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Transforming Narratives

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Virginia Commonwealth University

TRANSFORMING NARRATIVES

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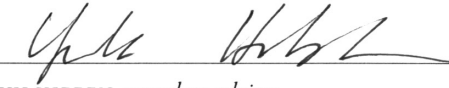
TRANSFORMING NARRATIVES

An MFA thesis by Lucia C. Weilein

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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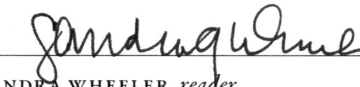
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TRANSFORMING NARRATIVES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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ABSTRACT

Narrative, often considered synonymous with "story," can be viewed from a structuralist perspective and analyzed independent of any particular content. Breaking narrative into categories of story and discourse, this autonomous structure makes possible a translation of content from one form to another. The various media and form types common in graphic design can serve as both recipients and translators of narratives, converting content into a framework that includes the concept of craftsmanship, visual components and specifications, legibility and composition, and the physical form of the designed object.

To examine how this framework functions in practice, I have developed a series of three volumes in which cinematic tropes are represented in book form based on a morphology of traits.

When narrative is viewed as a structure independent of a story, it holds the capacity to function as a framework for expression in any artistic medium. As such, it is possible to translate content across media types regardless of form.

The analysis of narrative through a semiotic lens demonstrates that underlying subdivisions consisting of story and discourse each contain components that contribute overall to an autonomous foundation. According to film and literary critic Seymour Chatman, these components can be viewed as subcategories that further encompass elements compulsory for any narrative's perpetuation.[1]

In the theory Chatman posits, *existents* are inherent aspects of a story, which constitute characters, settings, and objects affected by an event or series of events. The audience, in turn, perceives these elements and interprets them with influence from their own cultural codes and personal experiences. The manifestation of the overarching story—that is, how each of these pieces is represented and delivered to an audience—contributes to a broader narrative discourse. Formally, this can include any expressive media ranging from literature to performing arts.

As an expressive medium, graphic design falls under the *manifestation category*. As a result, a similar analysis can be applied to determine its independence from content; it too has a wholeness inherent in the nature of its construction that qualifies it to be considered a structure. With parallel breakdowns such as the concept of craftsmanship; visual components and specifications; legibility and composition; and the physical form of the designed object, it can be surmised that graphic design itself possesses an underlying framework like that of narrative. In other words, because graphic design as an expression can exist on its own, it can more easily act as a recipient medium for other narrative-bearing forms.
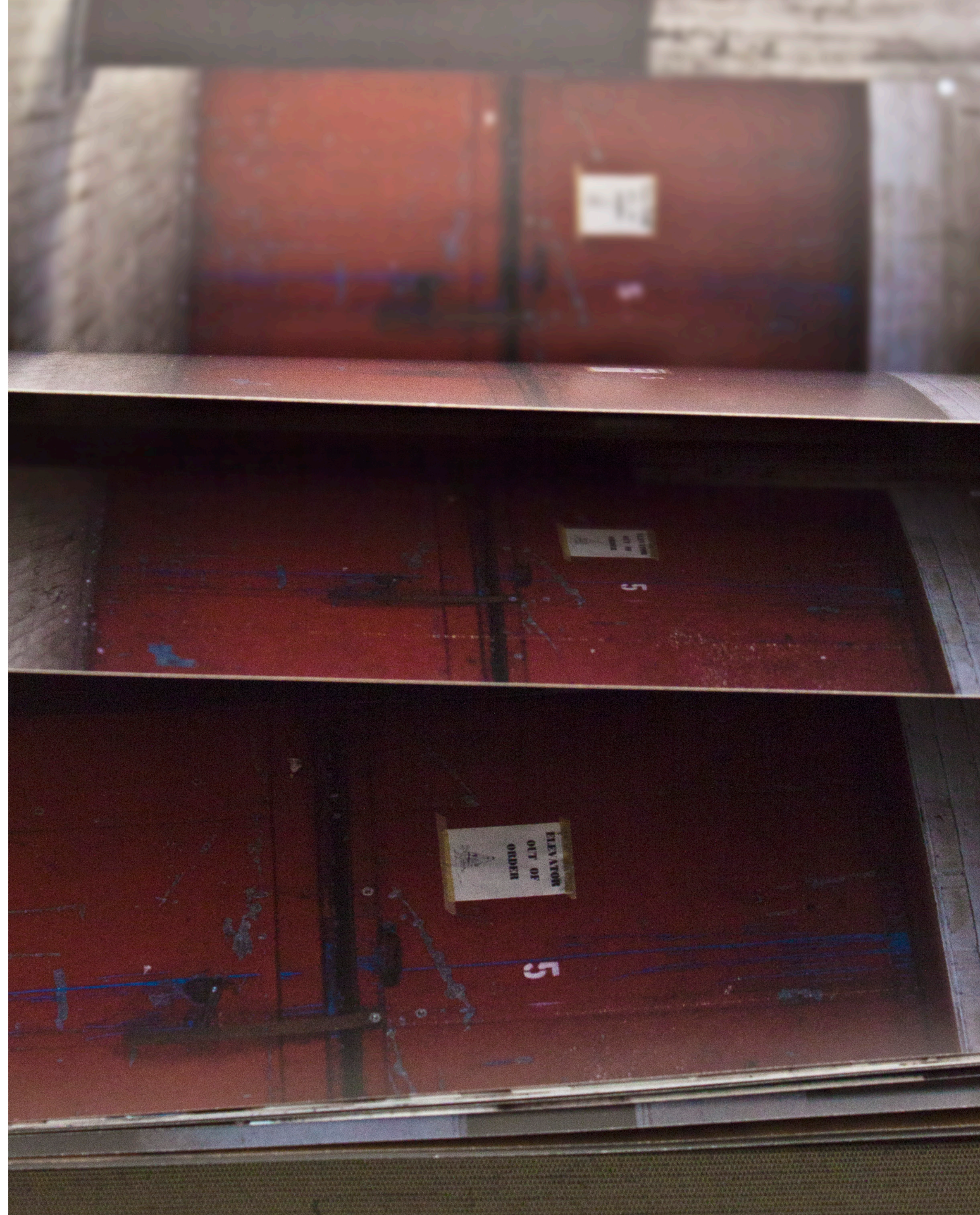
My fascination with stories began the moment I learned to read. It was easy to lose myself in tales spun on yellowing pages between tattered covers, to fall into new realities that blossomed to life in my imagination as I read. With eyes opened wide to the adventurous worlds stored in the printed word, I quickly devoured the contents of my elementary school library, prowling its aisles as I tackled shelf after shelf of their mismatched collection.

It was only natural that my love of writing flourished alongside my bookwormish tendencies, and before long, I was weaving stories of my own. In the third grade, I took my first keyboarding class—a bi-weekly departure from our regular classroom. My group was a ragtag pack of seven-year-olds who were more excited by the fact that we were allowed in the computer lab than the prospect of learning to type properly. Thrilled that my writing could *look* like the books I was reading, I was hooked the moment my fingertips struck the sticky keys.

Though it would be years before being introduced to the finer points of typography and book design, I began to develop a sensibility about the appearance of letterforms on a page that no one else seemed to share. My first frustration came late one evening; I rushed to my mother and demanded to know how I could type "curvy quotation marks" since our ancient version of Microsoft Works did not recognize typographer's quotes. Needless to say, I returned to our boxy Gateway computer without an answer, more disappointed that I was the only one who seemed to care about this discrepancy than the fact that I was forced to use prime marks.

It was from this simple appreciation that I gradually made the connection between a story and its visual representation. Narrative and typography have been inseparable in my mind ever since.

My affinity for film also stems from my innate affinity for storytelling. The multi-step process of creating a film differs from planning a piece of graphic design; in order to manage time and three-dimensional space, it requires an alternate set of problem solving tools. Though both film and graphic design culminate in a visual conveyance of a story, the notion of time adds an additional layer of complexity that must be carefully addressed in a different way. During my undergraduate study of cinema at the University of Iowa, my primary interests included filmmaking and film theory—an examination of the medium at a structural level. The mechanical process of putting a film together from the inside out is what drew me to the discipline; it is a puzzle requiring the orchestration of multiple parts and processes to become a final whole.

For me, the parallel equivalent is letterpress printing, a historical method of typesetting and production that relies heavily on the physical manipulation of specialized equipment. Breaking from the sterility of the computer screen in this way provides an important three-dimensional perspective to a two-dimensional outcome. This perspective has tremendously influenced my work, especially as it pertains to craftsmanship and narrative in much of my graduate school work.

FIG. 1 *above left*
The ETAOIN SHRDLU keyboard of the 1957 Intertype machine where I typed each 20-pica line one at a time. Perched on the copyboard is an Amazon Kindle, the only digital assistance I used on the *Sherlock Holmes* project.

FIG. 2 *above right*
The immaculate 1963 Heidelberg Windmill platen press upon which I printed my edition of 50.
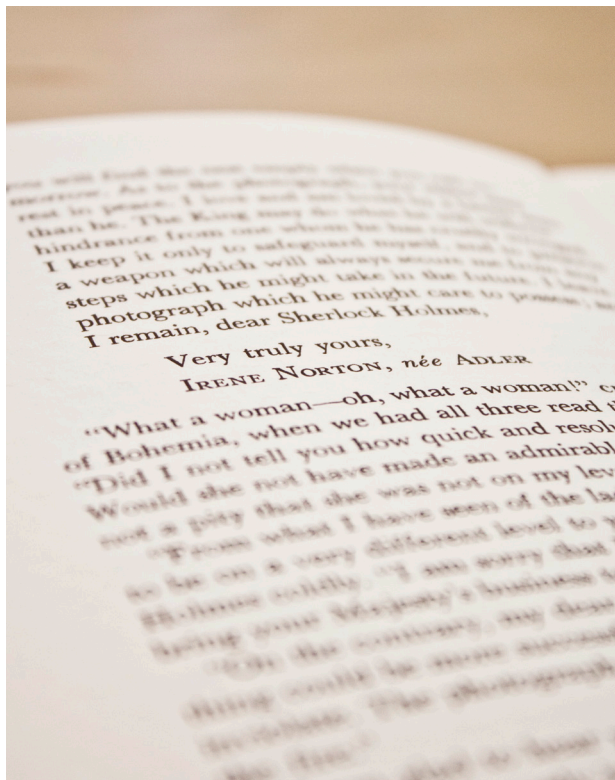
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Scandal in Bohemia,* the first of the Sherlock Holmes short stories, hard-cover and coptic-bound. Cover labels were foil stamped on a Chandler & Price hand-fed platen press.

A page detail of body text, displaying Intertype Baskerville's small caps and italic diacritics. This 10-point type was set on a 1957 Intertype linecasting machine.

Coptic binding utilizes a series of wrapping chain and kettle stitches through each signature and cover station.

In the summer of 2012, I apprenticed with master letterpress printer Jim Daggs in Ackley, Iowa. Housed in an early-1900s brick warehouse that formerly operated as a railroad access point for egg distribution, the Ackley Letterpress Company is a fully function-ing slice of printing history tucked away in a city of 1600 people. Five Heidelberg Windmill presses, four Chandler & Price hand-fed platen presses, and a Miehle vertical cylinder press live alongside an equally-impressive collection of hot metal equipment—five colossal Intertype line casting machines and a Ludlow typograph—and some 600 different brass fonts with which to feed them.

I spent nearly every day immersed in this world, learning how to operate the equipment and how to compose with a new set of tools and limitations. My efforts culminated in a limited edition book—*A Scandal in Bohemia,* the first of the Sherlock Holmes short stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—produced, printed, and bound without digital assistance (FIG. 3–5). I set the body content on a 1957 Intertype line casting machine, typed one 20-pica line at a time on an ETAOIN SHRDLU keyboard (FIG. 1). After pagination, extensive proofing, and imposition, it was ready for its run on a 1963 Heidelberg Windmill press (FIG. 2).

Though digital typesetting comes with its own challenges and restrictions, correcting an error does not require physically moving (or re-casting) line upon line of lead type, nor does it necessitate special cast-iron machines that weigh several tons (as is the case in letterpress printing). My apprenticeship not only instilled within me a new appreciation for the convenience of Adobe InDesign, it also changed the way I consider space and visual organization within a document. In addition, it reinforced my preexisting desire to use and celebrate a high level of craftsmanship, allowing my hand to play a major role in a project's construction.

During my first year of graduate study at Virginia Commonwealth University, professor John Malinoski tasked my classmates and me with taking a specific Richmond bus route and creating a 16-page hand-made booklet based on the experience (FIG. 6–7). Focusing on the people I observed on the ride, I wrote one-sentence vignettes imagining the lives of these strangers. With only one week to complete the project, I began the painstaking process of stamping these miniature stories using a small collection of foundry type I had come across at an antique store the previous year. The horizontal cut in the interior pages (FIG. 8) divides the individual stories in two, allowing the reader to flip between pages to create as many alternate combinations—and consequently, different narratives—as she pleases.

Another opportunity to advantageously utilize a document's physical structure arose with the construction of an information graphic in Steve Hoskins' workshop (FIG. 9–10). After cataloguing the typefaces and typeface combinations used in the featured sections of the *2010 AAUP Book, Jacket, and Journal Show*, I created four diagrams that corresponded with the Trade Typographic, Trade Illustrated, Scholarly Typographic, and Scholarly Illustrated categories.[2] The structure of an accordion fold book allows this content to be viewed as individual spreads as well as in its unfolded length; each diagram can be viewed separately for closer inspection while comparisons between sections can be made by extending the pages (FIG. 11).

These projects, which emphasize my interest in letterpress printing, typography, and making things with my hands, have led me to focus my graduate inquiry on the relationship between narrative and craft.
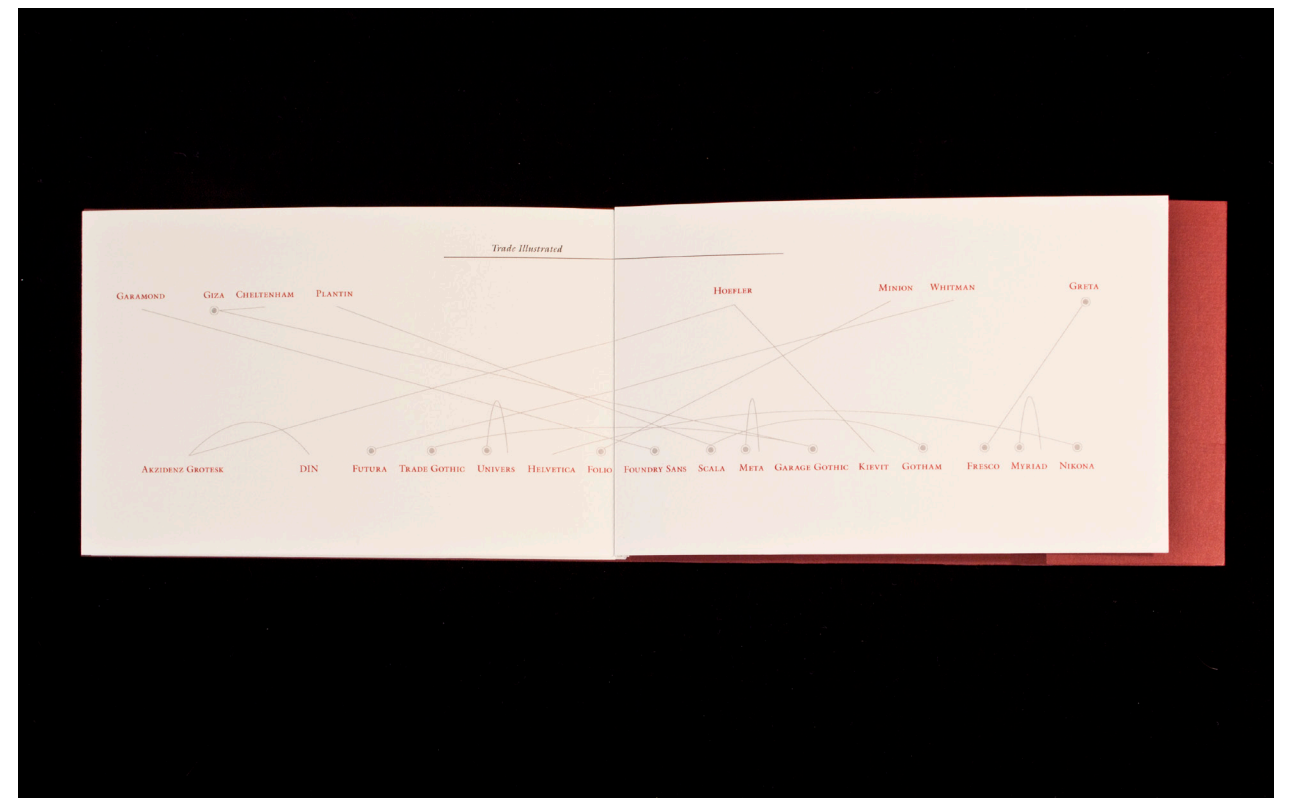
CONTEXT

Given the independence of narrative structure, cross-comparing different media-specific characteristics of film and graphic design can produce unexpected combinations that inspire new ways of expressing a story through both physical and conceptual means. These cross-references can be expressed in a morphological system, and in conjunction with Chatman's narrative theory, they demonstrate the effectiveness of these transmissions in achieving such examples as Robert Massin's *The Bald Soprano,* Warren Lehrer's *French Fries,* Janet Zweig's *Scheherazade,* and Karl Hyde and Tomato's *Mmm… Skyscraper I Love You* (FIG. 12–19).

In considering this all-encompassing theoretical approach, a graphic designer can produce deeper, more meaningful expressions of story by combining the strengths of multiple media. *The Bald Soprano* (FIG. 12–13) transposes theater into book form with an avant-garde treatment of typography. Massin responds to qualities intrinsic in the play's original mode of presentation (speech and movement, for example) with traits specific to graphic design—type size, letterform manipulation, placement, and page sequence, to name a few. Embedded within each of these design decisions, therefore, is meaning; its pages succeed in communicating more than the stark black and white compositions at surface level.

A more colorful example of theater-turned-literature is Warren Lehrer's *French Fries* (FIG. 14–15), a typographic interpretation of a murder-mystery at a fast food restaurant. Characters' personalities are portrayed through differing typographic arrangements and illustration styles that correspond to the setting of the story. Similar to *The Bald Soprano,* dialogue is represented in unconventional ways that range from minimal to chaotic in response to its content.

With a construction reminiscent of a large-scale flipbook, Janet Zweig's *Scheherazade* (FIG. 16–17) incorporates a dynamic element of construction to minimalist illustration. The enormous scale of letterforms on the recto pages emphasizes typography as an essential element to the storytelling process. The ebb and flow—that is, the typographic enlargement and reduction and magnified textures—bring an additional level of cinematic allusion to the already-present notion of animation.

Tomato's *Mmm…Skyscraper I Love You* (FIG. 18–19) is a collection of energetic compositions reflecting the dense atmosphere of New York City. This particular project was organized in conjunction with the English electronica group Underworld, with the book acting as a companion piece to their 1994 musical album *Dubnobasswithmyheadman.* A narrative is spun from recognizable words and characters within the typographic images—a more organic approach to the expression of the original source of inspiration.
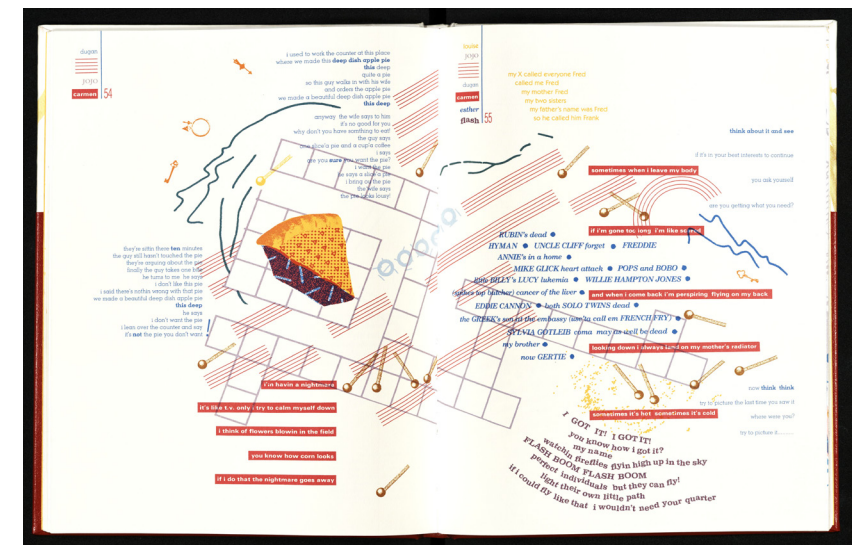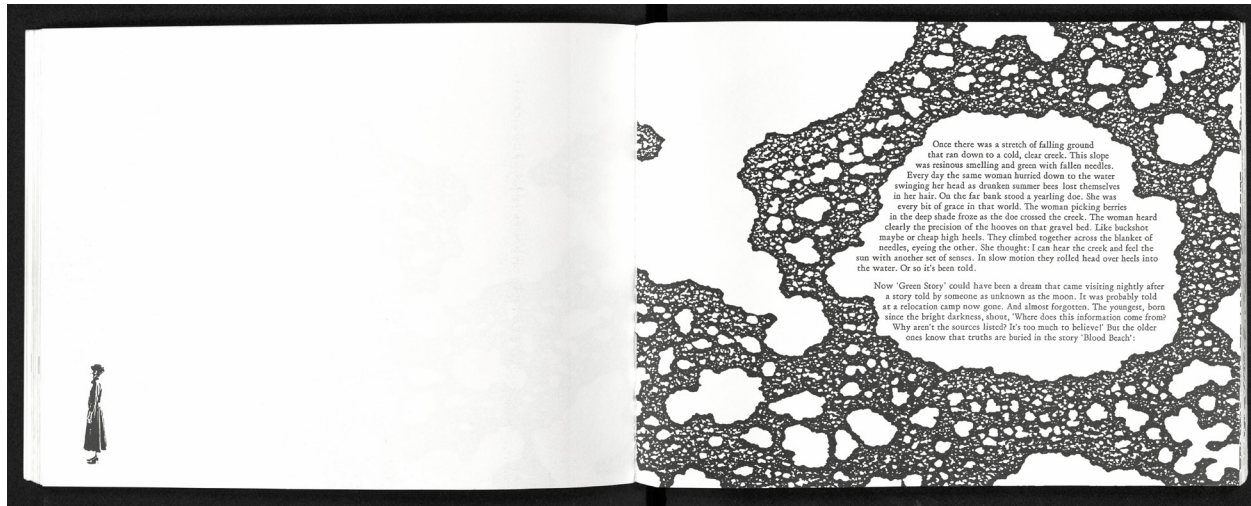
FIG. 16, *top*
A spread from Janet Zweig's *Sheherezade* flip book, where type appears inside of enlarged type opposite an illustration on the verso page.

FIG. 17, *left*
A detail of the enlarged type surrounding a block of type.

These examples are comprised of a *translation*—a new rendering that aims to produce an equivalent meaning—and a *transformation*—a physical change in form or appearance from one medium to another. Both shifts are necessary in expressing different tropes. The time-based nature of film and the static sequentiality of books, for example, may differ in their individual methodologies but ultimately strive for the same end goal—an expression of narrative. A film manifested in book form, therefore, has undergone both a *translation* and a *transformation* to get to its final state, held together by the underlying foundation of narrative structure in conjunction with the structure of graphic design.

Tomato's *Mmm...Skyscraper I Love You*, for example, is a translation because it attempts to retain the same rhythm, tone, and emotion of its original source. The title track of the music that accompanies the book is a densely-layered sonic composition that includes vocal tracks, synthesizers, a steady backing rhythm, and various sound effects that punctuate the subtly dynamic score like the irregular din of urban traffic. Typeface choices and typographic layering replicate these audial fluctuations visually, creating different textures that correspond to the shifts in the track's musical texture. The transformation, then, is the actual physical change the piece has undergone; where it was originally a hand-in-hand influence of the song and the city, it is now a single volume printed book.
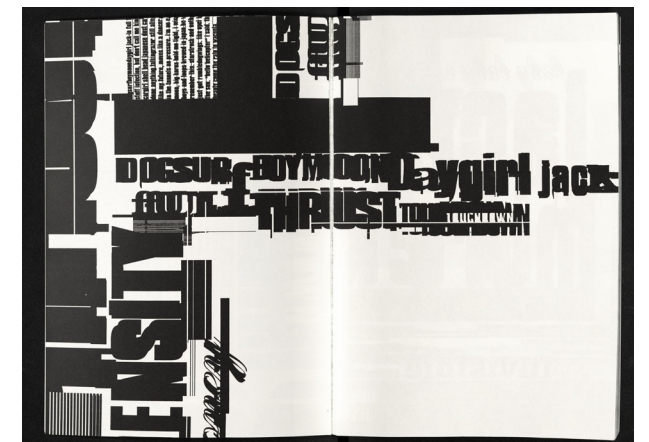
FIG. 18, *above*
A full spread from Tomato's *Mmm...Skyscraper I Love You,* a typographic interpretation of New York City and music.

FIG. 19, *below*
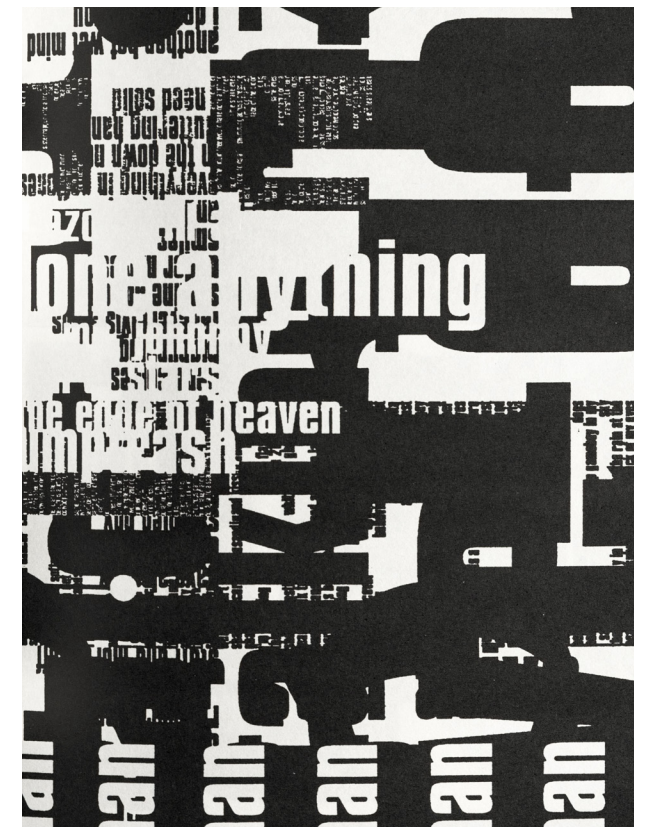A detail from a subsequent page.

EXPRESSION   CONTENT

SUBSTANCE

FORM

EXPRESSION   CONTENT

SUBSTANCE

FORM

Media insofar as they communicate stories.
Some media are semiotic systems in their own right.

Representations of objects/actions in real/imagined worlds that can be imitated in a narrative medium.
This is filtered through the codes of the author's society.

Narrative discourse consisting of elements shared by narratives in any medium whatsoever.
These elements comprise the structure of narrative transmission (discourse).

Narrative story components.
Events, existents, and their connections.

Regarded by many to be synonymous with story or plot, narrative is normally thought to exist outside the medium in which its content is delivered. Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice,* for example, has been conveyed in books, films and theatres in many variations, including an online video blog. But narrative is far more complex than storytelling; its underlying theoretical framework includes a well-established system of communication and discourse that also encompasses components of appearance. This view of narrative, in turn, can be applied to artifacts of graphic design, allowing for a semiotic examination that accounts for both form and content and strengthens communication by the possible introduction of qualities from other media.

In linguistics, the distinction between *expression* and *content* is viewed as being inadequate to describe the myriad elements at play in any given communicative circumstance; it is necessary to further subdivide the two categories with an opposing axis of *substance* and *form*.[3] A discussion of narrative structure in semiotic terms, therefore, requires an analysis with respect to a matrix that cross-cuts the two sets of distinctions (FIG. 20). Linguist Louis Hjelmslev created a diagram building on semiologist Ferdinand de Saussure's original dichotomy of expression and content, adding two additional levels of complexity to the initial dual distinction.[4] Hjelmslev's revision allows for further consideration of the structure of form and the structure of content not only in linguistics, but also in additional disciplines that seek a similar interpretation.

The content plane, which represents meaning, is conveyed via the expression plane. Linguistic elements such as marks on paper or vocal sounds constitute the *substance of the expression*, while the *substance of content* is the group of concepts that exist universally across the whole of mankind, regardless of culture or location.

The form[5] given to the content, on the other hand, is the abstract structure that each individual language or culture imposes on these universalities of meaning, emotion, and thought. The form of expression in speech, then, becomes a distinction of phonic relationships as they pertain to the limited set of phonemes found within a given language.[6] In other words, the *form of expression* is the means by which sounds, and in turn meanings, are communicated.

In order for narrative structure to be analyzed through this semiotic lens, it must be able to communicate meaning independent of its story's particular content. As in the linguistic outline above, narrative structure must contain both a form and substance of expression as well as a form and substance of content. So how can a narrative, stripped of all recognizable elements within its story, express meaning? According to Seymour Chatman, a scholar of poetics and literature at the University of California, Berkeley, narrative's province of expression is defined by its narrative discourse (FIG. 21).[7] He explains narrative structure in terms of story and discourse, where the story is *what* is depicted and the discourse is *how* it is depicted. Story, then, becomes the content of narrative expression; the discourse is the form in which that content is presented. The substance of expression is consequently the material manifestation of the narrative—be that the written word, a film, a dance, or any number of other artistic media.[8] This is parallel to the linguistic interpretation, where these materializations are the equivalent of the spoken sounds necessary to convey meaning, or content. The form of expression consists of qualities universal to all narratives; that is, the fact that there are subjects and actions—two defining components without which the narrative could not exist as a narrative.[9]

The approach to the content plane is somewhat different, resulting in an abstract and an objective consideration of substance and form, respectively. Subjects and actions in real or imagined worlds, as interpreted through the author's real or invented cultural society, function as the substance of content.[10]

Because a framework must be considered whole and self-regulating in order to comply with Piaget's definition of structure, Chatman argues that a narrative's internal government is essential for the organization of content.[11][12] The system is created by the author of the content; therefore the cultural codes of his or her own existence have an important role in the presentation of the story, be those influences obviously in play or deliberately left out of the fictional (or nonfictional) world. On the other end of the spectrum, the form of content is constituted by components of the story that are familiar to most audiences cross-culturally and independent of the author—the events, the existents, and their relationships as established in the narrative's self-contained world. This is closely related to the form of expression; but where the form of expression refers to technical definitions, the form of content describes the story-specific elements like setting, characters and their personalities, and nameable events that perpetuate the forward action of the plot.

The content of the matrix and its subsequent breakdown can also be represented in the form of a flow-chart diagram (FIG. 22). In this illustration, the branches of story and discourse as defined by Chatman are broken into the four quadrants of the Saussure-Hjelmslev categorization chart. The form of content, for example, can be traced to events and existents, which in turn leads back to story, which then serves as one of the two primary constituents of narrative. The substance of expression, too, is made up of physical manifestations of discourse, the point in the diagram that diverges from story and marks the Saussurean distinction between content and expression. Chatman lists several examples of narrative discourse's possible forms, but the analysis does not have to stop where this particular diagram ends. Further classifications branching from these final stations can in turn be considered via terms of the semiotic structure the diagram represents. Books, for example, are a quintessential storytelling vessel. The design of the book—that is, the setting of the interior typography, the designer's control over the appearance of the words—falls under the *manifestation category* of narrative discourse. Viewed through this same semiotic lens, the written manifestation—that is, the piece of graphic design itself—can be split into this same quadripartite formula (FIG. 23).

EVENTS — Actions / Happenings

STORY (Content)

EXISTENTS — Characters / Settings

NARRATIVE

People, things, etc., as pre-processed by the author's cultural codes

Structure of Narrative Transmission

DISCOURSE (Expression)

MANIFESTATION — *Verbal / Written / Cinematic / Balletic / Pantomimic, etc.*

Form of Content

Substance of Content

Form of Expression

Substance of Expression
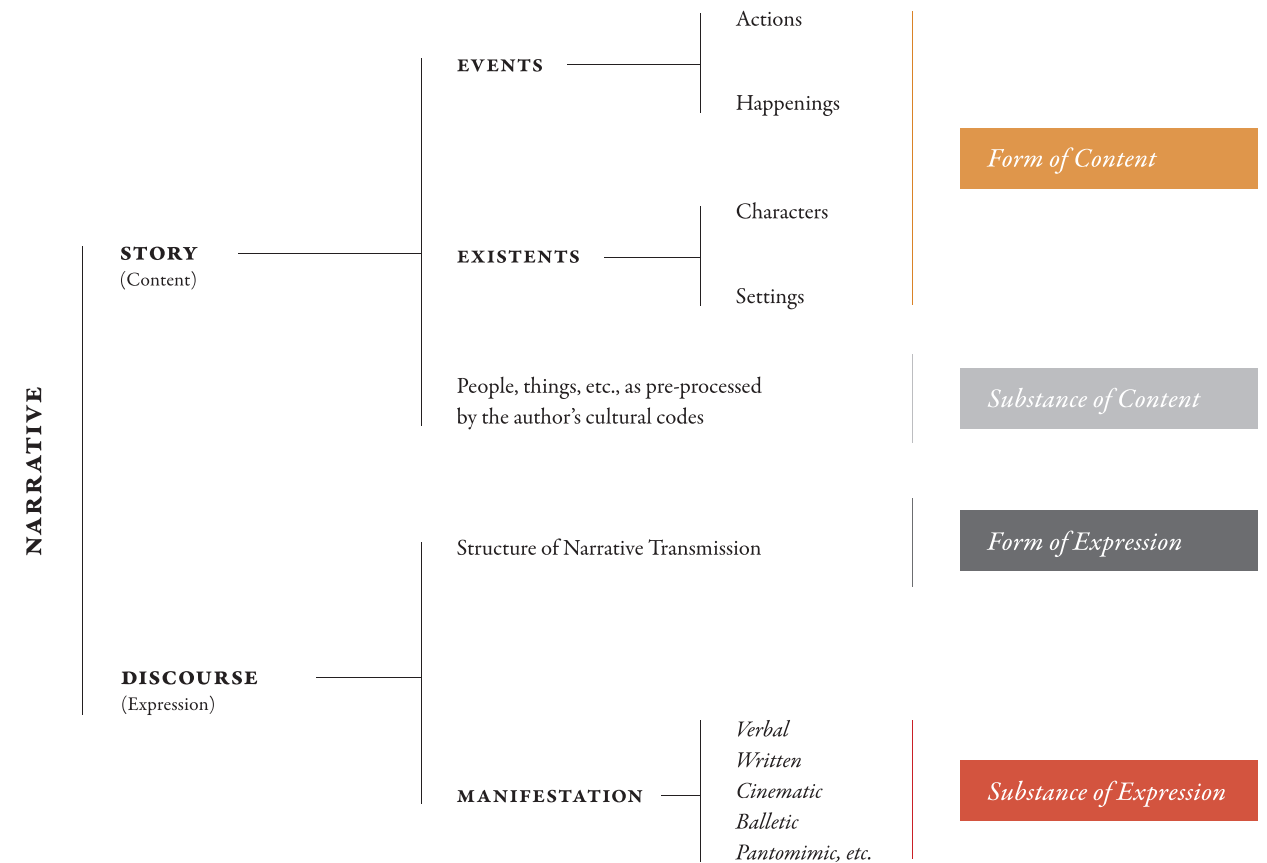
FIG. 22, *above*

A flow-chart diagram illustrating the dissection of narrative structure into components of story (content) and discourse (expression). Diagram reworked from Chatman's original.

	EXPRESSION	CONTENT
SUBSTANCE	■	■
FORM	■	■

■ Construction/production of physical object; the concept of craftsmanship.
Differences in means of production may include hand-made vs. mass-production.

■ Visual components and specifications.
Typeface, color, and imagery; this may also include plans and/or process.

■ The final physical form of the designed object.
A poster, book, pamphlet, video, etc.

■ Legibility and composition.
The presentation of the message itself independent from its content.

Like narrative, it too contains a structure broken into the substance and form of expression and the substance and form of content. Graphic design is a broad term encompassing a variety of historical styles, media, and craft—typography, photography, letterpress printing, digital publications, and so on. As such, the production and construction of physical objects becomes the substance of expression. One major component of this notion is the concept of craftsmanship. Because this is an examination of the medium itself, separated from the "voice" of any singular designer, a number of other participants' efforts have the potential to affect the substance of expression. The role of a printer or draftsman, for example, may or may not be filled by the designer himself, and therefore allows for multiple perspectives to contribute to the whole picture.

The components that comprise a designed piece (such as typeface, color, and imagery) as well as its specifications (plans, process, or instructions as given to other involved parties) make up the substance of content. Similar to the way in which narrative must stand independently of its story, these design elements must be considered completely separate from the message they convey. Like the

pre-processed societal codes described in narrative's equivalent quadrant, typefaces, for example, carry with them their own cultural and historical connotations that have nothing to do with the words themselves or even the contributions of the specific designer.

The final physical form of a piece of graphic design falls under the form of expression category. Posters, books, pamphlets, videos are distinctive methods of transmitting graphic design—not to an audience (this is implied in the definition of graphic design) but rather translated from one form to another, or from the message itself to the physical manifestation of that message. It is important in this category to consider the actual content (the design's "story") not as it pertains to the surface appearance of the design, but rather to the physical form it takes.[13] A novel written on a poster, for example, is an entirely different form of expression from that same novel bound in a book's codex form.

In the broader interpretation of narrative previously described, the form of content details a list of manifestations—the point in the diagram from which this sub-analysis branches. Because commu-

nication via physical presentation falls under this category, graphic design's parallel includes the notion of legibility. In other words, regardless of the piece's form of expression (poster, book, etc.), it is only as comprehensible as the arranged elements of which it is comprised. Similarly, composition—the placement of these elements on the page—has as much power to clarify as it does to complicate, either helping or hindering the content's ability to be read or interpreted by an audience.

It's clear that artifacts of design can be interpreted through semiotic means, but can graphic design be considered an independent structure of its own right? According to Piaget's criteria, it must possess qualities of wholeness, transformation, and self-regulation.[14] Like narrative, graphic design consists of elements that, on an individual level, are completely different from the sum of all its parts; a poster cannot solely be defined by its typeface or its background color, for example. Graphic design, therefore, has a wholeness inherent to the nature of its construction that qualifies it to be considered a structure. Within this wholeness are standardized sets of rules and guidelines pertaining to things like type, image, and color—hierarchy and alignment, a plethora of type specifications—that regulate appearance and organization. Graphic design also has the potential to be transformed from one form of expression to another, as illustrated by most major branding operations that dictate their identity system must work equally effectively for signage, stationery, online advertising, and any number of additional company applications.

Because graphic design as a manifestation of narrative discourse can exist on its own as a structure, it can act as a recipient medium for other narrative-bearing forms. Cinema is another vessel commonly used to convey stories and narratives, often with an underlying

framework associated with the construction of the film itself. Though this conveyance often follows traditions established within the medium's own history, deconstructing the internal narrative by means of the semiotic matrix allows for extrapolation of universal transmissive qualities. These qualities can be translated from one media to another—cinema to graphic design, for example—using the foundation of narrative as a preserving vessel.

Narrative structure involves more than just the components of a story; because it also includes the physical characteristics of its delivery, the examination of more specific formal aspects can also be made using the same semiotic matrix. A morphology of formal tropes common both to film and to books, for example, cross-pollinates two very different means of narrative expression (FIG. 24). Thinking about the ways in which one can be represented in the other—in this case, film to books—results in new and atypical combinations that inspire fresh creative thought. This method, though a shallower, strictly formal process, is made possible by the theoretical groundwork upon which it is built.

THE THORACIC TYPE

Individuals in whom the circulatory system (heart, arteries and blood vessels) and the respiratory system (lungs, nose and chest) are more highly developed than any other systems have been named the Thoracics.

This name comes from the fact that the heart and lungs (which constitute the most important organs of these two closely-allied systems) are housed in the thorax—that little room made by your ribs for the protection of these vital organs.
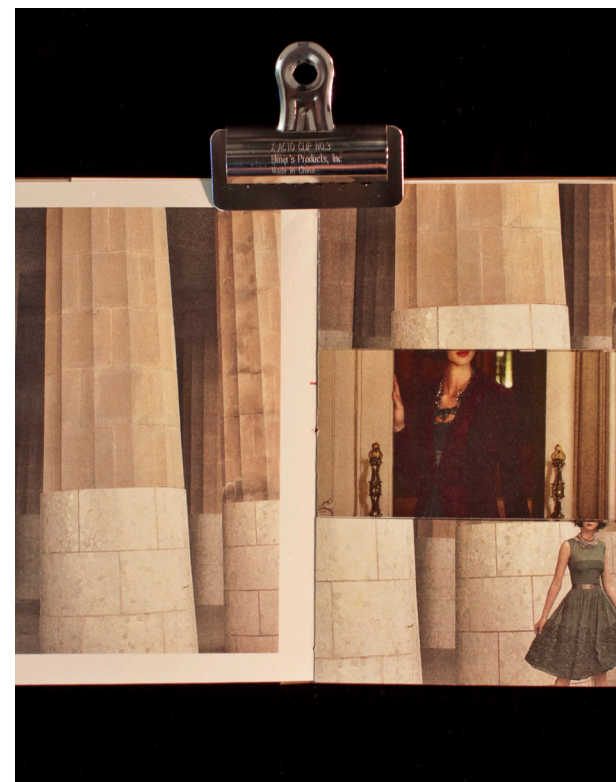
FIG. 25, *top*
The first prototype based on my morphology; shortened fore-edges and repeated imagery are reminiscent of cinematic jump cuts.

FIG. 26, *opposite left*
A detail of horizontal slices across multiple pages.

FIG. 27, *opposite right*
Horizontal cuts indicate a dissolve transition from one image to the next.

PROCESS

The development of a morphology (FIG. 24) began with a list of common traits inherent in the two media upon which I have focused—books and cinema. The horizontal list of characteristics corresponds to formal tropes of film; the vertical list consists of qualities intrinsic to books. With the book acting as a recipient form for filmic characteristics, the points of intersection in the matrix detail potential solutions for the combination of traits.

Cinematic transitions, for example, are more than just spliced segments of film or paired-together shots. The rhythm, pattern, duration, and transition type are all factors that determine the tone and spacing of a scene regardless of what the footage displays. These transitions are much like the physical act of turning a page in a book. When these two ideas meet, the experience of the commonplace page turn shifts to such an extent that the simple action alone is enough to alter the reader's experience of the narrative content. A jump cut might be represented by sequential page shortening from the fore-edge (FIG. 25); a dissolve may be illustrated with horizontal cuts in the page that allow for singular turning of the individual segments (FIG. 26–27). These effects are not reliant upon the story itself to maintain their influence—they will change perception of the content regardless.

Front cover of *Art/Reality I,* my second prototype, featuring a hand-lettered title and custom rips to reveal the subsequent title page.

FIG. 29, *right*

The cardboard village illustration.

Using literary content from *Book of Embraces*, a collection of short stories by Eduardo Galeano, my second prototype book functions as a condensed exploration of these morphological suggestions. I began my analysis by selecting a passage from Galeano's book, entitled "Art/Reality I," then dissected the text to find natural opportunities for the manifestation of various cinematic characteristics. The story itself takes place in Cuba, where a man is directing a film that requires the construction of a faux village and a large cage that has been artificially aged. When giving a tour of the set one day, however, the director discovers that the local supervisor has restored the purposely bent, rusted cage to straight, shining gold to more fittingly house their angel protagonist. Influenced by the imagery described in the story, I began the book with an image of the "cardboard village" (FIG. 29) and used a large black marker to illustrate its crude geometric structures. Turning the page is representative of a tracking shot, shifting positions within the same scene to a different viewpoint.

From there, I turned my attention to the type. The first sentence acts as a title card, establishing the basic premise for the remainder of the narrative; set low on the page in small italics, its quiet presence functions as a simplistic exemplar for the structural changes to come. Upon turning the page, the reader is presented with five horizontal segments of paper which can be turned individually in any order, breaking up the phrase, *"On the Cuban coast, Fernando had established…"* The letters of the phrase have been arranged around the geological shape of the Cuban island. When flipped, each segment presents two lines of distorted type on the verso side, revealing a mirrored reiteration of the text's island shape on the underlying page (FIG. 30). This signifies a dissolve transition to an alternate visual angle while the typography ensures the continuation of the written narrative. Other textural elements, such as the two-inch vertical cuts at the bottom of the concluding page, allude to bird wings and plumage while maintaining the manageability of the book's structure.

This prototype makes use of many possible structural changes in one small volume, but such a condensed interpretation is not justified for every narrative. In contrast to these physical means, a more conceptual approach to the translation from alternate time-based media to printed book form includes the consideration of content. Massin, for example, makes use of expressive typography and illustrative characterization in his graphic interpretation of *The Bald Soprano* (see page 14), using features of the narrative, characterization, and dialogue to inform his layout and composition; rather than altering the book's structure, he manipulates the layout. The original French play belongs to the "theater of the absurd" genre, with pointed non sequitur dialogue and blurred character relationships whose interactions border on the surreal.[15] Massin's unconventional treatments of typography and representation of character call attention to the bizarre nature of the exchanges themselves. Type functions as compositional and expressive image accompanying the speaking figures, highlighting the dialogue rather than the speakers as the focus of the scene.[16]
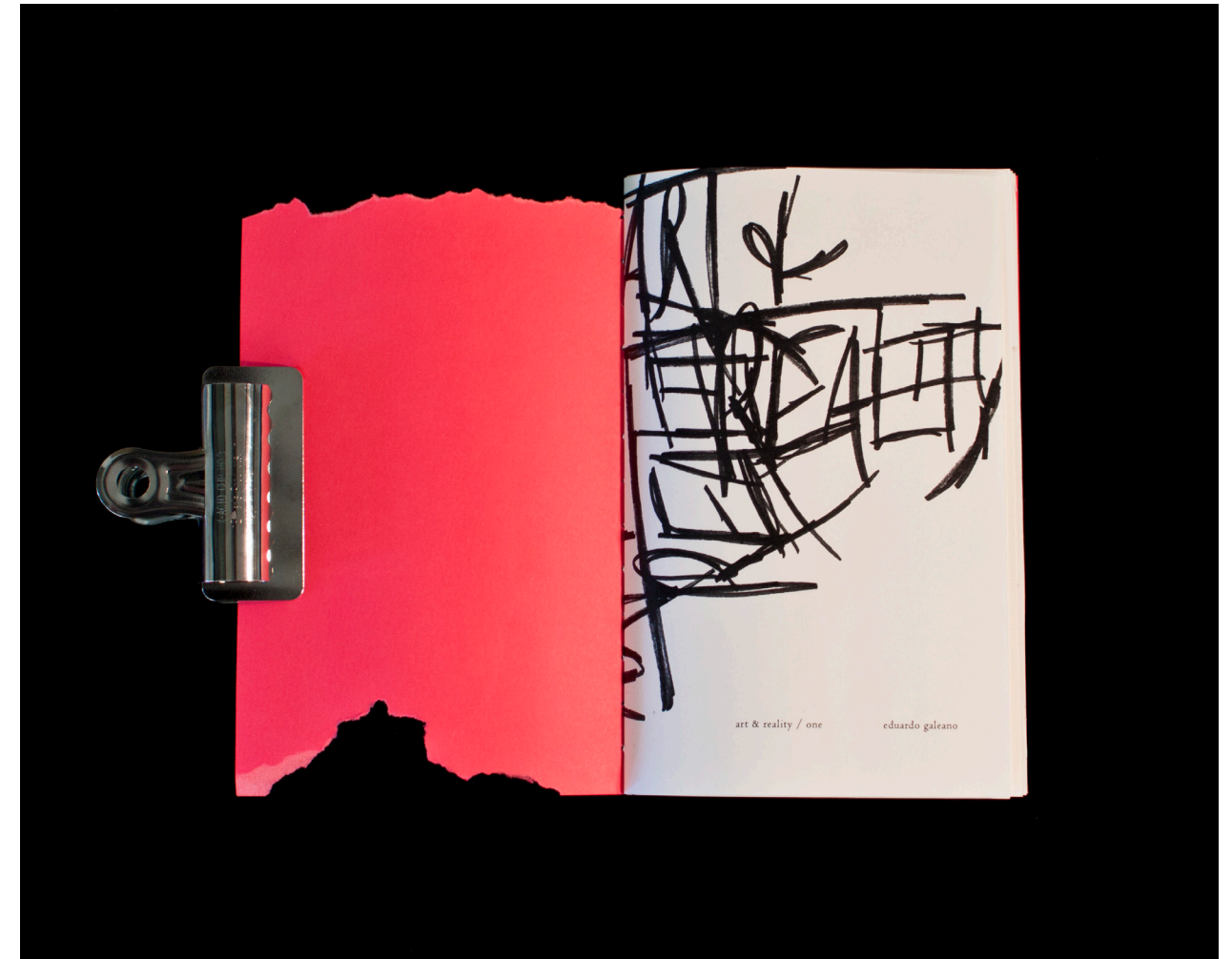
FIG. 30, *left*
Horizontal slices in the page allow for individual turning of the segments, breaking or revealing different pieces in multiple combinations.

FIG. 31, *below*
The reverse side of the ripped cover with title page, repeating the hand-lettering from the front.

In Massin's case, typography functions simultaneously as text and image, demonstrating the power of imagery to drive a narrative forward. How, then, can a series of related illustrations or photographs alone convey a story? After a class trip to the Hamilton Wood Type Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, I returned with a plethora of photographs documenting the vacant, multi-floored warehouse where the operation was once housed. Viewing these images in sequence relative to the architecture of the building (and, subsequently, my journey through it) reveals a narrative embedded not only in spatial relationships, but also my personal point of view as established by the photos themselves.

Exploring these correlations further, I placed the photos into a book (titled *Desert*), keeping them strictly in the order in which they were shot. With multiple angles and differing zoom levels of the same subject, I was able to create cinematic shifts in composition that mimic tracking shots and 35° position cuts while maintaining the integrity of the original images. Windows cut in the pages act as additional guides to lead the reader's imagination through the space, activating the compositional geometry while emphasizing the locational relationships between image settings.

The overall structure of the book, aside from the physical manipulation of individual pages and spreads, also creates an arc-like rise and fall of brightness and lighting that corresponds to the physical location of each shot within the building. The physical alterations to the page enhance the navigation through the space represented by the photographs as well as the navigation through the book itself, leading the reader through a two-dimensional world that mimics three-dimensional space just as would a film. The narrative, then, becomes a journey through a space, an exploration of vacancy and dilapidation, and the reconciliation of two- and three-dimensional perspectives through the eyes of one unseen protagonist.
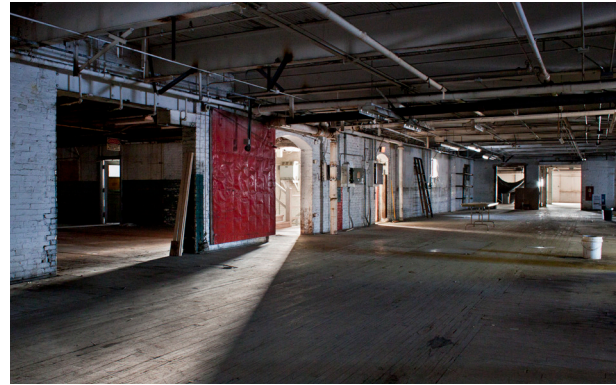
FIG. 33–36, *left*
Four photographs from the Hamilton interior warehouse on various levels.

FIG. 37, *below*
From the third floor, facing north.

FIG. 38, *above left*

Cues in the imagery of *Desert* provided opportunity for physical manipulation. Here, a window cut in the center of the page suggests motion through the depicted space as the page is turned.

FIG. 39, *above right*

Repeated imagery in combination with a sequential shortening of the fore-edge mimics a series of jump cuts within the space. The alignment of the red door frame also constitutes a graphic match in film editing.

FIG. 40, *opposite*

An image from the first floor of the Hamilton warehouse building, facing north.

When working with literary content, however, the design approach is slightly different. Ben Loory's surreal *Stories for Nighttime and Some for the Day* is a volume of short stories whose characters range from people to octopi to television sets. With settings like dark tunnels, crowded cities, and public swimming pools, Loory spins black tales of familiar human struggles and embeds them with eerie, nightmarish details that resonate with the reader throughout.

Taking cues from the book's overall tone, my investigations for *Notes on the Origin of Species* began with sketches inspired by the imagery in the stories. Charcoal expresses the same gritty darkness embodied by the text; its wispy, granular nature is reminiscent of a dreamlike haze.

NOTES ON THE

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Because the original form of Loory's stories relies exclusively on the printed word, a reinterpretation of his text in a different book form requires a certain consistency in order to convey it with accuracy. In this case, the typographic treatment of the written narrative is the thread that not only connects the new iteration with the original form, but also weaves together the new volume. The type—with its low stroke contrast and hefty serifs—subtly reflects the macabre undertones; in turn, the way it is set reacts to the content on a more literal level, responding in part to the charcoal illustrations that have been scanned and placed following the same cues.
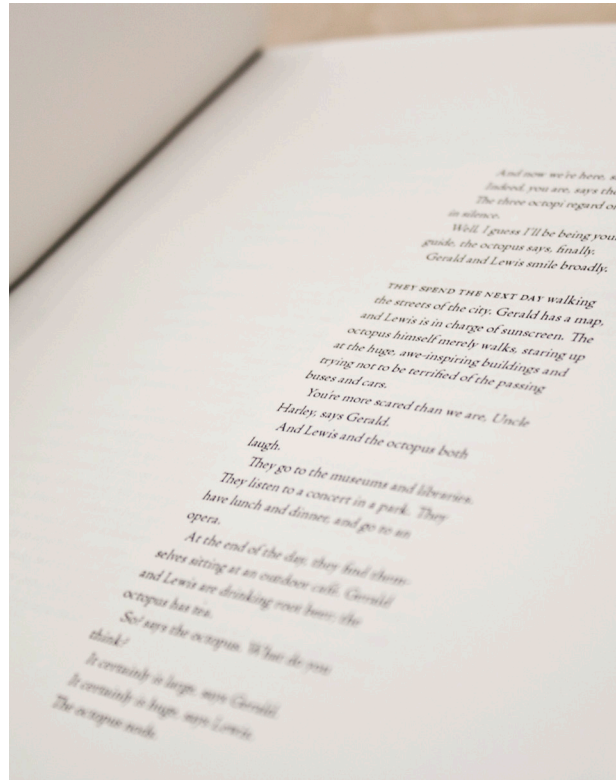
Responding intuitively to the content, I allowed my experience and interpretation of the content to inform my compositions. My intent was to convey the tone, emotion, and theme as influenced by cinematic thought, not to realistically illustrate the images described in these bizarre vignettes. In this way, the consideration of cinema from the very beginning is a crucial component to the development of my books; when filmic traits factor into the design from the start, the story's *manifestation* can intertwine with its narrative to a point where they become inseparable. In mutual reinforcement, the representation on paper—both image and typography—work hand-in-hand with the manipulation of the page itself.

FIG. 48, *above*

A detail from Loory's "The Octopus" in *Notes on the Origin of Species.*

FIG. 49, *opposite right*

A top view of the complete hard-bound volume.

With content that does not inherently contain a plot or story, this cinema/book morphology can be used to create or suggest one. In the case of my third volume, logician Patrick J. Hurley's textbook *A Concise Introduction to Logic* is not meant to contain a plot, and its only hint of a story lies in the layering of facts and explanations as they build in nonfiction progression to the end matter. Drawing the main points from the text and assigning a certain trait to each term, the narrative is extrapolated through the physical manipulation of the page and construction of the book.
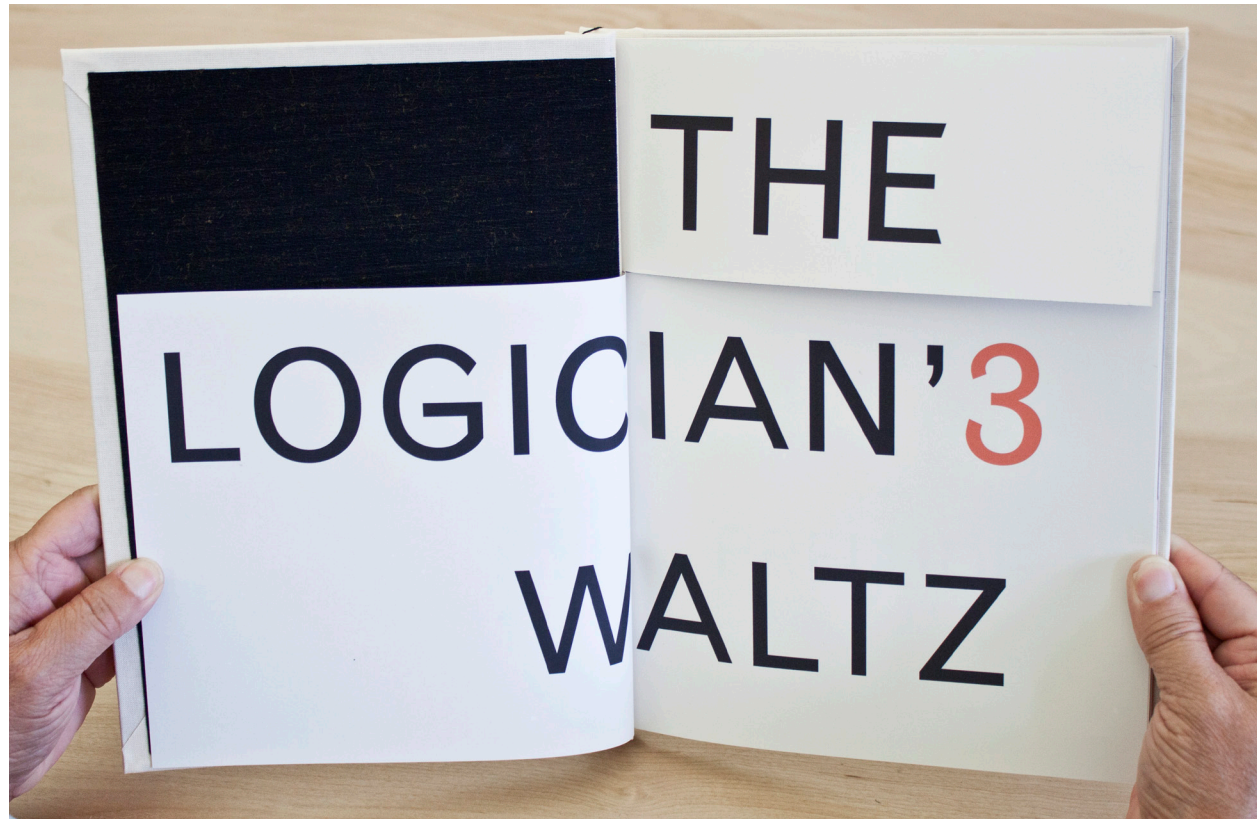
FIG. 53, *above*
The manipulated title page that introduces the tripartite division in the "waltz"-inspired section. The turning of individual segments acts as an opening title sequence.

In symbolic and propositional logic, rules and equations are used to prove or disprove the equivalency of certain statements. The process of solving these puzzles involves a carefully defined set of assumptions and equivalencies in which one statement is translated to another, one step at a time. Factoring this into the design of the book, I cut the text into key pieces of explanation and allowed the typographic treatment to intensify as more information was introduced. The transitions from line to line are composed differently depending on the solution to the problem.

When considered as a set of three volumes, these interpretations illustrate the effectiveness of the translation and transformation process on different types of source material. From photographs to surrealist fiction to educational nonfiction, the narrative of each is reinforced (and even created) by the physical and aesthetic manipulation of the book's structure.

FIG. 54–55, *below*
Details from the middle section of *The Logician's Waltz*. The pages are divided into three segments each and can be turned individually to create new compositions.
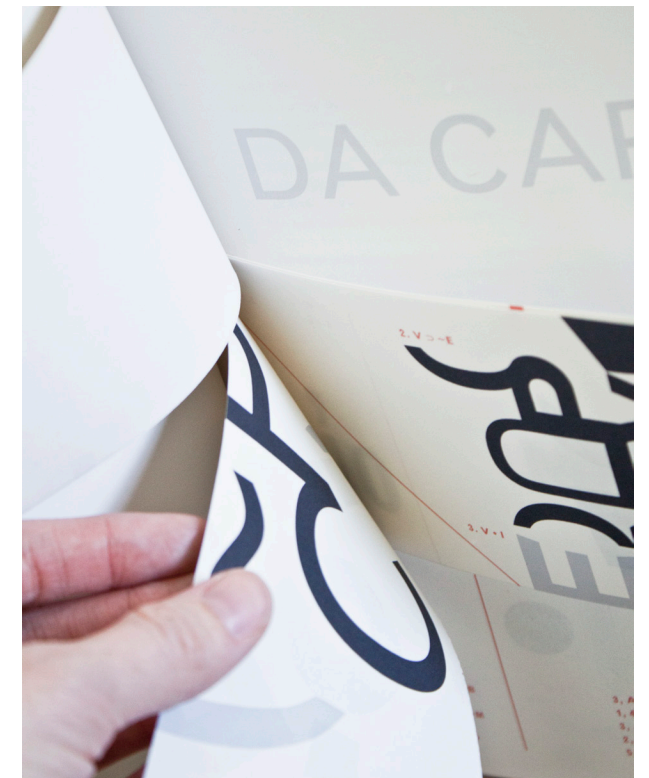
FIG. 56–57, *above*

New compositions made by turning individual pages.

FIG. 58, *opposite right*

A layered composition is created with light shining through
the paper and shades of printed gray.

In exploring the relationship between narrative and graphic design, I have discovered a theoretical foundation that makes possible any combination of media and storytelling. With my interests in letterpress, typography, writing, and filmmaking, this knowledge has opened my eyes to a greater breadth of creative possibilities that can be considered regardless of specific expressional means. The ability to unite traits from multiple artistic media can enhance the conveyance of a narrative, which in turn can more effectively impart a message to an audience. In graphic design, a discipline whose foundation is built upon visual communication, this methodology will remain relevant indefinitely.

As technology advances, global relationships expand, and the role of graphic design subsequently changes, these cross-media influences will inspire an increasing number of opportunities for progression within the field. Digital books and e-readers, for instance, are relatively recent examples of graphic design's versatility; the manifestation changes, but the narrative remains the same. Interactive e-publications, too, are an increasingly common method of expressing narrative that is supported by the same theoretical framework I have explored here.

As detailed previously, Seymour Chatman challenges the common perception that structure and narrative are inseparable. My visual investigations put his argument to the test, exploring these notions of structural separability in the actual production of graphic design. My method of translating and transforming filmic media to book form applied Chatman's ideas in a morphological sense, appropriating his breakdown of narrative structure (as illustrated in the visual diagrams; see pages 22–26) to the practice of graphic design. In producing my three volumes, I was able to experience this way of thinking firsthand, following it through from the planning stage to design to production.

While I agree with Chatman's statement that narrative as a structure can exist separate from its content, in practice it was difficult to sort my design elements into the carefully defined categories I extrapolated from his ideas (see diagram, page 26). Where my goal was to take cues from the source material to mandate the treatment of the composition and physical manipulation of my books, there were not always obvious places to insert these effects into the design. Even when consulting my cinema/book morphology system, I was very preoccupied with avoiding arbitrariness; my intention was to reinforce the story in response to its content, but it was easy to fall into the trap of over-designing and therefore distracting from the attributes I wanted to highlight.

This issue brings to light a strange contradiction. Theoretically, narrative exists as a structure and can indeed exist outside the scope of its content; it can also be conveyed in multiple forms while preserving the story. However, something that goes beyond the breadth of this investigation and warrants further detailed research is how, in practice, these alterations affect meaning as it pertains to personal interpretation. To what extent does a shift in manifestation also shift the narrative, and how does this impact an audience?

FIG. 59, *above*

Photographs from *Desert* and enlarged pages from *The Logician's Waltz* accompany my four books (including *A Scandal in Bohemia*) at the 2013 MFA Exhibition at Gallery A.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In my future endeavors, I will continue to expand and create new morphologies in order to harness the potential of translational and transformative processes. I am especially interested in how these cross-media relationships can change the place and trajectory of print design in contemporary society. Though these theoretical components may be tricky to navigate in practice, realizing *how* and *why* they conceptually function allows me to consider my other artistic interests in designing communicative solutions.

Taking inspiration from other expressive media is a practice I will continue into my career as a designer and educator. The tremendous flexibility of graphic design and typography—thanks to its underlying framework—is what makes it so remarkable as a conveyor of narrative. In the class I am currently teaching, *Typography III*, I have encouraged my students to consider how their aesthetic choices impact the meaning of their content and the story they are trying to tell. Through experimentation, trial-and-error, and the influence of their outside interests—music, sculpture, and animation, to name a few—my students are learning that graphic design has few expressive limitations. Instilling this knowledge in my students will provide an important lesson in creativity, introducing them to the infinite possibilities of the discipline.

ACTION A change of state (event) that is brought about by an existent (agent).[17]

CONTENT (PLANE) Units of meaning.[18] Chatman places *story* as the content of narrative expression, because elements of story comprise both the *substance* and *form* of narrative expression independent of its manifestation (which is a subdivision of discourse and the *substance of expression*, see below).[19]

    FORM OF CONTENT Components of a narrative story, including (but not limited to) events, existents, and the connections between them.[20]

    IN GRAPHIC DESIGN | The composition and legibility of a message's presentation, independent of what the message says.

    SUBSTANCE OF CONTENT A narrative medium comprised of objects and actions in real or imagined worlds, with or without influence from the author's societal codes.[21] In other words, the set of possible objects, events, abstractions, etc. that exist in the universe that have the potential to be included by the author.

    IN GRAPHIC DESIGN | Visual components and specifications of an artifact of graphic design (i.e., typeface, color, imagery; this may also include plans and/or process).

DISCOURSE An all-encompassing formal analysis or discussion of a particular topic and its distinct concepts and theories; includes terminology specific to the topic.

EVENT A change of state; the part of a narrative that includes *actions* and *happenings*.[22]

EXISTENT Characters and settings within the contained world of the narrative; something that exists in that world.[23]

EXPRESSION (PLANE) Units of the expression plane convey meanings, which comprise the content plane.[24] In Chatman's interpretation, this includes the narrative discourse.[25]

    FORM OF EXPRESSION The structure of narrative transmission, including elements shared by all narrative types (i.e., events, existents).[26]

    IN GRAPHIC DESIGN | The final physical form of a designed object; the manifestation. (i.e., a book, a poster, pamphlet, etc.)

    SUBSTANCE OF EXPRESSION The communication of stories through any number of media, some of which may be semiotic systems in their own right. This includes the narrative manifestation.[27]

    IN GRAPHIC DESIGN | The construction or production of a physical object of graphic design, including the concept of craftsmanship.

HAPPENING A change of state (event) that affects a passive existent (patient).[28]

MANIFESTATION The aesthetic object, a medium that actualizes a narrative—i.e., a book, a film, a painting, a play.[29]

NARRATIVE According to structuralist theory as documented by Chatman, narrative consists of two main elements: a story (actions, happenings, existents), and a discourse (how the content is communicated).[30]

PLOT The driving force of a story; the story as told by linking events together.[31]

SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION An analysis of a topic (narrative or graphic design, in this case; refer to pages 22–27) using language-based concepts from Piaget's definition of *structure* and Hjelmslev's four-part matrix to define separable categories within a self-governing framework.

STORY An essential component of narrative consisting of events and existents; essentially, the story is what happens and what is communicated.[32] [33]

STRUCTURE According to Jean Piaget, a structure is a system that meets three key requirements: wholeness, transformation, and self-regulation.[34] [35]

TRANSFORMATION The physical change in form or appearance as content is adapted to a new medium/manifestation.

TRANSLATION A rendering of form or appearance that aims to reproduce a meaning equivalent to the source material.

TROPE A significant and/or common physical characteristic or theme specific to one type of media. For example, a title page is a trope of books; a dissolve transition is a trope of film.

END NOTES

1. Seymour Chatman is a professor of poetics and literature at the University of California at Berkeley.

2. The American Association of University Presses (AAUP).

3. Seymour Chatman. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 22.

4. Ibid.

5. Specifically, form as defined by Hjelmslev.

6. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 23.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 24.

9. Ibid., 26.

10. Ibid.

11. Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, trans. Chaninah Maschler (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 14.
Chatman cites noted developmental psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget as having developed the quintessential criteria for a system to be considered truly structural—it must invoke qualities of *wholeness, transformation,* and *self-regulation.*

12. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 20.

13. The physical form of a design may include (but is not limited to) a book, a pamphlet, a poster, a diagram, a website, or a digital application. These manifestations exist outside of a design's aesthetic appearance, meaning that they should not be considered in conjunction with typeface, color, or image but rather with the content (or message) of the piece.

14. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 20.

15. Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove, 1965).

16. The story is driven by the form it takes just as intensely as it presses forward with the events in its narrative; the visual organization relies so heavily on the texture of the text that the English translation of the original French version required redesigning the book, which was published by Grove in 1965.

17. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 44.

18. Ibid., 22.

19. Ibid., 23.

20. Ibid., 24.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 44.

23. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 26.

24. Ibid., 22.

25. Ibid., 23.

26. Ibid., 24.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 44.

29. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 26.

30. Ibid., 19.

31. Ibid., 20.

32. Ibid., 26.

33. Ibid., 31.

34. Ibid., 21.

35. Piaget, *Structuralism,* 14.

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CHATMAN, SEYMOUR. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.

A detailed description of narrative structure as it pertains to semiotics, story, and literature. Chatman's analysis of Piaget, Saussure, and Hjelmslev in a narrative context provides the theoretical framework for my argument.

GALEANO, EDUARDO. *The Book of Embraces.* Translated by Cedric Belfrage with Mark Schafer. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

A collection of short, surrealist prose poetry upon which I based my second small prototype book.

HURLEY, PATRICK J. *A Concise Introduction to Logic.* Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education, 2008.

A university-level textbook introducing principles of logic and reasoning, including symbolic logic. The text from Chapter 7 comprises the content for my third major book.

HYDE, KARL & JOHN WARWICKER. *Mmm...Skyscraper I Love You.* London: Booth Clibborn, 1999.

Typographically expressive and compositionally experimental, this book is both an illustration of a city and an interpretation of an electronica album. It serves as an example of the translation and transformation process in the adaptation of a narrative.

IONESCO, EUGÈNE. *The Bald Soprano.* Translated by Donald M. Allen. New York: Grove, 1965.

This version of Ionesco's play is translated to English from the original French and is typographically interpreted by Robert Massin. This is a quintessential example of the expression of character and speech in the adaptation of narrative from live-action to static print.

LEHRER, WARREN & DENNIS BERNSTEIN. *French Fries.* New York: Ear Say Books, 1984.

A typographic interpretation of a play about a murder at a fast food restaurant. Imagery and type treatment correspond to the subject matter and reinforce the setting (an existent) as part of the narrative.

LOORY, BEN. *Stories for Nighttime and Some for the Day.* New York: Penguin Books, 2011.

A collection of surreal, nightmarish short stories with a wide variety of characters and settings. Select stories make up the content of my second major book.

PIAGET, JEAN. *Structuralism.* Translated by Chaninah Maschler. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

Piaget's definition of structuralism, also used and cited by Seymour Chatman, provides the criteria against which narrative is measured to determine that it can exist as an independent structure.

SMITH, KEITH. *Structure of the Visual Book.* Rochester, NY: Keith Smith Books, 2010.

Authored by expert book maker Keith Smith, this volume describes the physical structure and contextual arrangement of a multitude of book types. A discussion of the importance of sequence and flow in the structure of a book reinforces my morphological process.

TSCHICHOLD, JAN. *The Form of the Book: Essays on the Morality of Good Design.* Translated by Hajo Hadeler. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley & Marks Publishers, 1991.

A series of essays by renowned typographer Jan Tschichold regarding classicist book design and typography. Establishes a historical foundation for contemporary departures in composition and structure.