Piece Them Together)

"Inhabited space transcends geometrical space."
–Gaston Bachelard (47)

As we have seen in the previous chapters, visuals, beginning with cave paintings, print texts, such as non-linear postmodern literature, and interactive electronic texts all possess narrative qualities. Installation art is no exception. Although the feedback loop changes, with more focus on the viewer and the media, we already know that all art is interactive and that the fabula, “our understanding of story,” can be constructed from all sorts of puzzle pieces. As Brooks reminds us, “The Russian Formalists presented what one might call a ‘constructivist’ view of literature, calling attention to the material and the means of its making, showing how a given work is put together. ‘Device’ is one of their favorite terms—a term for demonstrating the technical use of a given motif or incident or theme” (14). This can be applied to work that immerses the viewer and relies on the embodied experience, resulting in a meaningful story or narrative to the viewer—a work of installation art.

From sculptural installation, where the viewer enters a space and, thus, the frame to create a narrative, to installations with text, where reading becomes a part of the narrative, to simulated environments where narrative is created through experience that includes prior knowledge on the part of the viewer—the viewer constructs the fabula. In an installation the viewer is a part of the work as she or he interacts with a work of electronic literature, but the viewer is also inside the work, viewing art from inside the frame. The narrative in installation art comes from the sjužet—the text presented by the artist and the installation but also the viewer as
she or he becomes part of the work in an embodied experience. Nathaniel Stern describes this embodiment as “Moving and thinking and feeling,” which he claims are all part of the same process (1). This focuses the feedback loop on the viewer within the medium, and the resulting fabula is one that is experienced bodily—personal, subjective, and unique to that viewer. As Roy Ascott argues, “The modern means of communication, of feedback and viable interplay—these are the content of art” (112-113). The most significant meaning is found in the space between the artist’s hand, imprinting the medium with emotion, and the gallery viewers; the narrative created by the viewer’s movement, thoughts, and gaze.

**All Art Is Interactive**

As Lev Manovich states: “All classical, and even moreso [sic] modern, art is ‘interactive’ in a number of ways” (56). A painting can convey meaning and narrative, varying from viewer to viewer depending on her or his past experience, and yet there is still a touch of the artist’s hand, her or his intention, that influences the viewer. Even if the art is abstract, this concept can often be conveyed in something as simple as the alphabetic text of the title, as it is in *Vertical Elevator* (1980) by Richard Serra (see Fig. 15), currently at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art (VMFA). Serra has other paintings in this series that do not involve movement but imply other concepts, such as *The United States Senate Dictates Censorship* or *Ginsburg*, in their simplicity and lack of color. But *Vertical Elevator* stands out because it implies movement. Serra may be better known for his three dimensional sculptural creations, but here he has implied a three dimensional space in a painting, and a moving one at that. The painting is composed of a vertical rectangle of heavy black paint, suggesting to me the blackness of space and non-place, the non-place of an elevator. The even brushstrokes imply the equality of identity-less passengers in an elevator. The white
edges cut into the blackness, which represents our anxiety of social norms within the non-place. It is the lack of definition, the lack of space, the painting almost sucks up the light in the room and the space in its blackness, not just a color but a dimension all its own.

![Figure 15: Vertical Elevator by Richard Serra, VMFA, 1980. Photo by Melinda White.](image)

His sculptural works, for which he is better known, include *Band* (2006) (see Fig. 16), a seventy-foot band of metal that the viewer walks through. Space and presence are not implied here but enforced. As in *Vertical Elevator*, there is a vertical feeling (in this case conveyed architecturally) to the space as the steel band rises far above the viewer moving through it. The physical relationship with the work is dependent on the viewer and each view is unique to the experience of the body within that space. The sheet of steel continually changes as the viewer winds through; the shift from inside to outside is seamless, creating an infinite feeling. Serra says that the band of steel creates new architectural spaces within the gallery (MOMA Multimedia, [http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/14](http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/14)). The viewer becomes, in the process of embodiment, a part of the architecture, the narrative and the feeling of the work. As Nathaniel

When we move and think and feel, we are, of course, a body. This body is constantly changing, in and through its ongoing relationships. This body is a dynamic form, full of potential. It is not “a body,” as thing, but *embodiment* as incipient activity. Embodiment is a continuously emergent and active relation. It is our *materialization* and *articulation*, both *as they* occur, and *about* to occur. Embodiment *is* moving-thinking-feeling, it *is* the body’s potential to vary, it *is* the body’s relations to the outside. And embodiment, I contend, is what is staged in the best interactive art. (Stern 1)

![Figure 16: Band by Richard Serra MOMA 2006 (http://www.denverpost.com/ci_7611593).](http://www.denverpost.com/ci_7611593)

Stern’s idea of embodiment is what occurs when the viewer encounters a space like Serra’s *Band*. No longer is *Band* an object or a work of art, it is an experience.
In an interview in *Bomb*, in answer to the question: “Do you make objects?” Serra answers: “Uniqueness and intentionality make a difference. Also, most objects imply usefulness, whereas art is purposefully useless. You use a chair but you experience a sculpture” (Serra, http://bombsite.com/issues/42/articles/1605). This implies that usefulness is not relevant to installation, as in *Band*, where the conceptual nature and expectation of the viewer’s interaction with the piece, provide meaning for both artist and viewer.

The prioritizing of the experience, the experience as artwork, the beholder subject, is a valuable aspect of interactivity in installation and, moreover, is also what pushes it into the realm of the theatrical. As Artaud states in “The Theater of Cruelty,” “what the theater can still take over from speech are its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility” (89). The non-verbal expression of an embodied installation articulates so much more, bringing us closer to Truth through the theatrical and interactive experience of the viewer. As one of Bruce Nauman’s light sculptures reads, “The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths” (Bismarck 40). In a subjective immersive experience, the artist may reveal something of his or her own intention, but the “mystic truth” that is revealed is left up to the viewer, a subjective and meaningful experience based both on bodily and emotional reactions within the work, but more importantly, on the overall experience.

**Video**

Experience in Bruce Nauman’s *Going around the Corner Piece* (1970) (see Fig. 17) is created with a white cube and the addition of monitors and cameras; the cube is not the focus of the situation, but still an obstacle that the observer must move around, as are the monitors. The cube serves less as an object and more as a presence, anthropomorphized even, as the situation is
more like being in a room with another being, not merely with an object. Lev Manovich elaborates on this type of interactivity:

Ellipses in literary narration, missing details of objects in visual art, and other representational “shortcuts” require the user to fill in missing information. Theater and painting also rely on techniques of staging and composition to orchestrate the viewer’s attention over time, requiring her to focus on different parts of the display. With sculpture and architecture, the viewer has to move her whole body to experience the spatial structure. Modern media and art pushed each of these techniques further, placing new cognitive and physical demands on the viewer.

(56)

Figure 17: *Going around the Corner Piece*, Bruce Nauman, 1975.

It is this conversation, this flow within the feedback loop of artist, medium, and viewer, where we find meaning. The demands that Manovich refers to here include the viewer’s ability to construct *fabula* through the medium provided by the artist. As Roberto Simanowski reminds
us: “Long before the advent of interactive art, the meaning of an artwork was also created as a
dialogue between the work and its audience. In the case of interactive art, however, the work
itself is created within such dialogue, which complicates the issue of meaning tremendously”
(120). The feedback loop is ever-present, even in the artist’s intentions for an interactive work—
in the hypertext *afternoon*, for instance, Michael Joyce envisioned the experience of the
(w)reader to be that of composing a meaningful work no matter what path the (w)reader chose to
follow. He had to let go of some narrative control, yes, but he lexias were carefully drafted to
make it seem as if the (w)reader is in control, when the author’s project is still very much
present. This is true of interactive spaces as well—the artist, although he/she may not know
exactly how the viewer will interact in all circumstances, must include multiple possibilities
when composing the work.

Marshall McLuhan and other theorists have predicted a future of mediation where
message depends on medium, although this is not a new concept for art or language. We are
always mediated in our communication of ideas and emotions, and we continually seek to orient
ourselves in the world through new forms of communication and mediation. Humanity is
continuously advancing in its use of technology, sometimes so quickly that in the grip of any
new technology, we inhabit a space between, yet move forward or upward, continually
anticipating the next level, never fully situated where we are. We continually seek Truth through
objects and experience, and through interactivity with a work of art, putting ourselves within the
frame and becoming a part of this process. This is exactly the environment in which Bruce
Nauman created in his installation, *Going around the Corner Piece*.

Imagine yourself entering a gallery room with white walls with a large white cube in the
center, confronted only with a monitor displaying your own retreating image. As you turn the
corner, your image has disappeared from view (McGrath 168-169). Turning the corner, the same scenario, yet another monitor, another image of self-retreat, and this is repeated many times. This disturbs you and you speed up to try to catch more of a glimpse next time you round a corner, but, inevitably, as you speed up, your retreating image does also. You keep trying, thinking that you will catch up, but end up going around the corner faster and faster with no change in the outcome. Eventually, what is left is the sensation of your own body, your own internal reaction to this chase and the experience. Nauman’s works, including the corridor pieces (see Figs. 18 and 19), are meant to confuse, discombobulate, leave the viewers alone with themselves, with their thoughts, their tail-chasing attempt in this case, to see themselves face-to-face, which, although it is inevitably impossible, does not stop the participant from trying to do just that. “Both what’s inside and what’s outside determine our physical, physiological and psychological responses—how we look at an object,” says Nauman (Wagner 68).

Figure 18: Green Corridor, Bruce Nauman.
The most interesting part of this work, however, is that the experience, the process of creating the work that is going on within the frame (or lack thereof) is almost entirely up to the viewer, the gallery-goers. Once inside Nauman’s construction, much like the interaction with Band, the viewers/participants, must make the decisions; they can choose to meander around the corners, walk backwards, wave their arms, become frustrated or bored and leave the work all together. It is this interaction, this involvement that allows this minimalist construction to become art, art in the making. In her article “Nauman’s Body of Sculpture,” Anne Wagner argues that the viewer’s body “is somehow actively immobilized—dis-animated—by the sculpture that invokes it; through that process body and sculpture are meant to become quite scarilly alike” (Wagner 67). That is both the playfulness and the frustration that confronts the viewer/participant. Nauman sought to take the “object” out of sculpture, or at the very least to blur the boundaries of the inside and outside, the definitive object-ness of a work.

It is through the bodily relationship between the work, structure, “object” and viewer/participant that the meaning is produced, by way of the work and the viewer engaging in an experience and becoming, together, meaningful. According to Stern: “Implicit body art –
interactive art – I argue, intensifies features of this ongoing mutation, the ongoing transformation of the ‘living’ body. Like a directional microphone, it can pick up and amplify specific facets of our continuous relations over time, and gift us with a stage to practice being and becoming” (39). Here the viewer is viewing her or himself with Nauman’s use of cameras and monitors, inside the frame, expression without language, making the work of art as they go, and in the process, practicing being in the body’s relation to the work and in the process of becoming implied in the bodily movement.

In her article “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” Rosalind Krauss illustrates the difference between the medium of video and more traditional media, from the point of view of where the artist is situated. She states that media like painting, sculpture, and film depend on objective materials through which the artist’s intentions must pass; the concept of object-state (4). With video, “the real medium is the psychological situation, the very terms of which are to withdraw attention from an external object—an Other—and invest in the Self” (57). Although artists use the medium in a variety of ways, it comes back to this non-reflective process of self. Joan Jonas, for instance, used video as more of a performance piece in her work, most often inserting herself as image and performer. Her goal with video performance was to offer “the possibility of multiple and simultaneous points of view” (10). When speaking of Vertical Roll (1972), she says:

Performing and audience were both inside and outside…. The audience sees the process of image-making in a performance simultaneously with a live detail. I was interested in the discrepancies between the performed activity and the constant duplicating, changing and altering of information in the video. The whole is a sequence of missing links as each witness experiences a different series
by glancing from monitor to projection to live action. Perception was relative. Time and space in these performances was like Borges’ “Garden of the Forking Paths.” (10)

In her 1973 essay on *Organic Honey’s Vertical Roll*, Constance De Jong argues: “As a means of constituting, the monitor supplied an opposite: oneself given back. An intrinsic quality of the media—feedback—was taken metaphorically. It suggested one who could become a multiple identity” (as quoted in Joselit 163). In his book, Joselit goes on to remark, “The encounters between persons and images staged by Nauman, Campus, Acconci, and Jonas represent identity as a process, not a televisual presence” (163). We are searching, not for an object, but for the self as process, media as process, in a constant state of becoming; as in *Going around the Corner Piece*, we are in a constant state of becoming self, of self-production. Although Nauman is not in his piece as perceiver and perceived, he has put the viewer there, and, as in Jonas’s work, there are gaps—Artaud’s “idea of the void” (71)—that must be necessarily filled by the viewer’s own perception and creation of *fabula*.

What is it that Nauman wishes us to experience within his technological framework, trapped in his corners? As we move around and around, eventually we stop looking for the meaning in the external corners, walls, retreating images and begin experiencing our interior thoughts, our being within a gallery, chasing our own image. It must seem ridiculous at the moment we realize we cannot possible catch our image or come face-to-face with ourselves, but can only keep moving, faster and faster, in this dance with mediation. During this chase, we are becoming one with the work, we are becoming sculpture, and becoming self. As Simanowski suggests: “When considering interactive installation art, however, it is common to promote the
body over reflection on the ground of the body’s return as the privileged site for experience. Granted such a turn, it would be appropriate to point out that the interactive environment encourages the body to find itself” (125). The internal effect, then, and the act of finding self, becomes the work of art. This is the idea of immersion in technology: by immersing ourselves in technology, we become one with the technology—a synthesis, a cyborg. But we are also continually between floors, going around corners, chasing ourselves, chasing technology faster and faster.

*Going around the Corner Piece* seems to provide a dystopian view of technology, with this feeling of chasing ourselves and never getting anywhere. We can also view it from a more McLuhanistic point of view, where we are inevitably immersed in technology, continually turning corners, hopeful for the future and what is to come. By immersing the viewer in the artwork, the viewer becomes the art. At the same time surveilled and surveilling self, the viewers are not only participants, interacting—they are the work. From inside the frame, the perspective, the reflection, is on us as viewers, our thoughts, sensory perception, and our participation in the technology chase.

In *Negative Horizons*, Virilio discusses technology as a vehicle; he points out that when we are within the vehicle we are moving forward, yet because we are immersed in the technology, we are, in fact, sitting still. He sees a danger here in that what we perceive, what we are presented with through the mediation, appears as progress, but in actuality is not. He also adds that we are moving “forward” with such speed, but we do not know where we are going. There is an underlying fear of the technology that propels us, when we do not know how it could end up—becoming cyborg soldiers, for instance, or inhabiting a culture where all of our
experience is mediated, reality only observable through a medium. As Virilio mentions in his foreword to *Negative Horizons*:

> Today we are no longer truly *seers* of our world, but already merely *reviewers*, the tautological repetition of the same, at work in our mode of production (i.e., industrial production), is equally at work in our mode of perceptions. We pass our time and our lives in contemplating what we have already contemplated, and by this we are most insidiously imprisoned. This redundancy constructs our habitat, we construct on analogy and by resemblance, it is our architecture. (37)

Are we so caught up in our mediated vision of the world that we are no longer *seeing*? This is a fear many share about television—that we see more mediated versions of our society than we experience actual society. So much of our lives, our culture, is dominated by the media—now even more so with smart phones and pads—where we are constantly connected to the Internet, yet at the same time disconnected from our surroundings. This plays on Virilio’s point that we are moving fast before we know where we’re going. Of closed-circuit installations like Nauman’s, Joselit says, “motion is so narrowly channeled in them that its ostensible dynamism results in virtual stasis: scan lines reconstitute images while the feedback loop recycles them” (28).

We can find a statement about television and the ever-present feedback loop also in the work of Nam June Paik, particularly in his *Buddha Watching TV*, currently at the VMFA, originally installed in 1974 and reinstalled in 1997 (See Fig. 20). As described by the French, Regional, and American Museum Exchange (FRAME):
Here, a stone Buddha head from Indonesia, partially embedded in dirt, appears to observe itself on the television monitor. A live image of the unchanging head is continually relayed to the monitor by the closed-circuit camera on the tripod. The Buddha thus generates and receives its own image in an infinite temporal loop, updating the act of contemplation for the age of technology. (Buddha Watching TV, installation placard VMFA)

Figure 20: Nam June Paik, Buddha Watching TV, VMFA, 1994. Photo by Melinda White.

Paik has provided an interesting twist in the feedback loop. As viewers we are observing an enclosed loop of medium observing itself through another medium. The Buddha’s eyes are closed—he is not the viewer in this scenario, and the viewer can only see him most fully on the television monitor; the hyperreal is the most real—mediation is the current gaze of our society.
The mechanism in this piece is explicit, drawing attention to the electronic medium and monitor through which, as the Buddha, we often view ourselves. The Buddha is surveilled but also self-surveilled and the effect is serene and meditative, while the technology seems a seamless component of the infinite loop. As Roy Ascott argues:

> The participational, inclusive form of art has as its basic principle “feedback,” and it is this loop that makes an integral whole of the triad artist/artwork/observer. For art to switch its role from the private, exclusive arena of a rarefied elite to the public, open field of general consciousness, the artist has had to create more flexible structures and images, offering a greater variety of readings than were formerly needed in art. (111)

Unlike more interactive installations, where the viewer is an integral and moving part of the work, here the viewer is outside the frame looking in and the feedback loop is static—the stillness both ironic in a mediated image and essential to the meditative theme of the work. Paik himself would appear to agree with Virilio when he says of his *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (with performance by Charlotte Moorman) (see Fig. 21): “The real issue implied in 'Art and Technology' is not to make another scientific toy, but how to humanize the technology and the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly-too rapidly. Progress has already outstripped the ability to program” (as quoted in Fogle, Walker Art Center, [http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B85391323C41DD836167.htm](http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B85391323C41DD836167.htm)) Buddha watching TV contributes to a need for the humanization of media (as well as our idea of them as perhaps a divinity), and the TV Bra is an even more infinite, personal example. Paik goes on to say:
“TV Brassiere for Living Sculpture” (Charlotte Moorman) is also one sharp example to humanize electronics...and technology. By using TV as bra...the most intimate belonging of human being, we will demonstrate the human use of technology, and also simulate viewers NOT for something mean but stimulate their phantasy [sic] to look for the new, imaginative and humanistic ways of using our technology. (Paik, label text for TV Brassiere for Living Sculpture, Walker Art Center)

Figure 21: Nam June Paik, TV Bra for Human Sculpture (with Charlotte Moorman), 1969 (http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B85391323C41DD836167.htm).

This illustrates that he might tend to also side with McLuhan, that media is an extension of self, inevitable and something that although we should be careful with, can ideally work towards imaginative uses, creative expression, and social commentary.

Text

In Xu Bing’s Book from the Sky (see Fig. 22), the meaning of the text—the fabula—is in the meaninglessness of the text. Socially, Bing comments on Chinese repression and propaganda, responding to propaganda posters of his youth and government control of words. He says of the repression of Communist China: “Words alone could determine a person’s fate, they could kill
one person, and ensure a very good life for someone else. There was a saying then: ‘Pick up a pen, just as you would pick up a knife or gun’” (quoted in Morley 194). By creating “fake Chinese writing” in traditional word-block printing, and “as visual forms rather than linguistic vessels, he also neutralized them as potential tools of propaganda” (Morley 1195). The artist’s hand is clearly visible, as each of the four hundred texts is hand-bound in the ancient Chinese tradition. Here we can see how narrative is dependent on the eye of the viewer. Entering the installation, the viewer might expect to find a narrative or at least some sense of message in the vast amount of text; instead, the viewer is perhaps thwarted by meaningless symbols that she or he recognizes as text and yet cannot find any meaning for. This is a blatant call for the viewer to create the *fabula* based on the visual information. What is the meaning of meaningless text?


Figure 22: *Book from the Sky* by Xu Bing (1987-1991) (http://theartofsculpture.tumblr.com/).

This may seem an unusual example of text in installation art since the text is unreadable, but for me it provides the aesthetic effect and the beauty of the written symbol, and the
significance of our readerly expectations and our unsettled, jarring response when those
expectations are thwarted. The *fabula* here is constructed by the feeling of the beauty of the text
and also by the weight of its lack of meaning.

More than ten years after *Book from the Sky*, where text is mysterious and holy, Bing
composed *Book from the Ground* (see Figs. 23 and 24), where the viewers can interact with text,
media, and each other. The *fabula* is still viewer-composed but, in this case, the viewer
encounters meaningful symbols and can construct narrative based on his or her tangible
embodied experience with the media. The hands-on immersion invites the viewer into the frame
as a part of the meaning-making experience. Bing’s intention is still behind the experience, but
here the meaning is open to subjective interpretation, which was also the case, though more
subtly, in *Book from the Sky*.

![Figure 23: Viewer Interaction in Book from the Ground by Xu Bing, MOMA 2007.](image-url)
The combination or addition of text in art is not new (see Chapter 1); however, as new technologies are introduced, new opportunities for developing multimodal work emerge. Text as visual art, such as in *Book from the Sky*, alters our perceptions of what we think of as text, art, and narrative, and works to dissolve the boundaries between them. These all combine in an embodied experience, enhancing communication between the artist and the receiver and emphasizing the role of the feedback loop on our construction of narrative.

Unlike *Book from the Sky*, *Text Rain* (see Figs. 25 and 26) by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv ([http://camilleutterback.com/projects/text-rain/](http://camilleutterback.com/projects/text-rain/)) is an interactive installation where the viewer can catch the text, intentionally, and can form words or phrases with some effort. As Utterback states, “With much of my work—in both traditional and digital media—I have attempted to draw attention to the connections between human bodies and the symbolic systems our bodies engage with” (218). Just as our eyes are used to interacting with letters, words, and phrases, in *Text Rain*, the viewer’s entire body becomes involved in meaning making with our most familiar system—language. Words and text are still art, yet the emphasis here is
on the play with language. In the cooperation between viewers, more text and phrases can be caught and/or collaboratively formed. *Text Rain*, with its combination of digital, aesthetic, and interactive qualities, puts the viewer literally in the frame, on the screen with the falling text, and fits Stern’s view of interactive installation:

> I define interactive installations as including works of electronic and digital art that feature: various forms of sensors or cameras for input; computers, microcontrollers, simple electronic circuits, or other digital or analogical terminals for processing; and any form of sensory output – audiovisual, tactile, olfactory, mechanical, or otherwise; where all are placed together in a system that responds to the embodied participation of viewers, either in real-time, and / or over lengths of time. And in these circumstances, interactivity is understood as the required physical activity of a viewer-participant in order to fully realize a technology-generated and process-based work. (Stern 4)

![Figure 25: Text Rain by Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv (1999).](http://camilleutterback.com/projects/text-rain/).

*Text Rain* definitely places the viewers within the frame—allowing them to view themselves and their interaction on the monitor. Here the boundaries in the feedback loop are difficult to see. As Ascott argues concerning interactive art: “The boundaries between making art, the artifact itself, and the experience of the work are no longer clearly defined. Or, more precisely, the tendency for this to be so is evident” (111). The purpose here is for the body of the viewer to become art—although the experience is fleeting, ever changing, it is meaningful, perhaps even more so because the viewer is engaging the art but also his or her own body, making an embodied awareness inevitable.

In the work of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller this play between reality and mediation is an embodied experience and a sensory interaction with language, but with emphasis more on audio than perception of the viewer’s own body. In the foreword to *The Killing Machine and Other Stories 1995-2007*, Ralf Beil and Manuel J. Borja –Villel state:
We can close our eyes but not our ears. The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach writing in 1851 concluded from this that ‘The ear is an organ of fear.’ He stressed in particular the important role of hearing in the history of human development as an early warning system against enemies and dangers of every description. Yet the ear can just as much be an organ of delight and enjoyment. The Canadian artists Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller work with the whole gamut of meanings and sensations which our sense of hearing offers us. Their particular focus on acoustic perceptions of every kind—from background noises to concert music—in multimedia installations means that they occupy a singular place in contemporary art. (5).

In the case of most of their installation work, headsets are required for gallery viewers. Bartomeu Marí argues that the audio in Cardiff and Miller’s work is “akin to sculpture”: “Binaural and surround sound allow a physical experience of sound to be reconstructed in the listener’s consciousness where it then takes on hyperrealistic qualities. Like sculpture, it, too, takes on the features of volume, proportion, and physical space” (Marí 15). The reconstruction of sound corresponds to the formation of fabula from the sjužet. In this case the sjužet takes on a physical presence but the narrative is hardly visible. The bodily experience within the frame is accessed through one main sense, hearing, yet this interaction is more powerful than we might suspect—what can influence the entire body more than music and sound? When we are experiencing live music, it is not just the sense of hearing that is involved; we can feel the music’s vibrations inside of ourselves and an emotional reaction is inevitable. It is most definitely an immersive
experience when sound is heard, but also felt through the entire body, influencing our emotions directly.

In some of the “walks” that Cardiff is well-known for, viewers (viewer/listeners in this case) are immersed in the construction of the audio narrative but are additionally interacting within an actual physical environment that they have to simultaneously navigate and merge with the rest of the story to form the fabula. In *The Paradise Institute* (http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/paradise_institute.html) (see Figs. 27 and 28), the viewer is aware of a simulated environment but once she or he enters the theater, wearing headphones that further simulate an actual movie theater experience, it is easy to forget that this is not a real space as it becomes an embodied experience—“a surreal blending of cinematic image and physical space” (Cardiff and Miller 135). Not only does the viewer see clips of films, he or she hears ambient theater sounds in stereo through the headset, like a cell phone ringing or another audience member whispering: “Did you check the stove before we left?” (135).

![The Paradise Institute](image)

*Figure 27: The Paradise Institute (2001) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller.*
In this case, the viewer is no longer at the window looking in but is “invited to enter the doorway into a world where interaction is all” (Ascott 226). Entering a physical space, enclosed and simulating a familiar place, the viewer already holds certain expectations, in this case of a theater experience; however, that experience is ultimately unpredictable. As Michael Rush argues: “Rooted in expanded notions of ‘sculptural space’ in Performance art and the trend toward greater viewer participation in art, Installation is another step toward the acceptance of any aspect or material of everyday life in the making of a work of art” (124). The narrative is composed of multiple media—the audio, the projection, and the feeling within the space and all that it implies. This is similar to what I hope to accomplish with my elevator installation—a simulated elevator that meets certain expectations of an actual elevator yet still surprises the viewer in its embodied encounter with narrative.

In one of Cardiff and Miller’s most well-known installations, *The Killing Machine* (see Fig. 29), the embodied experience is even less predictable since the simulated experience being
encountered is fictional. Yet it is still representational enough of weapons and violence in our society to be tremendously disturbing and able to relay a powerful message.

Partly inspired by Franz Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony,” and partly by the American system of capital punishment, this work is an ironic approach to machines designed to torture and kill. A moving megaphone speaker circles around an electric dental chair, which, draped in pink fun fur, is framed by robotic arms that move, attacking the invisible victim. The movement, sometimes graceful, as if part of the choreography of a mechanical ballet, also evokes the actions of menacing androids gone awry. (Cardiff and Miller 189)

From a distance, the installation is beautiful, although possessing an eerie glow from a disco ball and television monitors. Upon closer inspection, the chair, the mechanical arms, and the audio become menacing and uncomfortable. Because the viewer interacts and starts the mechanical dance, the hypothetical killing of the imagined victim, there is an inescapable participatory feeling in nameless, faceless deaths that we usually distance ourselves from. Here we are confronted with the darker side of what technology is capable of. One of the concerns, which Virilio might agree with, is that as our technology advances we become estranged from our humanity and accustomed to view mediated reality, where even real events seem fictionalized. Once the button is pushed and the machine begins, the viewer is helpless to control or keep it from its purpose; we create the technology and yet often feel powerless over it.

**Space and Non-Places**

Herbert Marcuse believes that technologies can lead us to utopia, that man can live his best life, but that the technology must first be liberated. In the elevator, we are disconnected due to the social structure and expectations, like silence, yet all we have to do is turn outward and engage with the other beings around us. Siegfried Kracauer would say that this silence “does not arise out of social courtesy, of the sort one encounters everywhere, but rather serves to eliminate differences,” as it does in his example in the essay “The Hotel Lobby” (181). With the addition of technology, this silence becomes even more profound, as passengers in an elevator may hear the sounds of the belts and gears, or Musak provided to calm them, accentuating this awkward social space where we have adopted unspoken rules of etiquette to cope with our isolation. As passengers in an enclosed space, or participants in the non-space isolation of the Internet, we are
equalized, anonymous, though we are able to connect and communicate with the wide world of the WWW.

In “The Hotel Lobby,” Kracauer explores this phenomenon of being in a public space, such as a theater (as in The Paradise Institute) or an elevator, surrounded by others, yet alone, identity-less. As he says, “[I]t is in this way that a person can vanish into an undetermined void,” and adds: “This invalidation of togetherness, itself already unreal, thus does not leap up toward reality but is more of a sliding down into the doubly unreal mixture of the undifferentiated atoms from which the world of appearance is constructed” (179). The elevator is similar to a hotel lobby although the space is closer, the physicality more intimate and inert, but with the same “coming and going of unfamiliar people who have become empty forms because they have lost their password, and who now file by as ungraspable flat ghosts” (183). This could also be said of the public space of an installation work, where the experience is bodily, internal, yet the physical space may be shared with others.

Kracauer also points out how these spaces can change our perception of reality: “In spheres of lesser reality, consciousness of existence and of the authentic conditions dwindles away in the existential stream, and clouded sense becomes lost in the labyrinth of distorted events whose distortion it no longer perceives” (173). When we are in an elevator, as when we are reading or viewing through media or within an installation, we are not in real space. Yes, we stand within four walls, floor and ceiling, but we are between floors, only aware of where we are in real space by lighted numbers on a signal indicator. The walls, floor, and ceiling, often artwork or mirrors, and calming Musak simulate what we know as a “room,” but closer to reality we are riding in a technology-controlled vertical vehicle. Installation art often simulates reality; viewers are immersed in a space that exists but is merely representational of a real space (see
Cardiff and Miller’s *Paradise Institute*). Within the space it is the embodiment that is prioritized. As Stern suggests: “The performance of embodiment *is* our potential; it *is* our relationality. And this understanding of the per-formed (not pre-formed) body foreshadows and amplifies what is at stake in interactive artistic encounters: an intervention in movement and continuity – in the emergence, potential, and relationality of the body” (33). The performance of embodiment is also what makes the artwork; without the embodiment of the viewer, the meaning, the narrative, the *fabula*, is lost.

There is also a simulation of social space in the medium of the Internet. The danger with the web is that we are immersed in this simulated world—social networks, information portals, role playing games—a second life, and often unaware or disconnected from the real world around us. Teenagers now text message to get to know one another, people meet and date, form relationships online, without ever coming into contact with one another.

As Virilio warns, we are moving faster and faster towards an unknown horizon. We ride the elevator, which moves increasingly faster as the technology advances, vaguely aware of where we are, or where we will be stopping next. Virilio’s metaphors are more violent and severe, reflecting his skepticism. He sees driving in a car, the moving or concepts of speed (in an elevator, pushing buttons, watching signal lights to know what floor we are on), as only illusions. We are at the mercy of the machine; it is the machine that is in motion, we sit still inside the vehicle, as we do when we “surf” the web. Virilio sees the “audiovisual vehicle” as the next step in this process, where the simulation will result in no movement at all, or what he calls an “ultimate sedentariness” (“The Last Vehicle” 34). The question he raises, as we morph more and more with machines and are caught up in the simulation over the reality, where is it that we are
going? Works like Cardiff and Miller’s *Killing Machine* echo these anxieties about where technology is taking us and at what speed.

In “The Age of Cybernetic Systems,” Bill Nichols discusses this swap of simulation for reality, cyborg for human. As we are constantly immersed in our technologies, dependent on cell phones, the Internet, and GPS devices, we are becoming inseparable from our technologies. Vannevar Bush’s hypothetical Memex may someday be a reality—we may soon back up our memories on hard drives, or even on Blackberries or iPods. Nichols sees interaction with media as simulation, “freedom” for the user, but still controlled by the medium that contains it. As he argues, “The question of ‘the machine in the middle’ and the simulation as reality dovetails with Jean Baudrillard’s recent suggestion that the staging powers of simulation establish a hyperreality we only half accept but seldom refute” (635). He sees metaphors as proposing identity, and contends that the real becomes simulation. He sees a danger in this, and uses war simulation examples to stress his point that metaphors take away from our freewill and freedom. This comes close to Virilio’s cautionary view.

The new “identity” that Nichols fears comes from Norbert Weiner’s term “cyborg” (Nichols 635). The term has been used to describe human organisms immersed in simulacra. In her essay “The Cyborg Manifesto,” Donna Haraway takes this concept even further to apply feminist theory to the effects of hybridization of “man” and machine:

> [W]e are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of “Western” science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-
dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of
nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of
the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and
machine has been a border war. (516)

Hers is a persuasive example of how our technical hybridization permeates all aspects of our
society and politics. We are immersed in technology, as it pervades our everyday lives—GPS
navigation systems that help us find our way, television and radio that keep us informed, and
smart phones and the Internet that keep us connected. This immersion can move towards a
transparency of media, but also disconnects us from reality; in an elevator we are unaware of our
physical location or movement, just like in Virilio’s vehicles. As Marc Augé reflects, “The
traveller’s space may thus be the archetype of non-place” (86). Moving through a “non-place”
like in an elevator, a hotel lobby, or an art installation, we lose identity but also become part of
something else—a collective identity, a temporal citizen in ethereal movement. This immersion
can lead to a direct response in the viewer or participant, for instance in an art installation where
the viewer is within the frame and physically involved in the work. Stern argues:

Interactive art can interrupt relationality. It can create a space of instability and
uncertainty that brings a situated moving-thinking-feeling to a higher power.
Moving-thinking-feeling, as I describe it in interactive art, must disposition,
unsettle, and expand. Here we encounter moving-and-thinking-and-feeling as they
are: both autonomous and with one another, as emergent agencies and effects and
affects. Each of moving and thinking and feeling is moved and felt and thought
before and after and during the others, as virtual and actual, as virtualizing and
actualizing, as intensity and lived relation, as suspended potential. In moving-thinking-feeling, art is always both a limitation and an amplification. It attunes us to a small number of ideas, relations, bodies, materials, or matters, and simultaneously magnifies how they act, relate, are. (36)

Full bodily immersion in a three dimensional space in installation art often accomplishes the goal of a direct emotional response through the non-traditional expression of ideas and increased involvement of the viewer in the work itself. While there is a more ambiguous plot, less text, no real linear narrative, the outcome can be a more subjective, metaphorical, and emotional experience that the viewer, as active participant, has a heightened response to. As Simanowski states:

Theorists generally have no problem acknowledging that the specificities of the lived body (gender, race, age, weight, health) contribute to the way a painting, text or performance is perceived. If the audience is physically engaged in the art and the interactor’s body becomes the central focus of the aesthetic experience, the body’s importance increases significantly. In such a context we “think” much more directly through the body and somehow feel the meaning of the work at hand. (ix)

Stepping inside the frame of an installation work, the physical interaction of a viewer can create an internal response, making the viewer a co-creator in the work, a physical, embodied experience.
Print texts, electronic texts, and installation works all involve a medium through which meaning and message pass from author/artist to reader/viewer. Sometimes the author or artist gives up some control, his or her mark, but, inevitably, some authorial project is there—in the conception, the composition—even if the message is dependent on reader/viewer participation and subjective experience. Remediating a narrative from one medium to another alters the feedback loop, requires varying degrees of reader/viewer interactivity and ability to form narrative from “[e]llipses in literary narration, missing details of objects in visual art, and other representational ‘shortcuts’” (Manovich 56). Although the narrative may become increasingly subjective as it takes on a more interactive and even embodied experience, the essence of the work, the feeling, the narrative, the metaphors, should still be ensuing from an authorial perspective, even if that perspective becomes multiple and uncertain. The author/artist’s use of media alters meaning, the medium is the message, however, that message changes as the presentation of the narrative, the sjužet, is reconstructed/refomed, and the fabula becomes more dependent on reader/viewers, who soar in the same elevator, yet arrive at different destinations.
Chapter 5
The Remediation of “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood-Related Diseases”
(Or the Near-Death of the Author)

David Seidner: “Where do you see your work going?”
Richard Serra: (laugh) “Up and down and sideways. And in between.”
Interview for BOMB, 1993 (45)

“Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases” is a narrative that has been remediated from print form to electronic literature and installation work. The discussion of theory and practice throughout this dissertation still does not illustrate how one narrative can be represented in three media. My own creative work here serves to inform my research and support theory in each area while providing me the opportunity to practice and create those narrative forms that I study in my project.

The melding of theory and practice is not uncommon in the fields in which I position myself. Robert Coover, whose works appear in Chapter Two, is a postmodern author and also a scholar who teaches and has contributed to the Electronic Creative Writing Program at Brown University and the Electronic Literature Organization. Talan Memmott (whose work Lexia to Perplexia appears in Chapter Three) is a well-known writer and also scholar of digital literature. His new book (his dissertation) looks at digital media theory and uses his own experience of coding and composing to inform his scholarly work. Nathaniel Stern, whose new book, Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance, is mentioned in Chapter Four, uses his own installation work to inform his theories of embodiment, while his theory informs his practice of the work. In this book Stern says of theory (philosophy) and practice (art):
It doesn’t advance aesthetics – a philosophy about art – but rather understands art and philosophy as potential *practices* of one another. It is about rehearsing the possibilities of what and how we might *be*, through what and how we perform. Art and philosophy, in other words, have the ability to create, transform, and mobilize each other. (3)

Theory and practice inform each other in this type of digital art and literature because the latter is a truly interdisciplinary field (or fields) and the theory or philosophy must be continually recreated as literature and art take new forms and authors and artists expand their horizons. The crossroads of these fields—the interdisciplinary space between in which we find ourselves—is a necessary expansion of creative endeavors within these fields. As Roy Ascott argues:

> The technology of computerized media and telematic systems is no longer to be viewed simply as a set of rather complicated tools extending the range of painting and sculpture, performed music, or published literature. It can now be seen to support a whole new field of creative endeavour that is as radically unlike each of these established artistic genres as they are unlike each other. A new vehicle of consciousness, of creativity and expression, has entered our repertoire of being. While it is concerned with both technology and poetry, the virtual and the immaterial as well as the palpable and concrete, the telematic may be categorized as neither art nor science, while being allied in many ways to the discourses of both. The further development of this field will clearly mean an interdependence of artistic, scientific, and technological competencies and aspirations and, urgently, on the formulation of a transdisciplinary education. (245)
Interdisciplinary studies have been crucial for both my research and my project. By expanding my education into the fields of art and technology I was able to obtain an informed view of these crucial areas that have become part of my work. Expanding my field of study supports the theory and practice of remediation (adapting a narrative into other forms); it is necessary to move beyond one discipline to compose work in other media. Throughout the process I felt, as Ascott explains, that I was between disciplines, parallel universes, between floors—between artist and scholar, reader and author:

As artists, we move through parallel universes, shifting in and out of time-frames, phase shifts, tunneling through one set of realities into other worlds: like Schrödinger’s Cat, neither precisely here nor there, actual or virtual. In our evolving symbiosis with the computer, in our telematic augmentation, these attributes are magnified. All is in transition, art and meaning constantly shift fleetingly between resolutions. (Ascott 230)

Just as electronic literature authors like Alan Bigelow must constantly achieve new knowledge about technological advancements, and installation artists must be up-to-date on coding and material advancements (and narrative), when creating narrative in literature or art and digital media it is necessary to move beyond the boundaries of just one area of expertise. It is also necessary to allow room for collaboration when there are complexities involved—one person cannot be an expert on everything.
Remediation

Remediation is a significant factor in creative work. Whether changing a narrative from a print text to a film, or turning a well-known fairy tale into something new, the ability to translate a narrative into a new experience is something authors and artists have done since the time the pre-historical human beings painted animal scenes on cave walls.

The previous chapters have shown how the feedback loop, structure, narration, and interactivity change through different media. My own work has confirmed the fact that the same narrative can be remediated into various forms, embracing these changes while retaining the original meaning. Even if it does not follow the same linear plot as the print version, the electronic and installation versions maintain the overall feeling of the narrative invested with perhaps more emotion as the “reading” becomes a bodily experience—requiring the viewer to become part of the work. The fabula, more dependent on reader/viewer and interaction as the feedback loop shifts its focus, can still be constructed from the sjužet presented, even though the presentation is vastly different in each remediation. As demonstrated in my earlier chapters, the author or artist’s and reader or viewer’s roles change from print forms of narrative to interactive digital texts and installations.

As in postmodern literature, the author, on his way to becoming “dead” according to Barthes, must give up some control, some of his intentionality in the feedback loop. Yet, we must recognize that the author’s intent is still inscribed in this apparent lack of intent all along. The fragmented structure, changes in point of view, ambiguous endings, are all planned and carried out by an author. The ambiguity must be intentional, the desire for the reader to comprehend meaning more subjectively is planned all along.
In electronic works of literature the author may seem less present as the medium is highlighted and it contributes to meaning through reader interaction. The author is still there; each link intentionally placed, each potential choice on the part of the reader mapped out in advance but some of its consequences are not mapped out or even predicted by the author; they become reality in the process of interpretation. The narrative, as in a “choose your own adventure book,” may seem left up to the reader’s movements and choices, but the author intends the presentation of the *sjužet*. This does not mean the author has control over the outcome, as no author can predict all the possibilities of a text or the maneuvers of a reader, but that the author purposefully designs the subjectivity, necessarily requiring the viewer to create meaning from his or her interaction with the work.

In an installation where the viewer becomes part of the work, the artist seems long forgotten. The mark of the artist is there in the concept, the idea, and yet the meaning we take from it is ultimately unique and ours. The viewer, in this case, is expected, required, to participate, become a part of the work through a bodily experience not possible in other narratives; that experience is individual to him or her, necessarily subjective, but more emotional, more personal, more of an unpredictable experience than something read from a page.

After initially composing the print version of “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” I began to envision it in multiple media forms. The narrative was fragmented and thematically suited to be a hypertext, as it moves between the floors of a hospital, changes perspective, and plays with time. It also has the powerful emotion of personal experience behind it, making it easy to add to the metaphor with images and interaction, and ultimately create an interactive embodied experience that brings the viewer into the narrative. Because it was such an
emotional story and one that I felt would convey to others who had experienced similar loss within the walls of a hospital, the story was a perfect candidate for remediation.

**Print (see Appendix A)**

In the print version of “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” the *sjužet* presents a multi-layered, mixed-perspective journey, leaving chronological gaps that the reader/viewer must reconstruct him or herself, however it ultimately fits neatly into a chronological *fabula*, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

In “What is Writing?” Barthes compares language to the horizontal plane and authorial style to the vertical. Writing is what happens in between and this is where we find message, where, as he puts it, the mythos of the author, the magic happens:

Style, on the other hand, has only a vertical dimension. It plunges into the closed recollection of the person and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter; style is never anything but metaphor, that is, equivalence of the author’s literary intention and carnal structure (it must be remembered that structure is the residual deposit of duration). So that style is always a secret; but the occult aspect of its implications does not arise from the mobile and ever-provisional nature of language; its secret is recollection locked within the body of the writer. The allusive virtue of style is not a matter of speed, as in speech, where what is unsaid nevertheless remains as an interim of language, but a matter of density, for what stands firmly and deeply beneath style, brought together harshly or tenderly in its figures of speech, are fragments of a reality entirely alien to language. The miracle of this transmutation makes style a kind of supra—literary operation
which carries man to the threshold of power and magic. By reason of its biological origin, style resides outside art, that is, outside the pact which binds the writer to society. (12)

Barthes must have later considered that the use of language and style were the primary things within the author’s control when he declared the author dead; the author has control over his or her presentation, but not the meaning of a text. The choice of language—words, phrases, and punctuation—is up to the author and the style is made up of experience, time, and culture. The author or artist makes choices, has an emotional intention when composing a text or work of art, but the meaning is, for the most part, out of his or her hands.

Beneath the language in my story are fragments of reality, based on the experience of the author. The sjužet is intentionally constructed to bring out the metaphor of in-between spaces and the bewildered, trapped state of the main character. The language of the print text is fairly minimal. Out of all of the forms of the narrative, I feel this one is the most emotionally distant. Because of the overwhelming emotions I experienced towards the situation, the text is more clinical, giving me an objective take on an overwhelming emotional experience.

I wrote the first draft of “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases” entirely in my father’s hospital room in an ICU. As many others who have lost track of days in an intensive care unit, with no control over the situation, waiting, and watching, and listening to beeps of machines, and drinking waiting room coffee, I felt trapped and barely able to breathe. The idea began, actually, as a joke. It was December in Salt Lake City during a blizzard, and the hospital parking lot was iced over. As my Mom and I arrived, I drove up to the front door to drop her off. She said she could walk and I responded that all we needed was for her to break a hip and end up in the hospital too—thinking then I would surely never escape the place.
In the ICU the mind wanders. I was reading *Tropic of Orange* by Karen Tei Yamashita, a book where each character alternatively experiences each day of the week, an interesting non-linear structure and perspective combined with elements of magical realism. My story was further influenced by “I Only Came to Use the Phone” by García Márquez, and, of course, Coover’s “The Elevator.” I was also knitting a scarf and felt it might go on forever as the hours and the days seemed infinite. The longing for home, combined with terrible confusion, shock, and frustration created this story about a woman named June who is brought to the hospital under unfortunate circumstances and ends up staying there for the rest of her life.

The story is written in lexia-style paragraphs that shift in time and perspective. June’s father attempts suicide, a fact obvious from the first two lines of the story: “What eventually became a lifestyle choice began with a suicide attempt. Not her own, of course, but her father’s.” The elaboration on the suicide attempt comes later as the reader is let in on June’s mom, Carol’s, experience of finding him in the basement of their house. White space between the lexias provides a metaphor for the between floors idea, as well as giving the reader space to construct the *fabula* and pause between sections. The first version of the story was much shorter and throughout the revision phase the biggest challenge was maintaining the non-linear structure and determining where to place new lexias within the structure. With time and distance, revision became necessary to give the story more emotion and character development.

Ultimately, the print text is characterized by fragmentation, ambiguous perspective and time, metaphorical space, and nonlinear structure—elements of postmodern literature that work to make the text more reader-focused and interactive.
Electronic Literature (see [http://ramsites.net/~whitemm2/betweenfloors](http://ramsites.net/~whitemm2/betweenfloors))

Even more nonlinear than postmodern literature, the electronic text is presented playing on the typical linear movement of an elevator with “stops” along the way to focus on pieces of the plot, read in an order of the reader’s choosing. In this case, the *fabula* relies more heavily on the reader’s interaction and interpretation of the text, as well as his or her response to the visuals, links, and movement. As Ascott says of Behaviorist art: “the spectator is involved and that the artwork in some way behaves” (129).

At first I could only see “Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases” as a print story, the first I had written in a long time. It then occurred to me that the structure could be recast into a hypertext fiction and made even less linear, with more emphasis on the various elevator floors, much like the days of the week in Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* or the elevator ride in Robert Coover’s “The Elevator.”

Although in the print version I had control over where the reader began and ended, in this case I wanted she or he to “Fall in through the living room ceiling” (Landow, *Hypertext 3.0*, 111); even though the floors are numbered and could potentially be read in numerical “order,” they do not correspond with the linear narrative of the print version. The first draft of the hypertext version included all of the text from the print story, with sections divided up by floor and read by continuous clicking of that particular floor’s button or by clicking internal text links to travel to another section (see Fig. 30).
The more I thought about it, the less this strategy seemed to work for the medium—it was text-heavy, did not really portray the feeling of the elevator or being trapped in and most likely it would not have been read in its entirety as it was composed of short lexias, but extending over twenty-two pages of text. I realized I hadn’t effectively considered my reader. As Camille Utterback argues:

All forms of “interactive text” demand a physical body with which to interact.

When we use the now-common interface that consists of a mouse and keyboard as input devices, it is easy to forget the body whose eyes perceive the screen, and whose hands and fingers manipulate the mouse and keyboard. (Utterback 218)

To revise the electronic version, I actually worked backwards from the sparse text I had remediated for the installation. I went through the extremely short segments of text, the main feelings that I wanted to convey, and then I returned to the longer print version to see what I felt was needed. I added to segments of text with Flash “pop-up” links to images from the installation work, showing hospital scenes, with the addition of audio, that could convey the
same sense of isolation as in the text; this added emotion to the story with images and offered additional navigation and surprises through the hypertext (see Figs. 31 and 32).

Figure 31: Final version, title page. Screen capture.

Figure 32: Final version with pop-up window. Screen capture.

The “random” seeming links also give the reader more control (or semblance of control) through the text. By clicking on a text link the reader does not know where he/she will end up or if he/she will be confronted with text or an image, some with audio. Although the sjužet is author-controlled and every choice was determined by me, where the reader ends up, in what order she or he reads the text, and the meaning she or he comes away with are very much out of
my control. As Ascott says: “While the general context of the art experience is set by the artist, its evolution in any specific sense is unpredictable and dependent on the total involvement of the spectator” (111).

The text is almost more linear in the electronic version as the reader can follow pieces of the narrative that appear on the same floor as well as click on links to images that correspond to that floor or section of narrative. It is the interaction that provides the reader with the choice to read the lexias in any order, click on links or not, and return back to the same floor to continue the thread there.

Installation Art (Third Floor Millhiser House, November 1st, 2012. See Fig. 33)

Putting the reader/viewer inside the narrative, the installation version requires bodily interaction, which creates a more subjective fabula, but also a more personal and emotional narrative. The viewer is required to take in sensory and bodily feelings, interact with the medium, view visuals and fragments of text, ultimately determining her or his personal experience and the overall message.

Figure 33: Installation show poster. (By Patrick Vickers).
As I mentioned before, because of the emotion involved in this work I felt I could capture the metaphor and the feeling within an actual structure, following such works such as Cardiff and Miller’s *The Killing Machine*. The elevator also works to represent both the control and lack of control we feel with technology and the disconnect we feel from others, both in grief and in the confines of this vertical transportation. I was lost in an elevator in Istanbul when I was three or four. My father would tell the story of how one minute I was waiting with him for an elevator and the next minute the doors were closing and I was whisked away. I only know his panic from the stories he told, of running up and down flights of stairs searching for me until he followed my wails to a group of very confused people trying to speak to me (in Turkish) and calm me down.

My own part of the story is vague recollection, as most recollections are, and consists mostly of the feeling of being trapped inside the mechanism with buttons that I knew meant something but gave me no control over the situation. I was swept away from my father with no idea where I would end up. This was oddly similar to how I felt in that room in the ICU.

The planning for this portion of the dissertation started about three years ago. I decided to do an installation but really had no idea what I was getting myself into. This was the creative stretch for me—something I had never attempted before. From the beginning I had a strong vision of what I wanted it to look like. I sketched it, discussed it with people, and it morphed some though it maintained the basic idea until it began to take shape. I originally saw a metal frame with white screen for walls, text and image all around and controlled by the elevator button panels. I also wanted it to be an immersive narrative experience for the reader/viewer. As Roberto Simanowski argues: “Although traditional Western art—painting, literature, theater, sculpture—served eye as locus of perception, in interactive art, the interface is no longer
exclusively focused on vision but engages the entire body and turns it into a privileged site for experience. The boundaries between body and world dissolve in favor of an affective contact” (124-125). This ideal of having the meaning develop through bodily experience rather than words on a page was new for me and something I wanted to push myself to create.

I am typically someone who fits the cliché of a solitary writer profile. I don’t like to ask for help—personally or professionally. Even the concept of an art installation would not have occurred to me if it were not for being a part of a program that includes artists. Suddenly I became aware that my electronic narratives could be bigger and more physical—I could compose a structure, a space in a gallery, and interaction with a computer screen in electronic texts could be replaced by an embodied experience for the reader/viewer. One installation in particular, Patient Viewer by Tara Strickstein and Jesse Yuhasz (April 8, 2011) in the previous MATX annex, helped me see that building a structure in a gallery and having viewers interact was a realistic possibility.

Once I imagined the elevator as a part of my dissertation project, I could not let it go. With the help of colleagues and friends I was able to see my vision take form. Since I do not claim to be a visual artist, I never expected it to be perfect but I am still amazed that my idea could come to life the way it did.

Sam Thibault programmed the elevator panels (see Figs. 34 and 35) to an Arduino circuit board (see Fig. 36) that then controls the Flash text file that I composed for the projection. Not only did he have to program the button panels, but he also soldered the lights and wires that run from the switches on the button panels to the Arduino controller. The lights run on one set of cables and the programming communicates with the indicator lights and elevator call buttons so that, when moving between floors, one experiences real time as the elevator “moves” from one
floor to another. The open and close door buttons will slow down or speed up this process. The other cables run from the main button panel to the Arduino and operate the Flash-based text program.

Figure 34: The control panels of Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases in process (July 2012).
Figure 35: Wiring of the main panel.

Figure 36: The Arduino circuit board.
Once the programming was complete it was time to buy materials and build the structure. My colleague John Priestly was the contractor for the elevator, as well as the musak composer. He helped with the design and did all of the construction of the wooden panels that hold the elevator buttons. The frame ended up being PVC pipes (see Fig. 37) with the elevator panels mounted on wooden boxes that also house the electronics and wires (see Fig. 38). I chose a hospital green color for the floor and panel boxes to add to the feeling of being immersed in a hospital. The screen was made from plastic sheeting, which gives a semi-translucent appearance and allows for the rear projections to come through clearly. The plastic also adds to the hospital motif—creating a sterile feeling and also emulating hospital privacy curtains.

Figure 37: Construction of the elevator in progress (September 2012).
I could not have completed this project without collaboration and I am very grateful for the generosity of everyone who contributed to making my wild vision a reality (well, a simulated reality). Imagining the elevator was easy. Building it was not. We encountered several stops and starts with both coding and construction. It took an entire summer to complete the programming, as I drove to Reston, VA on the weekends. Because I code in Actionscript Two there was some trouble getting the Arduino controller to talk to Flash. The construction was well planned but that did not mean we were immune to difficulties. There were some issues with the frame, the power tools, and fitting the boxes and mounting them to the frame. This meant several late nights spent at the studio sawing and fitting (and trips to the hardware store) before we could even get the base frame up and several more after that.

Once the elevator was constructed and operating, the immersive experience was close to what I had imagined. There were some small compromises due to technical equipment constraints (like projectors that could only fill a part of the wall screens). Unlike the electronic

Figure 38: Elevator panels mounted (October 2012).
literature version, the images in the installation do not correspond to a certain floor or lexia of text. This enhances the discombobulating feeling within the structure and provides time for the viewer to take in the looping images while reading the text on the opposite wall without really missing anything. The projected hospital images also zoom in, adding to the feeling of claustrophobia caused by the narrative (see Fig. 39). On the back wall of the elevator I decided on a movie of elevator images—some showing elevators, panels, or inner workings of elevators to add to the elevator-ness and serve as a reminder of the space as a simulated mechanism and medium of transportation.

Figure 39: Button panel and projected image of "Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases."

The text is a sparse version of the original print story, with one lexia of text per floor (see Fig. 40). Most often one line of text shows up with the elevator door’s “ding” and other lines or single words come in to make it dynamic. The narrative here is also in the second person. I made
this decision to add to the immersion of the reader/viewer in the experience, bringing him or her in as the main character in the work instead of June. Ultimately, I think this worked well—it pulls the reader/viewer into the work and makes it even more unsettling.

![Projected text in the second person.](image)

**Figure 40: Projected text in the second person.**

To enhance the embodied experience I revised the Flash text files controlled by the Arduino to make the text less simple. It originally was black (or red for emphasis) text on a white background. The revision involved changing the background of projected text to contribute more to the overall immersion of the reader/viewer. I think the final installation accomplishes the embodiment of the reader/viewer bringing him or her into an immersive narrative experience. The *sjužet* is unique and almost entirely changed from the print and electronic versions, yet the overall *feeling* that the reader has is strikingly similar. By being included in the work, she or he constructs *fabula*, most likely in a more personal mode—perhaps reminding them of former
hospital visits or ill friends or family—but the metaphor of traveling between floors of the hospital and the trapped and claustrophobic feeling all come through with the combination of visuals, text, and audio. We could apply to this installation Stern’s theory of embodiment:

Interactive art frames moving-thinking-feeling as embodiment; here “the body” is addressed as it is formed, and in relation. Interactive installations amplify how the body’s inscriptions, meanings, and matters unfold out, while the world’s sensations, concepts, and matters enfold in. Such work creates situations that enhance, disrupt, and alter experience and action in ways that call attention to our varied relationships with and as both structure and matter. I suggest that new media has the ability to intervene in, and challenge, not only the construction of bodies and identities, but also the ongoing and emergent processes of embodiment, as they happen. (3)

Part of the embodied experience included a soundtrack for the installation. Elevator Muzak is already a trademarked genre of amalgamated music that, as Joseph Landa, author of Elevator Music, says, “shifts music from figure to ground” (3). The music for the project was remediated by John Priestly from appropriate songs recreated with acoustic sound and no lyrics. The music really enhances the piece, giving it a more realistic elevator feel while adding another emotional layer to the experience. Landa goes on to say:

Hearing it, we are inspired to frame an otherwise disordered or boring existence into movie scenes whose accompanying soundtrack alternately follows and anticipates our thoughts and actions—but then shifts (or rather plays on) with a
rhythm and logic indifferent to our own. Moodsong reinforces mounting
suspicions that we live inside a dream. (3)

After the initial viewing of the installation, the guitar-based elevator music John
composed contrasted with the trapped, disconcerting feeling of the experience, but it was too
calming and lovely (what elevator musak or moodsong is meant to be). To adjust the music to
the rest of the immersive experience, I found another collaborator, Norberto Gomez Jr., who had
a collection of songs originally composed for his own digital video, *Savage Rite*
norbertogomezjr.com) under the band name CANNIBAL BOOM. Interspersing these more
jarring songs between John’s guitar remixes worked perfectly to give the viewer something
unexpected and unsettling throughout his or her elevator journey.

Overall the installation experience was challenging but the finished work has proven
quite surprising in its effects. My composition of an installation like this, inspired and informed
by those I had studied, allowed me a greater insight into the art world and theories of space and
embodiment. Although composing the print text and the electronic work were solitary endeavors,
building an installation—something out of my comfort zone and field of expertise—required
collaboration and pushed me into the interdisciplinary exploration that I feel this program was
meant to stimulate.

Composing my narrative in three forms contributed to my enhanced understanding of
each medium; in turn, it drew on my research into each. From my reading of postmodern and
electronic literature, literary, narrative, and new media theory, as well as of installation art and
theories of embodiment, I was able to make informed decisions about what to include in my
work. It also helped me consider the reader throughout the entire process. I did not feel that in
any of the forms I lost authorship or intention—my intention was consistent but achieved with
different media of expression—but I do think that the reader/viewer becomes more significant as
she or he becomes part of the work and my purpose for creating this work may not restrict the
ultimate meaning of this installation. As Foucault points out in his essay, “What Is an Author?”:

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to
which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur.
We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who
really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or
originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?
Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of
existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who
can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for
possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind
all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an
indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking? (120)

I did feel that my interdisciplinary background was extremely beneficial throughout this process.
Being allowed to research in multiple disciplines was at times challenging but I was able to
situate myself among them, perhaps with more of an emphasis on English literature and narrative
studies, and produce a cohesive set of projects and analysis that not only speaks to all of the
disciplines but blurs the boundaries between them.
Conclusions
The Future of Remediation, Text, E-Lit, Interactive Art, and Elevators
(Or This Author Survived)

But this means you, dear reader, must develop the fantic imagination. You must learn to visualize possible uses of computer screens, so you can get on down to the deeper level of how we’re going to tie these things together.
—Ted Nelson, Computer Lib/Dream Machines (80)

In an elevator, in art, in narrative, in life, we share the journey but not the destination. Even in a linear print text the experience of reading is inevitably a subjective experience. As the feedback loop shifts and the meaning of a work becomes more dependent on the embodied interaction of the viewer—whether in a print text, an electronic text, or an installation—the narrative becomes more of an emotional experience than a passive conduit. When we, as readers and viewers, encounter unexpected elements in a text or work of art (as opposed to more traditional linear narratives), we are forced to overcome this temporary obstacle, to be comfortable in the space between floors perhaps a little longer, to eventually reach (or imagine) a more personal relationship among the medium, the author/artist, and ourselves. Although authors and artists give up some element of control as the feedback places more emphasis on the medium, they are ultimately rewarded with knowing that the reader/viewer experience will ultimately reflect more of the emotional charge of the work. Each remediation had its own level of interaction and embodiment, becoming more immersive with each change in form. As a whole, in its construction and analysis, the work comes together as a hybrid of art and research, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, each aspect informing the others. As Nathaniel Stern says of interactive art:

The implicit body framework gives potential modes of explicating embodied
action and thinking through interactive art as relational and performed. It proposes thorough descriptions of physical activity and careful readings of that which is sensibly conceived. All this takes is time: time spent interacting with art, time spent describing those interactions in detail and time contemplating, writing and iterating through our multiple unfolding, infolding and co-emergent relations.
(Stern, “The Implicit Body as Performance: Analyzing Interactive Art” 237)

Through both my reading and my study, I have shown that as the media change so does the effect that the narrative can have when interaction and nonlinear structures are employed to create meaning. As author and artist I have experienced the process by which an emotional experience is turned into a postmodern story, a work of e-lit, and an installation, taking into account the various changes in media and message in all three forms. The narrative was not easier to express in one form or another, or more easily received. No single form is better than the others; they are very different and convey varied levels of emotional and bodily interaction on the part of the reader/viewer.

As in life, the elevator takes us up and down, through space, moving without really going anywhere, looking forward, waiting, inches away from other beings without interaction, without eye contact—perhaps a cough here, the distant drum of someone’s iPod, the rustle of gum wrappers, shifting bags or briefcases, some elevator Musak. We could reach out and connect with the person next to us but we do not. We retreat, as per social expectation, into ourselves, as we stand still to move through a transitional non-space.

We tend to see ourselves in a world of transparent technology—we talk on cell phones, drive cars, and log on to the internet without giving it a second thought. The elevator is a
definitive representation of immersive media. We think we control it, but we really do not. We are at its mercy. Like fate. Trapped, suffocated, and with limited choice. But pushing buttons nonetheless. Technology—cold and sterile as a hospital, but nevertheless connecting us. It is all that’s connecting us. Dangerous and impersonal. We are close together, packed like sardines, with strangers. No communication, no contact. Just a three-minute ride in a tiny box. Our lives on the line and in the air, literally, for a moment.

We get in and out of elevators frequently. Moving in two directions, defying gravity, unless we are in Willy Wonka’s great glass elevator, which travels in all directions and sometimes even through the ceiling to fly through the air. Just as the internet and computers have insinuated themselves into the composing and distributing of art and literature, concurrent with their development, and even before, the elevator has permeated our entertainment imperceptibly, perpetuating our utopian visions perhaps but also our fear of the technology and the social situations it produces.

An example of Utopian visions of possibility, connected I believe to the Utopian vision of technology, is found in Roald Dahl’s books, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*. Although there is a hesitancy surrounding Dahl’s elevator, it opens up hope and potential for adventure in the text, and also predicts that space travel via the elevator will become more and more a realistic possibility. At the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, when the elevator is first introduced, Dahl writes: “‘You musn’t despair!’ cried Mr. Wonka. ‘Nothing is impossible! You watch!’” (Dahl 158).

With the technology available to us it does seem as if anything is possible. As the tools progress, the potential for not only creative expression but also connection with our fellow human beings is astounding. As Roy Ascott states in *Telematic Embrace*:
More than a technological expedient for the interchange of information, networking provides the very infrastructure for spiritual interchange that could lead to the harmonization and creative development of the whole planet. With this prospectus, however naively optimistic and transcendental it may appear in our current fin-de-siècle gloom, the metaphor of love in the telematic embrace may not be entirely misplaced. (245)

This positive side to technological advancement, this network of communication and ideas, is what McLuhan sees as the “global village.” The Web allows us access to knowledge otherwise unavailable to us, or at least not without restrictions. We can communicate with others, geographically distant, can access text, visuals, maps, information, and even art in a way we couldn’t imagine even in the age of television. We feel more connected to others, and also to self, as we search through mediation to find these truths, these fragments of ourselves, in the world around us. We use the tools available to us as extensions of ourselves in our artistic endeavors, as a paintbrush—we are one with our materials in the act of creation. And anyone can be the artist—upload their thoughts, their perceptions, or ideal views of self, to a social networking site. At the same time as we feel bombarded by information, we are also free to express and access the expression of others.

If, as McLuhan claims, “the medium is the message,” in more interactive works, including postmodern literature, it is a combination of the artist/author’s choice of media, the *sjužet*, the choices of the reader/viewer, and the entirety of the interactive experience that makes up the message. It is important not to forget that this was to some extent the intention of the author/artist. In a narrative like Coover’s “The Elevator” or Michael Joyce’s *afternoon* or an
installation like Cardiff and Miller’s *The Paradise Institute*, the fragmentation, the ambiguity, the changes in perspective, the simulated space, and the dependence on the viewer’s embodied experience are all choices the author/artist made but they are negotiated differently by each reader. The author gives us the “blueprint” but does not entirely constrain our reading. Especially in interactive work the concept of authorial intentionality is weakened, even called into question.

The medium created by authors/artists of interactive works becomes just one part of the message for the reader/viewer; meaning relies on the interaction of the author/artist, the medium, and the reader/viewer, who may also modify, reinterpret, and restructure the work as he or she constructs the *fabula*. As we move through an interactive and/or embodied work we are not just a participant in the work we find ourselves immersed in, but one with the work—at once the medium and the message. As Stern says of embodiment:

> I call the body we “see” as positioned the *static body*, and the body in passing — what Massumi sometimes calls the body without an image — the *continuous body*. This is not parallel to Hayles’ or Hansen’s dual bodies; my continuous body *includes* the static, the moving, and the incorporeal – all our images, actions, and potentials – *in it*. We of course *relate* to understandings of the body, to its materiality, *and* to incipience, as part of embodiment’s continuous becoming. These are, in other words, not actually separate bodies. I use the terms static and continuous as heuristic devices that help to conceptually engage with re-thinking bodies and embodiment, as well as different modes of artistic intervention. It is useful to remember and think of them both, so as not to forget how they work together, in continuity. (30)
In McLuhan’s famous expression there is also a danger, however. It is this: are we now focused more on the technology than the message? If the medium is the message, it is the surveillance, the projection of our retreating image that is the message in Nauman’s piece, not our experience. This is disturbing, but appropriate in our culture of immersive technology and mediated experience. As a culture, we try to catch up, try to master new technologies, but by the time we come closer to them, they are gone. Around the next corner waits another and yet another, we continue to try to catch them. By the time we master a technology, it is transformed and we have to re-learn it or learn it anew.

In the installation work discussed in Chapter Four, it is the viewer who plays the role of “human sculpture” except that in installations like Nauman’s, for instance, our image is not adorned by media but mediated within it—essentially moving, but static within the mediated space of the television monitor and our actual self, our actual movements, showing up delayed as they are recycled back to us on the monitor, as the Buddha is in Paik’s work. According to Joselit, “One might argue that the whole history of modernism has been a response to the short-circuiting of humans and objects in which bodies and things have grown into one another as cyborgs and fetishes” (28). This only worsens when we are confronted with a surveilled medium such as the Internet, where we can even maintain a “second life” online—as anonymous or known as we desire to be on the World Wide Web.

In literature and art, even in daily encounters, the elevator is a reflection of our social state—proximity without connection. It also represents the furthering of technology leading to cultural changes—from the skyscraper to the way we conduct ourselves in a box full of strangers. Virilio says that it is not medium or message, but speed that takes precedence in our current society; we are moving forward but as in an elevator, where we move without physically
moving. This allows us to lunge forward with our technical innovations, without fully knowing where we are going, without even feeling that we are in motion. Technology provides us many abilities, and continues to expand possibilities—distribution of art, literature, and music, social connection otherwise impossible, information at our fingertips, linking us to the world.

But we should pause and consider where we are going. We feel connected, but as I type messages to friends on Facebook, I am alone, isolated; is the ease and illusion of connection at our fingertips keeping us from real social interactions? As we stand face forward in a rising metal box, we are still and disconnected from our fellow human beings, just as we are when we surf the web.

The internet and social networks, like elevators, are now so integrated into our lives that even those who use or ride them daily rarely give them any notice, yet we expect them to follow certain rules and fulfill our expectations and needs. In the introduction to *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Haruki Murakami describes a rather strange elevator:

> Another thing, most of the gadgets an elevator is supposed to have were missing. Where, for example, was the panel with all the buttons and switches? No floor numbers to press, no DOOR OPEN and DOOR CLOSE, no EMERGENCY STOP. Nothing whatsoever. All of which made me feel utterly defenseless. And it wasn’t just no buttons; it was no indication of advancing floor, no posted capacity or warning, no even a manufacturer’s nameplate. Forget about trying to locate an emergency exit. Here I was, sealed in. No way this elevator could have gotten fire department approval. There are norms for elevators after all. (2)
Even in literature, characters expect elevators to fulfill certain expectations, maintain a certain elevator-ness. These “norms”—button panels and floor indicator lights, emergency stop switches and telephones—all give passengers a sense of control, an awareness of physical space. Imagine getting in an elevator of a hundred-story building, riding all the way to the top without knowing which floors you were passing. Time would stand still even more than it already does in this solitary space. There are norms for elevators, just as there are for narratives.

I imagine that in Otis’ Compass system (http://www.otisworldwide.com/), with no controls within the elevator where new technology allows elevator passengers to choose their destination before they enter an elevator, will cause passengers to feel more helpless, defenseless, once inside the elevator, with no buttons to push, no purpose but passive participants in the up or down. Anything that can assist us in averting the perception that we are traveling in a metal box, suspended by cables, without control or connection to the outside world—buttons, phones, carpet, mirrors, Musak—anything will help. This should apply also to authors and artists as they move to provide the reader/viewer with more control, or semblance of control, of their narrative experience. Here is how Barthes emphasizes the significance of the reader:

In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader; the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is
only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the

text is constituted. (Barthe 6)

In works of installation art as illustrated in Chapter Four and through “Between Floors:
Love and Other Blood Related Diseases,” there is an environment where not only is the viewer
within the frame, but, as in many works of electronic literature, co-creates the work of art with
their interaction with it. As we move through an interactive work, we become one with “the
other” in one immersed sculpture. As Stern suggests:

If we approach the body / embodiment as relational, then “it” (not really an “it”) is also emergent: embodiment only is through its ongoingness and continuity,
through its active relations to other matter- and matters-in-process. Both human and non-human continuity, affect, movement, and relationships are precisely what constitute and differentiate both humans and non-human matter. (31)

From Virilio’s standpoint, in this movement we are focused on neither the medium nor the message, but instead on speed—trying to catch ourselves and catch up with the technology we are immersed in. How quickly can we get there—to this unknown destination? And, perhaps more importantly, what will we see when we get there? Or, perhaps, while moving towards this unknown destination, this unknown Truth, we find ourselves already there—in “spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future” (Augé 87).
Up or down. These have been the classic directions for elevators. Moving without moving. A modern dilemma. The rushing standstill. Being nowhere but always on the road to somewhere. We have been standing still in an enclosed metal space, pushing buttons, watching the floor numbers light up, waiting, waiting until the door opens on our floor—our temporary destination. These directions are changing. As author/artists and readers/viewers we are moving away from the linear expectations of up and down. As we are presented with unfamiliar possibilities, interaction that changes narrative, embodied experience that heightens the emotional experience, author/artists may let go of some intentionality and reader/viewers take on more responsibility for the message. The subjectivity of any text moves from the limited terms of language and style to the more open experience and unique reading of the reader/viewer. The fabula is constructed from the sjužet provided—the message may not be less subjective, but both author/artist and reader/viewer may be more fully understood and more connected—with differing journeys and a more common destination.
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Appendix A

Between Floors: Love and Other Blood Related Diseases

What eventually became a lifestyle choice began with a suicide attempt. Not her own, of course, but her father’s.

Since she was here for the duration, June might as well take a lover. Two thousand miles separated her from Vincent, the one she had so very recently—although it no longer seemed recent—united with. June saw no hope of returning. She had planned to—booked tickets, imagined the reunion, the lips and hands and the feel of his skin, her house, her bed, his house, his bed, her space, their space, the future, their theoretical future. Falling in love even, it was possible. Before the “accident.” She was anxious, at first, to get back—to unfinished art projects, ones that were still vague thoughts swirling around in her mind. There were no easels here, no oils, no canvas, but there were paintings—generic, sterile, vaguely impressionistic paintings that cluttered hallways, waiting and patient rooms. In the hallway to the cafeteria, an almost-Monet with lily pads and raindrops; in the fifth floor ICU waiting room, a Van Gogh-esque sky. But just as the paintings first appeared false and wanting, the sight of them began to soothe her, like seeing the same old friends day after day.

What eventually became a lifestyle choice began with a suicide attempt. Not hers, but her father’s. The lifestyle began when June’s mother, Carol, found Ted on the floor in the basement, a noose around his neck, a broken rafter that could not sustain his weight, blood, pooling and seeped into the beige Berber carpet, oozing from a gunshot wound to his right temple, red glue
through his thin gray hair. It was either the carbon monoxide leaking in through the window from the exhaust of the running car outside or all the Vicodin he’d swallowed that made him too woozy to carry out the other steps successfully. He thought he’d covered all the bases, but, instead, ended up Life Flighted to the shock trauma intensive care unit of St. Joseph’s and hooked up to life support for months. Spurts of consciousness, not his will to live, kept the doctors from pulling the plug.

June began searching on the second floor, casually perusing the watercolors, and was immediately drawn to one handsome man, perhaps ten years her senior, who appeared fully functional. He charmed her with spare change and compliments while they tried to figure out the automatic coffee machine. He was a Dr., of the academic variety, and had practiced as a lawyer for several years. Or at least this is what he led her to believe. But after the first two months of visits, he began to show signs of the mental impairment that brought him there. Perhaps it was a change in his dosage, she was never really sure, but during one heated tryst in a supply closet he told her he fantasized about being smeared with blood, asked her if she wanted to fuck in one of the refrigerated drawers down in the basement morgue (and not an empty one at that). Blood no longer made her woozy but she never was into threesomes. From then on she would more closely observe the floor she was on. Second floor: Psych Ward. Check. Third floor: Neurology: catheters complicated things, and often disappointing morphine conversation. Fourth floor: Orthopedics: awkward and uncomfortable maneuvering casts and attempting to wrap her legs around wheelchairs. Fifth floor: Burn unit: dangerous sensitivity to the gentlest rubbing, even without removing the bandages. First floor: Oncology: nauseating odor of chemical despair.
Carol came in from her morning walk, noting the smell of firecrackers and exhaust in the air as she took off her coat and boots. The dog immediately ran to the head of the basement stairs and let out a half-whine, half-bark. Carol called out to Ted, who she thought must certainly be up and about by now, but there was no answer. “What in the name of God is that smell?” she yelled, loud enough to wake the dead. Still, silence. She hesitatingly made her way to the basement, calling out to him as she went. It was years before she could accept what she saw there—the noose, the rafter, the blood seeped into the Berber, Ted oozing, eyes rolled back, sprawled. Even after she shook him, tried to revive him, called 911, she could not stop from asking, over and over, “What have you done? Ted, what have you done?” June didn’t have to see it to not believe it.

Ted really doesn’t want to be here, in more ways than one. He’d been very definite in his decision, was ready to move on. Now he’s stuck, strapped down in a hospital bed in St. Joseph’s ICU. He knows that once the respirator is out there will be questions. He sees the weepy, even angry eyes of his wife and daughter, pleading, questioning. He knows they will ask him and he never expected to have to provide an answer. He could make a break for it… through the window perhaps, although he imagines the IV tubes would complicate things and has a sudden flash of himself hospital gown bungee jumping, bouncing back and forth between floors, heart monitor and oxygen mask suspended, gown blown open, dancing.

Carol eventually went home to retrieve some of her belongings. The memory of it all came flooding back when she went downstairs and it took her three hours to scrub the blood out of the
Berber carpet. Even then there was a faint red-wine stain that she didn’t want to have to explain to professional carpet cleaners so she moved a chair to cover it up.

June brought him turkey-rice soup and chocolate pecan ice cream when he was finally able to eat, snuck them up in the elevator under her coat, despite the risk of burns or freezer burn. But he was still not talking. She was a good daughter. As soon as he was able, he mouthed the words: “I’m sorry” to June. She squeezed his leathery hand, attempted a half-smile, an “it’s ok Dad,” but her hazel eyes were full of water. She no longer looked at him with the same sparkling, adoring eyes of his little girl and he now found it easier to avoid looking at her altogether.

“Why don’t you find yourself a handsome doctor?” Carol suggested innocently. “Have you noticed all the handsome doctors here? This is the place for it. A little hospital romance. What? Am I wrong?” June looked at her the way with her usual skepticism—maybe she didn’t believe she was pretty enough to attract a doctor. “You should ask one of them a medical question… you know, strike up a conversation. But not like a rash or anything—something more attractive than a rash.” She always did have self-esteem issues growing up. Carol was persistent though—kept oh-so-casually bringing it up and finally June took her advice and snagged a surgeon. Imagine that. Carol was very proud, even though June never bothered to thank her for her advice.

One night Ted, connected and engulfed in a sea various tubes and machines, managed to remove his oxygen mask, pull out his IV and his catheter after some tube entanglement and forceful pulling. He was inching his blue footy slippered feet towards the floor, wondering where his
sweat pants and leather coat might be, when they caught him. He was going, that’s all he knew. All that work for nothing. He was a risk after that and had to be watched. And tied down.

Just about the time June was supposed to fly back home—to work, to Vincent—Carol slipped in the icy hospital parking lot and broke her hip. June’s theory is the news of Carol’s accident and subsequent absence from Ted’s bedside is what eventually led him to suffer an aneurism, which had to be repaired with a stint, sent into his brain with an angio procedure, since his doctors still did not want to open his skull lest they disturb the bullet still lodged there. Just as her hip was beginning to heal and Carol could wheel between halls and floors, the stress of the aneurism and Ted’s ambiguous mental state caused Carol’s bleeding ulcers. Between the two of them, it was months before they could see each other—Ted on the third floor, Carol on the fourth. June spent time on the elevator, relaying garbled messages back and forth. Carol was heavily sedated but conscious and Ted bounced between extremes—angrily attempting to disconnect from various tubes and machines or professing his undying love for the nurses. Needless to say, the messages were censored for health reasons.

Carol,

Look, I’m the one in the hospital. I need you. How could you be so careless as to slip and fall in the parking lot for Christ’s sake? Who’s going to sneak me chocolate and cigarettes? Damn it. I’m dying here. What do I have to do for a little compassion? At least have the decency to recover quickly.

Ted

In the elevator between floors, June scrawled gentler notes to avoid a rise in anyone’s blood pressure and the need for more medications. She then delivered the edited versions to both
parents. Ted and Carol were a bit bewildered, but June was certain it would speed recoveries all around.

Dear Carol,

I was devastated to hear of your fall. I hope you are feeling well and they are providing you with pleasant doses of Percocet. You mean the world to me.

Love, Ted

June slept in fits on a dingy mattress at the Motel Six around the corner for awhile and could expect that at least every third night the motel room phone would ring and Ted or Carol’s night nurse would say he or she was demanding something or other and, like any good daughter, June would crawl out of bed and venture out into the snow, in search of turkey rice soup or chocolate-pecan ice cream. Or warming blankets or cooling fans. Or shrimp fried rice or ginger beer. Or toenail clippers or an emery board. Or Time magazine or DVDs of Johnny Carson. It was easier on these nights to just fall asleep in a mossy green hospital chair listening to the sound of the respirator and the beep-beeping of machines. She would wake up to Ted asking her to scratch his shoulder since his hands were tied down. Once he said, “I just want to die, June. I just want to die.” Eventually it was just easier to stay.

Dear Ted,

My ass I mean the world to you. If I meant anything at all to you, you wouldn’t have tried to kill yourself now would you? Yeah, that’s what I thought. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be in this fucking mess in the first place. It’s not like I enjoyed walking through the icy parking lot every morning, and especially not ending up in the hospital with your cranky ass. My hip is excruciatingly painful and I blame you. And this is not the Percocet talking.

Carol
The notes were sometimes more intricate and June would be forced to ride the elevator a few floors past her destination and back again while she wrote. She didn’t worry too much about getting the handwriting perfect—between the medication and the fact that Ted’s hands were still tied down, neither of them ever questioned her.

Dearest Ted,

I know the news of my fall must have been hard on you. I hope your recovery continues to go well and wish I could be there for you. Don’t worry about me, I am doing very well. If it weren’t for you, I just don’t know what I would do. Hang in there.

Your loving wife, Carol

“Why don’t you find yourself a handsome doctor?” her mother kept suggesting. “This is the place for it. A little hospital romance. What? Am I wrong?” June chocked it up to too much bedridden General Hospital and Grey’s Anatomy but after a few weeks of it, she did Carol proud and roped a debonair ER surgeon in the cafeteria by asking a harmless “non-rash” question about various purposes of CT scans. After a few weeks, when Dr. X’s conversations of tracheotomies and tonsillectomies blurred together, June decided to sleep with him. After all, she was here for the long haul. For a while it was clandestine and exciting but sex in the doctors’ lounge, empty patient rooms, X-ray room, blood storage freezer turned out to be short-lived, uncomfortable, and unsatisfying.

June ate in the hospital cafeteria. Eventually she could walk up to the grill, ask for the usual, and receive a grilled cheese on white bread. Better than the ones Carol used to make. Or at least more comforting. She would sit, eating slowly while turning pages of a novel, and listen to the hospital-staff gossip, the woes of those who had relatives in surgery, and the excitement of those
who were visiting the newly born. This prompted June to wonder where they were storing the babies, since the only proof she witnessed of their existence here was when they were wheeled out, attached to their new mothers, and put in the waiting cars.

It was while her father was undergoing an angio procedure, one that would relieve his aneurism, caused by the still-embedded bullet, that Dr. X popped his head into the waiting room and motioned for her to follow. June followed him to the elevator and they rode up to the sixth floor CT scan in silence. Dr. X led her into the room, locked the door behind him, dropped his wedding ring in a small plastic dish before taking her in his arms. “I’m so glad you’re here,” he said. “It makes me look forward to coming to work every day.” She removed his white coat, the stethoscope around his neck as she kissed him hard. The narrow cot slid inside the tube and soon they were mostly undressed and contorted inside the tube of the CT scan machine. “Gives new meaning to Computed Axial Tomography,” Dr. X whispered. Aroused and claustrophobic, groping for satisfaction, she thought of the machine, how it could be used to find a brain tumor, emphysema, cyst, bleed, bowel obstruction, or pulmonary embolism, or aneurysm, how it could see, and capture, all of these abstracts in black and white imagery.

June stirred sugar into her coffee in the hospital cafeteria with a plastic spoon and thought about her own kitchen, her dining table, her coffee mugs, the ivy spoons that she had left behind to immerse herself, here, not in her childhood exactly, but close enough for it to be uncomfortable for her. They were her mother’s spoons, the ones in June’s kitchen. She had somehow disconnected the line from there to here, the past to the present. Or carefully erased it. Before the “accident.” She liked to think that the life she had created for herself was completely different
from the life of her parents, the life that was perhaps embedded in her, and by all physical
evidence, she had succeeded. But she had never considered the ivy-patterned spoons that served
up childhood memories. The table, perfectly set. By June. Since she was about 5 years old, that
had been her job. Her mother had taught her the correct way to set the table—knife on the right,
followed by a spoon, fork on the left, atop a properly-folded white linen napkin. A salad fork and
soup spoon too, if needed. Occasionally a shrimp fork.

The novelty of moaning “oh doctor” soon wore off. Particularly since over half the time the
moaning had to be faked. She spent less time thinking about sex and more time imagining him
going to his sterile home, wife and kids, white leather furniture and HDTV every night, cutting
vegetables with a scalpel and brewing coffee in an IV bag. She did end up composing a rather
nice tracheotomy poem and an impressionistic watercolor of lovers in the CT scan. She also
thought “Lovers in the CT scan” would make a great song. Vincent could have written it.

Sitting at that table of her childhood, silent, June often toyed with her utensils, her food, pushing
it along her plate, contemplating the strangeness of oddly shaped tools designed to get the food
from the plate to your mouth. “Don’t play with your food,” her mother would say. June stared
down at their ivy-covered handles and sometimes they would sway and grow, she imagined far
off places they would crawl away to, cling to brick walls, protecting them. She wondered if holes
could be put into their shiny ends, strung together, to fashion wind chimes. Young June clinked
her fork and spoon together when at all possible, mostly during spaghetti, to hear the sound the
wind chime might make, conducted similar experiments while washing the dishes. Until she was
asked to stop.
The staff let her shower in one of the oversized bathrooms, open showers with handrails and an emergency pull string. It was while manipulating the handheld showerhead in an experimental attempt at masturbation that she accidentally pulled the emergency string. Unshaved legs parted, plastered dripping auburn hair, 33 year-old breasts exposed, arms and showerhead contorted as she balanced herself on the shower chair. She was never able to look the stout occupational therapist in the eye after that.

“Keep an eye on your father,” Carol urged as she handed June another note for Ted. “He needs you.” June could see the stress of the hospital lighting and lack of sleep and the silence between them in her mother’s face, her gray/blond hair and weary green eyes.

Ted,

This has all been very hard for me. I just can’t understand why you would off yourself, what about me? What about your responsibilities? You are the most selfish person I’ve ever met. I want you to know how much you have hurt our family and me—so much I don’t think I can ever forgive you. Now that I’m stuck in this god-forsaken place I’ll probably never see you again and that’s just fine with me! You selfish, selfish asshole! I want a divorce.

Carol

On the fourth floor, June fed her father lukewarm oatmeal out of a white plastic bowl and scraped the remainder off his chin the way she imagined she would do for an infant, if she ever had one. The spoon was flimsy plastic, like the ones in the cafeteria. Not solid—breakable, weak. Lighter, she mused, to assist the ill and elderly in getting the whipped potatoes and green Jell-O
to their mouths. “Mom wrote you a note,” she said, “do you want me to read it to you?” Ted nods.

Dearest Ted,

This has all been very hard for me, but I want you to know that I still love you. I don’t know why you did it, but I understand things must be really awful for you to do such a thing, that you must have been so depressed that you could see no other way out. We will get through this, together. I’ve asked June to look after you, so try not to give her a hard time and make sure you’re eating. I’ll see you soon. And I forgive you.

Love, Carol

Ted made a motion for June to hand him his notepad and a pencil. June loosened the tie around his wrist so he could scrawl a response.

Carol,

Well, I blame you. I’ve been unhappy for years and as my health declined, you treated me more and more like a child, someone to be ignored. I’ve been fucking miserable. You say you still love me, but I don’t know if I feel the same. I’ve had a lot of time to think here, I still don’t know that I have much to live for, but if I do ever get sprung from this hell hole, I know I won’t need you judging me, criticizing me, telling me what to do. I would rather die alone.

Ted

As Ted was writing, June snuck a peak at his medical chart, propped at the foot of the bed. “Self-inflicted gunshot wound,” bolded, was the difficult-to-ignore main classification. “Suicide watch” it warned. “2 mg. Xanax, 5 liters type B positive, ½ aspirin NSAID per day, Lasix as needed.” The room was closing in on her. She took the note from her father without looking at him and made her way to the elevator, where she transcribed.
Dearest Carol,

Please don’t divorce me! I don’t know what I would do without you. Please give me another chance to change. I need you, need you to take care of me, need you to love me. I’ll do anything. I’m taking Xanax and I think it is beginning to help my mood. I’ll even go to therapy. June is taking good care of me and she makes sure I eat. Don’t worry. My words can’t ever express how very sorry I am, for hurting you, for hurting our family. I don’t know what I was thinking. I don’t want to die alone.

I love you, Ted

The note did not have the desired impact on Carol, but June swore she was just a little touched by Ted’s words, she could see something in her eyes, and she was hopeful her mother would eventually come around.

Two thousand miles separated her from Vincent, the one she had so very recently—although it no longer seemed recent—united with. June saw no hope of returning. She had planned to—booked tickets, imagined the reunion, the lips and hands and the feel of his skin, her house, her bed, his house, his bed, her space, their space, the future, their theoretical future. Falling in love even, it was possible. Before the “accident.” But since she was here for the duration, she might as well take a lover.

On the many elevator trips she noted that although there appeared to be six floors from the outside of the building, there were only five on the elevator. She saw it as a mystery to be solved, and scheduled it in her day planner (this was back when she still had the thing) for Tuesday. 10 am. After rounds, before lunch. And left the afternoon open just in case. She didn’t have a map of the hospital, so had to rely only on instinct. She first double-checked all of the elevators,
thinking the gurney/freight elevator must go there for something. She got on the elevator just to check the numbers on the button panel, and before she could get out, three white-coat doctors or nurses or lab techs wheeled in the bed of an elderly woman, attached to tubes attached to bags of fluid, a bypass machine, and a canister of oxygen. June smiled awkwardly but offered no explanation for her solitary presence in the massive moveable space. She then bore the medicinal, elderly smell for the elevator ride up two floors before they wheeled the woman out.

June still missed him. Vincent. While she sat in the hospital room, listening to the beep-beeping of machines, she knitted her longing into a patchwork scarf. June could no longer retrieve a static memory of Vincent’s face. At least not all at once. The blue eyes, the scratchy, stubbled chin, an earlobe, a collarbone—they came in fragments, tiny snapshots of a whole she could no longer grasp. She found the knitting therapeutic and it kept her mind off the questions the social worker was asking, where her father would end up if he got out of here, who would take care of him… and Carol.

June noticed employees come and go through a heavy yellow metal door in the far southwest corner of the cafeteria. She tried the door, but it was locked. Sipping her latte at the nearest table, she bided her time. When two chatty nurses balancing Styrofoam containers of BLTs and pizza used their ID cards to open the door, she sprang up and slipped through.

Things with Vincent had ended at the same the time the cell phone went dead. For a while they had kept things up over the airwaves—conversations that occurred only, for June, in the company of eavesdropping strangers in various waiting rooms of the hospital. She had tested the
reception in all of them and found the family waiting area in shock trauma the most welcoming—no children, a fish tank, free coffee, tea, and cookies, pillows and blankets; only when bad news was delivered by a doctor or nurse or desk telephone and the wailing and hysterical sobbing was too loud did she abandon her refuge.

The door to the sixth floor was unmarked and painted the same beige as the wall. If it weren’t for the knob, it would have been unnoticeable. Shiny floors and a fresh lemon scent accented crisp walls. More sterile watercolors adorned the hallway, although these were more nondescript pastel than any of the other floors’.

There’s only so much you can accomplish over the phone. June had missed Christmas, New Year, Vincent’s book publishing party, his birthday, Valentine’s Day, readings and book signings, dinners, parties. She could no longer remember what he looked like. Or felt like. All the day-to-day details of his life, and hers. Impossible to relay really in a one-hour phone call. She had left just before she would have defined them as a couple, the middle of the beginning. That sparkly time that should be full of passion, kisses, sex, laughter, joy, eye contact, contact. Eventually the cell phone gave out. It was a lot of trouble to acquire phone card minutes and find a waiting room landline that wasn’t crucial somehow to someone with a family member in surgery or a birthing suite or the ICU. Who was she to take away that life line?

Skulking down the hall on a reconnaissance mission, she jolted at the faint sound of feminine screaming, guttural and base. June continued forward and when she rounded the corner, the walls became glass and behind them, perfectly aligned bassinets with pastel-wrapped, pink-faced
infants in them. All this trouble to protect these little mounds of soft and pacifiers and toes and stripey blankies. Of course they couldn’t allow access to just any elevator-rider, she had seen plenty she imagined wouldn’t be above baby-napping.

The distance pulled but June became more and more absorbed into the sterile bubble of St. Joseph’s. She became an observer of life and death and the waiting for both. She watched families nervously waiting for news, daughters or widows crying in dark corners, young children coming to meet new siblings, proud fathers and grandfathers toting them through the lobby up to the glass baby room, gang members and cops, an occasional arrest, CNA’s, nurses, therapists, doctors, discussing hospital gossip over coffee. The occasional mention of sex in a supply closet, a couple holding each other after some tragedy or another, reminding her somehow of reunions in airports—the same voyeuristic feeling and a longing of sorts when you witness that sort of intimacy—not your own. In no way your own.

There were thirty or more. All different sizes, shapes, colors, yet indistinguishably uniform lined up in their rectangular plastic boxes. Some had hair, some with pacifiers, or sucking on tiny hands, some sleeping, others blinking wide-eyed at the fluorescent lights. She wondered about their newcomer thoughts, wrapped in cotton pink or blueness, their first moments of light, the difference in temperature out here than where they came from. Could they yet imagine the scope of the world, all the pain and beauty that was out there waiting for them? Not one of them cried but down the hallway, more screaming.

Someone to hold her, pat her back, kiss her hair, whisper softly, “Everything’s going to be
alright.” If only to protect herself she thought less and less of Vincent and, so, one day in the spring, her loneliness prompted the hunt for another lover. She wouldn’t look for a doctor this time, but a patient—someone, like her, who was here for the duration.

As she stood, almost not breathing, she imagined them all with silver spoons poking out of their little bird mouths. Her gaze was still fixed on the view of baby landscape, when a nurse, shrouded in the same sterile white of the walls, whisked into the sea of infants and deposited a squirming, wrinkly red, tightly bound infant into an empty plastic pod-cradle. The child looked with wide blue eyes, like she was taking it all in so she would remember the journey later, if someone were to ask her about it once her communication skills developed. The nurse placed a name card on the foot of the cradle and it read: Baby Girl M.

Seventh floor: Hematology. Disorders of the blood sounded permanent and not necessarily leading to immediate dilapidation or demise, but rather to an awaiting-tests kind of limbo. It held a mysterious curiosity of something understood by no one. Aside from an occasional hematologist. Like theoretical physics. She was fascinated and did some preliminary research. When she stepped off the elevator and out into the crimson hallway, she noticed the vampire-like pallor of the patients here, in their dark rooms, bags of blood flowing down into their fragile arms. Life, pumping in from the outside.

In his room, June rubbed Ted’s forehead, tried to comfort and quiet him by humming Neil Diamond. Fine baby hair, wrinkles, and wide wondering curious eyes, Ted, infant-esque, had too been through a recent life-changing, or life-giving (in a way) trauma. Like the babies, she
wondered what Ted was thinking. Could he recognize her, know who she was, hear her voice? So close the third and sixth floors, separated by the space of an elevator shaft, three flights of stairs, Ted’s wife, death and life. So close, and yet the time between the new and the old, the span of a life, the years between floors seemed disconnected. She thought of Baby M.

She heard the low moaning from down the hall—a throaty, deep, familiar, musical humming moan. June entered the darkened room, made out a pale figure with even paler blue eyes. He smiled. Familiar. And as her breath caught, stomach lurched, heart lifted, the fragmented pieces arranged themselves. “It’s you,” she said and tears dripped like IV fluid.

June remembered a picture of Ted, a younger man, holding up a chubby toddler laughing. She was the baby but the connection was almost impossible to make, no memory to assist her. Perhaps Baby M would have better luck. The toggling between the third and fourth floors continued, with intermittent trips up the cafeteria stairs to the mysterious baby floor. Baby M never left her plastic cradle, yet seemed always content as if waiting patiently. For something. If she wasn’t sick, why would she still be here, waiting? Or maybe she had stopped expecting anything else. June had begun to forget that she, in her mid-thirties, could survive outside these medicinally-scented walls.

“Or a ghost of me. A shade,” he replied. She watched on the monitor as Vincent’s heart rate increased and she knew she loved him still. June drew the curtain around the bed and crawled in beside him. She wrapped the scarf she knitted around his neck and his thin frame wrapped around her body. “How I’ve missed you.” The smell of the hospital blanket a strange comfort.
The lack of privacy was not a concern. What was a little intimacy among strangers? Besides, the patients and staff were family more than strangers now. She curled up inside his wiry steel frame. Safe. The subtle winding from bag to arm to life of a unit of blood, calling her home.

What eventually became a life began with a suicide attempt. Not hers, but her father’s.

Ted passes away in the summer, Carol and June by his bedside, although they never speak. There was no heroic leap from the third floor window, although he had thought about it, but he was instead taken by the very diagnosis that had prompted his journey here in the first place. The cancer, which had before only been creeping, seemed to thrive on his lack of survival instincts, the chocolate pecan ice cream, too much daytime TV, and the crisp germ-free air of St. Joseph’s.

Carol follows soon after, ironically takes her own life with an entire bottle of Valium, although she would never have admitted Ted’s passing grieved the life out of her, and they never performed the autopsy that would prove it. Despite protests, June insists that both funerals take place in the hospital.

Shortly after the death of June’s parents, Baby M is adopted by one of the pediatricians and his life-partner. Baby M couldn’t have asked for a more loving home and June is happy for her, but June grieved when M left the hospital, cradled in her new baby car seat, grieved for the loss of so much.
The hospital staff let June stay in Vincent’s room even though it is against policy. She fixes it up nice—a few plants, some curtains, a new comforter, a striped IKEA chair. Eventually she develops health problems of her own and needs health insurance and everything is easier in the hospital if you’re a relative. One day, June unsuspecting, Vincent proposes with a silver teddy bear ring from the gift shop with the words “Get Well” etched into it. They marry in the hospital chapel, patients and doctors in attendance, flowers and Mylar balloons from the gift shop, wedding cake and green Jell-O made by the cafeteria staff.

The priest on call is unavailable and, at the last minute, they wheel in a retired sea captain with a fractured pelvis to perform the ceremony. “Ah fuck,” he says at more than one crucial moment, “I’ve forgotten this part… only done this once before you know.” The salty language only adds to the festive mood of the day.

There is a community here, a family. June works in the gift-shop, or helps out in the glass enclosed baby-pod room. She reads everything off the library cart and in the medical library. She treats the Baby Ms as her own, tells them of every secret nuance of St. Joseph’s, as far as the pod-babies know, the entire world. June knits for the hospital staff and the patients, offers advice to those grieving for their parents, having been through it herself. She can sense family of suicide attempts the moment they step into the ER. Surprisingly, she ages with only minor health problems and doesn’t end up in the psych ward or back in the third floor ICU where it all began.

June makes it through the end-of-the-world scare of 2012, the typhoid fever epidemic of 2036, the cure for AIDs in 2040. When the Republicans took office again in 2052 and the war began,
she stopped watching the news or reading the newspaper. If it was not health and hospital related, it didn’t touch her life.

When Vincent’s health declines, June, now gray and wrinkled, stays with him night and day, rubs his forehead, his back, helps him up, feeds him green Jell-O with a plastic spoon. When he dies, she coincidentally develops angina (most likely years of grilled cheese and cafeteria fries) and a bad case of rheumatoid arthritis (most likely from years of hospital-bed tantric sex). Unfortunately, her health insurance lapsed, but the hospital staff, now her family, let her stay on for her remaining days. To repay them she volunteers in the cafeteria and checks on the newborns as much as possible, always partial to the Baby M’s passing through, filling their days of motherless-ness.

June lets the haunting memory of Vincent’s love be her companion in the final years—the heyday of their hematological romance enough to make her smile to herself. He is still her home and she has no need to wander the halls for another.

June moves into the cardio-pulmonary unit and dies of a myocardial infarction. She ends up in the morgue, where she donates her organs. Her lungs are harvested for transplant—strong and healthy after breathing years of oxygenated hospital air. The recipient, a young man with emphysema, takes her lungs outside St. Joseph’s for the first time in sixty years to breathe the “fresh” air.
June’s delicate hospital-air spoiled lungs can not be expected to take on the heavy reality of city
air, added to now by years of accumulating pollution, and the young man doesn’t survive long.