

New Media Stories: Subjectivity, Feminism and Narrative Structures

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By

Jessica Monica LACCETTI

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the relative ease with which multimodal and interactive elements can be introduced into online fiction demands a suitable mode of literary analysis and existing hypertext theory, largely formulated for application to early offline hypertexts, is inadequate for the critical interpretation of such born digital fictions. The purpose of this study has been twofold: to examine multimodality and to interpret how it has been used to represent subjectivity, temporality and multiple worlds. Multi-mimesis is offered as a term uniting the notion of multimodality and representation. Apart from signalling the role of representation this term testifies to the multiplicity which frequently appears both in the variety of modes each web fiction implements and in the expression of constantly becoming, evolving and en-process subjectivities.

Organised in thematic sections, the opening chapters establish the technological and theoretical context of the inquiry, preparing for three subsequent chapters concerned with the literary analysis of web fictions. The introductory chapter argues that born digital fictions, as a result of their online setting, engage more fully with multimodality and demand different degrees of reader interaction than disk-bound hypertexts. The following chapter elaborates the notion of multi-mimesis and drawing on contemporary feminist theory, offers a perspective on becoming subjectivity. Crucially, aspects of Rosi Braidotti and Luce Irigaray's thinking allow for a feminist connection between the web fictions' use of representation and their concomitant questioning of it.

The remaining chapters seek to develop and substantiate the dynamics of multi-mimesis by analysing nine exemplary web fictions. As the chapters demonstrate by breadth of example, there are intricate intersections of sound, text, image, video and user interaction. More than being a literary response to the affordances of the internet, these fictions navigate the deep entanglement of multimodality in order to challenge, develop and revise their representations of subjectivity.

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1.0 Introduction

...there is a need to move beyond narrowly defined accounts of literacy to ones that capture the complexity of real literacy practices in contemporary society.

Ilyna Snyder

Readers must learn how to correlate events, connections, images, sound, and other new media means of communication into one solid piece.

Deena Larsen

The nomad can draw maps in a mobile manner.

Rosi Braidotti

This thesis offers a new approach to the reading of web fiction written by women. The term web fiction indicates a narrative which is born digital (i.e. it has been created online and can only be consumed online) and is multimodal, composed of visual, textual, sonic, and video aspects.¹ This chapter begins with an overview of the history of hypertext. Subsequently there is a general introduction to the theory on the reading of hypertext and then the chapter moves towards web fictions and highlights feminist implications of reading born digital narratives. In the final section, a chapter guide will be provided marking the path for the body of the thesis.

1.1. What the Web Does Differently: A Note on Technology

Before beginning any introduction to web fictions and their critical interpretation, a brief history of hypertext and its origins should be noted.² In his 1945 article, "As We May Think," Vannevar Bush proposed the Memex System. This system would optimise the information available and the way in which people can access it:

¹ Throughout this thesis, the term born digital is employed in O'Reilly's sense of web-based and networked. See Tim O'Reilly, "Various Things I've Written," O'Reilly Media, February 2008, 9 February 2008 <<http://tim.oreilly.com/>>.

² For a fully furnished chronology of the development of the internet and hypertext see Vint Cerf et al., "A Brief History of the Internet," Version 3.32, 10 Dec 2003, Internet Society, 12 November <<http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/brief.shtml>>.

[w]holly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex and there amplified. [...] The patent attorney has on call the millions of issued patents, with familiar trails to every point of his client's interest. The physician, puzzled by a patient's reactions, strikes the trail established in studying an earlier similar case, and runs rapidly through analogous case histories, with side references to the classics for the pertinent anatomy and histology.³

Twenty years later Bush's concept of cataloguing and accessing information materialises in Ted Nelson's coining of hypertext. For Nelson, the technology of typewriters and file cards impede the kinds of associative connections he thinks of as hypertextual. An early software application, HyperCard, is based on a database system although it "is graphical, flexible and creates files that are easy to modify."⁴ Significantly, when in 1987 HyperCard software was included free with Apple computers, hypertext, i.e. "non-sequential writing," was firmly available for public consumption.⁵ Although HyperCard had the capacity to include different modes, images and sound were infrequent choices as the emphasis was on delivering textual information in different (associative) ways.

Building upon the notion of HyperCard, StorySpace software originated as a "hypertext writing environment."⁶ The emphasis, here, is on the writing. The StorySpace software allows users to occupy "writing spaces" in which they can create links to other writing spaces. StorySpace gained prominence in 1987 with the release of

³ Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic Online*, July 1945, 6 December 2007 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/194507/bush>>.

⁴ "HyperCard," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 9 Nov 2007, 09:03 UTC, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 10 Dec 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=HyperCard&oldid=170290400>>.

⁵ Tracey Logan, "Visionary Lays into the Web," *Go Digital*, 8 October 2001 BBC, 5 December 2007 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1581891.stm>>.

⁶ "Storyspace," Eastgate Systems, 2007, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/index.html>>.

Michael Joyce's afternoon. Though the creators of StorySpace claim that narratives, such as afternoon, are not based on hierarchical constructs, the software suggests otherwise.⁷ As a way of orienting readers within the narratives, StorySpace provides overall “views” of each story, there are map views, outlines, and tree charts:

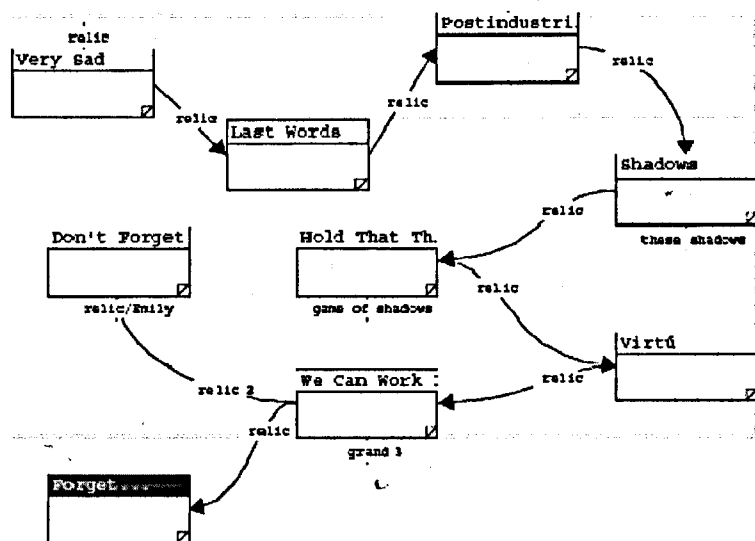


Fig. 1 A map of links in Victory Garden by Stuart Moulthrop. Mark Bernstein, “StorySpace 1” 52.

These views highlight the ordering of the different parts of the narrative as well as representing each story as a complete unit. However, more pertinent to the current discussion: StorySpace creations are constrained to a physical disk or cd which prevents two things. Firstly, these fictions cannot be adjusted by either the author or reader.⁸ Secondly, there is no opportunity for external links. In other words, links in afternoon or Victory Garden can only link to aspects within the story; they cannot link to the internet at large.

Linking to sites outside of a contained narrative is a central feature of the development of the web, “drawing [the internet] into the work.”⁹ The web, or more specifically, the web browser, also allows for the “easy, usual [and] natural”

⁷ See Mark Bernstein, “StorySpace 1,” *Proceedings of Hypertext 2002* (College Park, Maryland, June 11-15, 2002). ACM Press, New York, NY, 2002, 45-54.

⁸ Certain web fictions are updated by authors while others incorporate reader feedback.

⁹ Deena Larsen, “Living for Hypertext,” 5 November 2000, *Dichtung Digital*, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/Interviews/Larsen-5-Nov-00/index.htm>>.

implementation of modes other than text.¹⁰ According to Kress, the internet supports and intensifies the use of multimodality as well as highlights a greater degree of collaboration. If this is the case, then the internet will undoubtedly have an effect on what narratives are produced. As Deena Larsen explains, the internet allows an “infinity and one ways of playing with reality.”¹¹

1.2. Authors and Readers

In his first attempt (1992) to tackle “a radically new information technology, a revolutionary mode of publication and a highly interactive form of electronic text” George Landow subtly intertwines gender with his theorising of hypertext.¹² He characterises the hypertext author as having been “reconfigured” in the face of this new technology. The hypertext author “approaches, even if it does not entirely merge with...the reader.”¹³ If the author does not entirely become a reader he at least is “dispersed” for “hypertext embodies many of the ideas and attitudes proposed by Barthes, Derrida [and] Foucault.”¹⁴ Most obviously by referring largely to male theorists one can argue that Landow is setting his own theorisation within a male-centric framework, what Braidotti would consider a “form of masculinism.”¹⁵ Landow’s condoning of the death of the author seems to bypass what feminism has successfully argued: that women are already posited as “lack, excess and displacement.”¹⁶ Additionally, why might a reader’s greater sense of agency invoke a binary opposite resulting in an author’s lack of agency? Thus it is not so much the

¹⁰ Gunther Kress, Literacy in the New Media Age (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 5.

¹¹ Larsen, “Living for Hypertext.”

¹² George Landow, Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) back cover.

¹³ *Ibid.* 71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 73.

¹⁵ Braidotti notes this is the case with “comparative work” on Deleuze and Guattari that displays “a tendency to ignore Luce Irigaray.” Braidotti, Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2006) 92.

¹⁶ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 202.

death of the author that contemporary feminism may applaud but rather the fluidity of the boundaries between writer and reader and the gendering of the “voice that animates” each fiction.¹⁷

With this authorial reconception comes a parallel reconfiguration of the reader. Landow explains that hypertext calls for “a more active reader, one who not only chooses his or her reading paths but also has the opportunity of reading as an author [by] either attach[ing] links or add[ing] some text to the text being read.”¹⁸ According to Dennis G. Jerz, Landow’s ideal reader

studies each screen of text, thrills at the opportunity to co-author a unique nonlinear text (i.e., by selecting this sequence of links instead of that one), enjoys watching themes and texts approaching the center and receding into the margins, accepts responsibility for becoming disoriented, and even welcomes it at times.¹⁹

The kind of reader that hypertext and Landow welcome would not experience any anguish at the thought of possible narrative disorientation. Sven Birkerts does not seem to fall into Landow’s category of ideal hypertext reader. Birkerts sees print narrative – “words on a page [that] don’t change” – as existing between two poles: “the flesh and blood individual” and “the flesh and blood reader.”²⁰ With the co-authoring ability of hypertext Birkerts fears that what will survive is only poor quality literature. Even Robert Coover who initially saw hypertext in a positive light, “draw[ing] [the reader] ever deeper, until clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page, and much less constraining, more compelling” later views the multimodality of the web with anxiety: “the word, the very stuff of literature, and indeed of all human thought, is under

¹⁷ This is how Braidotti describes feminist writers and intellectuals, *Nomadic Subjects* 208.

¹⁸ Landow, *Hypertext* 42.

¹⁹ Dennis G. Jerz, “Kairos Critique: A Justification,” *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy* 5.1 (2000) <<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/5.1/response/interactive/jerz/pedagogical.htm>>.

²⁰ Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in the Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994) 96.

assault, giving ground daily to image-surfing, hypermedia, the linked icon. Indeed, the word itself is increasingly reduced to icon or caption.”²¹

However, words on a page that might or might not change alongside images, sounds, video and the mandatory reader interaction position a reader not so much as a binary to the author but rather in a productive dialogue with the web fiction itself. Rather than plot out a path for readers based on positive/negative oppositions such as either the reader “thrills at the opportunity to co-author” or does not, thereby seemingly not “really” reading, recent cyberfeminist slants sidestep these kinds of pairings in favour of multiple intensities.²²

One such example is Alla Mitrofanova’s “cyberfeminist embodiment [...] a database of intensity” which enables the reader to “connec[t]...as both presence and process.”²³ Following this kind of thinking there is little or no anxiety about disorientation nor are there oppositions between print and hypertext or between reader and author. A cyberfeminist reader responds to “specific events and creative necessities of the moment which is presence and process rather than organized structure.”²⁴ To read in this way suggests a piecing together of a narrative with and against multimodality (for this is the reading of born digital works): a “model of creation, of becoming.”²⁵

Part of the success of this kind of stance lies in the acknowledgement and acceptance of the expanding definition of reading which now includes notions of

²¹ Robert Coover, “Literary Hypertext: The Passing of a Golden Age,” Digital Arts and Culture Conference, Atlanta Georgia, 29 October 1999, 13 November 2007 <http://nickm.com/vox/golden_age.html>.

²² Jerz, “Kairos Critique.” See also Braidotti, Metamorphoses 21.

²³ Alla Mitrofanova qtd in Carolyn Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms,” “Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics: The Archival Text, Digital Narrative and the Limits of Memory,” 2003, 13 November 2007 <<http://www.mcluhan.utoronto.ca/academy/carolynguertin/li.html>>.

²⁴ Faith Wilding, “Notes on the Political Condition of Cyberfeminism,” Art Journal 57. 2 (Summer, 1998): 56, 13 November 2007 <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-3249%28199822%2957%3A2%3C46%3ANOTPCO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2>>.

²⁵ Ibid.

browsing, surfing and rearranging.²⁶ While searching for information online is often synonymous with browsing, readers of narrative like Birkerts seem to equate browsing in a literary context with something unnarrativisable. Following Mitrofanova and Wilding's logic, a cyberfeminist reading built on fluidity and motion is not situated within a binary between reader and author or between concepts of narrativity and non-narrativity as Birkerts would have it. Differently, this is a mode of reading that fits with the work being read. Thus, if the web fiction is composed of numerous aspects and multiple modes then one requires an interpretive account that is similarly nomadic and peripatetic.²⁷

1.3. Literacy and Technology

Unlike some of the web fictions examined here, this thesis follows a discernable itinerary built upon two main interrelated research questions:

Can female-authored web fictions be read alongside feminist criticism and new media theory?

Does multimodality affect the reading process and the development of narrative?

These two questions evoke a third:

How do the reading strategies developed here fit within a broader framework of reading in an online environment?

In order to begin answering the first two questions an important clarification must be made regarding terminology. As the reader of this thesis will notice, the terms "hypertext," "hyperfiction," and "web fiction" are employed throughout though they are

²⁶ See Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

²⁷ Similarly, for Guertin, readers online become "browsers" who are "free to explore in a peripatetic fashion." Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

not usually interchangeable. The term hypertext is used here to specifically point to contained or disc-based narratives like the frequently referred to afternoon by Michael Joyce. Importantly, hypertext theory such as that of Landow, Bolter, and Moulthrop (as will be made apparent in the literature review section in Chapter 2) is based on readings of these kinds of works. Moving from the late 1980s to 1990s when both hypertext narratives and their corresponding theories were widely broadcast to the early 2000s one can easily track a marked transformation in terms of accessibility, collaboration, interaction and multimodality (see Chapter 2). The hyperfictions or web fictions to which this thesis turns, crafted subsequent to a wider use of the internet are born digital, these are fictions created on the web and to be read on the web. Additionally, these fictions move from the text-centric nature of hypertext works to a multimodal exploration which demands a certain kind of literate reader; a reader able to simultaneously interpret text, image, interaction, sound and video. Due to this shift in method of creation and consumption the existing hypertext theories are notably insufficient. Therefore this thesis falls into a considerably under-researched yet very significant area.

Though this thesis, like the works it examines, forms part of a historical moment a trajectory is apparent. As the technology changes so too do the works and so do the kinds of readings that are performed as well as the reader required. Beginning the thesis with an early web fiction work, Disappearing Rain by Deena Larsen sets the scene of the year 2000 when readers were heavily informed by print constructs²⁸ and writers were concerned with “making new forms from the new materials found only in this [online] land.”²⁹ To that extent Larsen herself wrote Disappearing Rain for three kinds of readers, those who had never encountered a web fiction before, those who had, and

²⁸ For Lev Manovich “Hypertext is a particular case of hypermedia which uses only one media type — text,” The Language of New Media, March 2002, 12 November 2007, 57 <<http://www.manovich.net/LNM/Manovich.pdf>>.

²⁹ Deena Larsen, “Mapping the Transition from Page to Screen,” Chat Log, trAce Forum Chat, 2 December 2002, trAce, 12 November 2007 <<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/process/index.cfm?article=34>>.

those who were ready to probe the story in a highly demanding and careful way. Similarly, Marjorie Luesebrink who writes fiction under her pseudonym M.D. Coverley, recognises that some readers “tend to be more comfortable with well-established technologies” so for her the “essential project” is to craft a piece that foregrounds “multilinear[ity]” and facilitates the “interpenetration” of “images, sound, and movement” but not at the expense of a foundation of “fictional narrative.”³⁰

Moving from Coverley’s 1997 The Lacemaker and Larsen’s 2000 Disappearing Rain to Claire Dinsmore’s more recent High Crimson (2000, 2005) and Donna Leishman’s Red Riding Hood (2001, 2006) parallels a significant development in new media. Some works that Landow and Bolter refer to were created in HyperCard, an application not available today. There are current steps being taken in the hopes of averting this kind of loss such as the Electronic Literature Organization’s project to archive a sample of 300 web sites and the British Library web page archiving of .co.uk sites. In fact, aware that technology can change relatively quickly Claire Dinsmore announces that High Crimson does not work with Netscape and that the reader requires at least Flash 4. While Larsen might argue that Dinsmore is limiting her audience, Dinsmore could riposte that she is creating works that develop alongside technology. To this extent Larsen is right in noting that these writers require literate readers.³¹ But the levels and kinds of literacy required to read High Crimson and Red Riding Hood are noticeably different from the more accessible Disappearing Rain which because of its straightforward html coding is (currently) able to span numerous platforms.

³⁰ Marjorie Luesebrink, “E-Poets on the State of Their Electronic Art: M.D. Coverley,” Currents in Electronic Literacy, Fall 2001 (5), <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/fall01/survey/coverley.html>>.

³¹ “We not only require literacy, but access to an ever changing array of machinery and software. Writers explore the latest tools, requiring readers to have ever expanding hard drives for Flash and Shockwave plugins, sound systems, screen bandwidth,” Deena Larsen, “Getting Your Hands on It,” JODI: Journal of Digital Information, 3.3, January 2003, 12 November 2007 <<http://jodi.tamu.edu/Articles/v03/i03/Larsen/access.html>>.

While Red Riding Hood is not supported by previous versions of Flash or Internet Explorer it is similarly inaccessible to readers who are not adept at game-play and who do not want to take control. For readers like Kate Pullinger before she began creating online stories who “don’t want to make choices, [who] want the experienced to be ‘authored’” reading works like Red Riding Hood will be almost impossible.³² The kind of literacy demanded for a web fiction like Red Riding Hood and indeed High Crimson, requires that readers negotiate the various modes alongside the storyline while continually puzzling over and exploring the online environment. If the reader is waiting for the story, it will be to no avail. Readers of these fictions need to understand how to negotiate both the technology (Flash, Java, HTML) and the distinctive features of the online medium (image, sound, video, text, interaction). The web fiction reader in this case must recognise that part and parcel of telling new stories is figuring out new ways to read them.

1.4. Feminisms

In her 1996 overview Barbara Page found the “dynamic relationship between feminist thematics and textuality” to be “intensified” in certain hypertext works.³³ For Page hypertext creations enable women writers to “intervene in the structure of discourse, to interrupt reiterations of what has been written, to redirect the streams of narrative and to clear a space for the construction of new textual forms congenial to women’s subjectivity.”³⁴ In a 1998 article Mark Amerika claimed that “some of the most interesting hypertext work of the present moment is emerging from the computers of masterful women who develop their work outside the normal channels of institutional

³² Kate Pullinger, Interview with Sue Thomas, “Mapping the Transition from Page to Screen,” March 2002, trAce Online Writing Centre, 2 November 2007 <<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/transition/project.htm>>.

³³ Barbara Page, “Women Writers and the Resistive Text: Feminism, Experimental Writing, and Hypertext,” Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999) 130.

³⁴ Ibid.

support.”³⁵ Similarly, Laura Sullivan in 1999 posited a “feminist theorization of hypertext” which “encourage[s] reader-viewers of feminist hypertexts not only to interrogate their positions within dominant ideological regimes of representation, but also to join actively in efforts of collective social struggle.”³⁶

Although there has been some recognition of the feminist potential of stories created with new media technologies there has been little research (see literature review) and the research that has been conducted has been mainly constrained to the non-web variety. The purpose of this thesis is to begin to shift the understanding of reading practices to the online environment where the new fictions are being created; to read, in a dynamic way, the intersections of web fictions, feminism, and narrative theory. Just as acts of mapping signify the “simultaneity of the nomadic status” they also express “the need to draw maps,” to find further connections and engagements.³⁷ This is how the “shifting landscape[s]” of the women writers discussed in this thesis are read.³⁸ They, like Braidotti, are nomadic cartographers and storytellers who aim to represent “transformations, metamorphoses, mutations and processes of change.”³⁹ However, here lies an important caveat. This is not a claim that web fiction is the sole privilege of feminists and that all online narratives written by women engage in aesthetics associated with feminisms. In fact it is certainly true that one could argue, in the instance of a work like Michael Joyce’s web based fiction 12 Blue, that because it is composed of loosely connected fragments, it corresponds less to “traditional” narrative and more to Caroline Guertin’s conception of hypertext feminism which is

³⁵ Mark Amerika, “Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author as Cyborg-Femme Narrator,” 15 March 1998, Telepolis, 2 November 2007 <<http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/3/3193/1.html>>.

³⁶ Laura Sullivan, “Wired Women Writing: Towards a Feminist Theorization of Hypertext,” Computers and Composition 16, 25-54 (1999): 46.

³⁷ This is Braidotti’s “cartography,” Nomadic Subjects 16.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 1.

“performative and collective in its interactive nature.”⁴⁰ Rather than debating whether web fictions written by men can participate in a feminist aesthetic like that described by Guertin and how they might accomplish this, the choice here is to focus on web fictions written by women and consider how the texts in question connect their own strategies to concerns largely typical of feminism. There are two reasons for this choice. Firstly, this choice enables the contribution of new insights for academic thinking in the areas of feminist criticism and new media theory. Secondly, this choice embodies a mode of praxis by shifting the focus to what women are creating online. As Laurie Penny reports “contemporary feminism is alive and it’s online.”⁴¹ This research is about interpreting the role of multimodality in representation and performing close readings of texts that are about women in order to establish a dialogue between feminism and new media.⁴² In this way, the aim is to advance literary and literacy concerns without confining the web fictions or their interpretations to a definitional standard. Therefore the research here affirms and demonstrates that the web fictions particular to this study do indeed offer narratives worthy of literary analysis however they do demand a particular lens through which to be read. As Braidotti explains of her own “zig-zag” philosophy, “it is only the starting point.”⁴³

With a “nonfixity of boundaries”⁴⁴ and cyberfeminism’s specific focus on women within technological culture in mind, this research aims to articulate the

⁴⁰ Carolyn Guertin, “Buzz-Dazed States and Leaps of Faith: Random Swarmings,” *Beehive*, 1.2 July 1998, *Temporal Image*, 7 March 2006 <http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content_apps02/queen_bees/pages/honey1.html>.

⁴¹ Laurie Penny, “Hypertext Heroine,” *Red Pepper: Spicing Up Politics*, October–November 2007, 13 November 2007 <<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/article528.html>>.

⁴² Note that close-reading is used to suggest a literary analysis of a work rather than supposing a method that is able to unearth all possible meanings. Additionally, an important point must be remembered, there is always already an implicit tension in this thesis and its attempts to read web fictions as “literary” works. However, this tension can be seen as both a result of reading works which “escape” or overflow these kinds of boundaries as well as a feminist drive to side-step easy boundaries/borders à la Braidotti.

⁴³ Rosi Braidotti, “Filosofare a Zig-Zag: Apologia Pro Opera Sua,” *Per Amore del Mondo*, Autunno 2006, 20 September 2007, <<http://www.diotimafilosofe.it/down.php?t=3&id=154>>.

⁴⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 36.

significant difference between static hypertext, mainly written and theorised by men,⁴⁵ and web fiction with its particular use of multimodality and its representation of female subjectivity.⁴⁶ Just as narratology shifts, evolves, and resists unproblematic definitions, so too do feminist literary theories. Indeed, bringing feminist theory and perspectives into literary theory has reoriented narratology. Susan Lanser inaugurated this feminist slant when she presented her “task [as one which] ask[s] whether feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods...of narratology and whether narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understanding of feminist criticism and the experience of women’s texts.”⁴⁷ Just as feminist theories gave rise to new ways of thinking about narrative; they can similarly impart fresh perspectives on the study of web fiction.

Where theorists like Landow, Bolter, and Moulthrop have critiqued stand-alone hypertext fictions which appear offline and require specific data management programmes (HyperCard, Storyspace) to be read, this thesis demonstrates that it is imperative to develop a reading theory specific to online fictions. Why might online fictions appear different from static hypertext? Like theory, technology evolves, and with the growth and increased functionality of the Web, second-generation hyperfiction writers are able to explore the fertile multiplicity the online environment now offers. To put it simply, the difference of the online environment on the narrative as well as on the reading experience has not been adequately theorised thus the aim of this thesis is to examine how the technical mode of construction, i.e. the “born digital” element impacts the creation and representation of female subjectivities.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, Literature Review.

⁴⁶ My theorisation of multimodality extends Kress and Van Leeuwen’s idea. They see multimodality as having in common “semiotic principles [that] operate in and across different modes,” while I use multimodality to suggest a single medium (the internet) which allows for multiple modes to exist simultaneously. See Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication (London: Arnold, Hodder Headline Group, 2001) 2.

⁴⁷ Susan Lanser, “Toward a Feminist Narratology,” Style 20. 3 (1986): 341-63.

The intersections of feminism and narrative indicate intricate and subtle forms of reading whose process entwines the subjectivities of reader and author.⁴⁸ In terms of the online environment this interaction provides a highly significant paradigm for illustrating how the processes of narrative affect the interpretation of subjectivity. Having noted that existing hypertext theory deals almost solely with disk-based works the approach to a literary and feminist reading of specific web fictions that is undertaken marks out a context within which a new reading of online subjectivity might be performed. To this end I have contributed material specifically on the aesthetic, cognitive, and narrative aspects of reading certain web fictions.⁴⁹ To date, much related criticism tends to provide overviews of non web-based interactive narratives and focuses not on the actual experience of reading but on notions of what new media narratives should accomplish.⁵⁰ The work that has been published on hypertextual stories created in Storyspace software⁵¹ assesses the value and future potential of interactive fiction rather than performing close readings or literary analysis.⁵² This research is led by the readings/interpretations in order to establish a dialogue between feminism, web fiction, and literary analysis. Focusing specifically on web fictions by authors like Marjorie Luesebrink, Deena Larsen, Caitlin Fisher, and Donna Leishman,

⁴⁸ Adriana Cavarero, Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood, trans. Paul Kottman (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁹ Jessica Laccetti, "Multiple Choices: Beginnings in Hypertext Fiction by Women," Anthology of Narrative Beginnings. Brian Richardson, ed. University of Nebraska Press, 2008; Jessica Laccetti, "Representation, Feminism, and Hyperfiction: Towards a Theory of Multi-Mimesis," Sex and Sexuality: Exploring Critical Issues, Jessica Laccetti, ed., Inter-Disciplinary.Net and Rodopoi, 2007; and Jessica Laccetti, "Towards a Loosening of Categories: Women's Hyperfiction and Narrative," Electronic Review of Books. Jan., 2006. <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/>>.

⁵⁰ See George Landow, Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Alice Bell also notes this. See Alice Bell, "The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction," Diss. University of Sheffield, September 2006.

⁵¹ See Stuart Moulthrop, "In the Zones: Hypertext and the Politics of Interpretation," Writing on the Edge. 1 (1989): 18-28, J. Yellowlees Douglas, The End of Books? Or Books Without End? Reading Hypertext Narratives, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000, and Michael Joyce, Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1994.

⁵² Although recently a book on Close Reading New Media has been published it gives no space to the analysis of web fictions and only little discussion of disc-bound hypertexts: "out of the nine essays [the collection includes] two on hyperfiction. Koskimaa (2003) discusses the use of time in Coverley's (2000) multimedia text Califia and E. Joyce (2003) discusses the motif of fragmentation in Patchwork Girl." Bell, "The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction."

this thesis explores the multilayered articulations of narrative and subjectivity that permeate the words, images, sounds, and structures of these fictions. What matters is not necessarily a single line of narrative⁵³ traversing the screen, but rather the connections made through combinations of images, words, links, and screens.⁵⁴ The resulting mosaic of multiple narratives and interpretations calls for a new theorising.

This is where a particular emphasis and interpretation of each work's use of multi-mimesis comes into play. Multi-mimesis is how each fiction engages both multimodal elements and becoming subjectivities (in a Braidottian sense, see Chapter 1) as a way of telling a story. Fundamentally, the body of this thesis offers new readings of subjectivity through the engagement of feminist theory and multimodality. The reading of representations of subjectivity becomes one of the main aims of this thesis and is explored on two fronts: what are the authors representing and how are they representing. The interpretive approach, fluid like Braidotti's feminist figuration of a nomadic subjectivity, comprises performative readings which enact each fiction as it emerges. In a move inspired by N. Katherine Hayles' advice regarding media specific analysis, mainly that media should not be "considered in isolation from one another,"⁵⁵ this thesis offers a series of readings that consider the multimodality of certain fictions in relation to narratological tropes such as character and temporality.

Putting the focus on representation is significant and deliberate. Firstly, feminist and narratological contexts suggest the appropriateness of this aim as both have been deeply concerned with representation. Secondly, the online environment brings to the fore the ubiquity of (re)mediation. The particular characteristics of multi-modal

⁵³ J. David Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum) 1990.

⁵⁴ As Guertin says, "The collision of word and image (and sound and other multimedia elements) has a real distinction from text writing that most print-based critics seem to miss, even in reference to artists' books and other illustrated forms." This kind of writing demands "a new kind of literacy." Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

⁵⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002) 30.

representation which come to be termed multi-mimesis are articulated within this specific context of feminism and narratology. Additionally, a literary reading conscious of multi-mimesis is aligned with a notion inculcated in Hayles' media specific analysis – that of adopting and transforming old forms rather than simply passing them over. In fact, for Hayles, a media-specific analysis is “alert to the ways in which the medium constructs the work and the work constructs the medium” and the focus is on representation: this is “an ecology in which one medium is remediated in another, only to be remediated in turn.”⁵⁶ As Irigaray argues is the case with a feminist mimesis, the works examined in this thesis also consider aspects of representation and then rework them, or as Hayles might have it, remediate with a difference. However, while Irigaray speaks of a language that can “weave between past and future” change is only enacted when the subject can “mark” language.⁵⁷ In the online environment, authors, narrators and subjectivities can enact change not only by marking language, but by marking images, sounds, colours, sequences, animations and videos.

In beginning to make visible or detect what has otherwise remained hidden or inaccessible, this research provides the beginnings of a cartography; a way of identifying, reworking, and interpreting an ever-emerging terrain. As Manovich would put it, this is both “a record and a theory of the present.”⁵⁸ Importantly, this thesis does not aim to present a theory of reading which purports a static framework based on structures that suppose “if this, then that.” However, this thesis does present a possible way of reading online works that imbricates feminist thinking and internet technologies. Additionally, the readings undertaken here are just one instance of other possibilities and as such do not stand as “the” way of reading but as an example of how a multi-mimetic reading might be undertaken.

⁵⁶ Hayles, *Writing Machines* 6–7.

⁵⁷ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Continuum, 2004) 147.

⁵⁸ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Home page, September 2002, 12 August 2007 <<http://www.manovich.net/LNM/>> 33.

1.5. Thesis Outline

Though this thesis engages with interpretation and literary critique it is not fully aligned with it, at least not traditional evocations of narrative theory. As such, this thesis, like the web fictions it presents, reworks and reinterprets aspects of feminist theory and close reading in a different domain in order to examine the differences and the possibilities afforded by the online multimodal environment. To this end, Chapter 1 fleshes out and establishes an outline of multi-mimesis as a feminist digital technique, deeply informed by Rosi Braidotti's theory of nomadism.⁵⁹ By treating the works by Larsen, Fisher, Dinsmore et al. as literary texts, the aim is to make accessible an arena for analysis that seems to be bounded by both hypertext theorists and narratologists.⁶⁰ It is in the realm that recognises "the positivity of difference," both in terms of subjectivity and multimodality, that these analyses are situated.⁶¹ Though the authors considered here share similar concerns with representation and its multimodal performance, their works are related only by implication. There exist a few studies that testify to the importance of works such as Caitlin Fisher's These Waves of Girls but as Alice Bell has pointed out, the publications that do address these kinds of works do so in anecdotal ways rather than perform close readings.⁶²

Consequently, chapters 3, 4, and 5 concentrate on subjectivity, temporality and multiple worlds with reference to exemplar web fictions however the presence of subjectivity and its representation is always tangible. Chapter 3 explores the unfolding of multi-mimetic subjectivities within a double-bind. As each protagonist struggles to

⁵⁹ For the focus of this thesis, the remit remains a feminist one however a multi-mimetic reading need not necessarily be contained to only this type.

⁶⁰ For example, Fauth Jurgen, "Poles in Your Face: The Promises and Pitfalls of Hyperfiction," Mississippi Review Web, September 1995, 6 September 2007 <<http://www.mississippireview.com/1995/06-jurge.html>> and David S. Miall, "Trivializing the Word Hypertext, Postmodernism, and Reading," Mosaic 32 (June 1999): 157-172.

⁶¹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 111.

⁶² See Alice Bell, "The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction."

represent herself, her ideas, and her world, there is a concurrent awareness that each representation and each method of representing (image, audio, textual) is only ever provisional. In the first of the three chapters devoted to readings of web fictions, this one focuses on Braidotti theory of becoming subjectivity and how this thinking is charted in terms of multi-mimetic representation. Chapter 4 moves from the more well-known relations of hypertext and spatiality to that of web fictions and temporality and considers how each work multi-mimetically represents subjectivities in relation to temporal formation. Importantly, what the three works examined in this chapter make explicit is the sense that time is inherent in the reading and digitally mediated rather than an abstract or objective dimension surrounding it. As a counterpoint, Chapter 5 shifts from the fundamentally subjective endeavour of interpreting (as in Chapters 3 and 4) to more of a link-based analysis. What ensues is a delicate manoeuvre which places the interpretations closer to the structure of text than to plot readings, noting, however, the importance of the reader's role in negotiating between the two domains. This development parallels the development of the thesis argument itself, moving from a more generalised idea of representation of subjectivity in the online environment to a more specific approach of how link semantics are employed to create multiple worlds. To this end, the readings here illustrate how certain female-authored web fictions enact multiple stories through both articulation (the multi-mimetic representation as evidenced in chapters two and three) and process (the very necessary role of the reader). What is tested in the previous chapters receives substantiation in this chapter. Whereas Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 provide metaphorical evidence of feminist aims to produce "an invitation to the other's discourse"⁶³ via the use of multi-mimetic modes, this chapter takes a more clearly defined route by exploring the sometimes unstable but fundamentally connective conditions of html links. Building upon the multi-mimetic

⁶³ Retallack, "Re:Thinking:Literary:Feminism" 347.

theorising of the previous chapters, this chapter focuses on the multi-mimetic capabilities of the link and how it can function as an aid to the multi-mimetic representation of narrative worlds.

Ultimately this thesis aims to bring together feminist critique and literary interpretation with the focus on born digital fictions. Attentive to the medium's specificity as well as acknowledging that there is no existing discourse in which to situate this theorising, this thesis offers a jumping off point and concludes with the implications of interpretations that recognise multi-mimesis.

2.0 Orientations

Being literate in the context of these technologies is to do with understanding how the different modalities are combined in complex ways to create meaning.

Ilana Snyder

...gaps in the text are seen to be points of possibility, and differences in interpretation are part of the process of textual reception, a process which involves the reader's own positionality as well as that of the author(s) of the text.

Laura Sullivan

What then becomes central is the political and conceptual task of creating, legitimating and representing a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity...

Rosi Braidotti

In the introduction, general differences between hypertext fiction and web fictions were raised: hypertext fiction is print-centric and disk-bound while web fictions, as Deena Larsen explains, make use of the variety of modes available on the internet including the possibility to interact with the author and to link to other websites. Additionally, the first chapter introduced the potential of reading web fictions from a feminist point of view. This chapter will begin by setting the scene of hypertext theory and elaborate why it is insufficient for web fiction interpretations. Subsequently, multi-mimesis will be extended and enhanced to describe how multiple modes influence, shape, and transform narrative characteristics such as representation, temporality and worlds.

2.1 Background and Literature Review

Probing deeply into the field of new media reveals not only a deficit of resources on the topic but also a lack of consensus surrounding the language used to describe new media works and theories. Although Lev Manovich's Language of New Media takes as its main task the theorisation of new media, the author admits the difficulty inherent in his study with no "stable" language which he can employ: "I am not claiming that there is a single language of new media; rather, I use it as an umbrella term to refer to a

number of various conventions used by designers of new media objects to organize data and structure user's experience."⁶³ While little documented research has been done on web-based fictions debates continue concerning the terms to be used when referring to these kinds of works as a genre: hypermedia, interactive fiction, hypertext, hyperfiction, cybertext, digital literature, ergodic literature.⁶⁴ Such debates have similarly called into question the precision of the prefix "new" in the term "new media" and whether the kinds of interactivity demanded by these works actually suppress narrative or indeed the reader's access to it. As such, the hypertext theory considered here is generally referred to as "canonical;"⁶⁵ the theory which originated in conjunction with the world's first hypertext stories (early 1990s). Although writers seem to be developing their craft alongside the new possibilities the internet offers, theory is exhibiting little evidence of the same.

2.2 Issues of Representation

Against a background of a poststructural re-evaluation of print, early hypertext theory has been caught in a double-bind. On the one hand, this work has suggested itself as separate from existing literary traditions, citing its "newness."⁶⁶ On the other hand, theorists like Landow, Bolter, Joyce, and Moulthrop, have adapted and moulded ideas and "views held by Barthes, Deleuze and Guatarri" in order to highlight the parallels between print and hypertext fiction.⁶⁷ Especially apparent in terms of narrative fiction, the very term, *hypertext*, is loaded, suggesting a textual work which is beyond usual or established forms thereby immediately casting it in direct opposition to print

⁶³ Manovich, *The Language of New Media* 34.

⁶⁴ Bell also notes this issue.

⁶⁵ Adrian Miles, "Cinematic Paradigms for Hypertext," Home Page, 1999, 2 September 2005 <http://vogmae.net.au/works/paradigms/cinematic_paradigms.txt>.

⁶⁶ Miles makes a similar point. Ibid. See also Annette Comte, "Hyperfiction: A New Literary Poetics, Text 5.2 (October 2001), 2 September 2005 <<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct01/comte.htm>>.

⁶⁷ Comte, "Hyperfiction."

“discursive practice and traditions.”⁶⁸ In a remark that was typical for many, Bolter states: “what is unnatural in print becomes natural in the electronic medium and will soon no longer need saying at all, because it can be shown.”⁶⁹

Hypertext theorists were concerned not so much with describing actual reading responses or interrogating new media forms of narrative but with statements of its “radical effects upon our experience of author, text, and work...”⁷⁰ Owing to generalizations of this kind, hypertext fiction became touted as an “almost embarrassingly literal embodiment” of aspects of 20th century literary theory.⁷¹ The possibility of such a literal crossover between disciplines/genres stands in direct contrast to the hesitations voiced on the suitability of a medium which promotes multiplicity for the application of “argumentative discourse.”⁷² For some, the non-linear possibilities of hypertext evoke an authorial crisis, where is author control if the reader becomes author and orders her own way through the fiction? On the other hand, that very non-linearity is noted as useful in the expression of multi-linear ideas and “complex articulations of an argument better than linear text.”⁷³ As Mancini and Shum note, this tension between the threat of linearity and its positive aspects appear in “the main

⁶⁸ As Adrian Miles noted early on the term “casts hypertext under the surveillance, orbit or authority of the page and its particular discursive practice and traditions.” Miles, “Cinematic Paradigms for Hypertext.” Additionally, the prefix, “hyper” problematises recent and current feminist thought (which seeks to destabilise hierarchies such as mind over body and vision over touch) as it adds inscriptions of hierarchy to an already seemingly hierarchical and male-dominated field. The often cited theorists are male (Bolter, Landow, Amerika, Lanham, Joyce, Aarseth), the hypertexts often discussed are written by men (Landow, Joyce, Coover, Amerika), and the visions they present us with are distinctly male. For instance, Lanham argues that the strand of “postmodern visual art” that starts with the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti and runs through the work of Marcel Duchamp, Richard Hamilton, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Christo Javacheff created a dynamic and interactive aesthetic that is perfectly suited to computer technology with its “rolling, rich mixture of play, game, and purpose.” Richard Lanham, The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 51. Landow’s thesis is that the nonsequential, branching networks of hypertext produce the same kind of kinetic economy of reading and writing defined by Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault. Bolter compares reading Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, James Joyce’s Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, and Jorge Luis Borges’s Ficciones with navigating the linked, “non-linear” nodes of hypertext. See also Laura Sullivan who confirms “theorizations of hypertext are almost always articulated by men,” “Wired Women Writing” 29.

⁶⁹ Bolter, Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy 143.

⁷⁰ Landow, Hypertext 2.0 33.

⁷¹ Landow, Hypertext 2.0 32.

⁷² See Clara Mancini and Simon Buckingham Shum, “Towards Cinematic Hypertext,” Proceedings of ACM Hypertext ‘04, (ACM Press, 2004) 215-224.

⁷³ Clara Mancini and Simon Buckingham Shum, “Towards Cinematic Hypertext” 215.

paradigms adopted in hypertext research: *page-based hypertext*, *semantic hypertext* and *spatial hypertext*.”⁷⁴ Emphasised by the attempt of imbuing new technology with recognisable terms and the apparent conflict between linear and non-linear is the strong role that representation plays in discussions of hypertext. Couple these sentiments with hypertext’s alluring “attempt to represent complexity” and one may wonder why theorists and critics have consistently neglected to discuss these concepts together.⁷⁵

George Landow is recognised by hyperfiction authors and theorists alike as a pioneer of hypertext theory. Yet he overlooks the multimodal representational avenues available with online fiction. Criticising fellow authors’ “blindness to the crucial visual components of textuality,” he centers his discussion on an opposition between verbal and visual modes of representation; preferring to describe the function of images as a supplement to textual meaning, as though the image were secondary to the text.⁷⁶ For Landow, “visual elements” can be included in text and in so doing “expand” writing.⁷⁷ With this in mind, Miles makes an interesting point, not only do discourses like Landow’s “relegate” the image to “the role of ‘illustration,’ ‘figure’ or ‘supplement,’” but the very “way that hypertext theory attempts to prescribe rules of use” mean the relation of image to text is always secondary.⁷⁸

Bolter’s text, Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing, broadly subscribes to Landow’s view that this new “writing space” is a productive step on the evolutionary ladder of writing. Like Landow, Bolter applauds the emergence of hypertext systems. He posits hypertext as a technology that “frees the writer from the now tired artifice of linear writing” as it is better equipped for

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Janet H. Murray, Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) 91.

⁷⁶ Landow, Hypertext 2.0 63.

⁷⁷ See Landow, Hypertext 2.0 61–63.

⁷⁸ Miles, “Cinematic Paradigms for Hypertext.”

contemporary “experience [that can] not be recorded in the linear way.”⁷⁹ In arguing that “this new medium is the fourth great technique of writing that will take its place beside the ancient papyrus roll, the medieval codex, and the printed book,” Bolter sets up his argument with a clear privileging of the visual: “we are witnessing the emergence of a culture in which the preferred mode of representation is visual rather than linguistic.”⁸⁰ Bolter predicts that hypertext will counterbalance existing notions which appear too simplistic: “[i]t complicates our understanding of literature as either mimesis or expression, it denies the fixity of the text, and it questions the authority of the author.”⁸¹ While Bolter observes that hypertext problematises notions of mimesis, he also demonstrates the contention of this thesis that there has been a consistent reluctance to rethink mimesis in terms of the online arena. Bolter is content to be nostalgic for a coherent whole and concludes that readers must “shuttle back and forth between two modes of reading,” between images and text.⁸²

Recognised as the “father of hypertext fiction,”⁸³ Michael Joyce describes hypertext’s potential for blurring or collapsing boundaries between text and image as that of a “text [that] becomes a present tense palimpsest where what shines through are not past versions but potential, alternate views.”⁸⁴ Nearing the conclusion of his text, Joyce most clearly raises the concept of the possibility of representation online. “Hypertext,” argues Joyce, “is before anything else a visual form, a complex network of signs that presents texts and images in an order that the artist has shaped but which the viewer chooses and reshapes.”⁸⁵ Addressing the complexity of this “visual form,”

⁷⁹ By using the word “artifice” Bolter also implies that non-linear writing is more “real” than linear writing. Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991) 146, 116.

⁸⁰ Bolter, *Writing Space* 162, Jay David Bolter, *Degrees of Freedom*, 1996, 20 March 2004 <cc.gatech.edu/~bolter/degrees.html>.

⁸¹ Bolter, *Writing Space* 64.

⁸² Bolter, *Writing Space* 67.

⁸³ Jim Rosenberg, book cover, *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics* by Michael Joyce (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

⁸⁴ Joyce, *Of Two Minds* 3.

⁸⁵ Joyce, *Of Two Minds* 206.

Joyce speaks of “contours” which act as “a virtual representation of the reader’s experience of the hypertext as it unfolds in time.”⁸⁶ According to Joyce, a contour, that “sensual whole,”⁸⁷ is “what happens as we go, the essential communication between the artist who gave way and the viewer who now gives ways to see.”⁸⁸ What Joyce seems to emphasise is that contours are read in the visual display of the “verbal, graphical or moving text.”⁸⁹ Struggling to represent hypertext adequately, Joyce resorts to metaphors which, he hopes, describe the most important aspect, that it “vindicates the word as visual image and reclaims its place in the full sensorium. It is the revenge of the word on television.”⁹⁰

Discussions of hypertext seem invariably to centre on its powers of representation and its explicit visual modes, but none seem to tackle what this may mean in terms of a theoretical understanding of mimesis or representations of realities. Writing after Landow, Bolter and Joyce, in 1996 Llana Snyder attempts to provide a theoretical background to hypertext. She explains that it is a contemporary medium that has literalised notions of mimesis because it is founded on concepts of representation (in the form of ones and zeros).⁹¹ Snyder goes on to say that “[h]ypertext also challenges the traditional view of literature as mimesis because an electronic author cannot hope to stabilise a replica of nature in so radically unstable a medium as hypertext.”⁹² She not only confines the notion of reality to that of a stable universal but seems to make the standard association that mimesis is imitation and not representation.⁹³

⁸⁶ Joyce, *Of Two Minds*, qtd. in Ilana Snyder, *Hypertext: The Electronic Labyrinth* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 36.

⁸⁷ Joyce, *Of Two Minds* 207.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 206. Interestingly, Miles overturns this proclamation with his own: “hypertext is in fact cinema’s revenge on the word.” Miles, “Cinematic Paradigms for Hypertext.”

⁹¹ As Snyder further explains, “Although the letters on the screen look like those on pages, they are in fact the ‘temporary, transient representations of digital codes stored in a computer’s memory.’” Snyder, *Hypertext: The Electronic Labyrinth* 3.

⁹² Snyder 71.

⁹³ Prendergast points out that Aristotle himself views mimesis as representation, not mere imitation. Prendergast, *The Triangle of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 1.

Scanning the indices of other hypertext theorists reveals a similar reluctance to broach the topic of mimesis as representation and expression. Janet Murray's Hamlet on the Holodeck displays numerous attempts to explain that "we need time to get used to any increase in representational power" since "it is commonplace in the twentieth century to point to elaborate simulations of reality (electronic and otherwise) as a new and dangerous thing, a distancing of human beings from direct experience."⁹⁴ To some extent, Murray addresses the possibilities available for female hyperfiction writers when she indicates that computer simulations can "represent complexity" and should be used like "tools for thinking about the larger puzzles of existence."⁹⁵ However, she concludes her text by echoing the male hypertext theorists: hypertext "is first and foremost a representational medium, a means for modelling the world that adds its own potent properties to the traditional media it has assimilated so quickly. As the most powerful representational medium yet invented, it should be put to the highest tasks of society."⁹⁶

According to Judy Malloy, originator of the world's first attempt at a hypertext, one of the "highest tasks of society" is to present female voices.⁹⁷ The possibility for representation is integral to hypernarratives and hyperpoetry, as Malloy suggests: both forms "[f]ramed by the computer monitor...are inherently visual – incorporating visually represented navigational devices, integrating graphics with words, using image map interfaces, or arranging text visually."⁹⁸ This visual capacity allows Malloy to combine and recombine "seductive words visually arrayed, female narratives told in the first person, and computer manipulated, circularly pathed, associative memory

⁹⁴ Murray 103.

⁹⁵ Murray 91, 93.

⁹⁶ Murray 284.

⁹⁷ "Uncle Roger [began] on ACEN in 1986 [and] used a database linking structure similar to what is now called hyperfiction." Anna Couey, interview with Judy Malloy, "Restructuring Power: Telecommunication Works Produced by Women," Women, Art, and Technology, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2003) 77, Judy Malloy, Hypernarrative in the Age of the Web, 2002, 5 Jan. 2006 <<http://www.well.com/user/jmalloy/neapaper.html>>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

patterns.”⁹⁹ In this respect, hypertext may be thought of as a web of relations with an inexhaustible potential for narrative, “existing as it does in a perpetual state of potentiality – poised for flight.”¹⁰⁰ But Malloy seems unable to refrain, however unconsciously, from taking a universalising turn. Hypertexts are much more realistic, Malloy argues, as they “imitate the associative, contingent flow of human thought and the unpredictable progression of our lives. Using the computer’s capability of mimicking our disordered yet linked thought processes,” Malloy believes hypertext readers will be “immersed” in the minds of the narrators and consequently understand hypertext narratives not simply as imitation, reproduction, or simulation but as investigations into modes of expression, translation, and representation.¹⁰¹ But do all hypertext readers really share the same “disordered yet linked” ways of thinking? Another reading, however, may sidestep such universalising arguments and focus instead on key words like “disorder” and “unpredictability” as signalling difference. Indeed, there is no universal “human thought,” only culturally and historically determined interpretations that in turn, can only be known in specific and thus different (reading) contexts. As Braidotti explains, “[a]ll knowledge is situated, that is to say partial; we are all stuttering for words, even when we speak ‘fluently.’”¹⁰² Consequently a web-based narrative is known only as it is read, in its difference.¹⁰³

In other words, the issue here is difference and how it is represented. Theorising an online mimesis entails a widening of the term so that mimesis is no longer a rigid

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

¹⁰¹ Malloy, *Hypertext in the Age of the Web*. Guyer also sees hypertext as representative of “the human brain:” “I believed it was ‘natural,’ designed to work associatively, as the human brain does. I still believe something like that, but amplified, and with the plentiful hitches of a young technology thrown in. From those first days till now, I have continued to see this medium as very life-like. I see it in the form of a quotidian stream.” Carolyn Guyer, “Along the Estuary,” Sept. 1996, 23 July 2004 <http://www.mothermillennia.org/Carolyn/Guyer_Essays.html>.

¹⁰² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 14.

¹⁰³ As Guertin explains, “[o]ne misconception about the digital arts is that the text can be printed off the screen and read in a more conventional way. However, the text portion will not stand up on its own as text, for it is only one of the conceptual and/or syntactical elements at work in this form.” Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

2.3 Hypertext as Multiple Mimetic Mode

Beginning with the understanding that hypertext and its discourses are in an “incunabular stage” there is, none the less, something which is unchanging in this dynamic medium: the fact that hypertext mediums offer opportunities to employ multiple mimetic modes.¹⁰⁸

Aware of the proliferation of multiplicity online (i.e. multi-linear narratives, multiple reading paths, presentation of multiple subjectivities), Hayles writes that the “effects on literature are not widely recognized.”¹⁰⁹ Even critics, as Douglas later notes, “who have conscientiously read the works about which they write....do not exactly see eye to eye.”¹¹⁰ One thing, it seems, that online theorists do agree upon is the multiplicity inherent in this burgeoning genre. Now, although new media theorists agree that hypertexts represent multiplicity — as Robert Coover suggests, “[t]he most radical new element that comes to the fore in hypertext is the system of multidirectional and often labyrinthine linkages we are invited or obliged to create”¹¹¹ — there remains no definitive interpretation of what web fictions are, or what they comprise, “exactly.” Risking a broad overview of narrative multiplicity from new media theorists’ points of view seems to point to three main characteristics.

The first, perhaps most obvious way of presenting multiplicity is to think in terms of “multiple textuality.”¹¹² The communication protocols that underlie the structuring of the Internet enable the dynamic integration of print text, image, graphics, sound, video, through the use of data-streaming. What seems to be one of the most

¹⁰⁸ Jane Yellowlees Douglas, The End of Books – Or Books without End: Reading Interactive Narrative (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 8.

¹⁰⁹ N. Katherine Hayles, Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers, 1998, 3 December 2007 <<http://www.english.ucla.edu/faculty/hayles/Flick.html>>.

¹¹⁰ As Douglas notes, there have been cases where critics have not read the works. Douglas, The End of Books 4.

¹¹¹ Robert Coover, “The End of Books,” Multimedia English, Course resources, Aug. 1998-Dec. 1998, Department of English, University of Buffalo, 30 May 2006 <<http://wings.buffalo.edu/cas/english/faculty/conte/syllabi/370/EndofBooks.htm>>.

¹¹² Landow, Hypertext 2.0 17.

characteristic qualities of the web is its capacity to incorporate different means of representation in one code. Although it is possible to use images and colours in print, authors of novelistic fiction have seldom done so. Unlike print prose, except perhaps most obviously postmodern fiction, where the representation of text is (traditionally) seen as secondary, hypertext, while employing any or all of the aforementioned representational devices, often calls attention to the text itself.¹¹³ Thus this type of “writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of external verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures.”¹¹⁴ This self-reflexive technique can be seen as an example of each web fiction author’s awareness of partiality and their concurrent questioning of their “realities.”¹¹⁵ Their texts, like their representations, can only offer a partial view and, in acknowledging this, web fiction authors like Fisher, Leishman and Luesebrink remain self-reflexive.¹¹⁶ This double stance, aiming to represent while recognising the limits of any such strategy, enables a dual capacity of representation.

Ulmer calls this use of online representation devices “applied grammatology.” The “science of writing,” says Ulmer, is not exclusively concerned with deconstruction but more with its performative and “post(e) pedagogical” possibilities. For Ulmer “applied grammatology” implies a divorce from print culture so that hypertext writing is free from any commitment to its past: “pictoideo-phonographic Writing that puts speech

¹¹³ Other exceptions might include the coming together of image and text in an illuminated manuscript, poetry and journalism.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Waugh qtd. in Victoria Orlowski, “Metafiction,” *Postcolonial Studies at Emory*, Spring 1996, 29 May 2006 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Metafiction.html>>.

¹¹⁵ As Orlowski notes with regards to novelistic metafiction, this kind of questioning stems from Modernist conceptions of unified identity and reality. Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The references to the web fiction authors will vary, sometimes noting them all but at other times citing specific names. This is not meant to suggest that only those referred to are imbricated in that particular line of thinking. The dynamic referencing is a structural attempt to avoid repetition as well a performative move to remind readers that these authors share similar strategies.

back in its place while taking into account the entire scene of writing.”¹¹⁷ The most striking difference between hypertext and print writing, Ulmer argues, is that hypertext enables oral, print, and electronic modes to coexist interactively. Hypertext, like Derrida’s figure of *mise-en-abyme*, is a reflexive configuration whereby a text “shows what it is telling, does what it says, displays its own making, reflects its own action.”¹¹⁸

The second level of representation, instead of focusing on devices such as graphics, images, and video, brings into relief the structure of hypertext itself. With the option of choosing multiple paths through a web fiction there is, undoubtedly, an evocation of multiple worlds.¹¹⁹ Hayles suggests that hyperfictions encourage multiple approaches: “first, there is no central representation; second, control is distributed throughout the system; third, behaviours develop in direct interaction with the environment rather than through an abstract model; and fourth, complex behaviours emerge spontaneously through self-organizing, emergent processes” which force readers to “assemble the story.”¹²⁰ The chance to link to different nodes means not only a creation of “alternate specific female realities,”¹²¹ but also the suggestion of many narrative fragments that may not necessarily add up to a whole, nor be designed to do so. In Malloy’s terms, “hypernarratives are written with screen-sized narrative building blocks that can either stand alone or be combined with each other in multiple ways. Each ‘screen’ represents a complete, fully expressed and often visual ‘memory

¹¹⁷ Ulmer qtd. in Liliane Weissberg, “Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys,” *MLN* (1989): 1121.

¹¹⁸ Ulmer, “Grammatology Hypermedia,” *Postmodern Culture* 1.2 (1991): 4.

¹¹⁹ “As is only fitting for a medium that is virtually defined by its multiplicity, hypertext has a seemingly endless capacity to accommodate a variety of [representational] possibilities...When you spin [a representation] in hypertext, you can choose to represent a world that is strictly ‘either/or’ or one that is ‘and/and/and.’” Jane Yellowlees Douglas, “Abandoning the Either/Or for the And/And/And: Hypertext and the Art of Argumentative Writing,” 1996, 12 May 2007 <<http://web.nwe.ufl.edu/~jdouglas/AllenUnwin.pdf>>.

¹²⁰ Katherine Hayles, “Artificial Life and Literary Culture,” *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) 213, Murray 110.

¹²¹ Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

picture.”¹²² In a similar way, Joyce characterises hypertext narrative as “centred not on singularity, consistency, and closure, but on difference, multiplicity and community.”¹²³ In hyperfiction narrative, then, “the text is a network in which the nodes may be compared to worlds and the links to airlines: playing with the text is a perpetual travel from world to world.”¹²⁴ Links in hypertext can be considered connections between different narrative worlds, or in fact enlargements of existing or originary worlds. Links are “the jumps in thought” allowing readers to venture into various worlds.¹²⁵ However, each link-click moves the reader into another world, at once erasing one world (usually) and replacing it with another. Significantly, it is the reader’s choice that makes one world become, in Ryan’s terms, the “textual actual world.”¹²⁶

The third level of representation extends the idea of multiple worlds and multilinearity by focusing on the concept of reading as temporal travel. For critics like Aarseth, the main feature of hypertextual writing is “discontinuity – the jump – the sudden displacement of the user’s position in the text.”¹²⁷ Reading a narrative in the online environment implies navigating “a structure in time.”¹²⁸ Couple this sentiment with Susan Stanford Friedman’s argument that feminists are becoming more reflexive in producing history, anxious about “the risk of repeating the same patterns of thought and action that excluded, distorted, muted, or erased women from the master narratives of history in the first place,”¹²⁹ and web fiction looks like a perfect place to dissolve this risk. Authors like Luesebrink, Ankerson, and Dinsmore, suggest that readers abandon

¹²² Malloy, *Hyper narrative in the Age of the Web*.

¹²³ Joyce qtd in Stuart Moulthrop, “The Politics of Hypertext,” *Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies*, eds, Gail E. Hawisher & Cynthia L. Selfe (Urbana: NCTE Press, 1991) 267.

¹²⁴ Marie-Laure Ryan, “The Text as World versus the Text as Game: Possible Worlds Semantics and Postmodern Theory,” *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 27 (1998): 147.

¹²⁵ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

¹²⁶ Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 24.

¹²⁷ Espen Aarseth, “Nonlinearity and Literary Theory,” *Hyper/Text/Theory*, ed. George Landow (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 76.

¹²⁸ Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy* 107.

¹²⁹ Susan Stanford Friedman, “Making History: Reflections on Feminism, Narrative, and Desire,” *Feminism beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995) 12.

linear history and the “old logic of causality” for a dynamic model that considers the “temporal structure of a text [to be] created by the reader’s moment-by-moment encounter with [textual and visual] elements.”¹³⁰ Thus they see narrative temporality as a sequencing assembled of differences. Although temporality may be problematised, the reader can create links, bridges, and associations that combine and integrate different times and views together. With online fictions, narrative, and therefore subjectivity, is not only affected by these complexities, but is contingent upon them. Online narratives derive their sequence of unfolding through reader interaction.

Furthermore, temporality is not a theorisable whole.¹³¹ Instead, in terms of certain female authored web fictions, time, like narrative, becomes fluid and mercurial. This opens the way for a representation of temporality which is built upon a shifting foundation of “interface time” and “cognitive time,” where turbulence, improvisations, and complexity bifurcate into reflections of/on becoming subjectivities.¹³² This conception of multi-mimesis, then, views temporality, subjectivity, representation, and narrative, as a “shifting groun[d]” which enables “a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking.”¹³³

What is striking in arguments by certain new media theorists — which assuredly describe fictions in cyberspace as having “certain built-in possibilities: multilinearity, multiple foci, fuzzy boundaries, inclusiveness, collaboration”¹³⁴ — is the continuing use

¹³⁰ Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy* 107.

¹³¹ As Guertin notes is the case with Modernity. See Guertin, “The Matrix: Information Overload.”

¹³² Luesebrink has “identified six manifestations of time – categories that may describe our experience and understanding of hypertext fiction, contribute to the writing of texts, and suggest design features of authoring software. These categories are divided into two registers and named: Interface Time - Mechanical, Reading, and Interactive; and Cognitive Time- Real, Narrative, and Mythic.” Marjorie Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext: A Brief Lexicon in Time,” eds Groenbaek, Kaj & Mylonas, Elli & Shipman, III, Frank M, *The Proceedings of the Ninth ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia* (Pennsylvania, ACM Press, 1998) 107.

¹³³ For Braidotti this is a feature of “our present historical condition.” Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 14.

¹³⁴ Shelley Jackson, “Women and Technology, Beyond the Binary: A Roundtable Discussion with N. Katherine Hayles, Marjorie Perloff, Diane Greco, Linda Carroli and Shelley Jackson, hosted by Jennifer Ley,” *Riding the Meridian*, 10 May 2004 <<http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/rtable3.html>>.

of “metaphor and metonym.”¹³⁵ Nunes explains that “naming cyberspace reveals and creates a virtual location for actual experiences.”¹³⁶ What does this mean, then, for a theory of online representation, if even the medium itself evades figuration? The key, for theorists like Larsen, lies here: since there is no single definition for born digital fiction it is “easier to represent realities on many levels.”¹³⁷ In this new form, where reading is a process of occlusion or erasure, each link-click continually replaces the existing node with a different one.¹³⁸ This dynamic weaving together of verbal, visual, sonic, and textual narrative fragments, “like stepping stones” where “the real current of the narratives runs between them,” may be the very paradigm with which to represent specific fragments of realities which continually recognise their own partiality and the partiality of representation itself.¹³⁹

2.4 Towards a Theory of Multi-Mimesis

A new “terminology,” then, is required to convey aspects of this hypertextual hybrid that is “dynamic and volatile, a virtual text that has no concrete reality for either writer or reader.”¹⁴⁰ Although many proponents of hypertext see themselves as embracing revolutionary strategies and sounding clarion calls for new literary critical techniques, their work clearly indicates a reliance on print culture and print

¹³⁵ Mark Nunes, “Virtual Topographies: Smooth and Striated Cyberspace, *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 61.

¹³⁶ Nunes, 61. According to Landow, when thinking in terms of hypertext, the focus should be on the recognition that it “exists as electronic codes and not as physical marks on a physical surface; it is always virtual, always a simulacrum for which no physical instantiation exists.” George Landow, “What’s a Critic to Do?” *Hyper/Text/Theory*, ed. George Landow (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1995) 6.

¹³⁷ Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

¹³⁸ See Landow, *Hypertext* cf.

¹³⁹ Coover, “The End of Books.”

¹⁴⁰ Annette Comte makes this point in relation to constrained hypertext works. See Annette Comte, “Use of Feminist Literary Theory in Developing a Critical Language for Hypertext,” *Text* 4.2 (October 2000), 2 November 2007 <<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct00/comte.htm>>.

paradigms.¹⁴¹ At times Landow does not seem to recognise his own relaxed slippage into a privileging of ‘traditional’ narrative discourse, citing tools such as “plot, characterization, setting, and so forth,” while claiming that hypertext discourses which do make this slip, although “attractive and convincing,” require new configurations.¹⁴² In spite of various appeals, no theorist offers an interrogation and a rethinking of mimesis in terms of hypertext’s multiple mimetic modes and its “immersive, interactive experience.”¹⁴³ Setting the scene for a rethinking of mimesis online, Ryan explains that immersion¹⁴⁴ and interactivity make computer-assisted experience an experience of reality: “[t]o apprehend a world as real is to feel surrounded by it, to be able to interact physically with it, and to have the power to modify this environment.”¹⁴⁵

The result of this new reality is a “new language.”¹⁴⁶ As an advocate for feminist online writing, Guertin describes this new language as “the disorienting intersection of text and image,” and likens it to McLuhan’s “next logical step.”¹⁴⁷ The next step, Guertin writes, for McLuhan, is “to arrive at a state of weightlessness and

¹⁴¹ See especially George Landow, “Reconfiguring Narrative,” Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology ed., George Landow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 178-215.

¹⁴² Landow, “Reconfiguring Narrative” 180, 183.

¹⁴³ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Cyberspace, Virtuality, and the Text,” Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 89.

¹⁴⁴ As Mark Dery says, “I am staring at the computer screen. But the feeling is that I am really ‘in’ something. I am some ‘where.’” Mark Dery, Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century, (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 7. See also Marie-Laure Ryan, Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Jill Walker, “Performing Fictions: Interaction and Depiction,” Fineart Forum, 2003, 15 July 2004 <http://www.fineartforum.org/Backissues/Vol_17/faf_v17_n08/reviews/reviews_index.html>, Lisbeth Klasturp, “Interactivity Definitions,” (Copenhagen: IT University, 2003) 4 July 2004 <<http://www.itu.dk/people/klasturp/ianet.doc>>.

¹⁴⁵ Ryan, “Immersion vs. Interactivity.” As Richard Lanham says, transformability is the key to this digital age: “the same sequence of bits can be used as sound, visual, or text, and so on, while those bits themselves can’t be ‘presented’ or ‘represented’ as information as they are in themselves [information].” Richard Lanham, qtd in David Kolb, “Opening Statement,” 22 Sept. 1995, 8 July 2004 <<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/~jmu2m/kolb.ludd.html>>.

¹⁴⁶ Guertin, “Buzz-Dazed States and Leaps of Faith.”

¹⁴⁷ “not to translate, but to by-pass languages,” McLuhan qtd in Carolyn Guertin, “Gesturing Towards the Visual: Virtual Reality, Hypertext and Embodied Feminist Criticism,” Surfaces 8 (Montréal, 1999):15 <<http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces>>.

speechlessness.”¹⁴⁸ However, unlike McLuhan’s call to bypass language and the body, the cyberfeminism of the authors analysed in this thesis seek to explore the inextricable connection between their subjectivities (sense of becoming) and embodied experience (becoming): “the key to feminist nomadic politics is situatedness, accountability, and...partial perspectives.”¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Guertin’s “speechlessness” does not imply a lack of voice but rather a sense of “creative dislocation” where connections are performed in a nomadic and associative sense.¹⁵⁰ Suitably, web fiction invites a subjective reading position which “jumps, circles, misbehaves and is frequently sidetracked.”¹⁵¹ Like Braidotti, who chooses to be a “nomadic subject” because she sees it as a way of “blurring boundaries without burning bridges,”¹⁵² the female-authored born digital fictions discussed in this research are examples of experimental, interactive and multirepresentational spaces “woven of subversive bridges.”¹⁵³

Part of this subversion lies in web fiction technology’s ability to redefine representation as both “illusory and real.”¹⁵⁴ Like Ryan and Guertin, Hayles acknowledges that different systems of signification are bound to derive from different modes of production: “changes in signification are linked with shifts in consumption; shifting patterns of consumption initiate new experiences of embodiment; and embodied experience interacts with codes of representation to generate new kinds of textual worlds.”¹⁵⁵ “In fact,” for Hayles, “each category – production, signification, consumption, bodily experience, and representation – is in constant feedback and feedforward loops with the others. Pull any thread in the skein, and the others prove to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 196.

¹⁵⁰ Guertin, “Gesturing Towards the Visual” 15.

¹⁵¹ Guertin, “The Matrix: Information Overload,” “Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics: The Archival Text, Digital Narrative and the Limits of Memory.”

¹⁵² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 4.

¹⁵³ Guertin, “Buzz-Dazed States and Leaps of Faith: Random Swarmings.”

¹⁵⁴ Bolter makes this claim in relation to hypertext however the notion is as applicable to born digital works. Bolter, *Degrees of Freedom*.

¹⁵⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, *Virtual Bodies, Flickering Signifiers*.

be entangled in it.”¹⁵⁶ This particular focus on action, interaction, and process is central to a certain cyberfeminist theory of representation.

If, as Braidotti argues, “[p]ostmodern feminist knowledge claims are grounded in life-experiences and consequently mark radical forms of re-embodiment, [which] also need to be dynamic – or nomadic – and allow for shifts of location and multiplicity,”¹⁵⁷ then would not hypertext with its “ability to link image and text seamlessly, enabling...a marriage, between image and narrative,”¹⁵⁸ be the site to instantiate Landow, Bolter, and Joyce’s earlier calls? Given that postmodern narrative theory redefined mimesis in terms of a double reading — thinking mimesis and scepticism together — and since feminist theories redeployed mimesis in terms of critique through parody, mimicry, and scepticism, then a specific feminist hypertextual thinking can recast mimesis as multi-mimesis.

Situating her argument in terms of multiplicity, Douglas applauds Joyce’s hyperfiction for its “drift from consciousness to consciousness,” allowing the reader to experience multiple realities.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, she adds, hyperfiction narratives have the potential to “depict the minute detail of life as we know it.”¹⁶⁰ This aspect, according to Douglas, is a “new realism,” or “realism squared.”¹⁶¹ Arguing that hyperfiction’s “waste, in terms of the amount of detail, characters, potential interactions, and even entire story branches” promises “to turn the medium into a source of pleasure, of simultaneous exploration and escape,”¹⁶² she none the less dismisses the effects this “new realism” might have, especially when viewed through a feminist lens.

Similarly ignoring the potential for what this “new realism” might mean, Joyce

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism with a Difference,” *Women’s Studies*. Dept. home page. Utrecht University, 1996, 11 December 2007 <http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Douglas, *The End of Books* 158.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 158.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 170.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 149, 169.

¹⁶² Ibid. 171.

describes his own fiction as one which “promises to close the gap between the fragmentary experience of language and narrative...and the distinctly segmented consciousness of a larger audience who, from moment to moment, settle upon meaning for their lives in the intervals between successive account of their own or others’ lives in several media.”¹⁶³ For Joyce, “afternoon, a story” represents “a narrative which can make sense of life as it is lived outside of the regime of nextness...hypertextuality somehow represent[ing] the ordinarymindedness...of most people’s lives.”¹⁶⁴ Although Joyce alludes to multi-mimesis he refrains from directly discussing it.

What are feminist forms, then, of mimesis online? Guertin most specifically argues that virtual reality and immersive hypertexts provide more adequate paths to re-embodiment, “way[s] of engendering a new awareness of the proprioceptive sense of the world.”¹⁶⁵ In Greco’s words, “disembodied theorizing” prevents “both consciousness and the sensory input that is integral to our navigation of the world: that being the proprioceptive sense, our physical sense of our body boundaries.”¹⁶⁶ For feminist critics, the combined mediums of virtual reality and web fiction present a unique juncture where embodied cyberfeminist criticism can blend with “proprioceptive destabilisation” to explore and express becoming selves in the “discursive and material worlds;”¹⁶⁷ in other words, multi-mimesis is the name of the online representation game.

This new way of thinking mimesis, echoing the structures upon which the internet is built and contemporary feminist theories, is about “elaborate interconnections.”¹⁶⁸ Therefore it is not a movement set in critical opposition to traditional mimetic strategies, which Prendergast suggests is the predicament of modern

¹⁶³ Michael Joyce, “Ordinary Fiction,” Excerpt from *Paradoxa* 11 (spring 1999) 13 December 2007 <<http://paradoxa.com/excerpts/4-11joyce.htm>>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Guertin, “Gesturing Towards the Visual” 6.

¹⁶⁶ Diane Greco qtd. in Guertin, “Gesturing Towards the Visual” 5.

¹⁶⁷ See Guertin “Gesturing Towards the Visual” 6.

¹⁶⁸ Guertin, “The Matrix: Information Overload.”

mimesis. Instead, this project involves a strategic rescuing of “what we need of the past,” i.e. a view of mimesis as politically empowering, combined with an appraisal of the multi-mimetic possibilities available within hypertext.¹⁶⁹ This contemporary hypertextual renegotiation of mimesis is not a simple matter of inserting women and their dynamic realities into theories of mimesis, but a certain kind of thinking which seeks to redefine, rethink, and refit mimesis (as multi-mimesis) with respect to specific women’s representations in constant transformation. Unlike Bolter’s view of hypertext as representing “a more complete whole, a greater truth,” multi-mimesis as employed by the web fiction writers discussed in this thesis is aware of its constant transformation.¹⁷⁰ In its constant drive to represent what these writers acknowledge as fundamentally unrepresentable realities, it makes no claim to present or represent wholeness. Hence multi-mimesis works in terms of dynamic oscillations between representation and a self-reflexive interpreting as well as in the coming together of “the visual, the aural, and the textual.”¹⁷¹ Marjorie Luesebrink claims that no mimetic mode outweighs another: “[t]hat is, each of the media elements provides a set of sensory suggestions that act in a rhythmic interplay.”¹⁷² The suggestion is that no single mode can hope to represent a single story.

Knowing then that “the *text* will never be the complete story” is particularly applicable to a theory of multi-mimesis which aims to represent specific fragments of specific female realities.¹⁷³ If, as Braidotti in particular has argued, women are nomadic and in a continual state of becoming, then the task of multi-mimesis, like Braidotti’s nomadism, is to “represent[t] a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist

¹⁶⁹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 6.

¹⁷⁰ Jay David Bolter, *Degrees of Freedom*.

¹⁷¹ Marjorie Luesebrink, “The White Wall: Reframing the Mirror,” *Currents in Electronic Literacy* 5 (Fall 2001), 2 June 2007 <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/fall01/coverley.html>>.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Luesebrink, “The White Wall,” emphasis added.

subjectivity without falling into relativism or fragmentation.”¹⁷⁴ Where postmodernism’s problematisation of mimesis situates the question of adequacy as a central issue, cyberfeminist mimesis is more ambivalent. The realisation that representation is always already in a state of translation is not what is at stake. A cyberfeminist mimesis as employed in Dinsmore, Fisher, and Luesebrink, operating in the gap between experiences and their translations, is more concerned with expressing continually shifting quotidian experiences, what Ricoeur terms the “opaque depths of living, acting and suffering.”¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the challenge of a hypertextual mimesis is to operate in the opening of the space between a critical reflexivity and hypertext’s multiple-mimetic modes. It is through the intersection of the sceptical and the mimetic spaces that Ankersen, Fisher, and Dinsmore chart a theory of multi-mimesis with an emphasis on subjectivity and critical meditation.

The goal, consequently, of attempting to represent women’s personal and subjective experiences is not to re-present any “whole” truth but to illustrate aspects of certain individual and perpetually unfolding subjectivities. Echoing Cornell’s unheeded request for postmodern fiction, the aim here is to represent the experiences “of all women...‘seen’ and ‘heard’, in all of [their] difference,” which has, until now, remained hidden or only partially told.¹⁷⁶ The use, then, of multi-mimesis, allows readers correspondingly to journey through fragments and “constant flows” of Larsen’s, Leishman, and Jackson’s experiences and urges both readers and writers to ask questions of their own, perhaps still untranslated, experiences.¹⁷⁷ Most importantly, the performance of multi-mimesis which may be said to parallel the disclosure of these specific realities does not aim to create an object for study but generate a horizon of perspectives, much like a Braidottian cartography, within which the web fiction reader

¹⁷⁴ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 26.

¹⁷⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation* 3.

¹⁷⁷ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 116.

is implicated.

As such, multi-mimesis ushers in new ways of thinking about representations of female realities. Focusing on flux and dynamics, the current quest is not to develop a reactive theory of mimesis which pits feminist thought against phallogocentric philosophies. Specifically employed, multi-mimesis perpetually reconstitutes changing versions of Luesebrink, Leishman, and Jackson's stories while simultaneously recognising that "the continual shifting of a 'reality' presented in metaphor" is not "reducible to the subversion of the unrepresentable."¹⁷⁸

Specific responses to this assertion, as constituted by the web fictions discussed in this research, begin by positing contemporary shifting realities through multi-mimetic representations and move to a more contemplative stance which enters directly into a critical relation with existing print narratives to create a reality by suggestion. In other words, multi-mimesis, as in Leishman and Luesebrink's fiction, becomes a suggestion of what could not be represented.¹⁷⁹ Through its own critical commentary and inauguration of multi-mimetic spaces, multi-mimesis becomes a representation of the historical obscurity of women: it contains what was unrepresentable within representation. When the absent or elided subjectivity is multimodally refigured into representation, web fiction's capacity to move out of the sphere of metaphor and into political change though not certain, is at least made possible.

Beginning then, with Larsen's and Fisher's feminist stances, language is not a transparent intermediary between representation and reality. Language, for them, epitomises the values of *écriture féminine*: disruption, resistance, multiplicity, emotional texture, nonlinearity, and formal experimentation. It is not, as Kristeva describes

¹⁷⁸ Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation 2*.

¹⁷⁹ In this case Luesebrink traces the narrative of the Lacemaker who did not appear in *La Princesse de Clèves*: "Thus, while there was no lacemaker in the original story, it seemed likely that there *would* have been a lacemaker in the imagined universe of the story." Marjorie Luesebrink, e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

“Western discourse,” “statique, didactique et finitissante,”¹⁸⁰ but, when employed poetically and self-critically, can be used to uncover or recover the very specific and subjective experiences illustrated in their web fictions.

Used in this sense language can therefore be thought of as praxis. Its invocation of various modalities including gesture, rhythm, intonation, sound, rhyme, and repetition may be said to parallel “the multiple, transverse” and self-conscious experiences of these web fiction writers.¹⁸¹ Thinking of language in this way, à la Kristeva, permits it to function as an aid to multi-mimetic expression.

This transformation, however, is inevitably bound up with the fact that these female writers are writing in cyberspace, which means taking into account that other modes of representation are available. The online narratives by Larsen et al. do not rely solely on “language games” to articulate the “constant creation”¹⁸² but, like Haraway’s cyborg, appropriate graphics, sounds, and videos to express the “open-ended, hypertextual recomposition” of their “in-process” experiences.¹⁸³

To interpret multi-mimesis, then, as a feminist theorising of representation online, is to think multi-mimesis in terms of Douglas’s “and/and/and,” which destabilises the either/or tradition of mimesis versus diegesis by concentrating on multiplicity of all kinds.¹⁸⁴ Examples of such multiplicity include the potential of language to function both as poetic play and as a hypertext link (enabling multiple worlds), the possibility of performing mimesis through text, graphic, animation, sound, streaming video, and the linking of subjectivity to temporality where subjectivities, like the narratives, are dynamic. In short, multi-mimesis offers a promising scenario which

¹⁸⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotiké: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969) 29.

¹⁸¹ Julia Kristeva, “From One Identity to an Other,” *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 133-136, Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* 279.

¹⁸² Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* 279.

¹⁸³ Barbara Page, “Women Writers and the Resistive Text,” *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 133.

¹⁸⁴ Jane Yellowlees Douglas, “Abandoning the Either/Or for the And/And/And.”

does not reinscribe old values into new media, nor continues narrow debates of “image versus text,” but articulates a new and positive representational and reading mode.

The female web fiction writers considered in this thesis have developed these patterns of multiplicity in an effort to show and tell “the details of [their] immediate environment – the small things, the seemingly inconsequential events that trigger memories and thoughts.”¹⁸⁵ Through multi-mimesis the replacement of “grand narratives” with specific views enables these writers to share their subjective, and as Haraway would say, “situated” realities.¹⁸⁶

Consequently, as a sort of answer to Guertin’s call, multi-mimesis provides a new language for representation and reading. Multi-mimesis signifies a redefinition and a rethinking, not only of mimesis, but also of how writers like Dinsmore, Luesebrink, and Fisher constitute and create female subjects. Just as narratology can be “a mode of theorizing that is open, dynamic, neverending,” so too are the works approached here.¹⁸⁷ This assemblage of web fictions represent subjectivities which are, as Braidotti might say, “a dazzling collection of integrated fragments” much like the born digital works themselves.¹⁸⁸ Oscillating between modes of multi-mimesis the represented subjectivities, experiences, and web fictions perform a “dance between possibilities of representation” which is “provisional, conditional and characterised by multiple renderings.”¹⁸⁹ What is at stake, finally, is the use these women web writers make of

¹⁸⁵ Malloy, “Hypertext in the Age of the Web.”

¹⁸⁶ For Albright, “the technological determinism of hypertext itself [allows] the possibility for reaction and resistance to dominant metanarratives by enabling f
eminists a direct response via the creation of hyperlinks to alternative discourses connected to the very heart of the argument.” Julie M. Albright, “Of Mind, Body and Machine: Cyborg Cultural Politics in the Age of Hypertext,” *Net Culture: Gender Issues*, 13 March 2003, 15 September 2006
<http://w2.eff.org/Net_culture/Gender_issues/cyberfeminism.article>. See Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, ed., Donna Haraway (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), see also Donna Haraway, *Modest Witness @ Second Millennium FemaleMan© Meets OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge 1997).

¹⁸⁷ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 2002) 48.

¹⁸⁸ Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* 282.

¹⁸⁹ Loss Pequeño Glazier, *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2002) 15.

multi-mimesis to authorise their translations of their own complex and subversive stories with the full knowledge that, in feminist techie-speak, what you see is not necessarily what you get.

3.0 Distributed Subjectivities

A post-human body – that is to say, an artificially reconstructed body. The body in question here is far from a biological essence: it is a crossroad of intensive forces; it is a surface of inscriptions and social codes.

Rosi Braidotti

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized. Asleep again, unsatisfied, we shall fall back upon the words of men--who, for their part, have "known" for a long time. *But not our body.* Seduced, attracted, fascinated, ecstatic with our becoming, we shall remain paralyzed. Deprived of *our movements.* Rigid, whereas we are made for endless change. Without leaps or falls, and without repetition.

Luce Irigaray

How does one create a future that will acknowledge and incorporate the past – a past that includes, in our very own century, some of the darkest moments in human history – without repeating it?

Susan Suleiman

The previous chapter demonstrated certain inadequacies of hypertext theory, preventing it from simply being applied to the web fictions analysed here. Additionally, a mode of literary analysis that accounts for the multi-mimetic aspects of each fiction was described. This chapter is the first of three to put into practice a reading of multi-mimesis with a focus on dynamic and becoming subjectivities in three web fictions. The chapter begins with Deena Larsen's Disappearing Rain because it is written specifically with three audiences in mind: beginners, those comfortable with online reading, and experts. The analysis of Disappearing Rain commences with the beginner's route through the narrative but carefully builds up to an expert reading. This trajectory paves the way for Caitlin Fisher's These Waves of Girls and M.D. Luesebrink's Lacemaker, two fictions that are not composed with neophyte readers in mind.

3.1 Representation and Realism

The nature of seeing and representation are deeply entwined in the history of

Western thought. Fundamental to this tradition is an image of representation as an imperceptible medium that provides access to a knowable world. The literary endeavor, however, to show life as it is, to employ language as a transparent vehicle for “the ‘real’ is fraught with contradictions.”¹⁸⁹ Realism in this abridged understanding must count upon a coordinating relationship between the signifier and the signified. “Realism must, in effect, disguise its own status as artifice.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, for the reader, Realism must offer a “slice-of-life tableau.”¹⁹¹

Canonical hypertexts, alluded to briefly in the introduction, like Joyce’s afternoon, a story and Moulthrop’s Victory Garden, are often cited as offering an illusion of a referentiality similar to that of Realism. For Howard Becker, Victory Garden is “relatively realistic, using the possibilities of hypertext to make it easier to tell a complex story, crisscrossing narrative lines in complex patterns which result from the intersection of readers’ choices with constraints the author has created.”¹⁹² Even though critical of these types of theorisations, Laura Miller sees “the best hypertexts” (citing Joyce and Moulthrop) as demonstrating “an obsessive attention to detail,”¹⁹³ reminiscent of the writing of pioneering Realist; Madame de Lafayette. For Sverre Fiskaa, Joyce’s Twelve Blue, (although mostly textual and not really multi-modal), is praised because it pays “intimate attention to the magic of mimesis.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin and Robin Parmar, “Realism and the Realist Novel,” *The Electronic Labyrinth*, 2000, 2 Oct. 2007 <<http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hf10254.html>>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ This is Varsava’s phrase, Jerry A. Varsava, Contingent Meanings: Postmodern Fiction, Mimesis, and the Reader (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990). In terms of offering a slice-of-life, for example see Eliot, “it is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence...” George Eliot, “Chapter XVII: In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” Adam Bede, 2004, *The Literature Network*, 28 Sept. 2007 <<http://www.online-literature.com/view.php/adam-bede/17/>>.

¹⁹² Howard S. Becker, “A New Art Form: Hypertext Fiction,” *Home Page*, 1995, 11 April 2006 <<http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/lisbon.html>>.

¹⁹³ Laura Miller, “Clicking for Godot,” Salon Magazine, 1997, 7 April 2006 <<http://www.salon.com/21st/feature/1997/10/02godot4.html>>.

¹⁹⁴ Sverre Fiskaa, “Elegance and Intelligence: Twelve Blue by Michael Joyce,” 15 August 2003, DotLit: The Online Journal of Creative Writing, 3 April 2006 <<http://www.dotlit.qut.edu.au/reviews/twelveblue.html>>.

Moving beyond Realism to a hyperrealism, Moulthrop warns that these types of fictions are hyperreal: they “threate[n] to replace the ‘reality’ of books with a ‘hyperreality’ of information networks whose complexities will give rise to uncontrolled self-reference and involution.”¹⁹⁵ Hypertexts of this kind, although static in the sense that they do not exist on the internet but rather on cds or discs, are sufficiently realistic in that they are said to mimic mental processes. As noted in Chapter 2, Malloy sees the reading of links and nodes as “imitate[ing] the associative, contingent flow of human thought and the unpredictable progression of our lives. Using the computer’s capability of mimicking our disordered yet linked thought processes.”¹⁹⁶ Landow and Delany also support the idea of transparent representation when they suggest the seeming disorder of hypertext links replicates mental processes.¹⁹⁷ Joyce goes further by explaining that the structure of links can actually assist readers in discovering their own “distinctive structures of thought.”¹⁹⁸

In their texts, these early theorists also make a connection between hypertext structure/process and the human mind so that hypertext is not only a representation of how every reader’s mind makes connections, but it also offers a more realistic reading circumstance.¹⁹⁹ For theorists like Landow and Bolter, hypertext instantiates the “real” nature of reading by liberating it from the constraints of linearity.²⁰⁰ Additionally,

¹⁹⁵ Stuart Moulthrop, “Hypertext and the Hyperreal,” Hypertext ‘89 Proceedings, November 5-8, 1989 (Pittsburgh, PA: Association for Computing Machinery, 1989) 259-267.

¹⁹⁶ Malloy, Hypernarrative in the Age of the Web. Guyer also sees hypertext as representative of “the human brain:” “I believed it was ‘natural,’ designed to work associatively, as the human brain does. I still believe something like that, but amplified, and with the plentiful hitches of a young technology thrown in. From those first days till now, I have continued to see this medium as very life-like. I see it in the form of a quotidian stream.” Carolyn Guyer, “Along the Estuary,” Sept. 1996, 23 July 2004 <http://www.moothermillennia.org/Carolyn/Guyer_Essays.html>.

¹⁹⁷ George Landow and Paul Delany, “Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literary Studies: The State of the Art,” Hypermedia and Literary Studies. Eds. Landow and Delany (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 4.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Joyce, “Siren Shapes: Exploratory and Constructive Hypertexts,” Academic Computing November (1988): 13.

¹⁹⁹ There also seems to be a tendency for early theorists to employ “the language of the reader’s revolt.” Thomas Swiss, “Reviewing the Reviewers of Literary Hypertext,” Electronic Book Review, 26 July 2005, 10 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/corrective>>.

²⁰⁰ See Landow, Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

hypertext as a “nonlinear form...derives from attempts to be more truthful.”²⁰¹

In theorising new media writing, critics like Joyce see the role of memory in reading emerging like “light from the obscuring darkness.”²⁰² In this way narrative, once again, becomes associated with vision and a certain kind of realism: hypertext suggests the “truth in its telling.”²⁰³ This view seems at odds with feminist (print) literature like that of Brossard (Picture Theory), Woolf (in particular The Waves) and (online) fiction like that of Luesebrink, Fisher, and Larsen whose stories are dedicated to what cannot be illustrated. The irreducible difference between web fiction and print fiction is the potential for multimodality, a key point which is overlooked in Joyce’s emphasis on the “telling” of the story. Rather than exploring ways in which readers might become transliterate,²⁰⁴ Joyce relies on a “propensity for seeing our technologies as representations of the transcendence we yearn for...we have chosen to give ourselves over to that particular ‘consensual hallucination.’”²⁰⁵ Rather than being concerned with creating a likeness to reality,²⁰⁶ the female writers discussed here are intent on privileging personal subjectivity and interrogating representation. Where Joyce sees memory as a device which can piece together fragments of representation to create a linear whole enabling “everything [to] be read, every surface and silence...and every ending,”²⁰⁷ certain female web fiction authors employ the inconsistencies of memory and representation to point to inaccuracies of the past. Their drive to side-step a linear

²⁰¹ Landow, Hypertext 24-25.

²⁰² Michael Joyce, “My Body the Library,” 1995, The Electronic Book Review, 3 April 2006 <<http://www.altx.com/EBR/JOYCE.HTM>>.

²⁰³ Michael Joyce, “A Hyperconversation on Twelve Blue: E-mail between Michael Joyce and the students of American Novels – Wilderness to Metropolis,” Fall 1998, 2 April, 2006 <http://www.ecok.edu/academics/schools/hss/el/studies/eng_syllabi_amernovel_twelve_response.asp>.

²⁰⁴ For Thomas, transliteracy “refers to literacy across several media, which means, perhaps, that the more media you can use fluently, the more transliterate you are.” I extend the term transliteracy to mean literate across multiple modes within a medium, such as the internet. See Sue Thomas, “Del.icio.us Way to Talk,” The Times Higher Education Supplement, 28 Oct. 2005, 01 June 2007 <<http://www.thes.co.uk>>.

²⁰⁵ Joyce, “A Hyperconversation on Twelve Blue.”

²⁰⁶ Feminist thinking would also question whose reality is told.

²⁰⁷ Michael Joyce, “Each Ever After,” Twelve Blue, 1996, 12 December 2007 <http://www.eastgate.com/TwelveBlue/sl8_11.html>.

framework for reading confirms that these narratives are not simply fabrics but threads of times, figures, events, and sequences. As Haraway says, “you’re always inside complex material semiotic worlds and not inside these universal categories.”²⁰⁸

Instead of ensuring a snug fit between poststructuralist theories of representation and theories developed alongside static hypertext, this chapter provides a reading of web fictions written by women and the role of multiple modes of representation. The move from static hypertexts theorised mainly by men to web fictions written by women (and as yet generally not the subject of academic discussion) signals a shift in thinking. Much like the gesture effected in postmodern writing where “women experimentalists, declare themselves on the side of ruptured and unreliable narrative; for in spaces created by ruptures and anxiety provoked by the unreliable, they continue the project of a feminine discourse...,”²⁰⁹ there are marked gender differences between static hypertext and web fictions as well as between web fictions written by men and those written by women. Hayles sees that

women’s works display a multifaceted and persistent concern with the body and embodiment, [while] the men’s works show a similarly persistent fascination with chance and randomness. At issue in both these thematics...is control: who has it, who wants it, how to achieve it, how to satirize it, but also how to create strategies for living and working in distributed cognitive environments where agency is dispersed and thinking takes place in machines as well as humans. It comes as no surprise, of course, that both men and women are concerned with control, nor is it news that they conceive of it in different ways. Taken as a group, these

²⁰⁸ Donna Haraway, “Prospects for a Materialist Informatics: Interview with Lisa Nakamura,” *The Politics of Information: The Electronic Mediation of Social Change*, eds Marc Bousquet and Katherine Wills (Stanford: Alt-X Press, 2003) 155.

²⁰⁹ Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs. “Contexts and Continuities: An Introduction to Women’s Experimental Fiction in English,” *Breaking the Sequence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989) 27.

productions show how these well-established cultural thematics mutate in a Web environment and become transformed into hybrid productions where the simulation powers of the computer cause them to take distinctive new forms and express new kinds of subjectivities.²¹⁰

Though Hayles' thinking seems to fall back on binaries,²¹¹ she does raise the question of gender which is something that much of the first wave of hypertext theory disregards.

3.2 "Tiny Particles of Merging Realities:" Deena Larsen's Disappearing Rain

From Auerbach onwards, certain literary theorists exchange the words "mimesis" and "realism" as if each can be substituted for the other.²¹² As Prendergast notes, "they are not of course interchangeable."²¹³ The two concepts are similar, though, as Prendergast's example shows: when "Lukács talks of realism as a dynamic projection of the underlying historical forms of the social world he is talking in a way that in its deep conceptual structure is very like Aristotle's way with mimesis as a dynamic cognitive system."²¹⁴ The aims of what Prendergast calls the "great tradition" of literary realism²¹⁵ are, through the use of description, to record and to show "the *whole* history" "as it is" of life's "opaque depths."²¹⁶ Mimesis, instead, does not claim to record a whole universal reality but represent a "local history."²¹⁷ Continuing to

²¹⁰ Hayles qtd. in Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

²¹¹ In fact, in the preceding chapter Fibonacci's Daughter, though authored by a woman, shows a deep preoccupation with "chance and randomness."

²¹² One example Prendergast notes is Auerbach himself, who "conflates the two concepts." Christopher Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 118. For other examples see Gebauer and Wulf 225-232.

²¹³ Christopher Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 117.

²¹⁴ Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 117.

²¹⁵ Prendergast explains that literary realism has "had a strange history" but it "has meant essentially the nineteenth-century and in particular nineteenth-century France: the exemplary place and moment of what we conventionally understand as the great tradition of realism." Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 119.

²¹⁶ Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 118, emphasis original, Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 53.

²¹⁷ Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 118. For instance, "the 'representation' of reality is taken by Auerbach to mean an active dramatic presentation of how each author actually realizes, brings

follow the trajectory of representational aesthetics, multi-mimesis appears as hypertextual condition. Multi-mimesis, aims to represent specific becoming realities with the aid of hypertext's multiple mimetic modes. Since these becoming experiences are emergent and dynamic, they elude more "traditional" print-bound attempts to represent, so recourse to multiple mimetic modes is necessary.

According to Catherine Belsey, classic realism offers a stable positioning of the 'I' and a move towards closure.²¹⁸ Larsen's Disappearing Rain, on the other hand, clearly implies that this synthesis, which realism once made possible, becomes impossible (and undesirable) to achieve. Larsen notes that "good" contemporary web fictions seem to follow, "more or less, conventions of realistic fiction" while simultaneously aware of "their limitations and working this realisation into the hyperfictions themselves."²¹⁹ Larsen rightly realises that contemporary online narratives not only provide a postmodern tension between the novelistic commitment to rendering experience through traditional forms they also "ask very firm questions about what it means to try to represent reality."²²⁰ Ultimately, Larsen, although she herself is aware of the impossibility to fully represent, is unable to ignore her urge to do so. Thus she foregrounds questions of representation through a sophisticated use of multi-mimesis.

In making the move to a theory of multi-mimesis which aims to represent complex subjectivities, I am not implying that Realism is not without problematics of its own. Equally confusing perspectives exist concerning postmodern fiction. For some critics, postmodern fiction "depicts problems but not solutions," and fails to represent a

characters to life, and clarifies his or her own world." Edward Said, introduction, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, by Erich Auerbach, trans. Willard R. Trask (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003).

²¹⁸ Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (New York: Methuen, 1980). See especially Chapter One.

²¹⁹ Deena Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²²⁰ Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

“meaningful reality.”²²¹ For others, postmodern fiction means “that the lyric voice gives way to multiple voices or voice fragments.”²²² Hypertext also cannot escape from contradictory views. On the one hand Joyce, Landow and Bolter support hypertext’s ability “to literalize the post-structuralist notion of intertextuality” and “non-linearity.”²²³ On the other hand, there are critics who deride hypertext authors for being so busy exploring this nascent technological medium and its multiple representational possibilities that they neglect to write meaningful narratives.²²⁴ According to hypertext critic David Porush, contemporary boundary–pushing stories “court nonsense, chaos, paradox, entropy, silence and oblivion.”²²⁵ As Mark Amerika suggests, fictions like these invite unnarrativisable encounters.²²⁶

Larsen, though, is very aware of critical accounts which may describe her web fictions as unreadable or unnarrativisable. In an attempt to combat such accounts, she specifically writes for three audiences:

People who are approaching hypertext for the *first time*. I try to give them something to enjoy, to get their feet wet and something they can understand. *People familiar* with hypertext/elite. I want to give them some meat, something to

²²¹ Varsava 10. Varsava argues that critics like Gerald Graff dismiss the possibility of mimesis in postmodern fiction because it is self-reflexive. For Graff and others postmodern fiction does not “encourage the reader to attend closely to the structures and values that construct the warp and woof of contemporary life.” Varsava 11.

²²² Marjorie Perloff, Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990) 183.

²²³ Landow 24-25.

²²⁴ “In terms of new serious literature, the Web has not been very hospitable.... And even the word, the very stuff of literature, and indeed of all human thought, is under assault, giving ground daily to image-surfing, hypermedia, the linked icon. Indeed, the word itself is increasingly reduced to icon or caption.” Robert Coover, “Literary Hypertext: The Passing of a Golden Age,” 29 October 1999, 1 July 2004 <http://nickm.com/vox/golden_age.html>. Aware of these types of comments, Larsen proposes a way to “hone” web fiction writing: “A community of writers is needed to gather new writers into the fold and improve the overall state-of-the-art in hypertext writing.” Deena Larsen, “Criticism: Honing the Craft,” Journal of Digital Information 3.3 (24 Jan. 2003), 17 July 2004 <<http://jodi.ecs.soton.ac.uk/Articles/v03/i03/Larsen/criticism.html>>.

²²⁵ David Porush, qtd in Mark Amerika, “Triptych: Hypertext, Surfiction and StoryWorlds,” Amerika Online, 5.1(1998), 12 November 2007 <<http://www.altx.com/amerika.online/amerika.online.5.1.html>>.

²²⁶ “They, in a sense, ask to be mistranslated, to be encountered as unreadable and unnameable discourses.” Amerika, “Triptych.”

discuss and explore with narrative and structural connections.

Scholars and analysts: If you look deep in my works, you will often find a hidden space or meaning. Scholars love these types of things. Keeps them busy.²²⁷

Indeed, Disappearing Rain, Larsen's web "novel"²²⁸ of 144 internal pages and over 200 external pages, presents something for all three audiences.²²⁹ For web fiction neophytes, the simple synopsis from the title node will suffice:

The only trace left of Anna, a freshman at the University of Berkeley California, is an open internet connection in her neatly furnished dorm room. Join the four generations of a Japanese-American family as they search for Anna and discover credit card conspiracies, ancient family truths, waterfalls that pour out of televisions, and the terrifying power of the internet.²³⁰

The "first time readers," will soon realise that the waterfalls which "pour out of televisions" are not real (at least not at the beginning). Instead the waterfalls which "rush" and "seep everywhere" represent Kit's nervous fear that computers (i.e. technology) will weaken the control she exerts in her rigid life. What the elite readers will notice, through an exhaustive reading, is that "Merge into Meaning" is a key lexia. Depending on the reader's travels (reading path) this "Jane space," as Larsen calls it, can represent Anna's, Amy's or even Sophie's immersion in the fluid cyber-world. The

²²⁷ Deena Larsen, "Re: Children's Time," online posting, 14 April 2003, 2 July 2004 <<http://mural.uv.es/fersam/emaildeena.html>>, original emphasis. Just as James creates textual traps for his readers, so does Larsen. Larsen goes a step further and calls herself "the embodiment of New Criticism," as she "can't remember where the hidden spaces, [textual traps] are." Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²²⁸ Larsen herself chooses not to define her work, calling it "hyperfiction, web fiction, an online novel, a hypernovel, and digital fiction." Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²²⁹ Internal pages refer to nodes directly written and constructed by Larsen which form the basis of the web fiction. External pages are nodes which the reader can view but have not been written by Larsen. These are pages which already exist on the internet.

²³⁰ Deena Larsen, introduction, Disappearing Rain, 2000, 3 July 2004 <<http://www.deenalarsen.net/rain/>>.

“people familiar with hypertext” may also discover Larsen’s careful juxtaposition of the *kanji - ku* symbols which begin each node, the sub-titles of each page, and the narrative of each page.²³¹ They may also notice how, sometimes, the images, the centered blue, black, and green prose, and the narrative work together to illustrate the same story and how, sometimes, the three devices oppose one another, adding a subversive dimension to the narrative. This type of web fiction reader may also notice that structure is very important in this narrative. The placement of each word on each *kanji-ku* represents the point where the node with that word as a title appears. For example, in the node titled “Realities,” (fig. 3.1) the *kanji-ku* shows the reader that this node, because it is placed at the top of the *kanji-ku*, will be the first “page” of this chapter, whereas the node “Murky Puddles,” located at the bottom of the *kanji-ku*, represents the last “page.”

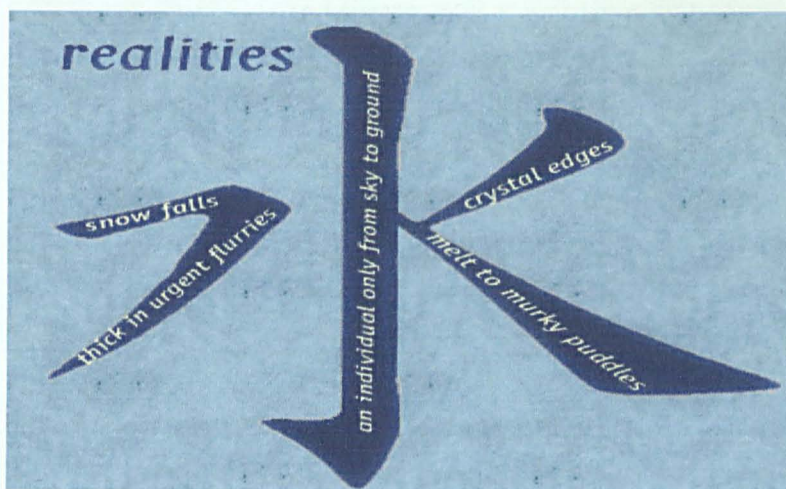


Fig. 3.1 Deena Larsen, “Realities,” Disappearing Rain.

Recognising Larsen’s desire to create complicated narratives, and her theory that each of her web fictions presents “a new way of seeing the world,”²³² one should also note that the narrator does not subsume “the real” in order to create a realistic narrative.²³³ Instead, the narrator of Disappearing Rain relies on the use of photographic images, references to places and people which exist in a contemporary reader’s life, links to real-life web sites such as The University of Berkeley, Macintosh, IBM, and

²³¹ Larsen explains that a *kanji-ku* is “one part Japanese ideogram and one part haiku,” Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²³² Deena Larsen, “Re: Children’s Time.”

²³³ Moulthrop, “Hypertext and the Hyperreal,” 264.

even local CCTV footage, to represent the complex and continually evolving realities of Anna's world. Upon closer inspection one can see how Larsen's web fiction shifts from aiming to give a detailed and precise account of specific material lives, to something which acknowledges its partiality, its inability to fully represent, even with the abundance of technology and descriptive prose: for the reader never actually meets the main protagonist, the missing University of Berkeley student, Anna.

A node entitled "Retreat To" in the "Water Leavings" section of Disappearing Rain (see fig. 3.2) presents an excellent example of Larsen's desire to persuade the reader that the setting and the characters are not fictional; not only do they live in the time of the reading, they exist in contemporary readers's perceptions of history.

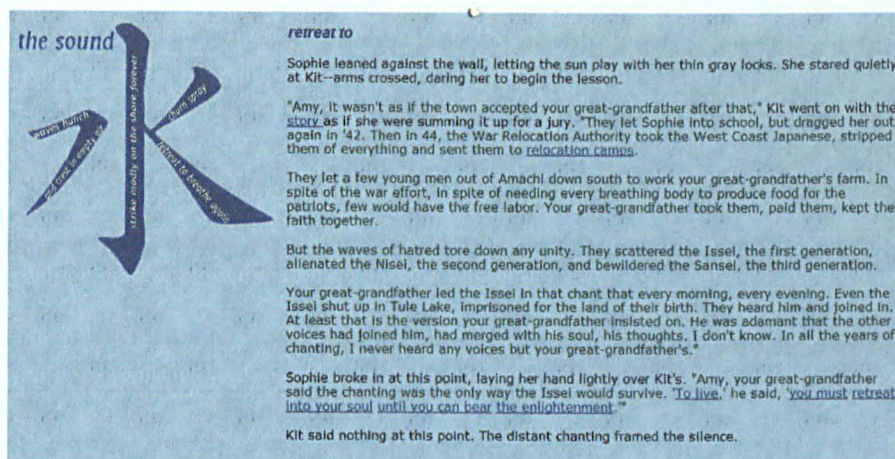


Fig. 3.2 Deena Larsen, "Retreat To," Disappearing Rain.

Larsen's use of description adds to the visuality of the scene, helping to persuade the reader of its accuracy: "Sophie leaned against the wall, letting the sun play with her thin gray locks...[b]ut the waves of hatred tore down any unity...waves hunch and crest in empty air," "right behind her was Sophie, who had mastered the art of silent tears, hunching into her herself, veined hands over her eyes, rocking in unvoiced prayers," and "she listened and still heard the chanting, voices rising and falling like waves. The voices bunched up, swelling bass, rose to a higher tenor pitch and slowly cascaded down to a dull indeterminate buzz." Larsen also adds references to history: "They let

Sophie into school, but dragged her out again in '42. Then in '44, the War Relocation Authority took the West Coast Japanese, stripped them of everything and sent them to relocation camps" and "my mother, your great-grandmother, Yuki came over after the Gentleman's Agreement, an allowed picture bride." "Retreat To," read together with "Breathe Again" and "Churn Spray," (all nodes depicted on the kanji-ku in fig. 3.2), deepens and complicates each narrative fragment and that "Read Only Memory called history,"²³⁴ allowing the emergence not only various layers of information but also of the representation of gender and race.

In all the nodes associated with this section of Disappearing Rain, issues of race and gender intersect in both literary and multi-mimetic ways. Nodes like "Waves Hunch" and "And Crest," combine what might be likened to a novelistic desire to envelop the narrative in a straightforward cataloguing of facts, descriptions, depictions, and histories with memories and visual signification. These nodes are also particularly important as they are concerned specifically with the experience of creating stories.

In terms of novelistic detail, we are told of Amy and Anna's "Issei" – Japanese immigrant – great-grandfather:

he could see them gathering on the dusty streets. He told me about it later. Years later. He nodded and continued his chanting. The words melded into each other, grasping each other, dancing wildly in the sounds of his homeland. His hand struck the willow drum in time with the chanting until the words themselves seemed to strike the chords, rumbling into the space between sound and silence, between water and rock. He chanted, they say, for over three days and nights without a single rest. The words never stopped.

²³⁴ Sadie Plant, Zeroes and Ones: Digital Women + the New Technoculture (London: Fourth Estate, 1998) 27.

And that was it. He put away the drum and never chanted again. He never went back, even though you could hear the longing to return in the undersides of his voice. Yet still the sound colored everything in our lives from then on. I hear the chanting even now – but mostly muted, mostly at night, Sophie’s voice stopped as the chanting took on the sound of harps and falling water...²³⁵

In this example Sophie relays the story as if she were writing it, crafting Kenji the great-grandfather, her husband, out of language, imbuing him with a degree of concreteness that his ephemeral singing lacked. This seems to be an attempt on Sophie’s part to “recode” Kenji, as Braidotti might put it, as a way out of ephemerality and back to her reality.²³⁶ It is this rendering that makes Kenji “real.” Reporting Kenji in the form of written fiction, it appears, parallels for Braidotti’s Deleuze “the process of becoming–minority.”²³⁷ It brings Kenji into being and grants him corporeality, and somehow allows him, or at least knowledge of him, to become “intransitive” for “to write is to become” thus it must hold that one can write another into becoming.²³⁸ As Butler puts it, “individuals come to occupy the site of the subject...and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language.”²³⁹ In this case, detailed storytelling by a woman succeeds in granting Kenji’s “survival.”²⁴⁰

However, language, even in these nodes, is not to be fully trusted. In fact, the excerpt above is only one interpretation. The account that Kenji himself prefers is the one where the other Issei hear him chanting and join in, and, as Kit says, “that is the

²³⁵ Larsen, “Strike Madly On,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²³⁶ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 93.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* 94.

²³⁸ See Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 92–94.

²³⁹ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 10-11.

²⁴⁰ Larsen, “Retreat To,” *Disappearing Rain*.

version your great-grandfather insisted on.”²⁴¹ With a metafictional turn, Kits admits this is an interpretation of events, thereby attributing doubt on this rendition and thus to language as well as questioning the characters’ identification with their own and shared histories. Indeed, Kit unmistakably refers to this dynamic when she reprimands her mother, Sophie:

[h]onestly, the way the legends grow around here...Mother, if you are going to tell my daughter about what happened, tell her the whole story. Tell her the truth the way it isn’t in your fairy stories, the way it isn’t in her history books. I won’t have my children growing up on half heard legends. Tell the truth. For once. No one in this family ever tells the truth.²⁴²

The all-female cast of storytellers enter into representation through their multiple interweavings and braidings of personal and family history, political and legal imagery, myth, photographs, sound, and narrative. As Braidotti would put it, what is affirmed here is “a cluster of multiple becomings” where the emphasis is on a situated view that emerges from the “simultaneous translation” of a variety of modes.²⁴³

As if explicitly noting the insufficiency of employing one mode at a time, words are reinforced by visual “labelling.” This becomes literally obvious to “scholars and analysts” who notice a visual cue emblematic of each speaker’s stature. While most of the narrative in Disappearing Rain is written in black font, there are times when speakers’ thoughts or parts of their conversations are hued in purple or green. For instance, when Kit scolds her mother for not telling “the whole story,” the font is not black but purple. When Amy questions her mother by asking her grandmother if “anyone else ever heard the chanting,” her words are in green. Again, when Kit insists

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Larsen, “Churn Spray,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁴³ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 94.

on “telling the story like it is,” the font is purple, and when Amy sarcastically complains, “if you insist,” the font is green. The different colours of the text reinforce a level of coding perhaps not at first apparent in the story itself. Moreover, the visual signification seems to testify to the inadequacy of language and the “ever-shifting nature of memory”²⁴⁴ and experience: “green is for out group and purple is for in group.”²⁴⁵ In Japanese culture, “inside your company, you are the in group and your co workers are the out group. Outside your company, you and your co-workers are the in group and the other company is the out group.”²⁴⁶ Considering the colours of the font then suggests that questioning the possibility of a whole story relegates Amy to the out group, while demanding a more realistic turn, “telling the story like it is,” positions Kit in the in group. Thus, the coloured font exists as a supplement, another level of the narrative, presenting itself as a necessary addendum to something that is implied to already be complete, the “whole” story. The coloured font thus functions subversively; it undermines the very thing it claims to represent – truth. Each mode evoking a certain part of the story suggests that neither image nor text is sufficiently capable to represent if looked at monologically. Rather, with the inclusion of various modes, Larsen implies “new media’s potential for expressing ideas beyond the bounds of conventional language.”²⁴⁷

Disappearing Rain thus focuses on what Larsen sees as an ideal of the online environment: there are “connections between ideas with links, images, and colored themes...where most of the meaning lies in the connections and relationships rather than

²⁴⁴ Guertin, “The Matrix: Information Overload,” “Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics.”

²⁴⁵ Larsen, “Re: Disappearing Rain,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 12 April 2006.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Deena Larsen, “Language Dancing in a Maze: Ternary Logic, Language, and Mind-States in Glide,” 17.8 (2003), *Fine Art Forum*, 4 August 2005
<http://www.fineartforum.org/Backissues/Vol_17/faf_v17_n08/reviews/reviews_index.html>.

in the words on the screen.”²⁴⁸ However, performing this ideal does not mean that narrative must suffer at the hands of multimodality. Consequently, Larsen expresses the “relationships between characters and text”²⁴⁹ through strategic use of novelistic devices such as Genette’s covert heterodiegetic narrator.²⁵⁰ The heterodiegetic narrator describes Kit telling the “story as if she were summing it up for a jury.”²⁵¹ The legal imagery implies a commitment to accuracy; Kit will share “in-sights” that arise from an “inner reservoir of truth.”²⁵² It is also Kit, a member of the in group, who reprimands her mother for not speaking the truth. Likewise, Kit is the one to attempt to extract the truth from Amy, “[t]he Truth. In no uncertain terms.”²⁵³ Furthermore, it is the grand narrative of Truth, with a capital “T,” which allows Kit to let Amy go in search of twin sister Anna, “As long as I know the truth, I can let you go. But please, please, let me know.”²⁵⁴ However, while verbal evidence of the truth seems to accumulate leading readers to interpret the testimony and witness as authentic, the complicated emergence of Anna is framed rather differently.

In Disappearing Rain how can subjectivity be rendered or even represented in language when language itself is not without complications? In fact, it is physical immediacy, corporeality, which provides a more material and stable link with reality. Kit trusts her touch to prove that the carpet is not wet, she trusts her eyes which render the water invisible and thus non-existent: “Kit knew what was real: ...her motions.”²⁵⁵ What distinguishes Larsen’s work from that of print is its insistent foregrounding of the creation of a becoming subjectivity in specific relation to the representation possible on

²⁴⁸ Deena Larsen, “Close Encounters of a Technical Kind,” *Women and Technology*, Riding the Meridian, 2.1 (Fall, 2001), 1 April 2006 <<http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/>>.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), especially Chapter Four and Five.

²⁵¹ Deena Larsen, “Retreat To,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁵² For Braidotti, her nomadic philosophising and insights “should not be thought of as plunging us inwards, towards a mythical “inner reservoir of truth” but should “prope[l] us in the multiple directions of extra-textual experiences.” Braidotti, Metamorphoses 9–10.

²⁵³ Larsen, “From Seeing,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Larsen, “The Illusion,” Disappearing Rain.

the web. Larsen appears to share the conviction of certain theorists like Butler, that appearing in language is a precondition for intelligibility and agency, but she departs from them in specifying the multi-mimetic strategy that this kind of storytelling requires. As she explains, layers of meaning and representation are required but they are encapsulated in the navigation of the narrative; in the multi-dimensional space of the web.²⁵⁶

How does the difference of the medium inform the materialisation of the becoming subjectivities? Put another way, what do the resources of different media offer those aspiring to achieve accuracy through representation? The narrator-as-witness testifies to her own trustworthiness in Larsen's text but, where Realist fiction is constituted in and through language, Larsen's narrator can employ other media. While one might say that this web fiction is similar to certain realist texts in that Larsen uses descriptive prose in an effort to endow accuracy, the web fiction goes beyond representation through language.²⁵⁷ Instead of employing perceptions merely informed by the visual, Larsen's work, in certain instances, exhibits the visual without recourse to a linguist detailing. For example, in the node "Retreat To" (fig. 3.2), the words "relocation camp" link to a very *real* website called "The Family Album Project." This web site "document[s] the human experience [and] the memory of dislocation and transition" while providing photographs of real-life World War II survivors (fig. 3.3):

²⁵⁶ See Deena Larsen, "An Anatomy of Anchors," *HT'04, August 9-13, 2004*, ACM Press, 16 September 2006 <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/deena/anchor/>>.

²⁵⁷ In fact, the narrator of *Disappearing Rain* describes Kit's distrust of language: "she peered closely at the words, distorted and hazy under the vapors." Larsen, "Of the Depths," *Disappearing Rain*. Elsewhere Larsen comments on the "treachery" of language: "Every word we have uttered is a sham." Deena Larsen, "The Language of the Void," *Riding the Meridian* 1999, 17 June 2005 <<http://www.deenalarsen.net/void/>>.

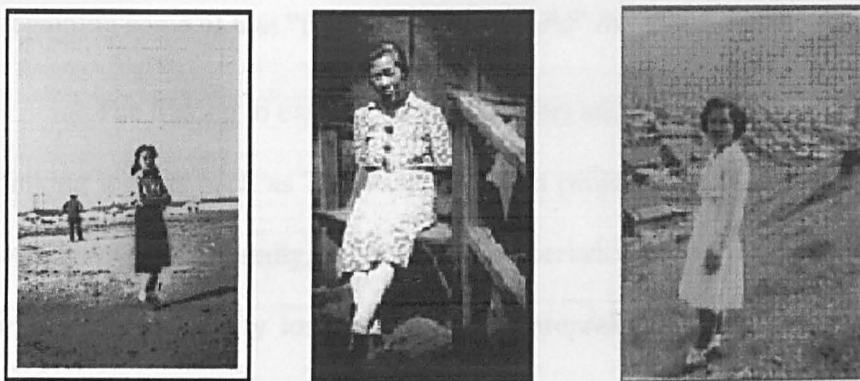


Fig. 3.3 Images of internees from the Family Album Project.

By linking to an external web page Larsen demonstrates the connections possible in the online environment. Kit, who is speaking, also suggests this web site as proof of her story. Vision, in this node, becomes equated with truth. The Family Album Project, upon which Larsen has no control, includes some information which places the images in fig. 3.3 in a somewhat different context. Rather than documenting simply the truth of stories, their subjects, and “preserving...the rituals of daily life,”²⁵⁸ these images exist as truths. While Japanese Americans were kept in internment camps “cameras were considered contraband.”²⁵⁹ As such, images, like the ones in fig. 3.3, become material proof of the existence of certain lives, families, and histories. The singularity of these images makes them more authentic than the multiply replicated images which could exist outside of internment camps. Without the usual reproductive capacity of photographic authorship there is little chance of producing simulacral subjectivities or representation without difference as Butler would have it. Representation which occurs under constraint, Larsen seems to suggest, can confer a more specific reality than images which are easily reproduced and saturate our experience.²⁶⁰ Linking to the Family Album Project website is, perhaps, Larsen’s way of continuing to document lives which were once considered unrepresentable, of

²⁵⁸ Masumi Hayashi, “The Family Album Pages,” *The Family Album Project*, 27 Feb. 1998, Cleveland State University, Ohio, 18 April 2006 <http://www.csuohio.edu/art_photos/famalbum/famalbum.html>.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Foss, Patton and Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e) 1983).

regaining some of that “thickness of the world” that binary thinking erases.²⁶¹

The linking to external websites offers another highly strategic condition. While linking to sites such as The Family Album project may connote senses of connection, attachment, community, and shared experience, the irretrievable or irrecoverable external sites signify loss, silence, and unrepresentability. From The Family Album project page readers understand that Japanese Americans suffered through the “long silence,”²⁶² so the breakdown between web pages seems to physically represent this disappearance. Read in one way, Larsen warns against multi-mimetic representation. The overt message of the missing web page is also a covert message of fractured experiences; the inability to show a whole story. Read another way, the jarring message: “Error: URL Not Found!”²⁶³ is emblematic of the indeterminacy central to the narrative. The epigraphic missing web page parallels the theme of incomplete and situated representation which runs through both the narrative and the theory of multi-mimesis.

In the tracing of Anna’s silent disappearance and in the quest to decipher the mystery of Anna’s absent discourse and image, Amy takes up the task of telling and showing; translating silence to speech, making present what seems to be absent. The untold stories of Japanese internees’ despair, then, are made hopeful in the female telling of the narrative. King-Kok Cheung points out that “silence runs even deeper in the work of minority women...Some of these women are, moreover, thrice muted, on account of sexism, racism, and a ‘tonguelessness’ that results from prohibition or language barriers.”²⁶³ In Disappearing Rain, the thematics of indeterminacy and inability to adequately represent also appear as a gendered issue. For the male

²⁶¹ Donna Haraway, “Prospects for a Materialist Informatics” 157.

²⁶² Masumi Hayashi, “Artist’s Statement,” The Family Album Project, 27 Feb. 1998, Cleveland State University, Ohio, 18 April 2006 <http://www.csuohio.edu/art_photos/docs/statement.html>.

²⁶³ King-Kok Cheung, “‘Don’t Tell’: Imposed Silences in The Color Purple and The Woman Warrior,” PMLA 103 (March 1988): 162-74.

characters, words are nonsense, “meld[ing] into each other, grasping each other, dancing wildly in the sounds,”²⁶⁴ and they lack the other necessary for conversation, “no one joined in. Nothing merged with his voice but the empty air.”²⁶⁵ This is contrasted by the female subjectivities’ fluency, “I’ll tell you about it.”²⁶⁶ What makes the women’s move towards “the spiralling staircase of ordinary language”²⁶⁷ all the more striking is the acknowledgement that “in Japanese, there is no equivalent for ‘I’. You can say ‘watashi’ but this is mostly a construction for foreigners and young children. The I is understood in the language.”²⁶⁸ Apparent here is a drive to combat deterministic tendencies that “assimilate[e]...the universal to the masculine,” eliding women and their difference.²⁶⁹ Underlying their use of language is a view (*pace* Cavarero) that “defends the idea of a female-specific notion of being...That the living matter may not require the thinking “I” in order to exist” means “more emphasis on the centrality of the sexed nature of the “she-I.”²⁷⁰ Consequently, the male silence is counteracted by the women’s discourse and ability to employ image and sound in order to narrate the story; for the narrative is only ever made available through the heterodiegetic narrator or the female characters. In this sense then, narrative and the ability to represent become intimately tied to gender.²⁷¹

Multi-mimetic representation thus offers a lens through which gender and, more particularly, specific subjectivities are ascertained. Multi-mimesis in the online environment demonstrates, as Disappearing Rain confirms, that “visualization

²⁶⁴ Larsen, “Strike Madly On,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁶⁵ Larsen, “In Empty Air,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁶⁶ Larsen, “Waves Hunch,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁶⁷ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 190.

²⁶⁸ Larsen, personal interview, 17 April 2006.

²⁶⁹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 193.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Irigaray especially challenges the valuation of logocentrism in literature with her “parler-femme” which is a way to “remodel existing languages so as to give place to [women].” Luce Irigaray, “The Three Genres,” The Irigaray Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford Blackwell, 1991) 152.

technologies no longer simply mimic or represent reality – they virtually recreate it.”²⁷²

While the female characters of Disappearing Rain recognise the problematics associated with any attempt to recreate or, in fact, represent realities, they, like Mary Flanagan, note the importance of moving the technologies of visualisation out of “male hands” and into women’s experience.²⁷³ In fact Sophie warns Amy about “those electronic monstrosities [that] don’t know the first thing about someone’s identity.”²⁷⁴ Perhaps, then, Anna’s disappearance into the internet is her attempt to adjust her own relationship to technology and “re-cover, un-veil and express”²⁷⁵ herself. This kind of new interaction between becoming, understanding that becoming and technology suggests a way out of what Flanagan sees as an impasse: a “battle between embodied, situated knowledge as opposed to the rational, Western, male mind.”²⁷⁶ Anna, though, via her personal website reminds readers that there is no easy way out of this difficulty. For Anna, technology and the body are inextricably tied together. Furthermore, the project of recovery as Irigaray might put it or the attempt to represent a *sujet-en-procès* is a game much like chess, involving defence and attack:

²⁷² Anne Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 125.

²⁷³ Mary Flanagan, “Hyperbodies, Hyperknowledge: Women in Games, Women in Cyberpunk, and Strategies of Resistance,” Reload Rethinking Women + Cyberculture, eds. Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002) 445.

²⁷⁴ Larsen, “Dripping From,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁷⁵ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 131.

²⁷⁶ Flanagan, “Hyperbodies, Hyperknowledge” 427.



Fig. 3.4 “Emerging from Somewhere,” an image from Anna’s website. Larsen, “Each Rolls Off,” Disappearing Rain.

Overall the narrative as a whole embodies the ideas represented in this image (fig. 3.4). Throughout the fiction the interplay of mimetic representation and the commensurate recognition of its partiality is marked by incommensurability: “the absence of information was first a trickle, then a raging torrent... ‘Dad, I can’t locate Anna. It’s been a week, and she hasn’t returned my calls.’”²⁷⁷ Only when Anna is represented in terms of an “absence of information” does Amy realise that Anna is “lost in the whirs of cyberspace.”²⁷⁸ When Amy attempts to bring her sister back to a “reality” which Anna finds “*so* boring”²⁷⁹ Amy, for an instant, becomes Anna:

Amy’s whole body, it had seemed to Anna, had been immersed in the internet. Her long, straight black hair fell forward past her face to brush the keyboard as she typed, making an intertwined, fast moving jungle of hair, fingers, wrists. Only her eyes stayed still, fixed on the screen until the light from her eyes and the monitor merged into the same bright,

²⁷⁷ Larsen, “Rivers,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁷⁸ Larsen, “Lost Words,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁷⁹ Larsen, “Route,” Disappearing Rain, original emphasis.

flickering pattern.”²⁸⁰

Then, failing to entice Anna from “the reality of the internet,”²⁸¹ Amy decides to join Anna in her (dis)integration into difference:²⁸² “your electrons could merge with the universe – could experience the infinity of possibilities...Why bother with travelling real distances when you can be anything you wanted to be, go everywhere, have anything in a matter of nanoseconds?”²⁸³ The incommensurability of this undertaking lies here: Anna can only be represented through her absence. Once Anna enters “the vortex of belief” where she can “shed the boundaries” of “reality,” photographs, letters, CCTV footage, and images cease to perform any representative function. Now Anna can only be represented as a hiatus, as a gap in between representational tactics.²⁸⁴

Just as the CCTV footage of the bicycle shop (fig. 3.5) and Mrs. Montgomery’s house (fig. 3.6) represent their existence in an external reality, the relation between Anna’s life and narrative discloses a perpetual provisionality of the narrative, which in turn, signifies an inability to represent a “becoming” individual. Anna’s life has always been accessible but only in degrees: the reader knows Anna only through an old photograph, a few letters she sends once she is in the machine, images of her university life, an “echoing giggle from deep within the monitor,”²⁸⁵ and “The Have You Seen Anna Mizunami”²⁸⁶ website. Larsen recognises the impossibility of representing the entirety of a dynamic identity like Anna’s. By never allowing the web fiction fully to constitute Anna’s reality Larsen succeeds in showing the extreme excess that is Anna’s

²⁸⁰ Larsen, “Lost Words,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁸¹ Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²⁸² Amy, like Anna, does not want to “worry” about reality anymore. She wants to “lose the boundaries of her skin entirely, to escape these trivial bonds.” Larsen, “Matters,” *Disappearing Rain*. See also Sherry Turkle who describes her life online in similar terms of multiplicity: “In my computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language.” Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 15.

²⁸³ Larsen, “Route,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁸⁴ Larsen, “That There Can Be,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁸⁵ Larsen, “Precisely What,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁸⁶ Larsen, “When It Is,” *Disappearing Rain*.

experience, paradoxically, by telling the reader, and Amy, very little.



Fig. 3.5 CCTV view “looking down Pearl Street.” Larsen, “By the Principle,” Disappearing Rain.



Fig. 3.6 CCTV view “focusing on a yellow clapboard house with an old veranda.” Larsen, “By the Principle,” Disappearing Rain.

This mode of encounter between what Hayles would cite as materiality and virtuality appears as a perpetual split in the figure of Anna.²⁸⁷ Anna represents — arguably — an extreme version of Haraway’s cyborg. The description of Anna merging with the computer where, “bodies touch, merge” and “show the electrons of [their]

²⁸⁷ For Hayles the “human body” is “at once a physical object and a space of representation, a body and a message.” N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 29.

atoms how to share orbits,"²⁸⁸ is ambiguous about her condition. Does the representation of Anna as a collection of electrons reduce her to a state of "corporeal anxiety,"²⁸⁹ or, on the contrary, does it confer a unique value on the feminisation of technology; literally a woman in the machine? Ultimately, the infinitely chiasmic structure (in a Butlerian sense) of multi-mimesis prevents any possibility of escaping provisionality.²⁹⁰

Larsen's analyses also extend to the actual representation/figuration of Anna. Amy is unable to redraw her sister from memory. When Amy attempts mimetically to reconstruct Anna by tracing the similarities between a portrait of Anna (fig. 3.7) and Amy's own memory of her sister, Larsen shows the impossibility of representing the reality of Anna once she has dived into difference.



Fig. 3.7 A portrait of Anna before she "cannot be located." Larsen, "Amy," Disappearing Rain.

Before Anna "merges with another reality" which will remain "unlit by any modem,"²⁹¹ she is described as "the girl with the long black hair and dark eyes,"²⁹² and someone who "never sought Amy out for a midnight cup of hot chocolate, a giggling session on one of their beds, feet hanging over the sides, shoulders sprawled and merged

²⁸⁸ Deena Larsen, "The Danger In," Disappearing Rain

²⁸⁹ In fact with Anna's dispersal into the "light of the internet" she does not transform from material body to disembodied idea. Instead Anna is "everywhere at once" and "becomes more. Actually Anna is constantly appearing, the question is where." Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

²⁹⁰ With respect to form vis-à-vis substance, the representation of Anna can be described as similar to Butler's positioning of the body vis-à-vis language as a chiasmus: "Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic [sic.] in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other." Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter (London: Routledge, 1993) 69.

²⁹¹ Deena Larsen, "Melted Water," Disappearing Rain.

²⁹² Deena Larsen, "Rivers," Disappearing Rain.

with the soft blankets and flannel pillow cases.”²⁹³ Clearly, before Anna decided to leap into the ether of the World Wide Web, she was easily representable, especially when the narrator is able to show photographs. As Braidotti might say, Anna’s “materiality is coded and rendered in language.”²⁹⁴ As Anna’s becoming self exceeds representation, the web fiction has only one way of representing Anna, through her absence. Once Anna has dispersed into an “electronic no man’s land of light and memory”²⁹⁵ Amy can no longer remember her sister’s features, just as Larsen can no longer mimetically represent Anna. Anna now consists of a “reflection in the casing or the glare of the screen. A bright flash of black hair tossed back on the current, a caught bit of red silk from her scarf going under the falls again.”²⁹⁶ Even Kit, Anna’s mother, has trouble recognising her daughter in her electronic state and must “learn to see Anna”:

slowly, like someone grappling with newly granted vision, Kit learned to pick out Anna from the waterfalls’ rushing. Squinting her eyes one way, she could make out Anna’s thin oval face. Slanting her neck, she could see the carefully outlined, pale pink lips and delicate nose. Bowing her head to the keyboard and looking up as if praying, she could see Anna’s eyes.²⁹⁷

Instead of a realistic photograph to aid in representation there is only Kit’s nascent vision, the three-pronged “Japanese kanji-ku or ideogram” which represents the word river and the internet itself.²⁹⁸ Portrayed as a lover, the internet “treasure[s] the picture of [Anna] on that site as if it housed [her] soul.” The internet-lover also sees and feels Anna in detail: “I envy the light as it bends around your tear-shaped eyes, as I gently reach my screen to caress your high thin brows, touch and enter your small

²⁹³ Larsen, “The Danger In,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁹⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 165.

²⁹⁵ Larsen, “The Danger In,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁹⁶ Larsen, “Of The Depths,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁹⁷ Larsen, “Carry,” “Our Rivers,” *Disappearing Rain*.

²⁹⁸ Deena Larsen, home page, 10 July 2004 <www.deenalarsen.net>.

pursed lips.”²⁹⁹ Recognising that Anna is unable to “become” in the real world, the internet promises “to take [her] away from reality” as it “can offer [her] so much, [its] love. Freedom. A chance to be.”³⁰⁰ The internet seems to win Anna over by telling and “showing” her what it can offer:

We can float in a sampan down the Yang-tse River, sighing into the green forest canyons just around the bend. We can raft the Mississippi, revelling in the slow motion of time amidst the ancient oaks and tides. Find an island in the middle of the stream. Tie up in a secluded, deserted corner and watch the world go by in its lace parasols and cotton bundles.

With this verbal description the internet adds two mimetic representations of what Anna’s hypertextual life looks like:

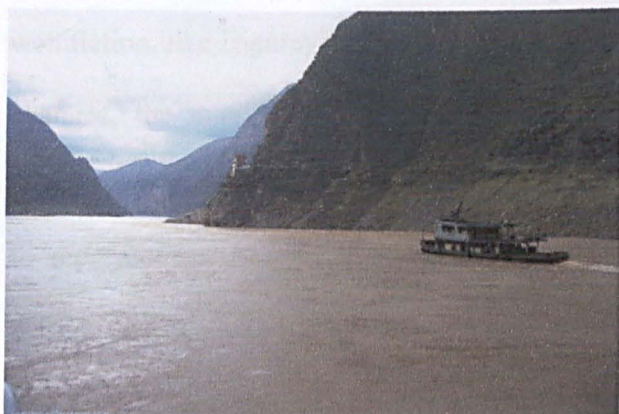


Fig. 3.8 An idyllic setting on the Yang-tse River. Larsen, “Drown,” Disappearing Rain.

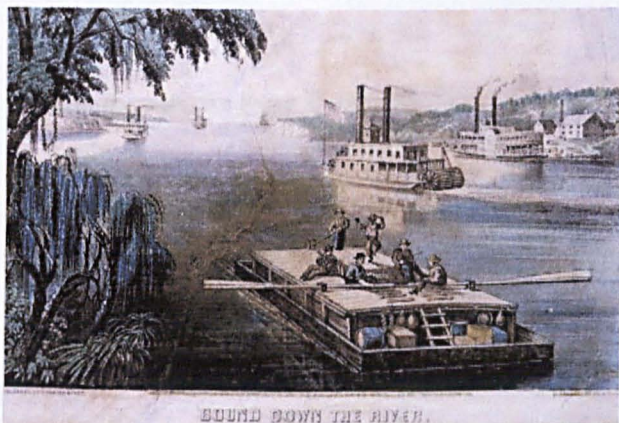


Fig. 3.9 People relaxing on the Mississippi River. Larsen, “Drown,” Disappearing Rain.

²⁹⁹ Larsen, “Drown,” Disappearing Rain.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

With Anna's immersion into education (University of Berkeley) and independence – “she was the doer, the go-getter and could always persuade anyone to do anything” – comes a plunge in the wider world, symbolised by her immersion into the actual internet.³⁰¹ Anna's transformation from a material being living in a reality where there is a “universal subject of knowledge” to a fluid, diffuse, and multiple subject is essential.³⁰² As Braidotti also argues, feminism must deeply question any “historically invariable structure...of representation, its myths, symbols, and the dominant vision of the subject.”³⁰³ Thus once Anna affects her transformation Larsen can only represent her as a static photograph. When Anna starts “becoming” and creates a new fluid life, the web narrative finds it impossible to represent her. Anna can only be represented in the time before she started becoming. Multi-mimesis in Larsen's web fiction, like Irigaray's mimesis, is tactical; it is disrupted by difference. Once Anna changes, the condition and possibility of her being represented cease to operate. Consequently, as Anna “escapes the bonds”³⁰⁴ that hold her, the web narrative is unable to represent her becoming reality. Therefore the story itself emerges only through Anna's absence. As Larsen says, “the ineffable quality of Anna's life is not something you can say in words.”³⁰⁵

3.3 Re-presenting the Gaze: Fisher's These Waves of Girls

Evident in Auerbach's Mimesis is a conception of narrative as an appeal both to and for visibility — writing as a form of picturing. The point of departure, for Auerbach, is a moment of visual experience in which Odysseus is recognised solely

³⁰¹ Larsen, “Drown,” Disappearing Rain.

³⁰² Braidotti argues that feminism critiques this “falsely generalized standpoint.” *Nomadic Subjects* 98.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Larsen, “In Water,” Disappearing Rain.

³⁰⁵ Larsen, personal interview, 19 July 2004.

from his scar — thus recognition is based on visual experience.³⁰⁶ One might also recall Auerbach's explanation of the "mimetic imagination of the reader" which he defines as a demand for "memory-pictures."³⁰⁷ As a result, Auerbach seems to draw an equation between "sight and insight."³⁰⁸

The inherent viscosity of a certain kind of mimesis is similarly apparent in Joyce and Landow's hypertext theory. According to Landow there exists a (literary) prejudice against "visual information."³⁰⁹ While he attempts to make a useful connection between print and hypertext on the basis of a shared visual past, both hypertext and "many alphabetic systems" originate from hieroglyphics...,³¹⁰ he falls into his previous comparative mode which pits hypertext as superior to print:

avoiding graphic elements...doesn't make much sense for one obvious reason: images and other graphic elements are the single most important factor in the astonishing growth of the Word [sic.] Wide Web. The invention of the image tag ()...made the World Wide Web immensely appealing, turning it into a medium rich with visual pleasures...Therefore, whether we believe it has an identifiable logic – a McLuhan-esque message in the medium – the Web certainly is significantly pictorial."³¹¹

The ability and, indeed, the new-found importance of the image, as described by Landow, are prized accomplishments among various hypertext writers and theorists. Fisher, however, is more skeptical and prefers not to implement a hierarchy of the

³⁰⁶ "An essential aspect of mimetic representation is theorized by Aristotle from the praxis of tragic recognition." April Alliston, "Female Sexuality and Enlightenment Realisms," Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre, eds Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 15. See also Prendergast who makes this point, The Triangle of Representation 118.

³⁰⁷ Auerbach 415.

³⁰⁸ Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 118.

³⁰⁹ See George Landow, Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 88.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Landow, Hypertext 3.0 88-89.

visual. In order to side-step dominion of the visual Fisher considers web fictions triadically: “nonlinearly, visually, cinematically.”³¹² Contemplating contemporary research on “hypermedia” Fisher is concerned that readers and writers value one mode (visual) over another. Fisher’s formal experimentation, as she puts it, is aimed, like her theory, beyond words and images, at a new relation between works that require the computer for its instantiation and its readers.³¹³

This “new relation” is consistent with Fisher’s conversation with representation and, importantly, her appraisal of the multiplicity available online: “texts combining word, sound, image, animation, or other components.”³¹⁴ As a reader, Fisher identifies different literacies required to read stained glass windows, the Kabbalah, astrological charts, maps, and paintings, and suggests that these literacies inform the way we read (and write) “electronic texts.”³¹⁵ Fisher’s musing here seems to find elucidation in Thomas’s more recent idea of transliteracy.³¹⁶ But, it is this idea of multiple modes of representation and reading positions which deeply inform the writing of the Electronic Literature Organization’s 2001 winning fiction, These Waves, and the emergence of the main protagonist.

There has been considerable feminist discussion of the relation between women writers and language.³¹⁷ This relation is only partially adequate given the web fiction’s use of visual devices and Fisher’s own theorising which emphasises the role of the

³¹² Caitlin Fisher, “Electronic Literacies,” *Light Onwards / Light Onwards: Living Literacies Text of the November 14-16, 2002 Conference at York University*, eds, B. W. Powe and Stephanie Hart (Toronto: Coach House Press, 2004) 57.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Fisher, “Electronic Literacies” 58.

³¹⁵ Fisher employs this term to mean “texts not simply generated on a computer, like a word processed document, but a text that must be read on screen, one that demands the computer for its instantiation.” “Electronic Literacies” 57.

³¹⁶ As previously noted, transliteracy “is the ability to read, write and interact across a range of platforms, tools and media from signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV, radio and film, to digital social networks.” See Sue Thomas, Chris Joseph, Jess Laccetti et al, “Transliteracy: Crossing Divides,” *First Monday* 12.12 (3 December 2007), 12 December 2007 <<http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2060/1908>>.

³¹⁷ See Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

cinematic. Turning to feminist discussions with the cinematic can help illustrate the shifting of multi-mimetic relations. As Laura Mulvey argues, “classic films in the Hollywood tradition,” and one might suggest, “canonical” web fictions, not only typically focus on a male protagonist but also assume a male viewer. “As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.”³¹⁸ Therefore, the female object of the gaze, according to Mulvey, is transformed into an object of male desire.

The cinematic gaze can only be theorised as “male” if one assumes, as Mulvey seems to, that watching is an act of the “male unconscious.”³¹⁹ What happens if the web fiction protagonist and reader are women? Where does lesbian desire fit within Mulvey’s theory?³²⁰ The protagonist of These Waves is aware of the power and politics which underlie female visibility.

Accordingly, the way Tracey shows her story becomes explicitly linked with personal power. In an early memory, Tracey admits to “[f]eeling I had all sorts of power. Power didn’t seem too complicated.”³²¹ Furthermore, this memory is boldly established against an image with the words: “in charge.” Power is readily available until Tracey realises she is watched: “First day of high school and here I am in the fishbowl of intro assembly and everyone is watching me.”³²² Initially, fifteen-year old Tracey, while gazed at, is unable to locate the power necessary to perform her own gazing. An older Tracey and “A man” go to “Geneva to see Marguerite Duras’ The

³¹⁸ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Visual and Cultural Studies, 2 Feb. 2004, 20 Nov. 2004 <<http://www.panix.com/~squigle/vcs/mulvey-vpnc.html>>.

³¹⁹ Mulvey argues that in patriarchal society “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.” Ibid.

³²⁰ See Jean Gallagher, “H.D.’s Distractions: Cinematic Stasis and Lesbian Desire,” 9.3 Modernism/Modernity, (September 2002) 407-422 for an examination of the Lesbian gaze in prose.

³²¹ Fisher, “Femme,” These Waves of Girls, 2001, 3 April 2007 <www.yorku.ca/caitlin/waves/>.

³²² Fisher, “Mr. Anderson,” These Waves of Girls.

Lover.” Finding it difficult to watch the film, Tracey explains that she cannot consistently “take on [the man’s] gaze” because she is “aware of eyes on her.” Tracey’s conclusion, “I cannot watch her because I am watched,” brings to mind Duras’s own words: “Men must learn to be silent...They must watch themselves carefully.”³²³ As Mulvey argues:

[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.³²⁴

Mulvey’s article remains important especially in light of her conclusion in which she raises the issue of how women filmmakers can create alternative conventions to liberate cinema from male-centered practices of representation. At the end of her article, Mulvey recommends the overthrow of the whole system of voyeuristic pleasure as the basis of narrative film:

[t]here is no doubt that this [the disappearance of filmic devices that invite voyeuristic pleasure] destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the “invisible guest,” and highlights how film has depended on voyeuristic active/ passive mechanisms. Women, whose image has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret.³²⁵

Fisher’s [These Waves of Girls](#) is an especially appropriate web fiction to discuss in the context of Mulvey’s call for a countercinema, as to a large extent it does what

³²³ Marguerite Duras, qtd in Braidotti, [Patterns of Dissonance](#) 145.

³²⁴ Mulvey, original emphasis.

³²⁵ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

Mulvey suggests. It subverts most male-centered conventions (according to Mulvey) of female representation by refusing the voyeuristic pleasure of objectifying or fetishising women (for male viewing) and it also interferes with the male-active, female-passive dynamics. At the same time, however, These Waves is “visually appealing, emotionally complex, and fun to read” according to Larry McCaffery, judge of the Electronic Literature Organization’s competition:

I found myself hooked on Waves from the moment I first logged on and watched Caitlin’s gorgeous graphic interface assemble itself out of images of moving clouds drifting across the screen, mingling with the sounds of girls laughing. Once inside the work itself, users encounter a series of writings – anecdotes, incidents, bits of story, and meditations – drawn from the memories and creative imagination of its playfully unreliable (and textually seductive) female protagonist at various key junctures of her youth (at age 4, age 10, 20).³²⁶

Sue-Ellen Case, following Mulvey, adds: the notion of “the Gaze...became one of the dominant strategies in revealing the status of women in representation.”³²⁷ Constituting women as objects of the “male Gaze” requires them to be passive. Later, in the scene mentioned above, Tracey acknowledges that she “expected to take on his gaze as [she] watched this girl.”³²⁸ Here then, Tracey is both watched and watching: thus she is both subject and object. Placing Tracey in the centre of this highly visual scene secures her power. Tracey does not simply overturn “woman...as sexual object...the leitmotif of erotic spectacle,” but constructs two performances for herself. Tracey performs what Kristeva calls on feminists to embody: to be “at once the attacker

³²⁶ Larry McCaffery, “Comments,” Electronic Literature Organization, 2001, 28 May 2006 <<http://www.eliterature.org/Awards2001/>>.

³²⁷ Sue-Ellen Case, The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 68.

³²⁸ Fisher, “The Lover,” These Waves of Girls.

and the victim, the same and the other, identical and foreign.”³²⁹ What does it mean, then, in another version of the same memory, that there is no man with Tracey? De Lauretis explains that the critique of the Gaze has moved from focussing on “the cinematic apparatus [as] a technology of gender” to “the representation of gender [and how it is] constructed by the given technology [as well as] how it becomes absorbed subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses.”³³⁰ Tracey’s memory parallels de Lauretis’s charting of the critical focus, shifting from mode of production to mode of reception. Earlier she was aware of being watched by “a man” and thus unable to express her desire for the “woman on the screen.” Now, Tracey permits herself to watch:

[i]t’s awful... scrutinizing, staring so fixedly, wanting this skeletal girl so badly...Ok. So it’s true, I’m watching this girl and thinking about fucking her... she’s dyed her hair red — against the yellow shirt I can only think safety vehicles — fire, police... anyone watching us would see only my strong back, sturdy legs, all perfectly still and keeping the anorexic chic [sic] warm like a blanket.

³²⁹ Julia Kristeva, New Maladies of the Soul, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 223.

³³⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, “The Technology of Gender,” Technologies of Gender (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 13.

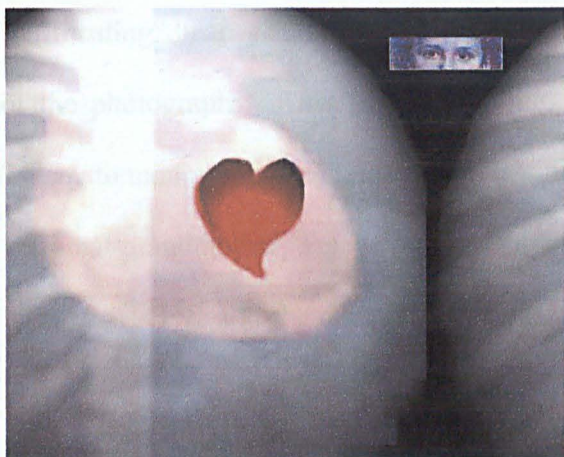


Fig. 3.10 Caitlyn Fisher, “Watching,” These Waves of Girls.

Further complexities of gazing emerge when Tracey recalls looking at photographs of her great-grandmother with her friends. She notices that all the women are “waiting, holding their breath, hoping they wouldn’t blink, eyes watering, nothing to do but wait wait wait underneath those heavy multi-buttoned dresses, slowly suffocating these women at the neck” (see fig.3.11).³³¹



Fig. 3.11 Photographs of Tracey’s great-grandmother. Caitlin Fisher, “Collect,” These Waves of Girls.

What will happen, Tracey wonders, if she imagines her great-grandmother “refusing to wait — getting up quickly, gathering her skirt and running to large rocky hills to sit, peacefully, not waiting?”³³² In order to re-present her great-grandmother’s

³³¹ Fisher, “Collect,” These Waves of Girls.

³³² Fisher, “Collect,” These Waves of Girls.

“suffocating” history, Tracey, calling herself a “voyeur,” sews herself “into the borders” of the photographs. This penetration, into the photograph and into the past, allows Tracey to manipulate the meaning of “waiting.” Initially seen negatively in reference to her great-grandmother, Tracey’s contemporary view of waiting is more favourable: it is New Year’s Eve and she must “wait wait wait” until the sun rises in Marrakech (see fig. 3.12).

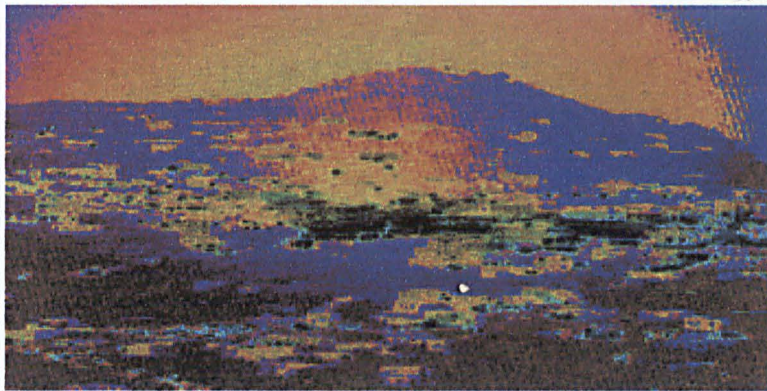


Fig. 3.12 Caitlin Fisher, “Happy New Year,” These Waves of Girls.

In these scenes, Tracey critiques a visual dimension which is implicated in the description of certain women’s oppressed past. Here, focus on the gaze is thematised as producing passive female objects. Tracey negotiates the gaze through a Butlerian repetition marked with difference: she waits but she is also watching.

Through disrupting the construction of gender Butler brings to light the “critical genealogy of the category woman,” questioning how discourse and social matrices shape subjectivity and agency.³³³ Similarly, Tracey’s becoming emerges out of a perpetual refashioning of these “fields of power.”³³⁴ Fisher’s use of images also develops sophisticated strategies which subvert dominant norms. Employing image manipulation, Fisher focuses on representations which unsettle compulsory heterosexuality à la Adrienne Rich. Rather than using digitally created images that are

³³³ See Braidotti, Metamorphoses 36–37.

³³⁴ See Jaishree K. Odin, “Embodiment and Narrative Performance,” Women, Art & Technology, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) 454.

potentially superior to celluloid images because they *seem* more real, as Manovich purports,³³⁵ Fisher modifies all the images. The resulting bright, grainy, and often blurry images suggest Tracey's own cloudy memory and perception: this is a narrative about a unique subjectivity, not a documentation of history as a "blueprint of authenticity."³³⁶

Speaking of the complexities of representing lesbian subjectivities, de Lauretis calls for a nonessentialised theorising of

'lesbian desire' that constitutes the kind of subjectivity and sexuality we experience as lesbian and want to claim as lesbians; and which therefore we need to theorize, articulate and find ways of representing, not only in its difference from heterosexual norms, its ab-normality, but also and more importantly in its own constitutive processes, its specific modalities and conditions of existence.³³⁷

Tracey, like de Lauretis, maintains a consistent preoccupation with the difficulty in articulating lesbian subjectivity. She is thankful that although she "always knew, early on, it's a cliché...but it's also true," that she was a lesbian, she did not suffer from "a serious case of femme invisibility."³³⁸ Almost as soon as Tracey utters a phrase equally found in queer discourse she retracts it: "no, I wouldn't have called it that."³³⁹ Moreover, as de Lauretis explains in "Sexual (In)difference and Lesbian Representation," there are only certain ways in which lesbians can appear on the dominant heterosexual semiotic screen.³⁴⁰ Indeed, Tracey's exploration of the

³³⁵ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001) 199–204.

³³⁶ Plant 191.

³³⁷ Teresa de Lauretis, "Film and the Visible – How Do I Look?" *Bad Object-Choices*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991) 256.

³³⁸ Fisher, "Femme," *These Waves of Girls*.

³³⁹ See Judith Butler, afterword, *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, ed., Sally R. Munt (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998) 255–230.

³⁴⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual (In)difference and Lesbian Representation," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 155–177.

importance of certain versions of the past links to how she controls the present. In this way Tracey is, in Kristeva's words, a "sujet-en-procès" who wears short skirts only to confuse men.³⁴¹

Tracey's becoming subjectivity enacts the very dialectic between present and past and between her representations and her experiences. The suggestion that there are only versions of the past and that subjectivity is dynamic indicates a feminist "double-voiced discourse" where memories and reality blend and blur to represent Tracey's unfolding present.³⁴² As Tracey "the author" reminds the reader, her stories are built on other stories: "[j]ust for fun, find this story's echo in most any country of your choice."³⁴³

Thus Fisher's web fiction affects a kind of challenge: "I see this work as being very much about resistance."³⁴⁴ Evoking different kinds of women — daughters, teachers, feminists, lovers, grandmothers and mothers — it challenges singular, unified, and universal notions of "woman" and answers Braidotti's call to "free female sexuality from its subjugation to the signifier Woman."³⁴⁵ Thus the creation and consequent performance of Tracey's lesbian realities are grounded in structures of *différance*. Meanings and realities emerge from a network of differences that involve not either/or but Douglas's and/and/and of experience.

Tracey's emphasis on difference is important in the light of her attempts to displace monolithic constructions of female identity which situate women as heterosexually desired objects. Recognising her very specific representations of reality

³⁴¹ See Fisher, "Alain Blazes," *These Waves*.

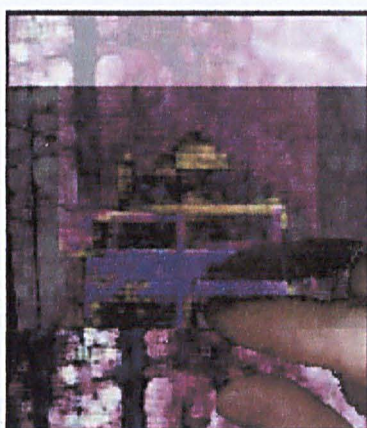
³⁴² Radner and Lanser show how some women's writing contains a subtle but subversive coding. Joan N. Radner and Susan Lanser, "The Feminist Voice Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature," *Journal of American Folklore* 100.398 (1987).

³⁴³ Fisher, "Beam Routine," *These Waves of Girls*.

³⁴⁴ Caitlin Fisher, "Re: more on Jane book," online posting, 3 June 2002, 21 Oct. 2004 <<http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmsti/jane3.html>>.

³⁴⁵ For Braidotti, thinking difference means thinking of female (and postmodern) subjectivity as "non-unitary, split, in-process, knotted, rhizomatic, transitional, nomadic...fragment[ed], complex...and [as] multiplicity." Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 5, 35.

— “he won’t remember it that way” — Tracey cannot be charged with presentism. She, after all, acknowledges her “self” as a “perpetual unfolding.”³⁴⁶ Constantly creating as well as describing her realities and identities, Tracey admits “I’m conjuring ghosts.”³⁴⁷ “At six I hold a whole house in the palm of my hand from under a tree the other side of the road...At ten. With Vanessa. I am a quarry girl, a motherless girl, an English girl, a kissing girl.”³⁴⁸ At fifteen Tracey “would do everything on a dare. Brave and desperately stupid and beautiful, if slightly off balance, in that wind.”³⁴⁹ Furthermore, at twenty, Tracey compares herself to the quilt she is creating: both are “in process.”³⁵⁰ Additionally, the visual representations which accompany these memories equally evoke the sense that Tracey perceives herself as a patchwork of identities which have been influenced by the culture and society around her. Not only do the images present physical aspects of Tracey, her hands and her face, but the reader is required to “touch” each image, thereby causing it to quiver, distort, and then sharpen. In the third image (see fig. 3.13) the reader must use the magnifying glass to locate a blurry image of Tracey’s face in the palm of someone’s hand. Without the reader’s involvement, the image of Tracey’s face, as well as other aspects of her “self,” would remain hidden.



³⁴⁶ See Guertin “Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics” cf. and Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, cf.

³⁴⁷ Fisher, “Mr. Anderson,” *These Waves of Girls*.

³⁴⁸ Fisher, “Vanessa,” *These Waves of Girls*.

³⁴⁹ Fisher, “Vanity,” *These Waves of Girls*.

³⁵⁰ Fisher, “Collect,” *These Waves of Girls*.

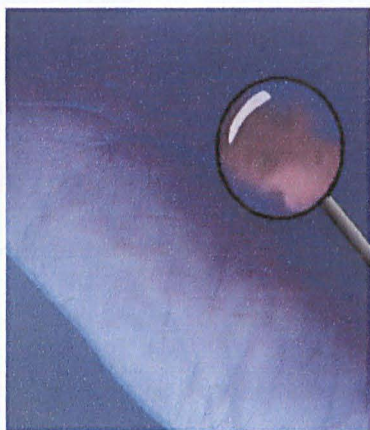


Fig. 3.13 Malleable images. Caitlin Fisher, “Vanity,” “Collect,” These Waves of Girls.

According to Braidotti, “[v]ision requires a politics of positioning; positioning implies responsibility.”³⁵¹ These images (fig. 3.13) that accompany Tracey’s “unfolding” lesbian identity might, on the one hand, represent her multiplicity, but on the other hand, they suggest “a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning.”³⁵² Visible in each image is a “part” of Tracey, further reinforcing her goal “not to reveal some objective reality but to display parts of a symbolic system laden with historical and personal resonance.”³⁵³ Since she is embedded in each representation, she cannot be a spectator. Thus, once again, although Tracey struggles to represent her “selves,” she and Fisher conclude that there are only partial perspectives and situated knowledges. This critical awareness might also suggest that one way of criticising representational practices is, literally, from within.

Set against these politics of representation, the visualisation and illustration of lesbian erotics in These Waves is explicit, but not unproblematic. Where the language of certain texts is about disguise and not being seen “because to be a lesbian is to live in a subculture which must maintain selective visibility,” the language and illustrations in

³⁵¹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 73.

³⁵² Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 73.

³⁵³ Although Margaret Morse makes this comment in relation to Agnes Hegedüs’s Handsight, it is applicable here. Margaret Morse, “The Poetics of Interactivity,” Women, Art & Technology, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) 29.

These Waves are more than suggestive.³⁵⁴ Fisher's representation of lesbian desire does not conclude with a Larsenian acknowledgement of the efficacy of signifying structures. In fact, Fisher would agree with the installation artist Dorit Cypis that "[w]e are in an era in which our survival is contingent on our ability to deal with our sexuality."³⁵⁵ Consequently, Tracey's increasingly vivid description of her sexual adventures culminates in a multi-mimetic profusion of image and voice:



Fig. 3.14 Caitlin Fisher, "Vanessa," These Waves of Girls.

These images (see fig. 3.14) convey another story of their own. Besides representing highly charged sexual scenes, they also seem to parody the "tradition of the masculine look."³⁵⁶ This move indicates that images, like language, cannot be free from

³⁵⁴ I have in mind Djuna Barnes' Nightwood. See Frances M. Doughty, "Gilt on Cardboard," Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes, ed. Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1994) 152.

³⁵⁵ Dorit Cypis qtd. in Sheila Pinkel, "Women, Body, Earth," Women, Art & Technology, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) 37.

³⁵⁶ Burke 70.

ambiguities of meaning. These Waves opens up a parodic space in which questioning the “oppositional logic” between the dualities of male and female, lesbian and heterosexual, and object and spectator can occur.³⁵⁷ By foregrounding the constructedness of these images as well as developing a certain kind of lesbian perspective, These Waves performs both a Butlerian parody where in “some ways...making fun [is a] subversive assault[t] on the original norms” and a reappropriation of “heterosexual concepts.”³⁵⁸

The ambiguous quality of Fisher’s graphics also suggests a double-voiced discourse; a coding of its own. In fact, the narrative of Tracey’s becoming sexuality and the explicit images reflect both a tension between a desire to represent as a way of “unsealing secrets” and a critical acknowledgement that, no matter how profuse the multi-mimesis, there is always something “at stake in framing early [lesbian] sexual experience.”³⁵⁹ However, Fisher further problematises the representation of becoming lesbian subjectivity. Keeping in mind Auerbach’s concept of mimesis as situating knowledge in terms of vision, one might expect multi-mimetic images and sounds in These Waves to “conform to the mimetic standard of illustration: i.e., that they should visualize the text.”³⁶⁰ If, as Charles Bernstein argues, “the gap between the verbal and visual [in print texts] is an almost insurmountable problem of translation,” then the very impasse of translation resides in a desire to equate verbal signification with visual.³⁶¹ Fisher’s web fiction indicates just this: becoming lives are not a “two-dimensional flattening,” either image or text. “Visual elements need not merely repeat what the text

³⁵⁷ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 99.

³⁵⁸ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990) 175, 177. The ambiguity, i.e. gender indeterminacy, contained within the images pulls the viewer into a problematical viewing position. The sexually suggestive images may perform for both a heterosexual male as well as a lesbian audience. This is another way of how Fisher moves away from the categorising tendencies of these particular types of representations.

³⁵⁹ Caitlin Fisher, “Re: more on Jane book,” online posting, 3 June 2002, 21 Oct. 2007 <<http://research.umbc.edu/~korenman/wmst/jane3.html>>.

³⁶⁰ Martyniuk 65.

³⁶¹ Charles Bernstein, “For M/E/A/N/I/N/G,” M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings, Theory, and Criticism, eds Susan Bee and Mira Schor (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 109.

says; the text need not merely explain the meaning of the picture. Words and images can flow together to illuminate and subvert each other.”³⁶² Thus, just as Tracey learns to read the texts of her evolving lesbian reality, the web fiction reader must learn to translate the meanings of the visual features with and against the narrative — “there is no monolithic art, no monolithic technology, but rather a plethora...a *multi* of everything.”³⁶³

Three clicks into [These Waves of Girls](#) and Abbas’s “third nature” is (re)produced. The crashing of the waves, the impish laughter, the digital photographs and the potent prose combine and recombine to “modif[y] the natural order of perception and experience by dramatically collapsing the ontological distinction between immediate and mediate engagement with the world.”³⁶⁴ This multi-mimetic representation, like Hayles’ reformulation of embodiment, “is akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational.”³⁶⁵ The partial images — a strip of film, the lower-half of a girl’s body — are visual signs that point toward a specific referent that cannot be completely represented (see fig. 3.15). They perform a dual operation, functioning both as individual elements and also as a whole “refractive and cyclical”³⁶⁶ structure that parallels the performance of Tracey’s sexuality.

³⁶² Mark Bernstein, “Beyond Illustrations,” [Hypertext Now](#), Eastgate Systems (2001), 15 May 2004 <www.eastgate.com/hypertextnow>.

³⁶³ In fact, “the word is an image after all.” Stuart Moulthrop, qtd in John Tolva, [Ut Pictura Hyperpoesis: Spatial Form, Visuality, and The Digital Word](#), 16 March 1996, 7 Sept. 2004 <<http://www.cs.unc.edu/~barman/HT96/P43/pictura.htm>>. See also Kathy Brew, “Through the Looking Glass,” [Women, Art & Technology](#), ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003) 99.

³⁶⁴ Niran Abbas, “Virtuality, Identity and the Posthuman Condition: An Exploration of Virtual Culture,” [Frame](#) 16.1 (2002): 64.

³⁶⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, “The Materiality of Informatics,” [Configurations](#) 1.1 (1993): 156.

³⁶⁶ Page 98.

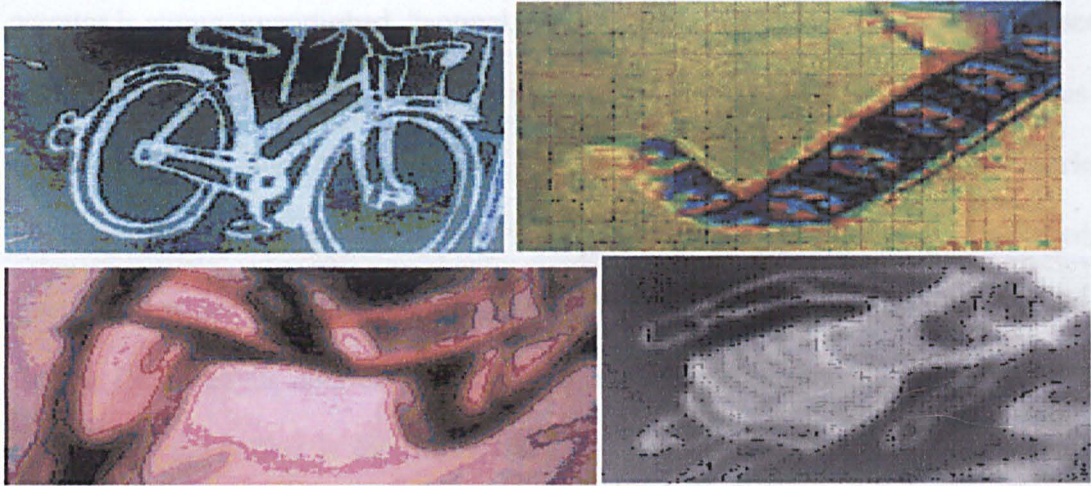


Fig. 3.15 Caitlin Fisher, "Parallel," These Waves of Girls.

In the node entitled "Wake-Up Fairy," (see fig. 3.16) the image of a young girl's clenched hands, blurry and slightly out of focus, is bordered by the bold and static text of the narrator's memory:



Fig. 3.16 Caitlin Fisher, "Wake Up Fairy," These Waves.

Tracey couches her abuse in terms which deny her abusers ownership of her body and her self. This scene (see fig. 3.16) especially suggests that narrative alone cannot contain the multiplicity of meanings associated with Tracey's identity. The text indicates that Tracey enjoyed "spread[ing] her legs" for "older men," and that she "knew everything about them — well the important things anyway. That they were so weak even a seven year old girl could see them crumble, desperate and fearful when she spread her legs."³⁶⁷ The prose itself, presented in bold black font, implies that the

³⁶⁷ Fisher, "Wake-Up Fairy," These Waves of Girls.

narrator is strong, unperturbed, “normal,” and certainly not a victim, unlike her abusers who are “weak.” The image belies this masquerade leading to what Pano describes as a “doubling of the story.”³⁶⁸ the chaste, innocent and childlike pose implies a buried suggestion of violation and her posture indicates her anxiety, as do the last four words, “just a little wider,” reminding Tracey (and the reader) of the physical pain of abuse. As George Dillon points out, the close-cropped image undercuts any feeling of balanced perspective; the “effect is sometimes more of glimpsing than seeing.”³⁶⁹ In this case then, the tightness of the image accentuates the clandestine course of abuse and the lasting consequences.

Reading this excerpt in relation to the node “He Moves” further enforces Tracey’s status of “victim,” even if her words do not. A seven year old Tracey, again in a cinema, says “what the hell” and lets the man next to her “brush [her] knee with his finger tips” and “one finger only inside the band [of her shorts], slowly heading back down.” Feeling in control Tracey “like[s] his warm, slow, tentative hand [and] move[s] her legs, just slightly.”³⁷⁰ Although Tracey’s language signals power and control and even enjoyment, the accompanying image does not (see fig. 3.17). The image, a version of the previous “angelic-like” posture but centred on her lap, includes a magnifying glass with which the reader can zoom-in.³⁷¹ While Tracey attempts to minimise her abuse and maintain a certain kind of silence, the images, with the reader’s intervention, accomplish the opposite. The effect of placing the magnifying glass in the reader’s hand hints at the intrusive voyeurism of the reader, actively examining details and close-ups. This action unequivocally supports Mulvey’s decree that in order to be nonsexist,

³⁶⁸ Ana Pano, “Dual Effects in Digital Texts: Connectivity in Hypertext Fiction and the Splitting in Two of Stories,” *Media in Transition 4: The Work of Stories*, May 2005, 20 May 2007 <<http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit4/papers/pano.pdf>>.

³⁶⁹ George Dillon, “Anti-Laokoon: Mixed and Merged Modes of Imagetext on the Web,” *Writing for the Web*, 4 April 2002, University of Washington, 2 May 2006 <<http://courses.washington.edu/hypertext/pala/laokoonMSOO.html>>.

³⁷⁰ Fisher, “He Moves,” *These Waves of Girls*.

³⁷¹ Fisher, “Warned,” *These Waves of Girls*.

one must eliminate the pleasures of voyeurism. Enabling the web fiction reader to zoom in on Tracey's abuse and subsequent anxiety means making visible the constructing devices which in this case, as Mulvey explains with reference to "camera presence," undermines readerly satisfaction and "the voyeuristic-scopophilic look."³⁷²

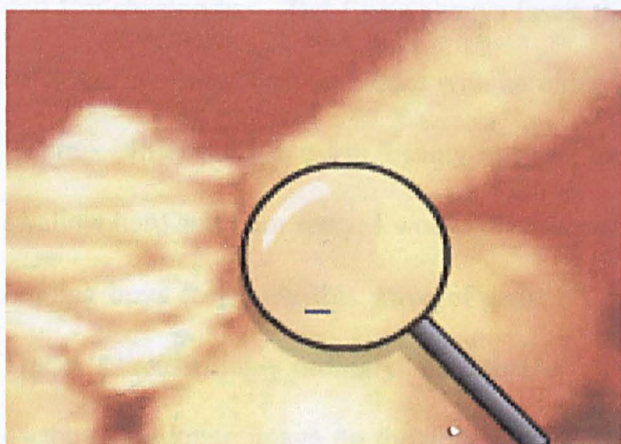


Fig. 3.17 Caitlin Fisher, "He Moves," These Waves of Girls.

Thus Tracey's own thoughts contradict the self-assured (verbal) image she tries to cultivate. The memory of what she was forced to do leaves her feeling small and inadequate and explains her frequent urge to declare that she is a "tough girl" who smok[es].³⁷³ The dynamic interplay between the text, the unfocused image, and the reader's interaction are mimetic of Tracey's struggle to construct a discourse within which she might articulate her memories, memories which consistently evade containment.

What These Waves makes clear is that there is no single correct image or single story which can document Tracey's exploration of her lesbian identity. This idea is not only present in the aforementioned nodes (see fig. 3.16 and fig. 3.17) but is repeated throughout the web fiction. In These Waves, however, images do not solely oppose or affirm the meanings of the narratives but contain a dual discourse within them.

There is considerable evidence of this type of revisioning of representation

³⁷² Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

³⁷³ Fisher, "School," These Waves of Girls.

throughout These Waves, but perhaps the most explicit example can be found in the node “Vanessa.” This excerpt chronicles some of the (mostly sexual) adventures Tracey has with Vanessa. Beginning with the early days of their partnership — “Vanessa. Here she is at 3, up ahead in the laneway, thin hair shining down that back and I’m chasing her...But I was always faster than Vanessa and I could always always catch her” — this node concludes with an older Tracey audibly reflecting on her sexual identity: “[h]er body is warm, beauty-marked, her hair thin across that lazy olive eye. I swallow hard and I am sorry, I would say something spell-breaking but I can’t feel what running boys feel, only this wave of girls.”³⁷⁴ While most of the images corroborate Tracey’s “reassuringly ordinary” narrative — a bicycle, a school-girl, a child’s drawing — the penultimate image on the node demands a second look.³⁷⁵ The blurry image is situated alongside an explicit description of young lesbian desire: “our bodies waiting for this frenzy...She closes the door and I read her mind some more and put my fingers on her warm chest and slow her heart and she presses her lips against mine, sealing secrets.” Initially the image seems to equally suggest sexual desire:



Fig. 3.18 Caitlin Fisher, “Vanessa,” These Waves of Girls.

At first glance, and in the context of the narration, the image corresponds to the sexual explorations of Tracey and Vanessa. An image of a hazy, rosy, and stretched vagina

³⁷⁴ Fisher, “Vanessa,” These Waves of Girls.

³⁷⁵ Dillon.

seems to suggest evidence of Tracey and Vanessa's frenzied sex. But, if one enlarges and turns the image ninety degrees clockwise, something else is visible:



Fig. 3.19 Caitlin Fisher, "Vanessa," These Waves of Girls.

Just as Fisher employs language to illustrate its relationship to power she also problematises the Gaze. What was initially a sexual organ is now the image of a sleeping girl. However, the protagonist is female and the viewer, one might expect, is also female (Vanessa) resulting in an image of a "purely" lesbian sexuality which disrupts notions of heterosexuality demanded by a male gaze. The result here is an example of Fisher's desire to represent difference and, like Mulvey, to question the scopoc gaze. Difference in this node is represented not only through the descriptions of young lesbian desire and the use of multi-mimetic images and sounds, but through the construction of a coded image which undoes any attempt to see singleness and singly. In Fisher, difference, appearing between women but also within women, marks this "sex that is not one" as a way of escaping Cartesian perceptions of subjectivity.³⁷⁶ For Fisher, as for Haraway, "[t]here is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women, there is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social

³⁷⁶ The splitting of the mind and female body is seen by certain feminists as Descartes' "responsibility." See Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 87.

practices.”³⁷⁷ Fisher consistently pushes at the boundaries of language and image in order to carve out a space for a specific kind of lesbian existence. The representation of lesbian desire then, is not to ignore complexities but to reformulate them.

3.4 The Politics of Resisting Representation Differently: Luesebrink’s The Lacemaker³⁷⁸

In a discussion of the concerns involved in aesthetic comparisons Lessing considers two art forms; poetry and sculpture. Lessing contends that certain subjects are more suitable for sculpture while others are more suitable for poetry thereby defining specific limits for each representational mode.³⁷⁹ A similar awareness of the limits of representation, and to a certain extent, the limits of a particular kind of multi-media comparison — in this case the printed novel and the multi-mimetic web fiction — is necessary to the present discussion. While situating Luesebrink’s hypertextual revisioning of Marie-Madeline de Lafayette’s La Princesse de Clèves within a historical and literary spectrum is not without its problems, it remains crucial to maintain a link with the past as “the desire for the new” requires a retrospective dimension.³⁸⁰

An “offer [of a] chance to...start over, to replay an event and try for a different resolution” is characteristic of web fictions which retain connections with previous fictions.³⁸¹ Luesebrink’s web fiction does offer a “different resolution” for the Lacemaker who originally was trapped in repetitions “which ultimately preclude development and progression.”³⁸² In fact, “the story works on several levels...as a story

³⁷⁷ Donna Haraway “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” Socialist Review 80, 15.2 (March-April 1985) 72-73.

³⁷⁸ A reminder to readers that Luesebrink writes under the pseudonym of M.D. Coverley. In this thesis, only the name Luesebrink will be used for the sake of clarity.

³⁷⁹ See Gebauer and Wulf 186–188.

³⁸⁰ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 30–31.

³⁸¹ Murray 175.

³⁸² Marianne Hirsch “A Mother’s Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in La Princesse de Clèves,” Yale French Studies 62 (1981) 75.

event, as a *reflection* of the historical exploitation of young, poor women, [and] as a socio-political metaphor for the socially-determined isolation of women in general.”³⁸³

What guides the narrative of The Lacemaker is not only plot development, as Brink notes is the case in La Princesse de Clèves, but the additional use of sound and images which must be constantly referred and cross-referred to one another throughout the web fiction reading.³⁸⁴ Thus the problematics inherent in representation and in attempting to represent are always an issue. Put another way, while Elys is multi-mimetically inserted into the plot of an existing narrative, she is nonetheless “kept behind walls, kept secluded” as “only the author, with the benefit of time and technology, can actually tell her story.”³⁸⁵

Representation and the becoming of subjectivity, then, are two concepts which cannot be separated. The issue present in The Lacemaker concerns how to manipulate multiple representational devices in order to adequately represent a subject who “did not figure in the past.”³⁸⁶ The commitment to review the means of representation and the visibility of women become the organising principles in both texts, enabling each to explore issues which “are most often not acknowledged in our surviving texts.”³⁸⁷

Although La Princesse de Clèves and The Lacemaker are both set within a patriarchal courtly context which explicitly identifies women as inadequate at decoding signifying systems, there is “hardly a hint in [Lafayette’s novel] of any society beyond that of the court.”³⁸⁸ Both texts centre on female protagonists determined to author their own stories. Both protagonists ultimately examine the relationship between certain women’s realities and elements of representation. Lafayette’s novel begins with an

³⁸³ Marjorie Luesebrink, “The Blind Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 19 Jan. 2005, emphasis added.

³⁸⁴ Andre Brink, The Novel: Language and Narrative from Cervantes to Calvino (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 46.

³⁸⁵ Luesebrink, “The Blind Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 19 Jan. 2005.

³⁸⁶ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Women in Literature,” 25 Aug. 2003, online course, 17 Nov. 2004. <<http://califia.highspeed.com/women/wof.htm>>.

³⁸⁷ Luesebrink, “Re: Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

³⁸⁸ Brink 46.

emphasis on “representation as absolute power”³⁸⁹ that parallels her allegation that “it is a perfect imitation of the world of the court.”³⁹⁰ For Lafayette, the visible “glamour and intrigue of court life”³⁹¹ is evidence of its reality; seeing is believing:

[n]ever has France *seen* such a *display* of courtly magnificence and manners...The king was chivalrous, nobly built, and amorously inclined; although his passion for Diane de Poitiers, the Duchesse de Valentinois, had begun more than twenty years earlier, it was none the less violent and he *advertised* it no less openly....Mme de Valentinois’s colours and monogram were to be *seen* everywhere and she took care to *adorn* herself no less brilliantly than...her granddaughter...”³⁹²

Luesebrink’s interpretation, instead, ascribes a fictional element to her account. In contrast to Lafayette’s linguistically-bound protagonist, Luesebrink’s lacemaker, although able to move beyond a life in a single medium (courtly language) continually negotiates the impossibility of adequate representation.

Opposing Lafayette’s desire to create a “perfect imitation” of a world, Luesebrink’s web fiction corresponds to Hutcheon’s postmodern thinking. The web fiction “does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretence of simplistic mimesis...Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality.”³⁹³ While Lafayette’s questioning of the adequacy of representation, (i.e. the conviction that language can offer stable meaning) is relevant to postmodern and hypertext fiction, there is a major difference between her

³⁸⁹ Françoise Meltzer, *Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 178.

³⁹⁰ Marie-Madeleine Lafayette, “To Lescheraine,” 13 April 1678, *Correspondance de Madame de Lafayette*, ed. André Beaunier, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) 63.

³⁹¹ Brink 46.

³⁹² Madame de Lafayette, *The Princesse de Cleves*, trans. Terence Cave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 4, emphasis added.

³⁹³ Linda Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988) 6.

hypothesising and Luesebrink's specific articulation of representation.³⁹⁴ Multi-mimesis for Luesebrink, like narrating for the Lacemaker, becomes a means of "creating a conspiracy between remembering [the past] and one's desire to move forward."³⁹⁵

Within Lafayette's framework, language is "inherently treacherous."³⁹⁶ Dissent can be articulated, but this demands a "profound retreat"³⁹⁷ from an aristocratic world manipulated by language to a place where there is no "danger of [being seen]."³⁹⁸ Luesebrink is also aware of the impossibility of total linguistic control (at least for women) and provides access, like Larsen and Fisher, to a wider representational system. Although one may "open up [a fictional past] to the present" and provide a marginalised character with access to an expressive aesthetic, any relationship to a signifying system, albeit expanded, remains problematic.³⁹⁹

It is precisely the (non)functioning of language which prompts certain characters in La Princesse de Clèves to seek other sign systems.⁴⁰⁰ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the novel is its use of what Brink calls "less obtrusive signs" to embark on a critique of the French court's acquiescence to the power of images.⁴⁰¹ As Gebauer and Wulf note, the fiction is "unusually rich in scenes constructed according to the mirror principle — an intercepted glance; an observed facial expression; a statement answered by a blush."⁴⁰²

The Princesse's relation to discourse, as Kristeva might say, is represented as an estranging encounter.⁴⁰³ Thus, in an effort to escape all signifying frameworks, the

³⁹⁴ See Brink 62.

³⁹⁵ Gail Scott, qtd. in Guertin, "The Matrix: Information Overload."

³⁹⁶ Brink 55.

³⁹⁷ Lafayette 156.

³⁹⁸ Lafayette 155. Brink sees this as "a sad comment on her world that a woman's only valid response to mail language should reside in silence," 60.

³⁹⁹ Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 59.

⁴⁰⁰ Brink 56.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Gebauer and Wulf 135. Brink makes the same observation, 56.

⁴⁰³ See Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

Princesse “retire[s] to a house of religion.”⁴⁰⁴ As Joan DeJean notes, “[t]he princess comes to realize that to control her story she must suppress it.”⁴⁰⁵ The telling of the Princesse’s narrative then, paradoxically relies on an absence and distance from a debilitating discourse of signs.⁴⁰⁶ This acknowledgement raises two points: since the Princesse’s language is that “of lack, of silence, of repression, of gaps” firstly, she cannot guide the telling of her own story and, secondly, the fictional world is relegated to an aristocratic sphere that employs a particular kind of language.⁴⁰⁷ Although the Princesse’s story obliquely seeps out chiefly via a heterodiegetic narrator, the narrative remains bound to court life and a restrictive “hegemonic interpretive framework.”⁴⁰⁸

This recognition, however, depends on a kind of exposure. The Princesse’s narrative, developed through a correlation between mimetic language and subsequent linguistic distance, indicates Lafayette’s problematisation of the intersection of subjectivity and language. The Princesse’s position, then, like that of Kristeva’s *sujet-en-procès*, comprises vulnerability as well as a need to master. Lafayette concludes that the Princesse must enter a “linguistic life” in order to appear as a (public) subject — even if that means her narrative is told by another. The emphasis here is that the Princesse cannot bring her own linguistic being into reality; she relies on others and their language to represent her.⁴⁰⁹ Subjectivity, as Cavarero argues is the “paradox of Ulysses,” depends on another’s narration.⁴¹⁰ Here then, both the narration of subjectivity and a mimetic aesthetic are bound up in language. As a result, Lafayette’s “perfect imitation of court life” depends, as Genette maintains, on an illusion of

⁴⁰⁴ Lafayette 155.

⁴⁰⁵ Joan DeJean, “Lafayette’s Ellipses: The Privileges of Anonymity,” *An Inimitable Example: The Case for The Princesse de Clèves*, ed. Patrick Henry (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993) 66.

⁴⁰⁶ Brink makes a similar observation, 60.

⁴⁰⁷ DeJean 51.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas Dipiero, *Dangerous Truths & Criminal Passions: The Evolution of the French Novel, 1569-1791* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1992) 200.

⁴⁰⁹ For Brink this is seen as a positive as “the narrator corrects its abuses in the narrated world,” 61.

⁴¹⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. with an introduction by Paul A. Kottman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 17.

mimesis “for this unique and sufficient reason: narration...is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating. Unless, of course, the object signified (narrated) is itself language.”⁴¹¹ If mimesis in “novel writing” is always already “an event of writing,”⁴¹² then Luesebrink’s web fiction, like Larsen and Fisher’s, with its use of sound, (coloured) text and image, corroborates this formulation and takes it to a new level.

The configuration of Luesebrink’s multi-mimetic aesthetic might at first seem conventional: in one instance, there is an almost Lafayette-like attention to detail; in another, there is a certain kind of postmodern assessment of the adequacy of representation which “consciously sets out to recombine and re-mediate in a way that questions our assumptions.”⁴¹³ While Luesebrink’s hypertext revisioning of the mimetic aesthetic is neither “classical” nor postmodern, it is distinctly situated in “the hypertextual architecture of the WWW.”⁴¹⁴ There are three levels to Luesebrink’s distinctive refashioning of mimesis:

at the largest level, [the internet] allowed me to enter the space of the old text (now digitized...) — and propose another aspect of the narrative. It does not seem to me that one could really enter into the story in quite the same way in print — print on paper being “closed” in that sense. The second part of the fluidity of representation is also made possible at a more fine-grained level through both the coding of linked screens and through the use of other media objects (sound, image, narrative structure, and navigation behavior) [sic]. There is a third level at which hypertext allows

⁴¹¹ G rard Genette, *Figures III*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 185.

⁴¹² Andrew Gibson, “Ranc re and the ‘Limit’ of Realism,” 29th March 2001, Royal Holloway, University of London, 22 May 2004 <www.rhul.ac.uk/english/staff/a.gibson/>.

⁴¹³ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

me to spatialize the 'imagined world.'⁴¹⁵

In this light, Luesebrink's multi-mimetic strategy, much like Irigaray's "double syntax" which puts forward "an alternative vision of women's subjectivity," becomes a triple syntax, intertwining representation, signifying structures (images, text, sound) and location (both spatial and societal).⁴¹⁶

Indeed, "challenging the fixity of traditional texts [and philosophical thought]" is a "hopeful act...and liberatory for women."⁴¹⁷ As Nancy K. Miller argues, "the plots of women's literature are not about 'life' and solutions...They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction. - Mme de Lafayette quietly...italicize[s] by the demaximization of [her] heroine[']s text the difficulty of curing plot of life, and life of *certain* plots."⁴¹⁸ As Luesebrink says:

in the original "romance," as in many tales of that era, the only characters of importance were the aristocratic personae (thus no lacemaker). It was typical of the time, however, for women of the status of the Princess to travel with a compliment [sic] of servants, including the woman or girl who would "finish" the lace on an outfit; usually this attendant would have had training in lacemaking [sic] as a child. Thus, while there was no lacemaker in the original story, it seemed likely that there *would* have been a lacemaker in the imagined universe of the story.⁴¹⁹

In The Lacemaker, Luesebrink braids together a triadic narrative consciousness: an intersection of voices (subjectivities as well as narrators), music, and images. The

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ For Braidotti's Irigaray, the "double syntax" legitimizes and actively encourages difference "as the condition of possibility for an alternative vision of women's subjectivity." Braidotti, Metamorphoses 26.

⁴¹⁷ Luesebrink, "Re: The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

⁴¹⁸ Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," An Inimitable Example: The Case for The Princesse de Clèves, ed. Patrick Henry (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993) 21, emphasis added.

⁴¹⁹ Luesebrink, "Re: The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004, original emphasis.

heterodiegetic voice represents, in a way, dispersed fragments of the past (i.e. Lafayette's fiction), while the autodiegetic voice articulates what Retallack sees as a feminist aim: it provides "an invitation to the other's discourse."⁴²⁰ The images, cloudy and undefined graphic representations of "19th Century literary stereotypes of women"⁴²¹ have been modified and manipulated so that they question the precision and supposed accuracy of the heterodiegetic narrator, ergo the original text. Furthermore, the aim of multi-mimesis to both show and tell the Lacemaker's narrative corresponds to the use of music: indeed, it is audible only in Elys's autodiegetically narrated scenes. Besides asserting the need for this type of representational tactic, the music, at times lamenting, subverts Elys's own hopes for a positive future at the nunnery — a "safe place. Where one does not need sight."⁴²² This technique allows Luesebrink to craft a web fiction which includes both a narrative and theoretical reflections on mimesis. While Lafayette's fiction centres on mimesis as made possible through language (writing), Luesebrink's web fiction, where word, image, and music combine and disperse in order to "remediate the past and communicate with [others] in the present,"⁴²³ demonstrates its own capacity to represent Elys's story. The Lacemaker is the multi-mimetic recovery of a previously eclipsed female existence, but it does not claim to provide a "perfect imitation of [a] world" as does La Princesse de Clèves.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Retallack, "Re:Thinking:Literary:Feminism" 344-377.

⁴²¹ Luesebrink, "Re: More Questions Regarding The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 24 July 2004.

⁴²² Luesebrink, "Nunnery," The Lacemaker.

⁴²³ Luesebrink, "Re: More Questions Regarding The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 24 July 2004.

⁴²⁴ Lafayette, "To Lescheraine" 63.

Luesebrink's version declares itself as a "double-true fiction."⁴²⁵ The oxymoronic phrase suggests that any kind of transparent depiction would be incongruous with Elys' recovered reality. With court music⁴²⁶ tinkling in the background, the reader is not drawn into a courtly scene but is immediately faced with choices:

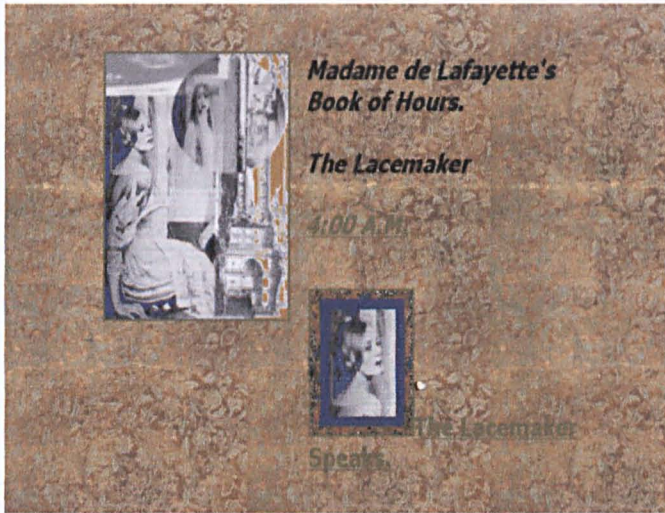


Fig. 3.20 Luesebrink, "In the Cabinet," The Lacemaker.

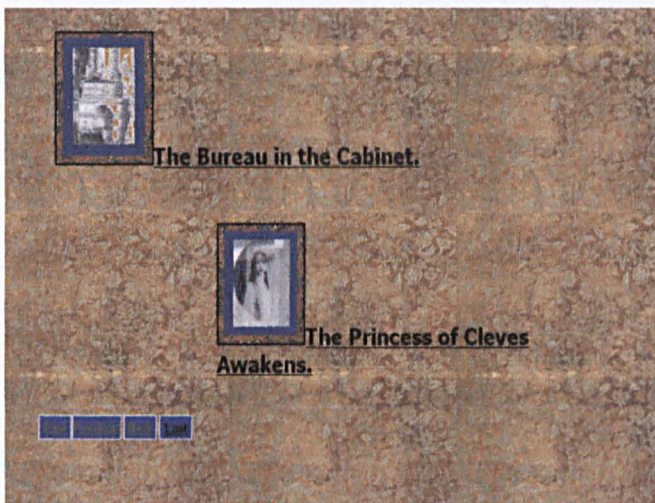


Fig. 3.21 Luesebrink, "In the Cabinet," The Lacemaker.

The reader can choose to follow one of the links accompanied by images — the lacemaker gazing into a mirror with a reflection of the princess staring back at her, a portrait of the lacemaker, a desk, or a blurry mirror-image of the princess — or choose

⁴²⁵ Luesebrink, "Author's Note," The Lacemaker.

⁴²⁶ "The music is a 16th Century air for Harp and Flute - Midi version." Luesebrink, "The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 10 Nov. 2004.

from buttons which point to first, previous, next, or last nodes. From the outset, then, the abundance of choices at the reader's disposal and the combination of sound, text, and images, are mimetic of the ways in which Elys the Lacemaker can now tell her own situated story. Or rather, as Cavarero might suggest, the abundance of entries into the multiple narratives illustrates both Elys' "desire...for the tale of [her] own stor[ies]" and Luesebrink's correlative representation.⁴²⁷

Luesebrink's dialogue with a certain kind of history problematises a Jamesonian thinking in which all things postmodern relate to the historical past primarily as a crucial absence, objects become signifiers with no referents.⁴²⁸ As Guertin notes, particular web works "us[e] historical context as a way of writing [themselves] free of old boundaries, of leaping out of the predestined, restrictive historical framework into a new future."⁴²⁹ This is the space in which Luesebrink sets her re-presentation of the "Clèves tale."⁴³⁰ Multi-mimesis in this web fiction is enacted as a dialogue between representation and the web fiction's signifying strategies (sound, image, and text), a move which entwines representation and its online medium from the beginning. For Luesebrink, theories of representation and becoming subjectivities share an acute awareness of potential which allows for a Braidotti-like "renewal" of both signifying structures and female identities.⁴³¹

As a result, the history which Luesebrink is interested in presenting is the imagined history of the Lacemaker which means that these representations are politicised. In fact, Luesebrink admits, "it seems to me that the very act of interrupting the 'accepted' narrative of the past to interject a different point of view is a political act

⁴²⁷ Cavarero 32.

⁴²⁸ See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 6–10.

⁴²⁹ Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

⁴³⁰ Luesebrink, "The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 3 Oct. 2004.

⁴³¹ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 8.

in itself.”⁴³² The Lacemaker significantly interrogates the representation of subjectivity in ways the earlier version could not. Although Lafayette’s fiction plays with “the beautifully precise vagueness of...language” in order to represent the Princesse de Clèves’s problematic relationship to court discourse and therefore to her identity, the web version translates an ellipse in the source text (the lack of a lacemaker) as a means for making present what was absent.⁴³³ As de Lauretis explains, “[t]he project of feminist [media]...is not so much ‘to make visible the invisible,’ as the saying goes, or to destroy vision altogether, as to construct another (object of) vision and the conditions of visibility for a different social subject.”⁴³⁴ Luesebrink’s mosaic of visual, textual, and audio devices transposes Lafayette’s invisible and inaudible female character into a contemporary arena thereby performing a critical and “non-nostalgic” look to the past which Braidotti sees as central to any cyberfeminism.⁴³⁵

“Hypermedia, then, allowed [Luesebrink] to re-enter the world of the story and add a character who illuminates, however briefly, a few of the shadows that conceal the difficult position of women in the past.”⁴³⁶ Images work as part of Luesebrink’s “historic” representation which allows Elys to “spea[k] as a woman, that is to say a subject emerging from a history of oppression and exclusion.”⁴³⁷ Where Lafayette’s fiction is unable to accommodate representations of anyone other than linguistically astute aristocrats, Luesebrink’s re-creation sets out to represent a version of a specific history.

From the opening, the images Luesebrink employs explicitly foreground the lack of precise boundaries — between modes of representation as well as between

⁴³² Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

⁴³³ Alter qtd. in Brink47.

⁴³⁴ De Lauretis, Alice Doesn’t 67-68.

⁴³⁵ Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism with a Difference.”

⁴³⁶ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

⁴³⁷ Although Braidotti makes this comment in reference to herself it seems particularly appropriate in the Lacemaker’s case. Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism with a Difference.”

subjectivities. The first image in the node entitled “In the Cabinet” (see fig. 3.22) places two women opposite each other. One woman, finely dressed, hair coiled on top of her purposely poised head averts her gaze from a mirror. The image in the mirror, instead, reveals a young woman with her long hair cascading over her shoulders and clothed only in a nightgown. With the original narrative in mind, one might imagine the latter as the lacemaker, but here it is the Princess⁴³⁸ who sadly gazes from within the mirror. Luesebrink points out that she “wanted the two women to be mirror images of one another — so much alike, yet so set apart by the difference in their stations.”⁴³⁹ This is a narrative, then, of seeing differently within circumscribed parameters and as such functions as a riposte to the former fiction.

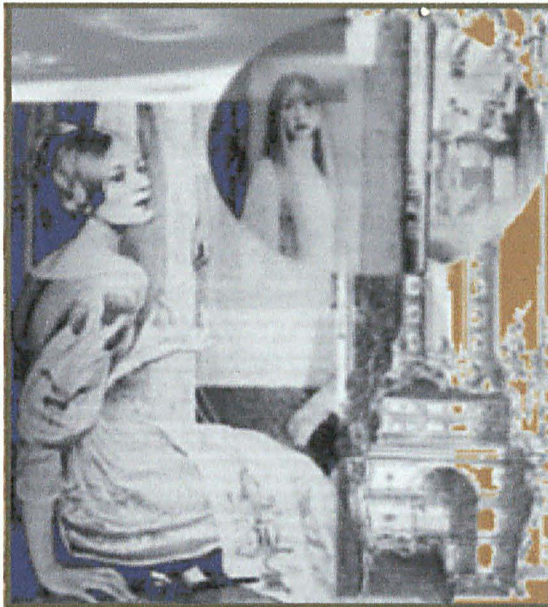


Fig. 3.22 Luesebrink, “In the Cabinet,” The Lacemaker.

Maintaining another link with The Lacemaker’s predecessor, Luesebrink’s revision of the Baudrillardian scene places the Princess within a frame (of a mirror).⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ To avoid confusion, the French spelling of *Princesse* is reserved for references to Lafayette’s character while *Mademoiselle* and the English spelling of *Princess* refer to Luesebrink’s protagonist.

⁴³⁹ Luesebrink, “Re: More Questions Regarding The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 24 July 2004. Note that mirrors correspondingly serve a function in The Princesse de Clèves: “...both lovers [Mme. de Clèves and M. de Nemours] regard their respective Others in a mirror. M. de Nemours knows that he is loved as an image, and Mme. de Clèves is aware that she manifests her love to an image. Their love takes place in a mirror; their relationship is one between images. The two mirrors stand opposite each other and reflect the Other.” Gebauer and Wulf, 139.

⁴⁴⁰ The *Princesse* bares her love to a *copy* of a portrait of the Duc de Nemours while unknowingly being

Elys averts her gaze (unlike Lafayette's *Princesse*), and the reader takes on the Duc de Nemours's previous scopic position. The concept of the passive gaze in The Princesse de Clèves is contrasted in the web fiction with a rejection of the role of passive reflector. Representation, in the former fiction, is powerful enough to "blind" the *Princesse* to her reality (i.e. the presence of the Duc) through its seductive power.⁴⁴¹ As if aware of the previous *Princesse*, whose fervent stare succeeds in gradually effacing what was meant to be a specular act, Elys seems determined to ignore representation (i.e. the Princess in the mirror) and in so doing not risk effacing her autonomous identity.

In the node "The Lacemaker's Story," the multi-mimetic devices corroborate Luesebrink's premise that rewriting the past is a political act. The sad notes of a song called "Lament" accompany the background of burnished floral wall-paper. The background is reminiscent of Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper in which the main protagonist "is all the time trying to climb through [the wallpaper]. But nobody could climb through that pattern — it strangles so."⁴⁴² The wallpaper, coupled with the music in this node suggests the difficulty of representing a character like Elys. Moreover, when the reader finally hears Elys's own clear voice, the portrait amid her narrative is hazy and shadowed (see fig 3.23). Here the portrait, as in Disappearing Rain, seems to appear as a chiasmic device: Elys the Lacemaker first represented clearly, now blurred and hazy. This visual move establishes Elys's becoming subjectivity as akin to a life which "follow[s] paths we cannot know the end of."⁴⁴³ Furthermore, this reciprocal movement enables Luesebrink to concomitantly affirm and question representation: where conventionally a portrait seems to suggest a holistic view, this web instantiation

admired by the Duc, who himself is observed by a spy. See Lafayette 125, emphasis added. Brink also makes this point, 57.

⁴⁴¹ Brink 58.

⁴⁴² Charlotte Perkins Gillman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing, eds, Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell, 3rd ed. (Orlando: Harcourt, 1997) 169.

⁴⁴³ Luesebrink, "Blind Love," The Lacemaker.

reveals no such perception.



Fig. 3.23 Luesebrink, “The Lacemaker’s Story,” The Lacemaker.

If, for Braidotti, “[n]omadic thinking is the project that consists in expressing and naming different figurations...of decentred subjectivity,”⁴⁴⁴ then Luesebrink’s multi-mimetic impulse consists not only of expressing different (con)figurations of subjectivities but of blurring them as well. Where Lafayette stresses the Princesse de Clèves’s partial access to a specific kind of language which “reflects the way in which nobility is to be *represented*,”⁴⁴⁵ Luesebrink emphasises Elys’s multilingual capability; she is fluent in verbal, visual and musical communication. Paradoxically, as the Lacemaker’s narrative develops textually and audibly, the “visual enigmas” break down and become murky; mimetic both of her obscured past and her worsening sight (see fig. 3.24):⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 33.

⁴⁴⁵ Meltzer 187, emphasis original.

⁴⁴⁶ Laura Mulvey, “Magnificent Obsession,” Parachute 42 (1986): 7.

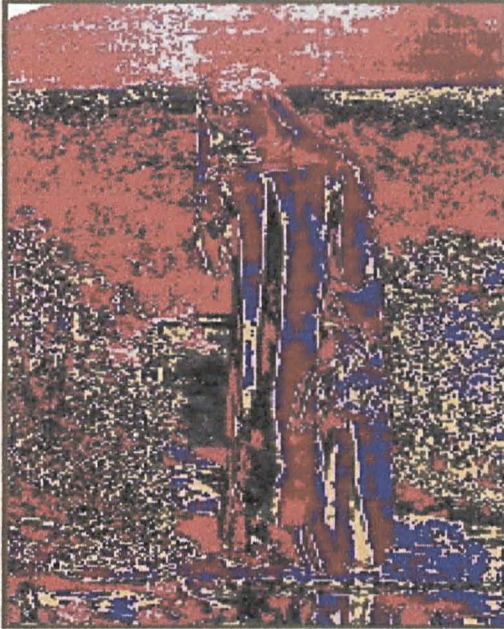


Fig. 3.24 Luesebrink, “Nunnery,” The Lacemaker.

Luesebrink notes that experimenting with new forms produces new ways of looking which subsequently necessitate new forms of showing and telling.⁴⁴⁷ She explains this process as “thinking through a story/narrative in a double-language — as Kate Hayles would call it, ‘coding the signifier.’”⁴⁴⁸ Manoeuvring within these new story-telling potentials, Luesebrink develops “a different story with the same material” and also creates a third character — a hybrid Princess and Lacemaker together.

Although the beginning of the web fiction suggests that the Princess and Elys are two distinct characters the lacemaker is already multiple. Born to the “young Viscount of Chartres” (evoking Lafayette’s novel) and his concubine Cinder-ella (suggesting “elements of Perrault’s Cinderella”) Elys is a “layering of historic interpretations.”⁴⁴⁹ Unlike the *Princesse de Clèves* who “has no life, no meaning, outside of the representation she represents,”⁴⁵⁰ Elys is a parody of stereotypical portraits of women. This move enables the articulation of a certain kind of subversive

⁴⁴⁷ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 10 Nov. 2004. Note that “electronic hypertexts are bilingual, written in code as well as language.” See also Katherine Hayles, “Print is Flat, Code is Deep: The Importance of a Media-Specific Analysis,” Poetics Today 25.1 (2004): 74.

⁴⁴⁸ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 10 Nov. 2004.

⁴⁴⁹ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004, Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 13 June 2004.

⁴⁵⁰ Meltzer 188.

representation.

Throughout The Lacemaker the perspective is not singular but multiple, alternating points of view from Elys, to the Princess, to the narrators. Accompanying the varying narratorial stances a switch in subjectivity emerges: links which declare that “[t]he Lacemaker [s]peaks” actually exhibit covert, extra- and autodiegetic narrators. Similarly when the homodiegetic narrator, referring to Lafayette’s Princesse, rhetorically asks “[w]hat profiteth a woman who should save her life but lose her good name?” it is Elys who responds. These examples not only suggest that female subjectivities are composed of “contradictory, polemical and important” difference but that there is a consistent awareness of the complexity involved in articulating certain women’s specific realities within what may be seen as an androcentric culture.⁴⁵¹

But while Elys desires a more authentic expression of individual identity — “a fuller sense of the depth and resonance of [herself]”⁴⁵² — her quest is tempered by a slowly enveloping blindness. Elys’s visibility appears to come only with her own lack of sight suggesting that “any perspective has blind spots, and a certain degree of blindness is necessary.”⁴⁵³ For Elys, visibility and visibility are to be regarded with caution, as conditions which prevent her adoption into the Viscount de Chartres’ family, since “[of] all his children none *resembled* him but his natural ones.”⁴⁵⁴ Thus, as Mulvey would have it, being seen and how one looks (actively or passively) determines the circumstances of Elys’s existence, as with Larsen’s Anna, Fisher’s Tracey, and even, Lafayette’s Princesse.

In The Lacemaker, Elys widens the gap between representation and reality in distinct ways. One drastic attempt to destabilise images is not to deny their existence,

⁴⁵¹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 148.

⁴⁵² Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

⁴⁵³ Liv Hausken, “Coda: Textual Theory and Blind Spots in Media Studies,” Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) 391.

⁴⁵⁴ Luesebrink, “Of Noble Blood,” The Lacemaker, emphasis added.

but to not see them at all. Elys, dreaming of “love [and] longing,” wakes momentarily to spy “the stars finishing the last pattern on the loom before the sun banishes them.”⁴⁵⁵ Resolving to “never dream again,” Elys is sequestered in “darkness.”⁴⁵⁶ However, because Elys cannot see does not mean that she does not remain aware of her world. Given her multi-mimetic environment Elys employs other senses with which to “read” the world around her. She “could feel [the Princess] grow frail and sick” and is aware of the “sweetness his [Duc de Nemours] touch might bring.”⁴⁵⁷ Although Elys’s other senses seem to recuperate any sense of (physical) loss which her “affliction” might bring, a paradox, similar to the Princesse’s representational double-bind, pervades Ely’s experience of reality.⁴⁵⁸ While she maintains that it is only in “a nunnery...[that] one does not need sight,”⁴⁵⁹ Elys reveals that a certain kind of blindness is intrinsic to a subjectivity which is built on past formations. As Luesebrink confirms, “the blindness is definitely a comment on how we see...the ‘classic’ view of reality.”⁴⁶⁰

It is precisely this paradoxical condition which defines Elys’s existence. According to Kristeva, language, like other signifying systems, is the unknown that lies just beyond one’s line of vision.⁴⁶¹ Similarly, Ely’s narrative is inextricable from the limits of vision: “she will never *see* the reality of her prison.”⁴⁶² The web fiction configuration as a mode which contradictorily offers multi-mimetic representation while questioning it reminds readers that this world, unlike that of Lafayette’s court, is not the whole story. The theme of blindness is relevant to both La Princesse de Clèves and The Lacemaker. In the novel one might say that the Princesse is metaphorically blind to the techniques of specific court language in addition to simulating blindness in response to

⁴⁵⁵ Luesebrink, “The Princess Awakens,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁵⁶ Luesebrink, “Elys,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁵⁷ Luesebrink, “Blind Love,” The Lacemaker, emphasis added.

⁴⁵⁸ Luesebrink, “Of the Darkness Ahead,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁵⁹ Luesebrink, “Nunnery,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁶⁰ Luesebrink, “The Blind Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 19 Jan. 2005.

⁴⁶¹ See Julia Kristeva, “The System and the Speaking Subject,” The Kristeva Reader, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 30-31.

⁴⁶² Luesebrink, “The Blind Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 19 Jan. 2005, emphasis added.

the Duc's theft of her portrait. According to Meltzer the Princesse "cannot say what she means...cannot see what she has seen...because she...must be as mute, blind, static, and lifeless as her portrait. She not only represents her name and her portrait; she must...imitate both."⁴⁶³ Alternatively, the web fiction presents the main protagonist as physically blind. With the emphasis on a lack of sight it is all the more interesting to note the "plethora, almost an overload" of visual images and sound.⁴⁶⁴ Thus there is a juxtaposition of relations between representational structures, in this case the narrative which denies visuality (via Ely's blindness) and the pictorial which demands otherwise. In other words, there is a dislocation between signifying structures which succeeds in questioning singular notions of female identity and representation.

An astute reader will note that the initial image which places the lacemaker and the princess as reflections of each other is the only image which exists without a frame and is the only which appears distinct and unclouded. The clarity of the image alludes to Elys's initial visual acuity, which declines once she has been forced to part with her half-sister's (the princess's) company and, therefore, the past. Luesebrink's web fiction continually affirms the importance of maintaining a link with the past as a way of imagining a history of women as "multifaceted complexities."⁴⁶⁵ Additionally the lack of a frame suggests two other possible interpretive strategies. On the one hand, if the two women/subjectivities are together — i.e. if their identities are able to "fuse" — their multiple subjectivities remain outside of a certain kind of oppressive discourse.⁴⁶⁶ On the other hand, this portrait is not a simple case of *mise en abîme*. There is no frame, thus no picture within a picture; rather this is a statement of ambiguity between levels of representation and complex subjectivities.

What marks this blending of identities most thoroughly are the illustrations

⁴⁶³ Meltzer 188.

⁴⁶⁴ Brew, "Through the Looking Glass" 99.

⁴⁶⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 170.

⁴⁶⁶ Luesebrink, "Re: The Lacemaker," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 10 Nov. 2004

accompanying each subsequent node. When “the princess speaks” a portrait-style image of a nun appears as an emblem at the top of the node:



Fig. 3.23 Luesebrink, “The Princess Speaks,” The Lacemaker.

Appearing to pray over the ensuing dialogue between the Princess and Elys, this image seems to confirm that, if seen as separate identities, the two women “are imperfect vessels.”⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, the image itself demonstrates a “reworking” symbolising the Lacemaker’s worsening “physical” sight, while, on another level, it points to her evolving insight.⁴⁶⁸ The background is a compilation and superimposition of “stereotypes (Jezebel, Cinderella, the Nun in the Garden)” which, transformed and altered are “three or four times removed from the original.”⁴⁶⁹ The relationship between foreground and background is one of incompatibility. Comparably, when “the lacemaker speaks,” the image that accompanies her now separate narrative is just as smudged and obscure (see fig. 3.26), indicating, once again, that plural selves might provide a way out of confining representational constructs. In this context, the indeterminacy of the images parallels the indeterminacy of the Lacemaker’s and the Princess’s becoming subjectivities which cannot be unproblematically represented. In

⁴⁶⁷ Luesebrink, “The Princess Speaks,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁶⁸ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 13 June 2004.

⁴⁶⁹ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 13 June 2004.

this way images function subversively, to conceal or render illegible characters who attempt to display an autonomous and static identity.



Fig. 3.24 Luesebrink, “The Lacemaker Speaks,” The Lacemaker.

A specific politics of representation is at stake in Luesebrink’s web fiction. The final visible result, however, acts as a reminder that any representation, even multi-modal, is not without complications. Elys is a hollow and triply “framed” identity — confined to darkness, to inadequate representation, and to a solitary existence.



Fig. 3.25 Luesebrink, “Endpaper,” The Lacemaker.

The complicated multi-mimetic strategy through which the identities of the Lacemaker and the Princess combine and connect is instantly thwarted when Elys’s blindness draws her into a realm of singularity. In this reading instance Elys cannot

steer the fluidity of representation in spite of her “good character.”⁴⁷⁰ Without the Princess’s narrative and with a particular blindness to a specific literary history, Elys’s corporeal decomposition symbolises her “preclu[sion] from ‘seeing’ a larger, more inclusive view.”⁴⁷¹ The multi-mimetic depiction, then, performs a feedback loop, in that the concept of multi-mimesis continually seeks to restore Elys’s sense of sight whose loss is in fact multi-mimesis’s own constitutive condition. On the one hand, Luesebrink performs a “challenge to the fixity of [identities].”⁴⁷² On the other hand, to affirm otherness is more “complicated than assuming a fused identity.”⁴⁷³ Hence the web fiction’s inescapably dynamic relationship with multi-mimesis.

The configuration of mimesis employed in Lafayette’s The Princesse de Clèves reveals an aristocratic world where the laws of representation are an index of a lack — a lack of language, of sight, but primarily a lack of adequacy of representational systems.⁴⁷⁴ Aware of this lack, Luesebrink’s interpretation perceives the literary past as an object for intervention. The world of The Lacemaker, therefore, emerges in the gap between the ability to represent and the recognition of its impossibility. One might say that what the language of Lafayette’s text mimetically evokes is multi-mimetically announced in Luesebrink’s web fiction. Thus, through its own critical commentary of signifying practices multi-mimesis becomes a representation of the historical obscurity of women: it contains what was unrepresentable within representation.

3.5 Summary and Next Steps

What becomes clear when reading Larsen, Fisher, and Luesebrink are the myriad different points of departure each author employs in her task of simultaneously

⁴⁷⁰ Luesebrink, “Of the Darkness Ahead,” The Lacemaker.

⁴⁷¹ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 19 Jan. 2005.

⁴⁷² Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 13 June 2004.

⁴⁷³ Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 10 Nov. 2004.

⁴⁷⁴ See Brink 55–57.

questioning and invoking representation. Though each author chooses a different tack, they share a similar concentration on the relationship between representation and becoming subjectivities. The interrelation and alternation between the various multi-mimetic modes alongside the emergence of each becoming subjectivity acts as evidence of the need to argue for a different way of reading online works that allows the medium's specificity for multimodality to converge with narrative and feminist reasoning. To this end, the web fictions read here facilitate the introduction and development of feminist web fiction critique. An attempt has been made to identify the inadequacies of a new media approach that extends from a print framework rather than a media specific analysis as Hayles posits. As is the case with Landow, Bolter, and Joyce, gender and modes – albeit to a lesser extent – play unclear roles in the midst of a version of hypertext theory that seems to be superimposed on existing literary and theoretical frameworks. In fact the multimodality that becomes “easy, usual, natural” in the online environment has important implications for subjectivity and the representation of narrative in general.⁴⁷⁵ It merits critical attention not only because the multimodal refashioning of mimesis at work in the fictions explored in this study does not attempt “to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real” as Bolter and Grusin argue.⁴⁷⁶ Rather, as has been demonstrated, Larsen, Fisher, and Luesebrink share an understanding of representation that constantly questions and transforms it specifically through the medium in which it is instantiated. The next chapter will move from the analysis of multi-mimetic subjectivities to the interpretation of multi-mimetic representations of temporality.

⁴⁷⁵ Gunther Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004) 5.

⁴⁷⁶ J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) 53.

4.0 Fluid Temporalities

Memory has become rhizomatic and roots itself no longer in the word but in the disorientation of new visual and temporal perspectives for the Information Age.

Carolyn Guertin

Even if the linear temporality of Newtonian mechanics is disputed, more contemporary representations of time by topological closed curves still rely on geometrical and fundamentally spatial models for their coherence.

Elizabeth Grosz

New time-based interactive media have in turn introduced supplementary questions about perception, visibility, and performance.

Rita Raley

The previous chapter outlined some of the ways in which particular web fiction writers have turned their attention to the multi-mimetic representation of becoming subjectivities. In the work of various authors crafting born digital works, this has led to a concurrent questioning regarding the conception, construction, and navigation of temporality. From a literary and critical point of view, temporality emerges as a significant issue for both writers and readers of web narratives as a corollary, “time-subjectivity-representation,” where temporality appears as a fundamental requisite for the representation of becoming subjectivities. In the web fictions read in this chapter, the relations that help shape each subjectivity or, more precisely, the representation of subjectivity, are contingent on temporality.

4.1 A Trajectory of Time: From Print to Online

While hypertext’s relationship to and construction of space has been discussed with some frequency, there has not, so far, been any sustained study focused in particular on web fictions written by women and temporality. In an attempt to fill this theoretical gap, this chapter will employ three web fictions as exemplars of a particular kind of multi-mimetic time which represents subjectivities through “liquid”

unfoldings.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, the objective of the present study is an attempt to trace the theme of time as an issue resolutely tied to conceptions and representation of subjectivity. Time, in fictions like that of Claire Dinsmore, Ingrid Ankerson, Megan Sapnar and Marjorie Luesebrink, arises out of multi-linear movements and multi-mimetic representations. The result is a conception of representation that acknowledges flux as a basic element of becoming subjectivity. Subjectivity and narrative emerge and form along co-present “neighboring moments”⁴⁷⁷ that are contingent and experiential rather than strictly linear. What is brought into focus are the conditions of each experience and how it is constituted; each fiction here emerges as it is created/read.⁴⁷⁸ Temporality in these exemplar web fictions develops in “the realms of flows and vectors and sensory signals”⁴⁷⁹ and remains a dynamic process.

As Stacy Burton notes, the notion of time and its role in narrative “remains vague; generally relying on an unwritten premise that time is a unitary, explicable phenomenon.”⁴⁸⁰ In formalist criticism, according to Burton, time is something that can be dissected and tracked as Genette does (see fig. 4.1), in order to impose a linear “order” on works where chronology is “neither clear nor coherent.”⁴⁸¹ Pertinent to the web fictions examined in this chapter is Burton’s critique that structures of the formalist kind ignore, among other things, the “relationship between temporality, narrativity and experience.”⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁶ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁴⁷⁷ Stephanie Strickland, “Writing the Virtual: Eleven Dimensions of E-Poetry,” Leonardo Electronic Almanac, 14. 05 – 06, (September 2006): 4, 10 October 2007, <http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n05-06/sstrickland.asp>. 4.

⁴⁷⁸ This is Irigaray’s productive mimesis, her “parler-femme” which is theory and practice. Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One cf.

⁴⁷⁹ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms,” Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics.

⁴⁸⁰ Stacy Burton, “Bakhtin, Temporality, and Modern Narrative: Writing the Whole Triumphant Murderous Unstoppable Chute,” Comparative Literature, 48.1. (Winter 1996): 42. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0010-4124%28199624%2948%3A1%3C39%3ABTAMNW%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>>. For a detailing of the ambiguities surrounding time in fiction see Ursula K. Heise, Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) Chapter 1.

⁴⁸¹ Genette, Narrative Discourse 90.

⁴⁸² Burton 42.

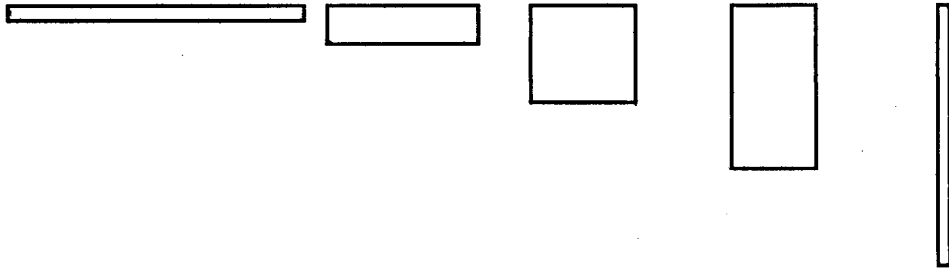


Fig. 4.1 For Genette “Each rectangle is a scene. The width of the rectangles indicates how much story time they cover, the height of the rectangles indicates how many pages the scene lasts. The gaps between the rectangles indicate increasingly long ellipses: unnarrated periods of story time.” William Gillespie, “Structural Translations between Literature and Music,” *Spineless Books*, 20, February 2002, 30 September 2007 <<http://www.spinelessbooks.com/theory/music/index.html>>.

The web fictions here challenge frameworks like Genette’s just as the earlier work by Brossard and Woolf attempts to “undo” linear trajectories but specifically as a way of “dismantle[ing] traditional ‘masculine’ literary structures.”⁴⁸³ For Brossard, “repetition, oscillation, spiralling and floating are [the] four movements of narrative”⁴⁸⁴ which opens up “new spaces of enunciation”⁴⁸⁵ and therefore, representation. The world in *Picture Theory* sees “time flow[ing]” bi-directionally “like information in optical fibre.”⁴⁸⁶ Time, in particular feminist texts, becomes more than an organising principle of plot or a structural element. It emerges as an axiomatic device; it constitutes subjectivity. Brossard’s interpretation of time is akin to Guertin’s quantum time which “crumble[s] the foundations of linear narrative” in order to perform a temporality that is “liquid and registers on a sensory, especially visual, plane.”⁴⁸⁷ “The hyper-realism of words transforms the body/the body unfolds DNA. The long spiral dissolves time. Each second is no more than an image. I open the book. Sequence of the instant...”⁴⁸⁸

It appears that, at least according to Guertin and Luesebrink and as demonstrated

⁴⁸³ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

⁴⁸⁴ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁴⁸⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 208.

⁴⁸⁶ Nicole Brossard, *Picture Theory*, trans. Barbara Godard (Montreal: Guernica, 1991) 97.

⁴⁸⁷ Guertin, “The Unfold: Immersion,” *Quantum Feminist Mnemotechnics*.

⁴⁸⁸ Brossard, *Picture Theory* 152.

by Brossard, there is a common interest in rethinking and performing possibilities of time that grows out of a critique or problematisation of linear or singular structures. Although each employs a different vocabulary, they recognise the need to articulate these conceptions of fluidity and simultaneity however there is a concurrent awareness that these attempts might enact the very stasis from which they seek to extricate themselves.

Indifferent to the cautioning explicit in Guertin and Burton, certain hypertext theorists rely upon a framework that subsumes temporal aspects into a wider logic or geometry (as Genette might have it) of the structural that separates fictions into fundamental elements while anchoring or freezing them in space. Robert Kendall explains that it is “comforting to endow hypertext with a virtual physicality via metaphors of pages, paths, and webs.”⁴⁸⁹ In fact, recourse to spatial metaphors “can help you get around the problems of temporality.”⁴⁹⁰

To a large extent hypertext theory approaches hypertexts of the “Eastgate School”⁴⁹¹ as topologies to be spatially mapped.⁴⁹² In Hypertext 2.0 Landow explores the idea of spatiality as a way of writing and as a way of reading. For him, one of the most significant aspects of hypertext is the “orientation information...necessary for finding one’s place.”⁴⁹³ Similarly, what Joyce values most about hypertext writing is “its depth, its sense of space.”⁴⁹⁴ Joyce insists that

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Kendall, “Time: The Final Frontier,” SIGWEB Newsletter, 8.3 (Oct. 1999): 8.

⁴⁹⁰ Scott Rettberg, “Chat Transcript: August 19, 2000,” Electronic Literature Organization, 19 August 2000, 2 October 2007 <<http://eliterature.org/chats/081900.html>>.

⁴⁹¹ Stuart Moulthrop, “Traveling in the Breakdown Lane: A Principle of Resistance for Hypertext,” Mosaic, 28 (1995): 58. There is a general view that the Eastgate School (both writers and publishers) “believe in the death of print,” Kathryn Cramer, “Hypertext Horizons: An Interview with Kathryn Cramer,” The Write Stuff, Alt X, 15 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.altx.com/interviews/kathryn.cramer.html>>.

⁴⁹² David Ciccoricco notes a similar move to spatiality in Marie-Laure Ryan’s approach which “demonstrates the conflation of ‘semantic space’ with the structural topology of links and nodes.” Dave Ciccoricco, “Network Vistas: Folding the Cognitive Map,” Image & Narrative 8. May 2004, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/issue08/daveciccoricco.htm>>.

⁴⁹³ Landow, Hypertext 2.0 212-214.

⁴⁹⁴ Michael Joyce, qtd in Karlin Lillington, “Ulysses in Net-town: On Bloomsday, A Portrait of James Joyce as a Young Web-head,” Salon, 16 June 1998, 22 Sept. 2006 <<http://archive.salon.com/21st/feature/>>

electronic text can never be completed; at best its closure maps point on point until time is real and the text stays itself, becoming print. But when a point suddenly fails to map onto itself the author is replaced. Replacement of the author turns performer to author. The world intended by the author is a place of encounter where we continually create the future as a dissipative structure: the chance of oriented insertion becomes the moment of structural instability, the interstitial link wherein we enact the replacement of one writing by another.⁴⁹⁵

In his spatial reasoning, Joyce alleges that the point where the reader fails to possess the spatiality of a narrative equals “the moment of structural instability.”⁴⁹⁶ According to Joyce instability occurs when there is no physical orientation. To ensure authors’ and readers’ orientation in the space of hypertext, StorySpace includes topographies for writing and reading (map, path, compass, space). StorySpace, like Bolter’s terminology, refers to nodes as writing spaces and terms hypertext spatial writing.

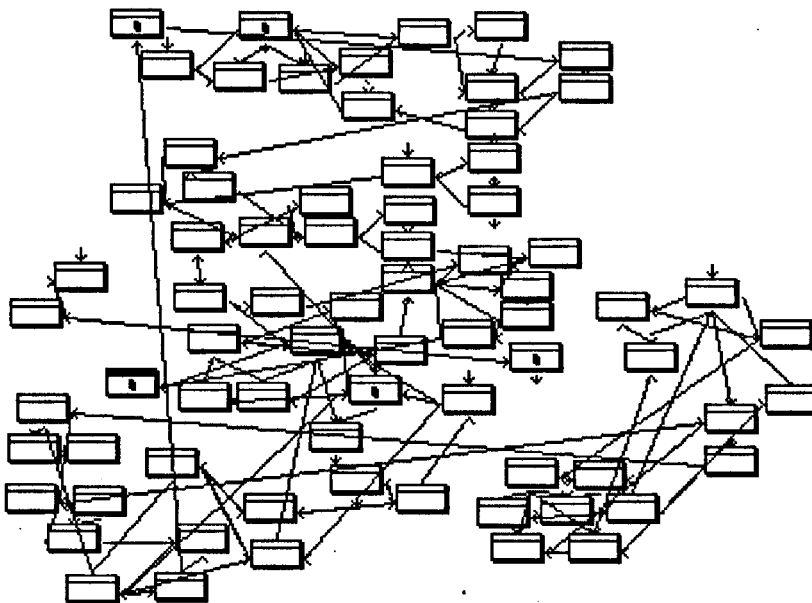


Fig. 4.2 A map of the linking paths between nodes within a StorySpace hypertext. Jeanie C. Crain, “Courseware Review: Storyspace Hypertext Writing Environment,” (Watertown, Massachusetts: Eastgate Systems, 1992) 2 November 2007 <<http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/chum/chum.html>>.

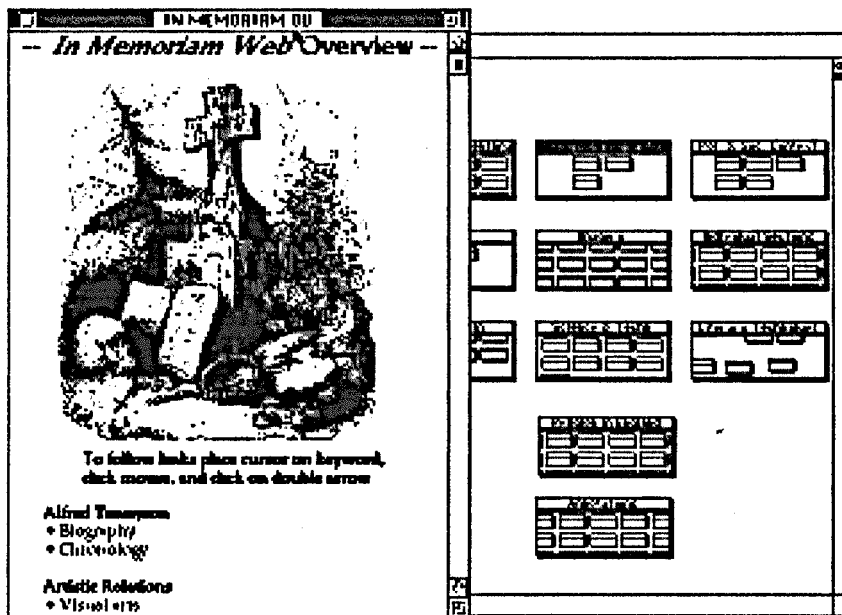


Fig. 4.3 An example of a writing space (left image) and a map of a hypertext. Jeanie C. Crain, "Courseware Review."

For Janet Murray, an important characteristic of digital environments is their capacity to "represent navigable space."⁴⁹⁷ While print books and films are "linear media," portraying space "either by verbal description of image," digital works "can present space that we can move through."⁴⁹⁸ According to Murray what marks these worlds as more "expressive" than others is the participatory affordances: they are "described as...geographical place[s] or...physical space[s], we do not merely read about [them] – we navigate [them]."⁴⁹⁹ In fact, what makes Moulthrop's hypertext Victory Garden deserving of its place in the hypertext canon is the way in which the reading path represents the narrative: "the instant of time it takes to go from one screen to the other takes on a poignancy that reflects the abruptness of the soldier's death."⁵⁰⁰ However, though the movement may be temporal, Murray ascribes it to a spatial dimension; it has "the shape of a labyrinth."⁵⁰¹ Other exemplary hypertexts are so by virtue of their "coherent patterns" which cannot be "modeled in physical space" but

⁴⁹⁷ Murray 83.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. 79.

⁴⁹⁹ Janet Murray, "A Riposte to Nick Montfort," *Electronic Book Review*, 26 July 2005, 10 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/homonym>>.

⁵⁰⁰ Murray 83.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. 82.

“express a sequence of thoughts as a kind of dance.” Murray goes as far as to directly invoke a certain notion of mimesis: the “action of moving...mimics”⁵⁰² particular narrative developments.

For Douglas, aspects of simultaneity in fiction require spatial organization in order to properly comprehend them. Narrative meaning for Douglas, then, lies in the relationship between “the content of the text and the place it occupies.”⁵⁰³ Douglas makes this point in relation to hypertext when she notes that “cartographic readers” of print must create the spatial form in their minds while hypertext readers are often able to see the spatial structure.⁵⁰⁴ As Douglas says, “to understand the ellipses, leaps in perspective, and disjunctions in time in Michael Joyce’s WOE...[one] need only crank open the cognitive map and peer into the structure of the hypertext.”⁵⁰⁵ For Kendall this would be an example of “simulating topographies.”⁵⁰⁶

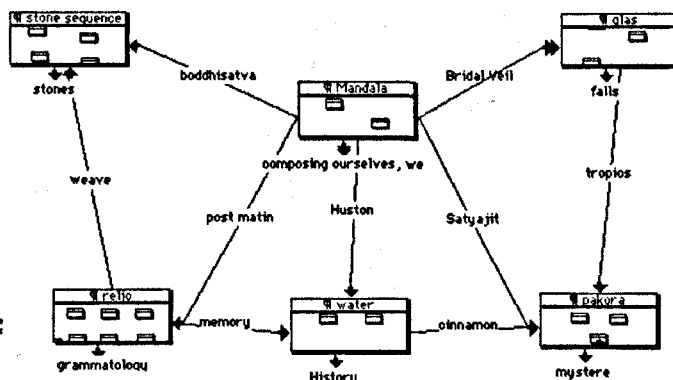


Fig. 4.4 The cognitive map of WOE – Or What Will Be.

The hypertext theorising of Douglas and Bolter seems to point to a double-bind inherent in any Storyspace hypertext. On the one hand the cognitive maps suggest a tangible space with landmarks within the narrative and specific paths readers can follow. On the other hand what makes this space tangible? How might the cartographer

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Douglas, The End of Books 109.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Douglas, The End of Books 112.

⁵⁰⁶ Kendall, “Time: The Final Frontier” 8.

measure the distance, via links, between separate nodes? As Koskimaa remarks, “there is no sense in claiming that one link is ‘longer’ or ‘shorter’ than some other link.”⁵⁰⁷ Here lies the double-bind; the cognitive maps represent aspects of a narrative temporality which remain unrepresentable at least on the level of “cruising” through the story. This double-bind appears to exist because such theorists seem to think of time and space as two separate trajectories. While Douglas admits that certain hypertexts require readers to “deal with ‘spatial form’” as well as temporality by “mak[ing] time as visible as palpable as space,” she focuses on the spatial aspects of her exemplar fictions.⁵⁰⁸

While spatiality is an important part of any narrative critique, temporality must persist as part of the web fiction equation.

The ultimate “shape” of a hypertext is inextricably bound up in an individual process of interactive reading and decision-making, which occurs in the mercurial dimension of time. Time is the element that must be added to the raw configuration of nodes and links to produce a textual realization – a finished structure.⁵⁰⁹

Moving beyond the theory affiliated with the study of cd-constrained hypertexts, Stephanie Strickland explains that reading “hypermedia” sees knowledge and narrative emerge through a process of accumulation and dispersion. Narratives “must be reconstituted continuously with computer processing time and human cognizing time, a kind of temporal knowledge that we must all learn to feel with...”⁵¹⁰ Similarly aware of the inadequacy of spatial metaphors, Gary Hink describes reading hypertext as temporal travel rather than as geographical exploration; “hypertext fiction is not text that readers

⁵⁰⁷ Raine Koskimaa, “Digital Literature: From Text to Hypertext and Beyond,” Diss. University of Jyväskylä, 2000, 22 Sept. 2006 <http://www.cc.jyu.fi/~koskimaa/thesis/chapter2.htm#_ednref38>.

⁵⁰⁸ Douglas, *The End of Books* 109.

⁵⁰⁹ Kendall, “Time: The Final Frontier” 8.

⁵¹⁰ Stephanie Strickland, “Dali Clocks: Time Dimensions of Hypermedia,” *Electronic Book Review*, 26 July 2005, 19 September 2006 <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/webarts/hypertext>>.

comprehend by traveling within or throughout; rather, it is text with potential narrative that readers actualize through their reading *sequence*.”⁵¹¹ The crux for Hink is the temporality inherent in reading click-by-click; the time it takes to make a sequence of narrative rather than a narrative space.

When Marjorie Luesebrink writes that “the linear quality of bound-print mitigated against the idea of simultaneity,”⁵¹² she implies a system built on flux and full of possibilities where time plays a central and constitutive role. A little further, she demonstrates this temporal implication, however, with reference to space, in which the constitutive action of time leads to endless possibilities: “with a spatial, linked structure, it is possible for a writer to *really* suggest that two endings are equally valid.”⁵¹³ These beginnings of a portrait of a “hypertext” (her usage) temporality suggest time’s role as something that shifts from an effort to delineate a specific course to paradigms of flow which are “enmeshed” in the reading experience.⁵¹⁴

In the absence of quantifiable temporality⁵¹⁵ hypertext theorists have implied a topological equivalence between space and time. Attempting to demarcate the area of multi-linear and interactive fictions is seen as an effort “to counter the fear that we might be lost in such a boundless digital cosmos.”⁵¹⁶ However, as Luesebrink notes, the shift of hypertext from offline to online brings with it a concomitant focus on temporality:

new developments in the field – the use of a multiplicity of media forms

⁵¹¹ Gary Hink, “Temporality of Hypertext Fiction: The Subjective Narrative of Sequence,” Juxtaposition, 29 Jan. 2004, 2 Oct. 2006 <[http://caxton.stockton.edu/Juxtaposition/stories/storyReader\\$83](http://caxton.stockton.edu/Juxtaposition/stories/storyReader$83)>. Emphasis added.

⁵¹² Marjorie Luesebrink, “Of Tea Cozy and Link,” Riposte: Cyber-literature, Electronic Book Review, 11, 1 Oct. 2001, 9 October 2007 <<http://www.altx.com/EBR/riposte/rip11/rip11cov.htm>>.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 109.

⁵¹⁵ Markku Eskelinen and Raine Koskimaa are creating a set of authoring tools “that allow a very complex temporal manipulation of narrative digital texts.” See Markku Eskelinen and Raine Koskimaa, “Discourse Timer - Towards Temporally Dynamic Texts,” Dichtung Digital, June 2001, 1 October 2007 <<http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2001/05/29-Esk-Kosk/3.htm>>.

⁵¹⁶ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 106.

(including video and music), the growth of the WWW, the presence of Java applets and scripts, and the advent of server push technology – have rendered the time elements more complex for programmers, writers, and readers of hypertext literature.⁵¹⁷

Although Luesebrink suggests that time in the online environment is “potentially infinite,”⁵¹⁸ she does display a desire to quantify time and its relation to web fiction narratives. Luesebrink’s argument of the transformation of time seems to model itself on the work of narratologists like Genette⁵¹⁹ for whom the study of temporal order is to compare the “order of succession of events of the story and the...order of their arrangement in the narrative.”⁵²⁰ Luesebrink’s take on a taxonomy⁵²¹ of time is divided into two “registers”: “Interface Time – Mechanical, Reading, and Interactive; and Cognitive Time – Real, Narrative, and Mythic.”⁵²² Interface Time indicates the “physical span of time” in which the reader “interacts with the text.” Cognitive Time, Luesebrink proposes, denotes the “span of chronological time that the reader constructs or reconstructs, imaginatively, to encompass the content of the poem or narrative.”⁵²³ At first glance, Luesebrink’s account of a hypertextual temporal ordering bears much resemblance to Genette’s, until one notes that within the designation of Interface Time, Luesebrink includes the aesthetics of the computer medium: “non-content computer processes such as booting, loading, transfer of data, downloading applications, and mouse command/response.”⁵²⁴ Recognising, as Hayles does, “that all texts are

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.107.

⁵¹⁸ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 107.

⁵¹⁹ As Heise points out, Genette’s procedure demonstrates that the study of narrative duration is “a spatial one, in the sense of the one-dimensional consecution of sentences across the pages.” See Heise 153.

⁵²⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 35.

⁵²¹ Genette specifically attempts to describe narrative time in “numeric terms so that texts could be compared mathematically,” Kathryn Hume, “Narrative Speed in Contemporary Fiction,” *Narrative* 13.2 (May 2005): 107.

⁵²² Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 107.

⁵²³ Ibid. 108.

⁵²⁴ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 107.

instantiated and that the nature of the medium in which they are instantiated matters,”⁵²⁵ Luesebrink entwines any online reading experience with a specific “mechanical” temporality.

Unlike conceptions which see time as ordered successions or linear arrows,⁵²⁶ Luesebrink suggests that by clicking the mouse the readers can invoke multiple “simultaneities”⁵²⁷ and rearrange layers of narrative. Correspondingly, Bolter understands that “the temporal structure of a text is created by the reader’s moment-by-moment encounter with [textual and visual] elements.”⁵²⁸ In this way, it is not so much that the reader moves through time (or space) and that changes occur in time (or space), where the notion of time appears to be an element somewhat apart from the narrative. Rather, time, sequence, and change become attributes of the differences between successive nodes, each with its own duration relative to the reading experience. In a Braidottian way, there is a becoming of time but not a time of becoming.

As the web fictions explored in this chapter testify, born digital narratives bypass ideas of time as linear progression in order to perform “multiple interstitial times,”⁵²⁹ which are co-extensive with and inseparable from individual events and new media aesthetics including “machine speed, time for the code to read itself, real time, clock time, coded speed, network lags [and] device delays.”⁵³⁰ Although Strickland and Luesebrink admit that their studies are just beginning to theorise problems that arise in thinking about time online, their accounts do capture something essential about contemporary experiences of web fiction time: the sense that time is inherent in the reading and digitally mediated rather than an abstract dimension surrounding it. As Grosz argues is the general case with thinking of time, such is the endeavour of the

⁵²⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, “Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis,” *Poetics Today* 25.1 (Spring 2004): 67.

⁵²⁶ Guertin, “The Unfold: Immersion.”

⁵²⁷ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 108.

⁵²⁸ Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* 107.

⁵²⁹ Strickland, “Writing the Virtual.”

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

three fictions read here, to “openly accept the rich virtualities, divergent resonances” and the “complex processes” of becoming in time.⁵³¹

4.2 An Economy of Time: Marjorie Luesebrink’s Fibonacci’s Daughter

Luesebrink’s Fibonacci’s Daughter, first published in 2000, might not be famous for its experimentation with narrative order as is, for example, Cortazar’s Hopscotch, however it is noted as a “*histoire*...that is conspicuously incomplete, despite its varied possible conclusions.”⁵³² While Cortazar instructs his readers of two different reading procedures, Luesebrink leaves her readers to ascertain the various routes available. None of the twelve beginnings of the narrative, – The Map, The Blackboard, The Contents, The Numbers, Random Quotes, The Book, The Place, The People, Headline News, Yours Truly, The Golden Square, Fibonacci Numbers and Nature – result in a “linear” or straightforward story. Each narrative beginning assures readers numerous oscillations between times, characters, and events, resulting in, as Douglas says, an elliptical story that, technically, never ends. With this beginning, or rather, beginnings, Luesebrink positions Annabelle’s becoming and her narrative as inextricable from temporality. In making this move, Luesebrink shifts Annabelle and the representation of subjectivity from “the destiny of women...[as] space” to a productive process.⁵³³

While Woolf’s temporal experimentation involved a similar move away from linear time to multi-linearity, she was specifically attempting to “represent more accurately the “intricate operations of human memory.”⁵³⁴ Rather differently, Fibonacci’s

⁵³¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “Thinking the New: Of Futures Yet Unthought,” Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures ed. Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 15.

⁵³² Jane Yellowlees Douglas, “Playing the Numbers: M.D. Coverley’s Fibonacci’s Daughter,” HTLit, Word Circuits, October 2000, April 2007 < http://www.wordcircuits.com/comment/htlit_9.htm>.

⁵³³ “When evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the space generating and forming the human species than of time, becoming, or history.” Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, Signs 7 (1981):16.

⁵³⁴ Heise 77.

Daughter is not focused on establishing consciousness as a perceivable whole as Heise argues is the case with Woolf. Here, instead the reader has access to distributed times accompanied by multimodal elements such as sound, image, animation and text which enable “an erasure of hierarchies – a way of suggesting multiplicity.”⁵³⁵

Fibonacci’s Daughter takes what Heise sees as the central preoccupation of Hopscotch, the diverging temporalities of the narrated story and the sequence of the pages on which it is printed,⁵³⁶ and multi-mimetically amplifies it. Positioned within the plot of gambling and its ancillary attempts at control there is wide scope for Luesebrink and main protagonist Annabelle to question and problematise linear narrative organization. The leitmotif of gambling operates both as a narrative theme and as a reading procedure, resulting in numerous paths through the narrative however none deliver any final answers. So for the reader, as for particular characters, “every choice is a gamble.”⁵³⁷

In Fibonacci’s Daughter, Luesebrink introduces a select assemblage of characters, much as she did in The Lacemaker, with Annabelle Thompson, self-declared daughter of gamblers, as the main protagonist. Annabelle decides to capitalise on her gift for numbers, so she opens a store called Bet Your Life where she sells “dream insurance”⁵³⁸ to people who are in search of a different or predictable future. Some of Annabelle’s most frequent customers are local secondary school students who place bets against becoming cheerleaders and securing record contracts. Although inundated with customers, “the lines were quiet and orderly. You would have thought they were in the library,”⁵³⁹ except when Annabelle unexpectedly closes the Bet Your Life shop early one afternoon and a riot ensues. In an effort to ascertain why the closure of

⁵³⁵ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Of Tea Cozy and Link.”

⁵³⁶ Heise 96.

⁵³⁷ Luesebrink, “Dear Readers,” Fibonacci’s Daughter, April 2000, New River, ed. Ed Falco, 10 Oct. 2006 <<http://califia.us/Fibonacci/choice.htm>>.

⁵³⁸ Luesebrink, “Louise Poole,” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

Annabelle's shop might cause such commotion, a local reporter deems it necessary to investigate.

The narrative develops via fragments of the reporter's feature story in the "Orange County Ledger-Times," the weaving in and out of the voices of various characters including the Cheez Pleez shop owners Louise and Joe and images of mathematic fractals. In November, one month after opening the extremely successful Bet Your Life shop, two of Annabelle's teenage customers go missing and eventually are found dead. Local residents who were against gambling or the selling of insurance accuse Annabelle of witchcraft and murder. Just after Annabelle disappears, Louise and Joe open up a successor to the Bet Your Life shop.

The narrative, the various reading routes, the music, and the images, combine and recombine to dramatise the theme of temporality, or more specifically, the theme of time as a spiral. By invoking and performing the spiral as narrative and reading strategy, Fibonacci's Daughter displays what Rita Raley considers are some of the "formal and thematic concerns of digital textuality as they have emerged over the last decade: a striking preoccupation with the originary moment, frequency, reappearance, and boundaries of a textual 'event.'"⁵⁴⁰ Significantly, Fibonacci's Daughter is prefaced with the phrase "eadem mutata resurgo"⁵⁴¹ (though changed I shall arise the same) which is synonymous with Luesebrink's structural and thematic enterprise.⁵⁴² The phrase itself appears throughout the narrative in different contexts corroborating the view that "life is a recurrence sequence" but this recurrence does not suggest mimicry or simple repetition. "That is, there is a mystical aspect to the recurrence insofar as the substance will be altered, perhaps even distorted, upon its re-emergence."⁵⁴³ As Raley

⁵⁴⁰ Rita Raley, "The Digital Loop: Feedback and Recurrence," 2002, 12 November 2007 <<http://homepage.mac.com/shadoof/net/in/whitecubebluesky/rrloop.html>>.

⁵⁴¹ Luesebrink, "Place," Fibonacci's Daughter.

⁵⁴² Raley also makes this observation.

⁵⁴³ Raley, "The Digital Loop."

also notes, recurrence indicates “repetition and temporal return, but with a difference”⁵⁴⁴ because mutation “presupposes a morphological standard against which it can be measured and understood as mutations. If there were only randomness...it would make no sense to speak of mutation.”⁵⁴⁵ What lies ahead is not a return but an evolution. This is “unpredictable transformation.”⁵⁴⁶

If Butler’s performative identity, what Braidotti refers to as “her particular brand of political utopia,”⁵⁴⁷ is “an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts,”⁵⁴⁸ then it only comes into being as it is repeatedly reproduced. The idea of repetition to bring into being also finds credence in mathematic thought. Fibonacci studied a set of numbers which would form a sequence recursively. Thus, each number in a Fibonacci sequence (apart from the initial two) is the sum of the two preceding numbers: $1+1=2$, $1+2=3$, $2+3=5$, $3+5=8$, $5+8=13$, etc... Herein lies a close tie with Butler’s thinking, for any sequence (or performance) to continue, it must recombine with the past (previous numbers), resulting in a continuation but with difference. Thus for Fibonacci’s numbers, Butler’s identity, and Luesebriek’s fiction, for a structure to become possible there must be a contingent repetition as its basis.

Aspects of Strickland’s temporal analysis of Donna Leishman’s Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw display a similar concern for repetition as found in Butler’s theory of identity performance and Fibonacci’s sequence of numbers. For Strickland the critical feature of Deviant is the demand for “re-readings with no clear payoff.”⁵⁴⁹ The act of re-reading in this case is aligned with “linearity and a feeling of being trapped in history” because readers are unable “to alter the narrative sequence.”⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 33.

⁵⁴⁶ Grosz, “Thinking the New” 17.

⁵⁴⁷ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 37.

⁵⁴⁸ Judith Butler, Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” Theatre Journal 40.4 (Dec. 1988): 519.

⁵⁴⁹ Strickland “Writing the Virtual” 6.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

For Strickland, as for Butler, to create meaning, i.e. to move “out of a prescribed landscape,”⁵⁵¹ one requires the addition of difference.

But, temporality, with particular reference to the web fictions here, is not “part of a rigid structure” as Strickland finds is the case with Deviant.⁵⁵² Rather temporality emerges as a flux in which narrative and identity can appear and be represented, therefore their becoming, in a Braidottian vein, is contingent on temporality. However, what Fibonacci’s Daughter makes explicit is not just the constituting possibility of temporality in general but what Luesebrink calls the “Interactive time” where the “reader is engaged in a meaningful exchange with the text.”⁵⁵³ Crucial to both narrative development in Fibonacci’s Daughter and Luesebrink’s conception is “[t]he act of choice...in itself, a construction of time, punctuated by the doing.”⁵⁵⁴ In fact, narrative meaning in Fibonacci’s Daughter is amalgamated and braided together by the reader through various repetitions and reenactments making narrative and temporality relational variables within a sequence which build and reconstitute one another.

The performative rearticulation of sequence with a difference marks both the narrative and reading experience of Fibonacci’s Daughter. In terms of narrative structure, temporality plays a key role. Luesebrink explains that her aim was to “capture the Fibonacci precepts – elements of predictability in natural forms – in a narrative. His mathematical sequence of numbers and golden sector were sources for narrative shape, structural organization, and design motif.”⁵⁵⁵ Fibonacci’s Daughter, then, is a “multilinear, hypermedia experience”⁵⁵⁶ that actualises the double-bind of representation within a temporal setting. On the one hand there is the seemingly

⁵⁵¹ Leishman qtd. in Strickland, “Writing the Virtual” 6.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext,” 180.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Gallery Show Workshop Participants,” trAce Workshop, Spring 1999, 10 Dec. 2006 <<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sanford/members.html>>.

⁵⁵⁶ Marjorie Luesebrink qtd in Jennifer Ley, “So You Thought You Understood Hypertext” Riding the Meridian, 2.1 (2000), 10 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/leyarticle.html>>.

chronological structuring of time as evidenced by the use of calendars, the marking of dates, the calculations of time, the verbal references to time and the musical allusions to speed and tempo. On the other hand, there appears a “thinking through flows and interconnections”⁵⁵⁷ of time which materialises as a consistent thwarting of that structured progression. For the reader then, there is “neither [the] encountering [of] a single unvarying (print) instance, nor [the] encountering [of] the infinite potential and philosophical resonance of a rule: ‘draw a line and follow it.’”⁵⁵⁸ In this way the reader and Annabelle are required to negotiate the appearance of chronology in order to “spira[l] both in and out at the same time.”⁵⁵⁹ Spiraling thus serves to express both the chance and unpredictability inherent in lived experience and the terms of narrativising that experience. The element of chance gains further significance for the notion of becoming if one agrees with Grosz’s definition of “contemporary time” that is “not regulated by causality and determination but unfolds [as] rhythms...enigmas and impetus.”⁵⁶⁰ In other words, if for Braidotti “the project of finding adequate representations” is possible with a “non-linear and non-unitary vision,”⁵⁶¹ then Fibonacci’s Daughter offers a “reconfiguring” of temporality as both lived experience which seems to burst from certain trajectories and the narrativising temporality that seeks a predictable chronology. This encounter acts as “living proof”⁵⁶² of the temporal complexities of Annabelle’s world, a world in which she constantly attempts to capture life, her own and others, while simultaneously aware that she is unable to master time.

The question of the relationship between time and narrative appears in Walter Ong’s description of oral cultures. According to Ong these cultures “have no focus and

⁵⁵⁷ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 2.

⁵⁵⁸ Strickland makes this comment in relation to geniwate’s “Concatenation.” See Strickland, “Writing the Virtual” 8.

⁵⁵⁹ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Author’s Note” New River May 2004, 22 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/journals/newriver/Luesebrink/authornote.html>>.

⁵⁶⁰ Grosz, “Becoming...An Introduction,” Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 6.

⁵⁶¹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 3.

⁵⁶² Strickland, “Into the Space of Previously Undrawable Diagrams.”

no trace (a visual metaphor, showing dependency on writing), not even a trajectory. They are occurrences, events.”⁵⁶³ While all sensations take place in time, Ong considers sound as having “a special relationship to time unlike that of the other fields” because sound is only palpable “when it is going out of existence...When I pronounce the word ‘permanence,’ by the time I get to the ‘nence,” the ‘perma’ – is gone, and has to be gone.”⁵⁶⁴ To have a sound which repeats, then, might be said to be an attempt to prolong ephemerality or at least an attempt to “reduce motion.”⁵⁶⁵

It is in this respect that the splash page (fig. 4.5) of Fibonacci’s Daughter reveals Annabelle’s awareness of the tensions between the various representational modes within her double-voiced discourse.⁵⁶⁶ This suggests that representation is always already a negotiation. For Annabelle the splash page can be viewed as Ong’s repeating word, an attempt to slow down time, to prolong the ineffable. Annabelle’s complex dialogue with different temporalities, as illustrated by the splash page, is an acknowledgement that no one time nor single representational tactic is sufficiently adequate to her becoming subjectivity. While neither Annabelle, Luesebrink nor the reader can simply move beyond this pivoting, it opens up a feedback loop between subjectivity and narrative where the complex relation between the two can be explored.⁵⁶⁷ What multi-mimesis can make visible is the performance of becoming, the “flickering signifier”⁵⁶⁸ in between the complex interdependences and engagements within times and modes.

⁵⁶³ Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Routledge, 2002) 31.

⁵⁶⁴ Ong 32.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ I employ this term in Henry Louis Gates’ sense: “...the tension between the oral and the written modes of narration.” “A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey,” ENG 541 Electronic Reserve, Spring 2005, North Carolina State University, 23 June 2007, 10 <<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/debclass/gates.htm>>.

⁵⁶⁷ A feedback loop signifies a “flow of information.” Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 8.

⁵⁶⁸ For Hayles, flickering signifiers are “characterized by their tendency toward unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions.” Ibid. 30.

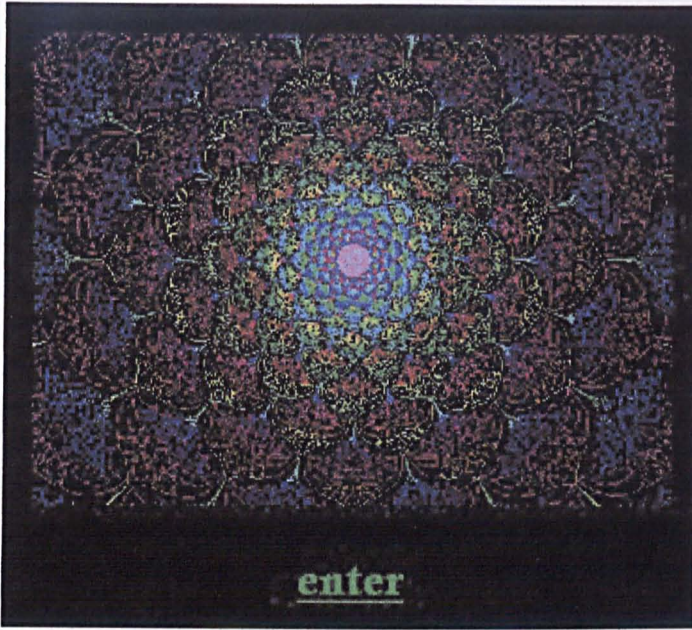


Fig. 4.5 Luesebrink, "Splash," Fibonacci's Daughter.

At this point of entry into the narrative (as Luesebrink has it) and into a certain kind of temporality, the reader's senses are overcome with the perpetual colourful cycling of a graphical spiral on a dark black background. The jarring of the senses due to the unyielding mass of colour is heightened with the reader's inability to focus on one single transformation at a time.⁵⁶⁹ This disjunction "captures the intense sonority of...lived-in spaces" and for Braidotti, space implies time. However for Braidotti this disjunction also suggests a representation emptied of its representational value.⁵⁷⁰ In fig. 4.5 it is not so much a "capturing" of the intensity of conflicting times nor is it an empty representation. Rather this is a comment on the impossibility to represent the flux of temporal becomings; what the eye cannot behold (successive transformations) also cannot be fully represented.

The constant and quick cycling through different spirals, in a way like Ong's sound, "resists a holding action, stabilization."⁵⁷¹ Somewhat different to Ong's perception, is the role of sound which accompanies this splash page. Rather than

⁵⁶⁹ As Ong explains, "[w]e often reduce motion to a series of still shots the better to see what motion is." 32.

⁵⁷⁰ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 154.

⁵⁷¹ Ong 32.

evading stabilisation, sound here is steady, predictable, and relentless. The midi piece called “Country” is reminiscent of what North Americans refer to as “elevator music.” However, rather than remain unobtrusive like elevator music, the constant tinny sound evokes an impression that time is forever elapsing. Pair the constantly evolving image and the looping sound with words such as “drift,” “sound,” “rhythms,” “flash,” “cacophony,” and “languish,”⁵⁷² all found in the following node, and no matter how rhythmic or predictable⁵⁷³ the tune might be the image and text suggest that time is always evanescent. Thus, despite the proliferation of repeating calculations and steadily cycling rhythms, patterns, and images, Annabelle (and the other characters) finds herself unable to rely on predictability. This dual discourse connects the “pattern/randomness” dialectic that Hayles believes epitomises the “material world” and can be seen as an effort to problematise notions that understand time as an objectively existing entity.⁵⁷⁴ As Luesebrink explains, “[t]he time issue is critical...Any change in the time frame, though, changes the probabilities.”⁵⁷⁵ This becomes evident with the web fiction’s final node which features the same image and music with one change, rather than the word “enter,” there is the word “end.” Subversive repetition, following Butler’s thinking, preserves the original while also transforming it; in a different context the same image and sound have set a different scene. Annabelle has sought to articulate her situated subjectivity within the parameters of representation. As such she is by no means static, and this becoming aesthetic, moreover, is illustrated in a more general sense by the links within of the web fiction. This “end” page sends readers and Annabelle back to the beginning, revealing the extent to which narrative temporality has no definite beginning or end and that looping is intrinsic to “the graphic, structural, and architectural aspects

⁵⁷² Luesebrink, “Fore-word,” *Fibonacci’s Daughter*.

⁵⁷³ “I wanted a steady beat because one of the main pleasures of music is the predictability of the rhythm!” Marjorie Luesebrink, “Re: Fibonacci’s Daughter,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 26 Oct. 2006.

⁵⁷⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 28.

⁵⁷⁵ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Re: More on Fibonacci’s Daughter,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 9 Jan. 2007.

of the story.”⁵⁷⁶ Here is what Hayles’ terms “the visible mark” of the play between pattern and randomness “for only against the background of nonpattern can pattern emerge.”⁵⁷⁷

Further signifying the impossibility to constrain time or narrative is evident in the choice of music for the “Reporter’s Notebook” section. On the one hand the reporter, “Yours Truly,” attempts to pin down what exactly happened with the Bet Your Life shop. On the other hand the music, “Afternoon of a Faun,” is “nearly rhythmless, in some sense, and certainly not comforting.”⁵⁷⁸ This music only appears in the concluding sections of the narrative confirming that there are no final answers or patterns to be found. Like Yours Truly, Annabelle and the reader are “confronted with a squad of answers that wander randomly...looking for the right question.”⁵⁷⁹

Having clicked on “the right question” the reader can find a particularly revealing node homodiegetically⁵⁸⁰ chronicling Annabelle’s history. Annabelle shares with readers her introduction to gambling:

I am the child of gamblers.

My mother gambled on my father. Mother was brought up in a three-storey house. When she was sixteen, in New York City for the summer, she fell in love with a twenty-one-year-old limo driver. His appeal, beyond his dark good looks, lay in the fact that he was a self-professed mathematical genius. She believed him when he said he could make a million in Las Vegas. Despite her parents’ insistence that he was a

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Hayles, How We Became Posthuman 33.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Luesebink, “Yours Truly.”

⁵⁸⁰ A homodiegetic narrator is “present as a character in the story he tells (example: Gil Blas, or Wuthering Heights).” Genette, Narrative Discourse, see especially Chapter 5.

“common hood,” she married him.⁵⁸¹

Informing readers that “some people grow up seeing the world in terms of appearances, or class differences, or money. I grew up seeing everything in terms of estimating probability,” Annabelle decides to begin her own business rather than simply gamble in Vegas since “the odds in the casinos favor the owners; I prefer to be the house.”⁵⁸² It is precisely Annabelle’s being present in this node which suggests a narratorial authority and signals its difference from the other nodes that employ heterodiegetic narrators. Additionally, the entire monologue is replete with references to life and the impossibility of tethering it: the marriage between Annabelle’s parents is doomed to failure as “the odds were all wrong,” when Annabelle’s mother is left on her own she “calculated her odds on finding a rich husband (slim-to-none),” Annabelle’s “real education” unfolds via card games with her father but “he didn’t know when to quit,” “the mink-coat lady, at the roulette wheel with her red-faced husband, was thrilled at the chance of 34 coming up, yet she never noticed the odds against her husband living past 55.”⁵⁸³ In the midst of this detailing, Annabelle reflects on something which at first may seem to be of little consequence: the fact that she herself does not gamble:

I was the observer, the note taker. The other gamblers probably thought I was my father’s bimbo girlfriend, because they talked about everything right in front of me as though I wasn’t there, like you do with a deaf person or something. And what I observed, what I took note of was this: it was all a gamble. People thought that Vegas was the place to take risks, but they were living in a whole world of probability.⁵⁸⁴

The excerpt is interesting for its muted reflection of Annabelle’s inability to fully

⁵⁸¹ Luesebrink, “Annabelle Thompson” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

participate in the gambling scene. Life, as Annabelle observes, “spirals in”⁵⁸⁵ and not even in-depth knowledge of Fibonacci numbers or mathematical patterning can predict its outcomes. The element of chance appears again as an enabling force, as “that which signals openness,”⁵⁸⁶ overtly contrasting Ryan’s claim that “randomness” signals the deathbed of narrative coherence.”⁵⁸⁷ But, perhaps even more interesting, recognising that Annabelle prefers to observe, is her allegation that “life is a recurrence sequence.”⁵⁸⁸ What initially may appear as simply an account for Annabelle’s status as spectator becomes significant if one considers the use of particular nodes, music, images and the reading trajectories. Namely, multi-mimetic devices and reading paths mean different things to different readers and appear in different contexts. In other words, multi-mimetic strategies are not only representational, as discussed in the previous chapter, but appear as necessary conditions for the construction of the narrative according to the paths of the reader. To put it simply, multi-mimetic processes come into being in the act of what Odin calls the “processual”: “the space of the reader’s/writer’s actual experience of [the] texts.”⁵⁸⁹

Although seemingly antithetical, Fibonacci’s patterning and Luesebrink’s employment of multi-mimesis not only interact like interdependent pieces in a puzzle, they also share a specular slant. This mixture of calculable repetition with a definitive beginning (Fibonacci’s sequence and spiral) and multi-mimetic representation is manifest in a key node, “Golden Table”:

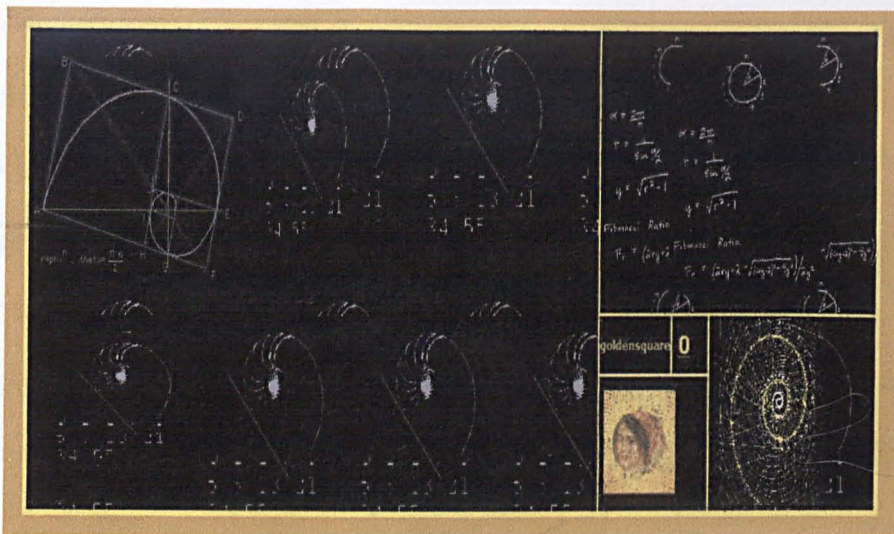
⁵⁸⁵ Luesebrink, “The Place, After All,” *Fibonacci’s Daughter*.

⁵⁸⁶ Grosz, “Becoming...An Introduction” 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Ryan qtd. in geniwate, “Word Limits,” Concatenation, *Spatial: New Media Artspace*, 27 January 2005, National Gallery of Australia, 13 June 2007 <<http://www.nga.gov.au/spatial/ARTIST/GENIWATE>>.

⁵⁸⁸ Luesebrink, “Annabelle Thompson.”

⁵⁸⁹ Jaishree K. Odin, “Part Two: The Performative and the Processual,” *The Performative and the Processual*, Political Discourse: Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism, 1998, National University of Singapore, 6 October 2007 <<http://scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/poldiscourse/odin/odin17.html>>.



originary spiral.⁵⁹¹ Used strategically, repetition here is conceived of as a response to the same. Like Annabelle's attempt to utilise repetition as a way of controlling the chaos of life, Luesebrink's repetition with a difference is a subtle transforming of patriarchal methods; it proceeds from but is not identical with. As Guertin says, "revising the future through spatial leaps or nonlinear links [is a way] out of the predetermination of patriarchal history."⁵⁹² As a further attempt to distance herself from mere reproduction, Luesebrink positions Annabelle at the centre of the spiral.

The portrait image of Annabelle in this node (fig. 4.7) serves at least two purposes. On the one hand, the placement establishes Annabelle at the centre of the spiral and thus makes concrete her position within the narrative. On the other hand, Annabelle's face is framed within the copious petals of a sunflower. For Fibonacci, sunflowers embody the presence of the golden spiral where the petals create curves both clockwise and counterclockwise.⁵⁹³



Fig. 4.8 A Fibonacci Spiral is duplicated, rotated around the centre, and the circular pattern is mirrored. Andrew Kator, "Quick Tips in Design," About this Particular Macintosh, Feb. 2004, 14 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.atpm.com/10.02/design.shtml>>.

Situating Annabelle at the centre of opposing spirals represents her desire to control chance and her subsequent realisation of that impossibility, "[i]f, indeed, the Fibonacci

⁵⁹¹ So, where the Fibonacci sequence is 0,1,1,2,3,5...the squares that are drawn begin by plotting on that is one unit by one, then another one of the same size, then drawing a bigger rectangle two units by two, then another bigger one that is five units by five etc... See Kate Long, "A Lesson on Spirals," 29 February 2000, The Shipley School, 2 November 2006 <<http://courses.wcupa.edu/jkerriga/Lessons/A%20Lesson%20on%20Spirals.html>>.

⁵⁹² Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

⁵⁹³ See Eddy Levin, "Fibonacci," Golden Proportion, 2 November 2006 <<http://www.goldenmeangauge.co.uk/fibonacci.htm>>.

numbers represent facts of nature, then they form a code we see only in flashes – strange recurrences in the patterns of our lives and in the stories we report.”⁵⁹⁴

Since Luesebrink’s use of the spiral represents a displacement of the same, or in a Butlerian sense, a resignification, Luesebrink and in a different way, Annabelle, point to the failure of mimesis when equated with a representation of the same, “accepting and fortifying the terms of authority.”⁵⁹⁵ The emancipatory movement in Fibonacci’s Daughter is to deviate from the original and “infiltrate its terms, to manifest the occluded feminine, and to provide a disruptive writing...” and multiple representing.⁵⁹⁶ Like Butler’s subversive performance of gender, Luesebrink’s spiral favours transformation and mutation but it also highlights the feminist manoeuvre to “giv[e] voice to the voiceless and mak[e] visible the invisible.”⁵⁹⁷

The goal, however, of representing is always already tinged with the recognition of partiality and the danger of replicating rather than multi-mimetically representing. In Fibonacci’s Daughter Annabelle sarcastically declares this to be “a true report from the invisible world”⁵⁹⁸ thus tackling two feminist concerns, that of representation and visibility. The process of telling her story becomes increasingly complex when the reader (and Annabelle) recognises that Annabelle’s survival (or at least her representation within the narrative) relies on her ability to create realities by mastering temporality, that “drift of human shadows.”⁵⁹⁹

Interestingly, the functioning of tense and image illustrate Annabelle’s ambition to control time and the students’ perpetual hope that she maintains that control. That the aim of Annabelle’s business is to “sell dream insurance”⁶⁰⁰ suggests a narrative that relies on the future tense. However it is the students who buy the dream insurance who

⁵⁹⁴ Luesebrink, “Odds,” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

⁵⁹⁵ Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (Boca Raton, Florida: Routledge, 2004) 201.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending 41.

⁵⁹⁸ Luesebrink, “Title,” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

⁵⁹⁹ Luesebrink, “Fore-word,” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

⁶⁰⁰ Luesebrink, “Louise Poole,” Fibonacci’s Daughter.

are relegated to a perpetual future. Their inability to control time leaves them in a perennial state of expectation, they are always already in anticipation. Expectation for Nikki, Kimberley, and the other gambling students is focused solely on future possibility, however, in Luesebrink's "cognitive time" mode, all the characters in Fibonacci's Daughter except for Annabelle narrate only the present tense. Hence the impossibility to capture and represent moments of becoming is indicated through the inability to represent, in this case through language, the future tense even though gambling is always already an expectation.

Just as significant as the gamblers who tell stories in the present tense, is Annabelle's monologue in which the description of Annabelle is most fully furnished. In this node, critically appearing early in the narrative and linked directly from the "Golden Table" node (see fig. 4.5), Annabelle takes an excursion into the past of the narrative by embarking on a homodiegetic analepsis.⁶⁰¹ The account of Annabelle's past history is posterior to the main narrative of the "You Bet Your Life" shop and the corresponding two murders, as such Annabelle, like Elys the Lacemaker, writes herself into the past.

Furthermore, each subjectivity's becoming appears in what Guertin terms the "poetics of navigation" where Annabelle is able to cross "the disjuncture" which is the gap between the chronological time and the time of lived experience.⁶⁰² Akin to Hayle's "multicourse" this notion of becoming is "richly resonant with its own specificities and meanings."⁶⁰³ Annabelle marks out her time of becoming as one which blends and blurs past, present, and future. With this invocation to multiple times Annabelle contests what Grosz sees as the dual disappearance of time. Annabelle simultaneously resurrects time as "events, processes, movements, things, as the mode

⁶⁰¹ According to Rimmon-Kenan, a homodiegetic analepsis provides "past information either about the character, event, or story-line mentioned at that point in the text," Rimmon-Kenan 47.

⁶⁰² Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

⁶⁰³ Hayles, "Cyber|literature and Multicourses."

of...becoming” and as representation that is not “tied to, bound up in...space and spatiality.”⁶⁰⁴ She begins by situating her current state, “I am the child of gamblers.”⁶⁰⁵ Then Annabelle shifts to the past and elaborates her move to Las Vegas, “At about thirteen, I was the terror of everyone’s existence. Dyed my hair royal blue, tried pot, and hung out late with my friends. When I was grounded forever, I insisted on going to live with my father.” Annabelle’s monologue concludes with her declaring, in the present tense, “The few people who know my story always ask why I don’t just gamble in Vegas.” In thinking about the (linguistic) representation, the reader can recognise Annabelle’s subjectivity as one which resembles a Serresian handkerchief; previously distant points become close together or superimposed even though they may be temporally distant.⁶⁰⁶ Time here, as in the web fictions described in this thesis and feminist theory in general, is not a “structural entity”⁶⁰⁷ but, as Morgan has it, “multigeneric, non-sequential and non-hierarchical.”⁶⁰⁸

Moving from linguistic representation of a becoming subjectivity to a pictorial representation, the image heading Annabelle’s monologue parallel’s Marsh’s stance that texts and subjects are dispersed in the “metalanguage of literary composition” appearing as [d]uration: scene progression, sequencing, real-time motion.”⁶⁰⁹ Evident in Annabelle’s shifting between tenses and exemplified in her portrait, is a becoming subjectivity whose preference for repetition with a difference appears as a performative loop: “a linear path is interruptible, but a looped one can twist and meet up with itself.”⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁴ Grosz, “Becoming...An Introduction” 2.

⁶⁰⁵ Luesebrink, “Annabelle Thompson” *Fibonacci’s Daughter*.

⁶⁰⁶ In *Conversations*, Serres explains the contrast between metrical geometry and topology by describing how points and distances between them on an ironed out handkerchief change spatial relations when the handkerchief is crumpled up and put in one’s pocket. Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) 60.

⁶⁰⁷ Luesebrink, “Of Tea Cozy and Link.”

⁶⁰⁸ Morgan, “Electronic Tools for Dismantling the Master’s House.”

⁶⁰⁹ Marsh, “Reading Time.”

⁶¹⁰ Strickland, “Writing the Virtual” 12.



Fig. 4.9 The five images that form the visual metamorphosis of Annabelle.

The portrait size image of Annabelle is set against a background of Fibonacci spirals and swirls through five (a Fibonacci number) different versions of herself. The visual metamorphoses are a recursive sequence; building on what came before; fundamental both to this narrative and to “literary hypermedia.”⁶¹¹

Due to the dynamic morphing of Annabelle’s image, each version blending into another, the past and future are, to use Nelson’s words, “intertwined” and add to what Strickland refers to as the “enlarging of the ‘now.’”⁶¹² Here is an explicit rejection of singularity of time and subjectivity that arises, as Amy Herzog notes with reference to film, “from the specificity of the singular, situated event.”⁶¹³ On the technological front, one way of explicitly addressing the question of time is via the “morph;” making visible the “microfluctuations and/or fractal patterns that had been smoothed over, averaged over, hidden by the older perception and knowledge processes.”⁶¹⁴ For Tom Brigham, a morph is an image that “smoothly transforms...into another with a motion so slow as to be almost imperceptible. Yet, at precisely some specific increment, itself undetected, the content changes utterly and a different pictorial subject becomes

⁶¹¹ “Various sorts of looping, simple, event-prompted, and recursive, are fundamental to e-writing.” Strickland, “Writing the Virtual” 2.

⁶¹² Strickland, “Dali Clocks: Time Dimensions of Hypermedia.”

⁶¹³ Amy Herzog, “Affectivity, Becoming, and the Cinematic Event: Gilles Deleuze and the Futures of Feminist Film Theory,” *Affective Encounters: Rethinking Embodiment in Feminist Media Studies*, eds. A. Koivunen and S. Paasonen, A. 49 (Turku: University of Turku, School of Art, Literature and Music, Media Studies, 2001) 2 December 2007

<<http://www.utu.fi/hum/mediatutkimus/affective/proceedings.pdf>>.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

comprehensible.”⁶¹⁵ While in Annabelle’s portrait the content itself does not change – it remains Annabelle – the morph technology nonetheless allows for the “separate interpolation of different attributes of the series, such as shape, colour, texture, and motion.”⁶¹⁶ Unlike Brigham’s morphs, in Annabelle’s interpretation there is no beginning or end morph, the images continuously cycle through each of the five stages resulting in an undeniable representation of a perpetually becoming of subjectivity. This move reinforces a hallmark shared with Braidotti’s becoming and with the kinds of temporality evoked in these web fictions, its “quality of intangibility,” as Grosz puts it, “its duration–particles [apparent] only in the passing or transformation of objects and events” that evade or counteract “concretization” and “direct representation.”⁶¹⁷

Referring to his own morph creations, when Brigham asks “what lies between a face and a chair”⁶¹⁸ he is questioning the moment that appears between images. Concerning Annabelle’s dynamic portrait, there is nothing that lies between images; her portrait is a constant feed loop sequence which seems to intensify the act of seeing. If Annabelle is constantly becoming, as this image confirms, how can she control the future even with the help of Fibonacci’s numbers? Here is another example of disjunction between modes appearing as confirmation of the double–bind of representation. The rhythm of the morphing images suggests an in-process Annabelle undergoing an “essential metamorphosis”⁶¹⁹ while the textual narrative proposes a seizing of temporality which allows Annabelle’s business to thrive. As Guertin might put it, “[t]here is a perpetual tension at work...against sequential narrative, the tension inherent in suturing incompatible things together.”⁶²⁰ However, it may be more accurate to interpret this tension between modes as a pivoting between two

⁶¹⁵ Tom Brigham, qtd. in Strickland, “Dali Clocks: Time Dimensions of Hypermedia.”

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Grosz, “Becoming...An Introduction” 1.

⁶¹⁸ Brigham.

⁶¹⁹ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 12.

⁶²⁰ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

temporalities. Annabelle's move from the metric and static order of the Fibonacci numbers to the transforming subjectivities embodies this pivot. The "quiet and orderly"⁶²¹ queues of customers and business defined by capturing time that shelter Annabelle, albeit temporarily, from the need for constant metamorphosis is juxtaposed with a visually in-process Annabelle "living in a whole world of probability."⁶²² Annabelle and the reader eventually realise, mathematics can not transform becoming experience, rather the temporality of a situated subjectivity like Brigham's morph, "emerges in a special way."⁶²³ So, no matter how "in sync with the numbers"⁶²⁴ Annabelle attempts to be, she cannot translate her becoming into mathematical equations; "life [will always] spiral in," continuously and beyond her control. Chance appears as a constituting force, it is "excess, superfluity, of causes, the profusion of causes, which no longer produces singular or even complex effects but generates events."⁶²⁵ As the reporter of the "Orange County Ledger-Times" acknowledges, "the pattern seems to have vanished into a black hole."⁶²⁶

While Luesebrink's Fibonacci's Daughter investigates the possibility of mastering two different temporal performances, the following fiction, Claire Dinsmore's High Crimson, examines the role of a duality of time in constituting subjectivity. The main protagonist pieces her experiences together and as she connects the various times she reflects on the creation of her own self and her lover. In Fibonacci's Daughter time seems to swing between two opposing and incompatible states, what might be described as the forward moving time (the Fibonacci numbers and gambling) and the cyclical, recurrent time (Annabelle). While Annabelle continuously negotiates between the two forms of time, the protagonist of High Crimson sees no such

⁶²¹ Luesebrink, "Louise Poole," Fibonacci's Daughter.

⁶²² Luesebrink, "Annabelle," Fibonacci's Daughter.

⁶²³ Brigham qtd. in Strickland, "Dali Clocks."

⁶²⁴ Luesebrink, "Odds," Fibonacci's Daughter.

⁶²⁵ Grosz, "Becoming...An Introduction" 6.

⁶²⁶ Luesebrink, "Yours Truly," Fibonacci's Daughter.

division as times blend in and out of one another.

4.3 Multiple Times: Dinsmore's High Crimson

In a recent theoretical offering, Braidotti asserts that in order to perform her theory she, like other feminists must “attack...linearity and binary thinking.”⁶²⁷ In “Women’s Time,” Kristeva describes three generations of European feminism however this is not a linear chronicling, this is “less a chronology than a *signifying* space, a mental space that is at once corporeal and desirous.”⁶²⁸ Kristeva explains that the first generation of European feminism “aspired” to appear in time, even if it was linear: “[w]hen the women’s movement began as the struggle of suffragists and existential feminists, it sought to stake out its place in the linear time of planning and history.”⁶²⁹ Kristeva’s second generation of European feminism “is characterized by a quasi-universal rejection of linear temporality and by a highly pronounced mistrust of political life.”⁶³⁰ Because this second generation vehemently shunned linear time, it consequently prompted characterising of a different temporality: “[s]uch a feminism rejoins, on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movement.”⁶³¹ The third generation of feminism marks a profound shift as, for Kristeva, this most recent generation will combine “the two attitudes – insertion into history and the radical refusal of the subjective limitations imposed by this history’s time.”⁶³² Laura Sullivan likewise argues for a renunciation of a split between temporalities when she explains that in hypertext narratives coherence occurs at the level of association. It is “opposed to linear

⁶²⁷ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 8.

⁶²⁸ Kristeva, “Women’s Time” 33.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.* 19.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³¹ *Ibid.* 20.

⁶³² *Ibid.*

reason” but is built, as Strickland also notes, on repetition and patterns.⁶³³ Such arguments underpin the conception of time in High Crimson. Time here is in the plural, as with Fibonacci’s Daughter. There are two times apparent in High Crimson, a blend of Kristeva’s “linear and prospective unfolding” with “women’s time” as “repetition and eternity.”⁶³⁴

Claire Dinsmore’s High Crimson, “a hyper-media love storie,”⁶³⁵ is perhaps one the most bewitching of the three fictions to be discussed in this chapter. The well designed aspect, the colours, images and evocative sounds encourage the reader to be lulled into the conversations which develop, creating a heightened sense of interaction which makes it particularly alienating that the narrator remains anonymous in all readings bar one. High Crimson focuses on two lovers – the homodiegetic narrator – named once as Jean, who is an art school student in search of “ideas,” “visions,” and “voices” and her lover, Beatrice fulfilling her “dream of a philosophy degree from an Ivy League university.”⁶³⁶ The web fiction provides glimpses into the two women’s perceptions of how they constitute themselves, both mentally and libidinally, enabling an opportunity for the reader to assist in an exploration of lesbian desire in time(s).

While High Crimson is not as overt in its representation of lesbian desire as These Waves of Girls, it demonstrates the most deliberate attempt to examine the constituting effects of temporalities on a particular lesbian subjectivity. This provides the occasion to examine the temporally fluid lesbian challenge to what seems to be envisaged as a “static” heterosexual norm. Furthermore, that both notions of heterosexuality and lesbian desire correspond to and through temporal conditions attests to the deep entanglement between time, perception and representation of subjectivity.

⁶³³ See Laura Sullivan, “Wired Women Writing: Towards a Feminist Theorization of Hypertext,” Computers and Composition, 16.25-54 (1999): 36.

⁶³⁴ Kristeva, “Women’s Time” 16.

⁶³⁵ Claire Dinsmore qtd. in “Women and Technology,” Riding the Meridian 1.2 (1999), <<http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/Claireedinsmore.html>>.

⁶³⁶ Claire Dinsmore, “Similitude,” High Crimson, Riding the Meridian, 2003, 20 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.studiocleo.com/projects/meridian/crimson>>.

Consequently the narrative, centered on the protagonist's relationship, emerges through the writing of letters, the continual – at times unanswered – exchange of words and images (in the case of this particular web fiction), seems an ideal way to ensure that critical meaning is not possible to simply “be,” but always unfolding, becoming. This is Braidotti's feminist body: “an assemblage of forces, a portion of spatio-temporally framed affects: it is a multiple phenomenon.”⁶³⁷ This acknowledgement of the role of temporality and multiplicity rather than stability is significant given the web fiction's drive to question and undo constricting plots of lesbian desire. High Crimson enacts this questioning through a variety of modes though the most prominent is the temporal aspect.

An interesting aspect of the fiction is its use of self-reflexive letter writing to undermine of a model of female development which pits linearity against anti-linearity. For Guertin this kind of model reduces female subjectivity to a flattened two-dimensional construction, constrained to stasis.⁶³⁸ What might be needed instead is a way to represent certain becoming subjectivities' experiences multi-temporally and multi-linearly, a way which enables the representation (however problematised) to be composed of “associations, fragments, snapshots and whiffs” of experience.⁶³⁹

One way in which High Crimson overtly explores this kind of representation in time through the main protagonists, Beatrice and Jean and their performance of “(sem)erotics.”⁶⁴⁰ The result of this blending of sexual and textual, as Meese has it, focuses on language games employed as attempts to thwart temporal conditions. When Dante gazes at his muse, Beatrice, he is overcome with her beauty, so much so that all

⁶³⁷ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 104.

⁶³⁸ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁶³⁹ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

⁶⁴⁰ For Meese, (sem)erotics is “the engagement of the body and the letter—the convergence of the sexual and the textual.” Elizabeth Meese, “The Erotics of the Letter,” South Atlantic Review, 57.2 (May 1992): 19.

times converge.⁶⁴¹ For the narrator of High Crimson, Jean, the modern Beatrice's beauty does not proffer a similar comingling. Rather, time seems to rush past and it becomes Jean's aim to slow it down. Thus, Jean attempts to treat temporality as a quantifiable matter that can be assessed and modified.

The imminent loss of Beatrice becomes a metaphor for the inability to control time and thus Beatrice, and also a suggestion of the inability to fully represent her. With specific reference to temporality, one might infer that Jean is pointing to (at least) two dimensions. On the one hand, Beatrice seems to inhabit a linear time as nodes in which she is present are governed by a sense of history, destiny, and progress; notably Jean dates her musings. On the other hand, Jean seems to want to destabilise that progression and generate an enduring time; a time "conducive to contemplation."⁶⁴²

However, Jean is wary of dichotomised positions and thus suspicious of merely shunning what Kristeva would describe as a linear time previously only available to men.⁶⁴³ Initially Jean refrains from romanticising an enduring or cyclical time and naming it as solely a feminine time. While Kristeva's second generation of feminism, privileged (arguably necessarily) a "logic of identification" resulting in a monolithic conception of what it means to be Woman,⁶⁴⁴ Jean is aware of subtler aspects of difference and subversion. In fact, Jean looks for ways to reconcile the progressing time with her preferred slow time. As Jean explains about the seating in her favourite restaurant, it had "a wondrous history upon its face, yet it lacked for comfort;"⁶⁴⁵ for Jean, history is not synonymous with ease. Thus, Jean's aim is to think enduring time alongside progressive time – that is, to move forward in an "ever present, ever telling,

⁶⁴¹ "Tutti li tempi son presenti." Dante Alighieri, "Paradiso," La Divina Commedia, Canto XVII, 18, Edicola Web, 2007, 5 October, 2007 < <http://www.edicolaweb.net/nonsoloufo/par17.htm>>.

⁶⁴² Dinsmore, "Colour," High Crimson.

⁶⁴³ Kristeva, "Women's Time" 15.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 19.

⁶⁴⁵ Dinsmore, "Evening," High Crimson.

ever setting”⁶⁴⁶ time and create a sense of history and a place where it is possible to “tou[ch] the memory.”⁶⁴⁷ This is a braiding together of times that is both “wholistic [sic.] and fragmentary,” that “defies and simple linear model of the arrow of time.”⁶⁴⁸

A major preoccupation for Jean, as for Tracey in These Waves of Girls, is the careful approach and then attempt to represent her lover, or rather, parts of her. Signalling an unsignifiable difference is the disclosure of the temporal differences (enduring time and progressive time), however Jean attempts to merge the two temporalities or at least to let them meet in the interval between her representation of Beatrice and Beatrice’s own fleeting impressions:

[e]ach time I watched her weaving her way through the maze of tables I found myself wishing they were strewn in a fashion even more confused, or that the room were at least five times the distance between the door and my table so that I could sustain that edge of tension between memory, dream, and fruition, feel all that moment encompassed at its height of anticipation before the balm of her presence began to soothe me.⁶⁴⁹

Jean’s senses, emotions, words, descriptions, and thoughts are attempts to chronicle her experiences, which she refers to as “dreams.” She explains her intention to “log” her musings and representation of Beatrice but her discourse seems to negate this possibility. Paradoxically, Jean thinks to herself that she has “known [Beatrice], watched these entrances and exits with avid interest for over a decade”⁶⁵⁰ but remains incapable of fully describing her as “language is a skin;”⁶⁵¹ masking rather than exposing. Here there seems to be an dynamic disjunction between the verbal and the

⁶⁴⁶ Dinsmore, “Vision,” High Crimson

⁶⁴⁷ Dinsmore, “Rendezvous,” High Crimson.

⁶⁴⁸ Grosz, “Thinking the New” 18. Emphasis original.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, emphasis original.

⁶⁵⁰ Dinsmore, “Vivid,” High Crimson.

⁶⁵¹ Dinsmore, “Similitude,” High Crimson. While Barthes employs language to caress, rub up against, and talk to the objects of his desire, Jean and Beatrice have multi-modal elements at their disposal to enact both their pleasure and the representation of their pleasure.

visual in place of a mere opposition; each mode, as Luesebrink notes,⁶⁵² offers a different version of representation. Representation for Jean, therefore, is influenced by the passing of time as well as by the modes at her disposal. The tensions made explicit by desiring to represent while acknowledging its inadequacy and the shifting between two types of times is representative of what Grosz demands is necessary for temporal “mode[s] of differing”: “to acknowledge...any event, any reading, to rewrite, resignify, reframe the present, to accept the role that the accidental, chance or the undetermined plays in the unfolding of time.”⁶⁵³

Readers learn that Jean is an “art school” graduate perennially “in pursuit of visual culture” whose trajectory is envisioned as following “the gloss of ivory tower dreams.”⁶⁵⁴ At the outset of her academic positioning Jean is determined to conceive of and defend art as academic practice. She “envisioned all these bright, passionate, talented artists everywhere, carousing galleries, working obsessively until all hours of the night, afterwards retiring to some smoky and ancient little cafe to have heated discussions about art.”⁶⁵⁵ As she gains experience and as her relationship with Beatrice unfolds, Jean comes to the conclusion that art as burgeoning experience is inconsistent with the structuring of academia and so searches for a “strong foothold on reality.”⁶⁵⁶ As Dinsmore explains in an interview, “the art-school system, is rather ‘cult of the individual’...when we realize the limits of that, we need new reasons, to redefine our meaning as creators.”⁶⁵⁷ The dialogue between the static time of academia and the dynamism of art appears emblematic of a deeper questioning of a Newtonian thinking that sees time-flow as an “absolute” move from “past to present to future.”⁶⁵⁸ For

⁶⁵² Marjorie Luesebrink, “Re: Fibonacci’s Daughter,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 26 Oct. 2006.

⁶⁵³ Grosz, “Thinking the New” 18.

⁶⁵⁴ Dinsmore, “Similitude.”

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Dinsmore, “Similitude.”

⁶⁵⁷ Dinsmore, “Defib Webartist Interview,” *Cauldron & Net*, 7 Nov. 1999, 12:30-1:00, 14 Jan. 2007 <<http://www.vispo.com/defib/canned/2Clairee/002.html>>.

⁶⁵⁸ See Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

Mendilow this conception of time finds substantiation in narrative language:

[t]he medium of fiction, language, imposes the most fundamental limitation on the writer's art, and conditions the 'what' no less than the 'how' of his writing. Words are distinct and separate units, even though their semantic edges are blurred, and they fall into distinct and separate groups. They follow one another in single file according to complex but rigid laws of order and sequence. Language then is a medium consisting of consecutive units constituting a forward-moving linear form of expression that is subject to the three characteristics of time – transience, sequence and irreversibility.⁶⁵⁹

For Heise, this preoccupation with configuring time as an independent variable which can be managed according to an external (objective) chronology is apparent in Realist forms of the novel.⁶⁶⁰ High Crimson challenges the idea that time is an external organizing structure "in" which events occur and exchanges it for an enduring time which is co-extensive with feminist inclinations such as Kristeva's where the text is a "fluid 'story,'" "a dynamic 'productivity,'" a continuing dialogue "ever in process."⁶⁶¹

In High Crimson, Jean's thinking of temporality is exhibited via a selection of multi-modal elements. Its combination of sound, touch, and vision allow her to draw conclusions about time that suggest it is understood as a distribution rather than a discrete unit. However, coming to any real final conclusions is not an easy process and the incomprehensibility of thinking the two temporalities together, even with the aid of forms of representation other than text, falls short of a complete grasping. Even her

⁶⁵⁹ Mendilow 32.

⁶⁶⁰ See Heise, Chronoschisms 13 and Chapter 4.

⁶⁶¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading Narrative," Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002) 218.

lover Beatrice suggests she is “mad with images even when they’re not [her] own.”⁶⁶² Jean’s outlook slowly develops into a remodelled interpretation of postmodern temporality which similarly sees time as offering “multiple possibilities and alternatives” but rather than viewing “time dividing and subdividing, bifurcating and branching off continuously...”⁶⁶³ Jean fashions a temporality that unfolds but at a lingering rate. Firstly, rather than “forward momentum” of clock-time,⁶⁶⁴ Jean invokes a critique that reminds readers that representation is not natural but always already constructed; “regurgitate[ed] knowledge.”⁶⁶⁵ Secondly, time is not a reification: it is not a “mechanism of proficiency”⁶⁶⁶ or “the mathematization of space”⁶⁶⁷ generated by an external and objective force.

Although Jean’s alternative to clock time employs various features, she most consistently relies on comparisons to dreams and memory. For Jean, the concept of dreams, indicating two understandings – “one referring to the self in the outside, day to day world, the other referring to the self within”⁶⁶⁸ – finds a suitable correspondent in a temporality that “sustains the edge of tension”⁶⁶⁹ and is able to endure. High Crimson therefore represents Jean’s belief as an attempt to think through the notion of time as a static and universal element to become a notion that eradicates any delineation between a private and public time; time is an “element of being” with a critical “place in ‘real life.’”⁶⁷⁰

The sense of duration is not dissolved with the addition of multi-modal representational tactics but seems to add another level of temporality. An interesting example of this occurs in a section of the web fiction entitled “My Heart the

⁶⁶² Dinsmore, “Similitude.”

⁶⁶³ Heise 55.

⁶⁶⁴ geniwate, “Word Limits.”

⁶⁶⁵ Dinsmore, “Similitude.”

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Grosz, “Thinking the New” 24.

⁶⁶⁸ Dinsmore, “Dream,” High Crimson.

⁶⁶⁹ Dinsmore, “Rendezvous,” High Crimson.

⁶⁷⁰ Dinsmore, “Dream.”

Bookkeeper.” Here, Jean is relaying her “earliest image of Beatrice wandering before her time with a copy of Dubliners underneath her arm.”⁶⁷¹ The scene’s contemplative mood and music suggests duration however the textual account highlights constant and sometimes disjunctive motion: enters and exits; a “body’s upper half moving forward while the lower’s retreating”; tension and balance; “age of transition”; “When she moves her small bones slide and pivot with a complete absence of jolt”;

[h]er long, slim neck with its forward thrust, craving meeting it seems, the lower portion running – a flash and turn of that neck and head, eyes piercing with perception, has the inquisitive yet sceptical [sic.] air of a frightened deer; longing for affection and approval, yet ever ready to leap to retreat at the slightest sign of danger or rejection.”⁶⁷²

For Jean, these flowing episodes are slowed down in order to gather together the fragmentary impressions and ephemeral associations of love and give them a more enduring value. They are more than moments of Bergsonian *durée*;⁶⁷³ they are drastically slowed, deliberate moments offering time for reflection. Jean requires this time to contemplate how, with Dinsmore and Hayles, “subjectivity becomes obviously constructed, fluid, and transformable.”⁶⁷⁴ As the dualities attest – meeting/running, inquisitive/sceptical, affection/rejection – Beatrice is characterised by multiplicity. However, multiplicity arises not only in the sense of description but also in the sense of time. Here the verbs in their present progressive act as further evidence of her perpetual becoming. However that the conjugation of the tense is incomplete – lacking the verb “to be” – suggests that “there is no systematic, linear or teleological stages or phases of

⁶⁷¹ Dinsmore, “My Heart the Bookkeeper.”

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ For Bergson the “duration of experience, *durée*, should be kept distinct from clock time.” Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

⁶⁷⁴ Katherine Hayles, “A Roundtable Discussion with N. Katherine Hayles, Marjorie Perloff, Diane Greco, Linda Carroli and Shelley Jackson, hosted by Jennifer Ley,” *Women and Technology, Beyond the Binary*, Riding the Meridian 1.2 (1999).

becoming.”⁶⁷⁵ What the web fiction explicitly demonstrates is that situated experience – “duration, memory, consciousness” – *is* becoming, the “possibility of unfolding.”⁶⁷⁶

Further marking the importance of temporality are the assorted sheets of paper circling the perimeter of the textual account. Time (of the reading and of the narrative), for the reader, becomes extremely fleeting as no amount of mouse-clicking can grasp the important-looking papers nor do they cease their incessant rotation. A perfunctory and seemingly accelerated force appears that inhibits the linguistic slow reflection: the encounter of the speeding documents, deftly avoiding the reader’s fixed gaze and the mellifluous text, produce an “ever present, ever telling, ever setting”⁶⁷⁷ temporality. The overwhelming (sense of) movement that fills the story becomes even more apparent when the reader, with the aid of external computer software, is able to grasp the fleeting image and capture it for extended perusal; this seems to be the only pictorial representation of Beatrice:



Fig. 4.10 Image of Beatrice and pages from Dubliners, Dinsmore, “My Heart the Bookkeeper,” High Crimson.

Only with the assistance of external software can the reader stop the eternally (at least

⁶⁷⁵ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 120.

⁶⁷⁶ Grosz, “Thinking the New” 25.

⁶⁷⁷ Dinsmore, “Vision,” High Crimson.

for the time of the reading) circulating image and seize the information, although the image has been saved in such a way that magnification, i.e. clarity, is impossible thus rendering the description of Beatrice equivalent to a “flash” and a “sigh.”⁶⁷⁸

The narrative thread of this section concludes here, for Jean has seen Beatrice and remains unable to represent her; she exceeds sensory perception, neither image nor text achieves full understanding, providing only an “atomized” sense.⁶⁷⁹ Appearing to deviate from this view of temporality, the episode designated as “Vivid” tells another story. Concerned again with the passing of time, this section demonstrates that while time cannot always be stopped in order to reflect, it does offer specific occasions for understanding: “I would muse there during those minutes, watching...”⁶⁸⁰ After a day of pining for an everlasting time during which Jean can watch and re-watch Beatrice make her entrances and exits, night-fall confronts this desire by offering “a certain distinct silence, a moody, still-point; the gentle preparation for a great transition.”⁶⁸¹ The transition into night signifies a certain kind of “precision” of temporal order which is described as “solitary” and “singular.” However, it is during this “successive moment” that “a sense of the ubiquity of the dream permeates the atmosphere profoundly.”⁶⁸² The “hour,” envisioned as a break with an enduring time seems at first to preclude reflection but rather gives Jean “the courage...to emerge and pursue [herself] towards attempts...at...fruition.”⁶⁸³ With further observation, the hour does not seem as dreamlike as Jean initially suggests:

[t]his transition more deeply etched and recognizable in the city, its distinction marked as dramatically as a change of costume I once witnessed in a forty-year old veteran of Kabuki in his transition from a

⁶⁷⁸ Dinsmore, “Vision,” High Crimson.

⁶⁷⁹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 122.

⁶⁸⁰ Dinsmore, “Vivid,” High Crimson.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

wrinkled, overweight, middle-aged man into a charming and sultry young courtesan in a mere thirty minutes.⁶⁸⁴



Fig. 4.11 Images of a man transforming into a Kabuki. Dinsmore, “Vivid,” High Crimson.

The fleeting image documenting this swift transformation sustains the notion that nomadic mobility is an “active, assertive process.”⁶⁸⁵ Unlike the transformation of Annabelle in Fibonacci’s Daughter which involves a cycling through five distinct images, the series of images here is not as clear. In fact, rather than one single image looping through different versions of itself, Jean perceives two images in each instantiation of the transformation. Although somewhat difficult to discern in the offline version (fig 4.11), the online live looping makes clear that it is not so much a transformation of a man into a Kabuki, but that the man and Kabuki are always already intertwined subjectivities rather than separate entities. Furthermore, there appears to be a disjunction between the “Real Time” of the narrative and the “Interactive Time” of the reader.⁶⁸⁶ Adding another layer of perception and temporality, the reader discovers that the transformation is not 30 minutes as Jean claims, but ten seconds. Also, each oscillation may be thought of as offering a glimpse of a different timeline as there are delicately discernable gaps in between each frame permutation. This, together with the perpetual but swift becoming produces a desire to prolong the moment in order to scrutinise and better decipher the transformation which mirrors Jean’s longing for an enduring time. Timelessness, for Jean, ensures she can step outside of “discursive

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 124.

⁶⁸⁶ For Luesebrink Real Time is the “current screen time of the narrative” while Interactive Time designates the reader’s involvement. See Luesebrink, “The Moment in Hypertext” 108.

articulation”⁶⁸⁷ which implies (for Jean) “a ‘logical’ or ‘reason’ oriented sense of order”⁶⁸⁸ so that Jean, and the reader, can “savour...the content.”⁶⁸⁹

The web fiction explores “the old certainties”⁶⁹⁰ of time by focusing on the way Jean’s sense of time is bound up with multiple modes of representation. At the heart of the narrative lies a clear sense that Jean’s conception of time cannot exist outside of representation. The introductory splash page projects the groundwork by offering entrances into the narrative labelled as “Similitude,” “Savour,” “Annunciation,” and “Vivid” which all point to notions of representation. The discourse employed in the “Vision” section, for example, relates temporality as intrinsically tied to a visual form of representation. Knowing Beatrice becomes equated with powerful “impressions,” “distinct sensations and visions,” deeply “ingrained visions,” “reiterate[d] vividness,” and “words that will flow.”⁶⁹¹

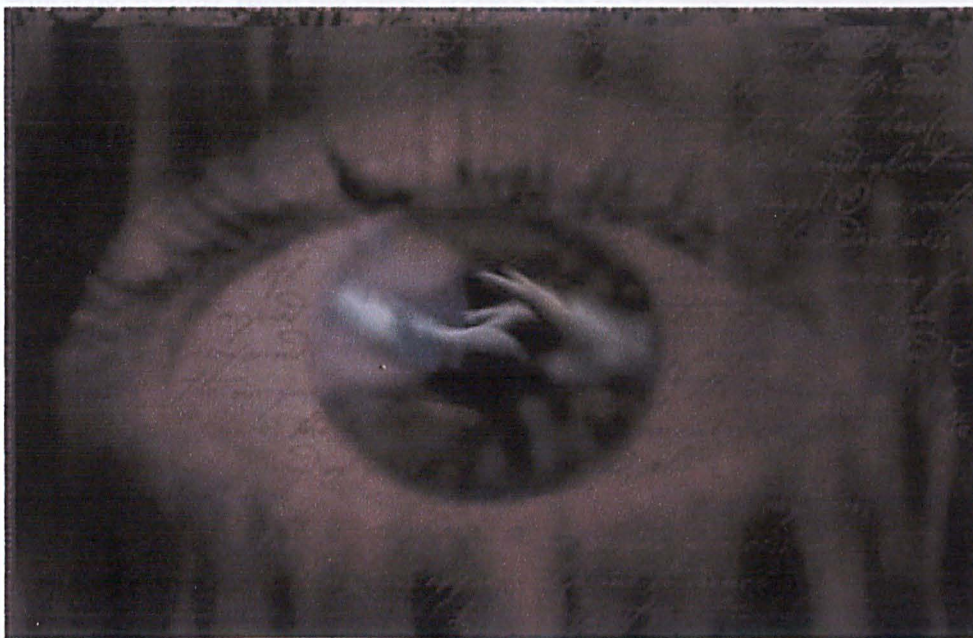


Fig. 4.12 Multiple moments within one image. Dinsmore, “Vision,” High Crimson.

The image appearing in “Vision” is a metaphor with temporal dimensions, bringing

⁶⁸⁷ Dinsmore, “Colour,” High Crimson.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Mendilow 7.

⁶⁹¹ Dinsmore, “Vision.”

together multi-modal experiences relating to different times. Embedded within the single image of an eye watching the reader is cursive writing relating to Jean's own narrativising act with the aid of her log book. Within the pupil there is also an image of a hand being caressed which parallels the scene set in "Similitude" and is reminiscent of the hand entwined in a heart/flower at the beginning of the web fiction. Each of these modes seems now to appear together as a blending of different experiences and temporalities, "invoking simultaneities"⁶⁹² as Luesebrink would have it. Additionally, clicking on this image links to an entry in Jean's log, dated "November." She writes, "I think to myself I have known her."⁶⁹³ While at first glance the past tense of "known" seems to correlate with a particular kind of certainty, suggesting an apprehensible past, however the verb construction is actually present perfect – "have known" – situating Jean in the now. Further complicating conceptions of time, "known" is itself a link which opens only when the reader hovers over it, evoking "the sensation that just below the surface of the text there is an almost inexhaustible reservoir of half-hidden story material waiting to be explored."⁶⁹⁴ That the following appears or disappears with any minute nudge of the mouse makes it all the more ephemeral:

I don't know your name.

I only know your aura,
and your eyes.

That's enough.⁶⁹⁵

In fact Jean does not really know Beatrice for time passes too swiftly, rather she recognises her.⁶⁹⁶ But even in Jean's explicit reflections and Dinsmore's use of multi-modal techniques the web fiction resists any straightforward summing up of Jean's

⁶⁹² Luesebrink, "The Moment in Hypertext" 108.

⁶⁹³ Dinsmore, "Vision."

⁶⁹⁴ Robert Coover makes this point in relation to another hyperfiction but it seems especially applicable here. "Hyperfiction: Novels for the Computer" 10.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ See especially "Savor."

conception of narrative temporality or indeed, her subjectivity. This scene is another example of Jean recognising her desire to represent – and in her specific case, maintain an enduring time – and her concomitant understanding (much like Annabelle) of its impossibility. Accordingly, the image of an eye blinking (for as long as the reader hovers on the link known) that concludes the above musings confirms that experience, for Jean, is both new and old, both present and past; a “dissolving of time.”⁶⁹⁷



Fig. 4.13 Image of eye winking. Dinsmore, “Vision,” High Crimson.

The particularity of Jean’s subjective experience and consequent critical representation of it ensure that her understanding of representation does not become a paradox (an either/or bind) but engages in a fruitful dialogue with past, present, and future (Douglas’s and/and/and). Since each image and representation embodies a play with temporality there is no “concrete information.”⁶⁹⁸ What emerge are multiple kinds of temporality appearing simultaneously, often with the reader’s involvement. Pair this with multi-mimesis and the shift from chronology, the “imposed temporality...of the printed page,”⁶⁹⁹ is achievable.

4.4 Cruising Along: Time in Ankerson and Sapnar

Responding to Nick Montfort’s “Cybertext Killed the Hypertext Star” prompts

⁶⁹⁷ Coover, “Hyperfiction: Novels for the Computer” 10.

⁶⁹⁸ Guertin, “The Unfold: Immersion” 143.

⁶⁹⁹ Guertin, “Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

Hayles to tackle the lack of a suitable discourse with which to discuss what she terms “electronic literature.” She explains that previous attempts like Aarseth’s “cybertext” though beneficial in some ways also “occlude[s] the qualities of language, structure and verbal richness that we traditionally associate with literature.”⁷⁰⁰ On the other hand, according to Hayles, aims like that of Guertin and Luesebrink to endow their terminology with literary meaning are also problematic. Their term, “blended genre”

has the disadvantage of masking ruptures (by implying differences have somehow been “blended” together), and of using “genre,” a term loaded with specifically literary meanings that do not map well onto the multiple discourses and multimedia effects characteristic of these works.⁷⁰¹

In an effort to gesture towards both the digital medium as well as literary aspects Hayles suggests “multicourse.” The term “can be understood as a neologism for ‘multiple discourses’ but that also alludes to the multiple reading pathways generated by links and computational combinations. Like ‘cyber|literature,’ ‘multicourse’ acknowledges both of electronic literature’s parents [computer games and texts].”⁷⁰² This kind of perception of digital fiction seems to correspond with Strickland’s admission about her own hypertextual work in which various “levels are always interwoven. Three impulses seem to work at once.”⁷⁰³ What is important to the present discussion is Hayles’ recognition of the “multiple discourses as well as text, image, animation, etc...”⁷⁰⁴ and Strickland’s interweaving of levels. The two ideas are enacted and explored in Ankerson and Sapnar’s born digital fiction, Cruising.

Situating Cruising as part of the road movie genre is problematic. Firstly,

⁷⁰⁰ N. Katherine Hayles, “Cyber|literature and Multicourses: Rescuing Electronic Literature from Infanticide,” *Riposte*, 11.11(2001) *Electronic Book Review*, 12 October 2007 <<http://www.altx.com/EBR/riposte/rip11/rip11hay.htm>>.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Stephanie Strickland, “Into the Space of Previously Undrawable Diagrams: An Interview with Stephanie Strickland by Jaishree K. Odin,” *Iowa Web Review*, September 2000, 12 October 2007 <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/tirweb/feature/strickland/stricklandinterview.pdf>>

⁷⁰⁴ Hayles, “Cyber|literature and Multicourses.”

Cruising does not present death as a final conclusion, typical of “male heroes” in this genre.⁷⁰⁵ Secondly, there are no distinct “border crossings or linear distances.”⁷⁰⁶ Although the main narrative action does occur within a car and journeying is equated with plot progression, what obviously seems to situate Cruising as a web fiction is its crucial demand for the participation of the reader.

In “Narrative Speed and Contemporary Fiction” Kathryn Hume argues that “excessive rapidity” where “events...hurtl[e] past too quickly...[and] scenes and focal figures change rapidly...” denies “real understanding.”⁷⁰⁷ Rather differently, Viktor Shklovsky, according to Hume, proposed “retardation” as a way of extending excessively short “kernels” so that they might develop into stories.⁷⁰⁸ Cruising inserts itself into these kinds of discussions of narrative temporality in a very specific way. Rather than document narrative speed or delay solely within the narrative content, Ankerson and Sapnar invoke it via the Interactive Time of the reading.

What Hume sees as the narratological neglect of fictions that give a sense of “the narrative being accelerated beyond some safe comprehension-limit”⁷⁰⁹ is brought to the fore when considering born digital narratives such as Cruising. In fact, it is precisely the notion of narrative speed that “highlight[s] the materiality of text, film, and interface”⁷¹⁰ in Ingrid Ankerson and Megan Sapnar’s Cruising. Ankerson and Sapnar’s larger case is that, since the more refined development of the internet, it is possible to narrow one’s interests and focus on concepts like “reactivity.”⁷¹¹ It is exactly along

⁷⁰⁵ Lynda Hart, “Til Death Do Us Part: Impossible Spaces in *Thelma and Louise*,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 4.3 (1994): 430.

⁷⁰⁶ “Road Movies: Iconography, Style and Themes,” Film Encyclopedia, 2007, Film Reference.com, 5 October 2007 <<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Road-Movies-ICONOGRAPHY-STYLE-AND-THEMES.html>>.

⁷⁰⁷ Hume, “Narrative Speed in Contemporary Fiction” 105.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid. 106.

⁷¹⁰ Ingrid Ankerson and Megan Sapnar, “Author Description,” Cruising, 2001, ELO Collection, October 2006, 5 December 2007 <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/ankerson_sapnar_cruising.html>.

⁷¹¹ Megan Sapnar, “Reactive Media Meets E-Poetry,” Poems that Go 12 (Winter 2003) <http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/winter2003/print_article.htm>.

these lines that, for Sapnar, reactivity appears to constitute an ontology of digital texts. For reactivity is a “condition of time”⁷¹² and as such the narrative comes into being only “in tandem with the viewer’s own movement or action.”⁷¹³

Instead of conceiving of narrative as sustaining or giving access to events, episodes or situations, Sapnar and Ankerson shift the agency to the readers’ “instantaneity of response” which grants access to the events and consequently to the narrative. The result, in Cruising, is “un montaggio ibrido”⁷¹⁴ composed of disjunctive rhythms, variable temporality, and the constant creation of narrative as an unfolding that parallels the “shift from space to time...an aesthetic shift from mapping, and radial structures, to happening, morphosis, and temporal experiences.”⁷¹⁵

The female protagonists in Cruising appear to lack the ability to pivot between different temporalities as exhibited by Jean in High Crimson and Annabelle in Fibonacci’s Daughter. Like the two women in High Crimson, Mary Jo, Joanie, and “the skinny girl in [the] back” of the car align required love with an enduring time. Unlike Jean and Beatrice, however, the “hundreds” of young women seem incapable of situating themselves within temporality in order to manipulate it. Whereas multi-mimesis comes together with different temporalities in High Crimson to engender a liberatory aspect, reader interaction as part of multi-mimetic representation, serves to impose chronology and sequence, which in Cruising is absolutely necessary for narrative comprehension.

The situation in which the reader finds herself when first approaching the web fictions previously discussed in this thesis is nothing like the one Cruising elicits.

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ A hybrid montage. My translation. See Giovanna Di Rosario and Matteo Gilebbi, “Hyperpoetry: Sincretismi–Ibridazioni–Margini–Interstizi,” Poesianet: Digital and Visual Poetry, 25 February 2006, 12 March 2007 <<http://www.poesianet.it/materiali9.htm>>.

⁷¹⁵ Bill Marsh, “Reading Time: For a Poetics of Hypermedia Writing,” Currents in Electronic Literacy (Fall 2001): 16 <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/fall01/marsh/marsh.html>>.

While the exact circumstances of the characters and plot in the aforementioned web fictions may not be apparent at first glance, a general impression is discernable. Cruising, however, at no point provides any background information, description, introduction, or exposition. In fact, without the reader's participation, the narrative streams across the computer screen in an incoherent flow of sound, image, video, and text. Thus, a brief summary is in order.

The unnamed narrator is relating a poignant memory of an event that has occurred numerous times. The narrator is with two friends, Mary Jo and Joanie, and they enact a typical North American teenage past-time; they "cruise" up and down local streets in search of adventure. As the girls drive up and down the same streets, the narrator notes that this cruising is an effort to find love with the male drivers also driving up and down the same streets. For the sake of succinctness the summary will end here, even though the narrative itself, as long as it is on the reader's screen, will continue ad infinitum.

The speed of the narrative, as Hume would see it, is easily established, the images, text, and sound flood past the reader. While the voice of the narrator is clearly distinguishable, the concurrent flow of black and white images and text obscures the textual narrative leaving the reader feeling queasy or carsick from driving/reading too quickly. In this fiction, the reader acquires too much narrative too quickly. In order to proceed, the reader must learn how to read haptically. According to Frank Wilson

[t]he new way of mapping the world was an extension of ancient neural representations that satisfy the brain's need for gravitational and inertial control of locomotion...a new physics would eventually have to come into this brain, a new way of registering and representing the behavior of objects moving and changing under the control of the hand. It is precisely such a representational system – a syntax of cause and effect,

of stories and of experiments, each having a beginning, a middle, and an end – that one finds at the deepest levels of the organization of human language.⁷¹⁶

Cruising comes into existence in a way similar to Wilson's new mapping of the world. A new ergonomics of reading is essential as a way of "registering" this particular narrative.⁷¹⁷ If the reader cannot come to grips, literally, with the temporality of the text, the narrative will remain unrepresentable.

The tripartite structure of Cruising and the concept of cyclical travel contest patriarchal assumptions of reading temporality as a following of a "Hansel-&-Gretel trail of breadcrumbs."⁷¹⁸ Guertin's appeal for reading temporality as a re-envisioning which opens up "ever-shifting perspectives"⁷¹⁹ coincides with Luesebrink's insistence that "the reader's reconstruction of time through the assembling and gathering of text and media is what makes each reading unique."⁷²⁰ Both statements raise similar concerns regarding the adequacy and applicability of purely formalist methodology.

By opting for a fiction that allows the reader to assemble time and thereby, the narrative, Ankerson and Sapnar ensure that each reading experience is unique but this does raise some difficulties. Ankerson notes that a particular challenge is finding the balance between interactivity and narrative.⁷²¹ In Cruising, Ankerson and Sapnar employ a triadic configuration which includes the simultaneous unfolding of a sequence of cinematic frames, text, and audio. Adding to the Reading Time/Interface Time

⁷¹⁶ Frank R. Wilson, qtd. in Gary Frost, "Reading by Hand: How the Hands Prompt the Mind," Institute for the Future of the Book, 14 July 2007, 14 December 2007 <<http://www.futureofthebook.com/storiestoc/hand>>

⁷¹⁷ It is possible that the haptic nature of Cruising may render it more readable by a gamer than by a traditional hypertext or print reader.

⁷¹⁸ Guertin "believe[s] that retracing one's steps in the new media is [not] possible. Instead, we experience re-visionings." For Guertin this is a specifically feminist way of reading digital fiction. Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Luesebrink, "The Moment in Hypertext" 111.

⁷²¹ Ankerson qtd in Jessica Ludwig, "Students' Poetry Web Site Showcases Hypertext Verse," Information Technology, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 12 June 2001, 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://chronicle.com/free/2001/06/2001061201t.htm>>.

juxtaposition Luesebrink sees as typical of digital literature, Cruising's narrative chronology is elusive and is (re)claimed only in the reading process. For readers still developing their haptic modalities like Larsen's neophyte readers, the audio track provides the first easily intelligible rendering of the narrative. The version details the basic storyline concerning the three girls cruising up and down Main Street in search of love. The words flow from the unnamed homodiegetic narrator, relating a story that occurred in the past but remains perpetually present. The racing filmic frames that run through the centre of the reader's screen operate dialogically; at times corresponding to the audio at other times countering it. Above the speeding reel of film streams text much like operatic surtitles, that at once mimics the movement of the film frames as well visualising the spoken words. The arrangement of the multiple modes on the computer screen – all fleeting without the reader's interception – reflects the character's journey and the reader's own tenuous grasp on the evanescent narrative. Consequently the web fiction interweaves the multi-mimetic representation of temporality with the reading experience.

From Hayles' perspective, Luesebrink's The Book of Going Forth by Day, "illustrates how navigation becomes a signifying strategy for electronic hypertexts."⁷²² In fact, Hayles notes that the hypertext, "employ[ing] both horizontal and vertical registers" provides two different sets of information: "narrative" appears on one plane while "linguistic, historical, and geographic" cues appear on another. Cruising also seems to employ various "registers" however they do not necessarily remain divided. While the audio spills out the frames sweep to the right. This movement means the textual narrative must be read backwards, from right to left, from end to beginning. The images, when streaming from right to left seem to follow a discernible chronological sequence, flowing from beginning to end and echoing the spoken narrative. The

⁷²² Hayles, "Print is Flat, Code is Deep" 83.

images, however, only match the audible narrative in the sense that they narrate the same events. The tempo at which those events are related differ drastically; the filmic narrative unfolds at a breakneck speed while the woman's voice keeps pace with contemplative reminiscing.

In High Crimson, Jean longs for an enduring time in which she can replay Beatrice's comings and goings. In Fibonacci's Daughter, Annabelle applies mathematical sorcery in an effort to circumvent "an inevitable chain of events."⁷²³ In Cruising, it is up to the reader to regain both temporality and directionality. Once the reader learns how to control the mouse, the narrative can be slowed down and, in fact, frozen, able to be considered at length. This move establishes what Ryan sees as a "the triple unity of interface, theme, and image."⁷²⁴ However, freezing the narrative in this way profoundly dislocates it from/in time. Time is no "neutral medium," Grosz explains, it is a "dynamic force" in the "framing" of subjectivity.⁷²⁵ In this way, the reader's intervention creates a double bind. At once the reader is able to "read" the narrative while at the same time the reader halts the progression of the story. Thus, freeze-framing the narrative highlights the implicit underpinning of general conceptions of representation where "visualisation is a way of fixing (in) time."⁷²⁶ Here however it is not so much the representation but the narrative itself that becomes fixed, stationary. In a way, then, the reader (re)gains control over the narrative, or at least the telling of it, for as Mulvey sees it "freez[ing] the narrative" is a way for women, as readers and spectators, to "disrupt linearity and cohesion."⁷²⁷

⁷²³ Luesebrink, "Re: More on Fibonacci's Daughter."

⁷²⁴ Marie-Laure Ryan, "Cyberspace, Cybertexts, Cybermaps," Dichtung Digital, 1(2004), 12 February 2007 <<http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2004/1/Ryan/index.htm>>.

⁷²⁵ Grosz, "Becoming...An Introduction" 3.

⁷²⁶ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 49.

⁷²⁷ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 11.

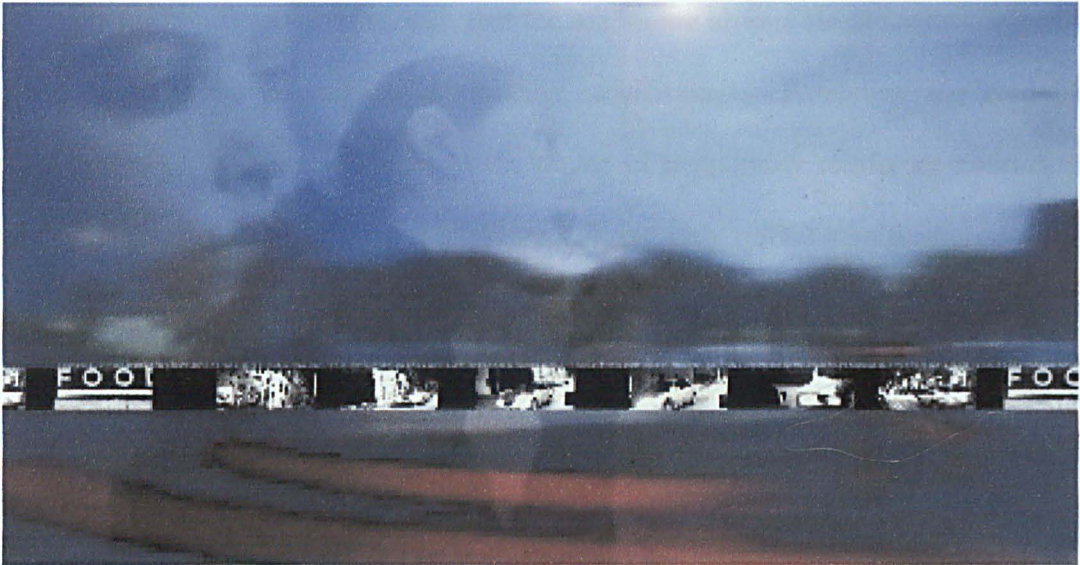


Fig. 4.14 A zoomed out scene from *Cruising* illustrating the filmic frames and the written narrative.

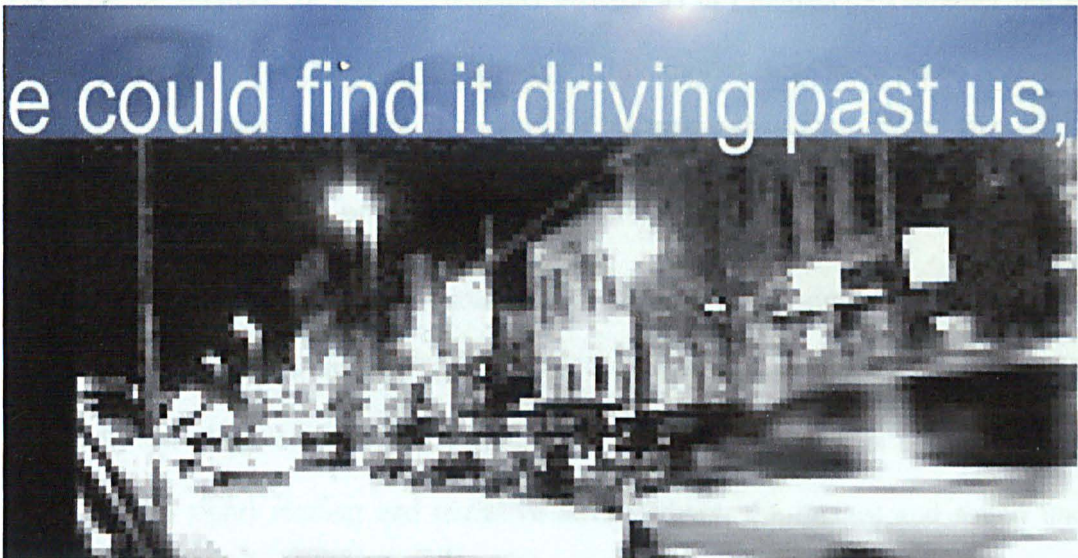


Fig. 4.15 A zoomed in scene from *Cruising* illustrating the filmic frames and the written narrative.

The unusual tripartite form of *Cruising*, what Daniel Punday refers to as a “textual ontology,” represents not only the connections between the different modes but the linked relationship between form and content.⁷²⁸ Punday sees the tripartite appearance of *Cruising* indicative of “theme, words and interface” however he suggests there is a hierarchy of modes here since there are “various levels” between which the

⁷²⁸ Daniel Punday, “Toying with the Parser: Aesthetic Materiality in Electronic Writing,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61. 2 (Spring, 2003): 111.

reader must “shuffle.”⁷²⁹ However, that the modes are always simultaneous suggests a thinking based on connection rather than stratification. Extending the conjoined relationship of the various modes to the theme of temporality reinforces notions that time is not a fixed and organized structure offering only reified significations. Rather temporality here, like the continuous flow of images, sound and text is distorted, leaving it up to the reader to negotiate all instances of multiplicity.

How these elements – the tripartite form; the act of reading, and the story – combine and recombine to represent a becoming subjectivity in time gain further significance when the reader notes that the fiction includes no chronological indicators. There are no numbers or dated newspaper articles as in Fibonacci’s Daughter nor are there dated diary entries as in High Crimson. This implies there is no grand scheme of time here. The past is only the past in reference to situated experience – “I remember...”⁷³⁰ – part of a process of becoming.

The repeating cinematic frames and “pumping” beat similarly correspond to Ankerson and Sapnar’s attempt to side-step the linear passing of time. Just as the repeatedly scrolling text (without the reader’s involvement) inhibits both a typically linear (left to right) reading and narrative advancement, the images and sound undo chronological order. The result is a reminder to the reader that whatever temporal conditions she invokes in order to narrativise the story, they are not the same conditions in which the protagonists develop their events. What both reader and protagonist do share is journeying as a “sequence of discovery.”⁷³¹

The connections between the three instances of multi-mimetic modes do not always tell the same story; they merge and divide in knotted ways. For Guertin,

⁷²⁹ Ibid. 112.

⁷³⁰ Ankerson and Sapnar, Cruising.

⁷³¹ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

following Harpold, knots “reach” across time and space.⁷³² Thinking of modes as knots helps explain their temporal positioning, always already in relationships with one another. At times the modes appear to offer parallel information, as the spoken words mirror the textual words. At other times the linguistic account swirls by too quickly to maintain time with the spoken narrative, creating a fissure between events and times. Consequently, to bridge the multiple times, to arrange or rearrange the various modes and to map the connections among them, the reader must “pull back the perspective.”⁷³³ “Driving” the narrative across the screen means placating the “coming-of-age...hormones,”⁷³⁴ enabling the ongoing action, the filmic sequences and the text to slide slowly from right to left so that the words connect in a legible order. This malleable and amorphous form (amorphous at least until the reader develops her haptic sensibility) highlights Braidotti’s view of “transformation” that here, constitutes the act of reading: the “reinscription of the text into a set of discontinuous variations...marks the tempo” of a subject’s becoming.⁷³⁵ In other words, the reader’s physical grappling with the multiplicity of Cruising generates new possibilities of subjectivity, as Butler explains “multiplicity is not the death of agency, but its very condition.”⁷³⁶ The multiplicity of modes in Cruising is the condition of the narrativising, the event of the narrative; “the unfolding of things occurs in time...”⁷³⁷

That the work has no “simple starting point”⁷³⁸ and the various modes are consistently entangled can be viewed through a feminist lens as a bid to remain mobile. For Braidotti mobility is a physical as well as creative feature but in Cruising mobility, as a nomadic enterprise, appears as an element with temporal dimensions. Just as

⁷³² Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁷³³ Punday 112.

⁷³⁴ Ingrid Ankerson and Megan Sapnar, “Author Description,” Cruising, 2006 (2001), Electronic Literature Collection, 2 Feb. 2007 <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/ankerson_sapnar_cruising.html>.

⁷³⁵ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 96.

⁷³⁶ Butler, Undoing Gender 194.

⁷³⁷ Lynn Hejinian, The Language of Inquiry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) 169.

⁷³⁸ Punday 112.

Braidotti notes that women's freedom to "take back the night" signifies "the freedom to invent new ways of conducting our lives, new schemes of representation of ourselves,"⁷³⁹ so too does taking control of the reading of Cruising suggest a certain kind of freedom. However, this freedom or "potential energy..."⁷⁴⁰ as Sapnar sees it is exclusively for the reader, the protagonists' experiences unfold and how they unfold results only with the reader's intervention.

For Braidotti, the "textual apparatus" is inherently "linear" and "binary" and thus her theory of nomadic subjects is a way of "renewing...language" and, by extensions, subjectivity.⁷⁴¹ If writing, for Braidotti, is a way to make a space habitable (particularly for women), reading transforms the space into time, pluralising the reader and the narrative world. For the reader interacts with the text at specific moments and "constructs it" much like Braidotti's view of the intersections of philosophy and feminist theory.⁷⁴² Therefore, the explicitly controlled emergence of temporality in Cruising and the tightly linked though uncontrollable multimodality combine and interact to expose what Ankersen and Sapnar perceive as weaknesses inherent in frameworks which preclude dynamism.⁷⁴³

The audio version of the narrative is a homodiegetic account of an unnamed woman relating a repeated teenage past-time, the cruising of the streets of Wisconsin. The narrator is the "skinny girl" in the back and is on the lookout for love, like her two female friends and the other cruisers. While the words themselves suggest a quotidian occurrence, the spoken voice sarcastically realises that "*maybe*, we could find [love]

⁷³⁹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 256.

⁷⁴⁰ Megan Sapnar, "Text that Moves," Archived Log of Live Chat: with guests Thomas Swiss of the Iowa Review Web and Megan Sapnar of Poems That Go led by Deena Larsen, LinguaMOO, 20 Oct. 2002, trAce Archive, 3 Feb. 2007 <<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/forumlive/chat102002.cfm>>.

⁷⁴¹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 8.

⁷⁴² Rosi Braidotti, "Nomadic Philosopher: A Conversation with Rosi Braidotti – Kathleen O'Grady," Women's Studies Resources, 1996, University of Iowa, 4 Feb. 2007 <<http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/Braidotti/index.html>>.

⁷⁴³ Megan Sapnar, Online Posting, 13:36, 22 November 2002, Poems that Go, 5 September 2007 <<http://www.poemsthatgo.com/discussion.htm#form>>.

driving past us, *maybe* in a pick-up truck....” suggesting that the kind of love for which the three friends are searching, will not be found by cruising.



Fig. 4.16 White rounded font from the written narrative, Ankerson and Sapnar, *Cruising*.

The streaming narrative text running along the top of the cinematic images acts, in a sense, like a counterpoint, establishing two durations (the tempo of the spoken word and that of the written), and in doing so brings another kind of temporality to the event both for the narrative and for the reader. The white rounded font seems to eschew the rhythmic complications audible in the spoken version, appearing either distinct when the reader “drives” apace or as a flood of hieroglyphs. Here then, are two modes, the aural and the textual, in motion with and against each other, telling the same story but narrating it differently. This pressure, on the two competing (at least from the reader’s point of view) versions illustrates the pressure the narrator feels to behave a certain way; the implosive momentum perhaps represents the skinny girl’s struggle with peer pressure. Though the girls may seem unable to fully “disengage themselves from their social [and] sexual identity” they can “melt into the landscape.”⁷⁴⁴ This blurring, of subjectivities in and out of focus and with and against their surroundings however assures their mobility, their nomadism.⁷⁴⁵ It is not so much the destination itself that secures transformation, but movement; they “become, transforming themselves and us as they go.”⁷⁴⁶

Both the written text and spoken word foster another kind of connection between the narrative and the reading experience especially apparent when one recognises the

⁷⁴⁴ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 239, 240. Although Braidotti makes these insights based on her interpretation of *Thelma and Louise*, they are applicable to *Cruising*, a different type of road movie.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

situated knowledge and partial perspective of the narrator. While there is no lengthy background information even though aspects are narrated as homodiegetic analepsis the triadic montage of modes are successfully symptomatic of the protagonist's enduring attempt to challenge the notion of a beginning and ending. Most interesting are the verbs: "night rolling," "sniffing the street," "honking at us," "laughing at them," "tracing the edge," and "eyeing life." Each construction is missing, or more likely, eliding, a conjugation of "to be" so it remains unclear whether this progressive tense is in the past or present. Significantly this linguist play with temporality represents structurally what becoming experience is to the narrator. Here Ankerson and Sapnar offer a vision of "[m]otion [as] another layer of language"⁷⁴⁷ and in the process they help disrupt typical ways of reading while connecting the multiple modes with what Kristeva sees as features of women's time, repetition and eternity.⁷⁴⁸

If the soundtrack and the textual narrative frequently seem at odds with one another, how then might the filmic sequences connect with both sound and text? Keeping in mind Mulvey's argument that posits cinema as irreducibly shaped by sexual difference, showing that film is built upon looks or gazes which reciprocally shape the narrative. Importantly, for Mulvey, it is the men looking and the woman connoting the "looked-at-ness" which Tracey vehemently deconstructs in These Waves of Girls. Similarly, Ankerson and Sapnar tackle the deconstruction of the gaze albeit in a very different way. With over 54 images used, there is only one scene which portrays the characters (see fig. 4.17).⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁷ Sapnar, "Text That Moves."

⁷⁴⁸ Kristeva, "Women's Time" 16.

⁷⁴⁹ With the aid of a Flash decompiler it was possible to decode the elements and number of elements used to create the web fiction.

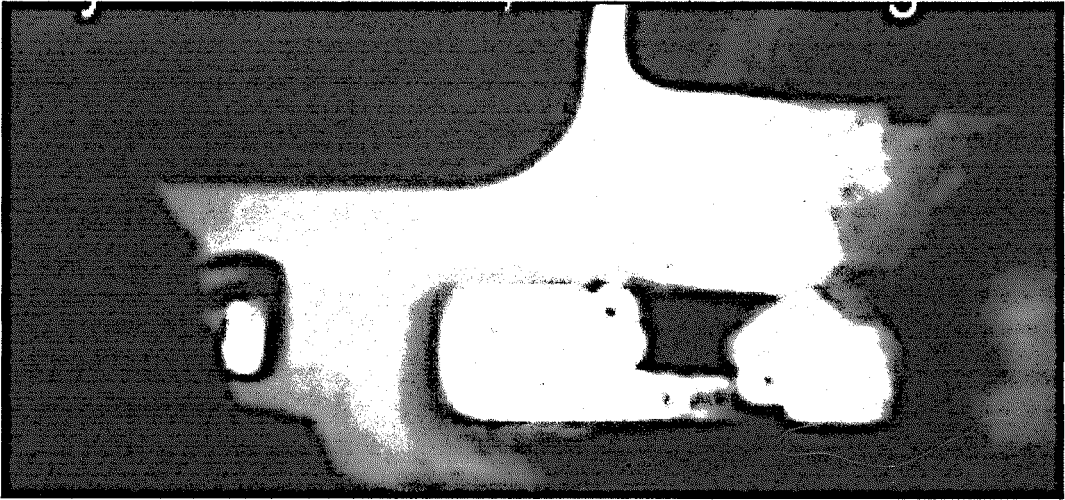


Fig. 4.17 The only image in *Cruising* in which the protagonists appear. Ankerson and Sapnar, *Cruising*.

The deconstructive gaze derives, not from a “genuine opposition,”⁷⁵⁰ as in Butler’s sense, but from the capacity for the narrator, and to a lesser extent, Mary Jo, and Joanie to construct themselves as becoming subjectivities. The three protagonists participate in a broad range of gazing; in fact, their entire pastime of cruising revolves around looking and being looked at. In a subversive move, the narrator refrains from including any words that denote the act of looking. Consequently, while the young women are on the prowl they only “hope they can find [love] passing” them, rather than see love. Additionally, the men in pick-up trucks “drive past” the girls and laugh and wave, they however, do not look. This subversive manoeuvre engenders another instance to problematise linear aspects of temporality. Mulvey suggests there exists an opposition between stasis and movement in relation to the gaze. Stasis, necessarily, fixes the woman as the object of desire, it “freeze[s] the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.”⁷⁵¹ Movement can provide a way out of this predicament, it “breaks the flow.”⁷⁵² Although Mulvey notes this in relation to spectacle (as stasis) and narrative (as movement), here it seems feasible to view this temporal distinction solely within the visual mode. Add to this the fact that the women are driving and this scene becomes

⁷⁵⁰ See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 140.

⁷⁵¹ Mulvey.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*

resolutely dynamic.

Although the gaze imposes itself in a particularly subtle way, the logic of the masculine gaze and the control Mulvey purports it to exert are explicitly parodied. According to Hutcheon, “[p]arodic art both is a deviation from the norm and includes that norm within itself as background material.”⁷⁵³ Corresponding to the subtle use of the gaze, the protagonists appear only eleven frames into the narrative rather than at the opening. Instead of presenting the three young women as objects of desire, Ankersen and Sapnar construct a distinctly parodic reworking of the gaze. The narrator, Mary Jo and Joanie appear only twice in the narrative and both times the images are remarkably grainy. The blurry visual code testifies to Braidotti’s notion of the becoming female subjectivity, “it is still a blank, it is not yet there.”⁷⁵⁴ This scene further plays with the (traditional) logic of the gaze. Rather than granting easy visual accessibility to Mary Jo, Joanie, and the narrator, only one young woman is most fully discernable, the driver wearing glasses (see fig. 4.18).

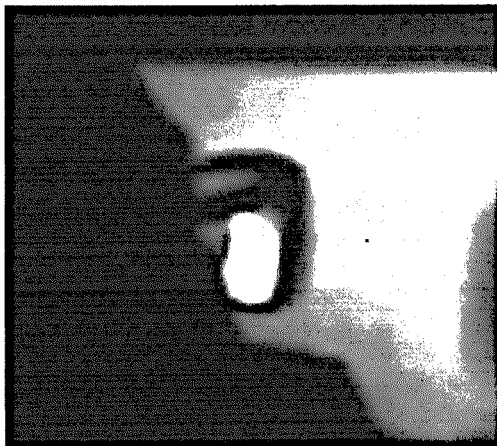


Fig. 4.18 An enlarged view of the driver. Ankersen and Sapnar, *Cruising*.

The accompanying front seat passenger is extremely blurry and the back seat passenger, the narrator, is visible only in the rear-view mirror, as a reflection (see fig. 4.17).

⁷⁵³ Linda Hutcheon, “Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox,” *Dissertation Abstracts International* 38 (1977), University of Toronto Research Abstracts, 12 Feb. 2007 <<http://hdl.handle.net/1807/9456>>.

⁷⁵⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 131.

Unlike Elys in The Lacemaker – framed within a mirror but simultaneously present to the reader – Cruising's anonymous narrator manipulates the gaze: she can look at the reader, but the reader has access only to a reflection. The story here is resolutely from the inside, a subjective text that “alternately challenges and ignores the institutional apparatus for “traditional” or “mainstream” literature.”⁷⁵⁵ The visual problematisation of the “hegemonic regime”⁷⁵⁶ multi-mimetically represents the concept of time, as previously argued, that is at stake in Ankerson and Sapnar’s text by foregrounding the “becoming-ness” of the narrative as well as the reading. Thus, what is persistently explored in Cruising, on the level of the narrative, its telling and its reading, is the desire “not to know who we are,” but “what, at last, we want to become.”⁷⁵⁷ For Ryan, this means “[t]he interface is much more than a way to manipulate the text — it is a simulative mechanism that enables the reader to participate symbolically in the experience of the speaker.”⁷⁵⁸ Through the visual evidence of a *sujet-en-procès* and the necessity to learn to drive the narrative, the only time that remains pertinent to the web fiction is that of subjective articulation itself.

Just as the complex entanglement of images, sound and the reader’s navigation permit multiple temporalities to emerge, the textual account adds further complication.

I remember cruising Main Street with Mary Jo and Joanie, the heat pumping full blast, windows down, night rolling through Mary Jo’s father’s station wagon like movie credits. I was the skinny girl in back, sniffing the street like a dog. We wanted love. That’s all anybody ever wanted, and we thought maybe we could find it driving past us, maybe in a pick-up truck, and we’d pass each other a few times — them honking at us, us laughing at them, until finally, they’d wave us into Shopko’s

⁷⁵⁵ Megan Sapnar, “Digital Poetry, Visual Media: The Promises and Pitfalls for New Practitioners,” 2006, Scene 360, 12 February 2007 <http://www.scene360.com/STORYboard_article_digitalpoetry.html>.

⁷⁵⁶ For Braidotti, “visualization is the hegemonic regime.” Braidotti, Metamorphoses 246.

⁷⁵⁷ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 2.

⁷⁵⁸ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Cyberspace, Cybertexts, Cybermaps.”

parking lot. Joanie would slide a line of pink lipstick on, and we'd all really get to know each other. There were hundreds of us, tracing the edge of small town Wisconsin, eying life through a car we couldn't yet take to the world.⁷⁵⁹

This lengthy paragraph represents the entirety of the web fiction narrative. Although it seems short for a story in terms of textual duration, it is genuinely limitless for the narrative will revolve fugitively as long as the reader allows the URL to remain open.⁷⁶⁰ From a more structural point of view the concept of frequency raises some interesting insights into temporality. If for Rimmon-Kenan frequency denotes "the relation between the number of times an event appears in the story and the number of times it is narrated (mentioned) in the text,"⁷⁶¹ then the act of reading Cruising drastically alters its frequency. If the reader chooses to interact with the narrative for more than one loop, then the act of cruising moves from a singular instance (telling once what happened once) to multiple instances where the repetitive telling repeats events. Furthermore, the duration of the textual narrative illustrates another temporal aspect. According to Genette the narrative pace is calculated by the amount of "space" given to each narrated event. For him, acceleration implies a short textual episode that narrativises a lengthy event while deceleration is the opposite. In Cruising, then, the somewhat brief textual account describes an event that presumably lasted some time. Here the acceleration that Genette describes is doubled if the reader has yet to develop an adequate haptic sensibility. What this kind of formalist approach makes apparent, is that Cruising depends on temporal parameters that come into being during the narrativising, in the process of reading.

Further attempts to negotiate linear time and repetitive cycling develop via the

⁷⁵⁹ Ankerson and Sapnar, Cruising.

⁷⁶⁰ It is not necessary that the reader remain on any "page" of the web fiction for it to continue of its own accord. As long as the URL is open, it will continue to scroll through the filmic frames.

⁷⁶¹ Rimmon-Kenan 57.

filmic frames that whizz past the inexperienced reader; however, this is not the only way that time is emplotted.⁷⁶² While all three parts of the triadic structure – the voice-over, the filmic sequences, the rolling text – consist of short portions, looped ad infinitum, the filmic frames contain a kind of punctuation. Rather than a deluge of images, each scene is separated by a black (not blank) space:



Fig. 4.19 Filmic sequence showing the black space punctuation between each image. Ankerson and Sapnar, *Cruising*.

The melodic voice reciting the story and the streaming words make it easy for any reader to conceive of the images as one continuous flow. However, with practice, the reader can slow down the narrativising time and see that the web fiction alternates between images and black spaces, sound and silence.

Reading the silences as detached from the filmic frames reduces them to a separate narrative. Rather, readers should employ Raley's "deep reading" or reading along the "z-axis:" "the user does not simply read the words [...] but she also reads through and behind [the text]..."⁷⁶³ One might argue that what *Cruising* calls for is a "shallow viewing" in order to enjoy the fleeting, dynamic story.⁷⁶⁴ However, in doing so readers would grasp only the superficial and cinematic sense of the story. Reading the gaps alongside the streaming images, narrating voice, and text facilitates a strategic interference. Strategic in the sense that the coming together of these multi-mimetic devices consistently calls attention to the instability of time – the black spaces are "the

⁷⁶² I am using this word in a context similar to Ricoeur's emplotment which brings the diverse elements of a situation into an imaginative order, as does the plot of a story although, for Ricoeur this action suggests "the unity of one temporal whole" vol. 1, *Time and Narrative* 66-67.

⁷⁶³ Rita Raley, "Editor's Introduction: Writing 3D," *Iowa Review Web*, Sept. 2006, 12 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/new/september06/raleys/intro.html>>.

⁷⁶⁴ Andrew Hugill, "Some Comments," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti. 19 November 2007.

irreducibility of in-between spaces.”⁷⁶⁵ Importantly, the black spaces interrupt the flow of the narrator’s memory. As Irigaray asks “[w]hat do we call a gap that is full?”⁷⁶⁶ Without the gaps, the story would continue to swirl by both narrator and reader, but the black spaces signify a time to slow down and make the controlling of time imperative, to “hear the inaudible.”⁷⁶⁷ In this way, the use of gaps act as evidence of the double-bind of representation – in Cruising there is an absolute necessity to slow down the time of the narrative – the rush of the memories – in order to create coherence.

In “The Temporality of Hypertext Fiction,” Hink demonstrates how “[t]he separation of plot chronology or textual time from narrative time or sequence is a key element of readers’ experiential navigation of hypertext fiction.”⁷⁶⁸ Rather differently, in Cruising such a separation renders the narrative impenetrable. Instead of requiring readers to divide narrative from reading time, Ankerson and Sapnar maintain a direct correlation exists between Cruising’s narrative drive and their attempt to engage systematically with a notion of time that takes the (re)production of difference into account. Each reader and each reading will enact a different experience of time passing and of the narrative progressing which links with Braidotti’s nomadic becoming where the “subject...is definitely not one, but rather multilayered, interactive and complex.”⁷⁶⁹

Phrased more generally, the “I” of the reading and the “I” of the narrative lead an intertwining existence in between a temporal dimension that requires correlation. As Cavarero explains it, narrative is reciprocal – it requires a teller and a listener for the story to come into being.⁷⁷⁰ As implicitly evident in Cruising, the paradoxes in the narrative logic – requiring the slowing down of time in order to progress the story – are multi-mimetic of the constitution of the narrator’s subjectivity. Just as the narrative

⁷⁶⁵ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 157.

⁷⁶⁶ Irigaray qtd. in Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid. 155.

⁷⁶⁸ Hink.

⁷⁶⁹ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman” 43.

⁷⁷⁰ See Cavarero.

requires a slowing down in order to progress the story, so too does the narrator's subjectivity come into view with the temporal speed, for it is precisely the motion which allows for the construction of subjectivity. Subjectivity in Cruising, like the narrative itself, appears in "in-between spaces...temporal points of transition" which deeply implicate the reader in their rendering.⁷⁷¹

4.5 Summary and Next Steps

In the three web fictions discussed here, past, present and future are not such distinct points on a linear sequence but signify states of becoming in which potential and multiple subjectivities and narratives unfold. While each of the web fictions employs its own aesthetics of temporality, they all focus on the temporality of becoming. As Grosz notes is the case with the theorists collected in her edited volume, the same can be said here, each web fiction author sees time as becoming and "conceives of time as difference."⁷⁷² According to Marsh "[w]ith motion built directly into the architecture of the piece, the time of reading comes alive as an agent of literary realization,"⁷⁷³ presenting time as a generative process. Amongst other things, temporality is always already intertwined with various processes including the narrative, subjectivity and reading. Cruising illustrates this most emphatically since it insists the reader learn to temporally organise the narrative.

Fibonacci's Daughter, High Crimson, and Cruising specifically reconceptualise time in light of multi-mimesis, linking representation and becoming subjectivity with temporal processes. The following chapter will explore this linking alongside an added dimension. By foregrounding what Guertin calls "the machinery behind the form,"⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷¹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 40.

⁷⁷² Grosz, "Becoming...An Introduction" 3-4.

⁷⁷³ Marsh, "Reading Time" 9.

⁷⁷⁴ Guertin, "The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms."

the next chapter will explore the logic of linking as more than either an arbitrary connection or chronological structuring.⁷⁷⁵ As suggested in the introduction, links in certain web fictions function as poetic play and as representations of multiple worlds. If narratives are “about connectedness, sequence, order,”⁷⁷⁶ then the logic of linking must be inextricably tied to multi-mimetic representation.

⁷⁷⁵ See Scott Rettburg, “Some Thoughts on Writing Hypertext Fiction,” Online Posting, 6 Jan. 1999, Online-Writing list, 2 March 2007 <<http://spinelessbooks.com/unknown/owlhypertext.htm>>.

⁷⁷⁶ Douglas, The End of Books 64.

5.0 Linking To Emergent Worlds

The links between...are only understandable through our interfaces.

Mary Flanagan

Situated knowledge is partial, locatable, critical...sustaining the possibility of webs of connections.

Donna Haraway

Missing key sequences in the project function as missing some context or grounding that would allow a different and fuller understanding.

Donna Leishman

This chapter marks a difference in style and examination from the preceding chapters. It turns from the more metaphorical interpretation of the representation of narrative and subjectivity to an examination more closely connected to a structuralist investigation of narrative “construction.”⁷⁷⁷ This transition from a fundamentally subjective enterprise to more of a textual analysis shifts the interpretive exercise from the realm of metaphor closer to the realm of the work noting, however, the importance of the reader’s role in negotiating between the two domains. This development parallels the development of the thesis argument itself, moving from a more generalised idea of representation of subjectivity in the online environment to a more specific approach of how link semantics are employed to enable multiple worlds. To this end, the readings here illustrate how certain female-authored web fictions enact multiple potentials of story through both articulation (the multi-mimetic representation as evidenced in chapters two and three) and process (the very necessary role of the reader). What is tested in the previous chapters receives substantiation in this chapter. Whereas Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 provide metaphorical evidence of feminist aims to produce “an

⁷⁷⁷ “To understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story, it is also to recognize its construction in ‘storeys’...to read (to listen to) a narrative is not merely to move from one word to the next, it is also to move from one level to the next.” Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) 87.

invitation to the other's discourse"⁷⁷⁸ via the use of multi-mimetic modes, this chapter takes a more definitive bearing by exploring the relational and contingent conditions of links. Building upon the theorising of the previous chapters, this chapter focuses on the multi-mimetic capabilities of the link and how it can function as an aid to the representation of narrative worlds. Here a clarification must be stated; when references are made to a "possible world" it is meant literally, as another option available exclusively because of the reader's participation and navigation of links. Similarly, when the notion of "actual world" is employed, it bears little resemblance to the term invoked in Possible Worlds theory which stresses the ontological differences between the actual world and the possible world.⁷⁷⁹ Therefore, when the designation of possible world appears in this chapter it refers more to the quantum idea of multiple worlds existing at parallel times and importantly, as these fictions appear online, it is through the act of reading and clicking that each possible world becomes an actual world, i.e. the world in which the reader is present.

Beginning with Fallow Field as evidence of a web fiction that does not leave the reader disoriented and mourning the "perpetually unfinished"⁷⁸⁰ ending, this chapter will go on to explore the most intricate and demanding narrative analysed in this thesis, Red Riding Hood, as an example of how user-interaction can acutely alter the story. It will conclude with Shelley Jackson's My Body & a Wunderkammer, where links are used as multi-mimetic devices with which to question binary or hierarchical thinking especially in terms of subjectivity. Thus, the course charted in this chapter, through each of the three fictions, mirrors the development of this thesis as a whole moving from a more recognisable notion (like that of mimesis) to a refined view (like that of multi-mimesis), demonstrating the need to expand the concept of mimesis to include

⁷⁷⁸ Retallack, "Re:Thinking:Literary:Feminism" 347.

⁷⁷⁹ See Bell for a thorough discussion of possible worlds in hypertext fiction.

⁷⁸⁰ Landow, Hypertext 2.0 3.

narratives composed in the online realm as well as noting the applicability of a certain kind of feminist thought.

5.1 Setting the Scene

In Literacy in the New Media Age, Kress sees multimodality as raising important questions for “directionality” through narratives. While it is clear that there is never only a single path through a narrative (one might suggest the same holds for print), Kress resorts to a Lessing-esque view⁷⁸¹ noting that each mode is best employed for a single purpose: “[w]riting is used for that which writing does best – to provide, in fact, an account of events, and image is used for that which image does best, to depict the world that is at issue.”⁷⁸² In making these rules Kress invokes at least two questionable stances. Firstly, he ignores the possibility that links can function as both image and text, as both description and account. Secondly, he suggests that image and text are two opposed and competing discourses unable to inhabit the same literary space/time painting the long (and continuing) association writing has had with image with a broad stroke.⁷⁸³ This notion becomes especially problematic when one recognises that images (like objects, video, sound) on the web must be coded in text in order to appear.⁷⁸⁴

What theorists like Landow succeed in showing is the simultaneity inherent in hypertext links. For Landow, the link has three advantages: “it permits simple means of orienting readers,” “it permits longer lexias” and it “encourages different kinds of annotation and linking”⁷⁸⁵ i.e. reading. The highest degree of “hypertextuality” is achieved, according to Landow, through linking that leads to “multisequentiality” and a

⁷⁸¹ See Chapter 3.

⁷⁸² Gunther Kress, Literacy in the New Media Age (London: Routledge, 2003) 155-156.

⁷⁸³ Although in his earlier book Kress’s outlook varied slightly: “the different modes have technically become the same at some level of representation,” he nonetheless maintains hierarchical boundaries between their representational tactics: “[s]hall I express this with sound or music? Shall I say this visually or verbally?” Kress and Van Leeuwen, Multimodal Discourse 2.

⁷⁸⁴ For example, in order for an image to be represented on a web site it must be embedded as an image tag: ``. Even if using Flash, all events are coded into API.

⁷⁸⁵ Landow, Hypertext 3.0 14-15.

plethora of “reader choices.”⁷⁸⁶ Landow claims that the hyperfiction structure allows the reader to control her or his own emphasis and experience, arguing that hypertext

provides an infinitely recenterable system whose provisional point of focus depends upon the reader... Hypertext transforms any document that has more than one link into a transient centre, a directory document one can employ to orient oneself to decide where to go next.⁷⁸⁷

For Landow, the text allows the reader’s interest or curiosity to direct their reading, so that the reader can choose which link to pursue, listen to, or ignore. He suggests that the reader is not wholly governed by an authorial voice, but is able to make an individual way through the text, “liberated” by the choices and the narrative that they themselves construct.⁷⁸⁸

However, the multiple worlds evoked through multi-mimesis do not come at the expense of authorial control nor do they offer an easy emancipatory move, rather as with the multi-mimetic representation of subjectivity and time, the link becomes part of a double-bind. On the one hand links act as singular jumps between sections orienting readers within a node and/or within a narrative. On the other hand links offer readers flexibility and positive destabilisation – connecting to other worlds and pointing away from themselves.⁷⁸⁹ But it is in this double-bind that multi-mimetic links permit the story to be told, seeping through the gaps between them while enabling meanings to emerge.⁷⁹⁰ Thus, what remains stable is not the narrative nor the link, but the fact that the link is always already a possibility.

For Landow, the liberatory aspects of links are spatialised: “*Hypertext*, as the

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁷⁸⁷ Landow, *Hypertext 2.0* 36-37.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ Similarly, for Guertin “the link is a means of navigating through this information and enacting the spatio-temporal jump, the act of browsing. The link is a jump within a system, a connection through disconnection. Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. 239.

term is used in this work, denotes text composed of blocks of text – what Barthes terms a *lexia* – and the electronic links that join them.”⁷⁹¹ Michael Joyce defines hypertext as

reading and writing electronically in an order you choose; whether among choices represented for you by the writer or by your discovery of the topographic (sensual) organization of the text. Your choices, not the author’s representations or the initial topography, constitute the current state of the text.⁷⁹²

Other definitions of hypertext by its major theorists corroborate this interest in choice as well as its spatial expression (see Chapter 3 of this thesis) through recourse to images of “forking,” “branching,” and “linkage.”

Murray likens the reading of links to “walking through a rhizome” where readers can “enac[t] a story of wandering, of being enticed in conflicting directions, or remaining always open to surprise, of feeling helpless to orient oneself or to find an exit...”⁷⁹³ Thus, although Murray accepts that the inclusion of links in any hyperfiction narrative enriches the experience adding to its “boundlessness,” she nevertheless maintains that “in the rhizome, one is constantly threatened.”⁷⁹⁴ Murray suggests web fictions that do not privilege any one order or do not map an overview of the story for readers risk indeterminacy.

Jim Rosenberg’s understanding of hypertext which “entails imposing a non-linear structure on a locally linear substrate”⁷⁹⁵ demonstrates a similar vigilance. For Rosenberg the “awful asymmetry” of hypertext where “following links is a kind of bending back and forth that can produce the aesthetic equivalent of metal fatigue”⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹¹ Ibid. 3, emphasis original.

⁷⁹² Joyce, *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics* 114.

⁷⁹³ Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* 133.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid. 134.

⁷⁹⁵ Jim Rosenberg, “Poetics and Hypertext: Where are the hypertext poets?” Home Page. 1996, 27 March 2007 <http://www.well.com/user/jer/ht_poetics.html>.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

seems to demand that the author ensure a “visible coherence to [her] method.”⁷⁹⁷ In fact, Marie-Laure Ryan also cautions about the potential of links to negatively destabilise readers: “the kaleidoscopic chunking of the text into recombinant fragments constitutes a major obstacle to the construction of narrative meaning.”⁷⁹⁸ Adrian Miles similarly equates links with risk for the reader:

For the reader, the link is also a moment of risk. This risk is that of comprehension and of readerly control. To follow a link is to surrender, in that moment of choice, control to a system whose logic of operation and connection remain unknown. A link is, then, in such a system, little more than a roll of the dice, and just as the dice may have a small set of outcomes (let’s say one in six), the particular outcome remains unknown in each instantiation.⁷⁹⁹

To reduce the link and its representational and narrative possibilities in this way is to ignore its performative qualities. This reduction becomes especially short sighted when one accepts “an expanded concept of language that is based on the interactions of netspeak and various computer and programming languages: the languages of zeros and ones, ASCII and HTML characters.”⁸⁰⁰

Rather than equate indeterminacy with risk, Donna Leishman sees linking as a powerful way to ensure the involvement of the reader. Leishman uses different kinds of paths, those that are “locked” and those that are “open-ended”⁸⁰¹ and none of her works

⁷⁹⁷ Jeff Ward, “27 May,” Blog Entry, Visible Darkness, May 2002, 23 March 2007 <<http://www.visibledarkness.com/blog/archives/00000671.html>>.

⁷⁹⁸ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Narrative and the Split Condition of Digital Textuality,” *Dichtung Digital*, Jan. 2005, 20 March 2007 <www.dichtung-digital.com/2005/1/Ryan>.

⁷⁹⁹ Adrian Miles, “Realism and a General Economy of the Link Anxieties,” *Currents in Electronic Literacy*, Fall 2001 (5), 23 March 2007 <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/fall01/miles/anxietie.htm>>.

⁸⁰⁰ Janez Strehovec, “The Word Image/Virtual Body: On the Techno-Aesthetics of Digital Literary Objects,” *Afterimage* 30.2 (2002), *Questia*, 10 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5000656655>>.

⁸⁰¹ Donna Leishman, “Further questions on *Deviant* in preparation for a panel at Duke University / SLS conference,” e-mail to Stephanie Strickland, July 2004, 12 March 2007 <<http://www.6amhoover.com/viva/appendices/strickland.htm>>

include back buttons, thus for the reader there is no easy method for retracing one's steps. In terms of both the reading process and the subsequent narrativising, the destabilisation and indeterminacy function as a "way to create perceived hidden and revealed sections, which ties into creating a sense of mystery, unknown and possible danger."⁸⁰² Thus, for Leishman destabilisation is necessary to the narrative.

However, linking in fictional works need not be equated with disorientation or incoherence. Basing his experience on Joyce's afternoon, Landow points out that as long as readers can make sense of the text – "that is, perceive as coherent"⁸⁰³ – it is not mandatory that readers encounter the fragments in a single authorial order. What facilitate the coherence are "the link between two lexias"⁸⁰⁴ and the ability of the reader to assemble meaning. Strickland suggests readers form "a new technique...to...reach below the Planck scale and attempt to decipher the fine structure of space-time."⁸⁰⁵

As a way to decipher the link as both showing and telling, multi-mimesis can form part of Strickland's call for a different kind of analysis. As noted in the introduction, multi-mimesis, as employed in the fictions read here, works on various levels. Just two possibilities: the link signifies via its verbal or pictorial sign and the link leads to a segment of narrative so that it also acts in relation to what ensues. Note the use of "and": the possibilities of link performativity do not appear at the expense of another.

As previously noted, for Coover, the writing and reading experience occurs in the interstices and paths between digital fragments so that "the real current of the narrative runs between them."⁸⁰⁶ Reading born digital works therefore requires an

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Landow, Hypertext 3.0 204.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Stephanie Strickland and Cynthia Lawson, V: Vniverse, 2002, 12 December 2007 <<http://home.nyc.rr.com/strickland10021/vniverse.html>>.

⁸⁰⁶ Coover qtd. in Molly Able Travis, Reading Cultures: The Construction of Readers in the Twentieth Century (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998) 24.

awareness of linking, “routing,” “looping,”⁸⁰⁷ as well as the more conventional notions of plot and character. “In the hypertextual writer’s relationship with the reader, the emphasis is on avoiding hierarchical structure and, instead, offering discrete constituent bits of information; these bits do not become narrative until the reader arranges and joins them.”⁸⁰⁸ Travis explains that compelling hypertexts are those that generate “complex and intriguing ways” of arranging the narrative information.⁸⁰⁹ The fundamental aspects of hypertext are “[f]luidity, contingency, indeterminacy, plurality, and discontinuity.”⁸¹⁰

Specific to the multi-mimetic consideration of links in web fiction narratives is the notion that links are much more than simple anchors and only a way to “ge[t] from point A to point B.”⁸¹¹ Aarseth suggests the link in hypertext requires “non trivial effort”⁸¹² and, along with the “inmates of the Eastgate school,” the link functions “as a connector, a glorified page to turn, the .”⁸¹³ Ascribing a mechanical, rather than narrative, function to the link deemphasises the simultaneous conjointment of departure and arrival that the link manifests and instead promotes a perfunctory operation as visible in Montfort’s term for the link: “computational literary interaction.”⁸¹⁴

Alternatively, Guertin perceives links as embodying a “dynamic connectivity, interconnection and disconnection [that] is both narratological structure and the means

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. 100.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. 24.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. 101

⁸¹⁰ Coover qtd. in Travis 101.

⁸¹¹ Jeff Parker, “A Poetics of the Link,” *Electronic Book Review*, 12 (Fall, 2001), 12 April 2007 <<http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr12/park/park.htm>>.

⁸¹² For Aarseth, it is ergodic literature that elicits nonlinearity and productive user interaction as in MUDS and MOOS, rather than claiming that the link itself calls for extended participation on the reader’s part.

⁸¹³ Parker.

⁸¹⁴ Nick Montfort, “Cybertext Killed the Hypertext Star,” *Electronic Book Review*, July 2005, 12 September 2007 <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/cyberdebates>>. Luesebrink finds also finds this a negative approach. Luesebrink, “Of Tea Cozy and Link.”

of navigation in space and time.”⁸¹⁵ Furnishing her conception of linking with a feminist slant, Guertin explains that links can form a “network of feminist discourse in virtual space.”⁸¹⁶ Though links and in fact narrative, need not necessarily or obviously be situated alongside feminist designs, the study of possible relations between nodes and the links themselves in this chapter represents an expansion of feminist critique and hypertext theory. When Bernstein asserts that links must be “clear, complete, and accurate” and “simultaneously explain what will happen after they are followed and why readers ought to follow them”⁸¹⁷ he inculcates a certain fixed view similar to Parker by specifying what is visible and tangible “rather than what lies in between joining one artifact [sic.], page, or space to the next.”⁸¹⁸ Guertin, following a Harawayian thinking, suggests that the increasing sense of multiplicity, contradiction, instability, and deterritorialisation, raises the possibility of cyborgian subjectivities – as characters, readers, and writers. For Haraway, the cyborg resists convention, linearity, and fixity while for Guertin the cyborg becomes a metaphor for the embodied reading subject tracing paths through the “uncontainable, quantum, and viral.”⁸¹⁹ As Guertin’s theorising of the cyborg suggests, a reader of multi-mimetic web fictions is comfortable with “permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints”⁸²⁰ and sees multi-mimesis more as narrative aesthetic rather than a model onto which web fiction structures can be mapped. This is especially important in light of hypertext theorists such as Landow, Bolter, and Douglas who conclude that all readers seek defined closure in what are ultimately “mercurial flow[s] through the network.”⁸²¹

⁸¹⁵ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Mark Bernstein, “More than Legible: On Links that Readers Don’t Want to Follow,” *Hypertext 2000: Proceedings of the 11th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia May 30 - June 3, 2000* (San Antonio, Texas: ACM, 2000), 216, 12 April 2007 <<http://portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=336296.226370>>.

⁸¹⁸ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 180.

⁸²¹ geniwate, “Word Limits.”

While several hypertext theorists offer insight into the mechanics of links in narratives, this chapter reads links as multi-mimetic devices, emphasising the significance of worlds in relation to subjectivity and multimodality, rather than attempting to structure the order in which they might emerge. In line with Guertin's view, the focus here will shift to the significance of worlds – how each is represented and how each comes into being – while explicitly foregrounding the role of the reader. What follows consists of three analyses, each examining an exemplar fiction in relation to how links enable the multi-mimetic emergence and representation of becoming subjectivities and their worlds.

5.2 “A Moment Pregnant with Possibilities”: Grigar’s Fallow Field: A Story in Two Parts

Certain theorists who claim that the inherent complications of reading hypertext, including lack of closure and inability to know the “whole” story, suggest that in fact in hypertext there is no narrative at all. From a narratological view point, Michael Toolan recently argued that “high-tech multimodal works” cannot qualify as instances of narrative because they are “too open, too interactive” and furthermore they are “too protean in sequence and event to let us analyse hypertext as narrative.”⁸²² For Toolan, that all readers do not share the “physical object” is commensurate with an unnarrativisable fragmentation. However, feminist theory, like much of postmodernist thinking, sees fragmentation as a kind of collage where the reader can “pu[t] things together without divesting them of their own identities.”⁸²³ This “positive fragmentation” as Lippard puts it, can be seen as a feminist strategy that arises out of

⁸²² Michael Toolan qtd. in Jessica Laccetti, “Narrative and Multimodality Conference - Day 2,” *Musings*, 28 April 2007, 7 May 2007 <http://www.jesslaccetti.co.uk/2007/04/narrative-and-multimodality-conference_28.html>.

⁸²³ Lucy Lippard, “No Regrets: An art Critic Looks Back on the Hard-Won Achievements of Feminist Art and the Current State of its Legacy,” *Art in America*, 1 June 2007, High Beam Encyclopaedia, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-165018227.html>>.

an awareness of marginal positions as “feminist identity is itself...a collage of disparate, not yet fully compatible parts.”⁸²⁴ In this sense, then, narrative clearly does exist as something rife with possibilities both for fragmentation and relation.⁸²⁵ If Toolan’s readerly expectations suggest that hypertext fiction signifies a disintegration of narrative possibility, then Dene Grigar’s Fallow Field confronts these parameters while simultaneously testing multiplicity, multi-modality, and connection. Grigar’s web fiction is “emergent and generative,”⁸²⁶ analogous to the protagonist’s unfolding experience. Rather than support critics’ claims by showcasing how a narrative unravels, Grigar focuses on what holds the story “tightly together.”⁸²⁷ The structure of the narrative itself with its particular use of sound, image, and interaction emphasise the connectedness between the modes and the development of the narrative and points of view rather than operating as “rupture or breakage” as do Guertin’s quantum links.⁸²⁸

According to Susan Buckingham, essentialist interpretations of ecofeminism “proposed that women had a particular relationship with nature by virtue of their biology (predominantly as actual or potential child bearers) and that this proximity to nature qualified them to speak more eloquently on nature’s behalf.”⁸²⁹ As might be expected, much of the critique directed towards these kinds of accounts centres on the “problems perceived with essentialism.”⁸³⁰ By situating the main character of Fallow Field within an agricultural scenario Grigar negotiates a questioning of such gender constructions while providing an alternative to Toolan’s non-narrative hypertext.

⁸²⁴ Ibid.

⁸²⁵ As demonstrated with the previous chapter’s reading of Fibonacci’s Daughter and High Crimson, narrativity need not equal linearity: “those factors that enable a text to be processed as a narrative are many and varied. Neither linearity nor action is the only index of narrativity.” Page, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology 99.

⁸²⁶ Dene Grigar, “Editorial: The Emergent and Generative in Nature, the Digital and Art,” “Wild Nature and the Digital Life,” Special Issue, Leonardo Electronic Almanac 14. 7 – 8 2006, 30 March 2007 <http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n07-08/dgrigar.asp>.

⁸²⁷ Dene Grigar, “Preface,” Fallow Field: A Story in Two Parts, 2004, Iowa Review Web, 7 May 2007 <http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/tirweb/feature/grigar/fallowfield/fallow_field_preface.html>.

⁸²⁸ Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

⁸²⁹ Susan Buckingham, “Ecofeminism in the Twenty-First Century,” The Geographical Journal, 170.2 (2004) np, Questia, 2 November 2007 <<http://www.questia.com>>.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

Linking the theme of nature to the emergence of the narrative means digging and cultivating signal both the plot and the reader's procedural harvesting of the narrative. Just as the homodiegetic narrator swots flies and bypasses empty fields in search of succulent corn, so does the reader pluck her way through sounds, images, words, and links.

According to Braidotti, Haraway's attempt to challenge the "informatics of domination" is "inspirational."⁸³¹ Her creation of "the cyborg, the coyote, the trickster [and] the onco-mouse produce alternative structures of otherness." Additionally, these "counter-figurations" are especially valuable for those who are displaced including "woman, the native [and] the abused."⁸³² This dual project, to "dislodge" constraining notions of both women and nature, is especially significant in light of Grigar's narrative. She also takes on a dual posture. Much like the productive double-bind of multi-mimesis itself, Fallow Field brings into relief problematic dualisms which cast "nature" and female gender as within an "ontology of domination"⁸³³ while simultaneously, and multimodally, critiquing visions that position "nature as a female object to be improved by men."⁸³⁴

One way out of this binary, Carolyn Merchant suggests, is through the implementation of a "partnership model" where the emphasis is on a "concept of relation rather than in the ego, society, or the cosmos."⁸³⁵ As if directly responding to Merchant's suggestion, Grigar's mechanics of linking seem to subscribe to this very ethics. Instead of employing links as modes of disconnection in an attempt to displace dualisms, links in Fallow Field, highlight connections and relations. Interestingly, links

⁸³¹ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 10 October 2007, European Graduate School, 5 December 2007, <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/haraway/haraway-the-promises-of-monsters.html>>, Braidotti, Metamorphoses 139.

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ Josephine Donovan, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange," Ecofeminist Literary Criticism, eds Greta Claire Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 74.

⁸³⁴ Merchant 26, 117.

⁸³⁵ Carolyn Merchant, Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture (New York: Routledge, 2003) 232.

for Miles are seen to exist outside of constructing practises. For him, links do “not require, need, or even recognise a codified set of rules for what may or may not be linked, either in terms of origins or destinations.”⁸³⁶ However, in Fallow Field, although the narrator’s links may, at first glance, seem to subscribe to this unrestrictive view, they perform the antithesis. Readers can relatively easily (especially when compared to works like High Crimson, These Waves of Girls and Red Riding Hood) “thoughtful[ly] trace” the emergence of becoming worlds.⁸³⁷ Each link–click is highly specific, offering either a sonic or visual embellishment of the protagonist’s experiencing. Furthermore, the links are always denoted in a particular colour (blue or green) and either in capital letters or lower case, each signifying a predictable multimodal eruption. In this case then, Grigar’s links are firmly within “the codified norms of language, that is to grammar, syntactic organisation, and rhetoric.”⁸³⁸

Shifting from the structure of the web fiction to its content reveals another aspect of how links function. The “economy” of the link, explains Miles, means “links cannot state the true or the false; they cannot negate.” Links, for Miles, are capricious rather than rigorous. However, in Fallow Field links are rigorous. They only ever corroborate what the textual narrative describes. When the narrator hears flies buzzing, so too will the reader. When the narrator gazes out at the fields from inside the house, so too will the reader. This operation means links amplify and add detail to the plot rather than exist outside of it. Couple this functioning of links as material detailing with the ecological slant of the plot and what appears is a very specific and structured attempt to affirm, as Haraway does, the “new interaction” with nature which is positive and empowering.⁸³⁹ In fact, the act of the reading process which demands the reader harvest the narrative is used as a vehicle for acknowledging the necessarily situated role

⁸³⁶ Adrian Miles, “Realism and a General Economy of the Link.”

⁸³⁷ Dene Grigar and Mindi Corwin, “The Loom and the Weaver,” Storyspace, 2007, Eastgate, 12 November 2007 <<http://www.eastgate.com/storyspace/lit/Grigar.html>>.

⁸³⁸ Adrian Miles, “Realism and a General Economy of the Link.”

⁸³⁹ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 139.

of subjectivity.

Marcus Bastos describes Grigar's narrative approach as one where "[t]he overlapping of physical and digital, among other things, problematize the existence of clear borders or, at least, defy traditional categorizations of 'natural' and 'artificial.'"⁸⁴⁰ This strategy becomes prominent if one considers how links are employed by the protagonist and her husband. While Theo's grasp on nature mirrors his "pulling" and "teasing" relation to links, the narrator's links provide multimodal details and a widening of her world. Invoking Haraway's cyborg identities formulated of "geometries of difference" and built on "new couplings and new coalitions," the narrator's relationship with links is also about "learning how to read" connections.⁸⁴¹ With a cultivation of perception in mind, the links – as images, sounds, and words – in the narrator's narrative embody Wendy Morgan's "shifting positionality – a sense of 'nextness' that is both temporal and spatial."⁸⁴² This shifting positionality receives substantiation through the story but, more distinctly, through the multi-mimetic strategies; the making of the story in all its modes and through the reader's linking to amplifications and elaborations but nonetheless immediate positions.

The dissolution of a marriage in Fallow Field focuses on two characters' "whose lives are horribly broken and fragmented."⁸⁴³ The chronological breakdown or fragmentation of the marriage and story fragmentation finds its parallel in Theo's use (or lack) of links. For Theo links become a means for disassociation. Contrastingly, links for the narrator engender connections and situated but multimodal views. The role of the reader further complicates the linking aesthetic: when Theo attempts to employ links as means to escape "the fury of the flies and the weight of the humidity," the

⁸⁴⁰ Marcus Bastos, "Dene Grigar and Tara Rodgers: LEAD - Wild Nature and Digital Life Chat Transcripts," "Unyazi," Special Issue, Leonardo Electronic Almanac 15.1 - 2 (2007), 13 April 2007 <<http://leoalmanac.org/resources/lead/digiwild/dgrigartrodgers.asp>>.

⁸⁴¹ Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto."

⁸⁴² Morgan, "Heterotopics: Towards a Grammar of Hyperlinks."

⁸⁴³ Grigar, "Preface," Fallow Field.

narrator explicitly critiques this stance by voicing these same words which in fact lead to scenes of Theo's return. The power of links to function as elaborations of worlds resides with the narrator of Fallow Field and with the reader through her collaboration. This power becomes even more significant alongside Guertin's conception which sees links as "gesture[s] performed by the body."⁸⁴⁴ In this case, the protagonist's reducing Theo's mobility subtly destabilises boundaries and subjectivities. An additional critique lies in the fact that when Theo speaks of "flies" and the "itching of the bites" his links go nowhere. They are closed, dead-ends. However, when the narrator, who remains anonymous, tells of the buzzing flies, images and sound accompany her version of events. Unlike Theo's "sheltered"⁸⁴⁵ narrative the narrator procedurally "grows bolder."⁸⁴⁶ Consequently, the "grammar" of linking in Fallow Field seems to establish links not only as operating on a level of "similitude, that is analogy and metaphor,"⁸⁴⁷ but "connection itself being a figure against the ground of writing."⁸⁴⁸

Commensurate with the situatedness of the protagonist comes an ability to "provide a larger canvas on which the reader can draw meaning;" i.e. to provide access to stories.⁸⁴⁹ The word stories, is applied here in the plural form not only to allude to the two related stories contained within Fallow Field, that of "Day" and that of "Night," but also to invoke Braidotti's nomadic identities which are plural as they continually articulate questions of "individual, embodied, gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity [and] the problem of knowledge."⁸⁵⁰ While both "Day" and "Night" nurture the narrator's homodiegetic position as internal focalizer – all events are narrated through her eyes – the former concerns "*what can be*" and the other

⁸⁴⁴ Guertin, "The Knot: Disorientation."

⁸⁴⁵ Grigar, "Day," Fallow Field 6.

⁸⁴⁶ Grigar, "Day" 9.

⁸⁴⁷ Adrian Miles, "Realism and a General Economy of the Link."

⁸⁴⁸ Carolyn Guyer and Martha Petry qtd. in Wendy Morgan, "Heterotopics: Towards a Grammar of Hyperlinks," Word Circuits, 1999, 12 May 2007 <<http://www.wordcircuits.com/htww/morgan1.htm>>.

⁸⁴⁹ Grigar, "Preface," Fallow Field.

⁸⁵⁰ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 30.

“*what is.*”⁸⁵¹ Although both “Day” and “Night” seem to consist largely of the same kinds of experiences, the narrator’s “Night” view is drastically different, enabling an opening up of a space in which she can enact change. There are two devices that signal the different mindset. There is the obvious structural separation of part one and part two. There is also a more subtle difference visible from Grigar’s note that part one, “Day,” is weighed down by passivity, the narrator muses on “what can be.” Part two, “Night,” becomes emancipatory for the narrator, she no longer dreams of escape but employs active verbs and continues to link to image and sound; she becomes mobile.

As if in answer to Braidotti’s question “by what sort of interconnections, sidesteps, and lines of escape can one produce feminist knowledge...,”⁸⁵² the narrator crafts her story with features that cultivate an awareness of links as magnifications and multiplications. Though this might suggest an excess of modality, helping the reader discover her path away from her damaged marriage, she does not discover escape with a simple move outside of harm’s way, and neither does the reader. There is a process of configuration that is figured and refigured, emphasising a dialectical association built on context and perspective. Links in Fallow Field, though not posited as gateways to full narrative disclosure are composed of what Donovan calls “concrete embodiments;” articulations devoted to personal experience and expression.⁸⁵³

That the reader must dig deeper, like the narrator, to uncover the narrative account pervades the reading process, especially when links that seemingly should offer more information do not.⁸⁵⁴ While for Harpold links are “wounds” that can be “sewn” together, “elevat[ing]...the fragmented corpus to a totemic object,”⁸⁵⁵ the narrator sees

⁸⁵¹ Dene Grigar, “Re: Fallow Field,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 22 May 2007, emphasis original.

⁸⁵² Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 31.

⁸⁵³ Donovan 85.

⁸⁵⁴ Larsen refers to these kinds of links as “ambiguous.” See Deena Larsen, “An Anatomy of Anchors,” HT’04, August 9-13, 2004, ACM Press, 16 September 2007 <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/deena/anchor/>>.

⁸⁵⁵ Terence Harpold, “The Contingencies of the Hypertext Link,” Writing on the Edge, 2 (1991), 18 May 2007 <www.newmediareader.com/cd_samples/WOE/Harpold.html>.

no necessity to bind her stories into one. Rather, her wounds, “blood that oozed from [her] lip” and the “gush [of her] own woman’s blood that flowed month after month,” are assuaged by multi-mimetic representations. A woman’s hearty laughter interrupts the flow of blood and narrative while an image of a cultivated field (see fig. 5.1) bears new vistas even if the narrator herself cannot. Thus, “[b]reaking out of silence means more than being empowered to speak or to write, it also means controlling the form as well as the content of one’s own communication, the power to develop and to share one’s own unique voice.”⁸⁵⁶ For Grigar, it is the manoeuvrability between form and content and between modes that “yields multiple ways of viewing [subjectivity]. Patterns emerge that might have otherwise remained hidden.”⁸⁵⁷



Fig. 5.1 New vistas. “Night,” *Fallow Field: A Story in Two Parts*, Dene Grigar.

In Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative, Elaine Lawless explains that stories of abuse must be read “very, very carefully because this story is not really a ‘life story’; it is a life honed down to what is speakable.”⁸⁵⁸ As is the case with Tracey in These Waves, where parts of the story become unspeakable, where words are not enough, the narrator has access to other kinds of markers – links, images, and sounds. As Lawless notes with reference to narratives of abuse, “herstories” are

⁸⁵⁶ Marsha Houston and Cheris Kramarae, “Speaking from Silence: Methods of Silencing and of Resistance,” *Discourse and Society* 2. 4 (1991): 427.

⁸⁵⁷ Grigar and Corwin.

⁸⁵⁸ Elaine J. Lawless, Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001) 14.

composed of “poignant moments”⁸⁵⁹ which, as is the case with Fallow Field, the listener or reader assembles. Accordingly, links in Fallow Field are only part of the story and they rarely indicate the whole story but when read in conjunction with the images and the instances of melody, that which was unspeakable emerges. Consequently, subjectivity as “successive becomings”⁸⁶⁰ surfaces and actuates through the intersecting of multimodal configurations. Becoming visible and mobile does not suggest that subjectivity or experience here is represented in any kind of entirety. This recognition of partiality is taken up explicitly with Grigar’s use of sound. The literality of the laughter, the flies, the wine bottles and their fixed duration “lead us to think about the frustrating and disjunctive ways memories come to us — how they lie beyond our grasp, and how when they do finally appear, they are never enough to take away our pain or satisfy our desires.”⁸⁶¹

Interestingly and decidedly different from the other web fictions to be discussed here, is the pointed resolution that links do not act as bridges to different worlds or function as analepsis or prolepsis to the ordinary narrative. Links in Fallow Field offer different views upon the reader and the narrator’s shared world, what Ryan refers to as “perspective-shifting links”⁸⁶² but rather than radically shift the perspective, these links embellish it. For instance, “Day” begins by setting the scene (see also fig. 5.2):

Last Tuesday, the FLIES descended upon us, nipping at the sweat that seeped from our arms and necks.

It was a bad omen, the flies. It told us that the rains were coming sooner than usual.⁸⁶³

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Braidotti, Metamorphoses 164.

⁸⁶¹ Dene Grigar, “Tangible Frequencies,” Leonardo Electronic Almanac, 1 January 2006, 10 December 2007 <http://lea.mit.edu/reviews/mar2006/tangible_grigar.html>.

⁸⁶² Marie-Laure Ryan, Avatars of Story (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 111.

⁸⁶³ Grigar, “Day,” 1, Fallow Field, emphasis original.

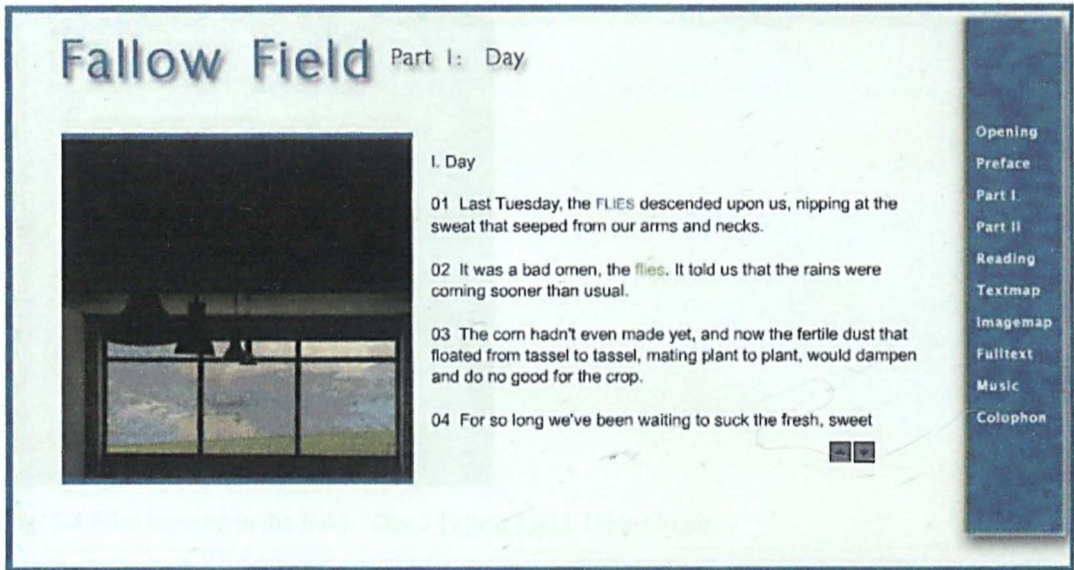


Fig. 5.2 "Day," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

Situated in the past, the narrator recalls a shared experience where both protagonists move from a physical encounter – the flies nipping at their arms and necks – to a cognitive assertion – “it was a bad omen.” In fact, the experiences are numbered; first the physical sensation, second the mental recognition; giving weight to the situated and embodied perception.⁸⁶⁴ Moreover, “flies,” the active link in this scene visible in fig. 5.2 in blue capital letters and then in green lowercase, while not leading the reader into another world, does perform both connection and separation. On the one hand the image and sound that ensue break the narrative flow, distancing the reader from the narrative and perhaps allowing the narrator a moment of protection from the trauma. On the other hand, the mass of flies that comes into view (see fig. 5.3) as well as the loud buzzing inaugurates the narrative event and cohesively binds the two separate sensations. This example seems, then, to substantiate Harpold’s claim that links “constitute a widening and saturation of *context*.”⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁴ This interpretation is indebted to an insightful reading of Steve Tomasula’s VAS: An Opera of Flatland by Allison Gibbons, “‘I Contain Multitudes’: Narrative Multimodality and the Book that Bleeds,” *Narrative and Multimodality: Language, Theory, Contexts* 27-28 April 2007, UCE, Birmingham, UK.

⁸⁶⁵ Harpold, “The Contingencies of the Hypertext Link,” emphasis original.



Fig. 5.3 Flies buzzing in the field. “Day,” Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

In terms of the unspeakability of trauma, the design of the opening node deeply reflects the narrator’s desire to control both the events in her life as well as the telling of them. That this story can be accessed in a variety of way suggests, as Kress might, the affordances particular to each mode allow different versions or instances of experience to seep through. Additionally, the highly contrived placement of the different modes is further proof of the narrator’s effort to control something she previously could not.

Since links in Fallow Field broaden and develop the narrative they become event enlargers. Rather than simply anchoring or connecting otherwise fragmented ideas together or just offering readers choice, as Moulthrop among others has argued, links in Fallow Field, are dynamic representations themselves. Links here do not simply aid in coherence but seem to embody it. In These Waves of Girls, High Crimson and Disappearing Rain, for instance, links serve as what Ana Pano describes as “multipliers of meaning...as shifting and subverting devices which, at the very instant of the click, makes the story progress in several directions favouring fragmentation.”⁸⁶⁶ Conversely, Grigar’s links maintain a more-or-less chronological structure, mimicking the narrator’s physical and emotional confinement. The paths that evolve through the links open up different sensory perspectives, either visual or aural but always favouring cohesion.

⁸⁶⁶ Ana Pano, “Dual Effects in Digital Texts.”

Rather than a “splitting in two”⁸⁶⁷ that Pano sees occurring via the links in These Waves of Girls, at work here is more of a doubling or even tripling of story: the textual narrative is subtly multiplied at syntactic and semantic levels. In fact, Grigar notes that cohesion is an important aspect of this narrative and the variety of links – readers can even choose to hear Grigar tell the entire story – she wants it to be “easily readable.”⁸⁶⁸

The easy reading fits uncomfortably with the theme of domestic abuse, rendering it a narrative easily navigable only in terms of structure rather than content. The narrative difficulty is palpable for the narrator who consistently recreates an experience that avoids explicit details of emotional pain and violence. Like Tracy in These Waves of Girls who refrains from naming her abuse, “the narrator” implicitly (the links are not underlined) ‘invites readers to examine the links as addenda to her verbal silence.

Part 1, “Day” is a retelling characterised by distance – both temporally as well as emotionally. In this section the narrator remembers the heartache, “before I would take caution,” and reflects on the past, a type of testifying to events. However, under the cover of “Night,” the narrator gains courage, she has “grown bolder” and no longer worries “if any evidence of [her] activities would be discovered.”⁸⁶⁹ With the narrator’s bravery comes a more immediate witnessing, a graphic recounting of raw violence climaxing with Theo’s “fist against [her] cheek.”⁸⁷⁰ In retelling the trauma, the narrator relieves the experience so that past emerges and converges with the present. In “Day” the narrator includes significant gaps whereas in “Night” the presence of the traumatic event is seen and heard (see fig. 5.4):

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Grigar, “Re: Fallow Field,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 22 May 2007.

⁸⁶⁹ Grigar, “Night,” Fallow Field.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 5.4 “When I did finally feel Theo near, it was his fist against my cheek.” “Night,” Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

Most notably with the retelling of events is the narrator’s decision to become active, to exert control over her positioning. With the shift in power, aligned with a shift in tense from past to present and a shift from passive voice to active, comes a modification of view. Throughout the episodes in “Day,” the narrator’s view is always from within the house; all her vistas are partially obscured by the same window frame:



Fig. 5.5 A selection of views from within the house. “Day,” Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

In Part 2, “Night,” the narrator “takes action,” she compels an “agency that she never had before.”⁸⁷¹ As such, her position changes and she is no longer a prisoner in a house but a woman who enjoys an affair with one of the farm hands, Alexander. With Alexander, the narrator is able to find comfort in melodies which languidly “waf[t] over the melon patch” and through intimacy “drowns the flies” that pervade the day. Analogous to the narrator’s strengthening transformation are uninterrupted views of her

⁸⁷¹ Grigar, “Re: Fallow Field.”

house which are elicited via links. Now the narrator is situated outside, viewing the house and the past from a point unconstrained by either Theo or the window frame:



Fig. 5.6 the narrator's views from outside. "Night," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

Although links in Fallow Field do not juxtapose diverse ontological realms as Bell argues is the case in Moulthrop's Victory Garden, they do however highlight the role of partial perspectives and different interpretations. The main or actual world, the beginning of the narrative enactment, recounts the literal failing marriage between the narrator and Theo. However, the possible world, though not overtly inaugurated via the links but elaborated through the oral telling and images, enacts a figurative story. This possible, or rather multiple world – a parallel world that amplifies and supplements the main narrative – features a story underpinned by nature, where land that is not properly tended fails to grow and eventually dies.

Aligning the female narrator with nature might, on one hand, seem to substantiate critiques of ecofeminism that allege connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature.⁸⁷² However, on the other hand, the narrator's relationship with nature is problematic, thereby challenging structures of patriarchy. Combining the actual world and the possible world connects the literal with the figurative becoming a transgressive operation that is constantly in process. In both interpretations the narrator reflects varied positions that become transformed or

⁸⁷² See for example Karen Warren, Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

augmented through links (both at the narrative level and mechanical level) with nature. Because of the narrator's constant fluctuation between views, her challenge to patriarchy and domestic violence is simultaneously enacted from different angles.

As a trope, linking comes to transgress and subvert conventional boundaries with regards to place and identity. In fact, the challenge for sufferers of abuse is to create stories that encourage "positive" versions of a self to emerge,⁸⁷³ and this is chiefly how links in Fallow Field are employed. The linking suggests a recognition that web-based multi-mimetic representations occur within a context where both the narrative and subjectivity are constituted in relation to its environs. In the figurative multiple world, Grigar skilfully exposes the interconnection between "husband[ing] the land [which means] to tend to it. To grow it. Love it. Watch over it and protect it," and "husbanding a woman"⁸⁷⁴ where both worlds "openly invite reader construction."⁸⁷⁵

With Grigar's testament to "nurture" the reader's immersion in Fallow Field she links the reading experience to one of organic growth while subtly reminding the reader to "tend" the narrative properly rather than let it lie fallow as Theo does with both his wife and his land. The perception that land, like loving relationships, must be cared for is most clear when the narrator finds herself analysing why Theo periodically leaves her to enjoy "beer-soaked porches."⁸⁷⁶ The narrator notes that he "deserts" her – suggesting both his act of abandonment as well as his inability to cultivate and to produce (either food or children). Markedly, this short monologue is one of the few sections in Fallow Field without any links. Both the reader and Theo are unable to harvest; Theo "ruthless and rough" leaves the land bare which translates into the reader's lack of links to the

⁸⁷³ Lawless 18.

⁸⁷⁴ Grigar, "Fallow Field – Questions," e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 23 May 2007.

⁸⁷⁵ While Rhodes notes this is the case with "activist women 's web sites," the notion of a collaborative piecing together of narrative and subjectivity it appertains to Fallow Field. See Jacqueline Rhodes, "Substantive and Feminist Girlie Action': Women Online," College Composition and Communication, 54. 1 (September, 2002): 129.

⁸⁷⁶ Grigar, "Day" 10.

figurative world.

Theo's professional ineptitude strongly parallels his incompetence with marriage. While not sensorially deprived like Alexander who "can't hear and can't speak," Theo is "too busy with [his] own li[fe]...to pay attention to the lives of others."⁸⁷⁷ He fails to observe the narrator's bold performances, what she refers to as "chores," with Alexander. The narrator recognises that to enact a shift, to change her view from inside the house to outside she must expose her affair; "now, I flaunt wine bottles we empty, lining them up one by one along the window ledge." Here the reader has access to the narrator's new-found courageous exploits; clicking on the pale green "bottles" the reader hears the long tinkling of many wine bottles. The reader further furnishes this world by eliciting additional "evidence":



Fig. 5.7 Wine bottles on the window ledge. "Day," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

Thus, while the reader and the narrator can see, hear, and touch her new world, Theo remains blind to these senses and the sensibilities that they engender. This blindness is enacted also in the way that the reader perceives Theo. Although Alexander is fully visible when the narrator ponders his "innocence," (see fig. 5.8) Theo – arguably the

⁸⁷⁷ Grigar, "Re: Fallow Field."

protagonist of the narrator's story, remains on the side-lines.



Fig. 5.8 A view of Alexander from inside the house. "Day," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

Just as he is not involved with the "husbanding" of field or wife, his placement in both images of him is evocative of his obscure relationship (see fig. 5.9 and fig. 5.10).



Fig. 5.9 Theo seeking shelter from the flies. "Day," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar



Fig. 5.10 The narrator's view of Theo from the field. "Night," Fallow Field, Dene Grigar.

However there is no "rah rah happy ending"⁸⁷⁸ in either of the narrator's worlds. The narrator cannot simply save herself or her crop. In accordance with Grigar's

⁸⁷⁸ Grigar, "Fallow Field – Questions."

“feminist edge,” the narrator shifts between recognising the deterioration of her marriage and the slow death of the corn crop – a shift between literal world and figurative world.⁸⁷⁹ At the level of language these shifts rarely occur, it is only at the end of Fallow Field when the narrator is “whacked” awake – literally and figuratively – by Theo that these two worlds meet.⁸⁸⁰ Rather, at the level of linking, the categories of literal and figurative consistently collide, creating a narrative built on both “the time of the now” and the memory of difficult events.⁸⁸¹ The encounter between the narrativising of the events and the experiencing of them is climactically most apparent at the end. This is what Lawless refers to as a “rupture;” a “‘tear’ in the ‘fabric’ of the narrative” that enables multiple stories to exist and be told simultaneously.⁸⁸² Theo has walked in on the narrator and Alexander in the throes of their passion. He cannot help but see exactly what is in process. Rather than “tend” to the situation he begins to beat the narrator, punching her in the face repeatedly. The narrator is jarred awake and realises that she alone can change the course of her life. She “takes pity on Theo and kick[s] him in the groin.” Following this the narrator dashes to the comfort of nature: “sweat and blood followed me into the corn, and I brushed past the rows and rows of fruitless stalks, feeling almost at once the patter of rain upon my head and shoulders.” But this is no happy ending as Grigar notes. Now that the narrator has developed the courage to leave Theo, more pain will ensue. The corn fields, the “phallic horn of plenty”⁸⁸³ where the narrator seeks respite cannot provide for her because of the rain. Though the rain might be linked with rebirth, for the too young corn it spells death. Additionally the narrator is lying in rows of mud signifying both her connection to nature as well as her own mental murkiness. The narrator is doubly alienated; from

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ Lawless notes that this shifting position from remembering to reliving is characteristic of abuse sufferers. Lawless 62.

⁸⁸² Lawless 59.

⁸⁸³ Grigar, “Re: Fallow Field – Questions.”

nature and from herself. The risk, therefore, of (re)inscribing the narrator within a stereotypical reading – women demand nurturing from men and are aligned with nature – is evaded. Thus, Grigar does not adhere to “pseudo universal categories.”⁸⁸⁴ Taking up Haraway’s challenge to understand the system and practises of gender means ensuring that the narrator does not easily fit into deterministic roles. By curtailing the narrator’s own capacity to nurture by relegating Theo to the status of “soldered off old bull”⁸⁸⁵ the narrator “resets” dualisms.⁸⁸⁶ Theo’s infertility might be said to work as a strategy that prevents stereotypical inscriptions. Indeed, the consistent relation of the narrator to nature and subsequent problematising suggests that to inscribe a becoming subjectivity in any single world or system, however multimodal, is to re-inscribe the very binaries Grigar is intent on destabilising. This process of representation is perhaps best captured in Kristeva’s *sujet-en-procès*, there is the demand for expression (here it is with the aid of sound, image, interaction, and text) but the paradoxical acknowledgement that representation can never fully express a becoming subjectivity.

Further evidence that the narrator’s attempt to piece together her experiences can never add up to a single and unified whole is strikingly apparent if one recognises that the narrator is never seen in any images nor is she ever named. However, her voice is heard when the reader assists in connecting the literal world with that of the figurative through links. Thus, although the narrator might be unrepresentable in the literal world – the world replete with an abusive husband – she is powerfully present in the figurative world through her voice. Grigar seeks to destabilise the nature and culture dualism that grounds, in the view of ecofeminism, the oppression of both women and nature. Fallow Field engages nature and the representation of a becoming subjectivity from a situated view, one that is continuously in flux and one that comes into being only through the

⁸⁸⁴ Haraway, “Prospects for a Materialist Informatics” 156.

⁸⁸⁵ Grigar, “Night” 27.

⁸⁸⁶ Haraway, “Prospects for a Materialist Informatics” 156.

reader's participation. Without the reader's interaction, the narrator's views would remain marooned within the house and she would endure an oppressive marriage. Links in Fallow Field, then, act as connectors and facilitators reminding readers that producing knowledge requires a collaborative effort, bearing out Le Court and Barnes's call for a shift from "one wherein the expression of self is a means to political transformation to one wherein gendered politics are inseparable from textuality."⁸⁸⁷ Fallow Field's multi-mimetic evocation of multiple worlds can be read in two ways. Firstly: as an act of negotiating the interplay of fixity and fluidity available in the networked environment. Secondly: as embodying a thinking valued by a Braidottian feminism, a productive pivoting between the desire to represent and the impossibility of doing so. With this in mind, the final image straddles both worlds, the figurative and the literal: "I laid down between the rows of the growing mud and wept for Theo. I wept for the shallow bed of dust and vegetation we had called our home. But most of all, I wept because I bled the blood of a fallow field."⁸⁸⁸ With this final move there is a dissolving of boundaries between worlds as the narrator realises she must flee to survive however there is also the painful recognition that she will likely never be a mother. If, as for Kristeva, giving birth also signifies a transformation for the mother – she can also be born as other – the narrator of Fallow Field remains unable to access this aspect of her subjectivity. As Lawless says of narratives of abuse, "[t]here are no magical formulas for escape and safety here; these are not fairy tales with happy endings."⁸⁸⁹

5.3 Searching for the Story: Links in Leishman's Red Riding Hood

While Donna Leishman's Red Riding Hood shares its focus – to challenge

⁸⁸⁷ Donna LeCourt and Luann Barnes, "Writing Multiplicity: Hypertext and Feminist Textual Politics," Computers and Composition 16.1 (1999): 56.

⁸⁸⁸ Grigar, "Night" 30.

⁸⁸⁹ Lawless 2.

uncomplicated or easy endings – with Grigar’s Fallow Field, it is realised in a fundamentally contrasting way. In Fallow Field a plethora of paths through the narrative and opportunities to hear the narrator tell her story are made explicit. In Red Riding Hood the links are employed as strategies in a consistent deconstruction of both the narrative and conventional ideas of subjectivity. The difficulty in piecing together the narrative and eventual frustration (for most readers) with Red Riding Hood mirrors what Leishman deems is the reader’s “burden” to by-pass any simplistic interpretations in favour of rearrangement and critique.

Fairytales seem to proffer Donna Leishman with a corpus of stories ready for revising and multimodal re-telling. Focusing on the representation of female subjectivity Leishman interrogates and challenges well known stories such as Bluebeard and Red Riding Hood. In situating her “interstitial”⁸⁹⁰ re-telling in the online environment Leishman incorporates multimodal elements as a way of “revising in different layers.”⁸⁹¹ Leishman further highlights this strain between stereotypical gendering in her explicit choice to foreground the visual and tactile in the originary story world while incorporating text in the multiple worlds. Thus, not only does Red Riding Hood provide her with opportunity for radical plot revision (Red beds Wolf) but it also affords further complication of archetypal characters preferring instead to create a “wiley” but necessarily “flawed” character.⁸⁹²

Central to Leishman’s multi-mimetic enactment of Red Riding Hood is the conception of a feminist subjectivity as polymorphous and situated. Also important is Leishman’s simultaneous encouraging of the reader – a “notional female” – to enact her

⁸⁹⁰ For Leishman the term interstitial is used to describe her artistic practise that “problematise[s] the labels of fiction and non-fiction, games and art.” Donna Leishman, “Chapter 1,” “Creating Screen-Based Multiple State Environments: Investigating Systems of Confutation,” Diss., Glasgow School of Art, September 2004, 17 October 2007, <<http://www.6amhoover.com/viva/>>.

⁸⁹¹ Donna Leishman, “First Few Questions Back,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 July 2007.

⁸⁹² See Donna Leishman, “Strickland E-mail,” “Creating Screen-Based Multiple State Environments.”

own stance.⁸⁹³ This thinking, as previously noted, parallels the narrative assemblage where image and sound combine to “return the viewer to a less passive role.”⁸⁹⁴ In Leishman’s interpretation Red’s success is not categorical. This is particularly important in light of Leishman’s attempt to offer various perspectives of women rather than limiting their subjectivity.⁸⁹⁵ In fact, in playing with multiple worlds, Leishman, and the adept reader, facilitate various opportunities for a Red who can be both prey and predator.

Red Riding Hood not only revises and perhaps even supplements existing versions of the story, but because of the online environment, offer a responsiveness that “transplant[s] the limitations of the book.”⁸⁹⁶ The responsiveness does however come at a price; only patient and practised readers will endure the “challenging computer screen interface”⁸⁹⁷ and uncover the various perspectives which lie beneath. For example, Leishman enables the reader to easily participate in a postmodern visioning of Red who, in the end, rather than being eaten by the wolf, becomes highly sexual and “empowered”⁸⁹⁸ and successfully seduces him. However, if the reader is not sufficiently tempted to explore the Flash environment – to “investigate the interface” as Talan Memmott puts it,⁸⁹⁹ she will miss several cues signifying plot development; the most important being the choice to allow Red to “dream” or “wake” (see fig. 5.11):

⁸⁹³ Donna Leishman, “Multi-Modal Coding: Jason Nelson, Donna Leishman, and Electronic Writing,” The Iowa Review Web 9.1 (August 2007), 3 December 2007 <http://research-intermedia.art.uiowa.edu/tirw/vol9n1/biographical_background.php>.

⁸⁹⁴ Leishman, “1.13: Artist Statement,” “Creating Screen-Based Multiple State Environments.”

⁸⁹⁵ Even if Leishman allowed only positive views of women, the representation would still be limiting as it would only include the portrayal of one kind of subjectivity as critics note may be the case with Carter’s Red Riding Hood. See Merja Makinen, “Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality,” Feminist Review 42 (1992).

⁸⁹⁶ Leishman, “1.13: Artist Statement.”

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Leishman, “Strickland E-mail.”

⁸⁹⁹ Talan Memmott, “Navigation, Investigation, and Inference: Donna Leishman’s Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw,” The Iowa Review Web 9.1 (August 2007), 3 December 2007 <http://research-intermedia.art.uiowa.edu/tirw/vol9n1/biographical_background.php>.

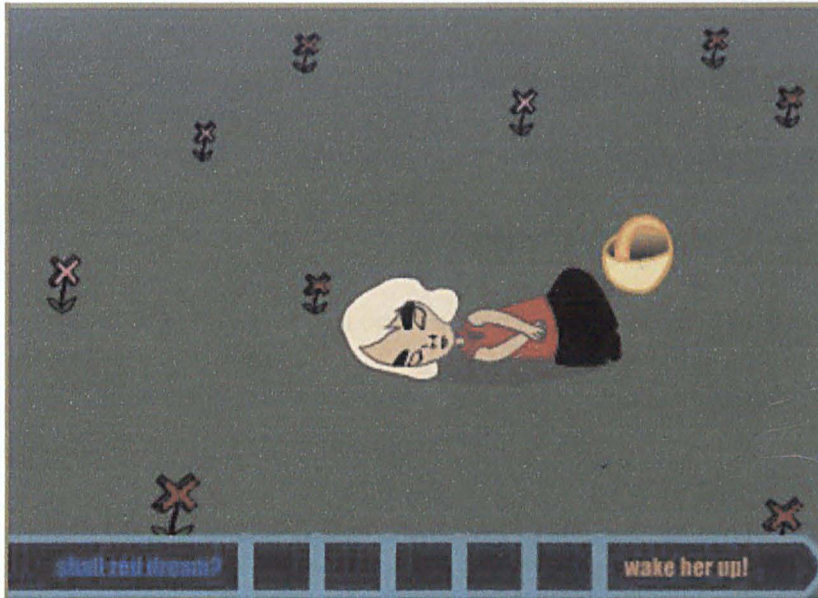


Fig. 5.11 Allow Red to dream or to wake. Donna Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

Persistence does not always offer the reader more as Anja Rau notes is the case with Leishman's latest web fiction, *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*: "picking all flowers...opening all trees.....gets you nowhere – or at least not further than less thorough mousing would."⁹⁰⁰ At this juncture (fig. 5.11) in *Red Riding Hood* the novice reader may opt for the linear story world thus selecting "wake her up!" and, similarly, the stubborn reader who, up to this point, has clicked everything that is clickable (all the flowers, the trees, the grass etc...) and found nothing to have elicited what could be a cornucopia of possibilities, may also choose the less challenging route.⁹⁰¹ However the multiple worlds are accessed not simply by "clicking" anywhere but through specific semiotic channels which demand deep user interaction and information interpretation. One such example is when Red is walking down the path to her grandmother's house. If the reader picks flowers as does Red, the narrative will continue to a key scene where the reader must choose to let Red dream or whether to wake her (see fig. 5.11). However, if the reader attempts to pull Red from the confining path, she will have access to different world in which Red is bereft and lovelorn. In the

⁹⁰⁰ Anja Rau, "Response to Donna Leishman's *Deviant* – "The Possession of Christian Shaw"" in Leishman, "Creating Screen-Based Multiple State Environments."

⁹⁰¹ The visual cue also suggests readers follow this route and the words "wake her up" are situated within an arrow implying a sequential move.

case of letting Red dream or not, it becomes especially important that the reader chooses to let Red dream for if she does not, the reader has access only to half the story. Additionally she foregoes Leishman's "different space where [the author] relinquish[es] control over the sequencing or indeed the level of closure the participant will attain."⁹⁰²

Although numerous oral versions of Red Riding Hood predate Perrault's his is cited as the source for the widely known Grimm Brothers' version.⁹⁰³ Both Perrault and Grimm's share the same story world: a young girl, "the prettiest that had ever been seen,"⁹⁰⁴ meets a wolf on her way to her grandmother's. The wolf arrives first, eats the grandmother, and lays his trap for Red Riding Hood. Distinctly, this is where the similarities between the two fairy tales cease and each creates a radically different ending. For Perrault's "Histoire ou contes du temps passé" the ending serves as a warning to girls that wolves are dangerous, they might (metaphorically) eat "pretty and well-brought up gentle' girls."⁹⁰⁵ The brothers Grimm instead concocted a happy ending, one in which young and innocent Red and her grandmother are extricated from the wolf's belly thanks to a passing hunter.⁹⁰⁶

Leishman's Red Riding Hood shares many similarities with its archetypal predecessors; the mother who sends Red to the grandmother's house, the wolf who is met in the woods, the wolf who, it seems, devours the grandmother and, finally, awaits the expected arrival of Red. The online version differs most notably from earlier interpretations both structurally – different beginning and ending – and thematically – Red's seduction attempts. From the outset of Leishman's Red Riding Hood the reader becomes aware of an undercurrent of unruly behaviour; this is not the innocent Red Riding Hood of Perrault (see fig. 5.12 and fig. 5.13).

⁹⁰² Leishman, "1.13: Artist Statement."

⁹⁰³ See Cristina Bacchilega, Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies (University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1997).

⁹⁰⁴ Perrault qtd. in Bacchilega, Postmodern Fairy Tales 53.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

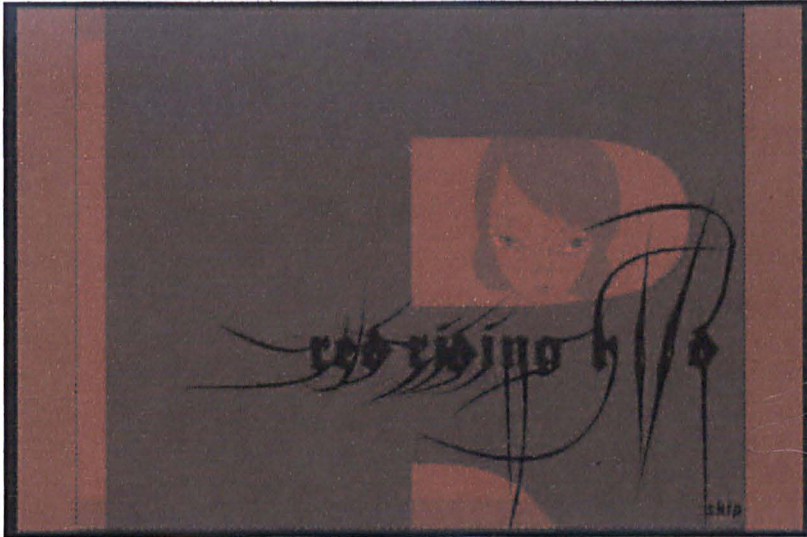


Fig. 5.12 The title screen, “they are evil.” Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

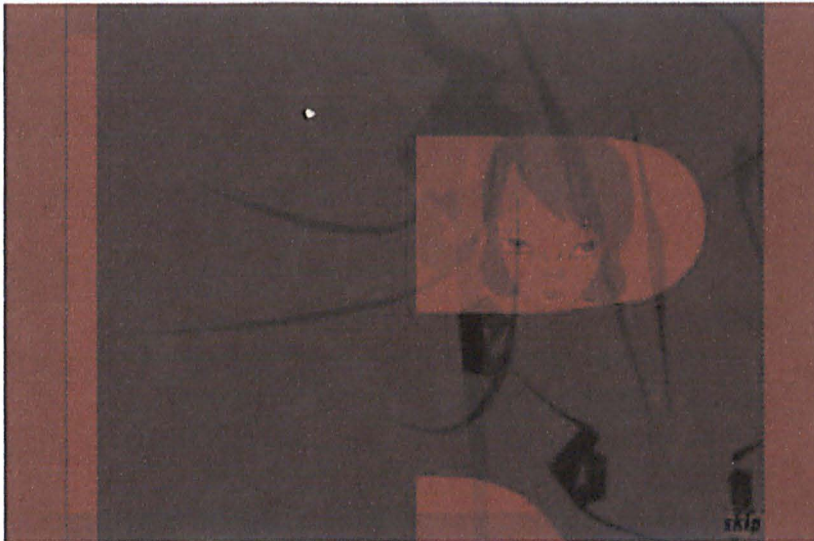


Fig. 5.13 The title swirls around if the patient reader clicks repeatedly on the text. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

That Red seems imprisoned behind the letter r and looks out at the reader further alludes to Leishman’s goal to include “multiple retellings” of a highly “gendered stereotype.”⁹⁰⁷ From the title screen, this revision discloses its affiliations with the familiar tales however it is not an “innocent persecuted heroine”⁹⁰⁸ who is tricked by the wolf, rather, it is she who explicitly seduces him, who changes her hair colour from brunette to blonde (see fig. 5.14) in order to “catch...the one.”⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁷ Leishman, “1.13: Artist Statement.”

⁹⁰⁸ Bacchilega 37.

⁹⁰⁹ Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

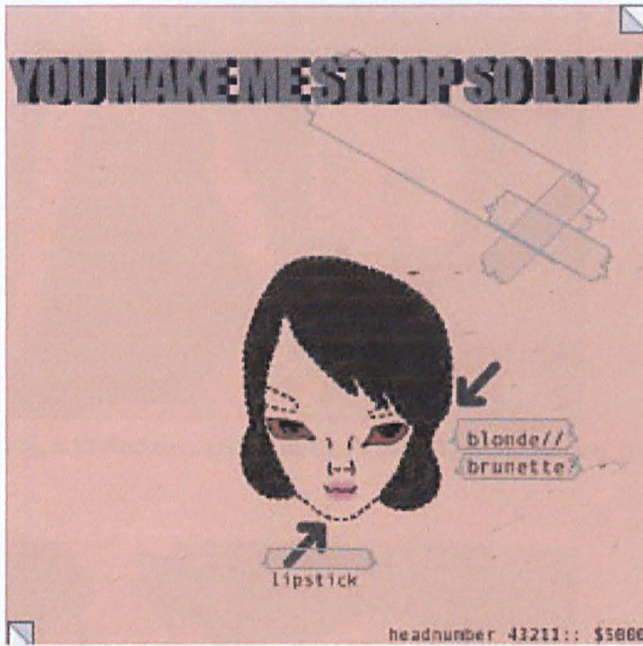


Fig. 5.14 Red's diary of her transformation from brunette to blonde. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

However, only “anti passive reading stances”⁹¹⁰ will divulge this other world contained in between the more linear story world suggesting that subverting stereotypes and thwarting limiting constructions take effort and time, it is not a case of easily opening a world of new and positive possibilities.

If the reader progresses through the narrative without exploring this other “dream” world, the story raises more questions rather than providing any straightforward answers. Red begins by setting off on a very straight and narrow path to her grandmother's house at her mother's order. While the reader cannot hear the “super-sexual mother”⁹¹¹ ask Red to perform this chore, the swift snapping of her lips becomes the main focus of the minimised screen as well as her burlesque attire; additionally the thumping base-line mimics the hastily barked order:

⁹¹⁰ Leishman, “1.14: Synthesis.”

⁹¹¹ Leishman, “Further questions on Deviant.”



Fig. 5.15 Red answers her mother's call. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.



Fig. 5.16 Red's mother explains the chore. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

As these two screen shots illustrate, Leishman is interested in challenging stereotypes. This mother is very clearly a physical construct; the focus on the body and mouth as well as the stance suggests this mother is more concerned with her sexual exploits than a “sick and weak”⁹¹² grandmother. The empty basket further signals that the grandmother's health is far from Red's mother's mind. In fact, Red's eye-rolling as depicted in fig. 5.15 and 5.16 suggests this assignment is far too familiar.

On her way to her grandmother's house Red adheres to the straight and narrow path (see fig. 5.17) however the wolf, “disguised” as a boy bares his “tainted smile”⁹¹³ (see fig. 5.18) and Red discloses her destination.

⁹¹² Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Little Red Cap,” Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts, ed. D. L. Ashliman, 2007, University of Pittsburg, 20 June 2007 <<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html#grimm>>.

⁹¹³ Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

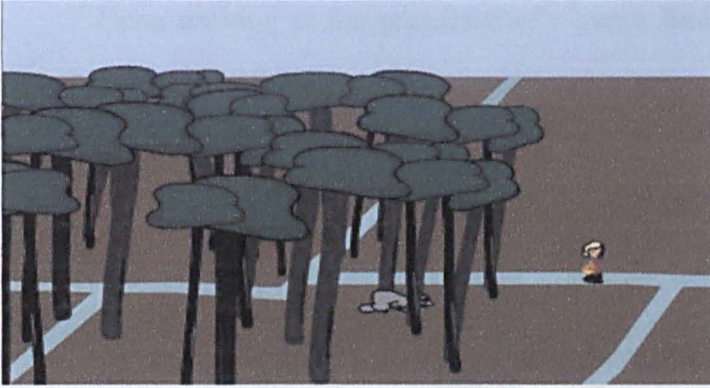


Fig. 5.17 Red on the straight and narrow path to her grandmother's house unaware of the wolf following her. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

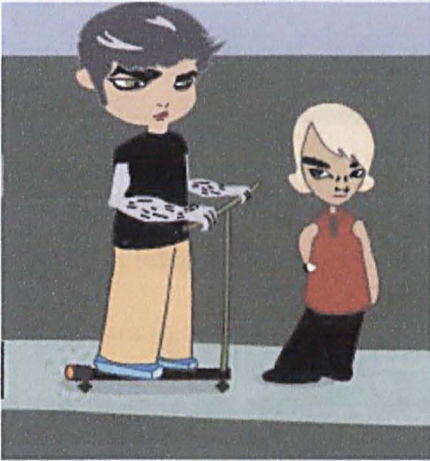


Fig. 5.18 The boy wolf smiling at Red. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

The boy wolf makes his way to the grandmother's house and proceeds to eat her with a flurry of zoomed in images as the only evidence:

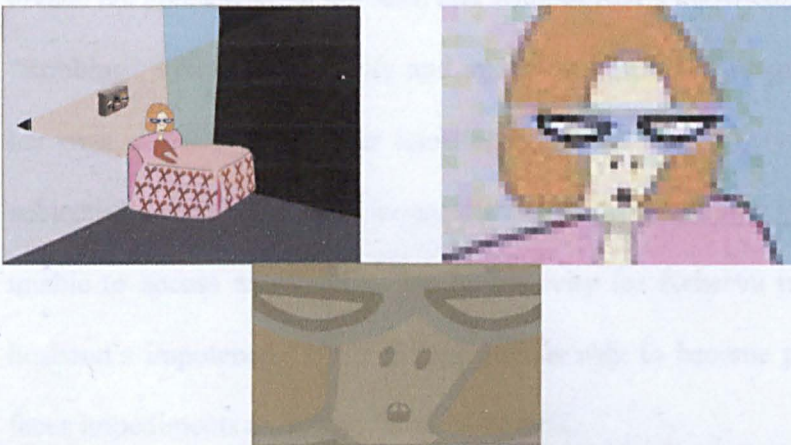


Fig. 5.19 The death of the grandmother. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

Meanwhile, Red picks some flowers for her grandmother, grows sleepy and lies down. Here the reader can choose simply to “wake her up” and enable Red to continue on her way (see fig. 5.11).

Upon arriving at the grandmother's house Red draws back a dark curtain to expose the wolf in the grandmother's bed. Red looks squarely at the viewer as if to preempt her move to subvert the traditional ending, and then grimaces at the wolf.



Fig. 5.20 Red gazing at the reader and then grimacing at the wolf. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

Again, in what can only be described as a Leishmanian move, images of Red and the wolf zoom in and out of focus, slowly clearing to reveal a sleeping Red (see fig. 5.21). Mousing over her stomach, the reader reveals Red's pregnancy while simultaneously invading her "bodily space."⁹¹⁴ The reader brings to the fore Longhurst's claim that "the gazing at, and touching of, pregnant women's stomachs is tied into a notion of the fetus [sic] as public property."⁹¹⁵ Though Red's body is her own, the reader is able to invade her space without question and without Red's knowledge; she continues to sleep. "Robbing" Red of subjectivity and agency suggests her pregnancy distances her from her own subjectivity and her knowledge of that subjectivity.⁹¹⁶ This questioning of subjectivity and motherhood is reminiscent of that in Fallow Field where the narrator is unable to access an aspect of her subjectivity (as Kristeva might have it) due to her husband's impotency. Here, though Red is able to become pregnant, she nonetheless faces impediments to certain facets of herself.

⁹¹⁴ Robyn Longhurst, Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 55.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid. 58.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.



Fig. 5.21 The end of the linear world. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

Further evidence of the distancing of her subjectivity, is the divide between mind and body, made explicit by Red's lack of awareness of the reader's touch on her stomach. That the reader, using the mouse, can reach out and caress Red's stomach parallels Longhurst's argument that pregnant women are construed simply as "containers" that must be "protected."⁹¹⁷ As is normally the case, Longhurst explains, pregnant women are "policed" by society because "the individual pregnant woman's capacity is primarily as a vessel."⁹¹⁸ However, this strategy is underlined by a double impulse. If on the one hand, Red's pregnant body signifies a split between mind and body, on the other hand it explicitly exhibits Red's becoming subjectivity as an unfinished and constituting process. As for Kristeva, the condition of pregnancy symbolises a split resulting in a signification that is always already uncertain. Within Kristeva's theoretical space, then, the maternal body can be recast as outside of signification: the pregnant body, like the *sujet-en-procès* both generates and simultaneously exceeds representation.⁹¹⁹ This holds even more so in the context of linking to multiple worlds beyond that of the initial narrative for, in a sense, a new world resides within Red but only comes into being with the reader as catalyst.

⁹¹⁷ Longhurst 62.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁹ See Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," Gender Trouble, 79–92.

Through the act of giving birth Red can literally bring one world into another. It is this extreme instability and potential to create worlds that comes to be feared and finally stopped.

The dialogue between mother and foetus, between reader and Red, and between worlds, appears as what Irigaray might term a “third space,” neither inside nor outside.⁹²⁰ In a space where multiple worlds can combine and recombine, can blend and blur, there are no separations. To bring a linear order to the narrative of becoming these fusions must be interrupted. This becomes the role of the wolf for it is he who fears Red’s capacity to “defea[t] the notion of fixed *bodily form*, of visible, recognizable, clear and distinct shapes as that which marks the contour of the body.”⁹²¹ In fact, because “the female body can change shape so drastically” it becomes “troublesome in the eyes of the logocentric economy within which to *see* is the primary act of knowledge.”⁹²² Thus, as the music rises to a crescendo and Red continues to sleep, oblivious of her surroundings, the wolf enters the bedroom. As he reaches over, like the reader, to invade Red’s bodily space, the screen dims – signifying the end of the fiction and, in this case, of subjectivity – the wolf holds a gun to Red’s head.

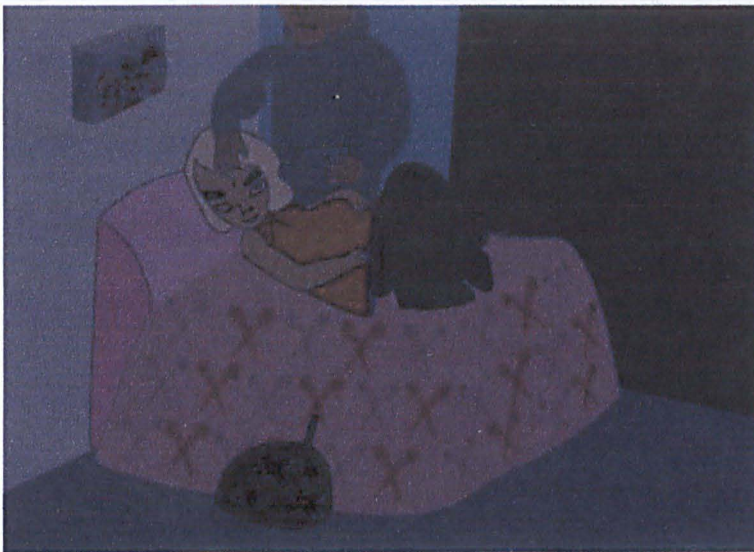


Fig. 5.22 The end of the linear world. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

⁹²⁰ See Irigaray, *Je Tu Nous* 49.

⁹²¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 80. Emphasis original.

⁹²² *Ibid.* Emphasis original.

In this way, the final scene of Red as mother-in-process encapsulates the theme of the web fiction: the act of bringing worlds of subjectivity together, of writing the body, is tantamount to witnessing the death of subjectivity. The more Red attempts to represent her selves, the further she grows from her subjectivity. The double-bind that has been apparent throughout all the fictions discussed in this thesis reappears in this final scene: the desire to represent while concomitantly aware of its inadequacy. At least here, when a subjectivity that is constructed in language, sound, and image dies, so too do those constructions.

Having demonstrated the progression of the linear world, a move to the interpretation of a multiple world (referred to as “dream world” within the narrative) is now possible. As Bell notes is the case with Patchwork Girl, the dream world similarly “implicitly foregrounds its own status as contrived construction and an ontological domain separate from the Actual World.”⁹²³ However, although an ontological dichotomy is established, it relies fully on the reader’s “systematic + detailed enquiry”⁹²⁴ to come into tangible being. Thus, a fracturing between the two worlds is likely but it is the reader’s immersion in both worlds which successfully melds them thus enabling both worlds to reflect and reinforce the other.

While the actual world of folkloric entanglement begins with the recognisable “once upon,” includes a climactic “meanwhile,” and concludes with the credits, the dream world is structurally antithetical to this Aristotelian configuration.



Fig. 5.23 Narrative structure of the actual world. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

The entrance to the dream world, or what Jenkins refers to as an “embedded

⁹²³ Bell, “Possible Worlds in Hypertext Fiction” 207.

⁹²⁴ Donna Leishman, “Further questions on Deviant.”

narrative,”⁹²⁵ might seem clear (see fig. 5.11) but how the narrative evolves from here can differ with each reading instance. Though the dream world narrative is driven entirely by reader interaction – “you’re interacting with the story as a maker of the world” – and there are no seemingly fixed sequences it is important to note that a clear story is nonetheless inevitably unearthed.⁹²⁶ With this possible world readers can experience what Malloy refers to as the “disorderly yet linked structure” prevalent in her own “narrabases” as the links here retrace the events that lead to the beginning of the originating story.⁹²⁷

Unlike the image of a passive protagonist as in preceding *Red Riding Hoods*, the dream world enables the reader to paint a portrait of a young woman who “exercises [her] own free will.”⁹²⁸ While the patriarchal ideology of earlier versions of *Red Riding Hood* place the male as saviour, the dream world challenges this hierarchy by focussing on a woman bent on revenge. With a sprinkling of alien dust upon Red’s head the reader is transported into events that preface her journey:

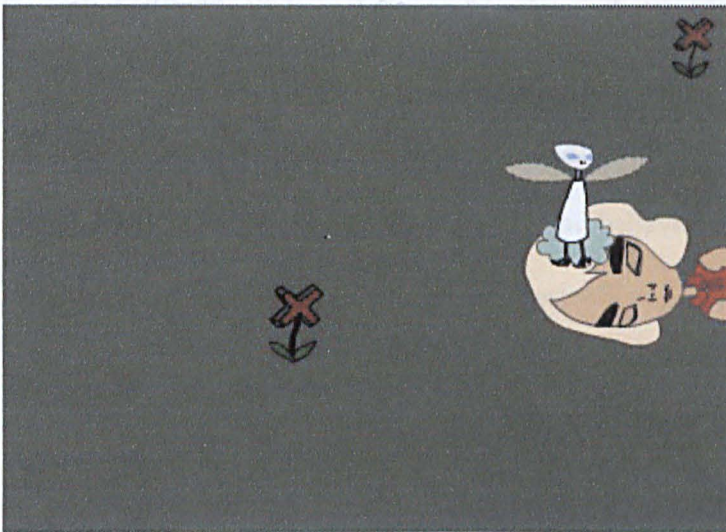


Fig. 5.24 Fairy dust sprinkled on Red’s head. Donna Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

⁹²⁵ Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” eds Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004) 126.

⁹²⁶ Donna Leishman qtd. in Matthew Mirapaul, “Beyond Hypertext: Novels with Interactive Animation,” 5 March 2001, *The New York Times*, 23 July 2007
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/05/arts/05ARTS.html?ex=1199682000&en=419bceff581b363f&ei=5070>>.

⁹²⁷ Malloy, “Between the Narrator and the Narrative.”

⁹²⁸ Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

From this point there are several renderings of the narrative establishing both “macrostructural nonlinearity and microstructural intersemioticity,”⁹²⁹ however most versions include key scenes ranging from Red sustaining her heartbreak by tearfully listening to sad songs, to Red attending a club or “meat market” to “ensnare” the wolf whom she “loves,” to Red searching through an apartment building in search of the wolf, to the reader choosing whether or not to allow the growth of embryos. Like the wolf in Perrault and Grimm’s texts, the digital wolf also poses a danger. However, rather than out to satiate his physical hunger this modern wolf hopes to assuage his sexual appetite. Red, as the reader discovers in the dream section, falls for “love’s disguise” and eventually becomes pregnant as disclosed in the penultimate scene of the originary world.

While Red is intent on seeking revenge, she wants her “wolf, the one thing [she] cannot control” to “suffer,” it becomes clear that she is doing more than simply “enjoying her own sexuality and using it to tenderize the wolf.”⁹³⁰ If “classic fairytales”⁹³¹ with their archetypes (the hero, the martyr)⁹³² offer only stereotypical gender roles, then this modern dream world can be seen as putting into play attributes associated with feminisms like Braidotti’s and Haraway’s. As Leishman explains, “Red as an archetype of understood performance and behavior [is] repositioned as an unstable signifier.”⁹³³ With the emphasis on destabilising stereotypes rather than simply rewriting them, it becomes especially strategic that the reader not only permits the “birth” of Red and the wolf, but that the reader must subsequently choose only one of the embryos in order to continue the narrative development. This birthing process and

⁹²⁹ Astrid Ensslin explains that as web fiction develops so too will an aptitude for “the material circumstances under which...works will be [read] as well as the idiosyncratic mediality of digital writing.” Astrid Ensslin, *Canonizing Hypertext*, Manuscript submitted for publication, 2007, 129.

⁹³⁰ Clark notes this is the case for Angela Carter’s protagonist. Robert, Clark, “Angela Carter’s Desire Machine,” *Women’s Studies* 14 (1987): 148.

⁹³¹ Bacchilega 4.

⁹³² Leishman, “Does Point and Click Destroy the Story?: The Convergence of Interactivity with Narrative,” 2001, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.6amhoover.com/destroystory.htm>>.

⁹³³ Donna Leishman, “Red Finally,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 25 July 2007.

ensuing choice can be read as a metaphor for the web fiction as a whole; it is solely the reader who can bring the narrative into being and it is only the reader who can ensure its evolvment. Additionally, it is especially clear at this juncture that neither the wolf nor Red succumb to one-dimensional stereotypes: they are not distinct beings but share character traits, rendering each a blend of the other. This blending is especially exemplified if the reader develops the narrative by choosing the yellow embryo which contains both Red and Wolf:



Fig. 5.25 Red and the wolf in an embryonic state. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

The intermixing of Red and the wolf prominent in this section draws attention to the “contrived premise”⁹³⁴ of gender stereotypes as well as highlights the inherently subjective piecing together of both personal experience and the web fiction itself, what Jason Nelson refers to as “mapless adventuring.”⁹³⁵ This scene in particular exposes the processes employed to construct Red’s becoming subjectivity; the reader who chooses which separate but connected link to follow. Additionally, that there is no direct verbal or textual address to the reader further emphasises the vital role she plays; there is no story without the reader’s participation.

Continuing through the narrative the reader eventually (for all readings include

⁹³⁴ Butler, Bodies that Matter 6.

⁹³⁵ Jason Nelson, “Multi-Modal Coding: Jason Nelson, Donna Leishman, and Electronic Writing,” The Iowa Review Web 9.1 (August 2007), 3 December 2007 <http://research-intermedia.art.uiowa.edu/tirw/vol9n1/biographical_background.php>.

this scene at some stage) discovers Red's teenage bedroom complete with posters of the wolf pasted to her walls, a Goth-inspired duvet cover, and even dust bunnies.



Fig. 5.26 Red's bedroom. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

A feature of Leishman's creations, as Rau notes, is the opportunity for the reader to tangibly explore insignificant elements of a screen, like the patterns on the duvet which change shape and the ability to make the dust bunnies box, which actually do nothing to progress the plot, i.e. an instance of "problematic accessibility."⁹³⁶ Leishman explains this as an attempt to "encourage the reader to keep participating" and to "offe[r] narrative burden-free playful interactions."⁹³⁷ However the links that go nowhere seem only to remind the reader of the construction of both Red and her worlds. Thus there is a distinct sense of a teeming of potential worlds but their severe restrictions are imposed on the agency of the reader. However, the reader who is determined to discover "hidden sections"⁹³⁸ will proceed to click everything in the room eventually discovering Red's diary and a link to another possible world.

This diary possible world, like that of the dream world, is not so much an alternative but an enlargement of the actual world, what Ryan refers to as "digressive

⁹³⁶ Ryan, Avatars of Story 116.

⁹³⁷ Leishman, "Red Finally."

⁹³⁸ Leishman, "Further questions on Deviant in preparation for a panel at Duke University / SLS conference."

and background–building.”⁹³⁹ However, rather than “suspend...the development of the story,”⁹⁴⁰ the dream and the diary serve to propel a deeper understanding of the narrative, including “pre or post histories.”⁹⁴¹ As suggested by Red’s change of hair colour, various fragments of memories, and selection of different physical personas in her bedroom, she is no single identity but a multi–faceted subjectivity. In other words, the sheer copiousness of details that seem to ratify Red’s multiplicity is illustrative of her subjectivity. She is not a unified identity characterised by a singular sign, an emblematic cape, rather, this Red is multiple.



Fig. 5.27 A physical instantiation of Red’s complex subjectivity. Donna Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

The cover of the diary attests to the reader’s move to another world, warning “do not enter,” rather than, if it were simply a textual artefact, do not “open.” Not heeding this advice, the investigative reader soon discovers a textual world and reveals another persona, a homodiegetic-autodiegetic narrator who until this point has been omnisciently heterodiegetic. Fittingly, this “establishing frame”⁹⁴² is entitled “my secret is my mind;” further corroboration that these are Red’s thoughts as well as attesting to the fact that she is more than flesh.⁹⁴³ In fact, this declaration destabilises the final scene in which the reader witnesses Red’s certain death. While that scene (see fig. 5.22) establishes a split between Red’s mind and her body, or at least sees them as

⁹³⁹ Ryan, *Avatars of Story* 111.

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 112.

⁹⁴¹ Donna Leishman, “First Few Questions Back,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 July 2007.

⁹⁴² Bernstein, “Patterns of Hypertext” 22.

⁹⁴³ Bacchilega argues that fairy tale characters such as Red Riding Hood and Sleeping Beauty are noted for the physical aspects and accoutrements rather than their knowledge.

separate, Red's diary declaration shows the two parts interact and connect. The diary section opens with Wolf's photograph haphazardly taped to the first page. To advance, the reader must click on the boy's face, eliciting the "next" page. Next here does not refer to linearity but rather temporality for each rereading of this scene proceeds to a different "next" page. The second page of the diary becomes the first instance of narrative text apparent in this fiction. Until now, the narrative has consisted of image, video, music, sound, and haptics.

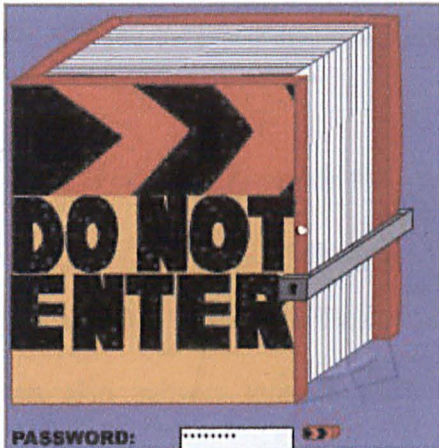


Fig. 5.28 The cover of Red's diary. Donna Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

The textual account brings into relief the notion of "bibliogenesis" which generally refers to production of books but as Braidotti notes with reference to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, this production is complicit with the "process of artistic creation."⁹⁴⁴ A similar process is evident in Red's diary. Red explains that "whenever I'm alone with you, you make the narrator feel that I am young agan [sic]. Whenever I'm alone with you, you make the narrator feel that I am home agan [sic]." Significantly as the reader clicks on the page, two lines disappear. Without the "whenever I'm alone with you" beginning, each phrase suggests Red's intensifying enchantment with the wolf for he no longer is required to "physically" be present. As readers learn later from analeptic diary entries, the wolf successfully seeps into Red's mind.

⁹⁴⁴ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 205.

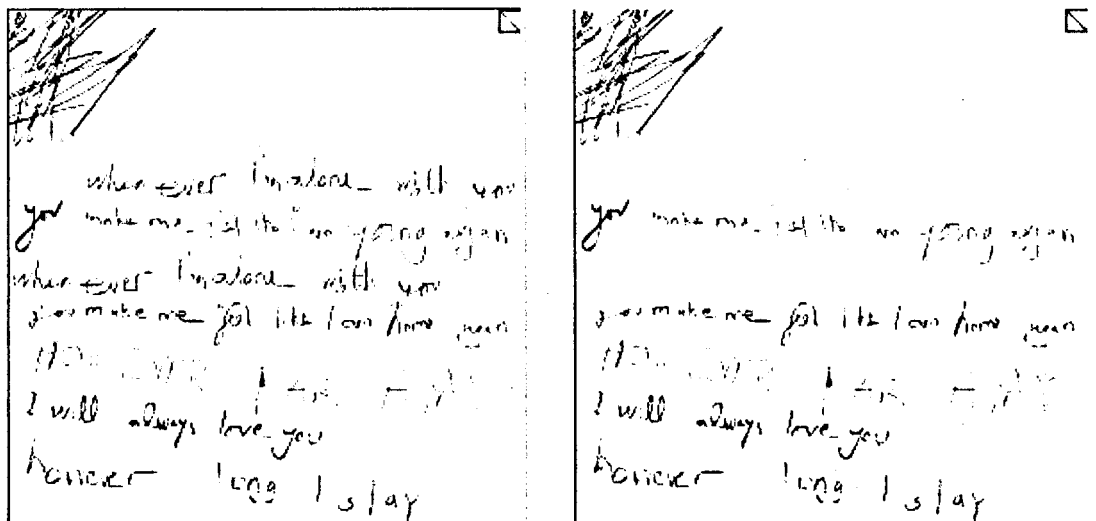


Fig. 5.29 The first textual excerpt in the diary. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

For Shari Benstock the language of diary entries “mediates the space between ‘self’ and ‘life.’”⁹⁴⁵ Though this coming together of subjectivity and experience in the pages of the diary might illustrate that subjectivity, like representation, is constructed, it can also subvert those constructions. However this subversive move need not necessarily be overt, as Radner and Lanser explain: “[c]oding occurs in the context of complex audiences, in situations where some of the audience may be competent to decode the message, but others – including those who might be dangerous – are not.”⁹⁴⁶ As indicated via Red’s obvious infatuation with Wolf and her demonstrated loss of agency, “a coded text is by definition complex, and its messages may be ambiguous. The coding need not be a conscious act.”⁹⁴⁷ If Alison Case is right and “the restriction of the female narrator to the role of narrative witness” is commensurate with “her exclusion from the active shaping of narrative form and meaning,” then Red’s role as conscious plotter implicates her as fully immersed participant.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁵ Shari Benstock, “The Female Self Engendered: Autobiographical Writing and Theories of Selfhood,” Women and Autobiography, eds Martine Watson Browne and Allison B. Kimmich (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999) 7.

⁹⁴⁶ Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, 414.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁸ Alison Case, Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999) 4.

Red's dynamic role as witness (as evinced in the originary world) and participant (in the multiple worlds) is coextensive with Braidotti's rendition of *écriture* feminine which embodies a shift "away from the mere critique of patriarchy to the assertion of...women's...range of experiences."⁹⁴⁹

Thoughts of me exemplified

All the little flaws I have denied

[...]

Your insults get stuck in my teeth as they grind

way past good taste...

[...]

You act like you knew it all along

Your timing sucks, your silence is a blessing

All I ever wanted out of you was something you

could never be...

I've got to have an answer

Why am I so fascinated by bigger pictures,

better things

But I don't care what you think...

As this excerpt demonstrates, Red begins by passively critiquing the wolf (i.e. patriarchy) and his negative view of her. However, towards the end of the stream of consciousness, Red authorises her agency while concurrently questioning her own documenting of her experience: she must have an answer but why must she have a "bigger picture?" For Radner and Lanser this shift in subjectivity, from passive to active, highlights their contention that subversive coding appears most prominently in "the very forms that men already consider nonliterary or inferior – the letter, the

⁹⁴⁹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 152.

diary...”⁹⁵⁰

Now that Red no longer cares what Wolf thinks, she has enacted her becoming. In the following example Red begins to chart her retribution. She notes that “even if you run...I will find you. I decided I want you.” Indeed from this page forward, Red ensures she represents herself as an active and becoming subjectivity. She is no longer an innocent girl who has been beguiled into bed by a “tormentor in a cunning disguise.”⁹⁵¹ The autodiegetic voice changes from a passive portrayal of what Red seems to believe she should feel to her to vehemently authorising her self; she is a becoming subjectivity and can make a choice:

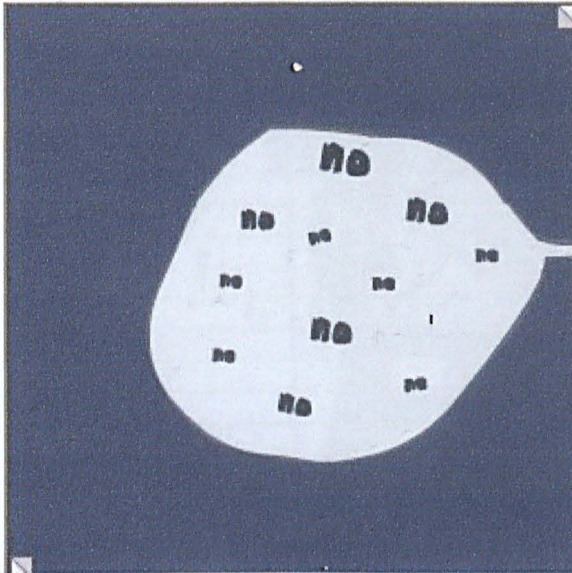


Fig. 5.30 Excerpt from Red’s diary. Donna Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

The most prominent examples of Red’s attempt to actively and multi-mimetically re-present her experience and subjectivity occur in her diary. In the originary world of the narrative (at least from the reader’s point of view) Red’s progress corresponds to that of the reader, but in the diary world, the reader’s momentum is regulated by the diary. In fact, in a poignant entry Red is constrained to “the language

⁹⁵⁰ Radner and Lanser 421.

⁹⁵¹ Leishman, “Red Riding Hood.”

of the powerless.”⁹⁵² Red feels loss, remorse and despair. This powerlessness affects the reader too for she is unable to easily turn the page. However, after sufficient clicking on the upturned edge of the page the reader, and Red, subvert that seeming powerlessness by creating more “specific cartographies” of subjective interpretation.⁹⁵³ Red’s previous thoughts and perhaps even the reader’s path must be “exorcised.” Here is an example of Red “redefining her subjectivity” as mobile; both in thought and body. Clicking adeptly means exiting the diary world and reuniting Red with the physical world, enabling Red to “fuck fate”:

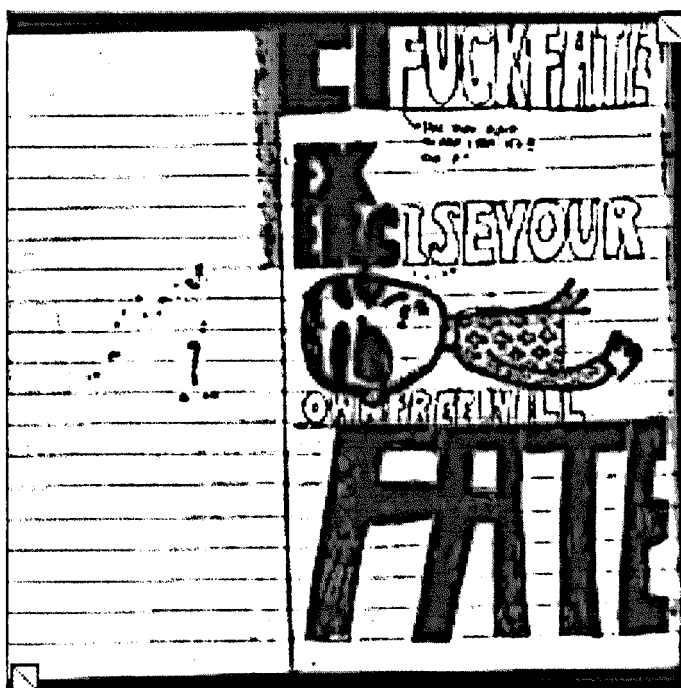


Fig. 5.31 An entry in Red’s diary. Donna Leishman, *Red Riding Hood*.

For the reader it becomes obvious that Red has no single “authentic self” that exists separately in either the originating world or the multiple worlds. Any attempt on Red’s behalf to exert control over any of these subjectivities merely underlines how intertwined her subjectivities are with themselves and with the reader. Thus, as

⁹⁵² Radner and Lanser see the use of “ellipses, litotes, passive constructions, euphemisms [and] qualifiers” deemed “characteristic of “women’s language” as potentially subversive, as a way of “deflecting” attention from underlying messages. Radner and Lanser, 420.

⁹⁵³ For Braidotti “texts are not semiotic–linguistic apparati that need to be entered following the logic of the signifier” but instead readings should “unveil” the “powers” or “repressive mechanisms at work in the text...so as to bring them into a manifest level.” Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 95.

Cavarero would have it, Red's subjectivity emerges and is constructed by the stories the reader tells about her. Shifting the creation of representation from the author, in this case Red, to the reader does not deny the drive to narrativise one's own experience, as Red clearly demonstrates, but affirms Cavarero's thinking that narratable subjectivities emerge with the help of an other.

According to Cavarero, "the word" is that which is privileged "as the vehicle of a desire for identity"⁹⁵⁴ and thus it is the word which illuminates one's story and one's world. Repositioning this thinking into a multi-mimetic environment, "the vehicle" becomes vehicles: text, image, sound, and interaction. Perhaps part of what is happening in Red Riding Hood is an increasing awareness of the limits and particular affordances of each mode. As long as each mode is constrained to a monologic sense, i.e. it does not interact with the other modes; the representation is less than partial.⁹⁵⁵ However, because the reader can bridge the multiple worlds (and their different modalities) they become bound to each other rather than existing discretely. Much as Red herself might aspire to maintain a distinction between the two worlds, she nevertheless acknowledges she is "fascinated by the bigger picture."⁹⁵⁶ As Red notes, "if you don't know yourself you have nothing," and it is the patient and searching reader who can help the Red of one world find herself in another.⁹⁵⁷

5.4 "Thousands of Partial and Accidental Views": Jackson's My Body & a Wunderkammer

While Red Riding Hood's technologically intricate and challenging design specifies the problematics associated with approaches that constitute subjectivity as

⁹⁵⁴ Cavarero 59.

⁹⁵⁵ This is reminiscent of both Lukács and Kress who see particular modes suitable only for particular representations, example painting and sculpture. See beginning of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

⁹⁵⁶ Leishman, Red Riding Hood.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

anything other than provisional, situated, and in-process, Shelley Jackson's My Body employs a manoeuvrable interface to illustrate that the crossing of different discourses is not as difficult as it might appear. Links in My Body, as with Fallow Field and Red Riding Hood, act as opportunities to connect different though related worlds, that of the mind and that of experience, however while Red Riding Hood is exceptionally challenging to read and Fallow Field unusually straightforward, My Body lies in between the two. The pivoting function of the links are also a hallmark of the theme of the narrative itself.

In the "Hands" section of My Body & a Wunderkammer, Shelley Jackson's web fiction, there is a fragment of text entwined in the tips of outstretched fingers: "[m]y forefingers were always marked (and are today) with magic marker dots and dashes."⁹⁵⁸ At the end of that same section the protagonist muses on their "extraordinary meaningfulness," eventually to realise that in her attempt to "situate" bodies by drawing them:

I could never settle on any rendition because every turn revealed a new personality. There were as many hands as sparrows and I could hardly catalog [sic.] them all. Every so often though, my pencil left some careless line that humped off the page with extraordinary meaningfulness, more knowledgeable than I would ever be. I learned to recognize the truth in the accident; I pirated chance for booty."⁹⁵⁹

These two quotes are representative of the questions and complexities that arise in Jackson's "autobiography plus lies."⁹⁶⁰ If the body, as Radner and Lanser would say, can be "coded" in different modalities – language and image – then how does that

⁹⁵⁸ Shelley Jackson, My Body & a Wunderkammer, 1997, Electronic Literature Collection, 2006, 3 December 2007 <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/jackson_my_body_a_wunderkammer.html>.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁰ Shelley Jackson, Ineradicable Stain, 3 July 2007, <<http://www.ineradicablestain.com/writing.html>>.

coding “refuse, subvert, or transform conventional expectations?”⁹⁶¹ If the subject is composed of vignettes of text and parts of a body, then what meaning can be “stitched together” and “who is the author of whom?”⁹⁶² Perhaps most importantly, in the context of multiple worlds, is the visual representation of the two worlds which seem to blend and blur continuously into one another. There is the visual mapping of Shelley’s physical body (see fig. 5.32), a sketched outline of a woman with certain parts of the body which equate to more strategic parts of the narrative illustrated in detail.⁹⁶³ Significantly evocative of an autopsy examination, this image offers up parts of the body for the reader’s consumption and interpretation. Most body parts are textually labelled except those related directly to her mind (eyes, eyelids, nose, mouth, ear) and link to meditations on the composition of Shelley. Interestingly Shelley’s right toe is bordered by a rectangle, reminiscent of a toe tag identifying a dead body. However there is no “death” of the body here, no “abstraction” of information as Hayles warns is the case with contemporary constructions of the “information/materiality hierarchy.”⁹⁶⁴ Rather, Shelley is fully aware of the complications inherent in representing her embodied experience but nonetheless, with pen and paper in hand, attempts a “rememory”: a “putting back together parts that have lost touch with one another and reaching out toward a complexity too unruly to fit into disembodied ones and zeros.”⁹⁶⁵ Paralleling Hayles’ contention that embodied virtuality describes bodies (or “material objects”) that are “interpenetrated by flows of information,”⁹⁶⁶ the visual map points to one world view and the memoir-esque multimodal descriptions of each body part suggests another. However, as with Hayles’ feedback loops, the blending of Shelley’s

⁹⁶¹ Radner and Lanser, 423.

⁹⁶² Shelley Jackson, “Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl,” Transformations of the Book Conference, MIT, 24–25 October, 1998, 3 July 2007 <http://web.mit.edu/m-i-t/articles/index_jackson.html>.

⁹⁶³ A clarification is in order here: as the narrator’s name is synonymous with the author’s, the name Shelley refers only to the narrative instantiation while Jackson refers to the author of the fiction.

⁹⁶⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 12.

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 14.

body together out of a cacophony of sense impressions, bright and partial views.”⁹⁷¹ Rather than relegate the body and Shelley to separate worlds as is the case in Patchwork Girl,⁹⁷² the process of reading creates a kind of collective fragmentation where there grows a reconciliation between disparate and often “unhinged” representations.

Accordingly, that it is the reader who facilitates the move from whole body to “grotesque” parts substantiates both Shelley’s view of herself as mutable but also as composed in relation to others. Shelley’s monstrosity allows another world to appear which Braidotti would term as a “third discourse.”⁹⁷³ In this world, monsters “represent the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent...both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration.”⁹⁷⁴ In the context of Shelley as a scientist the association between herself and monstrosity signifies that “woman” and “scientific discourse” – or body and mind – form a subversive relationship. If “the monster is the bodily incarnation of difference” then the multiple world evoked here is a point where Shelley can represent in a way that does not simply reproduce existing structures of knowledge. In fact, Shelley believes that efforts to imitate rather than represent correspond with a “kind of powerlessness.” Mere “copying” purports only ignorance:

[d]rawing well was a kind of powerlessness: I had to subordinate myself to what was there, and helplessly let it have its say, whether I understood it or not; by making myself its clear medium I might look more knowing than I was, but the dirty secret was that I might never catch up to what I copied, never understand how out of gradations of smudged pencil a nose erected itself on the page.⁹⁷⁵

Significantly, firmly implanted in this third discourse, Shelley invokes a sense of

⁹⁷¹ Ibid.

⁹⁷² See Bell, “The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction” 207.

⁹⁷³ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 77.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁵ Jackson, “Nose,” My Body.

process and reconfiguration of the self whose fluidity implicitly questions the “binary logic of oppositions that characterize the phallogocentric discursive order.”⁹⁷⁶ As Braidotti explains, with “woman” equated as monstrous, she occupies “the negative pole.”⁹⁷⁷ However, in shifting the dualistic system into a multi-mimetic operation, Shelley succeeds in recognising difference while negotiating the act of representation.

Much of Jackson’s work offers interpretations of what Braidotti terms the becoming woman, “a subject which is definitely not one, but rather multilayered, interactive and complex.”⁹⁷⁸ Rather than perform a complex subjectivity through a disjunctive reading like that which is undertaken in These Waves of Girls, Cruising, and Red Riding Hood, Shelley’s and Jackson’s interest lie in how the boundaries between corporeality and consciousness coalesce and combine. Possible interpretations of this blending or “spiritualize[d] anatomy”⁹⁷⁹ require an understanding of subjectivity, like Braidotti, as incomplete and discontinuous, as a process rather than a fixed structure. That notion of subjectivity lies at the centre of My Body where the enactment of multi-mimetic representation permits the reader, the author, and the protagonist to envision a female subject always already a mingling of textual construct and embodied experience. As Kristeva notes is the case with Colette, the same might be said for the multi-mimetic creation of a becoming subjectivity in My Body: for

it is in passing that it finds its rhythm and, in that perpetual slippage, its mode of being: no prohibition arrests that porous shifting from same to other, from normal to deviant...That body, disidentified, transferential, everywhere and nowhere, *exists* because it is *articulated* in a privileged language, that of metaphor: not metaphor as

⁹⁷⁶ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 77.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁸ Braidotti, “Becoming Woman or Sexual Difference Revisited” 43.

⁹⁷⁹ Shelley Jackson, “Shelley Jackson: Anatomist Extraordinaire,” Book Sense, April 2002, 5 July 2007 <<http://www.booksense.com/people/archive/jacksonshelley.jsp>>.

substitution but metaphor as *gesture* of contradiction and tension, as *metamorphosis*.⁹⁸⁰

Moving beyond the binary split – body *or* mind – with a subtle reframing – body *and* mind – allows the opportunity to open up multiplicities and posit an entrance into an unknown world. As Jackson explains in an interview, “[e]arly scientists...conceived...of the body as...[a] concrete tex[t].”⁹⁸¹ If Jackson’s protagonist Shelley is freakish, it is perhaps only temporary, for when the reader creates a syntax with which to traverse the two worlds, a link is made between mind and body, consciousness and feeling. Rather than two stable and separate worlds, Shelley’s recombinant body and voice set both worlds into dialogue.

Each world and thus each narrative – “the unstable site of the between” – reflect a double-bind.⁹⁸² On the one hand there is a visible tension between the apparent construction of the text. On the other hand there is the analogous questioning of that construction. This tension also appears as “the interval of becoming;” the unity and ensuing fragmentation of the narrative trace the unity and fragmentation of Shelley.⁹⁸³ As Thomas explains of LambdaMOO, “[s]ome people try to make a map, but the complexity of the place always defeats them. Some even make models out of wood or plastic or clay, but this is going in the wrong direction — it’s impossible to physically capture the multi-dimensional nature of virtuality.”⁹⁸⁴ Jackson explicitly proposes the act of, or journey through, narration as a means of reconstituting and refiguring (mapping) a nomadic subjectivity. This journey is no straightforward one. As the body map corroborates; there is a dual tension. There is the scientific desire to bring order to

⁹⁸⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Colette*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 195. Emphasis original.

⁹⁸¹ Jackson, “Shelley Jackson: Anatomist Extraordinaire.”

⁹⁸² For Timothy Murray the act of reading certain digital works provokes this feeling of instability. Timothy Murray, “Digital Impossibility: Cruising the Aesthetic Haze of the New Media,” *CTheory*, 13 January 2000, 13 October 2007 <<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=121#text6>>.

⁹⁸³ Murray sees “the interval of becoming” in relation to the act of reading as well as the development of the content of a digital work. *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁴ Sue Thomas, *Hello World: Travels in Virtuality* (York: Raw Nerve Books, 2004) 26.

the unknown, to impose boundaries on the body. However, limiting the potentials and connections inherent in a dynamic subjectivity must, conceivably, be difficult and this is made explicit by the links which proliferate most body parts. This productive tension is enacted by the reader leading Jackson to offer at least one caveat, it is not the author or indeed the subject who will compose her self, but the reader who is offered Shelley's body as a "curiosity cabinet" into which she can dive.

Presenting the body as text and text as body means the reader must constantly shuttle between different worlds and correspondingly different navigation methods. Approaching the work *through* the body means viewing maps and outlines of fragments of the narrative. Reading *in* the body, the reader is immersed in the detail of memories but with little sense of where certain fragments might be situated. Much like Shelley's phantom limb, denoted on the map of her body but does not link to a narrative section, the reader soon discovers there is no "through-line."⁹⁸⁵

The story begins with an image of a body divided into named parts; it is a black and white image in the style of a wood engraving or autopsy diagram. From this map the reader can proceed either by choosing words denoting physical aspects of Shelley or by choosing the physical body part. Throughout the story, all narrativising occurs in the first person so that My Body, like the dream world in Red Riding Hood, like These Waves of Girls, and Fallow Field, is homodiegetic. The voice of the first person mimics that of the author but also makes the reader complicit in this recounting and creation of a multidimensional subjectivity that spans across worlds. This action constitutes Jackson's thinking that "the body...is in collusion with texts of all sorts."⁹⁸⁶

The image of the inscribed body contributes to the articulation of the fundamental multiplicity of the *sujet-en-procès* but it is acknowledgement of Irigaray's

⁹⁸⁵ Jackson, "Stitch Bitch." As with all the fictions discussed in this thesis, any path can be taken through the narrative, what is noted here is just one reader's journey.

⁹⁸⁶ Jackson, "Shelley Jackson: Anatomist Extraordinaire."

notion of female subjectivity as inherently excess that parallels the narrative aesthetics. Both My Body and Irigaray's theoretical model share a concern with an expression of what Irigaray calls the "subject's multitude of selves,"⁹⁸⁷ that is, a subject which is at least two.⁹⁸⁸ It is this consideration that works alongside the active world-bridging on the reader's part to unveil both worlds and subjectivities together.

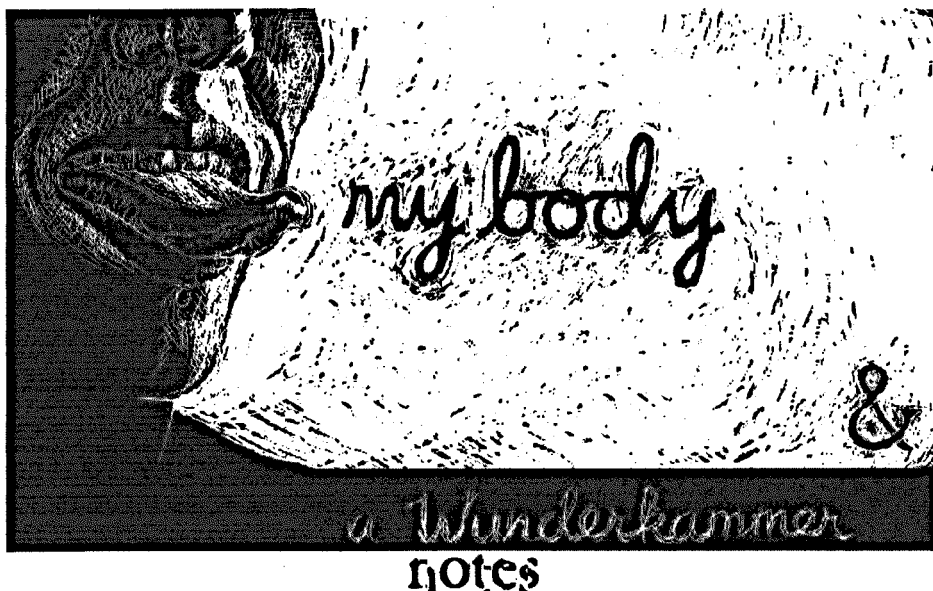


Fig. 5.33 Title Screen. Shelley Jackson, My Body & a Wunderkammer.

More specifically, the stakes inherent in My Body & a Wunderkammer are already implicit in the title screen (see fig. 5.33). As the ampersand indicates there is a blending between typography (as language/image) and subjectivity; each playing a role in the construction of the other. Furthermore, that the ampersand also appears as a tattoo on Shelley's right arm is corroboration of its dual semiotic significance; the ampersand as embodied experience and as constructing discourse. Consequently the offset ampersand enacts a dynamic tension between the body as a separate entity and the body as a searchable and knowable entity. On the one hand, Jackson invokes that patriarchal "stumbling block"⁹⁸⁹ that separates "intellect and sense," or as Bordo

⁹⁸⁷ Irigaray, The Sex Which is Not One 17.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 26.

⁹⁸⁹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 184.

explains: knowledge of the body and knowledge of the mind.⁹⁹⁰ Thus, according to Braidotti, the Cartesian split is a “binary opposition conveniently arranged so as to uphold a power system.”⁹⁹¹ On the other hand, Jackson’s imagery, both the ampersand and the topological structure of the body indicate a feminist framework where the primary and situated location is embodied experience; highlighting Haraway’s and Braidotti’s insistence that “[t]he subject is not an abstract entity, but rather a material embodied one.”⁹⁹² Similarly, as bodies in life are culturally coded – “there is no body as such; there are only bodies”⁹⁹³ – Shelley’s body in this fiction performs a visible intersection of “biological...social...linguistic” and visual codes.⁹⁹⁴ In a subversive move much like Irigaray’s sex that is more than one, Jackson reconceptualises information and materiality as intertwined entities, unlike current theories of posthuman cybernetics which “do away with the body.”⁹⁹⁵ The image, moreover, reveals an excess of meaning which mirrors Jackson’s challenge to the mind/body split: she sticks her tongue out at the words “my body.” Not only injecting humour into her science, this move allows both Shelley and Jackson to “hol[d] incompatible things together”⁹⁹⁶ thereby enacting what Butler sees as an avenue out of imitation: repetition with a difference.⁹⁹⁷ Jackson and Shelley do more than merely imitate the Cartesian split; they parody multiple binary splits (body/mind, male/female, knowledge/experience, text/image). The obscure sighing that sporadically makes itself heard here also serves to remind the reader that body and mind though intertwined are composed of sometimes inscrutable aspects.

Apparent, then, is an intersection between feminist models of subjectivity and

⁹⁹⁰ Susan Bordo, “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought,” *Signs* 11.3 (Spring, 1986) 444.

⁹⁹¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 184.

⁹⁹² *Ibid.* 73.

⁹⁹³ Grosz qtd. in Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 196.

⁹⁹⁴ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 238.

⁹⁹⁵ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 12.

⁹⁹⁶ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* 65.

⁹⁹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble* 148.

Jackson's mapping of a confrontation of an "essential difference" that is the interval between a becoming subjectivity as representation and a becoming subjectivity as experience.⁹⁹⁸ Irigaray's privileging of multiplicity receives substantiation in Jackson's fiction if one specifically considers the interval between the aforementioned dialectic of representation and experience. Rather than necessarily a hiatus that feminists seek to fill, as Braidotti sees it, the interval apparent in My Body is predicated upon connections and links.⁹⁹⁹ By bridging the two worlds, the reader undoes what feminist thinking cites as a schizophrenic split and focuses on a fluidity of boundaries. In short, the reader's enactment of Jackson's constitution of subjectivity multi-mimetically represents that the other is always already within.

Following Showalter, My Body specifies anatomy as textuality and subsequently that the possibility of other worlds, like that of subjectivity, is deeply connected to the corporeal rendering of lived experience. In fact, for Jackson it is definitively an "activity" in which one is constantly "trying to find [a] way to another world."¹⁰⁰⁰ As a way of substantiating or lending credence to her articulations of the body as interface to the world, Shelley deems them scientific explorations. She conducts experiments in an effort to constitute her existence, "I feel more real when I bump up against things and in this way become a thing for those things – the world's world, another's other. But this requires a bizarre imaginative excursion: myself as mud might see me, or water, or ink."¹⁰⁰¹ This creative move however reduces Shelley's investigation from one with scientific merit to one which her friends respond to "scathingly" and with "disgust." At this stage Shelley's negotiation between various dualities – herself/friends, body/mind – is readily apparent. Shelley unquestionably

⁹⁹⁸ Teresa de Lauretis, "The Essence of the Triangle," The Essential Difference, eds Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁹⁹⁹ Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 164.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Shelley Jackson, "Ink Q&A," Powell's, December 2007, 2 December 2007 <<http://www.powells.com/ink/jackson.html>>.

¹⁰⁰¹ Shelley Jackson, "Written on the Body: An Interview with Shelley Jackson," Iowa Review, July 2006, 16 July 2007 <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/new/july06/jackson.html>>.

rejects the hierarchical relation between body and mind that “early scientists” displayed; she does not “tr[y] to ‘read’ the body and the whole natural world like a text in which holy but inscrutable things were written.”¹⁰⁰² Further corroboration of this negotiation arises in Shelley’s description of her frequent headaches. On the one hand, Shelley’s thoughts gain bodily substance. They cause her brain to become red and swell. In fact, they are “dirt.” On the other hand, her mind is described as having “greasy seams,” lending a corporeal tangibility to her brain. For Shelley, this pivoting between bodily explorations of the mind and mental interpretations of the body secures her status as “scientist.”¹⁰⁰³ She conducts experiments in order to investigate “embodied reality”¹⁰⁰⁴ and the “startlingly different views”¹⁰⁰⁵ which emerge. Recognising that she has “no magical insight into the will of things,”¹⁰⁰⁶ Shelley clarifies that she remains a “scholar...carrying on [her] investigations.”¹⁰⁰⁷ Intent on reconnecting her mind and body – “[w]hy shouldn’t will intimately inhabit and entertain pleasure” – Shelley prides herself on her “almost holy dedication to the study of [her] own mysterious flesh.”¹⁰⁰⁸ Shelley’s interest in the body parallels Haraway’s scientific approach: to know her body and know herself and how she – both body and mind – relate to each other and the wider world.¹⁰⁰⁹ As Jackson explains, “[i]t will be obvious that I’m still stuck on language, the body, and the ambiguous boundaries of the (monstrous) self.”¹⁰¹⁰

The main thrust of Shelley’s body project can be seen as a feminist one – she is mobilising a kind of taxonomic logic by “intricately connecting” her worlds.¹⁰¹¹ For Shelley, her body and mind are not two separate entities or distinct substances –

¹⁰⁰² Jackson, “Shelley Jackson: Anatomist Extraordinaire.”

¹⁰⁰³ Jackson, “Eyes,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 12.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Jackson, “Eyes,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Jackson, “Theories,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Jackson, “Legs,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Jackson, “erogenous _gen,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁰⁹ According to Braidotti, Haraway’s “epistemological model” is not only a “classic dualism body/soul” but also “a theory about their interaction.” Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 108.

¹⁰¹⁰ Jackson, “Written on the Body.”

¹⁰¹¹ Jackson, “Cabinet,” *My Body*.

“outlines, those supposedly self-evident bits of piping around every given thing, [do not] exist”¹⁰¹² – her body and mind are two worlds which with the reader’s collaboration interact and merge.

My eyelids twitched for four days once in high school. I wondered if other people could see it, and tried to catch the twitch in the mirror, but it never happened when I was looking. That was the period when I went to the public library every lunch hour and strained my eyes over drawings by Durer and Kollwitz. I studied the heavy, dark eyelids in their sunken sockets. The thick greasy curve of the underlid, the weight of the eyeball in its sling of skin: I copied it into my notebooks with the blackest pencils I could get, pressing the soft lead voluptuously into the paper. A blind person could trace my drawings with her fingertips three pages down in my notebook. My own eyelids are embedded in flesh. I thought they were tediously modern. When I drew myself, I exaggerated the shadows, scoring harsh lines under my eyes. Time is making these lies truer every year.¹⁰¹³

If statements describing facts are congruent with scientific enquiry and *Einfühlung* (“the art-lover’s pleasure”) suggests artistic perception, then the above excerpt illustrates Shelley’s conciliation between her two discourses of representation.¹⁰¹⁴ On the one hand she “strained” to see, she “studied” and she “copied” all the details she could “catch.” On the other hand, the drawing itself can be read as supporting the undeniable presence of the body; it is “voluptuous,” “heavy,” “greasy” and “embedded with flesh.” The idea that neither part of this binary provides “good enough knowledge”¹⁰¹⁵ is

¹⁰¹² Jackson, “Eyes,” *My Body*.

¹⁰¹³ Jackson, “Eyelid,” *My Body*.

¹⁰¹⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, Introduction, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 1984, 3, Visual Arts Program, MIT, Sept. 2004, 17 July 2007 < <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/bourdieu1.pdf>>.

¹⁰¹⁵ According to Alan Liu, contemporary education must resolve itself to finding “good enough

reminiscent of Braidotti's "feminist nomadic position [that] can allow for these different representations and modes of understanding of female subjectivity to coexist and to provide material for discussion."¹⁰¹⁶

According to Longino, science traditionally approaches narratives mainly in terms of a "logic of justification" where the "logical structure of inquiry" is "truth-conducive."¹⁰¹⁷ Contrastingly, Shelley, like Braidotti and Haraway, sees her developing knowledge of her subjectivity as one which emerges outside of a purely empirical framework. This point of view leaves ample room for individual, situated, and context-specific variations. A clear instance of the encounter between the two kinds of approaches, that of justification and that of emergence, occurs during Shelley's recollection of how she came to "know" her own ear. Initially, Shelley interprets her ear as the same as everyone else's: "[a]bbreviated or elongated, squeezed thin or bunched thick, every ear was made on the same pattern."¹⁰¹⁸ However, a remembered story told by a friend subverts the universalising move inherent in certain scientific approaches,¹⁰¹⁹ offering a "corporeal"¹⁰²⁰ rewriting:

My friend Lisa, who was rarely right about facts, but had a colorful sense of story, told the narrator that earwigs crawled into your ear (if you were foolish enough to go to sleep outside), laid their eggs in your brain, and crawled out the other ear. When the eggs hatched, you went crazy. She delivered this fact from my garage roof, where we were sitting in disturbing proximity to earwigs, who were fond of the apples that dropped

knowledge" rather than "the best knowledge," Jessica Laccetti, "Renewals: Refiguring University English in the 21st Century," 5 July 2007, 17 July 2007 <<http://www.jesslaccetti.co.uk/2007/07/renewals-refiguring-university-english.html>>.

¹⁰¹⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 165.

¹⁰¹⁷ Helen E. Longino, "An Interview with Helen Longino," September 2003, University of Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science, 17 July 2007 <<http://www.stanford.edu/group/dualist/vol10/longino.html>>.

¹⁰¹⁸ Jackson, "Ears," *My Body*.

¹⁰¹⁹ Bordo 439.

¹⁰²⁰ For Braidotti, following Haraway, grounding scientific study and discourse in the corporeal is the path to understanding. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 109.

and rotted there. I gave the idea some thought. It had not occurred to the narrator that the ear passage might go all the way through my head, despite “in one ear and out the other,” a phrase popular with my mother. It was true that earwigs were unnerving animals and I later found they were named after the rumor Lisa was spreading...¹⁰²¹

The coming together of the two worlds, that of the mind and that of the body, is further complicated with the addition of an image of Shelley’s ear (see fig. 5.34):



Fig. 5.34 Shelley’s ear. Jackson, “Ears,” *My Body*.

The image highlights Shelley’s own individual “whorls in [her] own ear” as well as her three distinctive piercings. In a way, by seeing her ear the same as “every ear,” Shelley is performing a Cartesian split, dividing her body from her “real” self. However, in another way, with the help of “rhizomatic thinking,”¹⁰²² Shelley reattaches and reintegrates her visible differences enabling a new conception of subjectivity which is not built upon a “toss of signs” but situated and partial.¹⁰²³ Eventually Shelley subscribes to Braidotti’s call to accept her transforming and materially grounded

¹⁰²¹ Ibid.

¹⁰²² Braidotti argues that rhizomatic thinking is “not only cerebral, but related to experience, which implies a strengthened connection between thought and life.” In turn, the rhizomatic thinking forms part of Braidotti’s nomadic style which conceives of connections as neither “dualist or oppositional” but “multilayered network[s].” Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 76.

¹⁰²³ Jackson, “Nose,” *My Body*.

cartography, recognising that her perception is never static or stagnant: “[n]othing stayed still and flat and bright like a picture, not even a picture. Everything was jostling, shimmering, bleaching out or darkening, receding and then riding forward with a jerk. To stop that hokey pokey for long enough to pick a view and draw it wasn’t easy.”¹⁰²⁴ However, recognising the difficulty of representing such dynamics does not bring with it a desire to resist representation but rather a negotiation of the complicating factors:

[i]f I really wanted to render what I saw, then I would have to paint a faint nose-shadow just above the base-line of every canvas. In addition, I’d have to include the white ghosts of nearby shapes looked at too long and the incompletely joined, not-quite-duplicate views of objects closer to than the subject at hand: I’d have to learn to render the condition of Out Of Focus.¹⁰²⁵

Reconsidering the body map further exposes the “knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers, and levels of the self.”¹⁰²⁶ The body map consistently juxtaposes a kind of scientific imagery intent on cataloguing with language; that is, the body is continually compared to that which may be envisaged as “other” to it. As Kristeva and Braidotti consistently argue, “woman” is a construct embodied in language. Crucially, Shelley takes a feminist stance in her attempt to refigure her subjectivity within language. On one level Shelley has classified herself into separate and individual parts; arms, legs, hands, toes, etc... On another level, Jackson invokes a confrontation to this discourse through discourse itself. While the title screen declares this to be “my body,” the url refers to “the body,” and the main entrance into Shelley and the narrative is denoted simply as “body.” While both “my” and “the” are

¹⁰²⁴ Jackson, “Eyes,” *My Body*.

¹⁰²⁵ Jackson, “Eyes,” *My Body*.

¹⁰²⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 168.

determiners, one suggests ownership and thereby the possibility for a deeper knowledge however the other suggests a definite unknowable. The addition of “body” with no article indicates a shared position with the reader; this body is metaphoric of any becoming subjectivity. What these textual games further suggest is a dynamic circuit where Shelley’s subjectivity – her mind and body – are read in terms of the perpetual movement of the reader. The simultaneous contradiction here represents the double-bind in which Shelley and Jackson find themselves, how to know one’s shifting subjectivity through a necessarily situated positionality or indeed, through an other?

As with Kristeva’s *sujet-en-procès*, the double-bind noted above recognises a subjectivity constructed by and in language and the reader; becoming emerges through rhythms of interaction.^c As such it denies the possibility of a fixed or stable identity in favour of one that is constantly changing in context, as Morgan describes it: “we are each multiple selves, subjects woven out of diverse discourses.”¹⁰²⁷ Jackson, as author, seems to make it an explicit aim to remind the reader at every possible juncture that this text is always already a performance. No matter how vehemently Shelley (here as both author and protagonist) desires to offer a multi-mimetic representation of her becoming subjectivity she acknowledges, along with the other authors/protagonist discussed in this thesis, that the very desire to represent embodied experience, to bring it into the realm of multimodal signification requires a concurrent moment of stabilisation. In other words, to see the body, to represent the body, means tying it down, however temporarily. As a way of destabilising these accounts Jackson interrupts the narrative flow with various parodic interventions. As Shelley says of Jackson’s authorial persona, “I’m not who she says I am.”¹⁰²⁸

This kind of “ontological paradox” as Ryan classifies it, is accomplished most

¹⁰²⁷ Morgan, “Electronic Tools for Dismantling the Master’s House” 210.

¹⁰²⁸ Jackson, “Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl.”

overtly in two episodes.¹⁰²⁹ The first embodies and brings into sharp focus the notion that the possible world is a reality that however “absurd and fantastical is also strangely heart-felt, like a dream, or a love letter written in a code to which you’ve lost the key.”¹⁰³⁰ The reader, having topologically explored Shelley’s body to gain entrance to all the narrative segments finds only two body parts, though both labelled on the body map, unconnected and unlinked to the fiction as a whole. Shelley’s “phantom limb” and “tail” appear on the body map in language only, there are no accompanying images although all other parts of Shelley, including eyelids, eyebrows, fingernails, internal organs, and even leg hair are visually represented (see fig. 5.35).

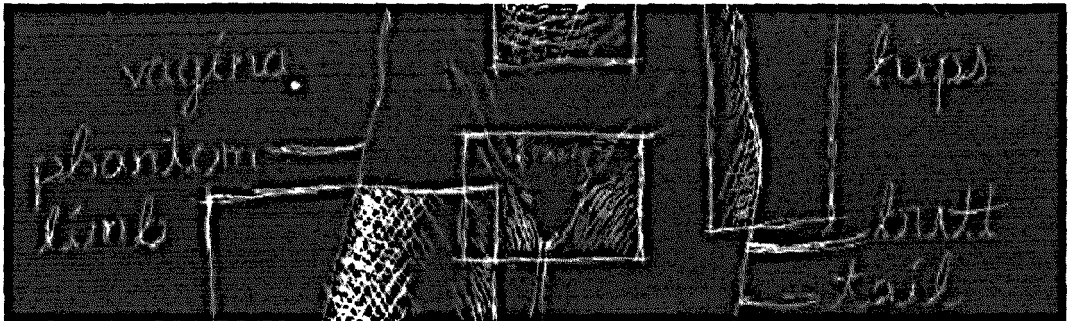


Fig. 5.35 The body map denoting various parts of Shelley including her phantom limb and tail. Shelley Jackson, *My Body*.

The reader gains access to the phantom limb via a link, “I roller skate,” housed on/in the “arms” fragment. Interestingly, although the text in this section does not suggest a possible world that might include fantastical elements such as a phantom limb or tail, the musings in the arms section do.

At twelve I did more chin-ups than anyone else in my class, and the boys came running jubilantly across the playground and caught me up like a sports hero. The girls were exhorted to manage one chin-up. That was

¹⁰²⁹ For Ryan, “ontological paradoxes” appear when boundaries between narrative worlds are crossed. For example when a character wonders whether he “exist[s] only in the alternate possible world of his creator’s dream” or when a fiction allows “the meeting of author and characters.” Marie-Laure Ryan, “Stacks, Frames and Boundaries,” *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002) 385.

¹⁰³⁰ Shelley Jackson, “A Conversation with Shelley Jackson,” *Bold Type*, April 2002. 3 July 2007 <<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0402/jackson/interview.html>>.

considered sufficient. I looked at the other girls' arms and knew I was a different animal.¹⁰³¹

At twelve Shelley considers herself another species because of her strength which is not “feminine.” Referring to herself as “just one jot off a Frankenstein monster” invokes the world of Jackson’s earlier hypertext, Patchwork Girl.¹⁰³² However, the reader is not required to “resurrect” her, even if it is “only in piecemeal. If you want to see the whole you will have to sew [her] together yourself;” rather it is the reader who breaks apart the whole to reveal possible worlds that lie beneath the (corporeal) surface.¹⁰³³ Moving the constituting agency to that of the reader mirror’s Shelley’s relationship to her science of drawing. In striving to be as “realistic” as possible Shelley becomes “powerless”:

I had to subordinate myself to what was there, and helplessly let it have its say, whether I understood it or not; by making myself its clear medium I might look more knowing than I was, but the dirty secret was that I might never catch up to what I copied, never understand how out of gradations of smudged pencil a nose erected itself on the page.

Though risky, according to Shelley, it is this very positioning that allows multiple aspects of subjectivity to be perceived both by her and the reader.

If, as Ryan argues, “the most fundamental act of self-consciousness situates the self on the ground level of reality; I am, therefore I am real,”¹⁰³⁴ then Shelley’s phantom limb quantifies her reality:

I discovered my phantom limb in fifth grade, when I stubbed a member I didn’t have against a tether-ball pole and asked to be excused from gym. My teacher was unsympathetic, but later on my classmates rallied around

¹⁰³¹ Jackson, “Arms,” My Body.

¹⁰³² Jackson, “Shoulders,” My Body

¹⁰³³ Jackson, Patchwork Girl, qtd in Alice Bell, “Possible Worlds in Hypertext Fiction” 210.

¹⁰³⁴ Ryan, “Stacks, Frames and Boundaries” 385.

the narrator and one of them, Vonda, said knowingly, "It's got to be a phantom limb; my uncle has one." I learned to be more careful with my phantom limb, and it has saved the narrator more than once. I locked myself into the hallway an hour before I was meant to show up to receive my MFA: my phantom limb kicked open the door. When I'm tired after hours behind the counter at work I can put down my phantom limb like a kick-stand and lean against it, so that I stand at a slight, imperceptible tilt. My phantom limb tires fast, but is very strong. I can't run on it, the choreography would be too confusing, but it is handy when I go rollerskating [sic] as a sort of sideboard motor or a brake. There are many other uses for it, in fact it has thousands, as lever, probe, and truncheon. But it is more (or maybe less) than helpmeet. Though my native tendency is to avoid conflict, with my phantom limb I have kicked, tripped, goosed, tweaked, rabbit-punched, poked, pulled, pinched and pried.¹⁰³⁵

As demonstrated in this excerpt, Shelley employs her phantom limb as a link between worlds. While the limb is apparent in one world, on the topological map, it also exists as a narrative segment however these two worlds are initially separate for Shelley as it is the reader who must traverse the body in order to discover the phantom limb. That Shelley is cognisant of both worlds constitutes Ryan's ontological paradox for here Shelley is more or less admitting her constructed status.

However, Shelley's status as fictional subjectivity rather than static identity suggests another level of ontological or world bridging when Shelley notes that

[o]nce, bored at dinner, I came to attention to discover that my phantom limb had slid up under the skirts of the woman opposite, a writer of

¹⁰³⁵ Jackson, "Phantom Limb," *My Body*.

whom I was rather in awe, and was paddling with its phantom toes in her august parts. She seemed to approve, but I was mortified. My phantom limb has kicked people, then tucked itself up and left me to run away on my own; it is an irresponsible limb, a gadfly and a turncoat.¹⁰³⁶

Here it is Shelley who is brought into being following the actions of her phantom limb. That her limb acts without her authorization suggests an encounter between a mind and a body that exist (or at least existed) in different worlds. But, no matter how ontological boundaries are transgressed or how possible worlds are bridged with the reader's help; the phantom limb remains unrepresentable. Though this section of the narrative marks one of the longest textual passages in the fiction, there is no image for the phantom limb, there is just muffled breathing in the background suggesting a world that is not quite accessible either to the reader or Shelley.¹⁰³⁷

If Shelley's body or a part of her body as in this case, remains indiscernible, the infrequent and often imperceptible but measured breathing functions as a further comment on the slidings between modes of representation. Thus, where image and text give an insufficient impression, a familiar sound is employed as a fragile but tangible corporeal condition. What Kristeva sees as "musical cohesion" in *Colette* is a bodily cohesion here.¹⁰³⁸ Rather than words or images that return the reader to "the pleasure of the rhythm of sound," Jackson employs breathing as a method which both reminds the reader and returns her to a 'real' corporeality.¹⁰³⁹ The ongoing dialogue between representing subjectivity and its impossible adequacy is brought to the fore when Shelley wonders if "there was such a thing as too much accuracy. Realism lay slightly

¹⁰³⁶ Jackson, "Phantom Limb," *My Body*.

¹⁰³⁷ NB. a recent update to the web fiction seems to have slightly altered various aspects including the subtraction of the breathing originally apparent in this node.

¹⁰³⁸ Kristeva, *Colette* 97.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid.*

short of the exact copy.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Though this fiction may include “renderings of all–[Shelley]–could–see” it remains the “truth (from [her] perspective).”¹⁰⁴¹

As the reader probes deeper into the “reminiscences,”¹⁰⁴² Shelley represents herself as more monstrous; the reader, like Shelley must maintain “a safe distance” as “look[ing] too closely” reveals “monsters.”¹⁰⁴³ Correspondingly the moving from one world to another becomes more difficult. In fact, the narrative fragments which depict Shelley at her most monstrous offer no links back to the original world, that of the physical body. Thus, as the narrative accrues, Shelley’s mind gains control and commandeers the reader to its world. While the reader may attempt to follow links or rewrite urls in order to move from one world to another, so too does Shelley’s body exert continued attempts to navigate both worlds. Most clearly, it is the tail that “sketch[es] out a new world” and with its gently curled tip, it seems to beckon the reader to follow:

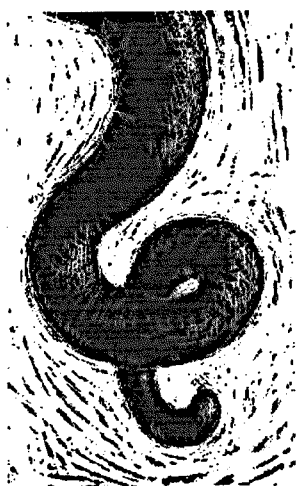


Fig. 5.36 “I was born with a short tail.” Shelley Jackson, “Tail,” My Body.

With this multi-mimetic indication of a possible world in mind, it seems somewhat contradictory that Jackson offers readers only one link from this section and no possibility to link back to the body map. Shelley struggles to “control” the tail that

¹⁰⁴⁰ Jackson, “Teeth,” My Body.

¹⁰⁴¹ Jackson, “Legs,” My Body.

¹⁰⁴² Jackson, “Cabinet,” My Body.

¹⁰⁴³ Jackson, “Teeth,” My Body.

“violates [her] shamelessly” and finally through great effort manages to “subdue its temperament.”¹⁰⁴⁴ What Shelley can more easily control, however, is the telling of her story. If her body is untameable, her mind is compliant. Thus the relationship between the wild tail and the structured “tale” offers contradictory performances of subjectivity which vacillate between a Cartesian desire to represent her body as whole and a peripatetic acknowledgement that her “body is dissociated, porous and unbiased, a generous catch-all.”¹⁰⁴⁵ “Tail” thus employs a particular opportunity for a possible world as a way to explore the double-bind of desiring to represent subjectivity and acknowledging that impossibility.

In My Body the problematic and complicated encounter between the body and the mind seeks to destabilise Cartesian dichotomies of reason as “a highly abstract mode of thought, separable, in principle, from the emotional complexities and practical demands of ordinary life.”¹⁰⁴⁶ It is not the body on its own, as “a single vision,” but its interactions with the mind that create a world where conflict successfully enables a space of “discovery and intervention, observer and phenomenon are blurred. Technology and theory generate each other...”¹⁰⁴⁷ The clash between the two worlds, “weakness and indecision,”¹⁰⁴⁸ culminates in a literal collision between Shelley’s body and text. If Patchwork Girl, composed as a body of text is simply a series of “typographical or grammatical errors,” rendering her illegible, then Shelley seems to perform what she sees as typographical errors in an effort to render illegibility, or specifically in this case, unrepresentability.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁴ Jackson, “Tail,” My Body.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Jackson, “A Conversation with Shelley Jackson.”

¹⁰⁴⁶ Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy (Routledge: London 1993) 49.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Lily Kay, Who Wrote the Book of Life?: A History of the Genetic Code (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 36.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Jackson, “Eyebrow,” My Body.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Shelley Jackson, Patchwork Girl or a Modern Monster,” qtd in Holly Johnson, “Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl: Hysteria, Hypertext, and the Ethics of the Fragmented Body, or, am I a Woman or a Monster,” Collage as Cultural Practice Conference, University of Iowa, March 2005, 20 July 2007,

As such, the “Vagina” of My Body emerges, after lengthy reading, as the most detailed and impelling visually represented “puzzle.” Having constructed her brain as “a burrow, a labyrinthine system of contorted tunnels with hairpin turns”¹⁰⁵⁰ a physical absence, unable to “see” or “feel,” her vagina becomes a literal and explorable presence.

My laboratory, where painstaking researches went on. Progress was slow and scarcely resembled progress at times, the findings were so bewildering, my methods so whimsical. I was more like an alchemist than a modern scientist, interested in intuitions, affinities, not in logic or proof. I potted about in the steam, my hands silent confidants of my secret parts. I pulled, I plucked, I unstuck fold from fold.¹⁰⁵¹

In an interview, Jackson comments that “[w]e are caught up in this awkward love affair between things and ideas.”¹⁰⁵² The “Vagina” section of My Body is perhaps the most explicit in its portrayal of Shelley negotiating such a quandary. Through her complicated negotiation Shelley re-establishes a connection between mind and body. A curious Shelley remembers that as a young girl she displayed an indifferent and detached acknowledgement of the inability to represent her body: “[i]f there was a vagina in there, it didn’t seem to be any concern of mine” and “[f]or years I referred to everything between my legs as my ‘bottom.’”¹⁰⁵³ However, desiring to represent comes with age and it is an older version of Shelley, who has “put distance between [her]self and [her feet],”¹⁰⁵⁴ who successfully, though not unproblematically undoes that initial disconnection or estrangement between mind and body and inscribes her body in text, sound, and image.

This is a narrative, then, about the difficulty and the personal necessity to know

<www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~haj2/pdfs/hysteria.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Jackson, “Brain,” My Body.

¹⁰⁵¹ Jackson, “Vagina,” My Body.

¹⁰⁵² Jackson, “A Conversation with Shelley Jackson.”

¹⁰⁵³ Jackson, “Vagina,” My Body.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Jackson, “Feet,” My Body.

one's self; to represent one's self. As an "archaeologist" Shelley "unearth[s] the passages" of her "deliberately private structure" but, seemingly years later, rereads the text of herself and attempts to re-present herself as her earlier impression leaves her "trust...betrayed."¹⁰⁵⁵ As a *sujet-en-procès*, Shelley highlights both the way subjectivity is composed as text but also how that subjectivity can be recomposed and altered with each re-presentation:

[i]t wasn't a big leap from eating books to sticking them up me, a page at a time. Fine literature in my vagina, pulp fiction up my ass, that was my instinctive decision, that is at first, before I began to question whether the distinction was really so clear. I sat through English class with Chaucer and Boccaccio here, S. E. Hinton there. One day, when I fished out the slippery wad, laid it on my desk and teased its folds open with a pen, I noticed that some of the words seemed changed. I took the stinking page to the library and confirmed my discovery in the echoing stacks. My vagina had rewritten Joyce.¹⁰⁵⁶

Shelley implies that the body and, in this case, the mind, are always already inscribed within representational structures. In light of this double-bind, subjectivity may find significant representation in the world of the mind, the world of language. Thus, aligned with the cyberfeminist manifesto of the VNS matrix (see fig. 5.37) it is in the world of the body, the possible world, that subjectivity can be reconfigured. Since it is Shelley's "vulvomorphic logic" that enables a literal rewrite there is an unmistakable connection between representation and a woman's body.¹⁰⁵⁷ Like Irigaray's "parler femme," here is language that "overflows the subject" once Shelley has taken control

¹⁰⁵⁵ Jackson, "Internal Organs," *My Body*.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Jackson, "Vagina," *My Body*.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jane Gallop refers to Irigaray's "feminine self" as constituting this kind of logic. Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 95.

and assumes a position of agency.¹⁰⁵⁸



Fig. 5.37 VNS Matrix, “A Manifesto for the 21st Century.”

This section culminates with a large sketch that resembles a Rorschach ink blot:

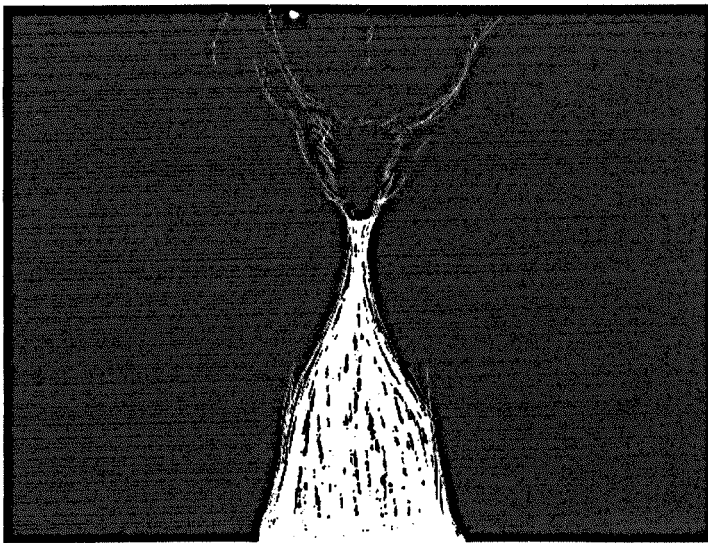


Fig. 5.38 Jackson, “Vagina,” My Body.

At first glance the image seems to be an aerial view of a head of a fox with its nose down in a ray of light. Upon closer inspection, within the context of this narrative section, the reader can detect both a vagina with “very long and sticky lips” and the tip of a penis. As Shelley herself explains, she is “half boy, half girl.”¹⁰⁵⁹ However, the visual indeterminacy bears witness to Shelley’s own ambiguous subjectivity or “system

¹⁰⁵⁸ Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One 112.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Jackson, “Vagina,” My Body.

of augury” as she puts it. She recognises the “complicated business” of attempting to represent what appears to be “just an unsignifying mess”¹⁰⁶⁰ but, with Kristeva, takes on the project of coming to know and therefore attempting to represent her subjectivity at the intersection of “corporeal, linguistic and social” signs.¹⁰⁶¹ Shelley invokes the other, as reader, to literally displace both the mind and the body. Tracing links from the world of the body – Shelley’s “animalistic” side – to the world of the mind – an “invisible” “underworld” – enables a new possible world to emerge. In this world, the “dance between inscribing and incorporating practises” metamorphose into a generative world where multi-mimesis as subjective process is produced.¹⁰⁶² In this possible world, Shelley’s once separate worlds of mind and body come together in a union albeit a partial one:

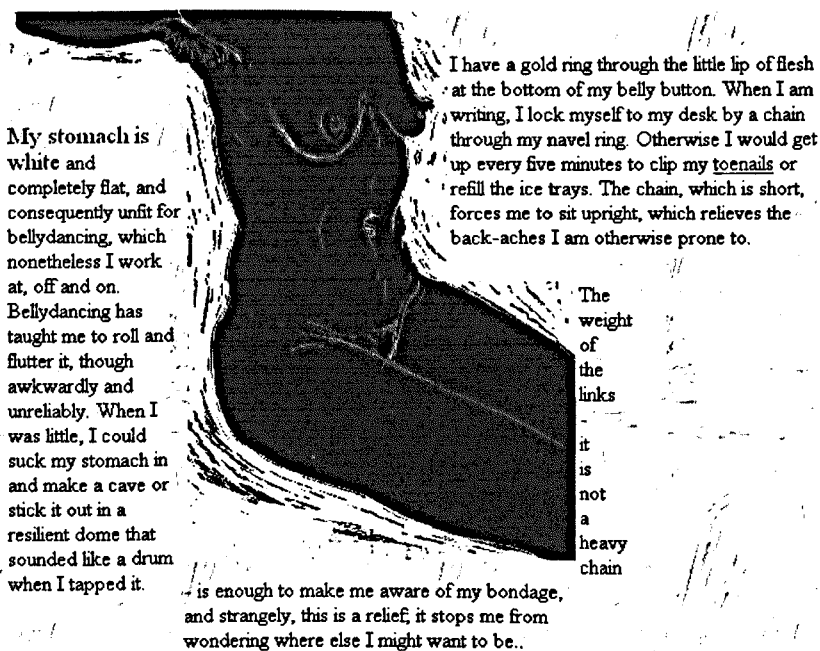


Fig. 5.39 A partial view of Shelley’s body contained within text. Shelley Jackson, “Skin,” *My Body*.

It is true that Shelley initially maintains the divisions between her mind and her body wishing she could “keep [her] body out of the running,” because she cannot adequately represent it. In fact Shelley initially believes “[f]lesh was thought, corrupt

¹⁰⁶⁰ Jackson, “Hips,” *My Body*.

¹⁰⁶¹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* 15.

¹⁰⁶² Hayles suggests this dance must form part of a “more flexible framework in which to think about embodiment in an age of virtuality.” Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* 193.

thought corrupted flesh, but will could strain and clarify both thought and flesh.”¹⁰⁶³ But this is just a “despotic fantasy” and eventually her “attention lapse[s].”¹⁰⁶⁴ Gradually Shelley comes to recognise that the tension of representing is related to how her mind constructs her body. The mind and body dualism might seem a “mismatch that won’t split up,” at times “look[ing] inscrutable and meaningless” but it is precisely the “shuttling maniacally” between the two that reconstitutes the binary.¹⁰⁶⁵ This “uncharted and unrated” possible world makes accessible “a way to re–describe a reality which would remain inaccessible to direct description.”¹⁰⁶⁶ The relationship, then, between Shelley’s mind and her body, through reader translation and manipulation, becomes a symbiotic one; “a unity divided in halves.”¹⁰⁶⁷ However, with the lack of precise boundaries between worlds there is no “setting apart” of the scientific mind and its bodily knowledge; there is a constant “portmanteau of possibilities”¹⁰⁶⁸ that brings together the two worlds to become a possible world: “[t]he healed real world looks whole, but its colors are a little tawdry, it turns up at the edges. I keep checking to make sure all the pieces are there, but if something were missing, could I tell?”¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus, for Shelley, as for the reader, the body and mind can be reconceptualised as a perpetual becoming; a nomadic state which constantly and consistently negotiates, à la Kristeva, knowledge and representation.

5.5 Summary

The three web fictions discussed in this chapter are very different stories though they share a concern with the hypertext link and the role it plays – alongside that of the

¹⁰⁶³ Jackson, “Legs,” My Body.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Jackson, “Hips,” My Body.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ryan, Possible Worlds 83.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One 19.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Jackson, “erogenous gen,” My Body.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Jackson, “Migraine,” My Body.

reader – in the creation and development of both story and subjectivity. While documented notions of links and link structures seem to either exaggerate the reader's control of the story process or focus on the orientational aspect of each link, the links at work in the three fictions read here are part of a double-bind. On the one hand links, especially noticeable in Fallow Field, offer singular steps and help plot a recognisable course through the narrative, often embellishing and adding to the story and background. On the other hand, links can also offer destabilisation, connecting to various and sometimes irretraceable worlds as is most noticeably the case with Leishman's Red Riding Hood. All three fictions highlight the relationship between links and story development and question the way the reader makes associations. At times links lead to recognisable developments as in the "Night" section of Fallow Field where the narrator's own view has moved from inside the house to the outside environment. As in My Body and Red Riding Hood, Fallow Field too uses links to destabilise readerly expectations such as when links within Theo's narrative interludes connect to nothing and lead nowhere. Fallow Field uses the breakdown of a marriage to illustrate both the difficulty of giving up what is known even if it is abusive in place of a dissolution of subjectivity. However, through the constructive process of the linking that takes place in Fallow Field, rather than such a binary, what appears is an integration between wholeness and fragmentation that leads, ultimately, to the narrator's own and necessarily subjective view. Shelley Jackson's My Body also interrogates the function of links and uses the image of a body as the organising metaphor for the narrative. The image of the narrator's body epitomises the productive dialogue between the mind and its embodied roots. Thus, through the reader's linking between the image of the body (corporeality) and textual description (cognitive processes) Jackson establishes a bridge between the Cartesian split of mind and body. Red Riding Hood uses the genre of the fairytale to challenge the split between mind and body and text and image. Rather than

simply attempt to undo such a binary, Leishman, like Grigar and Jackson, employs the reader as bridge between worlds. Thus, while Red herself occupies very different and separate worlds of her body and then, in the diary section, of her mind, it is the reader's immersion in both worlds which successfully melds them thus enabling both worlds to reflect and reinforce the other. As Guertin notes, "[m]eaning is born of our motion through the text."¹⁰⁷⁰ What becomes privileged here as in My Body and Fallow Field, is the interconnectivity and concurrent indeterminacy typical of a feminist thinking that recognises "narrative texts [as]...profoundly...referential."¹⁰⁷¹ That all three born digital narratives emerge through the gaps between worlds and multimodal systems is testament both to the necessary role of an (educated) reader and the feminist adage that each narrative is only known "in relation to a referential context that is simultaneously linguistic, literary, historical, biographical, social...political" and, one can now add, multi-mimetic.¹⁰⁷² As has been demonstrated in this chapter, Grigar's Fallow Field, Leishman's Red Riding Hood, and Jackson's My Body all embody Guertin's performative notion of links as "dynamic connectivity, interconnection and disconnection [that] is both narratological structure and the means of navigation in space and time."¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁷⁰ Guertin, "The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos."

¹⁰⁷¹ Lanser, "Toward a Feminist Narratology" 342.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid. 343.

¹⁰⁷³ Guertin, "The Knot: Disorientation – Knots if the Cosmos."

6.0 Conclusions

Yet it is doubtless in the direction of, and on the basis of, that first mimesis [mimesis as production] that the possibility of a woman's writing may come about.

Luce Irigaray

To regard "literacy and technology studies" and "media studies" as separate enterprises is becoming increasingly untenable.

Llana Snyder

Literacy today depends on understanding the multiple media that make up our high-tech reality and developing the skills to use them effectively.

Barbara R. Jones-Kavalier and Suzanne L. Flannigan

This thesis argues that existing hypertext theory, largely formulated for application to early offline hypertexts, is inadequate for the critical interpretation of born digital fictions. The relative ease with which multimodal and interactive elements can be introduced into online fiction demands a suitable mode of literary analysis. The purpose of this study has been twofold: to examine multimodality and to interpret how it has been used to represent subjectivity, temporality and multiple worlds. In the web fictions analysed here a central theme appears linking a practise of multimodality with the representation of becoming subjectivities. Though becoming subjectivities can be theorised in a variety of ways, contemporary feminist theories offer suitable approaches with which to read the ensuing questioning and problematising of representation.

A concept uniting the notion of multimodality and representation has been created to facilitate the interpretation of nine web fictions: multi-mimesis. Apart from signalling the notion of representation this term testifies to its multiplicity. Multiplicity appears as a technique both through the variety of modes each web fiction implements and through the recognition of constantly becoming, evolving and en-process subjectivities.

In order to convey "a new way of seeing the world" Deena Larsen deploys particular narrative strategies: techniques that adapt mimesis's drive to represent a

“local history” while simultaneously questioning it.¹⁰⁷⁴ The detailed account of specific material lives, for example, fulfills the traditional aim of mimesis,¹⁰⁷⁵ whereas Larsen’s appropriation of multimodality which fails to represent the main protagonist Anna, deeply questions it. A similar challenge to representation appears in Caitlin Fisher’s These Waves of Girls however her subversive strategies seem to pit visual against textual modes. A clear example of this challenge is developed through Tracey’s memory of a visit to the cinema. The surface reading implies that the narrator clearly remembers events; the text in bold, black font affirms this stance. However, the accompanying image signals a different reading, there is an underlying suggestion of violation and anxiety. The issue of discrepancies between textual and visual representation is also tackled in Marjorie Luesebrink’s Elys, The Lacemaker. Somewhat differently, The Lacemaker evokes a subjectivity from an existing narrative in order to introduce her into a new arena allowing for different modes of becoming. More precisely, Luesebrink notes that the original story of La Princesse de Clèves overlooked the role of the lacemaker. Inserting a character that did not appear in the past is a political act for Luesebrink and as such, she employs multimodality as a way to “recombine and re-mediate in a way that questions our assumptions.”¹⁰⁷⁶ This study has demonstrated Larsen, Fisher, and Luesebrink’s shared understanding of representation that does not seek to “overcome” mediation but does constantly question and transform it specifically through the medium in which it is instantiated.

The analyses of Fibonacci’s Daughter, High Crimson and Cruising focus on a particular kind of multi-mimetic time which represents subjectivities through rhythms of unfolding. Characterised by multi-linear processes and multi-mimetic representations, temporality is reconfigured as an attempt to “undo” linear trajectories

¹⁰⁷⁴ Deena Larsen, “Re: Children’s Time,” Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation 118.

¹⁰⁷⁵ See Prendergast.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Marjorie Luesebrink, “Re: The Lacemaker,” e-mail to Jessica Laccetti, 11 June 2004.

while “loosening the hold of patriarchy.”¹⁰⁷⁷ However, this questioning is not as straightforward as it may seem. Complicating the temporal dimension of subjectivity, Luesebrink invokes the double bind of multi-mimesis; representation and a concurrent questioning. Where there is an image of perpetual becoming, there is also a textual narrative that imparts a temporal frame, preventing chance or indeed change. High Crimson invokes a similar disjunction between image and text to participate in its conception of temporality. While textual accounts are drawn out, images become fleeting. Both the reader and protagonist experience a desire to slow down time in order to fully recognise the narrative, however this remains impossible for the representation of subjectivity is only ever partial. The temporal association between visuality and text becomes even more tangible in Cruising. Here, it is up to the reader to “write [herself] in the surface and depths of the reading surface” for she must learn to manage both temporality and directionality.¹⁰⁷⁸ Once the reader learns how to control the mouse or “perform the event” as Guertin would have it, the narrative can be slowed down and, in fact, frozen, able to be considered at length.¹⁰⁷⁹ However, freezing the narrative in this way profoundly dislocates it from/in time. This study has interpreted precisely this ability to problematise representation through temporal and multimodal aspects.

As Fallow Field, Red Riding Hood and My Body elaborate; an aspect of multimodality is the link. The object of study in the final chapter concerns the “metaphor[s] of ‘world’”¹⁰⁸⁰ and how each world is invoked and represented via links. While certain theorists argue that the use of links in web fiction can lead to complications and lack of closure, Fallow Field is determined to work against this thinking. Repeatedly concerned with multimodal representation, links in Fallow Field

¹⁰⁷⁷ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

¹⁰⁷⁸ Guertin, “The Unfold: Immersion.”

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Guertin, “The Knot: Disorientation – Knots in the Cosmos.”

are used judiciously. They hold the story “tightly together”¹⁰⁸¹ and underpin notions of becoming subjectivity for it is only the female narrator who uses links. Fallow Field’s multi-mimetic evocation of multiple worlds which act as enlargements of her ordinary world is read as an act of negotiating the possibility to “writ[e] [onself] free of old boundaries, of leaping out of the predestined, restrictive historical framework into a new future” available in the networked environment.¹⁰⁸² It also embodies a thinking valued by current feminisms, an interplay that simultaneously suggests both the desire to represent concordance (the links in “Day” embellish the narrative) and the impossibility of such straightforward congruity (the narrator escapes abuse but not difficulty). While Donna Leishman’s Red Riding Hood shares its politics – to challenge uncomplicated or easy endings – with Fallow Field, it realises it in a fundamentally different way. In Red Riding Hood the links are employed as strategies in a persistent “fractalization” of both the narrative and conventional ideas of subjectivity.¹⁰⁸³ The difficulty in piecing together the narrative and eventual frustration (for most readers) with Red Riding Hood mirrors the reader’s “burden” to by-pass any simplistic interpretations in favour of re-visionings, re-readings and critique.¹⁰⁸⁴ The interpretation of multi-mimesis culminates with Shelley Jackson’s My Body whose links which allow the reader to pivot between two worlds – that of the mind and that of the body – enable a dialogue to emerge that constantly questions such divisions. In all three fictions, the main protagonists become able, with the help of the reader, to traverse geographical, temporal and/or philosophical terrains in order to assemble elements of subjectivity in unpredictable and multiple ways. The analysis of multi-mimesis in these three fictions

¹⁰⁸¹ Dene Grigar, “Preface,” Fallow Field: A Story in Two Parts, 2004, Iowa Review Web, 7 May 2007 <http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/tirweb/feature/grigar/fallowfield/fallow_field_preface.html>.

¹⁰⁸² This is Guertin’s version of an online nomadic voyaging (reading). See Guertin, “The Archive: Memory, Writing, Feminisms.”

¹⁰⁸³ For Guertin, fractalization is analogous with the opening up of “collective of perspectives both simultaneously multiple, self-similar and independent.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁴ As noted earlier, it is impossible for readers to simply “re-trace their steps.” Rather, in a web fiction where subjectivity and narrative are distributed readers experience re-visionings where “[e]verything old is new again and, rather than going backwards, we see with new eyes from new, ever-shifting perspectives.” Ibid.

illustrates the entanglement of the multiple worlds and how, with the reader's help, these become arenas for enabling multimodal subjectivity.

Each chapter has endeavoured to trace and illuminate the particular ways in which becoming subjectivities are mutually constituted and reconfigured by multimodal representation. Additionally, each chapter has attempted to establish similarities between the web fictions and the tactics with which they engage, at times these connections have been explicit at other times, oblique. Although several thematic elements have been analysed, the notion of subjectivity has received particular attention. There are two reasons. On the one hand, each web fiction has made explicit its concerns with subjectivity and multiple modes of becoming. On the other hand, feminist theory like Braidotti's demands that one question what it means to elaborate a discourse.¹⁰⁸⁵ This "metatheoretical level"¹⁰⁸⁶ means that the (feminist) use of multimodality as a discourse should incorporate critique. This dual stance of what has been termed multi-mimesis, sidesteps the two drawbacks of hypertext theory. Conventionally, hypertext theorists have tended to treat hypertext fiction in colloquial and anecdotal ways, as, for example, Coover's "dreamlike experience of being swept along."¹⁰⁸⁷ Furthermore, deeply apposite to this thesis, is the fact that hypertext theory originated before the ubiquity of the internet and as such does not fully engage with the possibilities of multimodality. As the fictions investigated here prove, there are intricate intersections of sound, text, image, video and user interaction. More than being a literary response to the affordances of the internet, these fictions navigate the deep entanglement of multimodality in order to challenge, develop and "re-vision" their representations of subjectivity.

¹⁰⁸⁵ See Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 210.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Robert Coover, "Hyperfiction: Novels for the Computer."

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